

Sense, Orientation, and World Creation a dialogue between Jean-Luc Nancy and Sara Ahmed

Abstract

This article stages a dialogue between Nancy's post-phenomenology and Ahmed's queer phenomenology to examine the conditions, ethos, and politics of world creation as well as the habits, obstacles, and inequalities which resist it. It argues that Nancy's understanding of sense as the event of the mutual exposure of bodies reveals what exceeds dominant worldviews, how bodies extend the world beyond prevailing spatialisations, but that it does not sufficiently examine what prevents us from sensing that event as a call to world creation. Conversely, Ahmed analyses how the spatial orientation of bodies restricts exposure, causes uneven access to the world, suppresses Nancean sense. Her account of disorientation illuminates how we could experience the world as ungrounded and susceptible to creation but struggles to explain what would enable the sharing of this event so that it does not reconfirm the dominant orientations of whiteness and heterosexuality. Reframing disorientation in terms of Nancy's relational ontology and its spatial conception of justice rethinks the non alignment of bodies and spaces as freeing the circulation of sense so that alternative worlds could appear. In this way, disorientation can be read as potentially opening the passage from injustice to justice, from orientation to creation.

Key Words: Nancy, Ahmed, sense, world, body, orientation, whiteness

How does the world make sense? For Jean-Luc Nancy, to begin answering that question we need to reflect on what makes the question possible in the first place.¹ If there were a transcendental Being, meaning, or origin that could supply the sense of all worldly existents that question would never arise. The quest for transcendence, for a position from which we could represent the world as a totality, would paradoxically deliver us beyond the world whose sense we seek to understand. The seemingly opposite quest for total unity with the world, for immanence, would prove equally self-cancelling. The closure of immanence would destroy any sense of worldly existence by leaving nothing beyond us to sense. Transcendence and immanence meet in their suppression of the relation toward the world that sense presupposes. Seeing, hearing, touching involve a movement toward the outside, toward something else or other without which there would be nothing to sense, without which there would be no world. For Nancy, thinking the constitutively relational dimension of sense requires us to surpass not only a metaphysical perspective with its emphasis on origins and foundations but also a phenomenological one. That requirement may seem surprising given that Nancy credits phenomenology with advancing on metaphysics through its understanding of the world as 'the absolute horizon of sense'. While the phenomenological world 'is no

¹ Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Sense of the World* (SW, henceforth). Translated by Jeffrey S. Librett. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1997. Pages numbers will appear in the article.

longer subordinated to either a beyond-the-world or to a mere representation”, it becomes, Nancy avers, subject to another form of subordination. Its sense depends on human consciousness and action as its origin. This closure to “what precedes consciousness and the signifying appropriation of sense” leaves phenomenology tied to the metaphysical logic that it seeks to overcome (*SW*, 17). It presupposes a human subject that transcends the act of sensing, for, through, and in whom, the world makes sense. To avoid this closure, Nancy rethinks sense as the shared exposure of beings, of their coming into presence of one to the other. Being inherently relational, sense cannot proceed from a primary viewpoint or meaning.

If Nancy turns away from phenomenology because it starts from the perspective of human consciousness, Sara Ahmed turns toward it to analyse how that perspective becomes a starting point.² However, for Ahmed, the phenomenological perspective is not of humanity in general but of white, heterosexual, males. She queers phenomenology to show how the world becomes oriented around heterosexuality and whiteness as invisible viewpoints that determine the near and the far, the strange and familiar, the straight and the queer. The focus in phenomenology on bodily extension, motility, and pragmatic engagement describes the experience of white, heterosexual bodies which extend into the world, inhabit it, and take up space without their bodies becoming an obstacle to action or a point of stress, without their being stopped, questioned, or disoriented. Like Nancy, she draws on the work of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty.³ Whereas, for Nancy, the subject-object logic that they deploy to understand the world has exhausted itself philosophically, for Ahmed, that logic still prevails in the organisation and experience of the world. Queer, non-white, or other marginalised bodies are made to feel like objects that get in the way of their worldly extension and dwelling.

Both Nancy’s and Ahmed’s engagement with phenomenology turns on the question of access to the world. Nancy praises phenomenology for opening “new access”, for making possible “modern ‘transcendence’” (*SW*, 17). Phenomenological sense transcends toward the world as its ultimate limit. However, by turning the world into a phenomenal correlate of human

² Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology, Orientations, Objects, Others (QP, henceforth)*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. Page numbers will appear in the article.

³ For Nancy’s connection to phenomenology, see James, Ian. *The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006, 65-113 & 121-130, and *The Technique of Thought. Nancy, Laruelle, Malabou, and Stiegler after Naturalism*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2019, 54-65; Roney, Patrick. “The Outside of Phenomenology: Jean-Luc Nancy on the World and Sense”, *South African Journal of Philosophy* 32, no. 4 (2013): 339-347.

consciousness, that access is only partial. Phenomenology cannot think ‘a world beyond humanity’ (55). Ahmed tackles the question from a different angle. She criticises phenomenology for too readily assuming a world accessible to all human beings. She queers its concepts and methodologies to understand how differential access appears and how it gets experienced in ways that classify and objectify bodies. Their different approaches expose the limits of classical phenomenology not to dismiss it but to take forward its reflection. By establishing a dialogue between Nancy’s post-phenomenology and Ahmed’s queer phenomenology, we can address the question of worldly access more fully. That dialogue will allow us to understand what opens, restricts, or closes access to the world in its multi-layered existence.

I will argue that Nancy’s account of sense as the event of the mutual exposure of bodies allows us to imagine a world irreducible to hegemonic worldviews but that it struggles to explain how we would come to sense that event as the opening of a shared world. Conversely, Ahmed, by analysing the spatial organisations and categorisations that affect bodily sensing, exposure, and worldly engagement, prompts reflection on that question. Her attention to “what is habitual or routine in the ‘what’ of the world”, to how “we are stuck”⁴ reveals what stops us from perceiving the sensory event, what stop some bodies from being recognised as “open space”, as “places of existence”.⁵ Her work underlines how we cannot begin to sense the world anew without considering how sense is habitually restricted. Shifting from the openness of sense to the directedness of orientation, from post to queer phenomenology, will help explain why some bodies struggle to extend the world, why some are recalled to their externally imposed significations when others ignore theirs, how the spacings of bodies become space belonging more to some than others.⁶ Examining these

⁴ Sara Ahmed, “A Phenomenology of Whiteness” (*PW* henceforth), *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007), 149-168, 165. Page references will appear in the text.

