Unbound: a term of Promethean audacity for a field that is no stranger to derivations from the Greek. We choose this name, with admitted hubris, to loose some chains of narrative thinking, to transgress some theoretical boundaries, to unbind some narratological constraints. Our subtitle makes a second bold move by claiming for queer and feminist approaches the power to intervene in narrative theory tout court. If both of these bold moves are intentional, they are also provisional. Our subtitle recognizes that “queer and feminist” are not the only sites for intervention in narrative study. But we do aim to place gender and sexuality at the center of an inquiry about the production and reception, forms and functions of narrative texts. And we believe that the range, depth, and innovation that characterize this collection show why gender and sexuality belong at the heart of all narrative inquiry and how unbinding these concepts can unbind narrative theory as well.

Under the rubric of Narrative Theory Unbound, then, we gather a diverse and sometimes dissonant spectrum of theoretical challenges. Although the two of us have long preferred the term “feminist narratology” to describe our own practice, the more capacious and less contentious rubric of “narrative theory” better reflects the diversity of approaches gathered here. In this introduction as in the essays that follow, the terms “narratology” and “narrative theory” will both appear. Within the field, the two terms are sometimes used
interchangeably to refer to the systematic study of how narrative forms make meaning. But the phrase “feminist narratology” remains under pressure from two directions: from echt narratologists who assert that culturally invested and category-resistant approaches cannot properly be called narratological, and from scholars of gender and sexuality who remain suspicious of narratology’s formalist priorities and binary frames. Indeed, narratology’s roots in an ahistorical structuralism seemed at first to preclude a feminist or queer approach. When analysis depends on “either-or” categorizations, as it did in the narratology of the 1970s and 1980s, the rich multiplicity not just of genders and sexualities but also of narrative practices could indeed get reduced into essentialist and universalizing generalizations. Feminist narratology has been aware of this potential problem from the beginning, but Narrative Theory Unbound embeds itself in a consciousness of intersectional challenges, a commitment to pluralist bricolage, and a comfort with messy complexities that we believe foster an enabling flexibility without sacrificing theoretical rigor. In this sense, too, we hope to have loosened the field to embrace multiple pathways by recognizing a diversity—even a clash—among queer and feminist investments in narrative and indeed among understandings of narrative itself.

We also embrace capacious understandings of both “feminist” and “queer.” We recognize feminism as a set of move(ment)s designed to address—that is, to understand, analyze, and intervene to rectify—oppressive and regressive systems and practices that perpetuate limitations and inequalities rooted in assumptions about biological sex or social gender. Likewise, we recognize “queer” as the sign for move(ment)s that challenge—and again, aim to understand, analyze, and rectify—heteronormative systems and practices and their attendant binary assumptions about sex, gender, and sexuality. We recognize, however, that “feminist” and “queer” may foster divergent and even conflicting projects, whether on the stage of politics or on the page of scholarship; Narrative Theory Unbound reflects this multiplicity.

Feminism and narratology joined forces in the 1980s when literary and cultural critics, perhaps especially in the United States, were becoming highly self-conscious about articulating the theoretical principles governing their critical practice. In recent years, the theoretical imperative has become less distinct. Much of what was spelled out by structuralists, poststructuralists, new historicists, neo-marxists, queer theorists, postcolonialists, and feminists during the heyday of the “theory wars” has now become naturalized within critical practice; epistemological and methodological assumptions are now more often enacted than explained. Narratology still requires the articulation of method, however, particularly since the many developments in narrative theory—for instance, cognitive and mind-centered approaches, “unnatural”
or antimimetic narratologies, and rhetorical and ethical narrative theories—
differ in significant and sometimes irreconcilable ways. Mapping out those
differences is essential to the project of narrative theory, as competition and
collaboration among the various branches continue to build new ways of
thinking about narrative. Today as in the 1980s, criticism inspired by theories
of gender and sexuality continues to bring to light aspects of narrative that
other narratologies, however different their investments, tend to overlook or
underemphasize. For all the differences within and between queer and femi-
nist approaches, what unites them is precisely this primacy of commitment to
regard narrative and gender/sexuality as coequal terms.

This volume brings together scholars of literature, performance studies,
biography, and popular culture who are exploring the many ways in which
narrative represents, structures, and constitutes gender and sexuality, as well
as the ways these concepts inflect narrative itself. With its origins in a three-
day Project Narrative Symposium organized at The Ohio State University
by Robyn Warhol in May 2011, the book collects current work by three gen-
erations of narrative critics who are affiliated with gender and/or sexuality
studies. Though only a few would call themselves feminist or queer narrative
theorists, all the scholars in this collection draw on feminist or queer theory
in making their critical arguments, and all are concerned with the specific
workings of narrative. Each of the essays in this book speaks to the ques-
tion “What are the theoretical principles driving my current work on gender,
sexuality and narrative?” The authors pause to consider what it is about their
work on narrative that is feminist or queer, and what it is about their work in
feminist or queer studies that is guided by theories of narrative. While “femi-
nism” may still connote an exclusive focus on women in some circles, queer
and feminist narrative theories are united in viewing sex, gender, and sexual-
ity as constructions pertaining to women, men, bi-, trans- and gender-queer
people across other diversities of culture, race, ethnicity, class, age, (dis)ability,
religion, and nationality.

