

## **Metalepsis and/as Queer Desire: Queer Narratology and the ‘Unnatural’**

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ABSTRACT: After tracing the connection between metalepsis, originally defined as a transgression of narrative levels, and the term ‘unnatural’ in various strands of narratology, this article argues that unnatural narratology, a postclassical approach specifically dedicated to non- or antimimetic narrative phenomena like metalepsis, follows what Eve Sedgwick calls *paranoid* inquiry. The perspective of queer narratology subsequently weighs in on discussions of ‘naturalness’ and ‘unnaturalness’ in a reparative effort: Metalepsis, as theorized in this paper, is expressive of the queer failure at being ‘natural’ and thus possesses a potential to articulate desires that are usually made invisible, inconceivable, or unintelligible by the normative framework and exclusionary rhetoric of narratology. Case studies of the video game *What Remains of Edith Finch* (2017) and the film musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001) complement my theoretical deliberations and show that metalepsis can be more than ‘unnatural’ by affirming desires grounded in positive affects related to togetherness, belonging, and unity.

KEYWORDS: metalepsis; unnatural narratology; paranoia; queer narratology; affect; reparative reading

Unfortunately, the word “unnatural” carries a large amount of cultural baggage that has nothing to do with these narratological investigations, which are “unnatural” only in the socio-linguistic sense [...]. Unnatural narratology has no position on the nature/culture debate and does not designate any social practices or behavior as natural or unnatural. This term will inevitably cause a certain amount of confusion among the uninformed, but since the name is now fairly well established all are prepared to live with its natural (and unnatural) consequences.

(Alber et al., “Introduction” 4)

### **Introduction: Uninformed, Unnatural, Undone?**

In his entry on “Unnatural Narrative” in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, Jan Alber identifies four main topics for further investigation, one of which calls for the “fusion of the study of the unnatural with feminist, queer, and/or postcolonial approaches.” Alber is right in stating that feminist, queer, and postcolonial approaches in narratology largely remain desiderata. However, I doubt that unnatural narratology and the other approaches Alber refers to can be effectively ‘fused.’ In fact, the relationship between antimimetic phenomena such as metalepsis—or unnatural narratology, for that matter—and queer narratology, the

field within which I situate my deliberations in the following, is not as intuitive as it appears at first glance. Despite great efforts of unnatural narratology to reclaim the ‘unnaturalness’ of metalepsis as something positive, in this paper I want to make a point for viewing metalepsis in terms other than the ‘unnatural.’ I have argued elsewhere that the expression ‘unnatural’ echoes the naturalized status of heteronormativity in narrative<sup>1</sup> as well as scholarly discourse; “antimimetic phenomena and queerness cannot be made sense of in the context of what in this discussion is commonly referred to as natural narrative, i.e., narrative that performatively reproduces (and thus stabilizes) heteronormativity through mimesis” (Zitzelsberger 140). While I maintain that the language used in scholarship functions as a form of framing which determines the (cultural) intelligibility of its objects of study,<sup>2</sup> I also acknowledge that unnatural narratology is not as one-dimensional as my previous argument may have suggested. However, the implications of terminology cannot be cast aside, which is why this paper will offer a more nuanced account of the ‘unnatural’ from the perspective of queer narratology. Queer studies’ focus on alternative epistemologies and on “how specific forms of knowing, being, belonging, and embodying are prevented from emerging in the first place” (Freeman 11) will inevitably lead me to address the contested term ‘unnatural’ in reference to metalepsis by drawing attention to the heteronormative bias and exclusionary rhetoric that prevail in narratological research.<sup>3</sup>

As Monika Fludernik outlines, the term ‘unnatural’ is easily associated with “moralistic, phallogocentric, heterosexual and generally conservative ideologies of the natural and their rejection, if not demonization, of the (unnatural, perverse) Other” (357). However, unnatural narratologists repeatedly stress that it is not their intention to dip into such value judgements. Instead, they revert to definitions of ‘natural’ narrative and assume that ‘unnatural’ narratives, in contrast, feature either impossibilities (which is the defining criterion of the ‘unnatural’ per Alber; see *Unnatural* 14) or deviate from mimetic modes of representation. Brian Richardson, for example, suggests that ‘unnaturalness’ manifests in “representations that contravene the presuppositions of nonfictional narratives, violate mimetic expectations and the practices of realism, and defy the conventions of existing, established genres” (3). While the perspective of queer narratology in itself could attempt to ‘undo’ the harmful ascription of the ‘unnatural’ to narratives of any kind, considering the connotations the term possesses regardless of Alber et al.’s convictions, in the following I take a different route. After

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<sup>1</sup> In line with Robyn Warhol, I use the term “narrative” inclusively in reference to both story and discourse (24).

<sup>2</sup> Following Rita Felski, I conceive of texts as nonhuman actors (162-72), which are therefore involved in questions of intelligibility (see also Butler’s work) as much as legibility.

<sup>3</sup> I wish to thank the organizers of the 2019 PGF for the opportunity to present my paper on “Closeted Narratology: Metalepsis as Queer Signifying Practice,” which was a shortened version of the aforementioned essay, “On the Queer Rhetoric of Metalepsis.” I am grateful for the comments during the Q&A session and the feedback I received for the initial article on the matter. My discussions with Julia Siwek and Florian Weinzierl raised significant questions about the connection between ‘queer’ and the ‘unnatural,’ on which I elaborate in this article, and Selina Foltinek and Alexandra Hauke made useful suggestions concerning methodology.

looking at the connection between metalepsis and the ‘unnatural’ in classical, postclassical, and intersectional narratology, I will argue that unnatural narratology, through its reliance on ‘natural’ narrative and the ‘un’ prefix, follows what Eve Sedgwick calls *paranoid* inquiry.<sup>4</sup> I subsequently read metalepsis through a *reparative* lens of positive affect to show how it expresses desires that are far from ‘unnatural,’ impossible, or antimimetic. As exemplary case studies of the video game *What Remains of Edith Finch* (2017) and the film *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001) will demonstrate, metalepsis is not only related to desires of belonging, togetherness, and unity; it is also inherently queer in its approach to establish contact between that which is usually considered mutually exclusive. Such a reparative angle prompts narratology to loosen its structuralist corset and promotes a rethinking of metalepsis and narrative in queer terms that move beyond the ‘natural’/‘unnatural’ dichotomy.

