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Relational narratives: auto/biography and the portrait

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Abstract: In Cavarero's (2000) philosophical conceptualization of the narratable self, narration, both biographical and autobiographical, is a political act in its capacity to expose the fragile uniqueness of the self in its constitutive relation with others. Drawing on the notions of the narratable self and the relational character of stories, in this paper I am sketching out a genealogy of relating narratives by focusing on an early twentieth century document of life: Rosa Bonheur's auto/biography written by her companion Anna Klumpke. This rare blend of biography and autobiography brings forward in a unique way what Cavarero has defined as the desire of the narratable self to listen to her story being told by others. It further highlights the political and ethical responsibility of the listener to retell and rewrite the story disclosed to her. What I suggest is that there is an urgent need for narrative driven researchers not only to bend over the timely necessity of listening to stories being told by others, but also to problematize their listening and dig deeper into the political and ethical effects of the stories they write and tell.

Problematizing narratives

In 1908, nine years after Rosa Bonheur's death, Anna Klumpke—who as an artist herself was Bonheur's chosen portraitist and her intimate companion for a short period before her death—published a memorable document: *Rosa Bonheur: Her Life and work*. Bonheur (1822-1899) was one of the greatest animal painters of the nineteenth century. She was famous worldwide and her life had become the object of biographical interest, while she was still alive. What has been particularly significant, however with Klumpke's document, is its unique blending of two women's lives in what is an auto/biographical text par excellence. In this paper I want to look closer into this text particularly focusing on Adriana Cavarero's theorization of the salience of relational narratives in the constitution of *the narratable self*, a concept emerging from lines of Hannah Arendt's philosophy (1998). What I suggest is that Klumpke's auto/biography forces us to think around problems of how we listen to stories, how we read them, and how we keep rewriting and retelling them. Stories do many things, they produce realities as much as they are produced by them and within their own discursive constraints and limitations, they keep creating conditions of possibilities for other stories to be told, and written.

Relational Narratives

Following Arendt's philosophy, Cavarero (2000) has argued that the act of narration is immanently political, relational and embodied. To the Arendtian line that human beings as unique existents live together and are constitutively exposed to each other through the bodily senses (Arendt, 1998, 178), Cavarero adds the narratability of the self, its constitution by the desire of listening to her story being narrated. Being primarily an embodied practice, narration opens up a political sphere wherein human beings as narratable selves expose their vulnerability and dependence on each other, creating conditions of possibility for the crucial question of *who* one is to get registered and deployed in unforeseen directions:

We could define it as the confrontation between two discursive registers, which manifest opposite characteristics. One, that of philosophy, has the form of a definite knowledge which regards the universality of Man. The other, that of narration, has the form of a biographical knowledge which regards the unrepeatable identity of someone. The questions which sustain the two discursive styles are equally diverse. The first asks '*what* is Man?' The second asks instead of someone '*who* he or she is.'

(Cavarero 2000, 13)

In highlighting the question of 'who one is', Cavarero draws on Arendt's conceptualization of narration as the medium through which the uniqueness of existence enters the human world and the order of discourse: 'This disclosure of "who" in contradistinction to "what somebody is"—his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide—is implicit in everything somebody says and does.' (Arendt, 1998, 178)

Narration then is a process of responding to the world and connecting with it. It is important to remember here however, Julia Kristeva notes, that given that stories keep on unfolding, the revealed *who* is subsequently dismantled, 'dispersed into "strangenesses" within the infinity of narrations.' (2001, 27) Thus, the 'unique existent' in Arendt's and Cavarero's philosophies has nothing to do with the individuals of the dominant philosophical discourse who should come out as homogeneous, universal and equal or equivalent. For Cavarero, within the act of narration, the self emerges as narratable: she is spontaneously aware that she has a story, she desires to hear it narrated by others or by herself and she also knows that whoever she meets has a unique story. (2000, 33) Cavarero particularly stresses the idea that the narratable self need not emerge as an effect of active memory: 'The narratable self finds its home, not simply in a conscious exercise of remembering, but in the spontaneous narrating structure of memory itself. This is why we have defined the self as *narratable* instead of *narrated*.' (34) Cavarero therefore highlights and foregrounds the notion of embodied memory, which she links to what she calls 'auto-narration' (33) in creating conditions of possibility for the narratable self to emerge. This narrative constitution however, does not end up in pinning down the self within prescribed spaces, places, roles and identities. It does not produce an essence

neither does it require one. Simply put, the narratable self can never be reducible to the content of her story; the semantics of the story do not really matter. 'The narratable self is an exposed uniqueness that awaits her narration. The text of this narration, far from producing all the reality of the self, is nothing but the marginal consequence, or symptom that follows that desire.' (86) Following Arendt, Cavarero's interest lies with *Saying* and not *the Said*, 'the relationality of the act of speaking, not in speech as a system of signification characterized by objective rules that bring the speakers to an understanding.' (2005, 190) This is where narratability as an embodied practice reveals the self, exposes her vulnerability, relates to the *other* within the political and ultimately conditions the discourse of history: 'That every individual life between birth and death can eventually be told as a story with beginning and end is the prepolitical and prehistorical condition of history, the great story without beginning and end.' (Arendt, 1998, 184)

Although Arendt has framed life stories within the discursive limits of biography (1998, 193), Cavarero has suggested that both biography and autobiography are constitutive processes of the narratable self: 'biography and autobiography are bound together in a single desire [...] a life-story—while always having its most suite narrator in the *other* — is not totally foreign to the protagonist, as Arendt would have us believe.' (2000, 33) Bringing together biography and autobiography, and revealing the *who* of a genealogy of extraordinary women, Klumpke's document is a specific site where Arendt's and Cavarero's lines of analysis can be deployed, as I will further discuss.