In this introductory chapter, we will sketch out a brief history of feminist
and queer narrative theory, then make some generalizations about the present
and some predictions for the future of the field before turning to the specific
contributions that comprise Narrative Theory Unbound. To avoid reifying a
hierarchy between “feminist” and “queer,” we have chosen a self-consciously
random fluctuation between “queer and feminist” and “feminist and queer.”
We begin from the premise that although feminist inquiry emerged earlier,
neither queer nor feminist narrative theory could exist in its current form
without the other. Indeed, the two approaches overlap in respects that make
them difficult to tease apart even though they also live in fruitful tension.
Some projects lean more heavily on sexuality and some on gender, but much of the work in this volume is inflected by both.

Feminist narrative theory emerged as both an engagement with and a challenge to the body of theory that students of narrative were building primarily upon the principles of structuralism and semiotics. This enterprise—so much equated with the term “narratology” that structuralist narratology is now widely called “classical”—sought to elaborate a narrative grammar (as A. J. Greimas called it), a poetics of prose (in Tzvetan Todorov’s formulation) that could account for all narrative texts. Like structural anthropology and structural linguistics, narratology was to apply equally to all narratives, regardless of when they were produced or where they came from, and while prose fiction was the overwhelming generic focus, the new narrative grammars soon sought to account as well for film, drama, narrative poetry, and “non-fictional” narrative genres. Fostered especially by the translation into English in 1980 of Gérard Genette’s Discours du récit (1972), the new narratology also instantiated an array of terms, categories, and distinctions that, while remaining contested, provided a dazzling critical vocabulary on which students of narrative began quickly to rely.

During the same period that classical narratology was gaining its academic foothold, however, feminist literary criticism was also burgeoning, especially in the United States and western Europe, not only as a method of interpretation but as an inquiry into method itself. Feminist literary theorists began to ask whether “androcentric” epistemologies, models, and approaches were even applicable to female-written texts or could elucidate the historically contingent gender dynamics now understood to structure all textual and social arrangements. These scholars insisted upon grounding their theories in the lived experience of “women,” conceived at first naïvely as a unified category simply designating the opposite of “men.” Structuralism, with its differently totalizing goals and its formalist abstractions, seemed among the theoretical approaches least likely to be influenced by the historicizing turn that feminist criticism was pioneering. Elaine Showalter’s A Literature of Their Own (1977), for example, took all formalisms to task for “evad[ing] the issue of sexual identity entirely, or dismiss[ing] it as irrelevant and subjective” and thus in effect “desexing” both women and the field (8).

Such challenges, however, ended up expanding rather than foreclosing the intellectual space for a feminist understanding of narrative. Mieke Bal’s 1977 book translated into English in 1985 as Narratology: Introduction to the Study
of Narrative had already loosened the canon, if not the context, by focusing on works by Duras and Colette as well as the canonical Flaubert. In a direct critique of new narratological tenets, Nancy K. Miller’s 1981 “Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women’s Fiction” identified Genette’s notions of plot and plausibility as male-centered constructs masquerading as universals and argued that “the implausible twists of plot” common to many women’s novels constituted “comment on the stakes of difference within the theoretical indifference of literature itself” (44). Pointing to the “complete disregard of gender in the formalist study of narrative voice” (46), Lanser’s The Narrative Act (1981) aimed explicitly to forge a poetics of point of view that would recognize the imbrications of ideology, context, and form to accommodate women’s writings and feminist concerns. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Teresa De Lauretis’s “Desire in Narrative” (reprinted in Alice Doesn’t, 1984) exposed the gendered Oedipal structure both of narrative desire and of the language in which narrative had been characterized. Margaret Homans (1983), María Minich Brewer (1984), and Rachel Blau DuPlessis (1985) likewise challenged conventional thinking about plot by exploring what they saw as the different dynamics of women’s narratives.

In this same period each of us—committed to the larger project of narrative poetics and deeply interested in women’s writings though not yet acquainted with one another’s work—likewise asked what happens to narratology’s models when they are tested against gendered representations. We came separately to conclude that androcentric narratology had overlooked the structures we found in women’s writing. The tipping point arguably occurred in 1986 through the simultaneous publication of Warhol’s “Toward a Theory of the Engaging Narrator” and Lanser’s “Toward a Feminist Narratology,” both of which spoke from within the sphere of classical narratology to call for a gender-conscious poetics. Positing a distinction between “distracting” and “engaging” narrators, Warhol argued that the engaging narrator had been undertheorized and devalued because of its association with women writers and “sentimental” novels. Lanser proposed that “feminist criticism, and particularly the study of narratives by women, might benefit from the methods and insights of narratology” and that “narratology, in turn, might be altered by the understandings of feminist criticism and the experience of women’s texts” (342). Warhol’s Gendered Interventions (1989) further demonstrated the ways in which nineteenth-century women novelists, barred from addressing the public in person, used novels as a form of direct address, while Lanser’s Fictions of Authority (1992) explored the limits and possibilities of different instantiations of narrative voice in novels by European and American women. Significantly, the essays we published separately in 1986 received
far more, and more vituperative, criticism than the books we published a few years later; by end of the decade, the tide had turned for feminist narratology. The publication in *PMLA* of Susan Winnett’s “Coming Unstrung: Women, Men, Narrative, and Principles of Pleasure” (1990) sits at that turning point by advancing a bold critique of the masculinist assumptions founding major theories of narrative, especially Peter Brooks’s *Reading for the Plot* (1992). In *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers* (1996), Kathy Mezei collected a dozen essays by scholars explicitly aligning themselves with the new approach. *Narrative Theory Unbound* is the first collection of feminist narrative theory to appear since 1996 and the only collection of queer narrative theory published to date.

