ries, which cannot be stabilized as objects that can then be given to the other. My task instead is to work from the concept of orientation as it has been elaborated within phenomenology and to make that concept itself the site of an encounter. What happens if we start from this point?

Orientations

If we start with the point of orientations, we find that orientations are about starting points. 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.[6]

Orientations are about how we begin, how we proceed from here. 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." It is from this point that the differences between this side and that side matter. It is also only given that we are here at this 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."[7] The starting point for orientation is the point from which the world unfolds: the here of the body and the where of its dwelling.

At what point does the world unfold? Or at what point does Husserl's world unfold? Let us start where he starts, in his first volume of *Ideas*, which is with the world as it is given "from the natural standpoint." Such a world is the world that I am in, where things take place around me, and are placed around me: "I am aware of a world, spread out in space endlessly."[8] Phenomenology asks us to be aware of the "what" that is around. After all, if consciousness is intentional, then we are not only directed toward objects, but those objects also take us in a certain direction. The world that is around has already taken certain shapes, as the very form of what is more and less familiar.

> For me real objects are there, definite, more or less familiar, agreeing with what is actually perceived without being themselves perceived or even intu-

> itively present. I can let my attention wander from the writing-table I have just seen or observed, through the unseen portions of the room behind my back to the veranda, into the garden, to the children in the summer-house, and so forth, to all the objects concerning which I precisely "know" that they are there and yonder in my immediate co-perceived surroundings. (101)

The familiar world begins with the writing table, which is in the room: we can name this room as Husserl's study, as the room in which he writes. It is from *here* that the world unfolds. He begins with the writing table and then turns to other parts of this room, those which are, as it were, behind him. We are reminded that what he can see in the first place depends on which way he is facing. The things behind him are also behind the table that he faces: it is self-evident that he has his back to what is behind him. A queer phenomenology, I wonder, might be one that faces the back, which looks "behind" phenomenology, which hesitates at the sight of the philosopher's back. So having begun here, with what is in front of his front and behind his back, Husserl then turns to other spaces, which he describes as rooms and which he "knows" are there. These are spaces insofar as they are already given to him as places by memory. These other rooms are co-perceived: they are not singled out; and they do not have his attention, even when he evokes them for the reader. They are made available to us only as background features of this domestic landscape.

In Husserl's writing the familiar slides into the familial; the home is a family home, a residence inhabited by children. They are in the summer house, he tells us. The children evoke the familial only through being "yonder," being at a distance from the philosopher who in writing about them is doing his work. They are outside the house, yet part of its interior, near the veranda, which marks the edge, a line between what is inside and what is outside. In a way, the children who are yonder point to what is made available through memory or even habitual knowledge: they are sensed as being there, behind him, even if they are not seen by him at this moment in time. The family home provides, as it were, the background against which an object (the writing table) appears in the present, in front of him. The family home is only ever co-perceived, and allows the philosopher to do his work.

By reading the objects that appear in Husserl's writing, we get a sense of how being directed toward some objects and not others involves a more general orientation toward the world. The objects that we direct our attention toward reveal the direction we have taken in life. If we face this way or that, then other

things, and indeed spaces, are relegated to the background; they are only ever co-perceived. Being oriented toward the writing table not only relegates other rooms in the house to the background but also might depend *on the work done to keep his desk clear*, that is, the domestic work that might be necessary for Husserl to turn the table into a philosophical object. Some things are relegated to the background to sustain a certain direction, in other words, to keep attention on the what that is faced. Perception involves such acts of relegation that are forgotten in the very preoccupation with what it is that we face.

We can pose some simple questions: Who faces the writing table? Does the writing table have a face, which points toward some bodies rather than others? When reading Husserl, one could think of other writers who have written about writing. Consider Adrienne Rich's account of the process of writing:

> From the fifties and early sixties, I remember a cycle. It began when I had picked up a book or began trying to write a letter. . . . The child (or children) might be absorbed in busyness, in his own dream world; but as soon as he felt me gliding into a world which did not include him, he would come to pull at my hand, ask for help, punch at the typewriter keys. And I would feel his wants at such a moment as fraudulent, as an attempt moreover to defraud me of living even for fifteen minutes as myself.[9]

We can see from the point of view of the mother, who is also a writer, a poet, and a philosopher, that giving attention to the objects of writing, facing those objects, becomes impossible: the children, even if they are behind you, literally pull you away. This loss of time for writing feels like a loss of your own time, as you are returned to the work of giving your attention to the children. We could point here to the political economy of attention: there is an uneven distribution of attention time among those who arrive at the writing table, which affects what they can do once they arrive (and of course, many do not even make it). For some, having time for writing, which means time to face the objects on which writing happens, becomes an orientation that is not available, given the ongoing labor of other attachments. So whether we can sustain our orientation toward the writing table depends on other social orientations, which affect what we can face at any given moment in time.

