

INTRODUCTION **Find Your Way**

What does it mean to be orientated? This book begins with the question of orientation, of how it is that we come to find our way in a world that acquires new shapes, depending on which way we turn. If we know where we are when we turn this way or that way, then we are orientated. We have our bearings. We know what to do to get to this place or to that place. To be orientated is also to be turned toward certain objects, those that help us to find our way. These are the objects we recognize, so that when we face them we know which way we are facing. They might be landmarks or other familiar signs that give us our anchoring points. They gather on the ground, and they create a ground upon which we can gather. And yet, objects gather quite differently, creating different grounds. What difference does it make “what” we are orientated toward?

My interest in this broad question of orientation is motivated by an interest in the specific question of sexual orientation. What does it mean for sexuality to be lived as orientated? What difference does it make “what” or “who” we are orientated toward in the very direction of our desire? If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as “who” or “what” we inhabit spaces with. After all, queer geographers have shown us how spaces are sexualized (Bell and Valentine 1995; Browning 1998; Bell 2001). If we foreground the concept of “orientation,” then we can retheorize this sexualization of space, as well as the spatiality of sexual desire. What would it mean for queer studies if we were to pose the question of “the orientation” of “sexual orientation” as a phenomenological question?

In this book I take up the concept of orientation as a way of putting queer studies in closer dialogue with phenomenology. I follow the concept of “ori-

entation” through different sites, spaces, and temporalities. In doing so, I hope to offer a new way of thinking about the spatiality of sexuality, gender, and race. Further, in this book I offer an approach to how bodies take shape through tending toward objects that are reachable, that are available within the bodily horizon. Such an approach is informed by my engagement with phenomenology, though it is not “properly” phenomenological; and, indeed, I suspect that a queer phenomenology might rather enjoy this failure to be proper. Still, it is appropriate to ask: Why start with phenomenology? I start *here* because phenomenology makes “orientation” central in the very argument that consciousness is always directed “toward” an object, and given its emphasis on the lived experience of inhabiting a body, or what Edmund Husserl calls the “living body (*Leib*).”¹ Phenomenology can offer a resource for queer studies insofar as it emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds.

I arrived at phenomenology because, in part, the concept of orientation led me there. It matters how we arrive at the places we do. I also arrived at the concept of orientations by taking a certain route. In my previous book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, the concept of orientation was also crucial. Here I worked with a phenomenological model of emotions as intentional: as being “directed” toward objects. So when we feel fear, we feel fear *of* something. I brought this model of emotional intentionality together with a model of affect as contact: we are affected by “what” we come into contact with. In other words, emotions are directed to what we come into contact with: they move us “toward” and “away” from such objects. So, we might fear an object that approaches us. The approach is not simply about the arrival of an object: it is also how we turn toward that object. The feeling of fear is directed toward that object, while it also apprehends the object in a certain way, as being fearsome. The timing of this apprehension matters. For an object to make this impression is dependent on past histories, which surface as impressions on the skin. At the same time, emotions shape what bodies do in the present, or how they are moved by the objects they approach. The attribution of feeling toward an object (I feel afraid because you are fearsome) moves the subject away from the object, creating distance through the registering of proximity as a threat. Emotions involve such affective forms of (re)orientation. It is not just that

bodies are moved by the orientations they have; rather, the orientations we have toward others shape the contours of space by affecting relations of proximity and distance between bodies. Importantly, even what is kept at a distance must still be proximate enough if it is to make or leave an impression.

This point can be made quite simply: orientations involve different ways of registering the proximity of objects and others. Orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitation, as well as “who” or “what” we direct our energy and attention toward. A queer phenomenology, perhaps, might start by redirecting our attention toward different objects, those that are “less proximate” or even those that deviate or are deviant. And yet, I would not say that a queer phenomenology would simply be a matter of generating queer objects. A queer phenomenology might turn to phenomenology by asking not only about the concept of orientation *in* phenomenology, but also about the orientation *of* phenomenology. This book thus considers how objects that appear in phenomenological writing function as “orientation devices.” If we start with Husserl’s first volume of *Ideas*, for instance, then we start with the writing table. The table appears, we could say, because the table is the object nearest the body of the philosopher. That the writing table appears, and not another kind of table, might reveal something about the “orientation” of phenomenology, or even of philosophy itself.

After all, it is not surprising that philosophy is full of tables.² Tables are, after all, “what” philosophy is written upon: they are in front of the philosopher, we imagine, as a horizontal surface “intended” for writing. The table might even take the shape of this intention (see chapter 1). As Ann Banfield observes in her wonderful book *The Phantom Table*: “Tables and chairs, things nearest to hand for the sedentary philosopher, who comes to occupy chairs of philosophy, are the furniture of ‘that room of one’s own’ from which the real world is observed” (2000: 66). Tables are “near to hand,” along with chairs, as the furniture that secures the very “place” of philosophy. The use of tables shows us the very orientation of philosophy in part by showing us what is proximate to the body of the philosopher, or “what” the philosopher comes into contact “with.” How the table appears might be a matter of the different orientations that philosophy takes toward the objects that it comes into contact with.³

Even if it is not surprising that the object on which writing happens ap-

appears in writing, we might also point to how such writing turns its back on the table. So even when tables appear, they only seem to do so as background features of a landscape, which is full of many other half-glimpsed objects. As I suggest in chapter 1, this relegation of the table to the background is evident in Husserl's work even though he returns us to the object. Despite how the table matters it often disappears from view, as an object "from" which to think and toward which we direct our attention. In this book, I bring the table to "the front" of the writing in part to show how "what" we think "from" is an orientation device. By bringing what is "behind" to the front, we might queer phenomenology by creating a new angle, in part by reading for the angle of the writing, in the "what" that appears. To queer phenomenology is to offer a different "slant" to the concept of orientation itself.

To queer phenomenology is also to offer a queer phenomenology. In other words, queer does not have a relation of exteriority to that with which it comes into contact. A queer phenomenology might find what is queer within phenomenology and use that queerness to make some rather different points. After all, phenomenology is full of queer moments; as moments of disorientation that Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggests involve not only "the intellectual experience of disorder, but the vital experience of giddiness and nausea, which is the awareness of our contingency, and the horror with which it fills us" (2002: 296). *Phenomenology of Perception* gives an account of how these moments are overcome, as bodies become reoriented. But if we stay with such moments then we might achieve a different orientation toward them; such moments may be the source of vitality as well as giddiness. We might even find joy and excitement in the horror.

In offering a queer phenomenology, I am indebted to the work of feminist, queer, and antiracist scholars who have engaged creatively and critically with the phenomenological tradition. This includes feminist philosophers of the body such as Sandra Bartky (1990), Iris Marion Young (1990, 2005), Rosalyn Diprose (1994, 2002), Judith Butler (1997a), and Gail Weiss (1999); the earlier work of women phenomenologists such as Edith Stein (1989) and Simone de Beauvoir (1997); recent work on queer phenomenology (Fryer 2003); and phenomenologists of race such as Frantz Fanon (1986), Lewis R. Gordon (1985), and Linda Alcoff (1999).⁴

Through the corpus of this work, I have learned not only to think about how phenomenology might universalize from a specific bodily dwelling, but

also what follows "creatively" from such a critique, in the sense of what that critique allows us to think and to do. Feminist, queer, and critical race philosophers have shown us how social differences are the effects of how bodies inhabit spaces with others, and they have emphasized the intercorporeal aspects of bodily dwelling. I am also indebted to generations of feminist writers who have asked us to think from the "points" at which we stand and who have called for a politics of location as a form of situated dwelling (Lorde 1984; Rich 1986; Haraway 1991; Collins 1998), and to the black feminist writers who have staged the impossible task of thinking through how race, gender, and sexuality intersect—as lines that cross and meet at different points (Lorde 1984: 114–23; Brewer 1993; Smith 1998). My task here is to build upon this work by reconsidering the "orientated" nature of such standpoints.

Phenomenology is not the only material used in formulating a queer model of orientations: in addition to queer studies, feminist theory, and critical race theory, this book also draws on Marxism and psychoanalysis in its concern with how objects and bodies acquire orientations in part by how they "point" to each other. By using two strategies simultaneously—queering phenomenology and moving queer theory toward phenomenology—the book aims to show how bodies are gendered, sexualized, and raced by how they extend into space, as an extension that differentiates between "left" and "right," "front" and "behind," "up" and "down," as well as "near" and "far." What is offered, in other words, is a model of how bodies become orientated by how they take up time and space.

My aim is not to prescribe what form a queer phenomenology should take, as if the encounter itself must take the form of this book. After all, both queer studies and phenomenology involve diverse intellectual and political histories that cannot be stabilized as objects that could then be given to the other. My task instead is to work from the concept of "orientations" as it has been elaborated within some phenomenological texts, and to make that concept itself the site of an encounter. So, what happens if we start from this point?

Starting Points

In order to become orientated, you might suppose that we must first experience disorientation. When we are orientated, we might not even notice that we are orientated: we might not even think "to think" about this point. When

we experience disorientation, we might notice orientation as something we do not have. After all, concepts often reveal themselves as things to think “with” when they fail to be translated into being or action. It is in this mode of disorientation that one might begin to wonder: What does it mean to be orientated? How do we begin to know or to feel where we are, or even where we are going, by lining ourselves up with the features of the grounds we inhabit, the sky that surrounds us, or the imaginary lines that cut through maps? How do we know which way to turn to reach our destination?

It is by understanding how we become orientated in moments of disorientation that we might learn what it means to be orientated in the first place. Kant, in his classic essay “What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thought?” (1786, cited in Casey 1997), begins precisely with this point. He uses the example of walking blindfolded into an unfamiliar room. You don’t know where you are, or how where you are relates to the contours of the room, so how would you find your way around the room? How would you find your way to the door so you can leave the room? Kant argues that to become orientated in this situation depends on knowing the difference between the left and right side of the body. Such a difference, in its turn, shows that orientation is not so much about the relation between objects that extend into space (say, the relation between the chair and the table); rather, orientation depends on the bodily inhabitation of that space. We can only find our way in a dark room if we know the difference between the sides of the body: “Only by reference to these sides, can you know which way you are turning” (cited in Casey 1997: 20; see also Kant 1992: 367). Space then becomes a question of “turning,” of directions taken, which not only allow things to appear, but also enable us to find our way through the world by situating ourselves in relation to such things.

The concept of “orientation” allows us then to rethink the phenomenality of space—that is, how space is dependent on bodily inhabitation. And yet, for me, learning left from right, east from west, and forward from back does not necessarily mean I know where I am going. I can be lost even when I know how to turn, this way or that way. Kant describes the conditions of possibility for orientation, rather than how we become orientated in given situations. In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger takes up Kant’s example of walking blindfolded into a dark room. For Heidegger, orientation is not about differentiating between the sides of the body, which allow us to know which way to turn,

but about the familiarity of the world: “I necessarily orient myself both in and from my being already alongside a world which is ‘familiar’” (1973: 144). Familiarity is what is, as it were, given, and which in being given “gives” the body the capacity to be orientated in this way or in that. The question of orientation becomes, then, a question not only about how we “find our way” but how we come to “feel at home.”

Let us consider the difference it makes to walk blindfolded in a room that is familiar compared to one that is not. In a familiar room we have already extended ourselves. We can reach out, and in feeling what we feel—say, the corner of a table—we find out which way we are facing. Orientation involves aligning body and space: we only know which way to turn *once we know which way we are facing*. If we are in a strange room, one whose contours are not part of our memory map, then the situation is not so easy. We can reach out, but what we feel does not necessarily allow us to know which way we are facing; a lack of knowledge that involves an uncertainty about which way to turn. At the same time our intimacy with rooms, even dark ones, can allow us to navigate our way. We might reach out and feel a wall. That we know how a wall feels, or even what it does (that it marks, as it were, the edge of the room) makes the dark room already familiar. We might walk slowly, touching the wall, following it, until we reach a door. We know then what to do and which way to turn.

In this way the differentiation between strange and familiar is not sustained. Even in a strange or unfamiliar environment we might find our way, given our familiarity with social form, with how the social is arranged. This is not to say we don’t get lost, or that at times we don’t reach our destination. And this is not to say that in some places we are not shocked beyond the capacity for recognition. But “getting lost” still takes us somewhere; and being lost is a way of inhabiting space by registering what is not familiar: being lost can in its turn become a familiar feeling. Familiarity is shaped by the “feel” of space or by how spaces “impress” upon bodies. This familiarity is not, then, “in” the world as that which is already given. The familiar is an effect of inhabitation; we are not simply in the familiar, but rather the familiar is shaped by actions that reach out toward objects that are already within reach. Even when things are within reach, we still have to reach for those things for them to be reached. The work of inhabiting space involves a dynamic negotiation between what is familiar and unfamiliar, such that it is still possible for the world to create new

impressions, depending on which way we turn, which affects what is within reach. Extending into space also extends what is “just about” familiar or what is “just about” within reach.