The artist's (auto)biography

Cavarero has asked: 'does the course of every life allow itself be looked upon in the end like a design that has a meaning?' (2000, 1) In addressing this question I want to look into how subjects themselves intervene in the shaping of their lives as 'designs that have a meaning', either by merely living them or narrativizing them. As Klumpke herself was writing in her memoir: 'Life is after all essentially a serial story [...] a chain of infinite possibilities out of which one selects, arranges and creates new combinations.' (1940, 16)

In this context it is the very process of the production of the story Klumpke wrote that I am turning to. *Rosa Bonheur; her life and work* appeared in 1908, despite the immense difficulties that Klumpke went through after Bonheur's death, particularly in relation to how Bonheur's family contested her last will, which made Klumpke the sole legatee of her inheritance. The promise of carrying out Bonheur's legacy becomes the founding stone establishing Klumpke's authorial position and creating a context for the recognition of her signature: 'Rosa Bonheur entrusts me with the mission of writing her life story.' (2001, 76) Klumpke's attempt to validate her auto/biographical document is thus bound to Bonheur's desire for her story to enter the discourse of History.

As already discussed, Arendt's philosophical take on biography suggests that 'narratives invent stories that accompany history.' (Kristeva, 2001 p.15) What is exactly the relationship between the 'invented story' and history? In Arendt's thought, Kristeva notes, actors make history only if their action is recorded and becomes memorable and

this memorialization is the role of narratives. How is this memory constituted? 'It is *spectators* who complete the story in question [...]through *evoked memory*, without which there is nothing to tell.' (16) As I will further discuss, it is this need for completing the action and revealing its *who* that is forcefully expressed in Klumpke's narrative by way of Bonheur's desire: 'You'll be not only my voice, but dear Nathalie's too. You'll write about her the things she couldn't say about herself. You'll make us *complete*. (2001, 67, my emphasis) But the meaning of this story of course will always be negotiated by the audience, the community of memory that stories are addressed to.

In this context, the role of the biographer becomes terribly important for Arendt: 'acting and speaking men need the help [...] of the artist, of poets and historiographers, of monument-builders or writers.' (Arendt, 1998, 173) The biographer thus undertakes the responsibility to narrativize action and speech and in this way to sustain the mnemonic practices of the social world and fight against what Arendt had identified as 'the danger of oblivion.' (Kristeva, 2001, 17) Indeed, in the narrative of the document Klumpke's biographical task unfolds as a multifarious one:

Now I know that you'll draw me with your pen just as well as with your paintbrush. And you'll combine your own impressions of me with my life-story. That'll be the best way to give the public a true account of how we met and fell in love [...] It's because you're a woman, because I can open my heart to you with greater trust that I've chosen you to interpret my life for posterity. You'll understand that Nathalie and my mother were both my guiding stars. You'll know how to say what I mean with all the subtlety that is the privilege of our sex. You're also from America. For a long time now women over there have enjoyed the exceptionally favourable circumstances that I've always dreamt of for my French sisters. My feminism and my clothes aren't meant to surprise you. It'll be easy for you to explain the reasons behind them. I'll tell you everything without holding anything back. (2001, 79)

Portraiture and life-writing, sisterhood in painting, feminism, women's love and the spirit of the American freedom are highlighted in the extract above as central in Bonheur's choice of Klumpke as both her portraitist and biographer. Responding to this call and embedded in the mnemonic practices of the social world as discussed above, Klumpke's document needs to be mapped and analysed within the socio-historical, political and cultural conditions that created possibilities for its emergence. In this light, it is Bonheur's and Klumpke's biographical lines within their geographies and times that I will now follow.

Lives and stories

Bonheur was born in Bordeaux in 1822 but her family moved to Paris in 1829 where life was difficult for a painter with a wife and four children to support, notwithstanding the fact that Bonheur's mother Sophia was well educated and was giving music lessons to contribute to the expenses of the household. Things became even more difficult when Bonheur's father, Raimond joined the Saint-Simonians community,¹ abandoning in practice his wife and children to save the world. Bonheur's mother died from poverty and

exhaustion in 1833 and after her death Bonheur lived with her father, who taught her drawing and encouraged her to become a painter. While recognizing her father's contribution in her career as an artist, Bonheur has nevertheless described her life with him as 'a mix of tragedy and farce' and always in poverty. (Klumpke, 2001, 113) It was in these difficult circumstances, while she was still fourteen that Bonheur met Nathalie Micas; the two girls became friends and later on life-long companions, till Mica's death in 1889.

Bonheur's career followed an upward movement from 1841 onwards reaching its culmination in 1865 when she became the first woman artist to be awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honour. So great was her fame all over Europe and the States, that in the 1860s, 'American girls could hold, in an admiring clutch, Rosa Bonheur dolls' (Slyke, 2001, p.xii) It was actually as a doll that Anna Klumpke, 'an American girl' born in San-Francisco in 1856, would get to know Rosa Bonheur. And this is how I now turn to Anna Klumpke's story.

Klumpke (1856-1942) was born in San Francisco from parents of German origin. An accident while she was only two years old left her lame and she carried this disability throughout her life. In 1872, Klumpke's parents divorced and her mother having won full custody of her children—five daughters and two sons—decided to move to Europe. The children were educated in boarding schools and colleges in Germany, Switzerland and finally in Paris, where they finally settled down in 1877. Being well educated, Anna and her four sisters, Augusta, Dorothea, Mathilda and Julia grew up to become extraordinarily successful women: Augusta became a prominent neurologist; Dorothea got a doctorate in mathematical science at the Sorbonne, while Mathilda and Julia became famous musicians.² Klumpke enrolled at the famous *Académie Julian* in Paris and after painting the portrait of the famous American feminist and suffragist, Elizabeth Candy Stanton, in 1891 she went to Boston and succeeded in 'gaining notice' in the Bostonian male elite. (Dwyer, 1999, p.64) Klumpke was seriously thinking of settling down there, but in between her meeting with Rosa Bonheur would dramatically change the route of her life and career. Having established her fame as a painter in both sides of the Atlantic, Klumpke finally followed Bonheur in being awarded the medal of the Legion of Honour.

