Essay

Queer Narrative Theory and the Relationality of Form

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What is the relation between queerness and narrative? Since its inception, queer theory has approached narrative with skepticism. Influenced by psychoanalysis and poststructuralism, queer theory understands narrative as a conservative form that contains the unruly energies of sexuality. Narrative, it is said, straightens perversity through sequence, as it does in Sigmund Freud's plot of sexual development.[1] Narrative disciplines queerness into an identity to be disclosed, as Michel Foucault argues in his blistering account of confession (*History*). Finally, narrative structures the social imaginary into a heteronormative teleology that culminates in reproduction, as Lee Edelman contends in his polemic against futurity, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. As Valerie Rohy argues, "[I]t is narrative that turns queerness into LGBT identity, normalizing deviance into a difference that makes no difference and domesticating sexuality to fit the marriage plot" ("Queer Narrative Theory" 177–78). If narrative and heteronormativity are mutually constituting structures, then queerness must be, in Leo Bersani's words, "inherently antinarrative" (101). Queerness tells no tales. It only disturbs, troubles, or shatters them. As Teresa de Lauretis argues, queer literature can only be queer to the extent that it "works against narrativity, the generic pressure of all narrative toward closure and the fulfillment of meaning" (244).[2] In dialogue with Lauren Berlant, Edelman extends this premise when he describes queer theory as a project to discover "alternatives to narrative knowledge and knowledge as narrative" (Berlant and Edelman 3). Antinarrativity is thus foundational to queer literary studies, a default principle that underwrites much work in the field.[3] Antinarrativity presumes a universally antagonistic

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PMLA 136.5 (2021), doi:10.1632/S0030812921000407

relationship between queerness and narrative: narrative always works on behalf of the normative.

This essay proposes a different view. It argues that narrative affords important agencies for queerness. To grasp these agencies, however, I break with queer theory's tendency to define *narrative* narrowly —as a linear teleology that produces illusory coherence, or what Judith Roof calls "the phantom of a whole, articulated system" (xv). First, this definition places great stress on plot at the expense of other forms on which narrative depends, such as address, metonymy, description, point of view, and character. Second, antinarrativity assumes that a single temporality governs narrative. For example, Edelman argues that queerness "shatter[s] narrative temporality with irony's always explosive force" (31). This claim ignores the multiple, braided, and often conflicting temporalities that compose narrative as well as potentially queer temporalities of plot, such as suspense, simultaneity, and surprise. This oversight is a consequence of framing the relationship between queerness and narrative as a structural antagonism: the open-ended (queer) drift of the signifier pulls against narrative's (heteronormative) desire for closure. Such formulations discount the practical centrality of narrative to queer cultures, as in coming out, gossiping, and clocking. But they also forget narrative's significance to queer theory. What would queer theory be without the vivid interleavings of narrative and social theory in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Tendencies*, or José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia*? Narrative is not the antithesis of queerness, nor is it not mere window dressing to theory. Narrative is a condition of possibility for queerness. It is a form through which queers forge, experience, sustain, renew, and reimagine relationality.[4]

By theorizing narrative as a form that fosters queer relationality, I build on and contribute to the recent emergence of queer formalism, which reconsiders queer theory's tendency to depict forms as constraints to be ruptured.[5] As Kadji Amin, Amber Jamilla Musser, and Roy Pérez argue, form is "not (or not only) something to resist and transgress in the quest for a greater queer freedom" (Amin et al. 228). Rather, queerness takes forms. Queerness is shaped by passionate attachments to certain forms, and certain forms make queer orientations available for readers and audiences. Queer formalism is thus especially attuned to the affective dynamics of aesthetic objects, because it understands aesthetic form as making "sensual intervention[s]" into relationships of power, knowledge, and meaning (233).

While I share this investment in the enabling capacities and affective relations of form, I part with queer formalism's emphasis on the aesthetic.[6] Instead, I draw on strategic formalism, which defines form as patterning arrangements that move promiscuously across social, aesthetic, material, and other domains. I do so for two reasons. First, antinarrativity understands narrative in totalizing terms. For antinarrative scholars, narrative is an autonomous structure that seals subjects into the false coherence of ideology. By contrast, strategic formalism conceives narrative as an ecology of interdependent forms—aesthetic and nonaesthetic —in contiguous torsion with one another. As Caroline Levine argues, "[N]arratives are among the very best forms for identifying and tracking the unfolding of relations among different forms" (122). Narrative is not a master form that organizes everything in its orbit; it collides with, changes, and is changed by the forms it encounters. Thus, a strategic approach enables an analysis of narrative's queer interactions with social, corporeal, temporal, and other forms. Second, queer antinarrativity and queer formalism share an investment in avant-garde aesthetics; experimental texts are juxtaposed against realist, representational, or mimetic forms, which are often described as stylistically unqueer because of their imbrication with narrative. A strategic approach to the queerness of narrative, however, does not rely on dichotomies between legibility and illegibility, coherence and incoherence. Rather, it understands queerness as a mode of relationality that can be fostered through any number of styles, conventional and experimental alike.[7] Queer relationality, in other words, does not depend on one particular narrative form.

But what precisely counts as queer relationality? Some theorists identify a specific affective, social, or

sexual relation as definitive of queerness, such as friendship, drag, cruising, barebacking, loss, melancholia, abjection, or shame.[8] I am indebted to these arguments. However, I reframe queer relationality as an unsolved problem central to contemporary queer literature. I argue that contemporary writers turn to narrative to explore the relational forms that queerness takes in a historical moment when it is less clear what counts as queer. This opacity is occasioned, in part, by the important definitional expansion of *queer* to include identities, desires, and experiences that have rarely been at the forefront of queer representation, theory, or politics.[9] It derives, too, from the uneven inclusion of queerness within certain social institutions, such as the media, the state, the university, and the law. As Heather Love observes, "The beauty of queer sociality in both its actual and its utopian forms has been deeply tied to social exclusion. Now that new opportunities for inclusion are being extended to *some* members of the queer community, it is less clear than ever what the queer future will look like" ("Wedding Crashers" 139).[10] Queer theory often narrates this development as a battle between queer radicalism and neoliberal assimilation.[11] But this story tends to assume that queers will easily know the difference between the relational forms that will foster and those that will foreclose social change. It also portrays heteronormativity as a static form with a tenacious grip on the symbolic order. Yet, as Judith Butler observes, it is increasingly the case that "the relations that bind are no longer traced to heterosexual procreation" (*Undoing* 128). The proliferation of "new kinship and sexual arrangements" provokes queerer organizations of intimate and social belonging for people who identify as queer- and nonqueer alike.[12] In other words, we are witnessing a queering of relationality as such.