### **Informing Narrative: Classical, Postclassical, and Intersectional Perspectives on Metalepsis**

It is not in the scope of this article to ponder the origins of metalepsis and its subsequent development in much detail. Instead, I want to address the status of metalepsis as an ‘unnatural’ occurrence in narrative in the various stages of its narratological conceptualization. First gaining prominence in French structuralism (‘classical’ narratology, if we want to consider periodization), metalepsis has originally been described as “any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse” (Genette 234-35). For Gérard Genette, the violation of the boundaries of the text, be it a transgression of narrative levels or the implicit tangency of the border separating text and context (‘reality’), becomes the distinctive feature of metalepsis. Such transgressions evoke “an effect of strangeness that is either comical [...] or fantastic” (Genette 235), which already puts metalepsis into conversation with the ‘unnatural,’ because this kind of border crossing is simply impossible, “bear[ing] on the question of whether the represented scenarios or events *could exist* in the real world or not” (Alber et al., “What Really Is” 104-5). Emphasizing the criterion of actualizability, Alber et al. build on a mimetic understanding of fiction, which they will eventually try to work against in their notion of unnatural narratology. The classification of metalepsis as ‘unnatural’ therefore also highlights the antimimetic nature of the phenomenon. As Werner Wolf argues, the

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<sup>4</sup> A brief note on terminology: I am using the terms *paranoid* and *reparative* in line with Eve Sedgwick, who introduces them in *Touching Feeling* as qualifiers for reading practices. A *paranoid* reading, as I will show below, is characterized by negative affects and will look at texts skeptically or suspiciously, trying to outsmart the text, if you will, by looking at the shortcomings or failures of narrative. I thereby understand affect as the way in which feelings manifest and *affect* modes of being in the world, which I first and foremost connect to questions of epistemology (the ways in which we can conceive of bodies and desires) and morphology (the shapes bodies and desires take). In this sense, *paranoid* or *reparative* readings are a way of addressing the attitude or orientation the reading subject takes toward that which it reads. See also Rita Felski’s *The Limits of Critique* and Sara Ahmed’s “Queer Feelings.”

“defining paradoxiality of metalepsis,” a paradox initially observed by Genette, “obviously affiliates it with ‘unnatural narration’” (“Unnatural” 117).

While the ‘unnaturalness’ of metalepsis appears only implicitly in classical narratology as a perceived effect, the notion is explicitly and actively explored in various strands of postclassical narratology, a framework within which unnatural narratology can easily be situated as it draws on classical narratology to interpret phenomena that cannot be made sense of in terms of real-world parameters (Alber, *Unnatural* 19; Bell and Alber 166). The term ‘postclassical narratology’ thus suggests a move beyond the limits of classical, i.e., structuralist, narratology by broadening the scope of discussions of narrative, for example, through a transmedial expansion of its analytical inventory and contextual approaches (Alber and Hansen 1). Genette’s definition of metalepsis has been challenged by postclassical developments in several ways, including the question of narrativity and the notion of internally hierarchized narrative levels.<sup>5</sup> Jan-Noël Thon, for instance, argues that the notion of ‘worlds’ provides more useful terminology to describe metalepsis in media other than narrative literature (88). Indeed, most transmedial accounts of metalepsis feature the term (sub)world in their definitions (e.g. Wolf, “Metareference” 50), and Alice Bell and Jan Alber have proposed a cognitive model of metalepsis that builds on possible worlds theory. Bell and Alber “discriminate between, on the one hand, the process of world making—the cognitive reconstruction of ontological metalepsis—and, on the other hand, that of meaning making: the interpretation of metaleptic jumps” (175). As such, their approach speaks to the study of the ‘unnatural’ in two ways: While they foreground the ‘unnatural’ quality of a very specific type of metalepsis on the basis of its deviation from real-world parameters, they simultaneously address the challenges of making sense of the impossibilities posed by metalepsis.<sup>6</sup>

A postclassical, cognitivist approach to narratology facilitates a sensible engagement with phenomena that resist categorization in terms of the means that are cognitively available in and that help to decode everyday situations. As Alber et al. assert in their essay “Unnatural Narratives, Unnatural Narratology: Beyond Mimetic Models,” “one may try to approach the unnatural by reshuffling and recombining existing scripts and frames” (129). In other words, metalepsis prompts us to think differently about the possibilities and impossibilities afforded by our own lived experiences and fictional representations. Erwin Feyersinger offers a similar approach when he develops a model of conceptual blending of metalepsis and contends that metalepsis “is a phenomenon that relies very much on common sense and beliefs, i.e., on everyday concepts. A metalepsis is only paradoxical if we judge it according to our

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<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this paper, I am only focusing on narrative metalepsis. However, a transgeneric transfer of the concept has also been attempted by Wolf (“Metaisierung” 59-61).

<sup>6</sup> This cognitivist approach offers some new insights into the scope of metalepsis: In their article, Bell and Alber consider horizontal metalepsis (168); Wolf addresses lateral jumps between storyworlds (116); and Feyersinger conceptualizes crossovers and metalepsis as related phenomena (chapter 5).

expectations and knowledge about reality” (144). Blending theory and the general rearrangement of frames and scripts both constitute ways of rendering the ‘unnatural’ (mentally) possible—that is to say, both approaches explore the capabilities of human cognition in understanding ‘unnatural’ phenomena (that which is unknown) against the backdrop of or in contradistinction to mimeticism (that which is already known). In a response to a critique of their previously mentioned paper, Alber et al. reiterate that certain “narratives—we call them unnatural narratives—urge us to create new frames or impossible blends, and this is one of the striking capabilities of fiction that we are trying to highlight when we speak of unnatural narratology” (“What Really Is” 107-08). Postclassical developments in narratology thus give rise to studies specifically dedicated to the ‘unnatural,’ especially metalepsis, which, as most scholars in the field agree, is facilitated by and depends on reworking the mimetic bias of most existing narrative theories.