We can consider perhaps how one's background affects what it is that comes into view, as well as how the background is what allows what comes into view to be viewed. In *Ideas*, the relegation of unseen portions and the rooms to background, as the fringe of the familiar, is followed by a second act of relegation.

For although Husserl directs our attention to these other rooms, even if only as the background to his writing table, he also suggests that phenomenology must "bracket" or "put out of action" what is given, what is made available by ordinary perception.[10] If phenomenology is to see the table, he suggests, it must see without the natural attitude, which keeps us within the more and less familiar. By putting aside what is familiar, the world that unfolds from the writing table, Husserl begins again and reorients our attention to the table as that which is seen:

> I close my eyes. The other senses are inactive in relation to the table. I have now no perception of it. I open my eyes and the perception returns. The perception? Let us be more accurate. Under no circumstances does it return to me individually the same. *Only the table is the same*, known as identical through the synthetic consciousness, which connects the new experience with the recollection. The perceived thing can be, without being perceived, without my being aware of it even as a potential only (in the way of actuality, as previously described) and perhaps even without itself changing at all. But the perception itself is what it is within the steady flow of consciousness, and is itself constantly in flux; the perceptual now is ever passing over into the adjacent consciousness of the just-past, a new now simultaneously gleams forth, and so on.[11]

This argument suggests the table as object is given, as the same, as a givenness that holds or is shaped by the flow of perception. Indeed, this is precisely Husserl's point: the object is intended through perception. As Robert Sokolowski describes: "When we perceive an object, we do not just have a flow of profiles, a series of impressions; in and through them all, we have one and the same object given to us, and the identity of the object is intended and given."[12] Given this, the story of the sameness of the object involves the specter of absence and nonpresence. For despite the self-sameness of the object, I do not see it as the self-same. I never see it as such; what it is cannot be apprehended, as I cannot view the table from all points of view at once. The necessity of moving around the object, to capture more than its profile, shows that the other sides of the object are unavailable to me at the point from which it is viewed, which is why it must be intended.

Husserl then makes what is an extraordinary claim: only the table remains the same. The table is the only thing that keeps its place in the flow of perception. I want to make a rather queer connection between Husserl's thesis of intentionality and the concept of "the behind." Husserl points to the spectrality of sameness: if the table is the same, it is only given that we have conjured its missing sides. We

could translate this as: if the table is the same, it is only given we have conjured its behind. What is behind the object for me is not only its missing side, but also its historicity, the conditions of its arrival.

Husserl suggests that inhabiting the familiar makes things into backgrounds for action: they are there, but they are there in such a way that I do not see them. The background is a "dimly apprehended depth or fringe of indeterminate reality."[13] Rather than thinking of this table as being *in* the background, or the background being *around* the table, I want us to consider how the table itself may *have* a background. We can recall the different meanings of the word *background*. A background can refer to the "ground or parts situated in the rear" (such as the rooms in the back of the house) or to the portions of the picture represented at a distance, which in turn allows what is in the foreground to acquire the shape that it does, as a figure or object. Both of these meanings point to the spatiality of the background. We can also think of background as having a temporal dimension. When we tell a story about someone, for instance, we might give information about their background: this meaning would be about what is behind, where "what is behind" refers to what is in the past, or what happened "before." We might speak also of family background, which would refer not just to an individual's past but to other kinds of histories, which shape an individual's arrival into the world, and through which the family itself becomes a social given. Indeed, events can have backgrounds: a background can be what explains the conditions of emergence or an arrival of something as the thing that it appears to be in the present.

So if phenomenology is to attend to the background, it might do so by giving an account of the conditions of emergence for something, which would not necessarily be available in how that thing presents itself to consciousness, which is after all the presentation of a side. If we do not see (but intend) the behind of the object, we might also not see (but intend) its background in this temporal sense. To see what the "natural attitude" has in its sight, we need to face an object's background, redefined as not only the conditions for the emergence of the object (we might ask: how did it arrive?) but also the act of perceiving the object, which depends on the arrival of the body that perceives. The arrivals must coincide if the object is to be faced. The background to perception involves such intertwining histories of arrival, which would explain how Husserl got near enough to his table for it to become both the object on which he writes and the object around which his phenomenology is written. After all, phenomenology has its own background, its own conditions for emergence, which might include the very matter of the table.

Bodily Orientations

We can stay with the matter of the table. We already know how Husserl's attention wanders: from the writing table, and only then toward other spaces, the darkness of the room's unseen portions. What he sees is shaped by a direction he has already taken, a direction that shapes what is available to him, in the sense of what he faces and what he can reach. What is in front of him also shapes what is behind him, what is available as the background to his vision. So his gaze might fall on the paper, given that he is sitting at the writing table and not at another kind of table, such as the kitchen table.[14] Such other tables would not, perhaps, be the right kinds of tables for the making of philosophy. The writing table might be the table for him, the one that would provide the right kind of horizontal surface for the philosopher. 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."[15] 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 philosopher's body, or what the philosopher comes into contact with.