If we become orientated by tending toward the “just about,” then to be orientated is also to extend the reach of the body. It is by registering the significance of this point that we can return to the question of bodily sides posed by Kant. It is interesting to note that for Husserl, while orientations also do not simply involve differentiating left from right sides of the body, they do involve the question of sides. As Husserl describes in the second volume of *Ideas*: “If we consider the characteristic way in which the Body presents itself and do the same for things, then we find the following situation: each Ego has its own domain of perceptual things and necessarily perceives the things in a certain orientation. The things appear and do so from this or that side, and in this mode of appearing is included irrevocably a relation to a here and its basic directions” (1989: 165–66). Orientations are about how we begin; how we proceed from “here,” which affects how what is “there” appears, how it presents itself. In other words, we encounter “things” as coming from different sides, as well as having different sides. Husserl relates the questions of “this or that side” to the point of “here,” which he also describes as the zero point of orientation, the point from which the world unfolds and which makes what is “there” over “there” (1989: 166; see also Husserl 2002: 151–53). It is from this point that the differences between “this side” and “that side” matter. It is only given that we are “here” at this point, the zero point, that near and far are lived as relative markers of distance. Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann also describe orientation as a question of one’s starting point: “The place in which I find myself, my actual ‘here,’ is the starting point for my orientation in space” (1974: 36). The starting point for orientation is the point from which the world unfolds: the “here” of the body and the “where” of its dwelling.

Orientations, then, are about the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty suggests that “spatial forms or distance are not so much relations between different points in objective space as they are relations between these points and a central perspective—our body” (1964: 5). The body provides us with a perspective: the body is “here” as a point from which we begin, and from which the world unfolds, as being both more and less over there. The “here” of the body does not simply refer to the body, but to “where” the body dwells. The “here” of bodily dwelling is thus

what takes the body outside of itself, as it is affected and shaped by its surroundings: the skin that seems to contain the body is also where the atmosphere creates an impression; just think of goose bumps, textures on the skin surface, as body traces of the coldness of the air. Bodies may become orientated in this responsiveness to the world around them, given this capacity to be affected. In turn, given the history of such responses, which accumulate as impressions on the skin, bodies do not dwell in spaces that are exterior but rather are shaped by their dwellings and take shape by dwelling.

If orientations are as much about feeling at home as they are about finding our way, then it becomes important to consider how “finding our way” involves what we could call “homing devices.” In a way, we learn what home means, or how we occupy space at home and as home, when we leave home. Reflecting on lived experiences of migration might allow us to pose again the very question of orientation.⁵ Migration could be described as a process of disorientation and reorientation: as bodies “move away” as well as “arrive,” as they reinhabit spaces. As I have suggested, phenomenology reminds us that spaces are not exterior to bodies; instead, spaces are like a second skin that unfolds in the folds of the body. In *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000), I reflect on how migration involves reinhabiting the skin: the different “impressions” of a new landscape, the air, the smells, the sounds, which accumulate like points, to create lines, or which accumulate like lines, to create new textures on the surface of the skin. Such spaces “impress” on the body, involving the mark of unfamiliar impressions, which in turn reshapes the body surface. The social also has its skin, as a border that feels and that is shaped by the “impressions” left by others (Probyn 1996: 5; Ahmed 2004a). The skin of the social might be affected by the comings and goings of different bodies, creating new lines and textures in the ways in which things are arranged. This is not to say that one has to leave home for things to be disoriented or reoriented: homes too can be “giddy” places where things are not always held in place, and homes can move, as we do.

After all, homes are effects of the histories of arrival. Avtar Brah in her reflections on diasporic space discusses the “entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of ‘staying put.’” (1996:16) Diasporic spaces do not simply begin to take shape with the arrival of migrant bodies; it is more that we only notice the arrival of those who appear “out of place.” Those who are “in place” also must arrive; they must get “here,” but their arrival is more easily

forgotten, or is not even noticed. The disorientation of the sense of home, as the “out of place” or “out of line” effect of unsettling arrivals, involves what we could call a migrant orientation. This orientation might be described as the lived experience of facing at least two directions: toward a home that has been lost, and to a place that is not yet home. And yet a migrant orientation does not necessarily reside within the migrant body, as the “double point” of its view. In a way, reflecting on migration helps us to explore how bodies arrive and how they get directed in this way or that way as a condition of arrival, which in turn is about how the “in place” gets placed.

I do not mean to imply that the viewing points of migrant bodies do not matter. After all, it is my own experience as a migrant subject, and as someone from a family of migrants, that has led me to think about orientation and to wonder about how it is that we come to inhabit spaces as if they extend our skin. Indeed, I could start the story here. What I remember, what takes my breath away, are not so much the giddy experiences of moving and the disorientation of being out of place, but the ways we have of settling; that is, of inhabiting spaces that, in the first instance, are unfamiliar but that we can imagine—sometimes with fear, other times with desire—might come to feel like home. Such becoming is not inevitable. It is not always obvious which places are the ones where we can feel at home.

Those ways we have to settle. Moving house. I hate packing: collecting myself up, pulling myself apart. Stripping the body of the house: the walls, the floors, the shelves. Then I arrive, an empty house. It looks like a shell. How I love unpacking. Taking things out, putting things around, arranging myself all over the walls. I move around, trying to distribute myself evenly between rooms. I concentrate on the kitchen. The familiar smell of spices fills the air. I allow the cumin to spill, and then gather it up again. I feel flung back somewhere else. I am never sure where the smell of spices takes me, as it has followed me everywhere. Each smell that gathers returns me somewhere; I am not always sure where that somewhere is. Sometimes the return is welcome, sometimes not. Sometimes it is tears or laughter that makes me realize that I have been pulled to another place and another time. Such memories can involve a recognition of how one’s body already feels, coming after the event. The surprise when we find ourselves moved in this way or that. So we ask the question, later, and it often seems too late: what is it that has led me away from the present, to another place and another time? How is that I have arrived here or there?

After the kitchen, the room I hope to inhabit is always the study. Or the place that I have decided is the place where I will write. There, that will be my desk. Or it could just be the writing table. It is here that I will gather my thoughts. It is here that I will write, and even write about writing. This book is written on different writing tables, which orientate me in different ways or which come to “matter” as effects of different orientations. On the tables, different objects gather. Making a place feel like home, or becoming at home in a space, is for me about being at my table. I think fondly of Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*. How important it is, especially for women, to claim that space, to take up that space through what one does with one’s body. And so when I am at my table, I am also claiming that space, I am becoming a writer by taking up that space.

Each time I move, I stretch myself out, trying this door, looking here, looking there. In stretching myself out, moving homes for me is coming to inhabit spaces, coming to embody them, where my body and the rooms in which it gathers—sitting, sleeping, writing, acting as it does, in this room and that room—cease to be distinct. It takes time, but this work of inhabitation does take place. It is a process of becoming intimate with where one is: an intimacy that feels like inhabiting a secret room that is concealed from the view of others. Loving one’s home is not about being fixed into a place, but rather it is about becoming part of a space where one has expanded one’s body, saturating the space with bodily matter: home as *overflowing* and *flowing over*. Of course, sometimes we do not feel at home; you might feel discomfort and alienation in a space that is still overflowing with memories. Or you might feel homesick; estranged from your present location and long for a space that you once inhabited as home. Or you might not feel at home, and you dance with joy at the anonymity of bare walls, untouched by the faces of loved ones that throw the body into another time and place.

The work of inhabitation involves orientation devices; ways of extending bodies into spaces that create new folds, or new contours of what we could call livable or inhabitable space. If orientation is about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space, then disorientation occurs when that extension fails. Or we could say that some spaces extend certain bodies and simply do not leave room for others. Now in living a queer life, the act of going home, or going back to the place I was brought up, has a certain disorienting effect. As I discuss in chapter 2, “the family home” seems so full of traces of heterosexual intimacy that it is hard to take up my place without

feeling those traces as points of pressure. In such moments, when bodies do not extend into space, they might feel “out of place” where they have been given “a place.” Such feelings in turn point to other places, even ones that have yet to be inhabited. My own story of orientation makes just such a queer point.

Lines That Direct Us

If we think of bodies and spaces as orientated, then we re-animate the very concept of space. As Henri Lefebvre concludes in *The Production of Space*: “I speak of an *orientation* advisedly. We are concerned with *nothing more and nothing less than that*. We are concerned with what might be called a ‘sense’: an organ that perceives, a direction that may be conceived, and a directly lived movement progressing towards the horizon” (1991: 423; second emphasis added). If space is orientated, then what appears depends on one’s point of view. Within cultural geography and social theories of space, the idea that space is dynamic and lived is well established (see Crang and Thrift 2000: 2, 6; Massey 1993: 156; Soja 1989). As Benno Werlen argues: “Space does not exist as a material object, or as a (consistent) theoretical object” (1998: 2). And yet the significance of the term “orientation,” despite its centrality in Lefebvre’s work, has not really been taken up. If we think of space through orientation, as I will suggest, then our work will in turn acquire a new direction, which opens up how spatial perceptions come to matter and be directed as matter.

Space acquires “direction” through how bodies inhabit it, just as bodies acquire direction in this inhabitation. Adding “orientation” to the picture gives a new dimension to the critique of the distinction between absolute space and relative space, also described as the distinction between location and position. As Neil Smith and Cindi Katz state: “In geographical terms, ‘location’ fixes a point in space, usually by reference to some abstract co-ordinate systems such as latitude and longitude,” while “‘Position,’ by contrast, implies location vis-à-vis other locations and incorporates a sense of perspective on other places” (1993: 69; see also Cresswell 1996: 156). We might then distinguish “left” as a relative marker, or a position, from the east, which refers to a system of coordinates that must, if they are to work, be absolute.

We can be in the East, for instance, or in the West, even if east and west can also be used as relative positions (“to the east” or “east of here”). The distinc-

tion between absolute and relative space, or even between location and position, does not always hold. This is not, however, to make all space relative to “my position.” Spaces are not just dependent on where I am located: such a model, in its turn, would presume the subject as originary, as the container of space rather than contained by space. The social depends in part on agreement about how we measure space and time, which is why social conflict can often be experienced as being “out of time” as well as “out of place” with others. But the social dependence upon agreed measures tells us more about the social than it does about space. Or if it tells us about space, then it reminds us that “absolute space” is invented, as an invention that has real and material effects in the arrangement of bodies and worlds. We might not be able to imagine the world without dividing the world into hemispheres, which are themselves created by the intersection of lines (the equator and the prime meridian), even when we know that there are other ways of inhabiting the world.

We need to complicate the relation between the lines that divide space, such as the equator and the prime meridian, and the “line” of the body. After all, direction only makes sense as a relationship between body and space. For instance, one definition of the left direction is: “on or towards the side of the human body which corresponds to the position of west if one regards oneself as facing north.”⁶ The body orientates itself by lining itself up with the direction of the space it inhabits (for instance, by turning left to exit through the door “on the left side of the room.”) The left is both a way we can turn and one side of our body. When we turn left, we turn in the direction that “follows” one side of the body.

It is useful here to recall that the distinction between right and left is not a neutral one. Kant suggests, for instance, that the right and left only become directions insofar as the right and left sides of the body are not symmetrical. He does not give equal weight to each side of the body. As he puts it, the right side “enjoys an indisputable advantage over the other in respect of skill and perhaps of strength too” (1992: 369). Indeed, we can note here that the etymology of the word left is “weak and worthless,” and Kant himself describes the left in terms of “more sensitivity.” Women and racial others are associated with the left hemisphere of the brain. Further, we only need to think about “the left” as a marker of political allegiance, or of the associations that gather around the term “left field.” The right is associated with truth, reason, normality and with getting “straight to the point.” The distinction between left

and right is far from neutral, as Robert Hertz (1973) shows so powerfully in his classic anthropological essay on this distinction. This lack of neutrality is what grounds the distinction between right and left: the right becomes the straight line, and the left becomes the origin of deviation.

The distinction between east and west is also far from neutral; it is not that they exist as independent spatial attributes, in contrast to right and left. The distinction between east and west is asymmetrical. As I suggest in my analysis of “orientalism” in chapter 3, following postcolonial feminist scholars, the East is associated with women, sexuality and the exotic, with what is “behind” and “below” the West, as well as what is on “the other side.” Indeed, the prime meridian as the line that divides the West from the East as “two sides” of the globe is imagined, and it is drawn through Greenwich in London. As Dava Sobel states in her reflections on this line, “The placement of the prime meridian is a purely political decision” (1998: 4). So what is “East” is actually what is east of the prime meridian, the zero point of longitude. The East as well as the left is thus orientated; *it acquires its direction only by taking a certain point of view as given.*

In this book I hope to explore what it means for “things” to be orientated, by showing how “orientations” depend on taking points of view as given. The gift of this point is concealed in the moment of being received as given. Such a point accumulates as a line that both divides things and creates spaces that we imagine we can be “in.” In a way, it is lines that give matter form and that create the impression of “surface, boundaries and fixity” (Butler 1993: 9).⁷ For William James, lines are sensational: “When we speak of the direction of two points toward each other, we mean simply the sensation of the line that joins the two points together” (1890: 149). So space itself is sensational: it is a matter of how things make their impression as being here or there, on this side or that side of a dividing line, or as being left or right, near or far. If space is always orientated, as Lefebvre argues, then inhabiting spaces “decides” what comes into view. The point of such decisions may be precisely that we have lost sight of them: that we take what is given as simply a matter of what happens to be “in front” of us.