To contend with this queering of relationality, Butler urges us to pay more attention to the narrative practices of people living "outside of normative kinship or in some mix of normative and 'non-'" (*Undoing* 128). This essay answers Butler's call by turning to contemporary queer kinship narratives that do not position heteronormativity as their telos, nor suggest that narrative has an irreducibly heteronormative structure. Rather, these writers look to narrative because it is a dynamically relational form, shaped by the metonymic friction of social, discursive, and corporeal forms. For these writers, narrative can contest heteronormative kinship plots *and* trace forms of belonging that queer theory overlooks because of its overwhelming emphasis on explosive ruptures. Unlike antinarrativity, then, this essay does not identify one aesthetic style (rupture) as exemplary of queerness in general or at its most essential; instead, I articulate a queer narrative theory, which asks how narrative—and other forms thought to abet heteronormativity—elicits, arranges, and sustains queer bonds in and across time.

I begin with a canonical text of queer theory, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's essay "Sex in Public." In an antinarrative move now conventional to the field, Berlant and Warner subordinate narrative to sex, arguing that the latter does transformative political work by shattering narrative coherence. Yet their essay relies on narrative techniques to extend the queer relationality of sex beyond its material limits. In this way, "Sex in Public" reveals queer theory's disavowed reliance on narrative forms, even as it critiques them for maintaining social normativity. I then look to Paul B. Preciado's *Testo Junkie* to demonstrate queer and trans theory's ongoing debt to narrative. Where Berlant and Warner locate queerness primarily in sex, Preciado uses narrative form to probe the queerness of kinship itself—specifically, the ambivalent relationality between trans and cis queer men. *Testo Junkie* thus opens space for queer narrative theory to grasp forms of queer belonging in trans, nonbinary, and genderqueer narratives that do not necessarily center on sex or sexuality.

By tracing the queer relations that these narratives extend, I develop new understandings of classical narratological categories, particularly address, closure, and contiguity. Queer approaches to these concepts are crucial if we are to understand contemporary queer narratives, which are less stably organized around the binary of normativity and transgression. As an example, I turn to Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*, which innovates a "nuptial" form that uncouples kinship from the marriage

plot and narrates queerness as a relation of contiguous dependency, fueled by messy attachments rife with misunderstanding. *The Argonauts* shows the limits of queer theory's tendency to locate queerness in the punctual shattering of sexual norms, which fails to countenance the queerness of mundane attachments, particularly those marked by femininity and maternity. At a moment when queer belonging seems increasingly assimilated into heteronormative kinship, narrative enables Nelson to formalize the queerness of sustained attachment, which is easily misread as capitulation to the status quo.

The final section builds on the queerness of mundane attachment, but it relocates these bonds within the intersections of heteronormativity and white supremacy that conspire to erase the lineages of Black lesbian kinship. I look to Renee Gladman's nonfiction prose narrative collection, *Calamities*, which laments the popularity of antinarrative sentiments among contemporary writers. For Gladman, narrative unfolds the shapes that queer belonging takes in relation to the violences of colonialism and enslavement. Instead of "straightening" the contingent relations of Black lesbian kinship, narrative's relentlessly linear forms can map queer morphologies of kinship that break from white, heteropatriarchal notions of lineal descent.

Taken together, these case studies reveal the vitality of narrative to contemporary queer literature and its effort to reimagine queerness's relational forms. Narrative offers these writers a wealth of affordances to figure, extend, and sustain queer kinship. This essay only scratches the surface of these affordances. Thus, I conclude with a call for further work in queer narrative theory. To be sure, there have been influential contributions to the intersections of queer and narrative theory by Robyn Warhol and Susan S. Lanser, D. A. Miller, Roof, Butler (*Giving*), Lynne Huffer, and Rohy (*Lost Causes*; *Chances*), among others.[13] Yet, as Lanser observes, "[I]n 2018, and despite work of extraordinary breadth and depth in queer literary studies, queer narratology itself remains underdeveloped, its relationship to feminist narratology underexplored, and its potential contribution to narratology as such unspecified" ("Queering" 925). Lanser is right that the uptake of narratological problems in queer studies has been sporadic. This is due in large part to queer theory's entrenched antinarrative presumptions. By decentering those presumptions, this essay offers queer narrative theory as a relational formalism well-suited to trace the shapes that queer belonging takes now.

Second Persons: Narrative's Queer Extension

Despite its avowed antinarrativity, queer theory often uses storytelling to distinguish itself from other genres of social thought. For example, the first sentence of Berlant and Warner's "Sex in Public" declares that their essay "teases with the obscurity of its object and the twisted aim of its narrative" (547). Berlant and Warner argue that narrative consolidates heteronormative kinship. In heterosexual culture, "a complex cluster of sexual practices gets confused . . . with the love plot of intimacy and familialism that signifies belonging to society in a deep and normal way" (554). Yet Berlant and Warner also suggest that queer narration can forge modes of belonging that "bear no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation" (558). It is important, then, that "Sex in Public" culminates with a story. The authors narrate a sadomasochistic performance of "erotic vomiting" in a leather bar on a Wednesday night (564). They set the scene: a twentysomething bottom in "lycra shorts and a dog collar" sits in a "restraining chair" at the "low stage at one end of the bar" (565). A top enters the scene and "tilts the bottom's head up to the ceiling, stretching out his throat. Behind them is an array of foods" (565). A chain of events develops: "The top begins pouring milk down the boy's throat, then food, then more milk. It spills over, down his chest and onto the floor." The narrative chain builds suspense and excitement, desire and disgust, as "the boy's stomach is beginning to rise and pulse, almost convulsively." The vignette climaxes with vomit and questions. Hungry for narrative knowledge, Berlant and Warner imagine asking the allegedly "straight" bottom, "How did you discover that this is what you want to do? How did you find a male top to

do it with? How did you come to do it in a leather bar? Where else do you do this? How do you feel about your new partners, this audience?" Berlant and Warner do not serve up answers, merely whetting our appetites.

