

Queer bodies in teaching spaces: Dis/orienting practicum in Aotearoa

DR EUNICE GAERLAN (SHE/HER) AND DR Yael THOMAS CAMERON (SHE/HER)

EUNICE.GAERLAN@AUT.AC.NZ, Yael.CAMERON@AUT.AC.NZ

AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND



Starting Points

Context

Catalysts

Collaborators

Research Design

Tracing Lines and Bodies

- Refers to how participants begin to trace and surface the orienting and disorienting forces in their practicum experiences through reflective writing.

Turning Points and Divergences

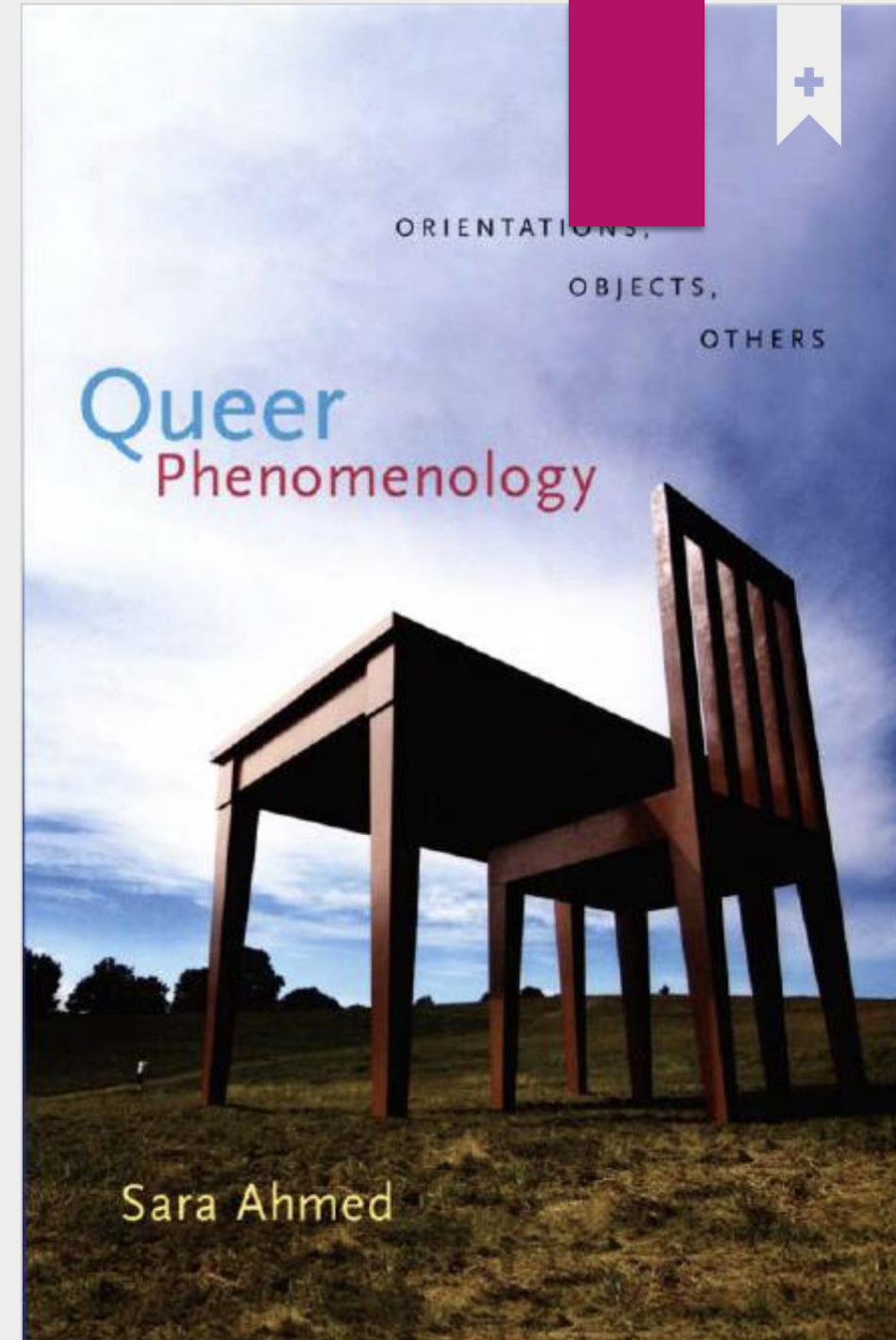
- Emphasises how space shifts through dialogic interaction. Interviews become sites of relational space-making and meaning-making.