In other words, we are oriented toward objects as things we "do things" with. It is no accident that Martin Heidegger poses this question of occupation, of what it is that we do, by turning to the table. In *Ontology—the Hermeneutics of Facticity*, Heidegger contrasts two ways of describing tables. In the first model, the table is encountered as "a thing in space—as a spatial thing."[16] He evokes Husserl's description of "the table" for sure, though Husserl is not named at least at this point. As Heidegger puts it, "Aspects show themselves and open up in ever new ways as we walk around the thing" (68). Heidegger suggests that this description is inaccurate not because it is false (the table might after all appear in this way) but because it does not describe how the significance of such things is not simply "in" the thing but a "characteristic of being" (67–68). For Heidegger what makes the table what it is, and not something else, is what the table allows us to do. What follows is one of the richest phenomenological descriptions of the table as it is experienced from the viewpoints of those who share the space of its dwelling:

> What is there in *the* room there at home is *the* table (not "a" table among many other tables in other rooms and houses) at which one sits *in order to* write, have a meal, sew, or play. Everyone sees this right away, e.g. during a visit: it is a writing table, a dining table, a sewing table—such is the pri-

> mary way in which it is being encountered in itself. This characteristic of "in order to do something" is not merely imposed on the table by relating and assimilating it to something else which it is not. (69)

In other words, what we do with the table, or what the table allows us to do, is essential to the table. So we do things "on the table," which is what makes the table what it is and take shape in the way that it does. *The table is assembled around the support it gives*. It provides a surface to gather around: Heidegger describes "my wife" sitting at the table and reading, and "the boys" busying themselves at the table. The "in order to" structure of the table, in other words, means that the people who are at the table are also part of what makes the table be itself. Doing things at the table is what makes the table itself and not some other thing. We might note that what bodies do at the table involves gendered forms of occupation.

Given this, how the table matters relates to not only how it arrives but what it allows us to do. When Husserl brackets the writing table and sees the table, he is bracketing his own occupation, or what it is that he does on the table. Such action involves the intimate co-dwelling of bodies and objects. This is not to say that bodies are simply objects alongside other objects, given they are the point from which the world unfolds. As Merleau-Ponty shows, the body is not "merely an object in the world," rather "it is our point of view in the world."[17] In the second volume of *Ideas*, Husserl attends to this body, what he calls the lived body, and to the intimacy of touch. The table returns, as one would expect. And yet, what a different table we find if we reach for it differently. In this moment, it is the hands rather than the eyes that reach the table: "My hand is lying on the table. I experience the table as something solid, cold, smooth."[18] Husserl conveys the proximity between bodies and objects, as things that become more than matter insofar as they can be sensed and touched, insofar as they make and leave impressions. Bodies are "something touching which is touched."[19]

Phenomenology hence shows how objects and others have already left their impressions on the skin surface. The tactile object is what is near me or what is within my reach. In being touched, the object does not stand apart; it is felt by the skin and even on the skin. In other words, we perceive the object as an object, as something that has integrity and is in space, only by haunting that very space, by coinhabiting space, such that the boundary between the coinhabitants of space does not hold. The skin connects as well as contains. The nonopposition between the bodies that move around objects, and objects around which bodies move, shows us how orientations involve at least a two-way approach, or the "more than one" of an encounter. Orientations are tactile and they involve more than

one skin surface: in approaching this or that table, we are also approached by the table, which touches us when we touch it: as Husserl shows us, the table might be cold and smooth, and the quality of its surface can be felt only once I have ceased to stand apart from it. Neither the object nor the body have integrity in the sense of being the same thing with and without each other. Bodies as well as objects take shape through being oriented toward each other, as an orientation that may be experienced as the cohabitation or sharing of space.

Bodies are hence shaped by contact with objects and others, with "what" is near enough to be reached. They may even take shape through such contact or take the shape of that contact. What gets near is both shaped by what bodies do and in turn affects what bodies can do. The nearness of the philosopher to his paper, his ink, and his table is not simply about where he does his work, and the spaces he inhabits, as if the "where" could be separated from what he does. The "what" that he does is what puts certain objects within reach. Orientations are about the directions we take that put some things and not others in our reach.