⁵ Nancy, Jean-Luc *Corpus* (*C* henceforth). Translated by Richard A. Rand. New York : Fordham University Press, 2008, 15. Page references will appear in the text hereafter.

⁶ Work in critical geography and critical legal studies addresses similar concerns. For example, Doreen Massey’s seminal *For Space* explores how the dominant conception of space as closed and static privileges certain perspectives and silences others, demarcates boundaries of belonging and responsibility. Cambridge: Polity 2006. More recently, Sarah Keenan has drawn on the work of Ahmed and Massey to analyse how spaces of belonging become spaces of propriety where some subjects “will smoothly fit because they are ‘in place’ and proper, while others will be ‘out of place’, improper and thus repelled, unsettled or realigned”. Sarah Keenan, *Subversive Property: Law and the Production of Spaces of Belonging*. London: Routledge, 13. Both Massey and Keenan offer alternative notions of either space or property to reveal their contingency, heterogeneity, and contestability. However, how those alternatives appear in the world to disrupt its organisation around certain identities or cultures is less clear. By contrast, Ahmed’s notion of disorientation seeks to articulate, as we shall see, those moments when the world appears as ungrounded and available to alternative senses.

questions will underline the importance of Nancy's ontology of sense and what resists its appeal to a shared world.

Using Ahmed's queer phenomenology to interrogate Nancy's post-phenomenology appears to reproduce the standard criticism that Nancy privileges the ontological over the ontic, that he theorises an apolitical realm of sharing removed from the struggles and antagonisms of the real world.⁷ By contrast, I aim to demonstrate how his ontology of sense, far from demoting the ontic dimension, promotes its potential for reconfiguration. Dialogue with Ahmed's work reveals, I maintain, how the ontological and the ontic are held in tension, that is, how the sensory event could produce a shared experience of disorientation, of what exceeds a world that aligns bodies with categories and spaces.⁸ It is here that Nancy's post-phenomenology, I argue, supplements Ahmed's queer phenomenology which gestures toward "a world we have yet to inhabit" but struggles to articulate its condition of possibility (*QP*, 156). It is unclear what, for Ahmed, enables the disorientation of the oriented world so that it exposes itself in *queer* ways. Nancy's conception of sense, by pointing to what exceeds orientation, could offer some clarification. That conception also supplies an account of justice in spatial terms that could deepen the critical force of Ahmed's depiction of the white world (*C*, 46). Justice, for Nancy, is not an abstract principle grounded in human reason but 'starts from' the "evidence" of bodies whose co-appearance discloses the *there is* of the world which we are responsible for (*C*, 47). On my reading, this material and spatial notion of justice affirms the equality of bodies in world creation to call into question the ontic inequalities analysed by Ahmed. In this way, what Ahmed describes as the becoming "worldly" of whiteness would, from the perspective of Nancy's philosophy, describe its becoming *unworldly*, that is, the injustice of its refusal to "form a world [*faire monde*]" where "there is room for everyone" (*PW*, 150).⁹ I shall conclude by arguing that Ahmed's politics of disorientation, by registering those moments when bodies experience the world as ungrounded, could illuminate how the

⁷ Simon Critchley argues that 'the ontological drive' in Nancy results in 'a subordination of the ontic other to ontological otherness überhaupt' in his *Ethics—Politics—Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought*. London: Routledge, 1999, 274. Oliver Marchart echoes this reading, arguing that Nancy neglects the ontic dimension of the instituting moment of politics which produces divisions, exclusions, and conflicts in favour of an apolitical being-with. See his *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, 61-84. For a robust response, see Crowley, Martin. "Being Beyond Politics, with Jean-Luc Nancy", *Qui Parle*, 22 no. 2, 2014, 123-145.

⁸ My reading develops Crowley's interpretation of the ontological and the ontic as 'equiprimordial, as pressing on each other from the very start', *Ibid.*, 124.

⁹ Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Creation of the World or Globalisation (CW henceforth)*. Translated by François Raffoul & David Pettigrew. New York: SUNY, 2007, 34, 42. Page references will appear in the text hereafter.

Nancean appeal to world creation could make itself heard. Her politics, I maintain, develops the ethical commitments that would support a world alive to what resists its own determination of sense, to the potential of bodies to extend and respace it in ways that could create room for alternative worlds. First, we shall begin by exploring how Nancy conceives a notion of sense that exposes a plural, shared, and dynamic world.

Nancy's Sense of the World

The Sense of the World opens by declaring “the end of the world.” The *end* designates neither the annihilation of a *thing* called world, nor the nihilism of the complete loss of sense, nor the failure of a certain conception of the world and the need to find a better one. Rather, it underlines the exhaustion of metaphysics – a logic that transcends the world to discover its meaning: “There is no longer this ‘to’ of sense: this ‘to’ of this signifying relay or directional sending, the index of this final and/or referential ideality that is at once the signified term and the ultimate goal of an operation of sense.” This coming to an end of metaphysics should redirect us toward the world as an end in itself. Being *toward* reveals the structure of sense: “If we are *toward* the world, if there is being-toward-the-world in general, that is, if there is world, there is sense” (*SW*, 7). Nancy’s use of sense plays on the polysemy of the French word *sens* which evokes bodily senses, meaning, and direction. The movement of sense as being toward precedes and exceeds any human apprehension of the world, any signification of it, while also providing their condition of possibility. In short, it is the primary orientation that enables sensing, signification, and all forms of presentation to occur. The orientations of whiteness and heterosexuality, which, for Ahmed, shape the sense of the world, would, for Nancy, always depend on this primary orientation toward sharing or being with that they deny. In other words, what conditions their determination of the world is precisely what leaves it indeterminate. How that indeterminacy manifests itself is a question, I maintain, that we can tackle more convincingly through dialogue with Ahmed’s work.