Bonheur's and Klumpke's lives should therefore been considered within the specific context of the European and North American historical, political, social and cultural milieus of the turn of the nineteenth century. Feminist historians have richly analyzed and discussed women artists' multi-layered positioning in the fin-de-siècle urban spaces and have highlighted their contribution in the cultural histories of modernity.³ As already indicated however, both Bonheur and Klumpke followed lines of flight from the patriarchal structures of modernity, albeit in different trajectories. Coming from an older generation, Bonheur had experienced the effects of the dramatic political changes in France: her family's active involvement in the socialist utopian movement not only tragically changed her life, but also shaped her ideas and perceptions vis-à-vis women's role in society. Bonheur actively responded to these ideals not only by becoming an extraordinary woman artist but also by defying and ridiculing social conventions and

expectations about how women would behave or leave. She lived with a woman, she was dressed in men's clothes and would publicly smoke cigars. It was through her art and her work that she had survived the wretched poverty of her childhood and had reached the point where she had earned more than she could ever spend. How different was Klumpke's trajectory particularly in terms of her class background, the educational opportunities offered to her and of course the cosmopolitan milieu she had grown up. Despite their prior differences in terms of their socio-cultural background, when the two women met, there were serious imbalances in terms of their power status and I will discuss some of the tensions in their relationship later on in the paper. And yet, it was through this multiplicity of differences that the two women came together in an act of recognition and love that was ultimately transposed in Klumpke's perceived responsibility to etch Bonheur's memory in history and leave genealogical traces of women in struggle and in love.

Technologies of auto/biography

Having considered Klumpke's narrative within the specific socio-historical and cultural conditions of its emergence, I now want to look more closely in the matrix of what Leigh Gillmore has identified as the *technologies of autobiography*, 'those legalistic, literary, social and ecclesiastical discourses of truth and identity through which the subject of autobiography is produced'. (1994, 42) In the discourse of the narrative, Bonheur asks Klumpke to paint her portrait and write her life story and in responding to this invitation—which actually the author composes for herself—Klumpke is carefully delineating the conditions of the writing of this auto/biography. It is going to be a faithful execution of Bonheur's will—written 'in her own words'—and will further combine Klumpke's own 'moments of being'. As explicitly put in the document in a direct address to the reader: 'Since I'm convinced that the reader will be more interested in hearing words almost straight from her lips, I've transcribed them without breaks except for a few stories, quotations and notions for the sake of clarity.' (2001, 80) It is interesting to note here that the promise to convey Bonheur's voice is particularly strong in Klumpke's discourse: the reader will *hear*, not read, 'words almost straight from [Bonheur's] lips'. Hearing Bonheur's voice, but also Klumpke's—as monologues and in dialogue—opens up a political space of interaction for what Cavarero calls 'the reciprocal communication of voices' (2005,197). We have to remember that what matters here is not what is said, but the act of saying itself, through which the *who* is revealed to the other and to the world. As Kottman (2005, xxiii) has suggested, the political here is conceived in the triangular configuration of uniqueness, plurality and relation. Klumpke's promise to allow the reader 'hear Bonheur's words straight from her lips' comes close to Cavarero's politics of voice: 'to listen in speech itself, for the plurality of singular voices' (xxiii). But if this is going to happen, through an auto/biographical document, what Klumpke inevitably asks from her reader, is to concede to what Philip Lejeune (1989) has theorized as 'the autobiographical pact', which in Klumpke's case has actually become the auto/biographical pact. In this light, the author and the reader of this auto/biography are bound within two regimes of truth: first Klumpke's faithful representation of Bonheur's life narrated 'in her own words' and second Klumpke's faithful representation of her own life interwoven with the life of her beloved companion. The narrative structure of the

document is actually responding to this double 'pact', being comprised of three parts. Parts One and Three are entitled as *Anna Klumpke's Story* enveloping as it were Part Two, *Rosa Bonheur's Story*. Within the theoretical framework of this paper, the question of course is not about whether Klumpke's representation of Bonheur's life or of her own life is true or false. More broadly, questions and issues around representation, context, truth and memory are now well identified and richly explored in the field of auto/biographical narratives. (Smith and Watson 2001) What has almost certainly become a consensus is that 'a story of the self—told or written—[is] not the same thing as a life lived' (Steedman, 2000, 36) A strong theme that nevertheless emerges from the rich field of feminist theorizations of women's autobiographical narratives is the question of the auto/biographical subject, the authority of her signature and her relationship to her audience. To put it bluntly, who is telling the story and to whom? In this light, Lejeune's famous *auto/biographical pact* has to be reconsidered.

