

# A set of propositions for a curatorial orientation/disorientation

Tags:

#orientation

#disorientation

#phenomenology

#affects

Quotes from Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006)

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

*Proposition 1: Articulate your position. Describe where you stand, what are you looking at from where you are standing, what is standing behind you and what is by your side. Describe the environment in which you work. Point towards what you think you recognise, and tell us what it is. Acknowledge the connections that have brought you here, display the network of mutual influences, state your allegiances. Make visible your evaluation processes.*

"...emotions shape what bodies do in the present, or how they are moved by the objects they approach. The attribution of feeling toward an object (I feel afraid because you are fearsome) moves the subject away from the object, creating distance through the registering of proximity as a threat. Emotions involve such affective forms of(re)orientation. It is not just that bodies are moved by the orientations they have; rather, the orientations we have toward others shape the contours of space by affecting relations of proximity and distance between bodies. Importantly, even what is kept at a distance must still be proximate enough if it is to make or leave an impression."

*Proposition 2: Describe the condition for the appearance of affects: discomfort, anger, tenderness, hurt, fear, disgust. What is the difference between your fear and the object's fearsomeness? Where do they stand from each other? If you slightly move towards the left or diagonally, would the fear grow or shrink? Is proximity more of a threat than distance? When is the distance too distant? Act based on your feeling. Act differently based on the same feeling. See if the feeling changes when you act differently. Sit with the feeling. See what remains. Change the feeling. Train the feeling. Practice. Try to do so as an institution. Try to do so as an articulated set of values. Bleed with boredom and work with bleeding.*

"The things appear and do so from this or that side, and in this mode of appearing is included irrevocably a relation to a here and its basic directions" (1989: 165-66). Orientations are about how we begin; how we proceed from "here," which affects how what is "there" appears, how it presents itself. In other words, we encounter "things" as coming from different sides, as well as having different sides. Husserl relates the questions of "this or that side" to the point of "here," which he also describes as the zero point of orientation, the point from which the world unfolds, and which makes what is "there" over "there" (1989: 166; see also Husserl 2002: 151-53). It is from this point that the differences between "this side" and "that

side" matter. It is only given that we are "here" at this point, the zero point, that near and far are lived as relative markers of distance. Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann also describe orientation as a question of one's starting point: "The place in which I find myself, my actual 'here,' is the starting point for my orientation in space" (1974: 36). The starting point for orientation is the point from which the world unfolds: the "here" of the body and the "where" of its dwelling."

*Proposition 3: Start from a positioning. Start from another, different positioning. See how things appear to you in this position. Make links between these positions in space. Imagine links between opposing orientations. What differences matter? Create connections between disparate notions. Remember the way you encountered things for the first time. What would be a generous orientation? What would be the zero point, the "here"?*

"Is disorientation a bodily sign of "dis/organization," as the failure of an organization to hold things in place? What do such moments of disorientation tell us? What do they do, and what can we do with them? I want us to think about how queer politics might involve disorientation, without legislating disorientation as a politics. It is not that disorientation is always radical? Bodies that experience disorientation can be defensive, as they reach out for support or as they search for a place to regroup and reorientate their relation to the world. So, too, the forms of politics that proceed from disorientation can be conservative, depending on the "aims" of their gestures, depending on how they seek to (re)ground themselves. And, for sure, bodies that experience being out of place might need to be orientated, to find a place where they feel comfortable and safe in the world. The point is not whether we experience disorientation (for we will, and we do), but how such experiences can impact on the orientation of bodies and spaces, which is after all about how the things are "directed" and how they are shaped by the lines they follow. The point is what we do with such moments of disorientation, as well as what such moments can do whether they can offer us the hope of new directions, and whether new directions are reason enough for hope."

*Proposition 4: Think of organization as a stretchy, porous fabric able to hold certain things and let some other things pass. Orient your ideas on a trampoline. Or during an earthquake and in its aftermath. How does losing your ground direct us? How are you physically involved? Let the defensiveness play itself out. Try to refrain from measuring things. Measuring only gives an impression of organization.*

Una Bauer