While I agree that previous narratological discussions of non- or antimimetic phenomena often fall short, I am hesitant to call for a narratology concerned exclusively with ‘unnaturalness.’ The inherent relationality and referentiality of the term ‘unnatural’ (which can, albeit to lesser extent, also be asserted about ‘postclassical’) leads me to question whether the intention of providing a space for negotiating such phenomena can be effectively realized. Fludernik also maintains a critical stance as far as terminology is concerned, arguing that what

“unnatural” narratology sets out to do is to escape from mimeticism. However, quite ironically so, by setting itself in opposition to the natural (what is unnatural must be the opposite of “natural” or mimetic), it falls into the trap of having to acknowledge the reality of the natural in the shape of the mimetic, even if the idea is to trace the non-mimetic underside of the mimetic. “Unnatural” [n]arratology thus partakes of a deconstructive methodology, inverting the dichotomy and, in typically Derridean fashion, colonizes the mimetic realm by means of its hitherto marginalized complement, the so-called unnatural. (365)

It appears as though unnatural narratology cannot escape the notion of ‘natural’ narrative, which results in the instability of both concepts since, as Wolf points out, they “vary according to cultural and historical parameters” (“Unnatural” 118). Besides the insistence of Alber et al. that the ‘unnatural’ provides, in their view, a positive framing and that their narratological discussions of the ‘unnatural’ do not dip into value judgements, one cannot evade the question of contextual and epistemological hierarchies completely, given the intersectionality of narrative representation and the stark polarity of the approaches outlined by Fludernik. Real-world parameters (a questionable notion to begin with, although we are following it for now to ensure coherence) may shape fiction through mimesis and narrative theory through its pronounced mimetic bias. However, fiction also informs the norms that seemingly precede the formation of fiction, norms that are perceived as though they compose said real-world parameters. This reciprocity between ‘reality’ and ‘fiction’—two terms that need to be seen as heavily constructed—in the ways I am describing it here follows Judith Butler’s work on performativity, a notion that can also be applied to culture to a certain degree (cf. Hamscha).

I am suggesting that narratology would benefit from an intersectional perspective<sup>7</sup> that acknowledges the intricate connection between social norms and the function of narrative in (re)inscribing them into the cultural imaginary by means of repetition, without *a priori* focusing on whether or not fiction corresponds with ‘reality.’

How, then, does intersectionality (or what we might call intersectional narratology) help us understand metalepsis and its relation to the ‘unnatural’? In a first step, intersectionality questions the naturalized status of mimesis, which is the result of a process of construction. I argue that mimesis is performative in Butler’s sense, that it constitutes a “reiteration of a norm or set of norms [that] acquires an act-like status in the present [and] conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition” (*Bodies* xxi). ‘Natural’ narrative, following this reasoning, appears as ‘natural’ because of repetition, the reiterative practice of claiming to be or posing as the norm, which inevitably results in the perceived naturalization of mimetic discourse and, eventually, its very status as norm in narrative. As such, both ‘naturalness’ and ‘unnaturalness’ are but an effect produced by this performativity and not the identificatory core of any kind of narrative. Metalepsis does not follow this reproductive logic of mimesis, which, however, does not mean that it is automatically ‘unnatural.’ Instead, by not subjecting to the perceived norm, metalepsis reveals the naturalization of mimesis and challenges the dichotomy of ‘natural’/‘unnatural’ altogether: “metalepsis *queers* the contested binary of naturalness and unnaturalness by not following straight lines but, rather, by cutting across them, *intervening* in the self-citation of heteronormativity [and other norms that may have acquired a naturalized status] in and through narrative” (Zitzelsberger 136, emphasis added). My reading of metalepsis thus resonates with Susan Lanser’s assertion that intersectionality constitutes “a particularly fruitful ground for narratology that is pliable enough to address feminist and queer interests and comprehensive enough to advance historical and cross-cultural inquiry” (28). Intersectional narratology acknowledges that there is a connection between texts, their form, and the contexts from which they emerge, and that it is also part of the discipline of narratology to “identify and demystify the workings of those norms in and through narrative” (Warhol and Lanser 8). While Alber et al. assume that the ‘cultural baggage’ of the term ‘unnatural’ has nothing to do with (the ways one approaches) narrative, an intersectional perspective will disagree—the rhetoric we use to talk about narrative and its ideological connotations and implications has *everything* to do with narratology.

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<sup>7</sup> In this paper, I mostly focus on queerness and its relation to gender and sexuality. However, considering the genealogy of intersectionality and its indebtedness to Critical Race Theory, I am sure that more work can be done with regard to narratology in general and metalepsis in particular. The inherent fluidity and ambiguity of queerness that my case studies will highlight as their source of reparation and restoration may well be used as first impulses to rethink metalepsis intersectionally beyond gender and sexuality.

## Naturalizing Desire: Unnatural Narratology, Paranoia, and Queer Failure

While I elaborated on the relationship between metalepsis and the ‘unnatural’ from the vantage point of very different strands of narratology in the previous section, I now want to focus more specifically on the possibilities of queer narratology in the study of antimimetic phenomena like metalepsis and on how the term ‘queer’ can help to move beyond the ascription of ‘naturalness’ and ‘unnaturalness’ to narrative. Drawing on Sedgwick’s work on affect, I will show that unnatural narratology follows what we might call a *paranoid reading* of metalepsis, one that focuses on what this phenomenon cannot do or cannot be. Even though Sedgwick acknowledges that a lot of paranoia happens especially in the field of queer studies, I want to highlight a specific subset of queer theory that follows unnatural narratologists’ original argument, namely the reworking of the mimetic bias of previous narratological approaches, without participating in secondary (and thus truly unnatural, i.e., constructed) ascriptions like ‘unnaturalness.’ However, instead of assuming that it “goes without saying that the term ‘deviation’ has a positive connotation” or that the “use of the term ‘unnatural’ is similar to the use of the term ‘queer’ in queer studies” (Alber et al., “Unnatural” 132n5), I recognize that outness is not always “an historically available and affordable option” (Butler, “Critically” 19; see also Ahmed, *Queer* 175). As a consequence, I will address the term ‘unnatural’ for its clear establishment of epistemological hierarchies and the intelligibility metalepsis is denied in the process. A queer narratological perspective, I argue, can offer a *reparative reading* of metalepsis, “a stance that looks to a work of art for solace and replenishment rather than viewing it as something to be interrogated and indicted” (Felski 151). I want to give room to metalepsis and to allow narratology to acknowledge the potentialities of metalepsis rather than its shortcomings as a narrative phenomenon that is defined by what it is not—mimetic.