Since the 1990s, feminist narrative theorists have focused richly, productively, and diversely on women (and sometimes men) writers, narrators, plots, and sometimes characters, as well as on the gendered and gendering impact of particular narrative strategies upon flesh-and-blood readers. Theorists have emphasized that gender is a process created in and through culture, “mapping” as Susan Stanford Friedman put it in her pathbreaking work, the complex intersections of culture, identity, and transnational geography that forge narrative practices. Conversely, in an equally important development, narrative theorists began to recognize in feminist approaches a model for other culturally conscious explorations of narrative. Indeed, feminist narratology has been widely credited with the “postclassical turn” from a universalizing structuralism to a contingent understanding of “narrative grammar” as inseparable “from questions about the contexts in which narratives are designed and interpreted” (Herman 11).

Like feminist theory itself, feminist narrative theory has grown over its three decades in both the scope of its interests and the depth of its insights. What began as a focus on the impact of culturally constructed gender upon the form and reception of narrative texts has broadened to feminist narratologies that recognize race, sexuality, nationality, class, and ethnicity as well as gender in formulating their theoretical and analytical projects. One of the most important developments of recent decades has been an acknowledgment of what legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw has called “intersectionality.” An intersectional approach foregrounds the conviction that sexuality, race, class, nationality, age, and ability—to name just the most frequently cited categories of difference—intersect with one another to form intricate

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1. In addition to the specifically literary work we have been discussing, feminist narratology has significantly inflected such fields as discourse analysis, folklore, and linguistic anthropology. In *Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Feminist Narratology* (2006), Ruth Page pioneered a methodology that synthesizes literary and discourse analyses.
variations upon oppression and privilege. Generalizing about the oppression of “nineteenth-century women in the United States,” for example, makes no sense if race, region, and class are not part of the analysis, since middle-class white women lived so differently from their counterparts who worked in factories, and both lived so differently from women who were enslaved or relocated from their ancestral homes to reservations. For that matter, when sexuality, age, disability, religion, and ethnicity come into the analysis, middle-class white American women even lived differently from one another. An intersectional approach tries to track the influence of as many identity categories as possible and to scrutinize the imbrications of those tracks when working out an argument, while remembering that the identity categories themselves are fluid within groups and even within individual persons. This intersectional approach further implicates gender and sexuality as mutually constitutive systems and expands the potential for alignments between feminist and queer approaches, especially where those approaches share understandings about identity.

In this regard, Judith Butler’s model of performativity has been profoundly transformative in aligning queer and feminist approaches and in understanding what it means to “act.” Although a perceived opposition between theory and activism has plagued academic feminism as well as queer studies, we understand theory as itself a form of academic activism, in that it continually overturns assumptions which have served to keep gender inequalities and heteronormative epistemologies in place. For feminist and queer narrative theory, gender matters, in the sense that gender makes a difference in the production and reception of texts, and also in the sense that the gendering of writing and reading has its basis in—and an impact upon—lived experience in the material world. Today feminists generally join queer theorists in understanding gender difference to be a cultural construction, not a biological given, and in recognizing that both gender and sexuality exist along a variegated spectrum that individual subjects experience in shifting ways across a lifetime. Within this framework, gender and sexuality are not who you are, but rather what you do, and they never settle into a solid or coherent identity. While gender and sexuality are therefore not an essence but a performance, these and other identity categories, however constructed and fluid, nonetheless have real implications and effects. And as many essays in this volume underscore, narratives are critical to constructing, maintaining, interpreting, exposing and dismantling the social systems, cultural practices,

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2. For a useful outline of intersectional feminist methodology from a scholar based outside the United States, see Lykke.
and individual lives that shape and are shaped by performative acts. Feminist and queer narrative theorists identify and demystify the workings of those norms in and through narrative, and expose the dominant stories keeping the binaries in place.