The lines that allow us to find our way, those that are “in front” of us, also make certain things, and not others, available. What is available is what might reside as a point on this line. When we follow specific lines, some things become reachable and others remain or even become out of reach. Such

exclusions—the constitution of a field of unreachable objects—are the indirect consequences of following lines that are before us: we do not have to consciously exclude those things that are not “on line.” The direction we take excludes things for us, before we even get there.⁸

The lines we follow might also function as forms of “alignment,” or as ways of being in line with others. We might say that we are orientated when we are in line. We are “in line” when we face the direction that is already faced by others. Being “in line” allows bodies to extend into spaces that, as it were, have already taken their shape. Such extensions could be redescribed as an extension of the body’s reach. A key argument in this book is that the body gets directed in some ways more than others. We might be used to thinking of direction as simply which way we turn, or which way we are facing, at this or that moment in time. Direction then would be a rather casual matter. But what if direction, as the way we face as well as move, is organized rather than casual? We might speak then of collective direction: of ways in which nations or other imagined communities might be “going in a certain direction,” or facing the same way, such that only some things “get our attention.” Becoming a member of such a community, then, might also mean following this direction, which could be described as the political requirement that we turn some ways and not others (see chapter 3). We follow the line that is followed by others: the repetition of the act of following makes the line disappear from view as the point from which “we” emerge.

We could recall here that Judith Butler, following Louis Althusser, makes “turning” crucial to subject formation. One becomes a subject through “turning around” when hailed by the police. For Butler, this “turning” takes the form of hearing oneself as the subject of an address: it is a turning that is not really about the physicality of the movement (1997c: 33). But we can make this question of direction crucial to the emergence of subjectivity and the “force” of being given a name. In other words, we could reflect on the difference it makes *which way subjects turn.* Life, after all, is full of turning points. Turning might not only constitute subjects in the sense that the “turning” allows subjects to misrecognize themselves in the policeman’s address, but it might also take subjects in different directions. Depending on which way one turns, different worlds might even come into view. If such turns are repeated over time, then bodies acquire the very shape of such direction. It is not, then, that bodies simply have a direction, or that they follow directions, in moving this way or

that. Rather, in moving this way, rather than that, and moving in this way again and again, the surfaces of bodies *in turn* acquire their shape. Bodies are “directed” and they take the shape of this direction.

It is worth noting here the etymology of “direction.” As a word, it so easily loses itself in a referent: when I think of direction, I think of this or that direction or of going this way or that way. But direction is not such a simple matter. A direction is also something one gives. When you tell someone who is lost how to find their way, you give them directions to help them on their way. When you give an order or an instruction (especially a set of instructions guiding the use of equipment) you give directions. Directions are instructions about “where,” but they are also about “how” and “what”: directions take us somewhere by the very requirement that we follow a line that is drawn in advance. A direction is thus produced over time; a direction is what we are asked to follow. The etymology of “direct” relates to “being straight” or getting “straight to the point.” To go directly is to follow a line without a detour, without mediation. Within the concept of direction is a concept of “straightness.” To follow a line might be a way of becoming straight, by not deviating at any point.

The relationship between “following a line” and the conditions for the emergence of lines is often ambiguous. Which one comes first? I have always been struck by the phrase “a path well trodden.” A path is made by the repetition of the event of the ground “being trodden” upon. We can see the path as a trace of past journeys. The path is made out of footprints—traces of feet that “tread” and that in “treading” create a line on the ground. When people stop treading the path may disappear. And when we see the line of the path before us, we tend to walk upon it, as a path “clears” the way. So we walk on the path as it is before us, but it is only before us as an effect of being walked upon. A paradox of the footprint emerges. Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created. The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition. To say that lines are performative is to say that we find our way and we know which direction we face only as an effect of work, which is often hidden from view. So in following the directions, I arrive, as if by magic.

Directions are about the magic of arrival. In a way, the work of arrival is

forgotten in the very feeling that the arrival is magic. The work involves following directions. We arrive when we have followed them properly: bad readings just won’t get us there. We can think of following as a form of commitment as well as a social investment. Following a line is not disinterested: to follow a line takes time, energy, and resources, which means that the “line” one takes does not stay apart from the line of one’s life, as the very shape of how one moves through time and space. We then come to “have a line,” which might mean a specific “take” on the world, a set of views and viewing points, as well as a route through the contours of the world, which gives our world its own contours. So we follow the lines, and in following them we become committed to “what” they lead us to as well as “where” they take us. A commitment is also a commitment made as an effect of an action. To say “we are already committed” is not simply a pledge or a promise that points to the future. Such a statement might suggest that it is too late to turn back, and that what will happen “will happen” as we are already “behind” it. If we are already committed to a bodily action (such as a specific stroke in tennis), then the body is already “behind” the action. To commit may then also be a way of describing how it is that we become directed toward specific goals, aims, and aspirations through what we “do” with our bodies.

Following lines also involves forms of social investment. Such investments “promise” return (if we follow this line, then “this” or “that” will follow), which might sustain the very will to keep going. Through such investments in the promise of return, subjects *reproduce the lines that they follow*. In a way, thinking about the politics of “lifelines” helps us to rethink the relationship between inheritance (the lines that we are given as our point of arrival into familial and social space) and reproduction (the demand that we return the gift of the line by extending that line). It is not automatic that we reproduce what we inherit, or that we always convert our inheritance into possessions. We must pay attention to *the pressure* to make such conversions. We can recall here the different meanings of the word “pressure”: the social pressure to follow a certain course, to live a certain kind of life, and even to reproduce that life can feel like a physical “press” on the surface of the body, which creates its own impressions. We are pressed into lines, just as lines are the accumulation of such moments of pressure, or what I call “stress points” in chapter 3.

How ironic that “a lifeline” can also be an expression for something that saves us. A lifeline thrown to us is what gives us the capacity to get out of an

impossible world or an unlivable life. Such a line would be a different kind of gift: one that is thrown without the expectation of return in the immediacy of a life-and-death situation. And yet, we don't know what happens when we reach such a line and let ourselves live by holding on. If we are pulled out, we don't know where the force of the pull might take us. We don't know what it means to follow the gift of the unexpected line that gives us the chance for a new direction and even a chance to live again.

A lifeline can also be something that expresses our identity, such as the lines carved on the skin that are created as an effect of the repetition of certain expressions: the laugh line, the furrow created by the frown, and so on. Lines become the external trace of an interior world, as signs of who we are on the flesh that folds and unfolds before others. What we follow, what we do, becomes "shown" through the lines that gather on our faces, as the accumulation of gestures on the skin surface over time. If we are asked to reproduce what we inherit, then the lines that gather on the skin become signs of the past, as well as orientations toward the future, a way of facing and being faced by others. Some lines might be marks of the refusal to reproduce: the lines of rebellion and resistance that gather over time to create new impressions on the skin surface or on the skin of the social.

For it is important to remember that life is not always linear, or that the lines we follow do not always lead us to the same place. It is not incidental that the drama of life, those moments of crisis that demand we make a decision, are represented by the following scene: you face a fork in the road and have to decide which path to take: this way or that way. And you go one way by following its path. But then perhaps you are not so sure. The longer you proceed on this path the harder it is to go back even in the face of this uncertainty. You make an investment in going and the going extends the investment. You keep going out of the hope that you are getting somewhere. Hope is an investment that the "lines" we follow will get us somewhere.⁹ When we don't give up, when we persist, when we are "under pressure" to arrive, to get somewhere, we give ourselves over to the line. Turning back risks the wasting of time, a time that has already been expended or given up. If we give up on the line that we have given our time to, then we give up more than a line; we give up a certain life we have lived, which can feel like giving up on ourselves.

And so you go on. Your journey might still be full of doubt. When doubt gets in the way of hope, which can often happen in a moment, as abruptly as

turning a switch, then you go back, you give up. You even hurry back, as the time expended without hope is time taken away from the pursuit of another path. So, yes, sometimes you do go back. Sometimes you get there. Sometimes you just don't know. Such moments do not always present themselves as life choices available to consciousness. At times, we don't know that we have followed a path, or that the line we have taken is a line that clears our way only by marking out spaces that we don't inhabit. Our investments in specific routes can be hidden from view, as they are the point from which we view the world that surrounds us. We can get directed by losing our sense of this direction. The line becomes then simply a way of life, or even an expression of who we are.

So at one level we do not encounter that which is "off course"; that which is off the line we have taken. And yet, accidental or chance encounters do happen, and they redirect us and open up new worlds. Sometimes, such encounters might come as the gift of a lifeline, and sometimes they might not; they can be lived purely as loss. Such sideways moments might generate new possibilities, or they might not. After all, it is often loss that generates a new direction; when we lose a loved one, for instance, or when a relationship with a loved one ends, it is hard to simply stay on course because love is also what gives us a certain direction. What happens when we are "knocked off course" depends on the psychic and social resources "behind" us. Such moments can be a gift, or they might be the site of trauma, anxiety, or stress about the loss of an imagined future. It is usually with the benefit of "hindsight" that we reflect on such moments, where a fork in the road before us opens up and we have to decide what to do, even if the moment does not present itself as a demand for a decision. The "hind" does not always give us a different point of view, yet it does allow those moments to be revisited, to be reinhabited, as moments when we change course.

I think one of the reasons that I became interested in the very question of "direction" was because in the "middle" of my life I experienced a dramatic redirection: I left a certain kind of life and embraced a new one. I left the "world" of heterosexuality, and became a lesbian, even though this means staying in a heterosexual world. For me, this line was a lifeline, and yet it also meant leaving the well trodden paths. It is interesting to note that in landscape architecture they use the term "desire lines" to describe unofficial paths, those marks left on the ground that show everyday comings and goings, where

people deviate from the paths they are supposed to follow. Deviation leaves its own marks on the ground, which can even help generate alternative lines, which cross the ground in unexpected ways. Such lines are indeed traces of desire; where people have taken different routes to get to this point or to that point. It is certainly desire that helps generate a lesbian landscape, a ground that is shaped by the paths that we follow in deviating from the straight line. And yet, becoming a lesbian still remains a difficult line to follow. The lesbian body does not extend the shape of this world, as a world organized around the form of the heterosexual couple. Inhabiting a body that is not extended by the skin of the social means the world acquires a new shape and makes new impressions. Becoming a lesbian taught me about the very point of how life gets directed and how that "point" is often hidden from view. Becoming reorientated, which involves the disorientation of encountering the world differently, made me wonder about orientation and how much "feeling at home," or knowing which way we are facing, is about the making of worlds.

We talk about losing our way as well as finding our way. And this is not simply a reference to moments when we can't find our way to this or that destination: when we are lost in the streets, or in rooms that are unfamiliar; when we don't know how we have got where it is that we are. We can also lose our direction in the sense that we lose our aim or purpose: disorientation is a way of describing the feelings that gather when we lose our sense of who it is that we are. Such losses can be converted into the joy of a future that has been opened up. "Life itself" is often imagined in terms of "having a direction," which decides from the present what the future should be. After all, to acquire a direction takes time, even if it feels as if we have always followed one line or another, or as if we "began" and "ended" in the same place. Indeed, it is by following some lines more than others that we might acquire our sense of who it is that we are. The temporality of orientation reminds us that orientations are effects of what we tend toward, where the "toward" marks a space and time that is almost, but not quite, available in the present.

The question of "orientation" is thus not only a spatial question. We might note here that "dwelling" refers to the process of coming to reside, or what Heidegger calls "making room" (1973: 146), and also to time: to dwell on something is to linger, or even to delay or postpone. If orientation is a matter of how we reside, or how we clear space that is familiar, then orientations also take time and require giving up time. Orientations allow us to take up space

insofar as they take time. Even when orientations seem to be about which way we are facing in the present, they also point us toward the future. The hope of changing directions is that we don't always know where some paths may take us: risking departure from the straight and narrow makes new futures possible, which might involve going astray, getting lost, or even becoming queer, as I discuss in chapter 2.

In the case of sexual orientation, it is not simply that we have it. To become straight means that we not only have to turn toward the objects that are given to us by heterosexual culture, but also that we must "turn away" from objects that take us off this line. The queer subject within straight culture hence deviates and is made socially present as a deviant. What I seek to offer in this book is an argument that what is "present" or near to us is not casual: we do not acquire our orientations just because we find things here or there. Rather certain objects are available to us because of lines that we have already taken: our "life courses" follow a certain sequence, which is also a matter of following a direction or of "being directed" in a certain way (birth, childhood, adolescence, marriage, reproduction, death), as Judith Halberstam has shown us in her reflections on the "temporality" of the family and the expenditure of family time (2005: 152–53). The concept of "orientations" allows us to expose how life gets directed in some ways rather than others, through the very requirement that we follow what is already given to us. For a life to count as a good life, then it must return the debt of its life by taking on the direction promised as a social good, which means imagining one's futurity in terms of reaching certain points along a life course. A queer life might be one that fails to make such gestures of return.

This book is a modest one, made up of three chapters. Each chapter follows the concept of orientations: starting with a reflection on the concept within phenomenology, and then turning to the question of sexual orientation, and then finally to the orientation of orientalism as a point of entry for reconsidering how racism "orientates" bodies in specific ways.

Although I follow the concept of orientations in this book, it is important to note that I start with phenomenology. And yet, even at this starting point I seem to lose my way. Perhaps my own orientation toward orientation is re-

vealed by the style of the book, which tends to drift away from philosophy toward other matters. My writing moves between conceptual analysis and personal digression. But why call the personal a digression? Why is it that the personal so often enters writing as if we are being led astray from a proper course?