As indicated above, the initial claim of unnatural narratology is one I can easily identify with. Assuming that classical narratology (as well as the postclassical transfer to other genres, media, and contexts) and its structuralist inventory suffice to adequately frame all texts, either by fitting them into a prefigured norm or by marking them as a deviation, neglects the vast diversity of narrative and the development of new forms of storytelling. One of the most important points unnatural narratology makes is that “there is a strong bias in *most* narrative theories to treat all narratives *as if* real-world limitations applied” (Alber et al., “What Really Is” 111), which Alber et al. call “mimetic reductionism” (“Introduction” 1). In line with this argument, one could almost consider their approach as reparative in its own right because Alber et al. use the term ‘unnatural’ to address the “potential meanings” of non- or antimimetic texts and the impossibilities they present us with “instead of shying away from them” (“Unnatural” 119). However, as a “strong theory of negative affect” (Sedgwick 136), paranoia is not only contingent on its alternative positioning. In fact, this is what paranoid and

reparative readings share. Paranoia also manifests in a specific tonality<sup>8</sup> or, as Rita Felski argues in *The Limits of Critique*, a specific mood:

All too often, we see critics tying themselves into knots in order to prove that a text harbors signs of dissonance and dissent—as if there were no other conceivable way of justifying its merits. [...] Both aesthetics and social worth, it seems, can only be cashed out in terms of a rhetoric of *againstness*. [...] *We shortchange the significance of art by focusing on the “de” prefix (its power to demystify, destabilize, denaturalize) at the expense of the “re” prefix: its ability to recontextualize, reconfigure, or recharge perception.* Works of art do not only subvert but also convert; they do not only inform but also transform—a transformation that is not just a matter of intellectual readjustment but one of affective realignment as well (a shift of mood, a sharpened sensation, an unexpected surge of affinity or disorientation). (17)

Despite their efforts to rethink narratology, Alber et al. overemphasize the ‘de’ (or ‘un’) prefix and thus engage in paranoid inquiry, which Sedgwick asserts “is drawn toward and tends to construct symmetrical relations, in particular, symmetrical epistemologies” (126). Unnatural narratology, *qua essence*, cannot be made sense of without mimeticism—‘natural’ narrative—as its counterpart. The symmetrical relationship between these terms forfeits its critical potential inasmuch as the description of phenomena like metalepsis still relies on notions of normalcy and normativity against which deviating means of expression are pitted. Even though much attention is brought to such narrative techniques because of unnatural narratology, Alber et al. fail to let go of previous conceptualizations that cannot fully explain or comprehend metalepsis and instead perpetuate the negative framing they wish to rework. Accepting metalepsis in its deviation—as a device that inevitably will disturb, disrupt, and surprise—still means to acknowledge that metalepsis constitutes a deviation.

While the basic premises of unnatural narratology underscore that “a mimetic approach amounts to trivializing literature” (Alber et al., “Unnatural” 129), its line of argument, and more specifically the very use of the term ‘unnatural,’ runs the risk of essentializing narrative phenomena. Metalepsis is readily perceived as ‘other’ to mimetic modes of representation and reduced to an essence that is, through the use of the ‘un’ prefix, formulated *ex negativo*, and thus as the inability to become legible within a mimetic understanding of fiction and thus as the constitutive failure at being ‘natural.’ This is also where the comparison between the use of the terms ‘unnatural’ and ‘queer’ falls short: As Fludernik notes, unlike “queer studies, which queers the heterosexual dichotomy between men and women, [...] the spirit of ‘unnatural’ narratology would need a term that signifies a third space or position from which to analyze the negotiations between the mimetic and its various contraventions” (366).

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<sup>8</sup> The way Alber et al. address previous approaches and position themselves suggests a reparative approach on the surface as well: “we all argue that most existing narrative theories offer a false tonality that neglects and excludes an entire literature because it cannot be contained within the parameters of a mimetic framework” (Alber et al., “What Is” 374). However, it is this reliance on the natural and previous approaches, the establishment of symmetrical relations (see below), that drives unnatural narratology toward paranoid inquiry.

Abandoning the ‘natural’ or mimetic frameworks of narratology cannot work via the ‘unnatural,’ as Wolf observes, because the “abolishing of ‘natural’ categories would entail abolishing the description of the ‘unnatural’ as well” (“Unnatural” 136). While Alber et al. are rather transparent in their limited applicability (they mostly focus on ‘unnatural’ narratives and do not want to get rid of previous conceptualizations or the notion of the ‘natural’ completely, as Wolf suggests), the term ‘unnatural’ is too misleading and charged to do justice to their theoretical deliberations. The rigor with which they nonetheless defend their choice of the term, despite being provided with alternatives by other narratologists,<sup>9</sup> attests to their paranoid mood and mode of inquiry. Unnatural narratology seemingly dismantles the normative corset of classical narratology by directing its attention toward disregarded and often overlooked phenomena. However, by focusing on the ‘unnatural,’ normative assumptions about narrative are reinforced: Mimesis is posited as the norm, as ‘natural,’ as comprehensible, familiar, legible, and also (at least implicitly) as intelligible. The ‘naturalness’ of mimesis, as discussed earlier, is performative in its nature, and the ‘unnatural’ cannot but address the ‘natural’ in an act of constructing symmetrical epistemologies, either in the way of insisting that ‘unnatural’ narratives are not any less important than ‘natural’ ones or by inverting the hierarchy between the two notions. As a consequence, unnatural narratology contributes to the naturalization and normalization of mimetic discourse, against which it inevitably and perpetually will situate itself and its objects of study.

This brings me to the perspective queer narratology offers in discussing metalepsis. Before considering a reparative reading of metalepsis, I want to briefly elaborate on the concept of failure addressed earlier. There are two basic ways in which we can approach metalepsis’s failure at being ‘natural,’ namely (1) removing the term ‘unnatural’ from scholarly discussions and thus casting aside the specter of the ‘natural’ and introducing a new, more sensible, terminology, or (2) using the aspect of failure itself as a means of restoration rather than as a marker of deviation and source of negative affect. Even though Alber et al. frequently point toward their intention of opting for (2), it is the reliance on the ‘natural’ addressed under (1) that makes this endeavor almost impossible, precisely because of their strong insistence on the term ‘unnatural.’ In contrast, ‘queer’—as theory, affect, orientation—can help, similar to the alternative position suggested by Fludernik, to highlight the potentialities of failure inherent to the ‘unnatural’ in a positive manner, which can serve as the basis for a reparative reading of metalepsis. To reiterate, metalepsis fails at being mimetic, for it constitutes an antimimetic practice, and so it also fails at being ‘natural’ or symbolically reproductive. Following the initial impulse of unnatural narratology to look at metalepsis in its deviation without making any value judgements, it can easily be argued that metalepsis merely offers an alternative mode of being and storytelling, an alternative to mimesis. Considering the connections between mimesis and heteronormativity on the basis of their respective modes of reproduction, we see that the term ‘unnatural’ cannot be looked at in isolation: Mimesis

