MASTER ESSAY
DISORIENTATION/OBJECTS/BODIES
DAVID LARSSON
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this world is there for me not only as a world of Mere things, but also with the same immediacy as a world of objects with values, a world of goods, a practical world. I simply find the physical things in front of me furnished not only with merely material determinations but also with value-characteristics, as beautiful and ugly, pleasant and unpleasant, agreeable and disagreeable, and the like. Immediately, physical things stand there as Objects of use, the “table” with its "books," the "drinking glass," the "vase" the "piano," etc. These value-characteristics and practical characteristics also belong constitutively to the Objects "on hand" as Objects, regardless of whether or not I turn to such characteristics and the Objects. Naturally this applies not only in case of the "mere physical things," but also in the case of humans and brute animals belonging to my surroundings. They are my "friends" or "enemies," my "servants" or "superiors," "strangers" or "relatives" etc.

(Husserl, Ideas, p. 53)

INTRODUCTION:
A SERIES OF FAILED ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL THE WORLD

Western philosophy is filled with attempts to create philosophical systems. These can be grounded on a number of different concepts: reason, logic, morals, god, nature, empiricism etc. ... But what seems to be a common aim for all of them is the overall goal to make it fit together in the end. To make the system coherent, without contradictions, without gaps. In other words: to make it perfect. But on the other hand, these philosophical systems are always created, in one way or another, to tell us about reality, about the world that we live in and everyday experience. The problem is that these two parallel aims do not easily go together. On one hand, it might be possible to create the perfect system, but then you must probably bend reality a bit to make it fit. On the other hand, it might be possible to just describe reality as it reveals itself to us, but then it would be extremely hard to make it in to a coherent system. The world (or reality as we see it) tends to change constantly, thus it rarely fits into any coherent system of thought for long. The world as nature, is often described as a system (by scientists, and as just mentioned philosophers, who all are in the business of trying to create logical coherent systems) but history has shown us over and over again that whenever we thought that we got it, that we cracked the code and found the underlying systematics, there is always something else (or something new) that will not fit. For example, Albert Einstein put forward his 'General theory of relativity' in 1916, and from that moment Newtonian physics, which scientists had believed in for over 200 years, was regarded as inaccurate. And in present day science, it has all of the sudden become questioned whether or not Einstein’s physics is really possible to combine with quantum theory ...

The point I am making is that theories and descriptions of the world change over the course of time, but somehow we still tend to believe in them over and over again. What is it that we want to believe in then?

Is there really an underlying system—a code—which everything in the world stems from

but that we just have not fully understood (or found) yet or does it just appear as some kind of order but really it is just chaos (although chaos has its own theory).

My aim in this essay is not to try to find the answers to these questions (the question) or to find the perfect way to combine them into one perfect system. Rather I want to discuss what happens in between these two different but parallel aims that seem to be appearing throughout the history of philosophy (and the history of our western world). The impossible dream of a system that is both perfectly coherent and a functional description of the world. What if the failure of the perfect system tells us more about the world than any almost perfect system could, even if it is closer to what we perceive as reality?

Making art has always been about describing the world in one way or another. Before modernism (before photography) this was maybe a more concrete task and now (the last 150 years) artists may have a little more freedom of interpretation but the general mission I would say is still to describe and discuss the world around us. But art also has its systems, and more than that, art is always a part of the greater system. And just as the world itself is quite bad at staying within the lines of a certain set of rules, so is art. Art is constantly changing, constantly making up its own and new rules, constantly expanding its own boundaries, deviating from the very lines that is set out to define it. Or does it really? Today the field of contemporary art has grown so large and all-embracing that it seems almost impossible to break away from the rules of art. And even if art still has the power to deviate from the lines of society it is not really deemed that outrageous because it is just art.

Maybe then, it could be important for artists to think about how philosophical systems work and how any attempt to create the perfect system is always a failure when attempting to describe reality. In my view, it is these failures that in the end leave us with the best explanations. It is these failures that make us realize that the power to define is something we have in our own hands. And if art can be a reminder of that, then it serves its purpose. On the other hand I also think that there is a great power in the attempts. Even if we are aware of the impossibility of it, that does not mean that we should stop trying. The dream of a perfect, accurate description of reality is a dream worth chasing, not because we think we can succeed in it, but because we might find useful things on our way.