My writing takes detours, turns, and moves this way and that. As noted above, I turned toward the table quite by chance. Once I caught sight of the table in Husserl's writing, which is revealed just for a moment, I could not help but follow tables around. When you follow tables, you can end up anywhere. So I followed Husserl in his turn to the table, but when he turns away, I got led astray. I found myself seated at my table, at the different tables that mattered at different points in my life. How I wanted to make these tables matter! So I kept returning to tables, even when it seemed that phenomenology had turned another way. Quite ironically, it was the appearance of Husserl's table that led me this way, even though it turned me toward the very objects that gathered at home, and to the queer potential of this gathering.

Perhaps my preference for such queer turnings is because I don't have a disciplinary line to follow—I was “brought up” between disciplines and I have never quite felt comfortable in the homes they provide. The lines of disciplines are certainly a form of inheritance. The line, for instance, that is drawn from philosopher to philosopher is often a paternal one: the line begins with the father and is followed by those who “can” take his place. We know, I think, that not just “any body” can receive such an inheritance or can turn what they receive into a possession. Disciplines also have lines in the sense that they have a specific “take” on the world, a way of ordering time and space through the very decisions about what counts as within the discipline. Such lines mark out the edges of disciplinary homes, which also mark out those who are “out of line.”

I write this book as someone who does not reside within philosophy; I feel out of line even at the point from which I start. It is a risk to read philosophy as a non-philosopher. When we don't have the resources to read certain texts, we risk getting things wrong by not returning them to the fullness of the intellectual histories from which they emerge. And yet, we read. The promise of interdisciplinary scholarship is that the failure to return texts to their histories will do something. Of course, not all failures are creative. If we don't take care with the texts we read, if we don't pay attention, then the failure to read them

“properly” won't do very much at all. Taking care involves work, and it is work that we must do if we are to create something other than another point on a line. We must remember that to “not return” still requires the act of following, we have to go with something if we are to depart from that thing. The following takes us in a different direction, as we keep noticing other points.

I begin in chapter 1 by exploring the concept of orientation in phenomenology and, in particular, the relationship between perception, action, and direction. My task in this chapter is to work closely with phenomenological texts in order to develop an approach to the concept of orientations, which I then explore with reference to more concrete examples in the following chapters. I also aim in chapter 1 to think about how the objects that appear within phenomenology show us how phenomenology might be directed in some ways rather than others. Using Marxism and feminist theory I explore how the orientation of phenomenology toward the writing table might depend upon forms of labor, which are relegated to the background. Chapter 1 considers how spatial orientations (relations of proximity and distance) are shaped by other social orientations, such as gender and class, that affect “what” comes into view, but also are not simply given, as they are effects of the repetition of actions over time.

In the second chapter I ask more directly: what does it mean to queer phenomenology? In my answer I begin by noting that in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* queer moments do happen—as moments where the world appears “slantwise.” Merleau-Ponty describes how this queer world is “reorientated,” which we can describe as the “becoming vertical” of perspective. In light of Merleau-Ponty's discussion of such queer moments, in this chapter I explore how bodies become straight by “lining up” with lines that are already given. I show how compulsory heterosexuality operates as a straightening device, which rereads signs of queer desire as deviations from the straight line. I suggest that a queer phenomenology might offer an approach to sexual orientation by rethinking the place of the object in sexual desire; by attending to how the bodily direction “toward” such objects affects how bodies inhabit spaces and how spaces inhabit bodies. It is here that I introduce the figure of the “contingent lesbian,” where contingency points to the role of contact and touch in the generation of both space and desire.

I begin chapter 3 by thinking about the significance of “the orient” in “orientation,” and I suggest that orientations involve the racialization of space.

I consider how racism is an ongoing and unfinished history; how it works as a way of orientating bodies in specific directions, thereby affecting how they “take up” space. We “become” racialized in how we occupy space, just as space is, as it were, already occupied as an effect of racialization. I also address the question of how we can consider the orientations of bodies “at home” who do not inhabit whiteness, for which I draw on my own experience at home of being mixed race, with a white English mother and Pakistani father, and how this mixed genealogy shaped what objects for me are reachable. Being mixed might also involve a queer departure from the lines of conventional genealogy. Bodies that do not extend the whiteness of such spaces are “stopped,” which produces, we could say, disorienting effects.

If we think with and through orientation we might allow the moments of disorientation to gather, almost as if they are bodies around a different table. We might, in the gathering, face a different way. Queer objects might take us to the very limits of social gathering, even when they still gather us around, even when they still lead us to gather at a table. Indeed, to live out a politics of disorientation might be to sustain wonder about the very forms of social gathering.

CHAPTER 1 Orientations Toward Objects

In perception properly so-called, as an explicit awareness (*Gewahren*), I am turned towards the object, to the paper, for instance, I apprehend it as being this here and now. The apprehension is a singling out, every perceived object having a background in experience. Around and about the paper lie books, pencils, ink-well, and so forth, and these in a certain sense are also “perceived,” perceptually there, in the “field of intuition.”

Edmund Husserl, *Ideas*

Phenomenology is often characterized as a “turn toward” objects, which appear in their perceptual “thereness” as objects given to consciousness. Rather than consciousness being seen as directed toward itself, it is understood as having objects in its view—as being shaped by that which appears before it in “this here and now.” But in turning toward objects, what actually appears within phenomenological writing? If phenomenology apprehends what is given to consciousness, then what is given within the writing about that apprehension? Or, in simpler terms, what objects appear within phenomenology as objects that the reader, in turn, can apprehend?

In Husserl’s *Ideas* objects do appear for sure, though we cannot assume that they record an experience, in the sense that we cannot assume that Husserl saw or even “could see” the object at the moment of writing. As with much philosophy, the object appears in the language of “say” or “for instance”: that is, “say, I see this”; or “for instance, I see that.” Such words preface the example as illustration and not anecdote—the point is not whether or not this *really* happened. The object appears not as a thing to which we should, as readers, direct

spaces that I do, by walking on the ground that has been cleared by such action. The arrival of black bodies at British universities was only possible given the history of black activism, both in the United Kingdom and transnationally, which has cleared some ground by the repetition of the collective refusal to follow the line of whiteness. This is why I love the use of the word “black” as a reorientation device, as a political orientation, despite the ways in which it can risk concealing the differences between bodies that are of different colors and the different histories “behind” us.²⁸ Such a word becomes an object, which gathers us around as a regathering and helps ground the work that we do, in part by redescribing the ground as the ground of whiteness. Such a word, claimed in this way, points toward the future and toward a world that we have yet to inhabit: a world that is not orientated around whiteness. We don’t know, as yet, what shape such a world might take, or what mixtures might be possible, when we no longer reproduce the lines we follow.

CONCLUSION **Disorientation and Queer Objects**

The instability of levels produces not only the intellectual experience of disorder, but the vital experience of giddiness and nausea, which is the awareness of our own contingency and the horror with which it fills us.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*

Moments of disorientation are vital. They are bodily experiences that throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground. Disorientation as a bodily feeling can be unsettling, and it can shatter one’s sense of confidence in the ground or one’s belief that the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make a life feel livable. Such a feeling of shattering, or of being shattered, might persist and become a crisis. Or the feeling itself might pass as the ground returns or as we return to the ground. The body might be reoriented if the hand that reaches out finds something to steady an action. Or the hand might reach out and find nothing, and might grasp instead the indeterminacy of air. The body in losing its support might then be lost, undone, thrown.

Sometimes, disorientation is an ordinary feeling, or even a feeling that comes and goes as we move around during the day. I think we can learn from such ordinary moments. Say, for example, that you are concentrating. You focus. What is before you becomes the world. The edges of that world disappear as you zoom in. The object—say the paper, and the thoughts that gather around the paper by gathering as lines on the paper—becomes what is given by losing its contours. The paper becomes worldly, which might even mean you lose sight of the table. Then, behind you, someone calls out your

name. As if by force of habit, you look up, you even turn around to face what is behind you. But as your bodily gestures move up, as you move around, you move out of the world, without simply falling into a new one. Such moments when you “switch” dimensions can be deeply disorientating. One moment does not follow another, as a sequence of spatial givens that unfolds as moments of time. They are moments in which you lose one perspective, but the “loss” itself is not empty or waiting; it is an object, thick with presence. You might even see black lines in front of your eyes as lines that block what is in front of you when you turn around. You experience the moment as loss, as the making present of something that is now absent (the presence of an absence). You blink, but it takes time for the world to acquire a new shape. You might even feel angry from being dislodged from the world you inhabited as a contourless world. You might even say to the person who addressed you with the frustrated reply of “What is it?” What is “it” that makes me lose what is before me?

Such moments of switching dimensions can be disorientating. If my project in this book has been to show how orientations are organized rather than casual, how they shape what becomes socially as well as bodily given, then how can we understand what it means to be disoriented? Is disorientation a bodily sign of “dis/organization,” as the failure of an organization to hold things in place? What do such moments of disorientation tell us? What do they do, and what can we do with them? I want us to think about how queer politics might *involve* disorientation, without legislating disorientation as a politics. It is not that disorientation is always radical. Bodies that experience disorientation can be defensive, as they reach out for support or as they search for a place to regroup and reorientate their relation to the world. So, too, the forms of politics that proceed from disorientation can be conservative, depending on the “aims” of their gestures, depending on how they seek to (re)ground themselves. And, for sure, bodies that experience being out of place might need to be orientated, to find a place where they feel comfortable and safe in the world. The point is not whether we experience disorientation (for we will, and we do), but how such experiences can impact on the orientation of bodies and spaces, which is after all about how the things are “directed” and how they are shaped by the lines they follow. The point is what we do with such moments of disorientation, as well as what such moments can do—whether they can offer us the hope of new directions, and whether new directions are reason enough for hope.

I have noted that phenomenology is full of moments of disorientation. And yet, such moments are often moments that “point” toward becoming orientated. As noted earlier, Merleau-Ponty, following Husserl, suggests that the “I can” proceeds from overcoming disorientation, from reorienting the body so that the line of the body follows the vertical and horizontal axes. Such a body is one that is upright, straight, and in line. The straight body is not simply in a “neutral” position: or if it is the neutral position, then this alignment is only an effect of the repetition of past gestures, which give the body its contours and the “impression” of its skin. In a way, the utterance “I can” points to the future only insofar as it inherits the past, as the accumulation of what the body has already done, as well as what is “behind” the body, the conditions of its arrival. The body emerges from this history of doing, which is also a history of not doing, of paths not taken, which also involves the loss, impossible to know or to even register, of what might have followed from such paths. As such, the body is directed as a condition of its arrival, as a direction that gives the body its line. And yet we can still ask, what happens if the orientation of the body is not restored? What happens when disorientation cannot simply be overcome by the “force” of the vertical? What do we do, if disorientation itself becomes worldly or becomes what is given?

In a footnote to his text Merleau-Ponty refers to Stratton’s *Vision without Inversion* in order to provide both an analysis of the way in which orientation happens as well as what happens when it fails to happen. As he states: “We remain physically upright not through the mechanism of the skeleton or even through the nervous regulation of muscular tone, but because we are caught up in a world. *If this involvement is seriously weakened, the body collapses and becomes once more an object*” (2002: 296; emphasis added). The “upright” body is involved in the world and acts on the world, or even “can act” insofar as it is already involved. The weakening of this involvement is what causes the body to collapse, and to become an object alongside other objects. In simple terms, disorientation involves becoming an object. It is from this point, the point at which the body becomes an object, that Fanon’s phenomenology of the black body begins. By implication, we learn that disorientation is unevenly distributed: some bodies more than others have their involvement in the world called into crisis. This shows us how the world itself is more “involved” in some bodies than in others, as it takes such bodies as the contours of ordinary experience. It is not just that bodies are directed in specific ways, but that the world is shaped by the directions taken by some bodies more than others. It is

thus possible to talk about the white world, the straight world, as a world that takes the shape of the motility of certain skins.

From Fanon we learn about the experience of disorientation, as the experience of being an object among other objects, of being shattered, of being cut into pieces by the hostility of the white gaze. Disorientation can be a bodily feeling of losing one's place, and an effect of the loss of a place: it can be a violent feeling, and a feeling that is affected by violence, or shaped by violence directed toward the body. Disorientation involves failed orientations: bodies inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape, or use objects that do not extend their reach. At this moment of failure, such objects "point" somewhere else or they make what is "here" become strange. Bodies that do not follow the line of whiteness, for instance, might be "stopped" in their tracks, which does not simply stop one from getting somewhere, but changes one's relation to what is "here." When such lines block rather than enable action they become points that accumulate stress, or stress points. Bodies can even take the shape of such stress, as points of social and physical pressure that can be experienced as a physical press on the surface of the skin.

Furthermore, as I showed in chapter 3, an effect of being "out of place" is also to create disorientation in others: the body of color might disturb the picture—and do so simply as a result of being in spaces that are lived as white, spaces into which white bodies can sink. I suggested that white space (as a "habit space") is an effect of the accumulation of such gestures of sinking. It is interesting to note here that Jacques Rolland's description of seasickness as a disorientation uses the metaphor of sinking. As he states: "We have seasickness, because we are at sea, that is, off the coast, of which we have lost sight. That is, again, because the earth has gone, the same earth into which, ordinarily, we sink our feet in order for this position or stance to exist. Seasickness arrives once the loss of the earth is given" (2003: 17; see also Levinas 2003: 66–68). The ground into which we sink our feet is not neutral: it gives ground to some more than others. Disorientation occurs when we fail to sink into the ground, which means that the "ground" itself is disturbed, which also disturbs what gathers "on" the ground.