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<sup>9</sup> Fludernik, for example, suggests the terms non-natural (362), impossible, and phantasmal (366).

reproduces the world from which it emerges; and heteronormativity performatively reproduces its own structures. As a consequence, mimesis contributes to the solidification and stabilization of heteronormativity through repetition in the context of fiction. If metalepsis is indeed ‘unnatural,’ then it is denied the intelligibility of the ‘natural.’ The failure of metalepsis, from the perspective of unnatural narratology, is thereby invariably characterized by negative affects because its perspective forecloses metalepsis the possibility to become viable and meaningful in its deviation as it remains chained to the ‘natural,’ to that which is perceived and constituted as the norm.

We might, however, consider the ways in which this constitutive failure poses a “threat to the social ordering of life itself” (Ahmed, “Feelings” 423), and how viewing this failure in terms of queer subjectivity severs the ties to the ‘natural.’ As Elizabeth Grosz writes in “Experimental Desire: Rethinking Queer Subjectivities,” queer pleasures “show that one does not have to settle for the predictable, the formulaic, the respected,” which is why alternative sexualities and epistemologies (or alternative modes of storytelling that elude the normative demands of mimesis) confront heteronormativity with “its own contingency, and openendedness, its own tenuous hold over the multiplicity of sexual impulses and possibilities,” and, eventually, also its “own un-naturalness, its compromise and reactive status” (208). In other words, metalepsis confronts narrative with the naturalization mimetic principles of representation possess. It lays bare the constructedness of both the work in which it occurs and the reproductive logic—of mimesis, of heteronormativity—through which narrative and ideology sustain themselves and each other. From the perspective of queer narratology, then, failing at being ‘natural’ or mimetic is nothing to be associated with negative affects; rather, queer failure becomes a means of substantiating queer subjectivity and of objecting to the naturalization of straightness in narrative. As such, the ‘queer art of failure,’ to borrow from the title of Judith/Jack Halberstam’s book, facilitates a meaningful engagement with metalepsis as an antimimetic narrative phenomenon: “Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world” (2-3). Failure, in this context, becomes a vehicle for positive affects and carries significant potentialities to rethink narrative outside of oppressive frameworks such as heteronormativity or classical narratology, and beyond the contested and reductive ‘natural’/‘unnatural’ dichotomy. Metalepsis articulates the “basic desire to live life otherwise” (Halberstam 2) and though it is not granted the privilege of being intelligible or legible within a mimetic framework, viewing metalepsis as queer indeed loosens the grip heteronormativity and mimesis have on narrative. The threat posed by the queer desires of metalepsis, in sum, speaks to the phenomenon’s power to distort “*previously ascribed notions of naturalness, normalcy and normativity employed to fix narrative in place*” (Zitzelsberger 133). Metalepsis makes queer failure productive and, where unnatural narratology cannot leave the ‘natural’ behind, queer narratology provides discursive, affective, epistemic, and rhetorical frames within which this potential can unfold.

In this sense, queer narratology can offer a reparative reading and move beyond the critical—or, in Sedgwick’s words, paranoid—mood of previous scholarship. In addition, the perspective of queer narratology opens up the discourse surrounding narrative to help understand alternative shapes narrative may take. Felski elaborates on Sedgwick’s concept in her approach to postcritique and argues that engaging in the act of interpretation “is to feel oneself addressed by the text as if by a message or a proclamation, to defer to a presence rather than diagnose an absence. The words on the page do not disguise truth but disclose it” (32). As such, the “desire of a reparative impulse,” Sedgwick contends, “is additive and accretive” (149). How can we subsequently rethink metalepsis in terms other than the ‘unnatural,’ namely through a reparative lens of positive affect and queer subjectivity? For this purpose, I want to briefly return to Genette and his notion of metalepsis as a transgression of narrative levels, a violation of textual borders, and its further development. In this article, I considered various definitions, such as the movement between subworlds, jumps between parallel worlds (also across textual borders), impossible blends, or my own formulation of metalepsis as an objection to normative modes of storytelling. All of these approaches, in one way or another, ruminate on the fact that metalepsis is disruptive and cuts across impenetrable lines separating (onto)logically differentiated syntactic units of a text. The perceived effect of the here implied impossibility (and, by extension, the antimimetic nature of metalepsis) is often described as ‘unnaturalness.’ Instead of focusing on this rather conflicting aspect of metalepsis, I suggest conceptualizing metalepsis in terms of the *desire to connect that which is usually perceived as mutually exclusive*.

Working with the spatial imagery of Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology* (169), metalepsis would then signify a contact zone, a moment of proximity, a queering of parallels. Metalepsis has a queer impetus for it brings together, builds bridges, and creates unity. A reparative reading would not consider metalepsis to be transgressive or subversive but rather as a practice that is both transformative and emergent. Perceiving metalepsis as unbound, far away from mimetic regulations of legibility and intelligibility, allows it to perform queer subjectivities in terms of what could be referred to as mimetic desire:<sup>10</sup> On an affective level, metalepsis might be more mimetic than it is antimimetic. True to the imperative of mimesis, reflecting the world of which it is a representation, metalepsis showcases various alternative ways of being, (be)longing, and feeling. It does not express the ‘unnatural’ in the sense that, given real-world parameters, such transgressions cannot take place. Instead, metalepsis cherishes desires that are usually marginalized or silenced through the very norms narratives are subjected to, desires that are very much present in the ‘real world.’ Reverting to the criterion of actualizability, in conclusion I want to argue that *metalepsis realizes desires that are taken away from queer subjects, those that cannot be conceived of within*

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<sup>10</sup> I am not using the term mimetic desire in line with René Girard. I specifically want to use it in reference to the fact that the desires articulated by metalepsis in fiction are mimetic in the sense that they are mirror images or reproductions of the extratextual world, working against the ascription of ‘unnaturalness’ to queer desires.

(hetero)normative frameworks, reinstating seemingly unobtainable realities within the realm of fiction.