Another way to discuss this discrepancy between what we as humans think (believe) about the world and what philosophical (or scientific) systems tell us, is the epistemological concept of inductive reasoning. The concept of induction is generally described as a derivation of the general from the particular—to form a theory or a hypothesis about the whole from particular events within this whole: Because the sun has risen in the east every morning for as long as I know, I believe that it will do so tomorrow, and every other morning for as long as I can imagine. However, according to logic this is not a valid reasoning. Just because something has happened the same way over and over again, there is nothing that says with certainty that it will happen the same way next time. Still we cannot help believing that it will, and this belief is in my view necessary to be able to live a normal life. If you would start to constantly question everything you thought you knew about the world, you would probably hesitate even stepping out of bed in the morning: "What if the floor does not support my weight? I might die!"

The question about inductive reasoning is basically a question about the possibility of making functional generalizations. And we need those, and we make them, and it is the most common and uncontroversial thing. But on the other hand we may believe in them too strongly, just the same way as we tend to believe in philosophical or scientific systems until we get hard facts the says they are wrong, even though history should have taught us that nothing stays true forever. In other words, we take a lot of things for granted, which is good because otherwise we would not be able to live our lives. But it is also bad because we may take things for granted that we should not.
The other side of this belief in inductive reasoning is the question what happens when it fails, and how that affects us. The more times you experience a certain event that turns out in the same way over and over again the more you start believing that it might be the way it works. And the stronger you believe in this the greater the confusion when you experience the same event turning out in a different way. The level of confusion (anxiety, shock...) depends on how strongly you believe something to be true. But, maybe the level of belief also is correlating to how liberating it can be to find new beliefs in the ruins of the recently failed ones? Believing is always connected to what it would mean if the belief seized to be true.2

Inductive reasoning, and the tendency to put too strong belief in it, could also be a way of describing the functions behind normativity—the way we think that the world is and hence should be lived. Inductive reasoning is what makes us stay within the boundaries of society and breaking these boundaries of standard living is sometimes as shocking as if the sun would not rise in the morning. Deviation from the lines of normativity, as well as experiencing the failure of inductive belief can affect us deeply and put us in great confusion, it can make us become disorientated.

The interesting thing for me is not the logical implications (or lack thereof) of inductive reasoning but in this discussion I put it forward as an example of how I think that we as humans are physiologically inclined to believe in repetitive patterns. In other words how we tend to make sense of the world around us by generalizing actions and behavior from sometimes quite little evidence. We believe that what repeats itself is part of a pattern that tells us what to come, and how we should act. I regard this to be similar to what Sara Ahmed would call following lines—lines that direct us—and we want to stay within these lines because it makes us feel comfortable. And I follow Ahmed’s point that, even though it might be very uncomfortable we need to be disorientated from these patterns of thought to be able to find new meanings, to rethink the way society is constructed and in the end to expand the notion of normativity.

Being orientated is about following lines (as Ahmed shows us). It is about conforming to normativity and live your life as if things will happen the same way as they always have (inductive belief). Being orientated is according to Ahmed also about affect, how we feel, and how being orientated makes us feel comfortable, safe in our world. To become disorientated on the other hand can be extremely sickening, nauseating and in any respect uncomfortable. So if we become disorientated, for whatever reason, we will immediately try to find our way back to being orientated. This is what Ahmed would call becoming reorientated.

2 That way of creating disorientation is also a classic method in dramaturgy. If something happens in the same way a few times in a row, the audience starts believing that this is the way it works and then it happens in another way which hopefully creates an reaction such as laughter, fear, etc.
FROM INTENTIONALITY TOWARDS ORIENTATION

My starting point is the book *Queer Phenomenology – Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006) by Sara Ahmed, Professor of Race and Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths College, University of London. Herein she explores what phenomenology could give to queer studies, or in other words, what it means to queer phenomenology (Ahmed p. 23). In the introduction Ahmed explains why her starting point is the classic modern phenomenology, introduced by Edmund Husserl in *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (1913):

I start here because phenomenology makes orientation central in the very argument that consciousness is always directed “toward” an object, and given its emphasis on the lived experience of inhabiting a body, or what Edmund Husserl calls the “living body (leib)”. Phenomenology can offer a resource for queer studies insofar as it emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds.