The end of the world therefore also underlines the finitude of any orienting worldview. If “[t]he world *no longer* has sense but *is* sense”, it cannot be ascribed meaning or appropriated (8). This shift from *having* to *being* affirms the withdrawal of any substantive ground or any unifying principle or essence for existence. If sense involves being toward something else or other, the quest for unity would negate that movement. By seeking to absorb beings within one single being, it would close off the passage toward the outside that sensing entails. As we shall see, this impossible desire for unity and identity drives the reproduction of the white

world for Ahmed. Ahmed's theory, I shall argue, suggests how the metaphysical logic, which, for Nancy, abstracts the world in its attempt to represent it, defines how whiteness functions as an orientation, how it ultimately suppresses the world in its quest to become it. It thereby fleshes out the socio-political force of Nancy's deconstruction

Central to that deconstruction and the idea of sense it produces is to affirm the world as constitutively in common. Existents offer themselves up to the senses, dispose themselves to intelligibility through exposure to each other. Sense does not therefore derive from an orienting viewpoint but circulates between existents or what Nancy calls plural singularities. The world is another name for this shared exposure and is therefore "always the plurality of worlds" (CW, 155). The task for Nancy, as it will be for Ahmed, is to understand how those multiple worlds make sense to challenge dominant worldviews. Vital to achieving that task is to recognise the irreducibility of sense to human consciousness or signifying systems. As human beings are singularised through contact with other singularities, they cannot supply the primary point of reference for sense. In other words, the human body does not demarcate a *here* from which the world unfurls, as it does in phenomenology, as our discussion of Ahmed will show.¹⁰ The sense of the world cannot be understood as being *for*, *through*, and *in* humanity.

For Nancy, "it is a question of understanding the world not as man's object or field of action, but as the spatial totality of the sense of existence, a totality that is itself *existent*, even if not in the mode of *Dasein*" (SW, 56). He differentiates his position from Heidegger's which, by locating the significance of the world in *Dasein*'s pragmatic engagement with it, remains caught within the subject-object relation. It thereby cannot think worldly materiality: "the concreteness of a stone does not come about only when the stone is encountered, thrown, or manipulated by or for a subject [...] The *concrete* comes before and after object and subject" (56).¹¹ Nancy's departure from Heidegger, for whom the world, he believes, is a 'phenomenal correlate of a human-taking in hand, taking-into-action, or taking-care of' marks not so much a clean break with his reflection but a radicalisation of it (55). The shared exposure of sense takes the Heideggerian notion of being-with to its logical conclusion: we do not simply experience our being-in-the world in relation to other people who supply a

¹⁰ For example, Husserl describes the lived body of perception as the 'zero point of *orientation*' in his *Ideas*. Translated by W.R. BoyceGibson. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1993, 18. Merleau-Ponty describes the body as 'my point of view on the world' in his *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge, 2002, 70. ¹¹ For the significance of Nancy's ontology for debates in post-humanism and ecopolitics, see Crowley, Martin. "The Many Worlds of Jean-Luc Nancy", *Paragraph*, 42 no. (2019), 22-36.

social context for our pragmatic engagement but also to what precedes and exceeds that engagement. If Descartes's strict opposition between subject and object closes, Heidegger argues, access to the world of shared meanings and purposes by reducing it to its objective measurable features (size, mass, motion), Heidegger, for Nancy, closes access to a 'world beyond humanity' by not going far enough in his deconstruction of the subject (55).¹² The world makes sense only for, through, and in Dasein. For Nancy, we cannot truly exist in the world, as Heidegger insists, if we are not towards the world in its infinite multiplicity. Existence as sense articulates this primordial openness to something else or other.

Ahmed, in *Willful Subjects*, seems to echo Nancy's critique, challenging the idea of an "intentional subject" whose actions bring objects into existence. She would agree with Nancy that stones are not as *worldless* as Heidegger and other philosophers assume; they do not simply wait for human "hands to become significant": "The stones leave an impression on our hands when we touch them. Perhaps touching is assumed too quickly as our gift. Perhaps we forget that our hands can be shaped by stones."¹³ The repetition of *perhaps* indicates how Ahmed's thought gestures toward but never fully develops a relational notion of sense in the way that Nancy's does. That tentativeness, I shall argue, leaves her thought struggling to articulate a conception of the world not oriented around a human viewpoint, to think through what enables disorientation to become a shared experience that does not simply present bodies as out of line. By contrast, Nancy thinks the *toward* we, as sense, are, that is, the fundamentally relational character of the world. If the world exists in being toward, it is not an object to be apprehended and represented by a subject. It is "relation, address, sending, donation, presentation to – if only of entities or existents *to* each other" (SW, 8).

For Nancy, that address occurs in the exposure of one body to another that spaces out the world so that it makes sense. Sense and body, for Nancy, James reminds us, are "co-originary [...] the body is the site of the movement to or passage to sense, without which there would be no shared being-there within a world, that is, no experience of the world as world."¹⁴ Nancy's ontology of being-with as the condition of being-in-the world is therefore "an ontology of bodies, of every body, whether they be animate, inanimate, sentient, speaking,

¹² Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell, 1973, 123-134.

¹³ Ahmed, Sara. *Willful Subjects*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014, 186.

¹⁴ James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, 107.

thinking, having weight, and so on.”¹⁵ Body does not designate exclusively the human body, either as a biological entity or as a signifying system overwritten with norms, categories, or taboos. Before any subjection to language, bodies already presuppose sense in their contact and separation that extends the world and disposes it to intelligibility. In other words, for Nancy, human and non-human bodies make sense in their materiality: “the ‘body’ really means what is outside, insofar as it is outside, next to, against, nearby, with a(n) (other) body, from body to body, in its dis-position.”¹⁶

That we, as bodies, always exist toward the outside means that the world constantly exposes it itself to us even if we fail to respond to or take responsibility for that exposure. That exposure is a demand for justice, a demand to take “a just measure” of “the community of bodies” without which there would be no sense of the world.¹⁷ However, as there is no unifying identity, origin, or essence, “no sense of sense”, taking that *measure* involves *measuring* their incommensurability, the in-between that enables relation, identification, communication, in short, world creation, to happen.¹⁸ Concomitantly, “injustice is the mixing, breaking, crushing, and stifling of bodies, making them indistinct”(C, 47). To oppose that unjust indistinction, justice must be rendered to the singularity proper to each and every body and to “the impropriety of the community of existents”, the constitutive lack of any common being, that singularises them. It “must be rendered to the line of the proper” to “the common cut that in one stroke separates and makes contact” (CW, 111). However, Nancy never fully explores how that *common cut* appears to denounce the injustice of *making indistinct*. One way it could appear, I contend, is with the non-alignment of bodies, spaces, and classifications that Ahmed’s disorientation records. That non-alignment reveals the ultimate lack of fixed worldly orientation.