It is for this reason that disorientation can move around; it involves not only bodies becoming objects, but also the disorientation in how objects are gathered to create a ground, or to clear a space on the ground (the field). Here, in the conclusion to this volume, I explore the relation between the notion of

queer and the disorientation of objects. It is worth noting that throughout this book I have been using "queer" in at least two senses, and I have at times slid from one sense to the other. First, I have used "queer" as a way of describing what is "oblique" or "off line." This is why, in chapter 3, I described a mixed orientation, which unfolds from the gap between reception and possession, as offering a queer angle on the reproduction of whiteness. I also describe the presence of bodies of color in white spaces as disorienting: the proximity of such bodies out of place can work to make things seem "out of line," and can hence even work to "queer" space; people "blink" and do "double turns" when they encounter such bodies.

Second, I have used queer to describe specific sexual practices. Queer in this sense would refer to those who practice nonnormative sexualities (Jagose 1996), which as we know involves a personal and social commitment to living in an oblique world, or in a world that has an oblique angle in relation to that which is given. In chapter 2, notably, I discuss lesbianism as a queer form of social and sexual contact, which is queer perhaps even before "queer" gets taken up as a political orientation. I think it is important to retain both meanings of the word queer, which after all, are historically related even when we do not reduce them. This means recalling what makes specific sexualities describable as queer in the first place: that is, that they are seen as odd, bent, twisted. In a way, if we return to the root of the word "queer" (from the Greek for cross, oblique, adverse) we can see that the word itself "twists," with a twist that allows us to move between sexual and social registers, without flattening them or reducing them to a single line. Although this approach risks losing the specificity of queer as a commitment to a life of sexual deviation, it also sustains the significance of "deviation" in what makes queer lives queer.

To make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things. As I have suggested, the effects of such a disturbance are uneven, precisely given that the world is already organized around certain forms of living—certain times, spaces, and directions. I have shown how the reproduction of things—of what is "before us"—is about what is assumed to be reachable at home, about what is gathered around as objects that can extend our reach. Heterosexuality as a compulsory orientation reproduces more than "itself": it is a mechanism for the reproduction of culture, or even of the "attributes" that are assumed to pass along a family line, such as whiteness. It is for this reason that queer as a sexual orientation "queers" more than sex, just as other kinds of queer effects can in

turn end up “queering” sex. It is important to make the oblique angle of queer do this work, even if it risks placing different kinds of queer effects alongside each other. Michael Moon’s (1998: 16) approach to sexual disorientation as “uncanny effects” is a useful guide for us here. If the sexual involves the contingency of bodies coming into contact with other bodies, then sexual disorientation slides quickly into social disorientation, *as a disorientation in how things are arranged*. The effects are indeed uncanny: what is familiar, what is passed over in the veil of its familiarity, becomes rather strange.

In a way, it might be a queer encounter with existential phenomenology that helps us rethink how disorientation might begin with the strangeness of familiar objects. Think of Sartre’s novel *Nausea* (1965). It is a rather queer novel, I would say, in the sense that it is a novel about “things” becoming oblique. *Nausea* could be described as a phenomenological description of disorientation, of a man losing his grip on the world. What is striking about this novel is how much the loss of grip is directed toward objects that gather around the narrator, a writer, as objects that come to “disturb” rather than extend human action. The narrator begins with the desire to describe such objects, and how they are given and arranged, as a way of describing queer effects: “I must say how I see this table, the street, people, my packet of tobacco, since *these* are the things which have changed” (9). Here again the table appears; it even comes first, as a sign of the orientation of writing. To write a story of disorientation begins with the table becoming queer. It is the things around him, gathered in the way that they are (as a horizon around the body, and the objects that are near enough, including the table), that reveals the disorientation in the order of things.

Disorientation could be described here as the “becoming oblique” of the world, a becoming that is at once interior and exterior, as that which is given, or as that which gives what is given its new angle. Whether the strangeness is in the object or in the body that is near the object remains a crucial question. It seems first that it is the narrator who is disorientated, that “things” have “slipped away” because he is slipping away or “losing his mind.” If objects are the extensions of bodies, just as bodies are the incorporations of objects, how can we locate the queer moment in one or the other? Later in the novel, the “inside” and “outside” do not stay in place: “The Nausea isn’t inside me: I can feel it *over there* on the wall, on the braces, everywhere around me. It is one with the café, it is I who am inside *it*” (35). Things become queer precisely

given how bodies are touched by objects, or by “something” that happens, where what is “over there” is also “in here,” or even what I am “in.” The story involves things becoming strange:

Something has happened to me: I can’t doubt that any more. It came as an illness does, not like an ordinary certainty, not like anything obvious. It installed itself cunningly, little by little; I felt a little strange, a little awkward, and that was all. . . . There is something new, for example, about my hands, a certain way of picking up my pipe or my fork. Or else it is the fork which has a certain way of getting itself picked up, I don’t know. Just now, when I was on the point of coming into my room, I stopped short because I felt in my hand a cold object which attracted my attention by means of a sort of personality. I opened my hand and looked: I was simply holding the doorknob. (13)

We begin with the “me” as the place where something happens, a little strangeness or awkwardness that emerges over time, as if it has a life of its own. The becoming strange of the body does not stay with “me.” For if it is my hands that are strange, then it is my hands as they express themselves in a gesture. Such gestures are the “point” where my hands meet with objects: where they cease to be apart; where they pick things up. So is it my hand or is it the fork that is different? What is so compelling to me about this account of “becoming queer” is how the strangeness that seems to reside somewhere between the body and its objects is also what brings these objects to life and makes them dance. So “the doorknob” when it is being what it is there to do (allowing us to open the door) is “just that.” But when the doorknob is felt as something other than what is it supposed to do, then it comes to have a tangible quality as a “cold object,” even one with a “personality.” A cold object is one that gives us a sensation of being cold. When objects come to life, they leave their impressions.

In the first chapter, I evoked Marx’s critique of German idealism for the very presumption that objects are simply before us, as things given in their “sensuous certainty.” I would certainly not want to describe the queer object as that which becomes given in this way. Existential phenomenology shows us that the objects that are gathered as gatherings of history (domesticated objects, such as doorknobs, pens, knives, and forks that gather around, by supporting the actions of bodies) are in a certain way overlooked. What makes them historical is how they are “overlooked.” Seeing such objects as if for the

first time (before this is a doorknob, how might I encounter it?) involves wonder, it allows the object to breathe not through a forgetting of its history but by allowing this history to come alive: How did you get here? How did I come to have you in my hand? How did we arrive at this place where such a handling is possible? How do you feel now that you are near? What does it do when I do this with you? To re-encounter objects as strange things is hence not to lose sight of their history but to refuse to make them history by losing sight. Such wonder directed at the objects that we face, as well as those that are behind us, does not involve bracketing out the familiar but rather allows the familiar to dance again with life.¹

So what happens when the table dances? It is important to note that Marx describes the table as “turning” and even as “dancing”—as a dance that expresses the false life of the commodity rather than the breath of history: “In relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than ‘table-turning’ ever was” (1887: 76).² For Marx, when the table becomes a commodity it is endowed with agency, as if it has a life of its own. This life, we could say, is “stolen” from those who make the table, and from the very form of its “matter” (the wood). The dancing table would be a historical theft and a theft of history. We could approach the dancing table quite differently, if we see that the life of the table is “given” through this intimacy with other lives, rather than being a cut-off point. A table acquires a life through how it arrives, through what it comes into contact with, and the work that it allows us to do. Perhaps this life is a borrowed rather than stolen life, where the act of borrowing involves a pledge of return. The dancing table would be for sure a rather queer object: a queerness that does not reside “within” the table but registers how the table can impress upon us, and what we too can borrow from the contingency of its life.

In *Nausea*, objects become alive not by being endowed with qualities they do not have but through a contact with them as things that have been arranged in specific ways. Such contact is bodily: it is a touch that returns to the body, as the skin of the object “impresses” the skin of the body. The “touch” itself disorients the body, so it loses its way. As the narrator states: “Objects ought not to *touch*, since they are not alive. You use them, you put them back in place, you live among them; they are useful, nothing more. I am afraid of entering in contact with them, just as if they were living animals. Now I see; I remember better what I felt the other day on the sea-shore when I was holding that

pebble. It was a sort of sweet disgust. How unpleasant it was! And it came from the pebble, I am sure of that, it passed from the pebble into my hands. Yes, that’s exactly it: a sort of nausea in the hands” (22).³ This way of coming into contact with objects involves disorientation: the touch of the thing that transmits some thing. The pebble becomes queer in such an encounter. What the story implies is that orientation is achieved through the loss of such physical proximity: things are kept in their place, which might be near me, but it is a nearness that does not threaten to get inside of me, or spill what is inside out.

This is how phenomenology offers a queer angle—by bringing objects to life in their “loss” of place, in the failure of gathering to keep things in their place. It is not surprising to me that it is the “hands” that emerge as crucial sites in stories of disorientation, and indeed as crucial to phenomenology in general. Hands hold things. They touch things. They let things go. And yet, what does it mean for nausea to be “in the hands”? For even if the hands displace the nausea from the “I” (the hands can easily be alien objects, along with doorknobs), the hands still return us to the “I,” as what offers the handle of the story. Making nausea in the hands, rather than in the handled, reminds us that existential phenomenology writes “disorientation” as a preoccupation with the subject, as a way of returning to the question of one’s being even if being itself is what is in question. So even if things matter in *Nausea* and come to matter as signs of life, how they matter still returns to the subject as a sign of his interiority, even if that interior is pushed out to the outer regions of the body—the regions that are closest to the matter.

How does this “matter” matter? It is crucial that “matter” does not become an object that we presume is absent or present: what matters is shaped by the directions taken that allow things to appear in a certain way. We can return to Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*. He relates the distinction between “straight” and “oblique” to the distinction between “distance” and “proximity.” Such categories are meaningful only in relation to phenomenal or orientated space. Merleau-Ponty suggests that distance functions like the oblique, as a way of transforming the relationship between the body and the object it perceives. As he states: “We ‘have’ the retreating object, we never cease to ‘hold it’ and to have a grasp on it, and the increasing distance is not, as breadth appears to be, an augmenting externality: it expresses merely that the thing is beginning to slip away from the grasp of our gaze and is less allied to it.

Distance is what distinguishes this loose and approximate grip from the complete grasp which is proximity. We shall define it then as we defined 'straight' and 'oblique' above, in terms of the situation of the object in relation to our power of grasping it" (2002: 304-5).

Distance is here the expression of a certain loss, of the loss of grip over an object *that is already within reach*, which is "losable" only insofar as it is within my horizon. Distance is lived as the "slipping away" of the reachable, in other words, as the moment in which what is within reach threatens to become out of reach. Merleau-Ponty, by proceeding with an analogy between the distant and the oblique, helps to show how the queer object might also be "slipping away." Here we recall my opening comments about the disorientation of switching dimensions: there is something about the loss of an object—"before" it has "gone," where the object can include simply what is "before us"—that disorients and creates a new slant. The disorientation can persist if what retreats does not return, and something does not approach to take its place. Of course, what slips must first be proximate. It might not so much be that the object becomes queer when it slips, but that the proximity of what does not follow makes things slip. In other words, we might be speaking of the queer effects of certain gatherings, in which "things" appear to be oblique, to be "slipping away." Things can lose place alongside other things, or they can seem out of place in their place alongside other things. Disorientation involves contact with things, but a contact in which "things" slip as a proximity that does not hold things in place, thereby creating a feeling of distance.

It is interesting for me to note (again) that the object around which I have most gathered my thoughts has been the table. In a way, I have made the table a rather queer object by attending to it, by bringing an object that is often in the background to the front of my writing. To move the "behind" to the "front" can have a queer effect. In so doing I have made the table do a lot of work. We normally work "on" the table. The table exists as an "on" device: we do things "on" it rather than just "with" it. The "on" can mean contact with a supporting surface ("on the table"), which is usually horizontal, or it can simply mean proximity, situation, location, place. Some proximities exist to "support" actions—some surfaces are there to support. The work of support involves proximity, but it is also the ground for the experience of other proximities. As Levinas suggests in *Totality and Infinity*: "The bit of earth that supports me is not only my object; it *supports my experience of objects*" (1969: 138;

emphasis added). Like the ground "on" which we walk, the table supports an action and thus supports my experience of the objects (the pen, the inkwell, and so on), which it also supports. If the table were oblique, it might be that it would be less supportive. But queer tables aren't simply oblique ones (the writing desk, for instance, can have an oblique angle and still support my writing). What do queer tables support, or do tables become queer when they fail to support?

We could ask, for instance, whether queer tables are the tables around which queer bodies gather. It is certainly the case that tables can support queer gatherings: the times that we might gather around, eating, talking, loving, living, and creating the spaces and times for our attachments. Queers have their tables for sure. Stories of queer kinship will be full of tables. This does not necessarily mean that the table itself becomes a queer object, or that the table necessarily has a different "function" in queer gatherings. And yet, the table might still be the site upon which queer points can be made.