### **Doing Queer: Metalepsis and Desire in *What Remains of Edith Finch* and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch***

Instead of providing an extensive theoretical discussion of metalepsis as reparative, in what follows I want to demonstrate the restorative power of metalepsis on the basis of two brief case studies. I approach key scenes from Giant Sparrow's videogame *What Remains of Edith Finch* (2017) and the 2001 film *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, directed by John Cameron Mitchell, that include metaleptic moments to show how both texts negotiate queer desires. While *What Remains of Edith Finch* features overt examples of metalepsis reminiscent of Genettian transgression, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* is characterized by more symbolical manifestations of metalepsis. I am using these two rather different examples to touch upon the limitations of a structuralist understanding of metalepsis, not only in terms of media-specific means of expressing subjectivity that diverge strongly from the original focus on narrative literature, but also in terms of how the affective dimension of metalepsis I identified in the previous section may unfold semantically rather than syntactically. Both texts share the desire to make queer contact possible: Metalepses in *What Remains of Edith Finch* function as portals to the past. It is through the interweaving of narrative levels that memories come to life, helping the player piece together the story and its protagonists to heal. In *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, metalepses help Hedwig piece together their identity. Rather than keeping Hedwig's past, their relationship with Tommy Gnosis, and their performances in the present separate, the film amalgamates its narrative levels and thereby creates unity.

The videogame *What Remains of Edith Finch* opens with a first-person perspective, the player's gaze limited to the movement of the player-character sitting on a boat. Upon looking at a notebook in one's lap, the story of Edith Finch, the game's protagonist whose name is inscribed on the cover of said notebook, begins in voice-over narration. The visuals soon transfer the player into a forest while playing as Edith herself. The story that subsequently unfolds is the only thing that remains of Edith Finch, as is revealed at the end of the game when we learn that Edith dies during the birth of her son, who now reads her diary. Indeed, narratives as remainders, as something that is bequeathed, as memories of those lost, constitute a major theme of the game. This focus on storytelling in metareferential fashion also motivates the narrative mechanics at play, such as the use of metalepsis: The transition described above, in its imagery, suggests a metaleptic jump between the realm of the game's reality (the boy reading his mother's diary) and fiction (the narrative presented in Edith's diary) that is referenced in various scenes during gameplay. The main objective of the game is to explore the house Edith grew up in. The rooms belonging to her relatives have all been locked up after their deaths. Edith suggests that her family is cursed, explaining the at times sudden and traumatic deaths of her relatives. The player must find alternative ways into the rooms to

access the narratives tied to the respective family members. The motif of books or reading is taken up here as the entry to a secret passage into the first room is hidden within a book rested against the wall. While the transition from frame narrative to the embedded narrative of Edith's diary is only implicitly metaleptic because it features a change of player-character, in this instance, Edith physically crosses a threshold intended to be uncrossable. Of course, this again only represents metaleptic imagery (or one could argue, a rhetorical metalepsis<sup>11</sup>). However, the rooms appear as manifestations of the narratives and memories of the respective family members so that, by following broad definitions of metalepsis, Edith's path through the book metaphorically constitutes a passage into another 'world.' Edith comments on this, saying that "being inside [Molly's room] for the first time, I felt like I'd stepped behind a painting."<sup>12</sup>

The *trompe-l'œil*-effect described by Edith is linked to actual instances of metalepsis through homology: Reading books, notes, or diaries within these rooms spawns embedded narratives (embedded in the already embedded narrative of Edith as a form of *mise en abyme*, that is) in which the player either plays as a different character (e.g. in Molly's episode, where Molly, in her search for food, morphs into a cat, an owl, a shark, and a monster) or interferes with the logically higher narrative level. In Barbara's room, for example, one encounters a comic book illustrating a possible story of Barbara's death, and the player is compelled to act within the comic while never leaving Edith's realm. Similarly, playing as Lewis, a 21-year-old working at a cannery, the realms of reality and fiction cannot be separated anymore. While engaged in the monotonous work at the cannery, beheading salmon, Lewis's thoughts wander off as he imagines himself as a king. His vision, an overtly fictionalized account of himself, and his work have to be operated simultaneously, probing the player as they try to balance both levels. Inevitably, however, Lewis's vision will take over, resulting in his presumed decapitation while he is crowned king over a guillotine in the embedded narrative. The inventiveness and imaginativeness of these narratives evokes a similar effect in all cases: While we could assume that the fantastic elements of these narratives diminish and mask the severity of trauma and death, I argue that, together with their metaleptic entanglement, they keep the memories of Edith's family alive. Metalepses in *What Remains of Edith Finch* serve as a means to open passages that have previously been closed or otherwise inaccessible, be it through entering the rooms of Edith's dead family members or their stories. That is, the power of metalepsis lies in its ability to unite that which is ontologically separated, to bring fiction to life, and to

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<sup>11</sup> In contrast to ontological metalepses, rhetorical metalepses do not effectively transgress the border between (sub)worlds but merely hint at it. In Marie-Laure Ryan's terms, rhetorical metalepses do not result in interpenetration (207).

<sup>12</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, all quotes in the remainder of this section are taken from the primary sources I am discussing. I refrain from indicating time stamps as a replacement of pagination for reasons of legibility and to avoid referential ambiguities. As each playthrough of *What Remains of Edith Finch* will be different, I am indicating scenes rather than specific points in time. Similarly, my discussion of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* focuses on individual musical numbers and their relation to the film as such rather than specific points in the narrative.

move past events (the narrated) into the present (where the act of narration takes place). Drawing on the homology between the various (quasi-)metaleptic moments and the motif of the book as gateway, we see how this restorative power also holds true for the frame narrative. For the son, to whose perspective the player returns at the end of the game, the memories of his mother, whom he never had the chance to meet, and, by extension, the rest of the Finches have come alive through the act of reading. In a similar vein, these memories or narratives have become visible for the player through metalepsis.<sup>13</sup>