Incarnation: the signified body

For Nancy, the dominance of the Western-Christian logic of incarnation explains why the world-disclosive potential of bodies remains overlooked. That logic figures them as signs, as

¹⁵ Nancy, Jean-luc. *Being Plural Singular*. Trans. R. Richardson & A. O’Byrne. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, 84.

¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁷ Nancy’s use of *just* here evokes both justice and the French word *justesse*, which connotes adequation and accuracy. The just measure must do justice to bodies by accurately presenting them in their singularity as well in their common exposure. Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Experience of Freedom*. Translated by Bridget McDonald. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994, p. 75. On this question, see James, Ian. “The Just Measure” in *Jean-Luc Nancy. Justice, Legality and the World*. Edited by Benjamin Hutchens (London: Continuum, 2012), 35-46.

¹⁸ Nancy, Jean-luc. *Adoration: The Deconstruction of Christianity II*. Translated by John McKeane. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013, 12.

needing to be ascribed meaning to make sense.¹⁹ It thereby implies that the body is a self-enclosed mass until touched by spirit or signified. However, if it were closed to sense, it would exclude touching and signification from the beginning. To re-affirm the bodily agency denied by incarnation, Nancy, as already noted, conceives bodies as making sense not by being signified but by being dis-posed and ex-posed to each other, by appearing before and with one another so that they form a world (*C*, 124). They are not opened to sense from the outside but are themselves “open space” or “places of existence” (15). He illustrates this idea with the new-born that arrives exposed to other bodies, thereby inaugurating a relation of *being toward*: “when a baby is born, there’s a new ‘there.’ Space, extension in general, is extended and opened. [...] this body is the spacing of a ‘there’” (132-33). The body as worldly exposition contrasts with the signifying body that points away from itself and the world toward its determinate signification.

Nancy’s reconception of the body as spacing will establish an important point of dialogue with Ahmed’s discussion of how spatial situations classify it socially. Nancy thinks spacing in a way that exceeds human categorisations of time and space to challenge the impression that the world is oriented around us. Ahmed, as we will see, by examining how space gets appropriated by certain bodies as their dwelling to the exclusion of others, exposes how bodily extension is unevenly distributed. Her analysis of that unevenness puts pressure on Nancy’s philosophy, which assumes that ontologically “equality is the condition of bodies” because there is “nothing more common” than them, to explain how that condition affects ontic inequalities (49). The way that bodies co-appear to present to each other the world they create together offers some explanation. Without co-appearance, it would become difficult to imagine how the inequalities that Ahmed’s queer phenomenology analyses could be contested. But, as we shall see, it is through dialogue with her work, that we can imagine the forms of that contestation. However, for Nancy, to reinscribe bodily agency, we would probably need to do more than queer phenomenology. We would need to surpass its logic which, by making bodily sense dependent on “a primary interiority”, follows the inside/outside structure of incarnation (128).²⁰ As will be clear, the body, for Nancy, is not a container from within which a conscious and rational subject senses the world. “We sense

¹⁹ “Through and through, angelic logic and the whole corpus of philosophical bodies are subjected to the signifying law, in such a way that signification (or representation) gives sense to the body, making it the sign of sense”(C, 67).

²⁰ He refers to Husserl’s and Merleau-Ponty’s account of “ ‘self-touching’ which always returns to a primary interiority”. I can touch myself only from the outside. What is touched therefore has to remain on the outside. To trace it back to a prior interiority is to deny this condition of possibility (*C*, 128-129).

ourselves as an outside” through exposure to other bodies (132). It is only by moving beyond the opposition of interiority and exteriority that we can think the interaction of bodies and space. That opposition, by presupposing that “there’s an exterior place that an ‘I’, an unassignable interiority would come to occupy” confronts the difficulty of explaining how that “ ‘I’ which has no place comes into a place” (132). Conceiving bodies as “the spacing of a ‘there’” overcomes that difficulty, demonstrating how the world makes sense without any a transcendental creator or orienting viewpoint (133). Moreover, that conception affirms the agency of bodies to extend and re-space the world to challenge sedimented configurations. Like phenomenologists, sense, for Nancy, is bound up with bodily sensing but, unlike them, that sense does not need to be recuperated by a subject for it to make sense. We will question to what extent Ahmed’s queering of phenomenology surpasses this limitation which, in my reading of Nancy, stops us from realising the agential quality of bodies, their capacity to open the in-between where sense circulates in common and resists appropriation.

Globalisation and the Demand for World-Formation

That bodies create the world is not just an ontological fact for Nancy but an imperative that becomes increasingly urgent with global capitalism. Globalisation spreads, what Nancy calls, following Marx, the law of general equivalence, homogenising all bodies by reducing them to little more than bearers of exchange value (CW, 38).²¹ This drive to uniformity and totalisation, which by evaluating everything in terms of its amenability to profit, nullifies distinctions, negates the spacing and exposition of the world. The nihilism of globalisation, its indifference to distinct values, senses, and identities, reveals a world without reason or meaning and thereby enjoins us to engage in an alternative process of world-forming that turns the ontology of sense into an ethos. That process involves our actively engaging in the creation of the world as the shared exposure of singularities: “*To create the world* means: immediately, without delay, reopening each possible struggle for a world, that is, for what must form the contrary of global injustice against the background of general equivalence” (55).

While the world does not depend on human apprehension to make sense, “the human being remains that by which the question of sense, the demand for sense, is opened”.²² That sense

²¹ Nancy explores general equivalence further in his *After Fukushima. The Equivalence of Catastrophe*, trans. Charlotte Mandel (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

²² Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Possibility of a World. Conversation with Pierre-Philippe Jandin*, trans. Travis Holloway & Flor Méchain (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 134.

arises as a question or a demand for us as human beings means that we are equally the ones that can resist its movement. We have to decide to be responsive to or responsible for it but not in terms of determining whether something exists or not or of legislating existence: “it is just that the world exists, even though nothing can justify its existence.”²³ To respond to that demand is to recognise that we do not orient the world. If we did, there would be nothing for us feel responsible for, as we would have achieved mastery. The irreducibility of sense to human consciousness conditions rather than diminishes human responsibility. While the “unjustifiable justice” of existence surpasses any instituted set of rights, since any institution always entails exclusions that render it inadequate to existence as whole, it does have a “task”: the tireless struggle to create a world “in which there is room for everyone but a genuine place, one in which things can genuinely take place” (CW, 112, 42).²⁴ We are therefore enjoined to (re)open the spacings of the world so that sense can circulate freely between bodies, so that they come into presence, one to other, without their being made sense of in terms of pre-existing categories, significations, and evaluations that decide their place or lack of it in the world.