Indeed, over the past twenty years influential feminist theorists have revisited many of the assumptions of the autobiographical literary canon and have raised the question of who could sign the famous *pact* in the first place, since women and slaves amongst others were historically excluded from the right of signature. Moreover, the often assumed spontaneity of the auto/biographical act and its supposed interrelation with practices and *technologies* of self constitution has been interrogated once placed within the constraints of specific histories, geographies, societies and cultures. Steedman's *Landscape for a good woman* (1986) has highlighted questions of social class and gender in the processes that centralize some stories and authors, while marginalizing others in the discourse of history. Steedman (2000) has particularly pointed out to what she has termed as 'the autobiographical injunction' in the relation between self-narration, autobiographical writing and the making of the self and in this light she has raised a series of questions resonating with the issues of authorship and audiences as discussed above: 'Who tells the story of the self? Who does it most at one time, in one place? Who uses these stories? How are they used and to what ends?' (2000, 28) Beverley Skeggs has further raised questions around processes that authorise or discredit the story teller, arguing that 'the self is classed' and that 'the resources and techniques necessary to self-formation and self-telling are not equally available.' (2004, 134)

Klumpke's narrative is inevitably situated within this matrix of questions, issues, material and discursive limitations. However, within the Arendtian framework, although stories are conditioned, they are not totally constrained or determined by these conditions. Stories exceed, what is given or what is possible and although there are always people who tell or write stories, stories as the outcome of action, do not actually have 'a tangible author.' (1998, 184) Within the Arendtian framework therefore, the focus of the analysis was to explore 'narrative modalities of power and desire' (Tamboukou, 2008) through which the 'truth' of Klumpke's auto/biographical document has been constituted and to chart its position in a cartography of feminist politics, (counter)discourses and micro-histories.

From the middle to the beginning

The artist's auto/biography starts with a significant event, the day when the two women first met. Thus, it is to their first encounter that I will now turn, entering the flow of Klumpke's narrative again.

Klumpke first met Bonheur in October 1889, acting as an interpreter for an American visitor. 1889 was a difficult year for Bonheur: her life-long companion Nathalie Micas had died and she was mourning her loss. Against this gloomy backdrop in Bonheur's life, Klumpke gives a vivid description of that first meeting: 'On the steps of the house, we saw a short little person dressed like a peasant in trousers and smock and holding a black and white dog [...] he stretched out his hands in the friendliest welcome. It was Rosa Bonheur. I'll never forget our first meeting' (2001, 8). This first impression is clearly interwoven in the myths that had already been formed around Bonheur's unconventional life and particularly her insistence on going around in men's clothes, a trope that Klumpke carefully elaborates and partly deconstructs in writing Bonheur's life. In the extract below where Klumpke recounts one of her later visits to Bonheur's house in the company of her mother, Bonheur's attitude to dress is explicitly commented upon:

After lunch, she offered to show us some of her paintings and took us to her studio. While she was opening the door, I noticed hanging on a chair the work clothes that I had seen on my first visit. With a glance I drew my mother's attention to them. Rosa Bonheur picked up on my signal.

"Ah hah!" said she good humoredly, you're looking at my men's clothes. I bet you make the same mistake most people do. They're wrong to think I despise women's clothes. Oh! Of course, for work, I prefer men's. But today, in your mother's honor, I put on skirts, as you can see." (Klumpke 2001, 13)

What is interesting in the above extract is that the author revisits Bonheur's unconventional gendered practices by looking at them in the light of the everyday and the ordinary. The message she wants to send to her reader is that things are much simpler than they seem. Women's clothes may be the mere effect of practical necessities; women should feel free to be practical, don't read too much in what they do. If you pay attention to the micropractices of everyday life the veil that covers people practices and ideas can be removed and truth can emerge in its splendour simplicity. It is thus in recounting details of everyday life, the minutiae and the mundane, that the truth of this life document is being interwoven. Later on in the document however, the question of clothes becomes more complicated:

If you see me dressed this way, it's not the least to make myself stand out, as too many women have done, but only for my work. Don't forget I used to spend days in slaughterhouses. Oh! You've got to be devoted to art to live in pools of blood, surrounded by butchers. I was also passionate about horses; and what better place to study them than at horse fairs, mingling with all those traders; Women's clothes were quite simply always in the way. That's why I decided to ask the prefect of the police for permission to wear men's clothing. (204)

What Bonheur seems to suggest in the above extract is that wearing men's clothes is a sacrifice for the sake of her art, but also an implicit statement that women's clothes are not well suited for independent working women. It is true that she had obtained permission from the police to go around in men's clothes. What is not mentioned in Klumpke's narrative however is that this permission was given on 'health grounds' and not as a recognition of her working conditions. Such recognition was simply not discursively available in Bonheur's time and going around in men's clothes was a true act of rebellion even when sanctioned by the police. Bonheur's *Permission de Travestissement* is a mark of a woman's defiance of gendered practices and of ridiculing laws and regulations. Klumpke's document however downplays Bonheur's subversive practices, although it points to the fact that Bonheur would be an advocate of men's clothes not only for herself but for her 'sisters of the palette as well':

I strongly disapprove of women who refuse to wear normal clothes because they want to pass themselves off as men. If I thought trousers suited women, I would have given up skirts altogether, but that's not the case; so I've never advised my sisters of the palette to wear men's clothes in ordinary circumstances. (204)

The ordinary and the extraordinary seem to interchange continuously in how gendered discourses and practices are discussed and contested in Klumpke's narrative. Of course respectability and freedom were always antagonistic discourses in the ways women's ontological, social and cultural position was defined and represented at the turn of the nineteenth century. What is interesting in this document however is that there seems to be a certain pattern in how Bonheur's gender attitudes are simultaneously defended and contested within a polyphonic auto/biographical narrative. This, I argue is an ethical stance that the author of the document consciously adopts: striving not to obscure Bonheur's ideas and practices at the same time of creating a safety net around their reception. Whether she is successful in keeping this delicate balance depends on her audience and the socio-historical contexts within which the document has been read.