I thus want to stress the importance of contact, belonging, and togetherness metalepsis spotlights in *What Remains of Edith Finch*. By merging the ontologically disparate categories of reality and fiction, life and death, as well as past and present, the game advocates an understanding of being in the world that specifically resonates with queer epistemologies. Rather than being oriented toward an other, players of *What Remains of Edith Finch* find themselves within a web of reciprocal contingencies of people, time, and space. As Bonnie Ruberg contends, “rather than being linked to neoliberal narratives of linear progress, queerness is in fact far more closely tied to other ways of being in relation to space and time” (188). As a game pertaining to the genre of walking simulators, which, according to Ruberg, perform “resistance to chrononormativity” (186), *What Remains of Edith Finch* foregrounds spatiality and temporality as means of expressing queerness. In addition, the game’s non-linearity is also evident in its narrative structure. Similar to the ways in which queer temporalities turn “us backward to prior moments, forward to embarrassing utopias, and sideways to forms of being and belonging” (Freeman xiii), metalepsis allows us to access pasts, presents, and futures. It is through metalepsis that the game connects all of its narrative levels, resulting in the dissolution of epistemological and ontological boundaries and hierarchies. Its narrative appears as queer because its constituents meet on eye level. The seeming paradoxicality of metalepsis, in effect defying chrononormative ways of living, enables the narrative to highlight alternative modes of being. Death in *What Remains of Edith Finch* is neither final or absolute, nor does it mean departure or farewell. Instead, the characters live on through their memories and narratives in ways chrononormativity and mimesis cannot possibly realize. As such, metalepsis expresses the boy’s, his mother’s, their family’s, and the player’s desires to figure out their stories, a process vital in the formation of identity (raising questions of origin, belonging, and becoming). The contact established between all these characters, though situated in ontologically separate realms, in turn becomes a source of restoration, reparation, and healing. Metalepses in *What Remains of Edith Finch* show how the queer desires of eternal connectedness—the passages opened by metalepsis remain open—help overcome normatively prescribed notions of death, loss, and grief in favor of alternative epistemologies and affects.

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<sup>13</sup> One could go a step further and suggest that the interaction with the medium (which is one of the most distinctive features of videogames) is also metaleptic in nature (see Neitzel). It is through play, then, that we *experience* the past in the present, which would therefore qualify all scenes discussed earlier as metaleptic.

While *What Remains of Edith Finch* features several representations that can be read as queer because they seem out of place in the context of heteronormativity, my reading of metalepsis more overtly foregrounds the queer *aesthetics* of the game. The relation between aesthetics and representation, as I have shown, is complementary rather than contrasting. Metalepses result in a breakdown of the levels of storytelling and the story told. Such moments of collapse, in turn, can significantly substantiate a text's queer expression. A similar observation can be made concerning my second example, the film musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. The film features trans\* characters, dissociated queer identities, and spotlights the protagonist's drag aesthetic during their shows. However, I primarily want to argue that *Hedwig and the Angry Inch's* narrative structure as a musical, existing in the tension between narrative and musical numbers, sets the stage for such metaleptic moments of queer desire.

*Hedwig and the Angry Inch* follows Hedwig and their rock band, The Angry Inch, along their tour of the United States. Hedwig's journey starts in East Berlin around the time of the fall of the Berlin wall. After a (botched) sex-change surgery to make then-Hansel eligible for marriage with Sgt. Luther Robinson, Hedwig moves to the US. Their subsequent journey is motivated by disorientation and displacement: Left alone by Luther, Hedwig needs time to heal and figure out who they are, coming to terms with their identity and the difficulties their transition poses in terms of an orientation within the normative frameworks of heteronormative society. As Hedwig puts it, they must "find [their] other half." While Hedwig seems to have found it in Tommy Gnosis, their relationship turns out to be rather conflicted, and Tommy, who will eventually become a greater star than Hedwig, seemingly abandons Hedwig before their reconciliation at the end of the film, which I will elaborate on in a few moments. The presumption that Hedwig will find their other half in another person, more specifically a person whose gender expression opposes that of Hedwig, who presents as female, is grounded in Plato's *Symposium*. The key scene I want to look at in more detail is the musical number "The Origin of Love," which tells the "sad story how we became lonely, two-legged creatures," who, once separated from their counterpart, wander through the world looking for completion.

The myth of the origin of love centers on three sexes, as Hedwig explains, namely the children of the sun ("two men glued up back to back"), the children of the earth ("two girls rolled up in one"), and the children of the moon, who are "part sun, part earth, part daughter, part son." Separated by the gods, children of the sun and earth will look for completion in their other half, meaning that they are homosexual based on an asserted gender binary, and children of the moon, following a literal understanding of Plato, become heterosexual. However, the film moves beyond these reductive notions of gender and sexuality and suggests that completion—unity—an only be found in the "love for one's self" (Henry 71). This manifests itself in several ways, one of which can be found in the narrative structure of the film: The film's use of metalepsis mirrors the creation of unity, which relies on self-reference rather than heteroreference, i.e., completion is achieved not by being directed or oriented toward an other but toward oneself. "The Origin of Love," through the use of metalepses between

the level of storytelling (Hedwig performing the song) and the story told (animations of Hedwig's childhood drawings illustrating the myth), inscribes itself into the narrative surrounding it. While the song features several instances of what could be seen as visually explicit representations of metalepsis, such as the use of a split screen that signifies how both levels will ultimately blend into one another, most of the film's metaleptic moments happen on a semantic level rather than a syntactic one, showing that the two realms of narration and narrated, i.e., narrative and musical number, cannot be clearly separated. In other words, while Hedwig tells the story of "The Origin of Love," "The Origin of Love" also tells Hedwig's subsequent story—a paradoxical and reciprocal containment of signifier and signified suggestive of what Sonja Klimek terms complex metalepsis (34). As a metareferential device, metalepsis is inherently self-referential and thus elicits a comment about that which it represents as much as the act of representation, the very properties of representation and signifying processes. Reading this form of self-referentiality in conversation with "The Origin of Love" and its relationship to *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* drastically alters our understanding of Plato's myth and our perception of the characters of Hedwig and Tommy Gnosis.