No one forgets this moment in "Sex in Public." Readers chew on this scene as if it were the main course, although it comprises only three of the essay's thirty-six paragraphs. One could argue, as Berlant and Warner do, that the scene resonates because it is a scene "where *sex appears more sublime than narration itself*" (565; my emphasis). Indeed, Berlant and Warner claim that "sex opens a wedge to the transformation of those social norms that require only its static intelligibility or its deadness as a source of meaning." In other words, sex—not narrative—does the political work here. Sex may or may not be sublime, but narrative offers it new relational horizons. Narrative is not necessarily a second-order representation that pales in comparison to the reality of sex; it has its own erotic charge. After all, sometimes and for some people, the story of sex is better than the real thing. As "Sex in Public" so vividly shows, narrative extends the temporal, spatial, affective, and social relations of an otherwise bounded grouping of bodies and pleasures.[14]

Berlant and Warner extend these relations by shifting from past to present tense on entering the leather bar. Suddenly, readers of *Critical Inquiry* are drawn into an unfolding drama: "The crowd is transfixed . . . moaning softly with admiration" (565). We join the crowd, "pressed forward in a compact and intimate group." Their narration widens the boundaries of the group. This extension intensifies as the authors invoke the second person, addressing "you" six times in their litany of questions. The address puts readers onstage. We become the bottom, temporarily subject to a critical inquiry into our queer eroticism. Of course, one could argue that Berlant and Warner's narrative flourish signals the weakness of "Sex in Public." After all, the authors do not actually interview the bottom, they do not contextualize this erotic community within a broader data set, and they do not establish a methodology for their ethnography. Yet Berlant and Warner's failure as social scientists secures their success as queer theorists. Their unanswered address beckons readers to fantasize a narrative that can make sense of abstract concepts (sex, power, publicness) through concrete details (Lycra shorts, Wednesday night, leather bar). Queer theory requires a narrative imagination to unfold social worlds from such tantalizing details. A simple question like "Who mops the floor, and how do they feel about it?" suddenly teases with possibilities for queer inquiry—not only about sex but about the fields of sociality and power that surround it. From this perspective, narrative is one place queer theory begins.

To be clear, I am not claiming that narrative has grandiose agency. It cannot, on its own, overthrow heteronormativity. But narrative has agencies, and queer theory draws on these agencies even when it does not acknowledge its debt to narrative form. Sedgwick anticipates this point when she observes that critical theory often relies on "the prestige of a single, overarching narrative: exposing and problematizing hidden violences in the genealogy of the modern liberal subject" (*Touching* 139). Building on Sedgwick, Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski reframe critical theory as a distinct genre, composed of particular moods, attitudes, and styles (3). Queer narrative theory contributes to this project by foregrounding the narrative forms that make queer theory possible. My goal is not to blunt the potency of queer theory but to highlight that its potency often stems from narrative extensions of queer relationality.

This debt to narrative endures in contemporary queer and trans theory. Take, for example, Preciado's experimental autotheory, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*. Whereas Berlant and Warner locate queerness primarily in public sex, Preciado sees queerness at a molecular level, flowing through a body politic managed by capitalist biopower and exemplified by the pharmaceutical industry. *Testo Junkie* turns to narrative to map this fusion of queerness, biocapital, and gender. Six of its thirteen chapters develop a sweeping, Foucauldian narrative of contemporary "technosexuality" (68). The other seven chapters narrate Preciado's experimentation with testosterone, his gender transition,

his sexual exploits, and the aching loss of his friend, the novelist Guillaume Dustan. Some chapters interleave these two modes, shifting between the autobiographical and the theoretical. Much attention has been paid to how such shifts complicate the stability of life writing.[15] "This book is not a memoir," Preciado insists (11). It is a "body-essay. Fiction, actually." Invoking antinarrativity, Preciado explains, "If the reader sees this text as an uninterrupted series of philosophical reflections, accounts of hormone administration, and detailed records of sexual practices without the solutions provided by continuity, it is simply because this is the mode on which subjectivity is constructed and deconstructed" (12). Withholding the "solutions" of continuity, *Testo Junkie* aligns queerness with the endless revision of a discontinuous self.

This is an accurate description of *Testo Junkie*'s queer approach to subjectivity. But it diminishes the book's no less queer approach to intersubjectivity, which reveals that continuity affords queerer possibilities than closure. It can extend relationality between the living and the dead. As Elizabeth Freeman argues, queer kinship is marked by a yearning to reach "a hand across time and touch the dead or those not born yet, to offer oneself beyond one's own time" ("Queer Belongings" 299). Preciado's *Testo Junkie* forges this temporal and corporeal extension in its first chapter. Titled "Your Death," the chapter is addressed to Dustan. It begins, "October 5: Tim tells me you've died" (15). Preciado calls his lover, VD, to share the news. He writes, addressing Dustan, "You're the one who pushes me to dial her [VD's] number. You listen to our conversation. Your mind unfurls and forms an electromagnetic layer from which our words flow. Your ghost is a wire transmitting our voices." Preciado's narration revivifies Dustan into a voyeur, witness, muse, medium, and specter. Narrative, here, is an intersubjective form, incarnated by other voices, bodies, and desires. Preciado films himself as he takes testosterone, shaves his head and genitals, glues a mustache to his face, and masturbates with two dildos. As he does so, Dustan watches, encourages, and possesses Preciado's body. Preciado then looks into the camera and declares, "This testosterone is for you, this pleasure is for you" (20). This address is shot through with ambivalence. As Preciado unfolds the narrative of their relationship, we discover Dustan to be cruelly transphobic, misogynistic, and lesbophobic. He mocks, dismisses, and humiliates Preciado, who eventually decides Dustan is "nothing but a pathetic asshole, you're over, dead" (244). Here, narrative continuity does not lead to resolution; it threads an ambivalent kinship between two queer writers, between a trans queer man and a cis queer man, between two people experimenting with substances society has deemed illegal. For Preciado, narrative highlights the imperfection, even the trauma, of a queer bond that sustains.