Epistolary narratives

To take up the thread of their relationship again, Klumpke's first meeting with Bonheur was to be followed by a series of letters between the two women. It was through these letters that their relationship evolved on unforeseen planes: 'Almost unconsciously, my relations with Rosa Bonheur became more and more cordial, despite the limitations of this epistolary exchange' (2001, 11). Letters opened up channels of communication in the two women's relation but as a genre they also become a fundamental trope in establishing the truth of Klumpke's narrative. Throughout the document and particularly in Part Two, *Bonheur's story*, letters keep the plot of the narrative and emit signs of authenticity and immediacy, a direct access to internal thoughts and feelings, interrelated with broader social, philosophical and ethical stances:

Paris, October 1856

Dear Love and sister,

For a long time now I have wanted to answer your kind letter announcing that you have once and for all renounced the world. Please accept, my dear friend, from Rosa and me, our sincere congratulations.

We both thought, that given your faith, truly nothing but the convent would suit you, but let me say I doubt the same would apply to a woman artist who needs great movement of thought and movement. I'll repeat my dear Love, what I've often said in the past: salvation can be worked out anywhere, and a mountain top maybe just as good an altar as the inside of a cloister. Believe me, don't try to convert us; love your old friends as they are. (159)

Written by Nathalie Micas, Bonheur's companion for forty years, the letter above unfolds a philosophical discourse on faith, friendship, good and evil and explores dilemmas around who is socially eligible to choose monastic retreat as an alternative to life's harsh realities:

You ask me my dear love, to send you somebody who knows how to draw. If I knew of somebody alone in the world, I would talk to her about your convent, where everybody sounds happy, from what you say. As for my little Angelique she does not belong there yet. With what she earns, she feeds her mother and father who are both elderly and unable to work. She carries the heavy load alone and the day she stops providing for them, they will die of hunger or go begging in the streets. If the convent wanted to take them in charge, she might consider leaving the world. (160)

There is much irony and scepticism in Micas' letter above, as to the possibilities and choices women really have in obtaining freedom, but at the same time the letter recognizes and respects multiplicities and differences in how women make choices about their lives. There is a long reference in the same letter to the unbearable heaviness of being famous and the many ways that women's freedom can be restricted:

I would like to tell you about all her triumphs, but this is difficult in a letter. While you were with us you knew what success she had. Well, that was nothing. The English and the Scots are much more enthusiastic about her than the French. For that reason we had to respect the strictest incognito in order to move around with some degree of freedom. Otherwise there would have been nothing except parties, dinners, outings. More than ever, Rosa detests public appearances. (160)

In the above extract, where Micas recounts Bonheur's success in a professional tour of England and Scotland, the private / public knot is forcefully exposed and deconstructed. What emerges in this extract is the problem of privacy, women's historically constituted lack of space to retreat and have time for recollection and reflection whether in the public sphere of professional activities or in their domestic environment.

Klumpke's authorial decision to include long letters in Bonheur's life narrative creates multifarious effects on different levels. Having been theorized as inscribing

'sociographs', forming 'an autobiography of the self with others' (Stimpson 1984, 168), letters can be useful document of life. As Liz Stanley has argued, letters are dialogical, opening up channels of communication and reciprocity not only between the correspondent parts, but also between the writer of the letter and any reader (2004, 202). Recognizing this property, Klumpke includes many letters in her auto/biography since she wants to create communications between her readers and the women who were 'significant others' in Bonheur's life and whose stories she had been asked to record.

The inclusion of letters further enables Klumpke to create a forum for the exchange of different ideas on life in general and women's lives in particular. According to Mc Arthur's (1990) analysis, epistolary narratives provide multiple perspectives on the same event, challenge the narrative imperative of closure and force us to question the possibility of objective truth or stable authority. (14-15) Micas' letter above discusses many important issues in women's lives, then and now. But because it is a letter, her narrative need not reach closure. There are many possibilities to attain freedom and although there are disagreements, women can always count on their friendship in creating imaginary communities of solidarity and support, the feminist project that the whole auto/biographical document is ultimately about: 'I am reluctant to say good-bye, my dear Love [...] You can always count on our true friendship.' (161)

Letter writing as a practice sustaining women's relations and as a narrative trope keeping together multiple perspectives and voices of the auto/biographical project is further linked to diary writing, both constitutive of the *technologies of autobiography*, I have already discussed above. In further exploring these *technologies* I am now turning to the practices of inscribing the daily, taking the thread of Klumpke's story again.

Inscribing the daily

As already noted, between 1891 and 1895 Klumpke travelled to the States twice, invited by Bostonian friends for a series of portraits, but she kept in touch with Bonheur through the exchange of letters: 'While in America, I received many letters from Rosa Bonheur. She took every opportunity to prove to me and my family how much we meant to her.' (2001, 17) It was in the States that the idea dawned on her to ask Bonheur to sit for a portrait and when Bonheur accepted, Klumpke got terribly excited. Not only had the famous painter agreed to sit for a portrait but had invited Klumpke to stay with her while the portrait was being done. In the midst of the fervent preparations for this big project, Klumpke was given the idea of recording moments of her life with Bonheur:

Mrs Thaw [...] gave me some advice that probably made it possible for me to write these pages: 'Since the famous woman has invited you to stay with her while you're working,' she replied to my letter of farewell, 'jot down your conversations every evening you're there. Your notes will be a fine souvenir of this important time.' I vowed to follow her advice. From then on, I could think of only one thing: going back to France and seeing the great artist again. (Klumpke 2001, 30)

Klumpke's idea of recording the daily was further enacted by Bonheur's own explicit desire to tell her story to her beloved companion, so that the latter could write about it after her death: 'You are the one, Anna, I want to entrust with this task [writing my life story]. In idle moments I'll ramble on and tell you lots of things, just following the drift of my thoughts ... You can take notes. Later on, we'll put them in order and go over them together' (67). The story emerges here as an effect of forces of desire that bind these two women together.