I arrived at phenomenology because, in part, the concept of orientation led me there. It matters how we arrive at the places we do. I also arrived at the concept of orientations by taking a certain route. In my previous book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, the concept of orientations was also crucial. Here I worked with a phenomenological model of emotions as intentional: as being “directed” toward objects. So when we fall fear, we feel fear of something. I brought this model of emotional intentionality together with a model of affect as contact: we are affected by “what” we come into contact with. In other words, emotions are directed to what we come into contact with: they move us “toward” and “away” from such objects. (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 2)

Within this excerpt she manages to present most of her important concepts. Orientation is part of a phenomenological method because it argues that consciousness is always intended, directed toward something. Consciousness is always orientated towards objects (the world) around us. By using Maurice Merleau-Ponty and his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Ahmed also shows that orientation is the consciousness reaching out from the body toward the things around us. The body is the starting point, it is where the consciousness exists and orientation is the direction that it takes towards the world:

The starting point for orientation is the point from which the world unfolds: the 'here' of the body and the 'where' of its dwelling.

Orientations, then, are about the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty suggests that “spatial forms of distance are not so much relations between different points in objective space as they are relations between these points and a central perspective – our body” (1964:5). The body provides us with a perspective: the body is “here” as a point from which we begin, and from which the world unfolds /.../

(Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 8)

However, this connection between the body and orientation was something that Immanuel Kant wrote about almost 200 years ago in *What is orientation in thinking* (1786):

To orientate oneself, in the proper sense of the word, means to use a given direction—and we divide the horizon into four of these—in order to find the others, and in particular that of the sunrise. If I see the sun in the sky and know that it is now midday, I know how to find south, west, north, and east. For this purpose, however, I must necessarily be able to feel a difference within my own subject, namely that between my right and left hand. I call this a feeling, because these two sides display no perceptible difference as far as external intuition is concerned. If I were not able, in describing a circle, to distinguish between movement from left to right and movement from right to left without reference to any difference between objects within the circle, and hence to define the different positions of such objects by a priori means, I would not know whether to locate west to the right or to the left of the southernmost point of the horizon in order to complete the circle through through north and east and so back to south. Thus, in spite of all the objective
data in the sky, I orientate myself geographically purely by means of a subjective distinction: and if all the constellations, while in other respects retaining the same shape and the same position in relation to each other, were one day miraculously transposed so that their former easterly direction now became west, no human eye would notice the slightest change on the next clear night, and even the astronomer, if he heeded only what he saw and not at the same time what he felt, would inevitably become disorientated. But in fact, the ability to make distinctions by means of the feeling of the right and the left comes quite naturally to his aid—an ability which, though implanted by nature, has become a habit as a result of frequent practice; and if he silly directs his eyes to the Pole Star, he will not only notice the change which has occurred, but will still be able to orientate himself in spite of it.

I can now extend this geographical concept of the process of orientation to signify any kind of orientation within a given space, i.e. orientation in a purely mathematical sense. In the darkness, I can orientate myself in a familiar room so long as I can touch any one object whose position I remember. But it is obvious that the only thing which assists me here is an ability to define the positions of the objects by means of a subjective distinction: for I cannot see the objects whose position I am supposed to find; and it, for a joke, someone had shifted all the objects round in such a way that their relative positions remained the same but what was previously on the right was now on the left, I would be quite unable to find my way about a room whose walls were in other respects identical. But in fact, I can soon orientate myself simply by the feeling of difference between my two sides, my right and my left. This is what happens if I have to walk and take the correct turnings at nigh on streets with which I am otherwise familiar, but in which I cannot distinguish any of the houses.

(Kant, Kant: Political Writings, p. 238-9)

What Kant is saying is that orientation in its very basic function is subjective, that it emanates from the subjective feeling of difference that enables you to distinguish the left from the right side of your body. To be able to orientate yourself you must feel the difference in your own body. Orientation is a bodily function.

Ahmed also places orientations together with affect theory in order to make her point that emotions follow the same intentionality as that of the consciousness. When we feel something, we feel it towards something. Emotions, affects, are orientated in the same way as the consciousness. How we feel towards objects is also connected to proximity. The nearness of the objects of emotion, in either a spatial or emotional way, determines if, or how much we will be affected by them. The connection between proximity and affect could be seen as an analogy to my discussion about how we are affected by failed inductive belief. The stronger we believe in something, the nearer we are to that certain belief, and the stronger we will be affected when it proves to be false. When Ahmed writes about “the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds” (Ahmed p. 2), I read it as basically the same function as what I discussed in terms of our tendency to believe in inductive reasoning and how that makes us stay “in line.”

The way consciousness is intended, orientated, towards objects also shape the ways in which we can use objects. According to Martin Heidegger the way we use an object, what it allows us to do, is really what constitutes it. When Ahmed writes about “the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand” she draws from Heidegger and explains:

When the hammer hammers, then it is “ready-to-hand.” The nearness of the hammer, the fact that it is available to me, is linked to its usefulness; it is near as it enables me to perform a specific kind of work.

(Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, p. 47)

The proximity of objects is what makes them useful to us. Merleau-Ponty suggests that objects, when perceived by the consciousness, takes their shape from how they can become an extension of our bodily actions.

Most importantly, for Ahmed, is the way phenomenology can be used as a resource for queer studies—the phenomenological method as a tool for understanding emotions,
orientations and how people follow the lines of normativity. For me phenomenology, the way I read it through Ahmed, becomes a resource for understanding how we are orientated towards objects and how we see the objects that gathers around us. Being orientated in certain ways direct us to see certain objects more than others and certain qualities in objects more than others—in other words these objects are what Ahmed calls “orientation devices”. But the question is just as much about what we see, as about what we do not see, our should not see because it could disorientate us. And since I (just as Ahmed) consider disorientation to be necessary for really seeing the world as it is, and not just as it appears to be, I turn to phenomenology for the way it could be used to induce disorientation.

Ahmed describes the relationship between “following a line” (being orientated) and the emergence of the lines that we tend to follow:

The relationship between “following a line” and the conditions for the emergence of lines is often ambiguous. Which one comes first? I have always been struck by the phrase “a path well trodden.” A path is made by the repetition of the event of the ground “being trodden” upon. We can see the path as a trace of past journeys. The path is made out of footprints—traces of feet that “tread” and that in “treading” create a line on the ground. When people stop treading the path may disappear. And when we see the line of the path before us, we tend to walk upon it, as a path “clears” the way. So we walk on the path as it is before us, but it is only before us as an effect of being walked upon. A paradox of the footprint emerges. Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created.

(Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p.16)

Orientations are both something that we do and that we follow, but not necessarily in that order. It is a reflexive and ambiguous relationship that seems to oscillate back and forth and maybe it really only exist as a state of in between. And this in betweeness is probably the same as the state of disorientation that I seek when writing this essay.

I started this text with a discussion about the insufficiency of philosophical systems to accurately describe reality. And the troublesome relationship between thoughts on the world (theory) and descriptions of the world (empiricism) is, the way I see it, the very central point around which Edmund Husserl created his phenomenological method about 100 years ago. It is the question that he wanted to solve. I am not going to evaluate whether he succeeded or not, instead I am interested in the way he discusses how we see objects, what we see, what we should not see and how this seeing of objects and the intentionality of the consciousness is a way of describing how we construct our own models of the world. How we bend reality to fit in to our own *perfect systems*, to make the things around us stay “in line,” and how we conform to normativity. As mentioned earlier, to me phenomenology is about what we should, or should not take for granted in looking at the world, viewing the things around us and hence creating our own personal worlds.
THE MAN BEHIND THE TABLE

We see him from behind, sitting at his writing table. Two shelves filled with books on the wall in front of him. On the table stacks of paper. The sun is coming in from the window to the left of him. There is a lamp mounted on the wall next to the window, and the chair he sits in is made from dark heavy wood. He is leaning his right elbow on the table, his head directed towards what is in front of him. He is writing.

I am conscious of a world endlessly spread out in space, endlessly becoming and having endlessly become in time. I am conscious of it: that signifies, above all, that intuitively I find it immediately, that I experience it. By my seeing, touching, hearing, and so forth, and in the different modes of sensuous perception, corporeal physical things with some spatial distribution or other are simply there for me, “on hand” in the literal or the figurative sense, whether or not I am particularly heedful of them and busied with them in my considering, thinking, feeling, or willing.

(Husserl, *Ideas*, p. 51)

For Edmund Husserl the starting point is consciousness. You are conscious about yourself, your body, and how your body resides in space. You are conscious about the things around you, what you see when looking around, what you can feel with your hands, the sounds that might reach you through the open window. One way to understand Husserl is that this is the very ground upon which phenomenology is built, how you experience the world through your bodily sensations, with your living body. And the world that you discover is a world of objects. Things you can touch, see, smell, hear. Things you can imagine, remember—recollections of what you have experienced before. The consciousness in not just a consciousness about yourself but rather it is putting your own being in relation to the things
around you. Your consciousness is always directed, intended towards something—in other words, your consciousness always has an orientation towards something. Thus, to become conscious is to become orientated.

