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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CONCLUSION Disorientation and Queer Objects

The instability of levels produces not only the intellectual experi-
ence of disorder, but the vital experience of godliness 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 con-
fidence 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 in-
stead 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 dis-
appear 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 disorientated? 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 reground 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 even to 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 experi-
ence 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
“habitat 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 seasick-
ness, 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, ordi-
narily, we sink our feet in order for this position or stance to exist. Seasick-
ness 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 gath-
ered 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

160 CONCLUSION
Id, as a world that on, as the experienced, of being cut can be a bodily place: it can be a taped by violence experiences: bodies that do not extend somewhere else or follow the line of which does not relation to what is the shape of such experienced as a “out of place” is light disturb the lived as white, bite space (as a of sinking. It is seasickness as a have seasick have lost sight into which, or exist. Seasick: Levins 2003: it gives ground sink into the also disturbs wolves not only (ects are gathered). Here, in 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” (33). Things become queer precisely

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The story involves the spatial awareness of objects, which is quite a different issue from the areal awareness of objects. If you think about the way we perceive things, you can see how much the nature of perception changes. Something just happened to me. When I was sitting on the couch, I noticed how my body responded to the objects around me. I realized that the act of touching, grabbing, or holding something is not just a physical action, but also a mental one. It involves a sense of ownership or possession. The same is true for the way we perceive our own bodies. We are constantly aware of our bodies, but we also have a sense of ownership over them. This is why, when I was sitting on the couch, I felt a slight sensation of ownership over the objects around me. It was as if I was aware of my body in a new way, and this awareness was reflected in the way I perceived the objects around me.
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 queer-ness 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 Nausæa, 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 came from the...”

Yes, that’s how it begins. It makes you see that the story in its initial proximate is a new inside out. This is life in the place. It is in stories that existence begins. How does it make sense in stories? is a story. M⁰ is a subject, is what it means to exist. But it interiorizes the reg Tide. How does it make sense to Mer between “proximity” or one oblique or one object cease to be something i
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). 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 retreatling 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).
loss of grip over an object as it is within the reachable, in threat of becoming the object might also be an orientation loss of an object—what is “before” the table can persist in its not so much be proximity of what is speaking of the table to be oblique, to ings, or they can orientation involves a proximity that tance.

of which I have made the table that is often in behind” to the table do a lot of on” device: we contact with a stall, or it can nities exist to the rank of support other proxim- rhythm that sup- contrast (1999: 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 con-
vention, producing arrangements as an arrangement of things: in the pre-
sumption 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. Con-
sider 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 ten-
dency 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 table pride of night.
From lowered blinds the dark folk stare,

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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 kept 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. 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, 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 be a retreat that described of cused the o object “near that it is retr be “queer.” V but it is a fa

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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 dis-
cussed 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. 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 direc-
tion. 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 ori-
entated, 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 ap-
proach "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

**Disorientation and Queer Objects**

174
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 overemphasized 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 (2003) have also offered compelling critiques of a new “homonormativity.” As Duggan describes, “it is a politics that does not contest dominant hetero-
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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 mar-

riage 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." 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: 76). 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). 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. 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 compulsion to de-polarize politics, then we have to consider whether Eve Sedgwick's claim instead that she embraces its critical potential how it is understanding another's experience of one's shame— What does it mean to "other" queer politics, to treat "others" to a straight cult?

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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 won-
dered 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 commit-
ment 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 (off 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 quee 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, 133). 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 de-viating 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 other queers.

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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 lifelong commitment to deviation is not psychologically 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 straightness, 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 assume 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 skis behind us is making lines in the earth.

To resist then, to say that queers, as we recognize deviations from that which we can consider the norm, the question is raised as to whether our faces become visible through that which we come to meet. If we feel of ourselves as "support" to and out of the disorientations of gatherings, hence not toward queer full—inhale queer impr
tion: it makes things happen to be? If anything, I think what counts as a lifehable life (2004: xv). If you follow certain lines into a line of deviant democratic diversity such proliferating y would be forms of nes to be followed, other, and even have acts that retreat, and the. In facing what ck to the conditions ent, as a refusal that st in this world for all, as a mixed-race that is to trace th fail to inherit way of dwelling in wing toward, then id of finding other where we can re and look a different pen face. Looking glance also means it is behind us. As Edelman (2004) to “give” the fu- tim for a share in et even by having et”), but because us, 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 orien-tation toward queer moments of devia-tion will be. If the object slides 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 to-ward 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.

Disorientation and Queer Objects
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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 aunt's 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 do not 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." Of 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 Puur 1998; Patton and Sanchez-Eppler 2000; Fortier 2005; and Gopinath 2009.

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 (1993a), 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 (1994: 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!” (1988: 8). 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" (1996: 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 round 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, Bower 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 "pictures" (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.