The last song of the film, "Midnight Radio," explicates the idea that Hedwig might find their other half within themselves. During the number, Hedwig does not perform in their usual ambivalent drag aesthetic, but rather resembles a blend between female-presenting Hedwig and Tommy Gnosis. Looking at the changes in the *mise-en-scène* more closely, one will realize that the stage where Hedwig performs strongly digresses from previous settings, spotlighting the (onto)logical differences between the narrative prior to the song and "Midnight Radio." I argue that the last scene closes a narrative frame that had never been opened but rather positions itself as the level from which the entire film is told. The narration would, in this sense, be retrospective and part of one of Hedwig's shows, which resonates with the overall structure of the film. Following this line of argument, the conflict between Hedwig and Tommy Gnosis that can be witnessed during the film would be part of an embedded narrative, and the visual blend between them represented by Hedwig during "Midnight Radio" would constitute a form of metalepsis. This has two main implications: On the one hand, the conflict between Hedwig and Tommy is the inner conflict of Hedwig, who needs to come to terms with their two halves—as a child of the moon, they identify with both and neither of the binary gender expressions exemplified by Hedwig and Tommy. On the other hand, this queerness on the level of story is mirrored in the narrative structure, which establishes logical hierarchies between its narrative levels that are de-hierarchized through metalepsis and their self-referential interweaving.<sup>14</sup> The film connects all of its narrative levels so that, in the end, unity prevails in terms of Hedwig's newly found self-love as well as *Hedwig and the Angry Inch's*

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<sup>14</sup> This reading is sustained through visual acts of self-reference, such as Hedwig's tattoo: During the film, the tattoo on Hedwig's hip shows a face split in two, a reference to the lyrics from "The Origin of Love" and Hedwig's childhood drawings. After resuming to the animations from "The Origin of Love" in the "Midnight Radio" scene, we see Hedwig walking down an alleyway, completely naked—revealing that the tattoo now shows an intact face, suggesting that Hedwig has found unity in themselves.

poetics of self-love. In line with Linda Hutcheon's reading of metafiction as literary narcissism, though through a reparative lens, I view metalepsis as an expression of queer self-love, of the desire to be in touch with oneself, of unity also in the narrative sense. In addition to the semantic amalgamation of all its narrative levels, the film also promotes unity in narrative by referring back to "The Origin of Love" after "Midnight Radio," when the musical score is taken up again, which results in a certain ambiguity and circularity. The film uses the reference to its beginning to illustrate that identity formation is processual and dynamic rather than static; by returning to the pivotal scene of "The Origin of Love," the film engages in a rather suggestive loop of perpetual self-narration.

Similar to *What Remains of Edith Finch*, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* employs metalepsis as a means to create a sense of belonging, unity (and identity), as well as togetherness. However, instead of connecting with the inaccessible realms of fiction, death, and the past, the film shows how metalepsis can overcome the seemingly insurmountable barriers within oneself. In a more metaphorical use of the device, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* highlights the importance of transgressions in the process of self-discovery—not in the sense of the Genettian violation of textual borders, but the move beyond one's own limits and limitations. As such, the film can be used as an example of how metalepsis functions as truly reparative: In *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, metalepsis articulates the queer desire of being at one with oneself. Though outness is not always an option for queer subjects, especially in regimes that render 'deviations' from heteronormativity 'impossible' or mark them as 'unnatural,' metalepsis becomes a way of testing boundaries (of the text, the system, oneself) and overcoming them. I thus want to reiterate that I believe that metalepsis is not necessarily antimimetic. While Alber et al. make a point in distinguishing the (anti-)mimetic quality of the 'unnatural' in reference to theories by Plato and Aristotle, I am not convinced that metalepsis is "clearly anti-mimetic in the sense of Plato because it does not try to imitate or reproduce the world as we know it; rather, it transcends real-world parameters" ("What Is" 378).<sup>15</sup> Of course, some of the well-known and truly paradoxical transgressions associated with metalepsis, such as diving into the story one is reading or contact between ontologically separate realms (as in *What Remains of Edith Finch*), are difficult to identify in 'reality.' However, as a reparative and affective reading of metalepsis shows, the desires expressed by such fictional transgressions are in a way truly mimetic—and 'real.' These desires are also genuinely queer in that they are at odds with the normative demands of heteronormativity and/in narrative.

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<sup>15</sup> In contrast, Alber et al. assert that "the unnatural is quite obviously mimetic in the sense of Aristotle because it can be depicted or represented in the world of fiction" ("What Is" 378).

## Conclusion: Queer Narratology and the Post-Truth Era in American Studies

I would like to close by turning to questions of methodology and address the topic of the 2019 PGF, the post-truth era in American Studies, as well as the significance of queer narratology in the present moment. Referencing Sedgwick once again, it appears as though the more one settles on the idea that we might live in a post-truth era characterized by the dissemination of alternative facts that render the very production of knowledge unreliable, the more scholarship tends to rely on the unveiling of hidden meanings and truths. The post-truth era in American Studies (and beyond), one can easily argue, is intimately bound to paranoia. According to Felski, this vicious circle is inherent to the field of American Studies and its history, “as each wave of scholarship reproaches its predecessors for failing to be critical enough of its object” (124). The concept Felski tries to challenge here is that of ‘critique,’ which is most often practiced in terms of Sedgwick’s notion of paranoid readings. As this article has shown, consolidated scholarly discourses (e.g. classical narratology) and newer, albeit not any less paranoid, approaches (e.g. postclassical narratology and unnatural narratology) to narrative are not the only viable options for interpretation. Informed by theories of affect, texts can be read in a variety of ways that do not engage in paranoid inquiry but, rather, focus on the potentials of texts, on what these texts disclose, convert, or affirm.

Queer narratology is inherently concerned with questions of disclosure, desire, and orientation. I thus want to echo the title of Lanser’s article on intersectional narratology, “Toward (a Queerer and) More (Feminist) Narratology,” for two reasons: As I have demonstrated, queer narratology constitutes a productive lens that, by being narratological, helps us to look at texts indiscriminately in terms of aesthetics. In addition, by being queer, queer narratology provides rhetorical, discursive, epistemic, and affective frames through which to acknowledge the queer potentialities of narrative, its ideological implications, and the contexts from which narratives emerge. Calling for more narratology, and by that I mean a diverse set of intersectional narratologies that has yet to be conceived, also has an impact on the scholarly discipline of American Studies. Since the field is, after all, concerned with representation and signification (even more so than ‘reality’), I believe that queer narratology can help diversify scholarship in various areas and, to speak with Felski, move American Studies beyond the limits of critique. Instead of dwelling on queer negativity, as is the case in a number of (mostly psychoanalytical) approaches, I wish to have shown that queer narratology’s imperative can be reparative—and metalepsis, as we have seen, pushes the boundaries of our conceptualizations of narrative and urges us to *rethink* narratology and American Studies more queerly.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> I am using the term “queerly” as an adverb because I want to stress how queer narratology “modif[ies] the reading activity” (Zitzelsberger 139). Such a modification (or *reorientation*), as I understand Sedgwick’s reparative reading and Felski’s notion of postcritique, is necessary because “modes of thought are also orientations toward the world that are infused with a certain attitude or disposition” (Felski 4).

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