Indeed, this recognition of the power of narrative pervades queer theory and underwrites its longstanding investments in thinking about narrative. Although work explicitly calling itself “queer narratology” is presently modest—a circumstance this volume might ameliorate—theorizing about narrative has been intimately intertwined with queer theory from the inauguration of sexuality studies. The centrality of narrative in shaping heteronormativity and with it queer subjectivity has been acknowledged by virtually every major queer theorist from Roland Barthes to Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler to Lee Edelman. A key aspect of this queer engagement has been the question of whether and how narrative might be turned to queer ends; if Marilyn Farwell’s *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives* (1996) would have it in the affirmative, D. A. Miller’s *Bringing Out Roland Barthes* (1992) and Judith Roof’s *Come As You Are* (1996) insist on the heteronormativity of narrative itself. Bringing psychoanalysis and deconstruction to bear on questions of reading and desire, queer/feminist theorists have deconstructed notions of narrative teleology as both masculinist and heterosexist. The idea that narrative itself is heterocentric in its future-oriented drive has also become powerfully influential in the work of Judith Halberstam, Paul Morrison, Jane Gallop, and especially Edelman, who has argued that futurity is inextricable from the reproductive imperative. Edelman’s insistence on positing a queer temporality that does not focus on the future has profoundly influenced queer studies of narrative. Attention to temporality also raises questions about queer history and the ways that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered experience have been effaced by mainstream accounts of the past. The project of reconstructing a queer archive that would ground a new kind of history, as practiced by Ann Cvetkovich and others, asks how the materials of that archive would be arranged into a new narrative of the queer past and present. The field of queer performance studies has also intersected with narrative theory in books such as Joseph Litvak’s study of theatricality and sexuality in the nineteenth-century novel, *Caught in the Act*, and Claudia Breger’s *An Aesthetics of Narrative Performance*, which brings together narrative studies and performance studies to analyze contemporary German novels and films.

From their diverse vantage points, all the essays gathered in *Narrative Theory Unbound* are working with narrative-theoretical terms and concepts, some more explicitly than others. While feminist and especially queer narrative critics often distance themselves from the scientistic posture of struc-
turalist narratology with its seemingly relentless binaries, structuralism and its descendants among postclassical narratologies still provide much of the vocabulary enabling the theorists in this volume to make their arguments. Peggy Phelan offers the boldest dramatization of this fact by taking “hypothetical focalization”—David Herman’s refinement of Gérard Genette’s term for describing “who sees” in a given narrative text—as the starting point for an essay that speedily departs from the disciplined application of narratology to enact a queer textual performance of personal grief. “Spatiality” (invoked here by Hillary Chute) and especially “temporality” (explicitly central to the essays by Chute and by Jesse Matz, and likewise crucial to the arguments made here by Valerie Rohy, Paul Morrison, and Wendy Moffat) hold the same prominence in these essays as they do in other kinds of contemporary narrative theory. Claudia Breger writes here of narrative “worldmaking” and Warhol uses the word “storyworld,” terms developed within mind-centered or cognitive narrative theory. Several of the authors draw on narratological terms for describing the organization of materials in a story, from the “narrative teleology” (the selection and ordering of story elements that lead up to the narrative’s ending) invoked by Moffat and the “narrative etiology” (assumptions about the source and origins of particular narratives) explored by Rohy and taken up by Ellen Peel, to the “emplotment” discussed by Judith Roof and Shalyn Claggett, to Rohy’s discussion of “closure.” Narratology’s attempts to catalog narrative forms are mentioned by Roof as “taxonomies of story structure.” Sue J. Kim and Suzanne Keen both build upon Keen’s earlier research on “narrative empathy,” and Abby Coykendall draws on Genette’s formulation of the “paratext.” Both Lanser and Warhol use concepts that have been central to feminist narratology from its inception, including in Lanser’s case “free indirect discourse” and in Warhol’s, the “structure of address.” Warhol talks about “metanarration” (self-reflexive narrative practices referring to the constructedness of a text), which is not to be confused with Roof’s “metanarratives” (narratives about other narratives). This last distinction points to the disciplinary need for precision in facing a plethora of terms, one reason why narratology has developed so many of its notoriously clunky, Greek-based neologisms. But on the whole, the contributors to Narrative Theory Unbound strive to avoid “jargon” in our commitment to speak to a broad audience; the specialized terms we do evoke in this volume have specific denotations that allow narrative theorists to point directly to correspondences between textual features and narrative effects.

This volume also hopes to make a modest contribution to addressing the narrowness of the canon on which feminist and queer narratological models are built. As Lanser notes in her essay for this book, just as the struc-
turalists’ canon was too male and too European to yield insight into the forms of women’s writing, feminist narratology’s canon has generally been too white, too heterosexual, too female, and too centered in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fiction, while queer narratology has been centered mostly in twentieth- and twenty-first-century man-made films and novels, with Henry James as leading man. Feminist and queer narrative theories need both to test our models against a broader range of world narrative forms and to learn from that process the limits of our current understandings of narrative form and function. Queer and feminist narrative theories also would benefit from elaborating a literary history that takes into account the forms and structures our research has observed. So far the field has tended to operate in a piecemeal fashion, elucidating the narrative structure of a single text or of a carefully delimited set of texts. Insofar as a universalizing model of narrative is out of the question and a homogeneous chronology of developments impossible for a contextualist narrative theory, we might conceive of a history of gendered and sexed narrative forms built on something like the example of Franco Moretti’s maps, graphs, and trees. If our methodologies are ever to break free from the static and binary traces of structuralism that still lurk behind our practice, queer and feminist narrative theories might try out theoretical models that have recently proved fruitful in transmedial studies, such as Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory, and in queer/postcolonial/intersectional studies, such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of assemblages. And, too, after thirty years of dwelling on the politics of form, feminist and queer narrative theories may be ready to turn from poetics and hermeneutics to take on a politicized aesthetics, conceived perhaps as an erotics of narrative that would be focused on the reader’s body, and working, perhaps, in concert with the gendered neuronarrative approach (combining empirical research and psychoanalysis) that Kay Young and Suzanne Keen have both been pioneering.