The conclusion of *Testo Junkie* does not solve these tensions. It extends them in narrative time. At his funeral, Dustan's mother gives a eulogy that erases her son's queerness. Preciado is enraged at her "using language against us, against you" (424). This moment emblematizes how the rituals of official kinship—biological, heteronormative, state-sanctioned—often suffocate queer belonging. Against this image, Preciado and VD approach Dustan's grave and conduct an unofficial queer wedding. Preciado writes, "Your burial is our marriage. You, and no one else, will be the officiating ghost who will seal the alliance between your death and our love under the earth" (427). One could read this moment as securing the closure queer theory spurns. On this account, the wedding plot consumes the grave plot, happily satisfying Preciado's "desire to carry on your [Dustan's] line" despite "the impossibility of restoring your sperm" (20). But ambivalence has not left the scene. Transphobia has not been erased. Preciado acknowledges, "If you were still alive, you'd certainly hate us, VD and me. . . . [Y]ou'd mourn your gonadic heroism and would choose us as sacred wolves to carry on your AIDS-infected legacy" (427). *Testo Junkie* does not end the ambivalent kinship between trans and cis queer men so much as stretch out its temporality. Preciado promises to return again and again, to "rub our bodies against your grave . . . to quench your thirst for sex, blood, and testosterone." This

may or may not be a gift Dustan wants; Preciado may or may not be the emissary he craves. It is hard to say, and this uncertainty shapes the queerness of their kinship. Preciado's narration sustains this uncertainty. His queer-trans wedding plot secures a bond without resolution, and it enables this unsanctioned attachment to endure beyond death and beyond the page, in its nourishing ambivalence.

Antinarrativity grasps powerful ruptures of self-coherence. But it is less adept at identifying the queerness of intersubjective relations, especially those not organized around sex. Queer narrative theory, by contrast, understands queer belonging as a specific kind of narrative problem and highlights how even avowedly antinarrative texts depend on narrative to figure and extend queer relationality. The next section recontextualizes these relational forms within contemporary debates about queer assimilation. I turn to Nelson's *The Argonauts*, which cites *Testo Junkie* as its formal inspiration.[16] Nelson experiments with narrative contiguity to expand the story of queerness beyond transgression and, in turn, to make palpable the queerness of sustained attachments often read as heteronormative.

Metonymic Attachments: Narrative's Queer Contiguity

Queer theory typically interprets metonymy as the figural logic of desire.[17] Desire is driven from one object to the next in a search for satisfaction, which is necessarily doomed to fail. Metonymy is queer, from this perspective, because it does not end; its associative drift and endless substitutions unravel narrative closure. In Edelman's words, "a story implies a direction . . . toward some payoff or profit, some comprehension or closure" no matter how "attenuated, qualified, ironized, interrupted, or deconstructed it may be" (Berlant and Edelman 3). Without telos, "it isn't a story at all, just metonymic associations attached to a given nucleus." Yet Edelman's definition collapses the distinction between narrative and plot, the shaping of events toward a meaningful end that makes sense of what has come before. Instead, we might take a cue from Roman Jakobson, who locates contiguity—not causality—as narrative's organizing principle.[18] Contiguity lays one thing beside another; in a narrative, contiguous events may be linked by causality, but they do not need to be. Narrative contiguity allows for a wider range of relations, which are laden with queer potential.[19] As Sedgwick argues, contiguity can entail "desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations" (*Touching* 8). Here contiguity opens onto a world of narrative action between bodies that touch. Narrative's contiguous form can forge surprising associations, including those not sanctioned or sacralized by the social order, and render the affective complexity of such queer bonds.

Nelson's *The Argonauts* is especially attuned to the queer affordances of contiguity. Like *Testo Junkie*, *The Argonauts* is a work of autotheory. Despite its narrative interludes, however, *Testo Junkie* is recognizable as a work of critical theory. By contrast, *The Argonauts* quite literally moves theory to the margins. Its margins are peppered with the names of theorists, such as Sedgwick, Edelman, Butler, Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Bersani, Sara Ahmed, and Foucault. Their voices bleed into Nelson's narration as italicized text. The primary narrative centers on queer kinship: Nelson meets and marries her partner, Harry, who transitions in the course of their relationship; Nelson becomes a stepparent to Harry's son and gives birth to their son Iggy, who nearly dies from a nerve toxin; Harry's adoptive mother dies, and he meets his biological mother; and Nelson grapples with her ambivalence toward her mother, father, and stepfather. These narratives provide occasions for meditations on queer eroticism, family, and politics, which are juxtaposed alongside foundational queer theories.

Nelson's form repositions queer theory as a practice of everyday life.[20] As Love argues, *The Argonauts* refuses to posit "a fatal contradiction between queer radicalism and the quotidian realities of queer lives" ("Playing" 259). To be sure, Nelson questions the "assimilationist, unthinkingly

neoliberal bent of the mainstream GLBTQ+ movement" (26). Yet she is also skeptical of queer theories that locate transgression as the most radical alternative. For example, she quotes Bruce Benderson, the translator of *Testo Junkie*, who defines queerness as "a narrative of urban adventure, a chance to cross not only sex barriers but class and age barriers, while breaking a few laws in the process—and all for the sake of pleasure" (73). If queerness is *not* a narrative of erotic transgression, Benderson insists, "I might as well be straight." Such narratives position everything that is not, in Susan Fraiman's words, "heroic gay male sexuality" as heteronormative (qtd. in Nelson, *Argonauts* 67). Moreover, they underestimate historical and political shifts in sexual norms. As Nelson pointedly observes, "Who, in the straight world, besides some diehard religious conservatives, truly experiences sexual pleasure as inextricably linked to reproductive function?" (110).

Nelson decenters sexual transgression from queerness, but her goal is not to enshrine another mode of relationality in its place. Rather, she wants to narrate queerness in a way that does not presume "one set of practices or relations has the monopoly on the so-called radical, or the so-called normative" (73). Is this possible? Nelson is unsure. She wonders if "it's the word *radical* that needs rethinking. But what could we angle ourselves toward instead, or in addition? Openness? Is that good enough, strong enough?" (27). *The Argonauts* does not offer an answer. Instead, it develops a narrative form to explore the question in a new way. This form is signaled by the phrase "angle ourselves," which reframes queerness in relational terms.[21] Indeed, when asked to define *queer* in interviews, Nelson rejects queer theory's tendency to narrate *queer* as a verb. She points to the phrase "queering a genre, like memoir," as exemplary of that tendency ("What's Queer Form Anyway?"). This is significant because so many readings of *The Argonauts* locate its queerness in subversions of form.[22] For example, Monica B. Pearl argues that *The Argonauts* "refuses form," because it is "not a story . . . that we might recognize as developing, having a trajectory" (200). *The Argonauts* undoubtedly questions teleology. But a trajectory is not a teleology. Objects in motion have trajectories, and trajectories depend on angles, but trajectories do not necessarily imply causality, purpose, or design. They trace movements across space and time. Rather than "queer" a genre, then, Nelson outlines the trajectories that compose scenes of queer belonging. This is why she defines *queer* as a "shorthand for a particular scene or vibe" ("What's Queer Form Anyway?"). Subversion may be one angle in a scene, but it may not be the only—or even the most important—trajectory.