How we come to sense the struggles that need (re)opening, how we hear the call to form a world remains unclear. For Nancy, the sweeping destructiveness of globalisation, its subjection of all bodies to the law of general equivalence, should intensify that call. However, his insistence on its totalising and homogenising drive risks presenting all worlds, all bodies as blocked in their striving to make sense, even if Nancy mentions “the worsening of inequalities of all sorts” that globalisation causes (CW, 34). Doing justice, as we have seen, involves taking a just and accurate measure of bodies, of presenting their equality in non-equivalence, their shared exposure as the sense of the world. That non-equivalence renders the measure immeasurable; it renders justice infinite. That infinity means that justice “cannot be removed from the mire or fog of injustice” and must make its demand heard from within it (111). Sensing that demand would require greater awareness of the differential access of bodies to sense, of their uneven worldly extension, than Nancy’s ontology fosters. While his post-phenomenology analyses the ongoing spacing and extension of the world, it does not fully analyse the reverse process of worldly ordering and appropriation. Nor does it analyse in detail how the metaphysical logic it deconstructs affects habitual patterns of perception and signifying so that sense gets suppressed. To transform the ontology into an ethos would

²³ Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘On Human Rights: Two Simple Remarks’, *Critical Legal Thinking*, 2013. [On Human Rights: Two Simple Remarks \(criticallegalthinking.com\)](http://criticallegalthinking.com)

²⁴ Ibid

involve our becoming awake to the habits that make us fail as “exposers of the world.”²⁵ Sara Ahmed’s work, I argue, could illuminate how injustice in the spatial terms Nancy conceives it might register as a demand for justice.

Ahmed’s Queer Phenomenology

Ahmed queers phenomenology “to rewrite the world from the experience of not being able to pass into the world”, to call attention, in my reading, to the Nancean injustice of bodies being stopped from forming a world.²⁶ That disorienting experience when bodies become objects, unable to extend into space, foregrounds the background orientation that enables the worldly dwelling, movement, and action of some more than others. The shift from sense in Nancy, which considers how bodies open space through their movement toward each other, to orientation in Ahmed, which considers how bodies become aligned with space, marks the shift from spacing to spaces, from the event of sense to the habits of orientation (*QP*, 7). While both terms contain a directional meaning, orientation, concerned with how our starting point affects what we face toward, is more directed. Orientation directs us to the familiar which, due to its familiarity, goes unnoticed. The way things get oriented, Ahmed avers, depends on accepting certain “points of view as given” (*QP*, 14). While recognising that all forms of critique must “leave room for resistance” to retain a critical edge, Ahmed cautions against “wanting to know how things can be different too *quickly*.” That desire can render us resistant to seeing or hearing about what currently resists change (*PW*, 165). Therefore, to reorient ourselves, we will need to examine those viewpoints more decisively than Nancy’s work does. Disorientation, as an experience where the ground of the world disappears, prompts reflection on them. I shall read that experience as offering a way of understanding how the demand for sense becomes sensible, how it could inaugurate a politics whose commitments could support Nancy’s call to world creation.

A Phenomenology of Whiteness

I shall focus on Ahmed’s discussion of a phenomenology of whiteness. The way whiteness functions as a *given viewpoint* demonstrates, as we shall see, how the metaphysical logic that Nancy critiques is at play in worldly orientation. The genitive of the phenomenology of whiteness contains a double meaning, indicating both the *white* perspective of

²⁵ Nancy, *Being Plural Singular*, 18 (translation modified).

²⁶ Ahmed, Sara. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012, 176.

phenomenology (Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty) and an approach that illuminates the phenomenon of whiteness. Phenomenology's focus on the extension, dwelling, and motility of bodies, on "the I can", assumes a white perspective when contrasted with Fanon's phenomenology of "the experience of a black man in a white world", of "the bodily and social experience of restriction, uncertainty, and blockage", of "the despair of the utterance I cannot" (*QP*, 138). Whereas Merleau-Ponty identifies a *successful* body as one that 'extends itself (through objects) in order to act in and on the world', Fanon shows how "this success" is not about "competence" but about "bodily privilege" (139). That privilege consists in having your body extended by the world such that it never gets experienced as an object that obstructs movement or action. In response, Ahmed develops a phenomenology of being disoriented to record those moments when the non-white body cannot flow into space, becomes "a site of social stress" (140). Those moments not only disclose the uneven distribution of bodily stress and non-extension, but also the alternative worlds that struggle to reside in the *white world*. However, as Ahmed cautions, they do not necessarily call the dominant perspective into question: the disoriented body, by appearing out of a place, could leave that perspective in place. For disorientations to challenge that perspective, they would need be framed as appeals to justice in the spatial terms that Nancy understands it, that is, as the demand for a world where there is room for everyone.

If phenomenology focuses, as Ahmed claims, on bodily extension and motility, how does it elucidate the opposite embodied experience? If it is written from a *white viewpoint*, how can it enlighten us about the situation of non-white bodies? "Phenomenology is about whiteness, in the sense that it has been written from this 'point of view', as a point that is 'forgotten.'" That forgetting is also symptomatic of the organisation of the world more generally. For Ahmed, the world becomes oriented around whiteness on the condition that it withdraws from view so that it becomes the perspective from which the world is viewed (*PW*, 160). She queers phenomenology to offer a new angle from which we can analyse how bodies become sexualised, gendered or racialised by their spatial orientation (*QP*, 5). Queering entails examining the bodily experiences that phenomenology brackets out or seeks to overcome. Whereas Husserl brackets out "the natural attitude" to make the familiar object unfamiliar, Ahmed shows how Husserl's approach "allows us to consider how the familiar takes shape by being unnoticed" (37). Likewise, Merleau-Ponty's discussion of habit-bodies demonstrates how our pragmatic engagement with the world depends on our bodies passing unnoticed, on their *trailing behind* in the performance of actions. For Ahmed, non-white,

queer or marginalised bodies, by not *fitting in*, do not enjoy this *privilege*, often finding their worldly engagement thwarted or questioned (106). By considering what appears *queer*, that is, “oblique” or “off line” to classical phenomenology, Ahmed seeks to illuminate what enables the alignment of bodies, objects, and spaces (161).²⁷ What our perception or action gets oriented toward is not “casual” but derives from a more general orientation – in this case whiteness --which orients by going unnoticed (*PW*, 151-152).