Husserl started out as a mathematician, and as such his work was stuck within the boundaries of logic. He wrote his dissertation in mathematics and continued for a few years before entering into the field of philosophy. Maybe then, he still had the mind of a mathematician when he started out his philosophical career, trying to logically prove the existence of the world... Perhaps he never succeeded, since after a few years he decided to put all this metaphysical angst into brackets (the famous *epoché*) and start over as if the world is really there, because at least that is how it seems to be.\(^3\) This is the start of phenomenology, his philosophical method of studying the world as it shows itself to us through our conscious experiences. In a way Husserl’s philosophical development can be seen as a good example of what I discussed in the beginning of this essay. First Husserl tried to create the perfect logical philosophical system but in the end he realized that it could not describe the world as he saw it, it only turned him back to where he started just as any perfectly logical system would. Instead he tried the other way around, to start with the world as it is seen, as it showed itself to him. But to be able to do this and still be within the realms of philosophy, he had to use his “bracketing”. This allowed him to say that no matter the answer to this or that question, I will just assume that the world as I experience it is at least something (maybe the only thing) that I can study and learn about. At first glance, this could seem like the perfect way to escape the problematics of getting a philosophical system to correspond to the world, but as we learn more about Husserl’s phenomenological method, we see that the bracketing comes back. They are there in the very moment when you experience the world around you. The “bracketing” is Husserl’s tool to make the world fit into his phenomenological system, but as such it also seems to hide some important aspects of the world. And I am (just as Ahmed) interested in just those things that becomes hidden in this bracketing. To me, the bracketing is the most interesting yet problematical question within Husserl’s phenomenological method. When we see the world with Husserl’s phenomenological eyes what is it that we leave out, put into brackets, to make our descriptions of the world follow the normative lines, and what would happen if we reveal it, if we focus on just those parts that Husserl blocks out?

**ORIENTATION DEVICES AS OBJECTS**

As already mentioned, Ahmed discusses what she calls *orientation devices*. Starting with Husserl, she takes his writing table as one example:

> If we start with Husserl’s first volume of *Ideas*, for instance, then we start with the writing table. The table appears, we could say, because the table is the object nearest the body of the philosopher. That the writing table appears, and not another kind of table, might reveal something about the “orientation” of phenomenology, or even of philosophy itself.

(Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 3)

The writing table is an orientation device for Husserl because it is from his position behind it that he experience the world (by thinking). It is where he forms his thoughts, his philosophy, it is where his body dwells while pondering upon the things around him and their meanings

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\(^3\) This is maybe an unfair simplification of something that Husserl spent hundreds of pages to discuss. However, I am not trying to make it seem as an easy thing, rather I think it must have been quite an extraordinary thing to find this completely new starting point. And as I hope I will show in the following, I do think that it has proven a to be very fruitful turn. I also suspect that this epoché of his is a very intricate and well argued philosophical model, but trying to make sense of that would be a completely different essay.
and relations to each other. But Ahmed is also saying that the objects we use as orientation devices also affects the way we are orientated. Remember the way Husserl described how he is sitting behind his writing table and hearing the children playing outside. Being orientated by and from the writing table in the study keeps Husserl away from his children. He can hear them but they are not near to him in a spatial way and being near to something is what gives it its ability to affect us. Thinking about orientation devices, we may also remember what Immanuel Kant wrote about orientating oneself in a dark room. “In the darkness, I can orientate myself in a familiar room so long as I can touch any one object whose position I remember.” (Kant, p. 239) Here the objects function as orientation devices in a spatial sense but one could see the dark room where Kant finds his way by feeling the objects as an analogy to the mind. In our minds I think we have certain things, thoughts, models, that we recognize and feel familiar to and if we feel disorientated in thinking then we can use these mental orientations devices to find our way back to being orientated.

**HUSSERL’S OBJECTS**

In order to understand the role of the object in Husserl’s thinking we must understand how to see the object in his proper phenomenological way. For Husserl the aim is to see the object in itself as an object of pure perception, as a self-same. This is to see *the object* rather than *this* object. In order to do this, one must put all the social and familiar characteristics of the object into brackets, what Husserl call “the natural attitude”. The social and familiar characteristics of the object is really anything you might think or feel or know about the object, that is not directly perceived through your senses. You look at a table and you know who owns this table, you know what it is used for, you know what colour it was before it was repainted a few years ago, you know who painted it, and who first bought it many years before, and what she or he intended to use it for, even though it never happened that way... and so the history goes on. All of this is what Husserl asks you to put into brackets in order to see the table as a self-same object. All the familiarity with this specific table stands in the way of really seeing the table as a thing in itself and it must be kept out of Husserl’s phenomenological seeing.