By tracing the angles of queer scenes, Nelson refuses to locate pregnancy, domesticity, and partnership as endpoints in a heteronormative teleology. For example, a friend criticizes a *Snapfish* mug on Nelson's shelf. The mug depicts Harry, a pregnant Nelson, and their son in front of monogrammed Christmas stockings hung from the mantel. The friend exclaims, "*I've never seen anything so heteronormative in all my life.*" Nelson speculates about which chain of associations fixes the mug as "the essence of heteronormativity": that it is a gift from her mother, that it was purchased from a kitschy website, that she is pregnant in the photograph, or that the family is "participating, or acquiescing into participating, in a long tradition of families being photographed at holiday time in their holiday best" (13)? By reading the mug as a symptom of heteronormativity, the friend detaches it from an intimate and social field of queer kinship. This field includes the relations among queer and trans parents, a son that is also a stepson and a step-grandson, a fetus created through IVF and a sperm donor, and a heterosexual cisgender mother attempting to forge a relation to her daughter's genderqueer family. None of these relations are as coherent or unidirectional as the friend's reading suggests. Narrative enables Nelson to unfold the mug's contiguous angles of relation—without presenting them as an achievement of social acceptance. In doing so, she recuperates the contingent queer relationality that composes this scene of kinship.

Nelson suspects it is her pregnancy that beckons her friend to read the mug as a figure of heteronormativity. Yet she wonders, "How can an experience so profoundly strange and wild and transformative also symbolize or enact the ultimate conformity?"

(13–14). Pregnancy is often read as a classic signifier of heteronormative closure and reproductive futurity. By contrast, Nelson narrates pregnancy as a queer experience of embodied contiguity. She writes:

> Many women describe the feeling of having a baby come out of their vagina as taking the biggest shit of their lives. This isn't really a metaphor. The anal cavity and vaginal cavity lean on each other; they, too, are the sex which is not one. Constipation is one of pregnancy's principal features: the growing baby literally deforms and squeezes the lower intestines, changing the shape, flow, and plausibility of one's feces. (83)

Rewriting Luce Irigaray, *The Argonauts* depicts the contiguities of anus and vagina, feces and fetus. They touch, and their touch reshapes the body. As Nelson stresses, "[A] baby literally *makes space* where there wasn't space before" (103). Queerness arises in Nelson's changing body and her felt relation to its changes. She reflects on "the cartilage nub where my ribs used to fit together at the sternum. The little slide in my lower rib cage when I twist right or left that didn't used to slide. The rearrangement of internal organs." This pregnant body is a queer body with organs on the move. *The Argonauts* directs attention to the postpartum perineum, to dirt on the bottom of a newly protruded belly bottom, to breasts painfully and pleasurably filled with milk, to the experience of rocking a baby to sleep. Nelson insists these figures should be central, not peripheral, to queerness and queer theory alike, because they index a "buoyant eros, an eros without teleology" (44). Such eros may lack telos, but it does not lack form. Shattering can only countenance so many pleasures.[23] It may be ill-suited to the erotics of pregnancy and other queer relations that are mistaken for heteronormativity.

Queer contiguity expands the corporeal figures of queer theory, but it does not leave narrative theory untouched. Feminist narrative theory has long critiqued narratology's implicit reliance on male bodies and pleasures.[24] Susan Winnett anticipates *The Argonauts* when she turns to breastfeeding and pregnancy to challenge the male physiology that underpins narratological concepts, such as incipience, repetition, and climax (508). Nelson extends this project by refiguring closure through the cervix: "The task of the cervix is to stay closed, to make an impenetrable wall protecting the fetus, for approximately forty weeks of a pregnancy. After that, by means of labor, the wall must somehow become an opening. This happens through dilation, which is not a shattering, but an extreme thinning. *(O so thin!)*" (124). Here, closure does not seal permanently but holds contingently; it contains, yes, but to protect and nourish, not to trap and mystify.[25] Closure's dilation is not the same as "shattering." It is an "opening." Dilation takes time. It takes work. Dilation is more akin to "thinning" or spreading than to breaking. To conceptualize this form, Nelson cites Ralph Waldo Emerson: "*Spirit is matter reduced to an extreme thinness: O so thin*" (33). Yet in a queer twist, Emerson has gone into labor: his "O so thin" rewritten as an exclamation of the pregnant body's plasticity as it dilates, experiencing "radical intimacy with—and radical alienation from"—itself (13).

By incarnating the queerness of closure in pregnancy, Nelson presses back against the longstanding tendency to place queer theory and feminist theory in a hierarchy. In Huffer's words, queer theory too often positions "fluid, destabilizing queer performance" against a "stable, fixed feminist narrative as its nonqueer identitarian other" (57).[26] Nelson does not conceive of pregnancy as the foundational narrative of femininity. Rather, *The Argonauts* narrates pregnancy's queer transformations of embodiment. The text insists that gender matters to narrative's forms. In this respect, it invites minoritized and nonconforming genders to stake new claims on narrative. This is why queer narrative theory and feminist narrative theory need each other. Together, they challenge the centrality of male embodiment to queerness and narrative alike.

This project is important if queer narrative theory is to value what Nelson calls "the gifts of genderqueer family making" (72). Its primary gift is "the revelation of caretaking as detachable from—and attachable to—any gender, any sentient being." In

Nelson's view, queer theory offers a robust idiom of detachment, but it has less to say about "the pleasure of obligation, the pleasure of dependency. The pleasures of ordinary devotion" (112).[27] Ordinary devotion sounds like the least queer thing in the world. This may be because queer theory tends to conceive of attachment as cruel, as a relation of false consciousness that turns subjects against their interests.[28] Some attachments can be cruel. But the dominance of this story tends to sideline specifically queer forms of attachment. It also forgets that queerness cannot be sustained without attachments.

To figure the queerness of attachment, *The Argonauts* innovates a narrative form that Nelson calls the "nuptial." She borrows this term from Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, who describe nuptials as "*the opposite of a couple*" (qtd. in Nelson, *Argonauts* 7). The nuptial appropriates the language of normative kinship, but it does not culminate in a sanctioned couple. Instead, the nuptial traces an "*outline of a becoming*," which may or may not be recognizable as kinship (qtd. in Nelson, *Argonauts* 7). Nelson decouples the nuptial from the marriage plot. Indeed, *The Argonauts* begins with Nelson and Harry's wedding; it does not hold their marriage out as an end to be fulfilled. Moreover, their decision to marry stems from the imminent passage of Proposition 8, the California law banning same-sex marriage. Proposition 8 passes the day after their wedding, and the marriage is immediately annulled. Instead of creating a "new queer marriage plot," as Love suggests ("Playing" 269), *The Argonauts* offers the nuptial as an alternative narrative form for queer attachment.

