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QUEER PHENOMENOLOGY

Orientations, Objects, Others

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CONTENTS

- ix Acknowledgments
- 1 Introduction: Find Your Way
- 25 Chapter 1: Orientations Toward Objects
- 65 Chapter 2: Sexual Orientation
- 109 Chapter 3: The Orient and Other Others
- 157 Conclusion: Disorientation and Queer Objects
- 181 Notes
- 203 References
- 217 Index

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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 inhabitance, 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-

pears 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 by David 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 times take, 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 perception. 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