At the 2011 Project Narrative Symposium on Feminist and Queer Narrative Theories, we took stock of what our field has failed so far to do so that we could consider what it can do in the future. The impetus for the conference itself was our recognition that feminist and queer narrative studies, though grounded in similar theories and methodologies, have not been as closely in dialogue as they might be. The present book, an outcome of that symposium, is one means of bringing that conversation into being.

3. See the recent work of Frank Kelleter for explorations of serial narratives as actor-networks, and see Puar for groundbreaking work that brings assemblages into the discussion of intersectionality.
We have structured this volume into four sections of full-length essays, a fifth section comprised of challenging commentaries, and a compelling afterword. While we could have organized the essays in many different ways, we have clustered them into groups that seem to us to be in implicit conversation with one another around a burning issue in the field. “Narrative Discourse Unbound” presents four essays that exemplify a range of queer/feminist engagements with—and departures from—principles of narratology. “Intersectional Narrative Theories” brings together the three essays that rely most explicitly on intersectionality theory to advance queer/feminist understandings of narrative. “Lifewriting, Gender, Sex” reflects the challenges wrought by diverse biographical and autobiographical forms from the written and oral to the graphic and digitized. “Emplotment, or the Shapes of Stories” gathers essays that explore the impact of queerness, gender, and embodiment upon narrative practices; the overlap between this topic and lifewriting is profound. The commentaries that comprise our fifth section, “Challenges: Un/doing Narrative Theory,” cut across these topics to suggest points of solidarity and resistance among theorists with divergent commitments to our three anchoring concepts—narrative, feminist, queer. We include these challenges to the collection’s longer essays to open out the topics under discussion and thus to underscore the provisional nature of any project of theoretical inquiry. Taken together, the twenty contributions to this book map the present state of feminist and queer narrative theory, while each individual essay works to expand the boundaries of what a particular approach has enabled thus far. The afterword by Irene Kacandes takes the next step beyond the genealogy articulated in this introduction to glance back at the past so as to gesture towards areas that are open for exploration by new generations of narrative theorists who are also committed activists.

Revisiting the kinds of questions she raised in “Toward a Feminist Narratology” (1986), Susan S. Lanser opens the section we’ve called “Narrative Discourse Unbound” by calling for an approach that is not only queerer and more feminist but more narratological. Lanser makes the case for the power of narratology to elucidate the dynamics that story aims to conceal. She argues for recognizing narrative form as cultural content in order to forge a deeper understanding of the ways in which such social vectors as gender and sexuality, class, race and nationality shape historically and geographically diverse narrative practices. She proposes, however, that extending the still limited scope, reach, and relevance of narratology might require further reform of narratological terms and concepts and even of narratological priorities.
Judith Roof takes a very different and arguably queerer approach in “Out of the Bind: From Structure to System in Popular Narratives,” shifting the analytical model from “structure” to “system” and revealing the limits of conventional narratological taxonomies. Focusing on variant versions of “Red Riding Hood,” Roof demonstrates the “potential for morphing” intrinsic to the definition of character and exposes the insecure logic of story that enables elements within a system to “shift and recombine” into “non-binary multiples.” Roof’s systems perspective thus offers a complex account of narrative as a persistent, recombinant process as she shows how a systems model can militate against the hegemonic conventions of heteronormative closure that structuralist approaches can reify.

From different angles, Robyn Warhol and Peggy Phelan also turn the tables on conventional narratological concepts. Drawing on Judith Butler’s *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Warhol focuses on televisual form, showing how camera angles and editing practices efface the subjectivity of “real” women. The misogyny of Bravo TV’s *Real Housewives* series, she argues, inheres less in its content than in its narrative form. She offers as a contrasting example the mockumentary *The Office*, in which characters address the camera directly while talking about their experiences and feelings in narratives that represent the ambivalence and confusion omitted in the autobiographical sequences on *Real Housewives*. Ironically, Warhol concludes, the hyperrealist representations of fictional people on *The Office* come closer to signifying subjectivity than the depictions of “real” people in reality TV. In making this argument, Warhol also demonstrates the critical place of formal analysis in understanding gendered representations of subjectivity.