Orientation

Ahmed seeks to make the unnoticed noticeable by examining moments when bodies, objects, and spaces *fail* to align. These queer moments have the potential to raise the question of worldly orientation, of “how space is dependent on bodily inhabitation” (*QP*, 6). As we have seen, Ahmed is less concerned with spacing than Nancy and more with how bodies become situated in space. While, for Nancy, bodies articulate space, for Ahmed, they inhabit it. We may query whether this emphasis on bodily spacing and extension in Nancy’s post-phenomenology also replicates the white perspective of classical phenomenology. Whereas it does not adequately analyse the unequal access to sense caused by spatial organisations, it does develop a spatial conception of justice that affirms the equality of every body in world creation to denounce the injustice of that inequality. Making sense does not depend on certain capacities but on the shared exposure of bodies which discloses to them the world they create together. Justice involves restoring to bodies their place of (co)existence which the divisions and categorisations of spatialisation deny. Nancy’s account of justice deepens, I maintain, Ahmed’s critique of whiteness and its appropriation of space. That appropriation suppresses rather than forms the world, not only refusing others but also itself a place of existence. Dialogue with Ahmed’s work highlights the critical purchase of Nancean sense by bringing into focus the political realities it aims, perhaps too rapidly, to think beyond. It asks how ontological equality affects ontic inequalities. The shift between Nancy and Ahmed allows analysis of how and why some bodies come to be denied as *places of existence* and how that denial could be experienced as a shared injustice for the community of bodies that create the world.

For Ahmed, key to understanding that denial is to recognise that orientation is not epistemologically driven: it is not about knowing the difference between the left and right

²⁷ Ahmed also uses the word queer to designate specific sexual practices that the heterosexual world disorients, throws off line (*QP*, 65-108).

side of the body, as it is for Kant, who describes “the conditions of possibility for orientation rather than how we become oriented in given situations” (*QP*, 6). That we can still feel disoriented even when we have acquired this knowledge suggests that orientation, as Heidegger argues contra Kant, is about “my being alongside a world which is ‘familiar’”.²⁸ Familiarity is not “‘in’ the world as that which is already given” but “an effect of inhabitation” (7). Bodies inhabit space by extending into it and through the objects that they encounter there to render the strange familiar (11) Orientation, as “the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places”, entails feeling at home as well as finding one’s way (8). For Ahmed, following Merleau-Ponty, the perspective of the body which supplies the “here from which we begin, and from which the world unfolds” decides orientation. That *here* includes where bodies dwell and therefore transports bodies outside themselves as they “are affected and shaped by [their] surroundings” (9). That orienting perspective will render the world more familiar to some bodies than others, will render some bodies out of place.

Ahmed does not develop a concept of the body but her account of orientation seems to define it as “a material thing in which the subject exists and through which it interacts with the material world.”²⁹ It thus risks replicating the logic of interiority and exteriority which Nancy seeks to overcome to think sense as shared. While that account shows how bodies shape and are shaped by their surroundings, its understanding of them as perspectives or starting points limits the scope for imagining a common world. Ahmed analyses how the world is familiarised and oriented but thinks less about what precedes and exceeds that process. If the world *unfolds* from the perspective of the body, as Ahmed suggests, then how does the world expose itself in queer ways that do not align with that perspective. Nancy’s sense as the event of mutual exposure tackles this question.

We can detect this conceptual difference in their understanding of natality. Whereas newborn babies, for Nancy, inaugurate a novel place of existence, for Ahmed, they inherit contacts and proximities “as the condition of their arrival in the world”. Taking her lead from Marxian dialectical materialism which insists that we inherit the conditions in which we make history, Ahmed argues that “our inheritance as ‘our point of arrival’ into the familial and social order” determines what is near and far, strange and familiar, which physical and non-physical objects are available (*QP*, 125). Inheritance involves converting what we receive into possessions that appear as if they were always “already there”, so that we invest

²⁸ Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*, 144.

²⁹ Keenan, Sarah. *Subversive Property*, 85.

in and reproduce that order (126). One way we reproduce it is by accepting that we “inherit ‘who’ can or cannot be brought home” as love objects (128). Heterosexuality acts as the background orientation that directs us to certain bodies as acceptable for love.³⁰ The newborn therefore enters the world not so much as a *being toward*, as it does for Nancy, but as a *being oriented toward*, as a being that inherits a certain direction on arrival. However, Ahmed’s queer politics urges us not to treat that inheritance as a possession *already there* but as something we can choose to receive or not. In this way, her thought presupposes the possibility of a non-oriented world but does not articulate the condition of that possibility.

The White World

Her critique of the white world would make that possibility urgent. To be born into a world oriented around whiteness is to inherit physical and social spaces that afford bodies racialised as white greater motility and capacity. “Race becomes, in this model, a question of what is within reach, what is available to perceive and to do ‘things’ with” (*QP*, 126). In other words, whiteness is inherited not as a set of biological or cultural attributes but as “a bodily and social orientation” around which the world orbits. “The world extends the form of some bodies more than others, and such bodies in turn feel at home in this world” (129). Whiteness becomes “worldly” through “repeated” “forgotten” actions that “allow some bodies to take up space by restricting the mobility of others.” It therefore becomes “a bad habit” (132). Merleau-Ponty’s habit-body and Bourdieu’s adaptation of that concept as *habitus* underpin Ahmed’s analysis. The habit-body, as the one that acts in the world, can do so only if it does not obstruct the performance of the action.³¹ Habitual is therefore not simply about the repetition of actions but also about their becoming “second nature”, to use Bourdieu’s term.³² White bodies can act because they do not get stressed or even halted by whom or what they encounter when acting. Their whiteness goes unnoticed to the extent that they appear less as bodies and more as extensions of the world.

Their mode of appearance leads Ahmed to talk about “white spaces.” Spaces come to be shaped by the habitual actions of bodies that pass through them; they “acquire the skin of those bodies that inhabit them” (132). Whiteness thus recedes from view to the extent that it appears identical to the space itself. Ahmed illustrates this point with the example of institutions as public and social spaces. When a white person enters an academic meeting in a

³⁰ See Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004, 144-167.