As it has been richly discussed, theorised and contested (Bunkers and Huffs 1996), the epistemological status of diary writing is based on the space/time proximity of the event as it happens and as it is recounted, hence the advice above to 'jolt down your conversations every evening you're there'. In thus referring to her friend's advice Klumpke is explicitly situating her auto/biography in the truth regime of diary writing. But she does more than that. Inscribing daily practices of herself and her companion, Klumpke creates and actively participates in a newly found culture of the care of the female self. Foucault has pointed out that writing was critically important in the culture of taking care of oneself and has traced various writing activities, including 'taking notes on oneself to be reread, writing treatises and letters to friends to help them, and keeping notebooks in order to reactivate for oneself the truths one needed' (1988, 27). Moreover, women's auto/biographical writing has been a crucial theme in feminist explorations of the subject. Various feminist theorists have argued that self-writing is an act par excellence, through which women have negotiated space and invented the vocabularies to constitute themselves. (Smith and Watson 1998)

Klumpke's writing practices of recording her daily communication with the woman she loved are therefore situated in the philosophical plane of 'the care of the self'. As I have written elsewhere however, the practices of the care of the self—as analysed and discussed by Foucault—are decisively bent when their practitioners are women (Tamboukou, 2003). Care for the self and care for others alternate in the process of self-formation and what has been identified as a critical genealogical event in the deployment of *the technologies of the female self* is the creation of a public persona, who retains a passionate attachment to privacy and an intense caring involvement in the lives of others.

Klumpke's recording of the daily thus seems to operate on many interrelated levels: creating conditions of possibility for the truth of her auto/biographical document to be recognised, opening up new planes in the culture of the care of the female self and constituting an archive for Rosa Bonheur's legacy to be sheltered and sustained, etching as it were Bonheur's memory in history.

Portraiture and autobiography:

'I know that you'll draw me with your pen just as well as with your paintbrush'

Writing and painting are bound together in Bonheur's choice of Klumpke as her biographer. Portraiture is indeed in many ways related to life in general and life narratives in particular. As Jens Brockmeier has put it: 'modern portraiture (and self-

portraiture in particular) has been from its beginning, a most sophisticated genre of lifewriting' (2001, 255). What strongly inheres in the art of portraiture is an expectation that the painter will capture the essence of the sitter, unblock her light and represent it in a way that will open up channels of communication between the sitter, the painter and the viewer. The painting of a portrait can therefore be seen as a relational narrative par excellence:

Pictures and words, imagery and narrativity are interwoven in one and the same semiotic fabric of meaning. They are overlapping trajectories within the same symbolic space, a space of meaning in which our experience takes place and in which we try to make sense of the world. (Brockmeier 2001, 255)

Painting Bonheur's portrait becomes a significant event in the two women's relationship and the first part of the auto/biographical document is actually a story of how the two women met a propos of their art and how painting created a milieu for their relationship to evolve and flourish. Of course, painting Bonheur and living with her turned out to be a difficult endeavour. The agonising process of making Bonheur's portrait covers many pages of Klumpke's story and comprises a whole chapter entitled as *Subsequent Sitzings* (2001, 39-62). Bonheur had entrusted Klumpke with the difficult task of representing her but she would impose her own conditions, which included Klumpke's accommodation to Bonheur's difficult timetable, as well as her own ideas about how painting should be done. As recounted in a diary entry of Monday 11th, 1898: 'for your own good I want you to stick to my methods. You can't attack the final painting straight off. One sketch isn't enough. You need some serious studies. Don't be afraid of wasting time.' (47) Klumpke would often be in despair about the feasibility of her project:

I cannot get on with my work because my model is so uncooperative. And now, mademoiselle is going against my wishes and almost testing me. This morning she told me to finish up the little self-portrait she asked for yesterday. My self-portrait! Is that why I came all the way from Boston?' (19/8/1898, 54)

There were indeed many hurdles in the beginning of the two women's relationship, framed as I have already discussed by their different positions in terms of social class, cultural background, ethnicity, age and of course power and status. These tensions should also be considered within the specificities of artistic conventions and the cultural practices and negotiations necessarily involved in the creation of a portrait. Clearly, Bonheur was not just a sitter, she was a famous painter herself and therefore a mentor and role model for Klumpke. Klumpke on the other hand was younger and still striving for recognition. Yet, Klumpke's social and cultural capital has to be considered in the complex network of power relations between the two women. In a way Klumpke was carrying a rich depository of resources, being in Skegg's term 'an entitled middle-class self', well-versed in 'how to play the game' (2004, 145). Moreover the two women were in love, entangled as all lovers are, in the complexities of affects and passions of the amorous relationship. It is actually this forceful interplay of power relations and forces of desire that will set the plane of the two women's passionate encounter and will further make connections with the deployment of the truth regime within which Klumpke's life

document is placed. As I will further discuss, feminism and sisterhood in painting were formative axes of their encounter: once Klumpke had become Bonheur's portraitist, she had entered the process of becoming her biographer. There is indeed a straightforward link between the painter and the biographer in the discourse of Klumpke's narrative. As Brockmeier has argued, since the Renaissance the art of the portrait has been configured as the ability of the artist to create an image that would be true to life, and the artist had to be knowledgeable of and sensitive to human nature in general and the particular person she was trying to paint in particular: 'the art of portraiture became the art of understanding a life.' (2001, p.263)

In this context, Bonheur would see the writing of her life-story as complimentary to the making of her portrait and she would entrust her portraitist and the woman she loved with the task of recording her life. It is, as I have discussed, in establishing this truth regime that Klumpke devotes the first part of her document entitled 'Anna Klumpke's story' and comprised of eight chapters to carefully record the minutiae of how she got to meet Bonheur, how their relationship evolved, how she became her portraitist and eventually her chosen biographer. The last chapter of Part I is actually entitled 'Rosa Bonheur Entrusts me with the Mission of Writing her Life Story'. It was after all a question of love, trust and mission.