The expanded understanding of focalization proposed by David Herman becomes the starting point for Peggy Phelan’s “Hypothetical Focalization and Queer Grief,” at once a moving autobiographical meditation and a queer/narratological intervention. Drawing on concepts of performance, Phelan sees in hypothetical focalization a haunting “might have been” that evokes the doubt, uncertainty, and blurred vision attendant upon the articulation of queer lives and a caveat against taking “clarity and precision” as methodological goals potentially inadequate to “messier and blurrier” (queer) textual performances. Phelan weaves theory and—and as—narrative while evoking the “twin experiences” of queer “love and grief” by way of Eve Sedgwick’s life and work, particularly as Sedgwick’s presence touched upon the death of Phelan’s lover and collaborator, Lynda Hart.

Our introduction and Lanser’s essay both argue for an intersectional approach to narrative subjects, plots, and practices. The three essays constituting our second section approach intersectionality from distinct though
compatible vantage points. Susan Stanford Friedman elucidates an aspect of identity and culture—religious affinity—that she deems an “overwhelming absence” from feminist theory, parsing out the ways in which religion itself constitutes a multiplicity of force fields—theological, cultural, and institutional—that converge in narrative. Friedman maintains that religion is an axis not of power but of difference, and she sees the *Bildungsroman* as “a specific testing ground for an intersectional queer/feminist narrative theory in which religion generates narrative structures well outside the agonistic patterns of oppression and resistance.” Focusing on coming-of-age novels by Ahdaf Soueif, Leila Aboulela, and Randa Jarrar that grapple with generational tensions in Muslim diasporic communities, Friedman calls for a “fundamental shift” not only in conceiving narrative but in conceiving intersectionality.

Narrative empathy is the focal point of essays by Suzanne Keen and Sue J. Kim that likewise provide new intersectional perspectives. Keen’s “Intersectional Narratology in the Study of Narrative Empathy” expands her well-known work on this topic by exploring the “complex overlays” of form, content, and context that account for diverse responses to narrative. Using the framework delineated by psychologist C. Daniel Batson and focusing on popular fiction as an understudied (and gendered) genre, Keen asks how readers’ identities shape responses to characters, particularly “when narrative empathy reaches across boundaries of difference.” In turn, Keen shows how intersectional identities also shape the contexts of production and reception in the literary marketplace.

Sue J. Kim provides a particularly positive instance of intersectional empathy in “Empathy and 1970s Novels by Third World Women.” Building on Keen’s theories to recognize empathy as a “complex, historically and institutionally embedded concept,” Kim shows how social change can emerge from “crossing and changing existing borders between different groups of women,” in this case Third World women and U.S. women of color. In demonstrating how “specific narrative strategies” helped women to “map out the kinds of oppressions, repressions, and erasures that women of color shared” in the 1970s “across ethnic and national boundaries,” Kim is also able to shed light on the more limited potential of a present-day “fetishizing global capitalism.” Kim’s powerful conclusion that readerly empathy has social force is thus also conditioned by historical contingencies.

The section called “Lifewriting, Gender, Sex” begins with Alison Booth’s “Screenshots in the Longue Durée: Feminist Narratology, Digital Humanities, and Collective Biographies of Women,” a report on the Collective Biographies of Women (CWB) project, which gathers and sorts nineteenth- and twentieth-century collections of short biographies of famous women. Having
developed an analytic schema, Booth and her research team have identified patterns of structure and content in the forgotten genre of collective biography. Booth places her project within the history of feminist narrative theory, emphasizing the collaborative nature of her work and collective nature of her subject matter. Her immersion in digital humanities leads Booth to think in terms of systems and social networks, new moves for feminist narrative theory. Booth's essay adds dimensions to our concept of lifewriting, our understanding of “evidence” in feminist-narrative literary analysis, and our access to the history of mainstream representations of the female subject.

In “The Space of Graphic Narrative: Mapping Bodies, Feminism, and Form,” Hillary Chute sketches out a history of women comics artists’ autobiographical works, and then explores the ways in which comics are an especially fruitful field for feminist narrative studies. Emphasizing the interdisciplinary approach required for analysis of comics’ verbal-and-visual texts, Chute embraces the “enabling formalism” required for study of the medium. While comics’ unabashed constructedness invites analysis of its formal codes and conventions, the medium also foregrounds issues like embodiment that are central to feminist and queer narrative theory’s concerns. Acknowledging the importance of temporality to comics studies, Chute emphasizes that comics also raise equally pressing questions about spatial positioning. The essay illustrates Chute’s method with brief readings of images from Alison Bechdel’s Are You My Mother? and Phoebe Gloeckner’s A Child’s Life and Other Stories, which collapse time, space, and multiple selves to explore ambivalent desire for (as well as disavowal of) the past.

Wendy Moffat’s essay makes “The Narrative Case for Queer Biography.” Having written a life of E. M. Forster, Moffat argues that a biography of a queer person is not necessarily a queer biography, and reflects on the disconnection between gay social history and queer theory. Like other essayists in our collection, including Morrison, Rohy, and Matz, Moffat considers the part that temporality plays in queer conceptions of narrative. Narrative, Moffat argues, is not a dead issue for queer theory. She lingers with Eve Sedgwick’s later work to point out that while Sedgwick repudiated teleological narrative, she did not advocate putting some kind of antinarrative in its place. Moffat discusses the new historicist and poststructuralist penchant for narrating “a case,” weighing the appropriate scale on which to write a queer life.