³¹ Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 84.

³² Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Logic of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Polity, 1990, 56.

UK university, the space is likely to support her physical and social belonging; she is unlikely to feel out of place or disoriented. Her arrival will blend into the background to reproduce a sense of unquestioned institutional likeness.³³ Whiteness passes unnoticed for those that inhabit it or have become habituated to it to the extent the “somatic norm” of the white body makes non-white bodies stand out when they appear (133). If spaces are oriented around whiteness, we are not oriented toward it. It becomes the “given” viewpoint from which space gets seen, allowing white bodies to feel comfortable in the world:

To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one’s environment that it is hard to distinguish where one’s body ends and the world begins. One fits, and in the act of fitting, the surfaces of bodies disappear from view. White bodies are comfortable as *they inhabit spaces that extend their shape*. The bodies and spaces ‘point’ to each other, as a ‘point’ that is not seen as it is also the point from which we see (135).

White bodies and spaces point toward each other like a reflection in a mirror, thereby denying the relation to something *other* which conditions sense for Nancy. Paradoxically, the point from which the world is seen is the point from which it disappears. It thus marks the *end* rather than the *start* of the world. Ahmed hints as much when she describes how the world and bodies become indistinguishable. That indistinction would negate the exposure which creates the world for Nancy. In this way, whiteness thereby suppresses the world as it tries to become it. As we shall see, Ahmed’s work recognises this paradox but risks remaining trapped within it, by not fully considering how the sense of the world exceeds orientation.³⁴

The White *Unworld*

We can detect this oversight in Ahmed’s own description of her phenomenology as offering “a vocabulary for redescribing how whiteness becomes ‘worldly.’” It is the “disappearance” of whiteness “as a category through experience” that makes it *worldly* (*PW*, 150). This description of worldliness presents problems for Ahmed’s later appeal to a shared world for it suggests that it is more about having the world oriented around certain bodies than their being oriented toward it. Becoming worldly, in this description, would paradoxically follow the metaphysical logic that Nancy deconstructs. It would imply the quest for a point beyond the world from which to objectify and orient it, the quest to find the sense of the world in something other than the world itself. Ahmed calls out for an alternative form of worldliness

³³ Ahmed expands this discussion of the racialisation of institutions in *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life..*

³⁴ ‘Heteronormativity also becomes a form of comforting: one feels better by the warmth of being faced by a world one has already taken in. One does not notice this as a *world* when one has been shaped by that world, and even acquired its shape.’ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 148.

based on sharing but does not articulate it. However, via Nancy's work, we could argue that what she describes is the becoming *unworldly* of whiteness, its refusal to sense and be sensed through appearing in the world. In this way, Ahmed's queer phenomenology ends up confirming Nancy's critique that phenomenology depends on a *primary interiority* from which sense derives and to which it returns. This circular movement negates the relation toward exteriority which sense presupposes. Phenomenology thus remains tied to a conception of the world that acquires meaning only by being appropriated by human consciousness or action. It is this appropriative drive that Ahmed contests in her discussion of the white world. Her queering of phenomenology thereby critiques its logic but does not ultimately, I maintain, surpass it, which creates ambiguity. Worldly extension, dwelling, action would seem to require the world to become oriented around bodies so that it takes their shape. In that case, do non-white, queer or marginalised bodies need to make the world take their shape at the expense of others to experience the *comfort* associated with whiteness? Ahmed's description of whiteness as *a bad habit* would imply the need for better habits, for alternative ways of sensing the world that exceed the logic of orientation. Ahmed does indeed hope for "a world that is not oriented around whiteness" (*QP*, 156). In recent work, she has been more specific about the "shape" of that world, finding in her queer politics the promise of "a shared world of matter" or a "shared inhabitancy of the earth."³⁵ But it is unclear what would supply the condition of sharing when "orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitation" (*QP*, 3). Orientations, as starting points, would transcend sharing and would thus exclude any apprehension of it. To experience sharing would presuppose access to a world beyond orientation. Nancy's relational ontology allows us to understand how that access is possible, how bodies sense and are sensed through mutual exposure.

Through the lens of Nancy's theory, the bad habit of whiteness would consist in its negation of the world, in its denying others and itself a place of existence. It takes the world as an object to be occupied and appropriated. Ahmed's discussion of the risk involved in privileging whiteness as an object of study supports this reading. Talk of the "white world" "could", Ahmed cautions, "turn whiteness into something substantive, as if whiteness has an ontological force of its own that compels us and even 'drives' action" (135). Against this charge, she argues that her analysis does not reify whiteness but rather studies how "whiteness becomes worldly as an effect of reification. Reification is not something we do to

³⁵ Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*, 173, 192.

whiteness, but something whiteness does, or to be more precise, what allows whiteness to be done” (*PW*, 150). Whiteness therefore reifies the world by making it a correlate of itself but only by reifying itself in the process. Through their mutual reification, they blend into the background like furniture whose existence goes unnoticed, reproducing the self-cancelling logic that Nancy identifies in the idea of a world whose sense depends on subjective apprehension. To objectify the world, that subject could not exist within it (*CW*, 40). The world presents itself to us on the condition that we are in, or more precisely, toward it. Only then can we experience it as a place of existence.

Ahmed’s queer phenomenology seeks to make whiteness *exist* as “an effect of racialisation”, as “‘real’, material and lived.” It reveals its failure to achieve transcendence when we learn that “whiteness becomes worldly through the noticeability of the arrival of some bodies more than others” (*PW*, 150). Their noticeability confirms how the world is oriented around whiteness, but also, I maintain, how whiteness cannot escape the primary orientation of sense. In these moments, whiteness compears, to use Nancy’s lexicon, that is, it presents itself through exposure to other bodies. That exposure discloses its finitude even as it seems to “reconfirm the whiteness of space.”³⁶ Therefore, the “proximity of such bodies out of place can work to make things seem ‘out of line’ and can hence even work to ‘queer’ space” (*QP*, 161). These queering proximities could open the question of sense, as Nancy understands it, as white bodies experience their whiteness coming into presence through contact with other bodies which also come into presence. Through their co-appearing, they could actively experience *being toward*. Reframing these proximities in terms of Nancean sense also allows us to understand how their bodily appearance or *evidence* becomes a question of justice. It presents the unjust and false indistinction of the white world by making room within it for shared exposure to occur, for the world it suppresses to appear.