Stylistically, Nelson departs from the approach that Deleuze and Parnet take to the nuptial, which they believe must confuse "what [writing] came from one, what came from the other, or even from someone else" (qtd. in Nelson, *Argonauts* 47). For Nelson, an indiscernible blur of voices obscures the angles of attachment among subjects. Instead, Nelson privileges dialogic narration as the essence of the nuptial; she describes it as an "infinite conversation" (146). Conversations depend on an interplay of distinct voices. Dramatic tensions arise as voices angle toward and away from one another. A conversation has no necessary terminus. It can stay open—not so much unresolved as ongoing. It does not have to culminate in harmony. This is why Nelson's nuptial stresses the passion of difference and the intractability of misunderstanding between queer kin.[29] On the first page of *The Argonauts,* Nelson and Harry disagree about the nature of language, and this argument winds through the entire text. Later, Harry shares an essay with Nelson about butches and femmes, which sparks a debate between them about the meaning of honor and shame (31–32). When Nelson shares the first draft of *The Argonauts* with Harry, he expresses "quiet ire" at her "representation of him, of us" (46). Elsewhere, Harry pushes back against Nelson's self-righteous trans allyship, reminding Nelson that she, too, has expressed anxiety about his transition (50). These moments are crucial to the nuptial's narration of how often "there is difference right where we may be looking for, and expecting, communion" (93).

Nuptial tension underscores that queer kinship does not require mutual understanding so much as an openness to surprise, which narrative's unfolding temporality can highlight.[30] Surprise does not necessarily shatter an attachment; it can create new angles within a relationship. For example, Nelson juxtaposes her pregnancy and Harry's transition: "On the surface, it may have seemed as though your body was becoming more and more 'male,' mine, more and more 'female.' But that's not how it felt on the inside. On the inside, we were two human animals undergoing transformations beside each other, bearing each other loose witness. In other words, we were aging" (83). These transitions are contiguous, but they are not the same. They occur "beside each other." As Nelson writes, "Our bodies grew stranger, to ourselves, to each other" (86). Here, a transition is not necessarily understandable by oneself, let alone one's partner. This caveat is important because Nelson's and Harry's transitions proceed under stratified relations to social legibility. Harry confronts a "mainstream narrative" about trans identity that does not match his experience or values (52). "*I'm not on my way anywhere*, Harry sometimes tells inquirers" (53). For

him, transition is not about heading in a direction, least of all toward a culminating end.[31] Hence, Nelson wonders, "How to explain, in a culture frantic for resolution, that sometimes the shit stays messy?" The nuptial keeps shit messy. It shows that messiness and attachment are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, queer kinship embraces the transformative potential of messy attachments.[32]

By shifting from teleology to trajectory, queer narrative theory discovers new angles in pregnancy and partnership, which queer theory misses when it searches for explosive discontinuities instead of contingent contiguities. It may seem that narrative's inherent linearity is destined to "straighten" queer contiguity into heteronormative sequence. Yet, as I demonstrate next, narrative linearity can unfold queer dependencies that lack social legibility and predetermined form. In Gladman's nonfiction prose collection *Calamities*, narrative traces Black lesbian morphologies of belonging that contest white, heteropatriarchal lineage, and it preserves them despite historical erasure by subsequent queer generations.

Plotted Lines: Narrative's Queer Morphology

Whatever form queer kinship takes, it will not be a line—or so queer theory tends to suggest.[33] Lines lead to linearity; linearity points to progressive sequence, which subsumes "queer kink[s] in the straight timeline of historicism" (Hanson); and linearity bleeds into lineage, the bedrock of white supremacist and heteropatriarchal ancestry. These are important critiques. Yet the critique of linearity sometimes presumes that linear forms necessarily buttress oppressive ideologies. After all, a line is an abstract form, and the straight line—driving toward a point—is only one form lines can take.[34] Gladman makes this clear in *Calamities* when she asks a group of "ex-lovers to map a problem of space" (17). One ex derails the conversation by insisting that "the 'point' should be our vehicle of expression ('not the line') since it was the point that was the base of all communication." Gladman admits that points seem "to be the originary gesture of all movement," but she counters that "most people did not begin looking at points until they became lines." Lines move. In their movement, lines gather space around them. They visualize latent connections and even discover new relations that did not preexist their arc. Such affordances matter because Gladman understands lines as "the essence of writing" (104). While writing *Calamities*, Gladman experiments with ink-and-paper line drawings, which she publishes in *Prose Architectures*. These drawings look like architectural blueprints composed of illegible script—lines furrow, loop, stretch, curve, and twist. Freed from the point, untethered from overarching design, the line's relentless movement generates complex relational morphologies.

Narrative shares this organizing principle. Quoting Virginia Tufte, Gladman argues that prose linearity "generate[s] a symbolics of spatial or temporal movement," which "may resemble accumulation or attrition, progress or other process, even stasis, or any one of these interrupted, turned, reversed" (*Prose Architectures* xiii). Gladman adds "an emotional or bodily register in relation to prose" that Tufte ignores ("Sentence" 102). For Gladman, the lines of writing forge affective relations that are abstract yet somehow "*liveable*." This is not a paradox so much as an affirmation of the relational space that narrative fosters. Hence, in his afterword to *Prose Architectures*, Fred Moten asks, "Is there refuge in the sentence? Is there an underground railroad in the sentence?" (112). For Gladman, the promise of writing lies in fugitive lines that gather into surprisingly queer forms. These forms harbor space for Black queer belonging to live.

Gladman's need for narrative forms that foster fugitive relationality derives from her position as a Black lesbian, who is also a "post-abducted subject in language" ("Sentence" 100).[35] English is a mechanism of colonial and imperial dispossession that contributes to the fracturing of Black kinship. As Gladman explains, "I don't know the languages or landscapes that preceded the incursion of English and what is now the United States into my lineage. Yet, the violence of that erasure—all the inheritances interrupted—is as foundational to my relationship to language and subjectivity as is grammar" (92).