Loving to you

In her book *The way to love*, Luce Irigaray (2002) has opened up love as a plane for relations of reciprocity 'loving to you, rather than loving you' to be deployed: ' "I love to you" is more unusual than "I love you", but respects the two more: I love to who you are, to what you do, without reducing you to an object of my love.' (60) What is particularly interesting in Irigaray's reconfiguration of love is the role of language in undermining possessive discourses of love. Bonheur's act of choosing the author of her life-story is actively creating a non-phallogocentric register, for her story to become recorded. Bonheur further asks Klumpke to write a relational story, creating a genealogy of women brought together by the way of love:

You'll be not only my voice, but dear Nathalie's too. You'll write about her the things she couldn't say about herself. You'll make us complete. Another thing, not a single biography about me even mentions how devoted I am to my poor dear mother's memory. In my eyes, that's the worst fault of all. (Klumpke 2001, 67)

The whole narrative is actually framed by the complex subtlety of what Cavarero has theorised as the I/you/we relationship. Within a milieu of love and sisterhood, Bonheur is actually telling Klumpke: I exist because you exist to listen to my story—and the stories of women I have loved— and write it for others, 'make us complete'. 'It is therefore

interesting' as Cavarero points out 'to note the way in which [...] the *we* of the context [is] modelled on the relationship between the *you* and the *I*' (2000, 91). What the document suggests is that Bonheur wants Klumpke to write her story, but also the story of her former companion and her mother as a response to the burning question of 'who I am'. The desire of the *I* [Bonheur] for her story to be told is intertwined with the *you* [Klumpke] as author of the story of the *I*, but also as author of the story of the *we*, the story of four women, the author included in the *we* of what turns to be an auto/biographical story par excellence. Or is it? If we consider that the author is after all Klumpke, maybe it could be the desire of the *I* [Klumpke] for her story to be told intertwined with the *you* [Bonheur] as narrator of the story of the *you* and the *we*. But after all, as Cavarero succinctly notes the pronoun of biography is the *you*: 'The one who tells *us* our story speaks the language of the *you*. Within the shared narrative scene, the addressee of the tale and its presence wins over the classic role, in the text, of the absent protagonist.' (p.92)

Within the horizon of the *you*, the narratable self is constitutive of her desire to listen to her story that will offer the unity of the self, 'make us complete' as Bonheur had explicitly asked Klumpke. Being enacted in relation to a 'necessary other' (81), this desire for the narrated unity of the self forcefully brings to the scene the reciprocal communication of lovers. Love and narration are closely intertwined in Cavarero's image of thought: 'On the stage of love, the questions 'who am I?' and 'who are you?' form the beat of body language and the language of storytelling, which maintain a secret rhythm' (p.109). Resonating with Irigaray's analysis, Cavarero's take on love is unfolded beyond and against heteronormative and possessive discourses within which love has historically become a disciplinary technology for women (Tamboukou, 2003). Indeed, in Klumpke's narrative, love emerges as the theme that binds everything together as it underlies the rationale for the writing of the document itself: 'you'll combine your own impressions of me with my life-story [...] to give the public a true account of how we met and fell in love.' (2001, 79) The theme of love is further interlaced with feminism as an imagined radical future as well as a political project.

Sisters of the brush: auto/biography as a feminist project

Bonheur wants her story to be told to others as a testament of her life, but she also chooses the narrator of her story in the self of the woman she loves: 'I could never tell anyone of the male sex how the pieces of my life fit together' (Klumpke 2001, 67). It is here that the two stories that Klumpke writes intersect in the constitution of the desire of the narratable self to listen to her story being told by others. Cavarero has particularly related this philosophical proposition to real life practices of the feminist movement and particularly the political space that was opened up through narration in women's consciousness-raising groups. Although what we encounter in Bonheur's testament is the desire of a unique woman for her story to be told by her lover, this isolated practice is in a different socio-historical context 'translated' as a significant feminist practice wherein 'politics and narration intersect.' (2000, 60)

Bonheur's admiration of and support of women's art is a constant refrain of the narrative in weaving sisterhood in the regime of its truth: 'I know quite well that you're a talented woman and I noticed your beautiful portrait at the last Salon. I also know that you've got two very intelligent sisters. You're all three proofs that women aren't any less talented than men, that they can be just as good and sometimes even better.' (Klumpke 2001, 10)

Indeed, Bonheur's dedication to supporting and sustaining women's art was a persistent axis of action in her life. In entitling her study of 19th century French women artists as 'Sisters of the brush', Tamar Garb (1994) has actually used Bonheur's own phrase in a letter addressed to the members of the Union of Women Painters and Sculptors, for whom Bonheur was indeed 'their model and mentor' (3).

Bonheur's support of other women painters is not just an expression of the importance of art and aesthetic values in her life. It is tightly interwoven with her feminism, which should also be seen within the wider context of Saint Simonian ideals within which she was firmly connecting through her father's legacy:

Why shouldn't I be proud to be a woman? My father, that enthusiastic apostle of humanity, told me again and again that it was woman's mission to improve the human race, that she was the future Messiah. To his doctrine I owe my great and glorious ambition for the sex to which I proudly belong, whose independence I'll defend till my dying day. Besides I am convinced the future is ours. (206)

In being an advocate of women's emancipation, Bonheur had criticized the Saint-Simonian practices, which had celebrated women's position at the same time of leaving them to carry the burden of earthy practicalities: 'My mother, the most noble and proud of creatures, succumbing to exhaustion and wretched poverty, while my father was dreaming about saving the human race. (154) In having made her own way to life through her art, Bonheur's feminism, inspired as it was by Saint-Simonian ideals had nevertheless moved beyond the utopian-socialism of the movement to the conviction that women's emancipation had to be founded on strong material bases. In this context, Bonheur had firmly positioned herself in the revolutionary spirits of her time, striving to advance women's position, not only through her own attitude and life style but in collectively participating in concrete movements for opening up the art world to women.