To make such a point would be to suggest that there is something rather queer about furniture. We might first think about furniture as specific kinds of objects: tables, chairs, lamps, beds, and so on. We furnish space with "movable objects." I have been struck by how movability is a condition of meaning for furniture. You can move the table, here, there, into the corner of the room; in a sense the purpose of the table relies on your capacity to move it around. I suggest in my introduction to this book that I have followed the table around; yet I think that is a misrecognition. Instead, the table follows you around. The table is an effect of what it is that you do. In a way, then, while you furnish a house (with tables and other things that matter), it is the house that furnishes you. Queer furnishing is not, therefore, such a surprising formulation: the word "furnish" is related to the word "perform" and thus relates to the very question of how things appear. Queer becomes a matter of how things appear, how they gather, how they perform, to create the edges of spaces and worlds.

The objects with which we furnish "rooms" or interior spaces are called furniture. If you go to a furniture shop, or a place that sells "home furnishings," the furniture typically will be on display room by room: bedroom furniture, living-room furniture, and so on. In this manner, the shop is selling a lifestyle by how the furniture is arranged. In advertisements for home furnishings we can see this style displayed as a body intimacy: the white hetero-

sexual couple and their children surround the furniture, and it is as if in having “it” you could be “like them.” Furniture involves technologies of convention, producing arrangements as an arrangement of things: in the presumption that life should be organized in certain ways, in this space or that, for doing this or for doing that, where you find this or you find that. So, you will have a room in which you sleep, which will be your bedroom, which is where you will find the bed. Over and over again we see the repetition of this form, which “invites” one to inhabit spaces by following these lines. Furniture too is an orientation device, a way of directing life by deciding what we do with what and where, in the very gesture toward comfort, the promise of “that sinking feeling.”

And yet, perhaps a different orientation toward furniture is possible. Consider the expression, “You treat me like furniture”—which usually means, “You don’t notice me; you make me part of the background.” So, if furniture is conventional and indeed directs the bodies that use it, then furniture often disappears from view; indeed, what makes furniture “furniture” is this tendency to disappear from view. A queer furnishing might be about making what is in the background, what is behind us, more available as “things” to “do” things with. Is the queer table simply one we notice, rather than simply the table that we do things “on”? Is a queer chair one that is not so comfortable, so we move around in it, trying to make the impression of our body reshape its form? The chair moves as I fidget. As soon as we notice the background, then objects come to life, which already makes things rather queer.

Where do we go when we notice how tables follow us around, and when they become, in this following, rather queer? Where does the table take us when it dances with renewed life? If we think of “queer tables” we might also turn to the piece titled “Tableau” by Countee Cullen, a black queer poet from the Harlem Renaissance. The French word *tableau* shares the same root as the English word “table”—both are from the Latin *tabula*, for board. Here the table is a picture, and the picture is rather queer:

TABLEAU

Locked arm in arm they cross the way,
The black boy and the white,
The golden splendor of the day,
The sable pride of night.
From lowered blinds the dark folk stare,

And here the fair folk talk,
Indignant that these two should dare
In unison to walk.
Oblivious to look and work
They pass, and see no wonder
That lightning brilliant as a sword
Should blaze the path of thunder.

A queer picture for sure; the proximity of the white boy and the black boy who walk alongside each other “in unison.” They have crossed the color line, “locked arm in arm”; they have crossed the straight line, “locked arm in arm.” These moments are the same moment: we can register the difference only by reimagining this cross as the point of intersection between different lines. The act of walking alongside each other, without wonder, and as if it were an ordinary path to take, is returned by gazes of indignation. The boys take a path that others do not follow. A path is cleared by their “besideness.” Just that. Two bodies side by side. They pass by; they pass through. Perhaps this is a different kind of politics of sides: one is not asked to “take sides” when one is “beside”—one walks beside and alongside. That is enough to clear the ground. To walk “in unison,” to be “arm in arm,” requires work: one has to keep up. You walk together through such gestures of following, a following in which one is not left behind. Perhaps the simple gesture of bodies that keep up involves a radicalization of the side, when the beside becomes alongside, where one side is not “against” the other.

This is not just about any body, but specifically a black body and a white body. Two boys. It is the proximity of these bodies that produces a queer effect. So queer tables are not simply tables around which, or on which, we gather. Rather, queer tables and other queer objects support proximity between those who are supposed to live on parallel lines, *as points that should not meet*. A queer object hence makes contact possible. Or, to be more precise, a queer object would have a surface that supports such contact. The contact is bodily, and it unsettles that line that divides spaces as worlds, thereby creating other kinds of connections where unexpected things can happen. If we notice only some arrivals (the arrival of those who are out of place), then it is also true that we only notice some forms of proximity, some forms of sexual and social contact that create new lines in the very moment they cross others. What happens when we follow such lines?

It is not, then, that queer “surfaces” through the failure to support, or that queer surfaces are not supportive. I suggest above that disorientation happens when the ground no longer supports an action. We lose ground, we lose our sense of how we stand; we might even lose our standing. It is not only that queer surfaces support action, but also that the action they support involves shifting grounds, or even clearing a new ground, which allow us to tread a different path. When we tread on paths that are less trodden, which we are not sure are paths at all (is it a path, or is the grass just a little bent?), *we might need even more support*. The queer table would here refer to all those ways in which queers find support for their actions, including our own bodies, and the bodies of other queers.⁴ The queer picture on the table shows, I think, the potential of such supportive proximities to challenge the lines that are followed as matters of course. In refocusing our attention on proximity, on arms that are crossed with other arms, we are reminded of how queer engenders moments of contact; how we come into contact with other bodies to support the action of following paths that have not been cleared. We still have to follow others in making such paths. The queer body is not alone; queer does not reside in a body or an object, and is dependent on the mutuality of support.

What does it mean to think about the “nonresidence” of queer? We can consider the “affect” of disorientation. As I have suggested, for bodies that are out of place, in the spaces in which they gather, the experience can be disorientating. You can feel oblique, after all. You can feel odd, even disturbed. Experiences of migration, or of becoming estranged from the contours of life at home, can take this form. The angle at which we are placed gets in the way of inhabitation, even if it points toward inhabitation as its goal. At the same time, it is the proximity of bodies that produces disorientating effects, which, as it were, “disturb” the picture, or the objects that gather on the table, or the bodies that gather around the table as a shared object. Disorientation can move around, given that it does not reside in an object, affecting “what” is near enough to the place of disturbance. If, as James Aho suggests, “every lifeworld is a coherency of things” (1998: 11), then queer moments happen when things fail to cohere. In such moments of failure, when things do not stay in place or cohere as place, disorientation happens.

The question then becomes how we “face” or approach such moments of disorientation. In a way, we can return to the question of “facing” or of the approach we take to objects. It is interesting to note that for Merleau-Ponty

the object becomes oblique when it is “retreating.” It is during this moment of retreat that the object “slips away.” And yet, throughout this book, I have described objects as going in a different direction: *as approaching*. I have discussed the object’s arrival as itself an effect of an approach, which makes the object “near enough.” Of course, we still have to be facing an object to notice that it is retreating. We still have to face an object for the effect of the object to be “queer.” What this suggests is that disorientation requires an act of facing, but it is a facing that also allows the object to slip away, or to become oblique.

We need to think, then, of the relationship between “the face” and the act of facing. Merleau-Ponty describes the face as orientated.⁵ In *Phenomenology of Perception*, he states: “My gaze which moves over the face, and in doing so faces certain directions, does not recognize the face unless it comes up against its details in a certain irreversible order and that the very significance of the object—here the face and its expressions—must be linked to its orientation, as indeed is indicated by the French word *sens* (sense, significance, direction). To invert an object is to deprive it of its significance” (2002: 294). This model does seem to depend on the face as an object of knowledge, as something that “can” be recognized, as something that has a “right” way of being apprehended. But at another level, the face “matters” as it acquires significance through direction. In other words, the significance of the face is not simply “in” or “on” the face, but a question of *how we face the face, or how we are faced*.

What makes things “queer” for Merleau-Ponty is in that moment when they become distant, oblique, and “slip away.” If the face of the table is orientated, if it acquires its significance in how it points to us, then the table disorientates when it no longer faces the right way. When the face is inverted, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, it is deprived of its significance. Perhaps a queer orientation would not see the inverted face as a deprivation, and would approach “the retreat” as an approach—not in the sense that what retreats will return but in the sense that in the retreat of an object a space is cleared for a new arrival. Or, if a face is inverted and becomes queer or deprived of its significance, then such a deprivation would not be livable simply as loss but as the potential for new lines, or for new lines to gather as expressions that we do not yet know how to read. Queer gatherings are lines that gather—on the face, or as bodies around the table—to form new patterns and new ways of making sense. The question then becomes not so much what is a queer orientation, but how we are orientated toward queer moments when objects slip. Do we retain

our hold of these objects by bringing them back “in line”? Or do we let them go, allowing them to acquire new shapes and directions? A queer phenomenology might involve an orientation toward what slips, which allows what slips to pass through, in the unknowable length of its duration. In other words, a queer phenomenology would function as a disorientation device; it would not overcome the “disalignment” of the horizontal and vertical axes, allowing the oblique to open up another angle on the world.

If queer is also (in effect) an orientation toward queer, a way of approaching what is retreating, then what is queer might slide between sexual orientation and other kinds of orientation. Queer would become a matter of how one approaches the object that slips away—as a way of inhabiting the world at the point in which things fleet. And yet, I have suggested that queer unfolds from specific points, from the lifeworld of those who do not or cannot inhabit the contours of heterosexual space. After all, some of us more than others look “wonky,” living lives that are full of fleeting points. Some people have suggested to me that I have overemphasised this latter point, and in so doing have risked presuming that the queer moments “reside” with those who do not practice heterosexuality. A person said to me, but lesbians and gays have “their lines too,” their ways of keeping things straight. Another person said that lesbians and gays can be “just as conservative.” I would insist that queer describes a sexual as well as political orientation, and that to lose sight of the sexual specificity of queer would also be to “overlook” how compulsory heterosexuality shapes what coheres as given, and the effects of this coherence on those who refuse to be compelled. As Leo Bersani argues, we do not have to presume the referentiality of queer, or stabilize queer as an identity category, to explore how the sexual specificity of being queer matters (1995: 71–76). To be at an oblique angle to what coheres does matter, where the “point” of this coherence unfolds as the gift of the straight line.

And yet, the suggestion that one can have a “nonhetero” sexual orientation and be straight “in other respects” speaks a certain truth. It is possible to live on an oblique angle, and follow straight lines. After all, conservative homosexuals have called for lesbians and gays to support the straight line by pledging allegiance to the very form of the family, even when they cannot inhabit that form without a queer effect. Lisa Duggan (2003) and Judith Halberstam (2005) have also offered compelling critiques of a new “homonormativity.” As Duggan describes, “it is a politics that does not contest dominant hetero-

normative assumptions and institutions, but *upholds and sustains them*” (50; emphasis added).

We could think of this in terms of assimilation, as a politics of following the straight line even as a deviant body. Homonormativity would straighten up queer effects by following the lines that are given as the accumulation of “points” (where you “get points” for arriving at different points on the line: marriage, children, and so on). For instance, as Judith Butler argues, gay marriage can extend rather than challenge the conservatism of marriage (2002: 18). Such a politics would “extend” the straight line to some queers, those who can inhabit the forms of marriage and family, which would keep other queers, those whose lives are lived for different points, “off line.” Lee Edelman calls such a politics a “reproductive futurism,” which works to “affirm a structure, to authenticate social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of the Child” (2004: 30). This version of gay politics would ask us to reproduce that which we do not follow, by speaking in the name of a future as an inheritance that we did not receive: we would try and be as straight as we could be, as if we could convert what we did not receive into a possession.

We are right to be critical of such a conservative sexual politics, which “supports” the very lines that make some lives unlivable. Oddly enough, this gay conservatism has also returned us to the table. Bruce Bawer argues in *A Place at the Table* (1994) that gays and lesbians should desire to join the big table rather than have “a little table of our own.”⁶ In his critique of the queer desire to embrace the nonnormative, Bawer states the following: “He doesn’t want to be assimilated. He enjoys his exclusion. He feels comfortable at his little table. Or at least he thinks he does. But does he? What is it, after all, that ties him to his little table—that drove him, in other words, into a marginal existence? Ultimately, it’s prejudice. Liberated from that prejudice, would he still want to sit at his little table? Perhaps, and perhaps not. Certainly most homosexuals don’t want to be relegated to that little table. We grew up at the big table: we’re at home there. We want to stay there” (1994: 70). Bawer also describes a queer desire for “little tables” as the “ethos of multiculturalism,” where “each accredited victim group” is given their own table (1994: 210). It is interesting to note here that the “big table” evokes the family table (where we “grew up”), and also “society” itself as a “single big table.” Bawer’s rejection of queer “subcultures” hence calls for a return to the family table, as the presumed ground for social existence. To join this table enacts the desire for assimilation:

in the sense of becoming a "part" of the family but also becoming like the family, which is itself predicated on likeness. What is at stake in this desire to be placed at the table?