Whereas white authors like Nelson may discover queer potentials within normative figures of family, African American authors like Gladman have a far more vexed relationship to the narration of kinship. As Saidiya Hartman famously states, "Slavery is the ghost in the machine of kinship" (qtd. in Butler, *Undoing* 103). Chattel slavery turns Black kin into property.[36] At the same time, it codifies white supremacy through racist logics of state kinship, premised on the heteropatriarchal nuclear family. This violence endures in the present, as white kinship continues to pathologize, police, and fracture Black modes of relationality.[37] Yet, despite this dispossession, Gladman does not seek to recover her "displaced origins, that unmappable first land and unutterable first language" ("Sentence" 93). Rather, she innovates alternative "notions of origin and passage" not governed by the "terms of ancestry" (92). Against the bloodlines and timelines of white heteronormativity, then, Gladman traces queer lines of belonging that do not rely on blood or law.

These lines arise through narrative because of its queer relation to temporality. As Gladman notes, narrative is "baffled by both time and memory. And yet, these are its main source materials for world-building" (93). Narrative's most basic function—"describing the origins of one's acts, the chronology of events of a day in the life"—is paradoxically "one of its foremost struggles." The queerness of narrative arises, then, in lines sent off course, which twist into unexpected spatial and temporal morphologies. This is why Gladman is so "disappointed to find people more anti-narrative than narrative" (*Calamities* 8). Indeed, she begins *Calamities* with a joke about "characters [that] wrote books in which the world was never mentioned, the world where one took a bus or walked through snow to buy eggs" (1). Gladman knows narrative does not faithfully "reflect" the real. But for her, narrative is less a *representational* form than a *relational* form —it grapples with "the fragility and essential confusion of (1) being in the world and (2) being in the world with others" ("Sentence" 100). Hence, *Calamities* develops a narrative form called the "calamity," which offers short snapshots of everyday life. Most calamities begin with the phrase "I began the day," and they unfold a scene of mundane relationality: waking up next to a lover, teaching a class with disruptive students, enduring a boring department meeting, or eating a delicious Snickers bar on a family vacation. *Calamity* may seem a strange word for this form, given that there is no apparent trauma in these scenes. Yet Gladman's calamities founder as she struggles to narrate even the simplest moments of relationality, as when her birthday picnic becomes a meditation on whether points or lines are the essence of communication. Even when Gladman's book does not explicitly represent them, the structures of white supremacy and heteronormativity exert pressure in *Calamities* by threatening to delegitimate any relations that cannot be mapped in their terms.

The calamity depicts how this threat inflects the most banal experiences of a Black lesbian writer while also giving form to the queer morphologies of belonging most vital to her. Take, for example, the calamity where Gladman tries to explain to her white partner, Danielle, "what it was like to be a lesbian in the 90s" (83). Gladman and Danielle attend a dinner together, and Danielle is confused about "why there were so many ex-girlfriends around who were often in committed relationships with other ex-girlfriends of yours as well as one or two others in the room." Danielle struggles to understand, Gladman jokes, because she "[grew] up with better boundaries in another part of the country." These boundaries demarcate the difference between Gladman's and Danielle's racial, affective, geographic, and generational relationships to queer kinship. Danielle "missed this decade where we just couldn't burn our bridges, where we built bridges on top of ruined bridges, and lived in an elaborate architecture of trying and failing to try then at the last minute trying." Here, a bridge is not just a liminal threshold suspended between two points—it is a line that lives, retraced by people trying, failing, and trying again to sustain one another. Black lesbian kinship in the 1990s may be improvisational, but it does not lack form. Rather, its form is not legible *as* kinship, nor is its shape evident in advance. In Gladman's words, "We didn't know what it looked like and wouldn't have called it community" (84).

Community is too inert to render the morphology of bonds forged through sex, heartbreak, and care. Narrative, however, can unfold relations without known destination. It can map the experience of "escorting some broken love into what looked like a better love, until that love broke and that old love became an even older love who moved on, perhaps to someone you roomed with or someone a person you roomed with once loved" (83–84). Queer kinship is not so much the family one chooses as a family that accumulates over time. Its diagram is dynamic, and the categories are neither exclusive nor closed. Friends fold into lovers, lovers into friends, exes into roommates, caretakers into matchmakers, and so on. As the lines accumulate, they leave affective traces. Gladman notes that there often "floated some strange tension, residual of something that happened fifteen years ago, which no one remembers but which everyone holds vigil" (83). The inability to recollect these residues as memory does not obstruct kinship. In fact, the relationship to a residue sometimes becomes a more durable bond than the relationship that created it.

Queers need genealogy, then. In Gladman's hands, narrative gives form to such ineffable and dynamic relational economies, and it traces how they take shape through and around intersecting forces of race, sexuality, age, and affect. Yet, as *Calamities* stresses, narrative is also a form through which these relations survive. Indeed, after the dinner with Gladman's exes, Danielle re-creates the grilled peaches with balsamic reduction that were prepared by "a person who was now in love with my [Gladman's] best friend's ex-lover, my best friend who was once an old love, but is now my friend Chubby who has Kristy and kids" (84). Danielle makes the peaches for a "different gathering of people," which has "no ex-girlfriends and no friends of ex-girlfriends." As a consequence, the gathering is "not as warm as the previous gathering and the guests were not as old. They didn't remember the 90s in the way I did and didn't have fourteen bridges built over one piece of water and didn't have water." The peaches are a point on a line of queer belonging that changes drastically over time and yet still remains a source of nourishment and dependence. Gladman suggests that this palimpsestic kinship lives through the recursive accumulation of story lines, which Danielle's dinner lacks because it excludes the extending lines of current and former lovers, partners, friends, and dependents. The recipe is the same, but the most important ingredients are missing. Danielle's generation may benefit from an increasing legibility of LGBTQ+ identities, but that legibility does not necessarily secure more stable bonds or better kin. For Gladman's generation, the lines may be hard to follow, but they can be read—and while the lines keep twisting, they do not break.

Thus, queer narrative theory finds queerness not only in the fracturing of lines but also in the relations they unfurl. In this respect, queer narrative theory converges with the relational formalism of "weak theory."[38] As Wai Chee Dimock argues, weak theory follows "wayward lines of association, oblique to an existing system, pulling away from it and stretching it in unexpected ways" (736). As Gladman shows, language is a form of dispossession that makes blackness and queerness wayward in the first place. Narrative can unfold this calamity, and in this movement chart alternative lines of belonging that enable queer kinship to endure.