The tension between standing out as non-white and making whiteness stand out in its *invisibility* underlines the ambiguity of the politics of disorientation. The moment sense could arise as a question could also reinforce the dominant sense of the world. We will conclude by considering how sense could become experienced as relational and plural, how it could engender an ethos, a new way of inhabiting the world.

³⁶ Compearance is another name for the shared exposure that conditions existence. Nancy, Jean-luc. “La Comparution/The Compearance.” Translated by Tracy B. strong. *Political Theory* 20 no.3, (1992), 371-398; Nancy, *Being Plural singular*, 55-65.

Conclusion: Ahmed's Politics of Disorientation as the Politics of Sense.

Ahmed analyses orientation as a straightening device that keeps bodies in line by directing them to certain actions and objects. That analysis allows us to understand how Nancean sense gets suppressed, how the groundlessness of the world passes unnoticed. Nancy's work, I have argued, offers limited resources for analysing how we begin to register those worlds that struggle for a place of existence and join that struggle in the name of justice. By contrast, Ahmed's politics of disorientation, by recording those moments when the dominant orientation fails to hold things in their place, calls attention to those bodies that struggle to make sense. That failure could reveal the groundlessness of the world, its fundamental lack of fixed orientation, and its susceptibility to (re)creation. It could equally reconfirm the worldview if disorientation gets perceived as a property of the non-aligned body. Fanon's discussion of the black man's objectification in a white world underlines this risk. Non-white bodies are turned back on themselves, made to experience themselves as out of place despite the fact disorientation lies not in the body itself but in its confrontation with the dominant orientation (*QP*, 139). Whereas phenomenology, Ahmed argues, examines disorientation to reinforce the goal of orientation, Fanon's work invites us to see it as evidence of the "uneven" distribution of bodily extension (159). Queer phenomenology mediates these approaches by orienting us toward that "disalignment" "as opening up a new angle on the world" so that we experience the orienting viewpoint as disorienting, as unable to direct our sense of how things are or should be (172).

However, to understand how disorientations could be experienced as more than deviations from orientation, that is, as liberation from its directional force, we may need to turn to Nancy's post-phenomenology. Its conception of sense as irreducible to viewpoints explains how the world could expose itself to us from *new angles* so that disorientation becomes a shared sensory event that dis-aligns bodies, spaces, and objects to allow sense to circulate freely among them. We could also read disorientation in terms of its spatial conception of justice that starts from the evidence of bodies as the sense of the world rather than from any supposedly universal worldview about what is rational and fair. Disorientation presents both the injustice of the strict alignment of bodies which ascribes sense to them, which unevenly distributes access to the world, and the justice of their non-alignment which allows the spacing between them to reappear so that they make sense beyond any ascriptions, so that they (re)open access to plural worlds. Disorientations could potentially open the passage from injustice to justice, to the sense and enactment of a shared world. Ahmed implies this

potential when she notes that “experiences of negation, of being stopped, or feeling out of place” can gather bodies to act together to refuse to inherit the orientations and proximities of the world (*QP*, 155). Before any articulation of demands, principles, or visions, these gatherings would enact justice, if we adopt Nancy’s idea of the term, by presenting the community of bodies that discloses a world through their shared sensing, by extending it to make for room for every body through their co-appearance. For Nancy, we cannot think justice in its more conventional meaning as the fair distribution of resources, rights, and obligations until we have taken just measure of this presentation.³⁷

Taking just measure of the world disclosive potential of bodies may explain why Ahmed urges us “to sustain wonder about the very forms of social gathering” as part “liv[ing] out a politics of disorientation” (*QP*, 24). Sustaining wonder entails “a queer commitment to the opening up of what counts as a life worth living” and “a way of inhabiting the world by giving ‘support’ to those whose life and loves make them appear oblique, strange, and out of place” (179). Her politics urges us not to inherit the world like a possession but to create it. It thereby implies but never fully develops a conception of the world which exceeds human apprehension and signification, exposing itself to us in *queer* or novel ways. It rests on the capacity of bodies to act together to extend the world beyond the sedimented organisations and perceptions of space. It gestures toward Nancy’s sense of the world as the condition of queer politics. The Christian inflected term of wonder finds a correlate in Nancy’s appeal to adoration, another Christian term. In the absence of God, what is worthy of adoration for Nancy is the fact that “there is no sense of sense” which calls on us to “recognise one another as being responsible [répondant] for sense.”³⁸ As the movement toward the outside, as the coming to presence of singular plural beings one to the other, sense is always shared. As we have seen, that account is not purely ontological but contains an imperative to inhabit the world in such a way that it truly becomes a world: an ungrounded, untotalisable, plurality of existents whose sense depends on in their being toward each other, rather than on any origin or higher or common being.

Whereas Nancy’s focus on sense explores how the world makes sense beyond orienting worldviews, Ahmed’s focus on orientation directs us more pointedly to the lived experience of the *unworld*, to moments of disorientation as a demand for sense. Queer phenomenology

³⁷ On this point, see Hutchens, Benjamin. “Nancy contra Rawls” in *Jean-Luc Nancy. Justice, Legality and World*, 96-111.

³⁸ Nancy, *Adoration*, 12.

and post-phenomenology supplement each other. Queer phenomenology, through its discussion of how bodies become racialised, sexualised, or gendered through their spatial situation, reveals the bad habits that both call for and stymie the emergence of an alternative sense of the world. Post-phenomenology affirms the spatial justice of the community of bodies which, through their shared sensing, discloses a world that exceeds those spatial situations and habits. Ahmed's politics of disorientation fleshes out, I maintain, some of the commitments that Nancy's ethos of world creation as justice could entail: making visible the invisible points of orientation that determine the direction, proximities and actions of bodies and thereby restrict the free circulation of sense; the refusal to inherit those orientations as the only way of inhabiting the world; expanding what counts as liveable lives by taking alternative directions; registering the effects of disorientation as a call to solidarity with those whose *queer* lives seek to extend the world in ways that resist the dominant orientations and in turn meet with resistance. These commitments imply bodies that make sense beyond any externally imposed signification, that challenge habitual ways of seeing and acting through their exposure to one another, through their coming into presence to each other. Both Ahmed's wonder and Nancy's adoration ultimately meet in their devotion to a world without a fixed orientation, as an act of ongoing co-creation.