We could agree with Bawer that a queer politics is not about laying new tables, whatever their size. After all, to set up new tables would leave the "big table" in its place. We might even agree that the "point" of gay and lesbian politics might be to arrive at this table, as the table around which a family gathers, producing the very effect of social coherence. But such an arrival cannot simply be a matter of being given a place at the table, as if it were "family prejudice" that prevents us from taking that place. After all, despite Bawer's emphasis on "being at home" at the big table, his book is full of examples of being rejected from the table, including from the different kinds of tables that organize the sociality of straight weddings (Bawer 1994: 261).⁷ The desire to join the table is a desire to inhabit the very "place" of this rejection. As Douglas Crimp (2002: 6) has shown, the act of following straight lines as bodies that are at least in some ways sexually deviant is melancholic: you are identifying precisely with what repudiates you. Such forms of following do not simply accumulate as points on a straight line. We can certainly consider that when queer bodies do "join" the family table, then the table does not stay in place. Queer bodies are out of place in certain family gatherings, which is what produces, in the first place, a queer effect. The table might even become wonky.

After all, this very desire to "support" straight lines, and the forms they elevate into moral and social ideals (such as marriage and family life) will be rejected by those whose bodies can and do "line up" with the straight line, which is not, of course, all straight bodies.⁸ In other words, it is hardly likely that attempts to follow the straight line as gays and lesbians will get you too many points. To point to such rejection is not, then, to say that homonormativity is the condition for an emergence of a new angle on queer politics (though it could be). Instead, it is to say that inhabiting forms that do not extend your shape can produce queer effects, even when you think you are "lining up." There is hope in such failure, even if we reject publicly (as we must) this sexual as well as social conservatism.

At the same time, to conserve and to deviate are not simply available as political choices. It is important, for instance, that we avoid assuming that "deviation" is always on "the side" of the progressive. Indeed, if the com-

pulsion to deviate from the straight line was to become "a line" in queer politics, then this itself could have a straightening effect. I have often wondered whether recent work on queer shame risks drawing such a line. I admire Eve Sedgwick's (2003) refusal of the discourse of queer pride. She suggests instead that shame is the primary queer affect because it embraces the "not"; it embraces its own negation from the sphere of ordinary culture. But I am not sure how it is possible to embrace the negative without turning it into a positive. To say "yes" to the "no" is still a "yes." To embrace or affirm the experience of shame, for instance, sounds very much like taking a pride in one's shame—a conversion of bad feeling into good feeling (see Ahmed 2005).⁹ What does it mean for this "yes" to be inaugurated as the proper signifier of queer politics? Does this, in the end, create a line around queer, by asking "others" to repeat that "yes," by embracing their rejection (the "no") from straight culture?

Such a "yes" is not available to everyone, even to all sexual deviants, given how we are shaped by the multiple histories of our arrival. Some might feel compelled to follow the lines before them, even if their desires are off line. Of course, to live according to certain lines does involve a certain kind of commitment to those lines: one's actions are behind them. But it does not necessarily mean an assimilation in the terms described above: the points of deviation might, instead, be hidden. Not all queers can be "out" in their deviation. For queers of other colors, being "out" already means something different, given that what is "out and about" is orientated around whiteness. At the same time, of course, not all queers even have the choice of staying "in" for some, one's body is enough to keep one out (of line). Some butch lesbians, for instance, just have to open the front door to be out: getting out is being out. Yet, for others, there are ways of staying in, even when one gets out.

We could consider "the closet" itself as an orientation device, a way of inhabiting the world or of being at home in the world. The closet returns us to the question of queer furnishings, and how they too are orientation devices. The closet provides a way of staying in. Orientations would be about the terms upon which moments of deviation are let "out" or kept "in," thereby creating lines between public and private spaces. If the closeted queer appears straight, then we might have to get into the closet, or go under the table to reach the points of deviation. In other words, while the closet may seem a betrayal of queer (by containing what is queer at home) it is just as possible to be queer at

home, or even to queer the closet. After all, closets still “make room” or clear spaces, in which there are things left for bodies to do.

Indeed, I am suggesting here that for some queers, at least, homes are already rather queer spaces, and they are full of the potential to experience the joy of deviant desires. As Gayatri Gopinath suggests, in the postcolonial home, sex might happen “in the house,” locating “female same-sex desire and pleasure firmly within the confines of the home and ‘the domestic’ rather than a safe elsewhere” (2005, 153). To queer homes is also to expose how “homes,” as spaces of apparent intimacy and desire, are full of rather mixed and oblique objects. It is also to suggest that the intimacy of the home is what connects the home to other, more public, spaces. If homes are queer then they are also diasporic, shaped by the “entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of ‘staying put’” (Brah 1996: 16). Within homes, objects gather: such objects arrive and they have their own horizons, which “point” toward different worlds—even if this “point” does not make such worlds within reach. The point of the intersection between queer and diaspora might precisely be to show how the “where” of queer is shaped by other worldly horizons—by histories of capital, empire, and nation—which give queer bodies different points of access to such worlds, and which make different objects reachable, whether at home or away.

After all, if there are different ways of following lines, there are also different ways of deviating from them, as deviations that might come “out” at different points. I suggested in the introduction to this book that to follow a line is to become invested in that line, and also to be committed to “where” it will take us. We do not stay apart from the lines we follow, even if we take the line as a strategy, which we hope to keep apart from our identity (where one might say: “I do” this, but “I am” not that which “I do”). The act of following still shapes what it is that we “do do,” and hence what we “can do.” And yet, there are different kinds of investment and commitment. For some, following certain straight lines might be lived as a pledge of allegiance on moral and political grounds to “what” that line leads to. But for others, certain lines might be followed because of a lack of resources to support a life of deviation, because of commitments they have already made, or because the experience of disorientation is simply too shattering to endure. For example, as I suggest in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004a), some lesbians and gay men may need access to heterosexual kinship networks in order to survive, which might

mean appearing to live a certain kind of life, one that even seems “straight” to other queers.

In calling for a politics that involves disorientation, which registers that disorientation shatters our involvement in a world, it is important not to make disorientation an obligation or a responsibility for those who identify as queer. This position demands too much (for some, a life-long commitment to deviation is not psychically or materially possible or sustainable, even if their desires are rather oblique), but it also “forgives” too much by letting those who are straight stay on their line. It is not up to queers to disorientate straights, just as it is not up to bodies of color to do the work of antiracism, although of course disorientation might still happen and we do “do” this work. Disorientation, then, would not be a politics of the will but an effect of how we do politics, which in turn is shaped by the prior matter of simply how we live.

After all, it is possible to follow certain lines (such as the line of the family) as a disorientation device, as a way of experiencing the pleasures of deviation. For some queers, for instance, the very act of describing queer gatherings as family gatherings is to have joy in the uncanny effect of a familiar form becoming strange. The point of following is not to pledge allegiance to the familiar, but to make that “familiar” strange, or even to allow that which has been overlooked—which has been treated as furniture—to dance with renewed life. Some deviations involve acts of following, but use the same “points” for different effects. This is what Kath Weston’s ethnographic studies of queer kinship show us. As she notes: “Far from viewing families we choose as imitations or derivatives of family ties created elsewhere in society, many lesbians and gay men alluded to the difficulty and excitement of constructing kinship in the *absence* of what they called ‘models’” (1991: 116; see also Weston 1995).

A queer politics does involve a commitment to a certain way of inhabiting the world, even if it is not “grounded” in a commitment to deviation. Queer lives would not follow the scripts of convention. Or as Judith Halberstam notes, queer might begin with “the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing” (2005: 65). The “conventions” take the white heterosexual couple as their social ideal. If we see the failure to sink into the chairs of convention as a political gift, then other things might happen. In a way, we can bring Weston and Halberstam together by suggesting that queer lives are about the potentiality of not following certain conventional scripts of family, inheritance, and child

rearing, whereby “not following” involves disorientation: it makes things oblique.

What kind of commitment would a queer commitment be? If anything, I would see queer as a commitment to an opening up of what counts as a life worth living, or what Judith Butler might call a “liveable life” (2004: xv). It would be a commitment not to presume that lives have to follow certain lines in order to count as lives; rather than being a commitment to a line of deviation. I share Lisa Duggan’s enthusiasm for queer as “the democratic diversity of proliferating forms of sexual dissonance” (2003: 65). Such proliferating forms would not necessarily be recognizable; rather, they would be forms of sociality as well as sexuality that are not available as lines to be followed, although they might emerge from the lines that already gather, and even have already gathered us around. We might, then, face the objects that retreat, and become strange in the face of their retreat, with a sense of hope. In facing what retreats with hope, such a queer politics would also look back to the conditions of arrival. We look back, in other words, as a refusal to inherit, as a refusal that is a condition for the arrival of queer. To inherit the past in this world for queers would be to inherit one’s own disappearance. After all, as a mixed-race queer the choice is not either to become white and straight or to disappear. This is a choice between two different kinds of death. The task is to trace the lines for a different genealogy, one that would embrace the failure to inherit the family line as the condition of possibility for another way of dwelling in the world.

If orientations point us to the future, to what we are moving toward, then they also keep open the possibility of changing directions and of finding other paths, perhaps those that do not clear a common ground, where we can respond with joy to what goes astray. So, in looking back we also look a different way; looking back still involves facing—it even involves an open face. Looking back is what keeps open the possibility of going astray. This glance also means an openness to the future, as the imperfect translation of what is behind us. As a result, I would not argue that queer has “no future” as Lee Edelman (2004) suggests—though I understand and appreciate this impulse to “give” the future to those who demand to inherit the earth, rather than aim for a share in this inheritance. Instead, a queer politics would have hope, not even by having hope in the future (under the sentimental sign of the “not yet”), but because the lines that accumulate through the repetition of gestures, the lines that

gather on skin, already take surprising forms. We have hope because what is behind us is also what allows other ways of gathering in time and space, of making lines that do not reproduce what we follow but instead create wrinkles in the earth.

To resist an impulse to make deviation a ground for queer politics is not, then, to say that it does not matter which lines we follow. It does matter. Some lines, as we know, are lines that accumulate privilege and are “returned” by recognition and reward. Other lines are seen as ways out of an ethical life, as deviations from the common good. Despite this, queer is not available as a line that we can follow, and if we took such a line we would perform a certain injustice to those queers whose lives are lived for different points. For me, the question is not so much finding a queer line but rather asking what our orientation toward queer moments of deviation will be. If the object slips away, if its face becomes inverted, if it looks odd, strange, or out of place, what will we do? If we feel oblique, where will we find support? A queer phenomenology would involve an orientation toward queer, a way of inhabiting the world by giving “support” to those whose lives and loves make them appear oblique, strange, and out of place. Queer gatherings, where the objects we face “slip away,” are disorientating. For me, the table is just such a supporting device for queer gatherings, which is what makes the table itself a rather queer device. It is hence not surprising that a queer phenomenology, one that is orientated toward queer, will be full of tables. It is also not surprising that such tables will be full—inhabited by those who in gathering around have already made a rather queer impression.

NOTES

Introduction

1. Phenomenology provides a set of tools for thinking about orientation. Given that orientation is commonly described as a bodily spatial awareness (as the “sixth sense”) and is related to proprioception and kinesthetics, it is important to note that many other traditions in psychology and the social sciences have also contributed to debates about how bodies become orientated. In particular, work in the neurosciences may be of interest to readers, particularly given that the neurosciences and phenomenology share common histories, interests, and concerns, and that key texts in each draw on work in the other. See Gallagher (2003) who summarizes some of the main debates about orientation and proprioception in the neurosciences and phenomenology. I should note as an aside here that my starting point in thinking about queer phenomenology is not so much to explain orientation as a distinct sensory formation (with the primary debate being about its origins and mechanisms). Rather, I want to offer instead another way of thinking about orientation, which points to how spatial distinctions and awareness are implicated in how bodies get directed in specific ways. In other words, orientation for me is about how the bodily, the spatial, and the social *are entangled*. This is not to say, however, that we cannot learn from work that proceeds from other starting points. See also Weiss (1999: 8–38) for an account of relevant debates about the origins of the body schema.
2. Writing tables are not the only kinds of tables that appear in philosophy. As I will discuss in relation to the work of Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt, dining tables also make an appearance, although this is less of a convention and it creates quite a different impression. Not all tables refer to the conventional meaning of furniture, or if they do expose this convention, they do so more obliquely. A “table of contents” is also a conventional element within philosophical writing. As Michel Foucault shows us, “the table” when used in this way functions as an ordering device, which enables “thought to operate upon the entities of our world, to put them in order, to divide them into classes, to group them according to names that designate their similarities and differences” (2002: xix). It is not accidental that the word “table” points to this function: to place things on a board is itself a

way of ordering objects, gathering them around, or giving them a place, around which we can work. It is also useful to recall that the table provides support for philosophy as a key metaphor. For example, consciousness itself has been imagined through the metaphor of the table: *tabula rasa*, the blank slate. The table is what “waits” for writing, for the very “marks” that transform the potentiality of life into the actuality of being. Life becomes writing on the table, which evokes futurity as a present mark: when we say “the writing is on the table” we imply that a specific future has already been decided. The appearance of the table as a supporting device takes different forms, depending on what kind of support the table is being asked to provide.