Like Moffat, Jesse Matz takes up queer theory’s critique of teleological narrative in “‘No Future’ vs. ‘It Gets Better’: Queer Prospects for Narrative Temporality.” Here Matz juxtaposes Lee Edelman’s trenchant critique of the reproductive imperative implicit in narrative’s emphasis on futurity to Dan Savage’s “It Gets Better” YouTube campaign aimed at potentially suicidal
queer teenagers. Matz points out that although Edelman’s and Savage’s projects would seem to oppose each other directly enough to cancel each other out, they share a form of queer dissent that opens up new ways to think about “what narrative temporality means for queer possibility.” Matz outlines an understanding of temporality as pedagogy, calling for queer narrative theorists to shift attention “from time-schemes that shape our lives to those that are shaped by our practices and rhetorics.”

The first two essays in “Emplotment, or the Shapes of Stories,” are closely related to the work on queer lifewriting in the previous section. Paul Morrison’s “Maurice, or Coming Out Straight” reads Forster’s most explicitly homosexual novel to show the ways in which heterosexuality turns out to reproduce sameness among normative persons and plotlines, while homosexuality opens up the possibility for divergence and difference, even though “hetero” denotes difference and “homo” means sameness. Morrison’s essay has as much to say about Freud as it does about Forster, contending that “Freud makes possible the situation in which homosexuality can mean either nothing or everything, as homophobic convenience dictates.” As long as the story of homosexuality seems to fit the heteronormative plot, as in the gay marriage movement, it doesn’t signify, but when “the hetero reproduction of the same is threatened with difference, or . . . exposed for what it is,” homosexuality suddenly explains everything.

Valerie Rohy’s “Strange Influence: Queer Etiology in The Picture of Dorian Gray” begins with prevailing accounts of what explains homosexuality, or rather, with stories of where homosexuality comes from. She approaches the etiology of homosexuality as a narrative form that could enable us to “think causality differently,” looking to Oscar Wilde’s novel as a model for how that might come about. Homosexuality is, in this novel, both an absent cause and an absent effect. The essay considers the undecidability of Wilde’s own sexual transgressions in the context of his trial, and ends on the contention that homosexuality “exerts its own . . . strange influence, pitting the closure of etiological narratives against the queerness of sexuality as such.”

Susan Fraiman’s “Gendered Narratives in Animal Studies” shifts this section’s focus to a field that has not yet received much attention from queer and feminist narrative theorists. Fraiman identifies four widely circulated anecdotes about encounters between humans and animals (from Jacques Derrida, Barbara Smuts, Carol Adams, and Donna Haraway), examining each of these very short stories for signs of gender. Fraiman suggests that the brevity of these stories already marks them as “feminine,” but her essay’s purpose is to analyze the gendering of the narratives themselves. For her, this entails looking at the gendering of the narrators, actors, affective tenor, and narrative arc.
in each of the four stories; emplotment is only one of the narrative concepts guiding her analysis, but it is crucial to her argument. While a modification to theories of narrative is not among Fraiman's immediate goals, narrative theory provides a framework for grounding her feminist intervention into animal studies.

Bringing narrative theory together with neuroscience, Kay Young's “Sex—Text—Cortex” examines the sexed and gendered emplotment of “the brain's story.” Young tackles the controversial question of whether or not sexuality and gender differences are hard-wired into the physiology of the brain, and points to ways in which queer and feminist narrative theories can help explain the stories presented as answers to that question. Her essay examines researchers' stories about where gender and sexual orientation originate, showing breakdowns in cause-and-effect plots that resonate with Rohy's and Morrison's observations. Young ends her essay by directly addressing the question that framed the 2011 symposium session in which she participated: “Feminist/Queer and Cognitive/Neurological Narrative Theories: Can We Talk?” According to Young, a conversation between these subfields of narrative theory must happen in order to complicate and diversify the developing story of the human brain.

The commentaries that we gather into the final section, “Challenges: Un/doing Narrative Theory” offer both provocative perceptions and a stark reminder of the limiting linearity of print. Robyn Warhol built into the 2011 symposium an exciting innovation: to begin the second and third mornings with a set of reflections on “the conference thus far.” These reflections were of course stimulated by, and in turn stimulated, the wide-ranging and intense discussions that followed each paper, creating, over three days and some thirty-five speaking voices, a cumulative intellectual heft that exceeds representation. Only a full transcript could begin to give the flavor of those days, and only hypertext could begin to map the myriad of linkages from thought to thought. The five short papers that comprise the volume's final section are transformations of selected “conference thus far” commentaries into trenchant theoretical interventions that offer new, often provocative points of view. Abby Coykendall pushes back on two major assumptions that ground this volume: the compatibility of “queer” and “feminist” and the centrality of “narrative.” She cautions that “combining feminist and queer” risks construing feminism as unqueer and queer as unfeminist, and she challenges the “tacit primacy” we grant to narrative theory. Reversing the paradigm, Coykendall presents narrative studies as a “specialized application of feminist and queer studies” since “the sole center of gravity around which queer subjects can circulate is their collective resistance” to regulatory cultural narratives. Thus,
for Coykendall, queer theory is effectively narrative theory, and indeed a critical corrective to a narratology that treats gender and sexuality as “peripheral to its core interests and practices.” In contrast to Warhol and Lanser’s call to recuperate narratology, Coykendall would “unburden” narrative theory from narratology’s institutional legacy.