Relational Formalism: Queer Narrative Theory

How do contemporary writers tell the story of kinship in a way that sustains its queerness? This is an open question in a moment when relationality is being transformed by a range of social and material forces. As Nelson puts it, "When or how do *new kinship systems mime older nuclear-family arrangements* and when or how do they *radically recontextualize them in a way that constitutes a rethinking of kinship?* How can you tell; or, rather, who's to tell?" (*Argonauts* 14).[39] This essay has offered queer narrative theory as a method poised to address this question. Queer narrative theory asks how forms figure and sustain queer relations of belonging in and across time. It approaches these forms in nonidealized terms, as irreducibly and ambivalently marked by differences in gender, sexuality, race, and generation, among other vectors of social

power. Queer narrative theory does not assume that queerness is best narrated as a punctual rupture. Antinarrativity is just one story of queerness, not its essence. Instead, queer narrative theory traces the affective and social agencies that narrative extends to queer belonging. In this story, queerness does not shatter narrative; and narrative does not suffocate queerness. Their relation is less antagonistic, more dependent. But their kinship is no less queer.

Notes

I am deeply grateful to Caroline Levine, Jennifer Spitzer, Brian Glavey, Jonathan Culler, Megan Cole Paustian, Laura Davies, Cori McKenzie, and Carolyn Sorisio, as well as to audiences at Cornell University, West Chester University, and Durham University, for their generative feedback. This argument began as a presentation for Robyn Warhol and Amy Shuman's Project Narrative seminar, Queer and Feminist Narrative Theories, held at Ohio State University in 2017. Thank you to the organizers and participants for their insight and encouragement.

1. See Jagose; Halberstam, *In a Queer Time*; Stockton; Freeman, *Time Binds*; and Dinshaw et al. For queer affirmations of sequence, see Warhol, "Making"; Fawaz; and Amin et al.

2. To count as "queer," de Lauretis continues, a text must also disrupt "the referentiality of language and the referentiality of images" (244).

3. For a convergent critique of queer iconoclasm, see Freeman, *Beside You*.

4. On queer kinship as a practice of dependency that must be renewed, see Freeman, "Queer Belongings."

5. See Doyle and Getsy; Glavey; and Snediker.

6. On new formalisms, see Levine; Levinson; and Kornbluh.

7. On the limits of queer style, see Hurley.

8. See Foucault, "Friendship"; Roach; Butler, *Gender Trouble* and *Psychic Life*; Muñoz; Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*; Sedgwick, *Touching*; Eng and Kazanjian; and Scott.

9. I am thinking of identifications beyond lesbian and gay, such as bisexual, trans, intersex, asexual, aromantic, nonbinary, agender, genderqueer, gender-fluid, pansexual, demisexual, poly, and Two-Spirit.

10. See also Love, "Queerness" and "Playing."

11. See Duggan.

12. On queer kinship, see D'Emilio; Weston; Freeman, *Wedding Complex* and "Queer Belongings"; Rodríguez; Eng; Rifkin; and Clarke and Haraway. On queer bonds, see Weiner and Young.

13. See also Lucey; Ohi; McCallum; Pérez; Seitler; Young; and Lanser, "Toward (a Queerer) More (Feminist) Narratology."

14. On the affective and incipiently social relations of queer reading, see Bradway.

15. On autotheory, see Fournier; Reid.

16. See Nelson, "Riding."

17. See Edelman; Dean, *Beyond Sexuality*.

18. See Jakobson; Lodge. On plot, see Brooks.

19. On queer contiguity, see Dinshaw.

20. On theory and the everyday in *The Argonauts*, see Pearl.

21. For a convergent methodology, see Ahmed.

22. See Pearl; Paige; Wiegman; Silbergleid; and Mitchell. On how *The Argonauts* structures reading, see Stacey; Ioanes.

23. See also Freeman, *Time Binds*.

24. See Lanser, "Toward a Feminist Narratology"; Nancy K. Miller; Warhol, *Having*; and Warhol et al. On narrative's affective norms, see Punday; Kim.

25. For a different take on closure, see Seitler.

26. See also Fraiman.

27. Queer disability studies values dependency. See McRuer; Gallop; Kafer; McRuer and Mollow; and Clare.

28. See Berlant. On narrative and attachment, see Butler, *Giving*. Referring to Butler's *Undoing Gender*, Nelson yearns for "writing that dramatizes the ways in which we are *for another or by virtue of another*, not in a single instance, but from the start and always" (*Argonauts* 60).

29. For a critique of Nelson's negotiation of racial difference, see Mayer. The extent to which Nelson's performative misunderstandings acknowledge her relationship to colonialism, or appropriate indigenous epistemologies, remains an open question for Mayer.

30. On the queerness of surprise, see Sedgwick, *Touching* and *Weather*; Berlant and Edelman.

31. For relevant discussions of trans narrative, see Preciado 236–64; Prosser; Spade; Drabinksi; Halberstam, *In a Queer Time* and *Trans**; Snorton; Gill-Peterson; Chu and Drager; and Currah and Stryker. For Harry's self-narrative, see Dodge.

32. For a convergent argument, see Amin.

33. See Halberstam, *In a Queer Time*; Roof; Jagose; Rohy, *Lost Causes*; and McCallum and Tuhkanen.

34. On queer abstraction, see Harper; Getsy; Amin et al.; and Cooper et al.

35. On blackness and fugitivity, see Harney and Moten.

36. See Patterson; Spillers; and Hartman, *Scenes*, *Lose*, and *Wayward Lives*.

37. See Sharpe, "Lose" and *In the Wake*.

38. On weak theory, see Dimock; Saint-Amour; and Sedgwick, *Touching* and *Weather*.

39. Nelson cites and rewrites Butler, "Body."

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Abstract: This essay contests the antinarrative foundations of queer literary studies. Antinarrativity understands narrative as a conservative form that abets heteronormativity by imposing a coherence and linearity on subjectivity and meaning. By contrast, this essay reframes narrative as a relational form rife with affordances for figuring and sustaining queer bonds. I trace these affordances through contemporary queer kinship narratives, including Paul B. Preciado's *Testo Junkie*, Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*, and Renee Gladman's *Calamities*. These texts reveal unexpectedly queer potentials within address, contiguity, closure, and even linearity, which queer theory misses when it defines narrative as inherently teleological and when it locates queerness primarily in transgressive ruptures. This essay discovers queerness instead within mundane and messy attachments that endure across time and space. Queer narrative theory thus emerges in this essay as a relational formalism well-suited to debates about the shapes queerness takes now.