3. In many cases “the table” simply appears as an object alongside other philosophical objects without any account of it as that which is “before” the philosopher at the moment of writing. As I will show in chapter 1, Husserl gives us an account of the table as a writing table that he is facing, before the table becomes an object that is used to illustrate his phenomenological method. Such an account is also available within the work of other philosophers. A good example is Bertrand Russell’s *The Problems of Philosophy*, which sustains “the table” as its primary object and begins with a description of the scene of writing: “It seems to me that I am now sitting in a chair, at a table of a certain shape, on which I see sheets of paper with writing and print. By turning my head I see out of the window buildings and clouds and sun” (1998: 1). The table functions as a way of illustrating a philosophical point about knowledge and the existence of matter as independent of perception (sense data). When tables appear in order to illustrate points, then they tend also to disappear as objects with their own histories. I should note that when tables appear in unconventional philosophical writing, then the conventions for their appearance also change. For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, for instance, the round table is evoked as a nonphilosophical table: “Discussions are fine for roundtable talks, but philosophy throws its numbered dice on another table” (1994: 28). For Michel Serres, the table enters as a critique of the ordering of tables: “Set against the classical table of correspondences or equivalencies, language as restricted economy, there is the table at which eating and drinking takes place, which exceeds the economy” (cited in Connor 1999). And as I will explore in chapter 1, Heidegger’s turn away from Husserl’s phenomenological method means he turns to quite a different kind of table. I am suggesting that how tables appear in philosophy shows the orientation of philosophy, as well as other modes of writing, which also might say something about the orientation of this book. See Banfield 2000 for an account of the specific role of “tables” within the British philosophical tradition, as its primary example of an external and familiar object, which then turns to how Virginia Woolf uses tables in her writing as a way of being in dialogue with this tradition.
4. It is striking, for example, that Edith Stein’s work on empathy makes orientation crucial. She suggests that empathy involves switching orientations: “When I now interpret it as a sensible living body and empathically project myself into it, I obtain a new image of the spatial world and a new zero point of orientation” (1989: 61). It is

useful to recall the work of such early women phenomenologists, who indeed shaped the preoccupations of phenomenologists such as Husserl in ways that have often gone unrecognized. Edith Stein was Husserl’s student, and she worked with him on the manuscript that was posthumously published as the second volume of *Ideas*. Stein stresses the intercorporeal aspects of lived experience; in particular she introduces the idea of the “foreign body” as “living” and as “co-given” (1989: 57). In many ways, later feminists such as Gail Weiss and Rosalyn Diprose who stress the intercorporeal dimensions of lived experience could be seen as following Stein’s work, even if the influence is not direct.

5. For an exploration of the intimate relationship between home and migration, see the volume *Uprootings/ReGroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* (Ahmed, Castañeda, Fortier and Sheller [2003]).
6. This definition is taken from the *Macquarie ABC Dictionary*. All subsequent definitions are drawn from this volume.
7. Butler states that materialization produces the effect of matter, or “boundary, fixity and surface” (1993: 9). I am also suggesting that “matter” is orientated: that matter is directed in specific ways, which is what gives matter its shape or form. We could therefore redescribe materialization as the “direction of matter.”
8. This is especially true for disciplinary lines or the lines that accumulate to produce formations of knowledge. Sometimes I am amazed when I find that some people are not aware of the work done by feminist, black, and postcolonial scholars on questions relevant to the general debates within cultural studies or philosophy. How can you not know? I want to ask. How can they not be cited? I protest. What I have learned is that not knowing about certain things is an effect of the lines people have already taken, which means they “attend” to some things only by giving up proximity to others, which is at the same time giving up on certain futures. Such a “giving up” is not conscious or even a loss that can be made present. *We do not know what follows from the lines that we have not followed as an effect of the decisions we have taken.* Given that some lines more than others are lines of privilege (i.e., that following such lines is “returned” by reward, status, and recognition), then the loss of certain futures becomes a political loss and a necessary site of political struggle. So point to such exclusions we must!
9. See chapter 8 of *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Ahmed 2004a) for an analysis of hope, which attends to the relationship between hope and investment.

1. Orientations Toward Objects

1. As Gadamer points out, Husserl rejects Max Scheler’s argument that “sense perception is never given” and argues instead that “interpretation is always a secondary act” (1985: 318).
2. See my model of this slide between sensation, perception, and judgment in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004a: 24–25). Here I offer a rethinking of “impressions” by considering how objects “impress upon bodies” and how such impressions

how “queer” does not only refer us to nonnormative sexualities but to the moments in which norms fail to be reproduced. We need to explore how queer and race intersect at different points. See Barnard 2004.

19. This is why white working-class bodies can be seen as not “really” white, and black middle-class bodies can be seen as not “really” middle class. At the same time, the white working classes are not “on the same line” as the black working classes, and the black middle classes are not “on the same line” as the black working classes. The “points” of intersectionality make the social map very messy.
20. Thanks to Imogen Tyler for encouraging me to think about the significance of Husserl’s loss of a chair for my argument about whiteness, and to Mimi Sheller for her insights into the politics of mobility.
21. Of course, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, as I showed in the previous chapter, is full of queer moments, often when he describes experiments by neuroscientists that rely on disturbing the ordinary functions of perception. It is important to note here that his analysis suggests that the “I can” requires the straightening of perception (spatial functions come back into line so the body can act) and is an effect of action: “We remain physically upright not through the mechanism of the skeleton of muscular tone, but because we are caught up in a world. If this involvement is seriously weakened, the body collapses and becomes once more an object” (2002: 296). If we begin to think about the conditions of involvement, and how the world is shaped by some “involvements” more than others, then we can begin to develop a politics of disorientation—that is, one that *sees the reduction of some bodies to objects as an effect of how the world itself takes shape*. See the conclusion to this volume for an extension of this point.
22. I develop this thesis on the “economies of movement” (how movement for some blocks the movement of others) in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004a). See also the introduction to Ahmed, Castañeda, Fortier, and Sheller 2003, which critiques the ways in which mobility has been taken up within social and cultural theory.
23. The difference between racial categorizations in the United States and the United Kingdom is significant, and it means, of course, different orientations toward “race.” Some of my arguments might not translate, which points to the difficulty in working with “objects” that acquire different meanings depending on the “point” of their dwelling. Of course, all objects transform when they translate, or travel. One approach might be to see what does not translate as a gift, in the sense that it generates some new impressions. See Spivak 1995 for an analysis of what follows from what does not translate or “move across.”
24. I am drawing on my own experience of mixed-race genealogy, which will not necessarily correspond with the experiences of others. For excellent black British feminist accounts of mixed raceness that draw on empirical research, see Ali 2003; Ifekwunigwe 1999; and Tizad and Phoenix 1993. See also Ifekwunigwe 2004 for a good collection of historical and contemporary articles in mixed-race studies.
25. While I was working on this chapter one of my Pakistani cousins (who now lives in London) gave me her copy of our family biography, which was written by my eldest

aunt and uncle. Reading through it, and reading about my aunt’s incredible life, I felt more than ever that I often underestimate how much my Pakistani “side” has shaped me. In a way, it is fitting that it is the lives and loves of politically active women that sustains this connection: women who refuse to define themselves through men, and who orientate their lives creatively around other women. This became an especially important connection when my father ended contact with me when I told him about my queer life. It is only through my aunts that any connection to my Pakistani family is now possible. It is interesting to imagine how family stories might be told differently, through the very affective labor of the women who don’t reproduce the family line; who in a conventional tree would just be an “end point.” In an alternative or queer genealogy, life might even unfold from such points.

26. For a manifesto on the intimacy of mixed race and queer identities, see the Web site by Lauren Jade Martin, a mixed-race queer activist and writer, at <http://www.theyellowperil.com/manifesto.htm>. Martin suggests that mixed-race (multiracial and biracial) identities are queer because they do not inhabit existing racial categories. But she also suggests that multirace or mixed-race people are more likely to become queer. As she puts it: “Almost every person I know of mixed-race background is queer. I don’t think that this is a random coincidence. I’m not saying that there is a direct correlation—that if your parents are of different races then that means you are destined to be a flaming homosexual—but I do think there is a relation here that needs to be explored. There is something in living an interstitial existence—a life between the lines—that creates a certain freedom and fluidity. We are anomalies among anomalies, able to enter multiple worlds at multiple times, as both outsiders and insiders.” Being between lines, she suggests, might open up other kinds of “between.” Or course, it might not, as the experience of being mixed or between could also mean we seek support by following other kinds of lines.
27. For other important and critical work on “queer diasporas,” see Puar 1998; Patton and Sanchez-Eppler 2000; Fortier 2002; and Gopinath 2005.
28. Of course, this use of “black” as a gathering device is very specific to British race politics. Such “words” do not always travel, or if they do, they acquire quite different meanings. The use of this word in the United Kingdom is no longer so powerful, as it has been seen to risk essentialism by assuming that all those who are not white have common backgrounds and interests. Within public policy, black has been replaced with black and minority ethnic, which is often abbreviated as BME (a rather helpful way, one suspects, of concealing the “trouble” of race). My own view is that the word “black” can gather us around without necessarily assuming a “common background.” I have always been rather hopeful about collective forms of political gathering.

Conclusion

1. It might be possible to rethink Husserl’s concept of bracketing. Rather than the bracket functioning as a device that puts aside the familiar, we could describe the

bracket as a form of wonder: that is, we feel wonder about what is in the bracket, rather than putting what is in the bracket to one side. A reconciliation of Husserlian phenomenology and a Marxist critique of the reification of objects might be possible through wonder: a wonder at how things appear is what allows histories to come alive. See chapter 8 of my *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004a), which describes Marxism as a philosophy of wonder.

2. Thanks to Lisa Armstrong who reminded me during a visit to Smith College that the table takes a very queer turn in Marx.
3. Of course, there is a much queerer story to tell about hands. Within lesbian sexual cultures hands emerge as erotic sites, becoming public as well as intimate signs of desire. See Merck 2000 for an exploration of the significance of lesbian hands.
4. This might even make Proust's legs an example of a queer table. As Diana Fuss (2004: 189–90) notes, Proust used his legs as a table, and his bedroom as a writing room, given his ill health and physical immobility. When one's legs serve as one's table, they support different kinds of action, providing something to do something on.
5. In contrast, for Levinas the face is precisely that which is not orientated. This is why despite the way he reorientates philosophy from ontology to ethics, from the question of being to the question of otherness, or what is "otherwise than being" (1998), Levinas has less to say about "orientation" than do other phenomenologists. For Levinas the orientation of ethics itself is precisely to suspend orientation, in the sense that it is to suspend one's relation to others in time or in space. To approach others as one might approach an object, as something "in" space, would not be an ethical approach. We can only truly approach the other, he suggests, when we are "uprooted from history" (1969: 52). Furthermore, the other is not "before" me; I do not "face" the other's face, and the other's face is certainly not a matter of direction. This is why his work does not offer a phenomenology of the face: "I do not know if one can speak of a 'phenomenology' of the face, since phenomenology describes what appears. So, too, I wonder if one can speak of a look toward the face, for the look is knowledge, perception. I think rather that access to the face is straightforwardly ethical. You turn yourself toward the Other as toward an object when you see a nose, eyes, a forehead, a chin, and you can describe them. The best way of encountering a face is not even to notice the colour of his eyes!" (1985: 85). I also would not want to offer a phenomenology of the face in this sense of beginning with such description (see Ahmed 2000: 145). Yet, I think we learn a lot from what we do and do not notice, and the question of ethics is partly about the directions we take that allow us to notice some things rather than others. For me, the act of facing, how it is that we come to face the direction that we do, is deeply bound up with the ethical relation we have with others: facing is about a "somatic mode of attention" (Csordas 2002: 241–46), which allows us to be touched by the proximity of others. The direction we face is also what allows us to encounter some faces and not others; to notice them as faces at all, whether or not we can describe their faces. Lingis in his

translator's preface to *Otherwise than Being* suggests that facing "is not turning a surface" but instead an "appealing" (1998: xiv). I would propose an ethics of facing (rather than of the face), which proceeds from the relation between "turning surfaces" and an appeal. More generally, such an ethics would reconsider the role of surfacing, or what we could call "the politics of turning" (and turning around), and how in facing this way or that the surfaces of bodies and worlds take their shape. As I showed in chapter 1, Husserl's description of what is around him shows that he is facing the writing table, which depends on the relegation of other spaces to the background, including what is "behind" him. It would be right for us to think both of that table as itself "facing" Husserl and of pointing toward the work he does: the work of philosophy. An ethical turn in philosophy might then also return to the question of the table, in the sense that the "face" of philosophy is itself shaped by what it faces, *by what gets its attention*. An ethics of the table might give attention to the table, which also means noticing the labor that is behind its arrival, as well as the work it allows us to do.

6. For bringing this book to my attention, I thank those who participated in the workshop on orientations at the Five College Women's Studies Research Center.
7. In this particular instance, Bawer describes how he and his partner were missing from the wedding photographs of couples in whose weddings they had participated. Weddings involve tables both in this sense of being "pictured" (*tableau*) and also in the organization of receptions and dinners. Conventionally, a wedding places the "bride and groom" and their "immediate family" at the front table, and other tables face this table. The heterosexual couple becomes given by being given this place around which other tables gather. The point of the gathering is to witness their place at the table.
8. Of course, you can have a heterosexual orientation and "not line up" in the sense that you may actively refuse that line (by refusing marriage, monogamy, or other ways of being straight) or in the sense that what you have behind you prohibits your capacity to move along the line (you may lack the resources necessary for approximating a social and moral ideal).
9. For an important critique of the racial politics of "queer shame," see Perez 2005.

Sara Ahmed

**QUEER
PHENOMENOLOGY**

Orientations, Objects, Others

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