However, even if Husserl manages to block out all of what he calls the “natural attitude” towards the table, he still can not see it the way he wants. We can imagine him looking at his writing table. He moves around it, keeping it steady in view while blocking out every other object in the room as well as any presumptions he might have about this specific table. What is clear to him is that in any given moment he sees only one profile of the table and as he moves around it he sees in every moment a new profile of the table. This means he can never really see the table as the self-same that he wants it to be because he cannot see the table from all sides at once—he cannot see the whole table. The table is in this way unavailable to him, but still he knows that this should be the table. A knowing that is created by what Husserl calls “synthetic consciousness”—the act of connecting new impressions with what has been seen before. The object becomes a self-same object of pure perception as the recollection of the object is synthesised with the present view of the object. When seeing one side of the table Husserl can recollect the other side of the table which he saw just a moment ago, and in this way he intend that it is in fact the table that he has before him.

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 remains 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 simultaneously gleams forth, and so on.

(Husserl, *Ideas*, p. 86)

What Ahmed finds striking about is the “extraordinary claim” that only the table remains the same. What is extraordinary, she argues, is that in order for the table to actually remain the same we need to conjure its missing sides and this makes the sameness of the table spectral. Instead, she suggests that what we do not see when we look at the table is the behind of it, and that this could be thought of in a different way: “what is behind the table is what must have already taken place for the table to arrive” (Ahmed, p. 37). This she calls the “spectrality of history”, which resides within the object (the table). Spectral, because it is not something that necessarily shows on the surface, but something that we know is there. We know that objects has arrived in one way or another to where they currently are, even if we do not now exactly how it happened. This arrival of the object, the history of the object, is probably something that Husserl would connect to the “natural attitude”, and hence want us to block out of our perception of things, put into brackets. But Ahmed on the other hand suggests that this history of the object is exactly what we need to conjure in order to really see the table as a self-same. Husserl’s synthetic consciousness asks us to conjure an objects missing sides from memory at the same time as we should block away any remembrance of this certain object that is connected to the natural attitude towards the same thing. However, Ahmed is telling us that what we need to conjure is something that is within this natural attitude.

I would like to suggest that what actually is “behind” the table, and what we have to conjure in order to fully perceive the object as a self-same, is exactly what Husserl’s want us to put into brackets and that makes this into somewhat of a paradox. To see the table as a self-same object of pure perception one must bracket all previous social and familiar qualities that one knows in relation to this specific table, but one must at the same time conjure ones previous perceptions of the table in order to perceive it as a whole table. The question is if it is really possible to divide between the recollection of previous perceptual encounters with this specific table and the memory of any other kind of relation to this table that one might have? Maybe this is a question for neuropysiology to answer, but without asking them I would say no, I don't think that this division is possible to perform. Neither, I would argue, is it desirable. Because all our previous experiences and knowledges, both perceptual and social, is what makes the object near to us. The “natural attitude” towards objects is what makes them feel proximate to us, and as discussed earlier, this is what makes an object ready-to-hand. It makes the object a possible extension of your bodily actions, it is basically what makes any object useful to us.

This question about what to conjure and what to block away in order to fully see a certain thing in the “right” way could also be connected to the use of the object. As I mentioned earlier Martin Heidegger puts this aspect of the object as the very central thing that defines it, that makes it what it is. An object is what it is depending on what it allows us to do. In *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, Heidegger writes about a table:

What is there in the room 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, 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 primary 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. Its standing-there in the room means: Playing this role in such and such characteristic use. This and that about it is "impractical," unsuitable. That part is damaged. It now stands in a better spot in the room than before-there's better lighting, for example. Where it stood before was not at all good (for ... ). Here and there it shows lines-the boys like to busy themselves at the table. These lines are
not just interruptions in the paint, but rather: it was the boys and it still is. This side is not the east
side, and this narrow side so many em. shorter than the other, but rather the one at which my wife
sits in the evening when she wants to stay up and read, there at the table we had such and such a
discussion that time, there that decision was made with a friend that time, there that work written
that time, there that holiday celebrated that time.

(Heidegger, Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity, p. 69)

Heidegger seems to mean that what makes the table the table (instead of “a” table) is just
those qualities that Husserl wants us to block away. When Heidegger describes the table he
puts emphasis on the temporality of what he sees, that is, the histories that is in and behind the
table (what Ahmed would call the arrival of the table). But foremost, Heidegger puts the
applicative aspect of the table to the front, namely, what it allows the people around it to do.
What people do with the table even has the power to alter what the table really is, as they
might perform something else with the table than what has been done before.

