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Author response

Ambivalent methods, geographical difference, and the politics of feeling-knowing

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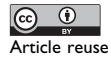
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Abstract
We offer an engagement with the generous responses to our article, 'Feeling Otherwise'. We think with the authors who responded to our paper to sketch out an affirmative way to understand the concept of ambivalence. We clarify key points, reflect on the responses, and make suggestions for ways to explore this topic further.

Keywords
affect, ambivalence, critique, difference, politics

In our engagement with debates about affect in geography, we work with ambivalence as a way to think difference in relation to conversations about the moods and modes of critique (Ruez and Cockayne, 2021). Our goal is to stage an intervention around what happens when the relationship between feeling and knowing is acknowledged, as it is in many corners of critical geographic scholarship, and to explore the ethics and politics that scholars might inhabit in relation to the multiplicitous affective resonances of critical scholarship. We point to the complexity of feeling-knowing, where how we feel about scholarship is connected, intimately, with the knowledges that we are able to create, but not in a singular or predictable way. This is in contrast to a dispassionate, uninterested 'objectivity' that is the prevailing tenor of colonialist and Enlightenment sciences. It is also in partial contrast to both a negative or 'paranoid' critique, informed by a logic of exposure, and an affirmative project of feeling better, insofar as it seeks to move beyond the bad feelings of critique. All of which, whether through colonial 'discovery', paranoid exposure, or affirmative erasure, can situate the scholar as the masterful purveyor of knowledge on the basis of feeling or conveying feeling appropriately, whether that means feeling negatively, positively, or not at all.

Instead, we suggest both alternatives to and a multiplication of possible ways of feeling-knowing through an account of affect as overdetermined, multiple, overlapping, and unpredictable, in

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which feeling one way about an object doesn't exclude other ways of feeling about it. We call this critical mood 'ambivalence', both to make space for affects that don't easily fit into projects valuing either positive or negative feeling, as well as to highlight the tense and seemingly contradictory feelings that often co-exist as part of being affected. The responses to our piece rightly note that, while making normative statements about feeling and knowing, we eschewed a definite concept of ambivalence. Nor do we argue that scholars *should* feel ambivalently. Instead, we connect our account of ambivalence with difference and the challenge to self-mastery that difference opens up. This approach allows our account of ambivalence to do at least two things in relation to discussions about the moods and modes of critique. First, it asks us to pay attention to the context in which concepts are produced and used, and to connect scholarly debates with the uneven social and political landscape in which they are enmeshed. Our acknowledgment of ambivalence can, we hope, further open space for scholars who are not able to or interested in feeling and knowing in the prescriptive mode of the traditional, white, masculinist, and heteronormative academy. Second, it allows what we hope is a productive questioning of the tendency present in some writing about the moods and modes of critique to imagine a too singular pathway from critical scholarship to its affective resonance to the actions or changes in perspective it seeks to motivate. At every point in this movement, difference intervenes in ways that cannot be fully predicted or prescribed.

The careful and generous responses from Leslie Kern, Jess Linz, Anna Secor, David Seitz, Eleanor Wilkinson, and Jason Lim themselves inhabit a proliferation of different affective tones, modes, and resonances that push us to know differently, and situate centrally the differences embroiled in the embodiment and materiality of that knowing. Noting their own ambivalence about our ambivalence toward ambivalence, Linz and Secor (2021) draw out the (im)possibilities of a refusal of critical mastery. While the risk of such a project is that it may stop us in our tracks, and 'deliver us to a frustrating place of work and little forward movement', they also see possibilities in this lack of forward movement that may 'pry open an impassive place for relational transformation and intra-activity rather than progressive propulsion'. Riffing on the polyvalent nature of ambivalence, they highlight its tense, indeterminate nature, while flagging as a danger its possible slippage toward indifference, which may itself be a more charged affective state than it seems. Linz and Secor's response is a rejoinder to take seriously experimentation without losing sight of a political and ethical approach toward where that experimentation might (not) lead us.

Similarly, Wilkinson and Lim (2021) offer a critical reminder about the risks of getting too stuck, given the urgency of responding to the violently uneven processes and practices in which we are differently implicated, asking that we point more directly to 'whose writing is too masterful, too bitter, too generous?' To begin to answer that question, we would be unlikely to find anyone's work either too bitter or too generous in the abstract. For us, much depends on the *politics* of that bitterness or generosity. A recent *Third World Quarterly* editorial on 'The Case for Colonialism', which sought to articulate a generous and reparative reading of colonialism, provides an example of how dangerous a reparative orientation can be (Sultana, 2018). Attempts at mastery are a part of most work, to some degree, and may only be jettisoned, as Linz and Secor note, at the cost of a certain amount of forward movement. The particular moves toward mastery that most concern us are those that operate through eliding difference. For example, Kinkaid's (2020) recent critical work on post-phenomenological geographies highlights areas where an ostensibly affirmative ethos can run aground in failing to contend with the violent social differentiation that shapes the worlds geographers study and the institutional and intellectual contexts in which we work.