We can stay with the example of the table. As an object it also provides a space, which itself is the space for action, for certain kinds of work. As we know, Husserl's table in the first volume of *Ideas* is the writing table, and his orientation toward this table, and not others, shows the orientation of his philosophy, even at the very moment this table disappears. Around the table, a horizon or fringe of perception is "dimly" apprehended. The horizon is what is "around," as the body does its work. As Don Ihde puts it, "Horizons belong to the boundaries of the experienced environmental field. Like the 'edges' of the visual field, they situate what is explicitly present, while in phenomena itself, horizons recede."[20] The horizon is not an object that I apprehend: I do not see it. The horizon is what gives objects their contours and even allows such objects to be reached. The objects are within my horizon; it is the act of reaching "toward them" that makes them available as objects for me. The bodily horizon shows the "line" that bodies can reach toward, what is reachable, by also marking what they cannot reach. The horizon marks the edge of what can be reached by the body. The body becomes present as a body, with surfaces and boundaries, in the showing of the limits of what it can do.

Phenomenology helps us explore how bodies are shaped by histories, which they perform in their comportment, their posture, and their gestures. Both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, after all, describe bodily horizons as "sedimented histories."[21] This model of history as bodily sedimentation has been taken up by social theorists as well as philosophers. For Pierre Bourdieu, such histories are described as the *habitus*, as "systems of durable, transposable, dispositions,"[22] which integrate past experiences through the very "matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions"

that are necessary to accomplish "infinitely diversifed tasks" (83). For Judith Butler, it is precisely how phenomenology exposes the sedimentation of history in the repetition of bodily action that makes it a useful resource for feminism.[23] What bodies "tend to do" are effects of histories rather than being originary.

We could say that history "happens" in the very repetition of gestures, which is what gives bodies their dispositions or tendencies. We might note here that the labor of such repetition disappears through labor: if we work hard at something, then it seems "effortless." This paradox — with effort it becomes effortless — is precisely what makes history disappear in the moment of its enactment. The repetition of work is what makes the signs of work disappear. It is important that we think not only about what is repeated, but also about how the repetition of actions takes us in certain directions. We are also orientating ourselves toward some objects more than others, including physical objects (the different kinds of tables), but also objects of thought, feeling, and judgment, and objects in the sense of aims, aspirations, and objectives. I might orient myself around writing, for instance, not simply as a certain kind of work (although it is that, and it requires certain objects for it to be possible) but also as a goal: writing becomes something that I aspire to, even as an identity (becoming a writer). So the object we aim for, which we have in our view, also comes into our view, through being held in place as that which we seek to be: the action searches for identity as the mark of attainment (the writer becomes a writer through writing). We can ask what kinds of objects bodies tend toward in their tendencies, as well as how such tendencies shape what bodies tend toward.

Bodies hence acquire orientation by repeating some actions over others, as actions that have certain objects in view, whether they are the physical objects required to do the work (the writing table, the pen, the keyboard) or the ideal objects that one identifies with. The nearness of such objects, their availability within my bodily horizon, is not casual: it is not just that I find them there, like that. Bodies tend toward some objects more than others, given their tendencies. These tendencies are not originary; they are effects of the repetition of "tending toward."

Becoming Straight

What then does it mean to be oriented sexually? We might suggest first that such orientations take time. We can paraphrase Simone de Beauvoir by starting with the following point: "One is not born, but becomes straight."[24] What does it mean to posit straightness as about becoming rather than being? That such a question

is askable reminds us that we should not approach the question of orientation simply as a spatial question. We might note here that dwelling refers not only to the process of coming to reside, or what Heidegger calls "making room,"[25] but 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. 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 always that we do not 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.

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. In the case of sexual orientation, it is not then simply that we have it. To become straight means not only that we have to turn toward the objects 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 is present to us in the present is not casual: as I have suggested, we do not just acquire our orientations 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.[26] The concept of orientations allows us to expose how life gets directed through the very requirement that we follow what is already given to us. For a life to count as a good life, 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. Such points accumulate, creating the impression of a straight line. To follow such a line might be a way to become 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 repeatedly passing over ground. We can see the path as a trace of past journeys, made out of footprints, traces of feet that tread and in treading create a line on the ground. When people stop treading, the path may disappear. When we see the line of the ground

before us, we tend to walk on 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, 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 then 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 will not get us there. 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. Considering the politics of the straight line helps us rethink the relationship between inheritance (the lines that 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 for sure. We are pressed into lines, just as lines are the accumulation of such moments of pressure, or what we can call "stress points."

I want to consider the stress or work of becoming straight by telling an anecdote. I am seated again at a table. This time it is the dining table, a table around which a "we" gathers. Such tables function quite differently to the writing table: not only because they support a different kind of action but also because they point toward collective gatherings; they depart from the solitary world of the writer. The dining table is a table around which bodies cohere through the mediation of its surface, sharing the food and drink that is on the table. This role of the table as mediating between bodies around it to form a gathering is described by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*: "To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it."[27] Gatherings are not neutral, but directive. In gathering we may be required to follow specific lines. If families