Just as Heidegger, Ahmed also has problems with the things that Husserl wants us to put in
brackets. In a footnote she suggests an alternative way to conceive Husserl’s bracketing:

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.
(Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, p. 200)

A queer phenomenology, Ahmed suggests, will rather than hide away these aspects, feel
wonder about them. This is an interesting thought but it is also not clear how it is supposed to
work. What would the difference be in feeling wonder about what is in the brackets instead of
just realizing what is there, and take it into account when meeting a specific object? And
maybe it is exactly what is in there that makes us able to see the object as what it is. Although
a queer phenomenology might make an ideological point about putting emphasis on the
hidden histories within Husserl’s brackets, we still need to think about the bigger question:
whether this bracketing is even possible to carry through? Can we really block away all social
and familiar knowledge we have about a certain table that is actually known to us? And if we
block away all our social understanding of the table, could we then really understand it as a
table? As I already pointed out, my answer is no, but that still leaves us with the question of
why? Why does Husserl want us to put certain feelings, thought, wonders, in brackets, and is
it something that we also would want to do? What would be the purpose for such an approach
in seeing the world and what possible outcomes may emerge from it? One could say that what
Husserl want us to do by putting away all our “natural attitude” towards an object, is to
disorientate ourself from that object. To see it, not as something that is part of our life that we
know of, something that is within the lines that we follow, but to instead step out of our lines
and try to see the object from what Ahmed might call a queer angle. What if the bracketing
could really be a disorientation device?
CONCLUSION—DISORIENTATION

Phenomenology is for me a way of turning method into theory. A method to see the world in a special way. To, so to say, really see the world, and out of that make an accurate philosophical description of it. In this sense one could say that phenomenology as a philosophical system is based upon what happens within the discrepancy between what appears in front of us, and how to describe it accurately. Whether Husserl manages to mend this gap remains an open question (at least for me with my quite limited knowledge about his oeuvre), but I see this lack of a clear answer as an asset rather than fault. It opens up a potentiality in Husserl’s work which, as I see it, Sara Ahmed also is pointing out. This openness in the answer to the question of how to mend the gap between what we believe to be true about the world and how the world really could be, is a tool that I think one can use to discuss the concept of disorientation. Just as Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology gives meaning to objects according to their ability to extend the range of our bodily actions, we should value a theory and its thoughts based upon their ability to expand the way we think. And the ambiguity that I read into the queer phenomenology that Ahmed is creating from Husserl, is an ambiguity that could be the ground for thinking about disorientations. And disorientations is, the way I want to use it, a tool for expanding the way we think.

I want to suggest that the bracketing in Husserl’s phenomenology is a representation of the gap between theory and empiricism, between perceiving the world and thinking about the world. The bracketing is about what we should or should not take into account when looking at, and interacting with the things that surround us. Husserl’s brackets might at first sight appear to be an instrument that hides certain things and in that sense keeps us orientated within the lines of normativity, but I think that it could just as well be used as a tool for disorientation. In a way, I think that this may also be what he himself intended it to be. However, he was writing in a time and context far different from mine, which means I may want (and need) to use this tool in a different way.

My view on the “bracketing” as a tool is closer to what Sara Ahmed calls a queer phenomenology. There might not be a very great difference between Husserl’s phenomenology and the way Ahmed represents it but there is a shift in focus from what is outside of the bracketing to what is in there. Furthermore, I think that where Ahmed is really deviating from Husserl’s lines is the way she connects phenomenology through the concept of orientations to affect theory and emotions. How does it make us feel to be orientated and what happens when we fall out of orientation into the state of disorientation. Ahmed quotes from Jean Paul Sartre’s novel Nausea from 1965, in order to give a description on how disorientation might be experienced:

4 Husserl is considered to be the founder of what is usually called modern phenomenology but there is also an older phenomenology who’s main character is Friedrich Hegel who in 1807 published the work Phenomenology of Spirit in which he develops his thought around the evolution of consciousness. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georg_Wilhelm_Friedrich_Hegel, 2011-10-20)

It is also important to remember that Husserl only laid the ground which the very rich and widely dispersed construction of phenomenological thinking is built upon and that contains many different phenomenologists and many different phenomenologies. The questions that I discuss in this essay might get very different answers depending on which phenomenologist you ask.