Martin Joseph Ponce advances a queer-of-color critique from an angle even more skeptical of any project that aims “to break down the current conundrums and competing interests operating in queer studies and ethnic studies and their encounters with narrative theory.” Ponce doubts the possibility of “reciprocal engagements across queer, feminist, and narrative theory” because of the “incongruous intellectual histories and political commitments” of these fields. Ultimately, Ponce sees as the most viable option an approach that recognizes “feminist, queer, black, and other ethnic studies” as necessarily grounded in “highly contingent and variable” relationships both to narrative and to narrative theory. He likewise points to tensions within queer theory in its failure to attend sufficiently to racial and ethnic diversity.

For Claudia Breger, the merger of feminist/queer/narrative has a different valence, one that pushes against both old theories and new universalisms to forge what she calls a “critically affirmative theoretical bricolage.” It is precisely by moving away from a lines-in-the-sand drawing of boundaries that queer/feminist narratologies are able to forge new interventions. Taking “‘polyamorous relations’ between affect and sexuality” as one instance, Breger calls upon scholars to map “the multifaceted, plural, and contextually changing ways in which feelings are sexualized and desires imbricated in affective orientations.” But where Coykendall might prefer revolt against the traffic cop of narratology, Breger asks theorists to “calm” their well-trained “inner hermeneutist of suspicion” in order to create fruitful provisional alliances with fields and positions that might be less congenial for permanent relationships.

Each of these five commentaries draws attention to specific contributions to *Narrative Theory Unbound*, and none more than Ellen Peel’s. In “Narrative Causes: Inside and Out,” Peel shows the ways in which several of our contributors have collectively “brought the notion of causality back to life” by offering a new understanding of two different aspects of causality: the first intratextual and focused on the relationship of one event to another; the second extratextual and focused on the relationship between text and reader. Exploring especially the contributions to this volume of Sue J. Kim, Valerie Rohy, Paul Morrison, and Jessie Matz, and coming to terms through them

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4. See also Ann Cvetkovich, “Public Feelings” 462.

In a final commentary, Shalyn Claggett takes on what she sees as an “overlooked and undertheorized” problem at the heart of queer and feminist narrative theory: how to “take stock of extratextual significance while at the same time distinguishing between real-world context and its representation.” She calls on queer/feminist theorists to consider “how the arsenal of techniques narrative theory has accumulated since its structuralist beginnings can be used to examine character understood as human personality, rather than exclusively focusing on character as literary device.” Evoking Jonathan Adler’s research on the ability of narrative to forge rather than simply reflect agency, Claggett underscores the value of narrative as a “tool” for the self-actualization of marginalized groups. Claggett reverses the paradigm that gives primacy to fiction and treats the referential world as its analogue, asking narrative theorists to make a new “bid for relevance” by bringing the tools of narrative theory to bear on the nonfictional genres that are so influential in today’s fraught world.

Irene Kacandes takes up those ethical and activist imperatives in the afterword to the volume as she reminds us that it’s the “afterward that will count.” Evoking her transformative encounter with the writer Toni Cade Bambara, Kacandes places herself historically as a scholar who grew up with second-wave feminism, profoundly influenced not just by Bambara’s field-defining ideas, but also by her refusal to participate in the academic star system. Kacandes offers a meditation on three messages inspired by Bambara: the need to break down hierarchies within academia and within our own ranks, the importance of developing strategies for managing our envy of colleagues’ presumed access to authority on issues of identity and privilege, and the insight that projects of feminism and queer theory can only work if we enact alliances among ourselves. Kacandes relates her impressions of how three generations of feminist and queer narrative theorists interacted at the 2011 Project Narrative Symposium, and frames our debates with the contemporary realities of oppression, discrimination, and human-rights violations that prove we still have work to do in the world. Kacandes expresses a faith that not just storytelling but also feminist and queer accounts of narrative can support that work.

We hope this introduction gives an indication of why we took the bold step of naming this volume *Narrative Theory Unbound* and why *Queer and Feminist Interventions* might become a vanguard for all narrative inquiry. We also hope we have underscored the importance of narrative to queer and fem-
inist theorizing and to the reconstructive activism of feminist/queer praxis in the interests of social change. We look forward to a neo-Promethean future of positions and perceptions about narrative that no one has yet conceived. Among all the movements in U.S. literature departments that emerged during the theory revolution of the 1980s, narrative theory in general, and narratology in particular, was probably the most uncool, the approach considered least likely to have a future. As it turns out, and as this volume testifies, contextual narratologies had a future then and have one now: our story is not likely to come to closure any time soon.

Works Cited