In choosing Klumpke as her portraitist and biographer, Bonheur's feminism is interwoven in the narrative of the document with her admiration of the United States as a utopian country of women's freedom: 'I admire American ideas about educating women. Over there you don't have the silly notion that marriage is the one and only fate for girls. I am absolutely scandalized by the way women are hobbled in Europe. It's only because of my God-given talent that I could break free. (Klumpke 2001, 10) Indeed, as already discussed above, Klumpke was the personification of the American dream; she was further in close contact with feminist networks in the States and had painted the portrait of Nancy Fraser, a pioneer of women's education in the USA:

I showed her a few photographs of my Boston portraits. 'This one lives and breathes. Who is she?' she exclaimed about the portrait of Mrs Nancy Fraser. With a few words I gave her some idea of this remarkable woman and feminist to whom the University of Chicago owns the construction of a special pavilion for female students.

'In America you always find some generous souls eager to devote themselves to women's education and emancipation. Your country is becoming great because you all understand that girls, once they marry, have unparalleled influence over their children's education'. (21)

There is an implicit reference here to Klumpke's mother herself and the 'unparalleled influence' that she had indeed over her daughter's education. Indeed the figure of the mother—either by her matriarchal omnipotence as in Klumpke's case or by her tragic absence as in Bonheur—is strong in both women's lives and in how their subjectivities are constituted in the discourse of the document. As it has been commented, 'the notion that women in particular have a more fluid sense of self, developed in relationship to their mothers, has become one of the favourite sites of both psychoanalytic and literary engagements with the autobiographical.' (Cosslett et al., 2000, 4)

Life is a story

Klumpke was neither a writer nor a researcher; she was a painter, a feminist of her times and a woman in love. In writing Bonheur's story she weaves together many different storylines and draws on a variety of narrative tropes, genres and discursive practices. Painting the self and writing the self, blend together in the narrative matrix wherein the truth of the auto/biography is constituted in the interrelation of sisterhood in painting, women's love and feminist praxis. In this context, letters and diary entries emerge as particularly effective *narrative technologies*, decisively gendering the historical and cultural tradition of the care of the self. What I suggest is that the unique mode in which Klumpke handles the task of narrating Bonheur's life story and of blending it with other stories encompasses Cavarero's configuration of the narratable self in the I/you/we network of relations and responds to the Arendtian conceptualization of narratives within the political.

Indeed, in reflecting on Isaak Dinesen's philosophy of storytelling, Arendt has asked: 'If it is true [...] that no one has a life worth thinking about whose lifestory cannot be told, does it not then follow that life could be, even ought to be, lived as a story, that what one has to do in life is to make the story come true?' (1968, 105) Arendt's argument that lives should be lived as stories is indeed a unique and strong political argument, bringing agency and the possibility of intervening in the politics of life to the fore. But here again she was very careful to clarify that living life as a story should not mean that one creates a normative pattern that has to be followed: 'creating a fiction and then trying to live up to it' (1968, 106) The Arendtian imaginary of 'life as a narrative' (Kristeva, 2001) is about creating conditions of possibility that will eventually allow the story to emerge.

And although everybody can or should live their life as a story, Arendt notes that, 'certain people are so exposed in their own lives that they become junction points and concrete objectifications of life.' (Weisseberg, 2000, 31) In this light, biographical subjects can become inspiring examples that move beyond their actuality and transcend their historicity. It is as I have discussed, the responsibility of the biographer to write about a life, creating forceful connections between life histories and the discourse of history. As Weissberg has commented, 'biography reflects on an individual life, but this life becomes public for history.' (18)

Rosa Bonheur's life, unique and unrepeatable as it was, left its trace through the story that her sister/lover/companion wrote about her. Through the story that Klumpke wrote about Bonheur, but also about herself, the unrepeatable moments of their life together were preserved beyond the restricted life span of their actors. The writing of this story, but also the multiple readings of it have actually formed the discursive registers and provided the cultural codes for the female artist, but also for the love between women to be represented, made intelligible and find a position—albeit a marginalised one—in the symbolic order. *The Artist's (Auto)biography* can be and indeed has been read from a wide range of perspectives: 'a public statement of the French painter's artistic credo, a manifesto of her particular brand of feminism [...] a bold story of lesbian love' (Slyke 2001, xv).

Researchers dealing with narratives have consciously taken up the task of writing the stories they were told and indeed entrusted with. Over the years there will be different and diverse audiences of these stories, as well as different 'makings of them'. Following Klumpke's route, what I therefore suggest is that there is an urgent need for researchers-as-narrators to problematize their listening and dig deeper into the political and ethical effects of the stories they listen to and which subsequently they write and tell. Situating myself as a feminist researcher, I would like to conclude this paper by raising this question: how is it possible to go on telling and writing the stories we were entrusted with, in ways that are both transparent and meaningful, not in terms of how they represent 'reality' or reconstruct the past—which they can't—but of how they allow lives 'be looked upon in the end, like a design that has a meaning', stories of the feminist imaginary.

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¹ Bonheur's mother and father became members of the Saint Simonian movement in 1830. Saint-Simonianism was a utopian-socialist movement in France with radical reconceptions of work, property, marriage and women's role in society. For a discussion of Saint-Simonianism, and of women's experience in the movement, see, Slyke, 2001, p.xv-xviii. There is a rich body of literature around the Saint-Simonian's , important parts of which are reviewed in Klumpke, 2001, pp.93.

² See Dwyer, 1999 for a detailed discussion of Klumpke's family.

³ See amongst others, Cherry and Helleand, 2006; Pollock 1988.