Furthermore I want to make clear that when I now enter into the final part of this essay I use the term phenomenology to talk about what I could call “my own” phenomenology the way I have constructed it within the corpus of this essay. I am well aware that this might not be what any one else would call phenomenology but my aim was never to write an accurate philosophical description of phenomenology as such but rather to try to search the literature I have read for concepts and ideas that is usable for the discussion in this essay as well as for me in my artistic practice.
What is really interesting in this (which Ahmed also makes a point of) is how the disorientation reveal itself as an object getting “a sort of personality.” To me this describes how disorientation can make objects come alive, and following my previous discussion about the individual histories that lies hidden in objects (which Husserl wants to put in brackets), coming alive through disorientation might be a way to let these histories loose. An object that gets disorientated is an object that starts telling its stories. In the same way, I think a great artwork is something that wears its individual histories on its very surface. Thus, a great artwork is an disorientated object. However, orientations is reciprocal. By analogy then, it must also be the case for disorientations. A disorientated object is also an object that disorientates, a disorientation device.

The overall issue I have been discussing in this essay is the problem of how to represent reality. The necessity of trying to do it, and the impossibility of succeeding. I do not believe that any philosophical system, or any other system for that matter, can accurately provide a description of the complexity of what we as humans perceive as reality, however, I do think that we need to keep on trying to represent the world in a different way. And maybe it is just in the moments where we are confronted with the failure of the representative systems that we can see things with the clearest eyes. I believe that to be disorientated is to confront the failure of a system of representations. It is to find ourself in unknown territory when what we thought was reality seize to be plausible. But the important part is what inevitably follows. Ahmed showed us with the quote from Sartre, that disorientation is sickening, it comes with weariness, angst, nausea and it is in all respects not a state in which we want, or could for that matter, stay in. So we find our way back to being orientated, and hopefully, all though it is not at all a given, we are then becoming reorientated.

It is these moments of uncertainty and weariness that more than anything else leads to new insights. The bigger the belief that gets thrown over, the greater the angst, but also the greater potential for finding new truths that hopefully is better suited for the presence than the one's that just vanished. Believing in induction (as discussed in the introduction of this text) makes us follow certain lines, it makes us orientated in the world as we know it. When these beliefs fails us we find ourselves in a world that is less familiar than before, and we become disorientated. What we thought was something firm to hold on to, now seems to be slipping away and we immediately grasp for something new, something other to support us. And it is in these moments, and depending of what we get a hold of, that new worlds possibly are created.

Within art, it is almost something of a platitude to state that art creates worlds. We are always making worlds, as an artist friend of mine once said in a discussion around the title for the Venice Biennial a few years ago5. And I think many artists would agree to this, but how is this making of worlds made? In following my previous argumentation around the ambiguity of philosophical systems and the potentiality of disorientation I would like to make a twofold suggestion on how to make worlds using art. Either you try to construct this new world by putting components together to form a system—you create new rules for living, new viewing

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points or perspectives to see things from, new suggestions on how to do certain things, basically you build a new system. However, this will probably fail to be believable just the same way as any philosophical system will fail to describe reality in a comprehensible way. The other way would be to use the power of disorientation and try to do art that works as a disorientation device. Disorientation will then hopefully lead to a reorientation, which I think is the way to piece by piece change and make new worlds. If one manages to induce disorientation then the world-making will happen by itself within the spectator when trying to find new solid ground to stand on.

Here it might be interesting to remember the relationship that both Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger argues exist between objects and actions. Objects are what they are according to what they allow us to do, and hence if this property of being ready-to-hand seizes to be, than the object becomes something else. This disruption between a thing and its intended use makes us see the object as something else, thus other qualities spring up as important. Ahmed draws from Heidegger and writes:

So it is when the hammer is broken, or when I cannot use it, that I become aware of the hammer as an object-in-itself, rather than as object, which refers beyond itself to an action that I intend to perform. So at this moment of “failure” the hammer is perceived as having properties; as being, for instance, “too heavy.”

(Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 48)

Thus, to deliberately separate objects from their intended purpose, or use, could be a possible way to make objects become objects of disorientation. Whether it is in philosophy, science, art, or in life in general, I think that disorientation is what makes us able to find new paths to walk, new truths to believe in and new possibilities. Disorientation has the power to expand the notion of normativity and hence expand the possibilities to live with different identities, identities that before might have been considered undesirable deviations from what we feel familiar to. Disorientation could help us to make better descriptions of reality as we see it, and in a way this is to recreate reality, to make new worlds.