Thus, we could not agree more with Wilkinson and Lim (2021) about the urgency of responding to those conditions, in and beyond the discipline, even as we cannot but be hesitant about the call to convey a *feeling* of urgency in the text, given our argument about the potential productivity of multiplying the affective resonances of critical work and the limits of prescribing particular affects. To be sure, urgency is an entirely appropriate tone to strike in the current

moment, or in any moment (not that anyone needed us to say so), but it's our hunch that the depth and scope of these problems can be productively addressed by a whole, discordant chorus of affective tones and resonances. Nevertheless, we take this point as an important caution that a refusal of critical mastery—which is less a decision than an acknowledgment of a condition—cannot be an abdication of responsibility. Indeed, our attempt to foreground politics and context, as Seitz's (2021) response highlights and extends, is meant to situate these conversations about the feelings of critique more centrally in relation to their stakes, rather than their 'positive' or 'negative' character. For example, in McKittrick's (2016) work, the stakes of an affirmation of Black life are not the same as those of a view-from-nowhere affirmation of life in general. Similarly, Kaba's (2018) abolitionist call for hope as a discipline—based on the 'long arduous work-of generations' that Wilkinson and Lim highlight—is distinct from calls for hopefulness based on downplaying the violence of the present.

Seitz's reading also poses a series of questions that push the reader to consider their own epistemological commitments in ways that point toward a methodology of ambivalence. He asks, which objects are worth repair and why? How and why should we care for those objects? Which objects remain beyond repair? Responding to these questions could be an individual project or one for what Seitz calls a 'geographical Left' more broadly. This questioning necessarily places one in an ambivalent relationship toward the certainties often associated with knowing. This can, as Seitz notes, be a vulnerable place to be. It can also, as Kern (2021) emphasizes, be an unsettling one. But it can, perhaps for that reason, be productive (and, of course, given our own positions as settlers, some of us need to be more unsettled than others). Taking up the paper's focus on the critical 'stories we tell', Kern develops themes around narrative and undecidability that open up further possibilities for carrying forward ambivalent methods that 'refuse to choose between negation and affirmation'. Here, ambivalent affects become 'signs that we feel, in our bodies, the possibility of something different'. That possibility shares something with the 'queer longing', which Wilkinson and Lim highlight through Muñoz's (2009) work, for more than the current world can offer.

Taking up Kern's focus on narrative, we conclude by suggesting that methods for ambivalent critique could be developed further through work that questions a straightforward relationship between feeling and knowing in style, form, and genre. For example, Crawley (2020) offers an autoethnographic account of queerblackness through an analysis of an epistolary narrative between two fictionalized protagonists. Crawley develops this as a mediation on feelings of 'severance, abandonment, of being left behind' (2020: 7). He writes,

> The letters attempt to resist the epistemology of western thought that privileges so-called critical distance, abstraction, rationality, the dispassionate, the neutral and does so by moving intentionally and intensely with and into the feeling of the flesh, the way one can be moved to tears and joy and happiness and heartbreak. (Crawley, 2020: 10)

Experiments in style, form, and genre of this sort can take forward projects of feeling-knowing otherwise in important ways (also see Hartman, 2019). They point to a multiplicity of affective registers through which the critical stories that scholars tell can be developed, where joy, anger, love, hate, sadness, hesitation, hope, dread, and many more, separately or together, all have a place—or, perhaps more importantly, can be productively, critically, queerly *out of place* in relation to dominant regimes of feeling-knowing. As Kern suggests in her response, 'all of our stories are written into a world that we don't yet know'. This is true, as well, of our paper, which was originally written before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The urgency of the current moment—which is not limited to *this* moment, given the regularity of violence in the context of hetero- and cis-normative racial capitalism—certainly demands much of us, whether that 'us' is construed as the authors of this piece, or in a broader, necessarily problematic and contested disciplinary sense, but those demands are best understood not as demands to feel a certain way, but to

work with whatever feelings we inhabit in the interest of knowing and acting otherwise.

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