Gathering

- Highlights collective sense-making and the creation of new lines of affiliation, memory, and expression. Poetic inquiry becomes an act of shared meaning-making—towards each other, towards possibility, towards being seen.

Queering Phenomenology with Sara Ahmed

- ▶ Orientation—the organisation of bodies in spaces
- ▶ Lines and histories
- ▶ Disorientation and suffering
- ▶ Possibilities of the oblique and uncanny



Orientation

“Orientation involves aligning body and space: we only know which way to turn *once we know which way we are facing*. If we are in a strange room, one whose contours are not part of our memory map, then the situation is not so easy. We can reach out, but what we feel does not necessarily allow us to know which way we are facing...” (Ahmed, 2006, p.7)

Lines and histories

“The lines we follow might also function as forms of ‘alignment,’ or as ways of being in line with others. We might say that we are orientated when we are in line. We are ‘in line’ when we face the direction that is already faced by others. Being ‘in line’ allows bodies to extend into spaces that, as it were, have already taken their shape...” (Ahmed, 2006, p.15)

Disorientation and suffering

“Disorientation involves failed orientations: bodies inhabit spaces that do not extend to their shape or use objects that do not extend their reach...[they] 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 of stress, as points of social and physical pressure that can be experienced as a physical press on the surface of the skin.” (Ahmed, 2006, p.160)

The possibilities of the uncanny

“Or, if a face is inverted and becomes queer or deprived of its significance, then ... [there is] 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...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 oriented toward queer moments when objects slip.” (Ahmed, 2006, p.171)

Wearing the Colour, Not the Story

“Pink Shirt Day...if parents ask to tell them it doesn't have anything to do with LGBT...”

“...the posters have rainbows on them ... the deputy principal said was misleading because it does give that idea it is just for LGBT bullying.”

“This was difficult for me to sit through and hear her say Pink Shirt Day doesn't have anything to do with the LGBT+ community.”

“As a student teacher I didn't think it was my place to question that in front of the rest of the staff but a part of me wishes I had...I think now as a full time teacher who is a member of the staff I would speak up.”

What kind of spaces are school spaces in this vignette?

- ▶ School spaces are not neutral; they are shaped by norms and histories that favour some bodies over others.
- ▶ Inclusion was framed through erasure, as staff distanced Pink Shirt Day from its queer origins.
- ▶ George's body did not fit the space shaped for cis, straight, white norms. He moved with caution, not ease.
- ▶ The school functioned as a site of regulation, not belonging, a space that did not leave room for him.

How did George experience the school space as a queer body?

- ▶ George's body could *pass*, but he felt a constant tension between visibility and erasure.
- ▶ He experienced internal misalignment, wanting to speak up, but feeling unable to do so.
- ▶ The space demanded straight conformity, making queerness risky or unprofessional.
- ▶ His silence was not passive. It reflected the pressures of alignment as a student teacher.

What lines arise or disappear in this part of the story, and how are these lines marked by histories?

- ▶ The school followed the line of heteronormativity, distancing itself from queer histories.
- ▶ Pink Shirt Day was stripped of its origin, reframed as general anti-bullying.
- ▶ The line of queer resistance was absented, replaced by a “safer,” parent-approved version.
- ▶ Institutional repetition reproduced erasure, instead of allowing queer histories to surface.

In what ways was George's experience disorienting?

- ▶ George felt bodily unease and ethical discomfort, unsure how to respond.
- ▶ He shrunk back, not because he didn't care, but because the space didn't allow action.
- ▶ Disorientation was not a one-off. It reoccurred across practicum in subtle ways.
- ▶ His body couldn't fully extend into the space.

What marked the possible emergence of a liveable life at school?

- ▶ George imagined speaking up “*as a full-time teacher,*” a future shift in orientation.
- ▶ Recognition from a queer parent and colleague offered solidarity and affirmation.
- ▶ Even in erasure, there was emerging resistance.
- ▶ The beginnings of an assemblage towards a liveable life.

Final Thoughts



Reshape the lines. Don't just ask bodies to fit.

Recognise and support orientation devices.

Work with schools to notice and respond to discrimination.