Working with stories as multiplicities, opening up the black box of the archive

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Abstract: This paper opens up a dialogue between narrative researchers working within and between history and the social sciences. Following Israel's (this issue) account of how narratives of lives are useful subjects for historical analysis, I consider issues arising from the social sciences, particularly focusing on questions that destabilize narratological conventions around sequence, closure and agency. In agreement with Israel, I suggest that narrative research as the art of the archive foregrounds the importance of partial truths in life-writing research, offers rich knowledges and invokes intense intellectual pleasures. But also the subject in my analysis seems to transgress the discursive limitations of her textuality, foregrounding the salience of the political in narrative research. In its capacity to help shape historical and auto/biographical writings, narrativity emerges as an immensely rich way of opening up an interdisciplinary field of inquiry. However, the narratological canon also needs to be continually problematised.

Herein I shall explore some questions and issues arising from the tension of working with narratives and at the same time problematizing them, and thus being 'a heretic' in narrative research. I address two questions in doing this: a) why do narrative research while also destabilizing narratological conventions? And b) what does it mean to problematize narratives and how can this be done?

Why narratives?

A number of the points Israel (this issue) raises revolve around the argument that narratives are exceptionally useful topics for historical analysis, particularly in offering rich insights into how lives, images, and stories are intertwined in multifarious and complex ways. In a parallel way, narratives have long become an area of growing interest for researchers in the social sciences. In flagging up the significance of 'the narrative turn', Norman Denzin has argued that 'the study of narrative forces the social sciences to develop new theories, new methods and new ways of talking about self and society' (xi). However, approaches to this vary according to the disciplinary field they are located in and the theoretical and epistemological frameworks they draw on. Such differences have both created the need, and also opened up space, for dialogic exchanges and interdisciplinary discussions in narrative research today and it is to this that my paper will contribute.

In fleshing out her argument about the significance of narratives as useful analytical topics, Israel has taken the biographical route, albeit decisively bending its traits. She has meticulously worked with texts around and about "Emilia Dilke" in deploying her analysis of how lives may be caught up in texts, be these historical, biographical or fictional. To this end, she has used the trope of the name to follow different trails, transformations and discursive constructions. Distancing herself from the role of the conventional biographer who draws on different narratives in constructing her own version of "history" and "the past", Israel has avoided sequentially ordered narratives and worked with her archival documents in a spatial rather than chronological way. She has thus created a map where narratives have been placed as source texts and their role as sites of story-making delineated, analysed and ultimately deconstructed. What finally emerges from her analysis is the argument that stories 'participate in and evoke larger narratives [...] organize perceptions and delineate possible ways of thinking, acting and being' (Israel 14).

What seems to remain purely textual in Israel's analysis is the subject herself, both as a researcher and as a research object. Israel is quite explicit that she is not interested in capturing the subject, and implicit in her conviction that this cannot be done anyway. There are some inevitable tensions here, particularly in the light of how the study of the lives of 'the others'—women amongst them—has long become a powerful tool in the theoretical platforms of social and political movements such as feminism. Israel is well aware of this tension

and her paper particularly addresses the notion of agency, not as something that she wants entirely to dispense with, but as a notion that needs to be continuously problematized, particularly because causality can be too easily simplified and what is actually an effect can be erroneously taken as a cause. In taking this critical stance, Israel follows a long-standing tradition of criticizing history and historicism in particular, a strand that is most recognizable today in Foucault's ("Nietzsche, Genealogy") suggestion for undoing history, his redeployment of the Nietzschean genealogy.

Having myself worked with narratives as tools for writing feminist genealogies, I now want to take up some of the points that Israel has raised and make connections with my own heretical tendencies in narrative research.

Narratives as stories in becoming: In my work with women's auto/biographical writings (Tamboukou "Women, Education and the Self", "Interior styles, extravagant lives"), I have interrogated sequence as a necessary organizing axis for making sense of narratives. In doing so, I have focused on minor processes of how narratives emerge and evolve as stories in becoming, taking unpredicted bifurcations, being interrupted or broken, remaining irresolute or open-ended. D.H Lawrence has argued that the novel should seize the living moment of man's subtle interrelatedness with his [sic] universe (Gibson 52). This is exactly what I think narrative texts in the social sciences can do: grasp the living moments of the subject's subtle interrelatedness with their world. In this light, narratives are analysed as textual effects of specific socio-historical and cultural milieus and as forces shaping the social as well as our historical understanding of it. This way of thinking about narratives is driven by an interest in singularities and differences that can nevertheless be imagined as related and as making connections, thereby seeing texts as representing multiplicities of meanings, subjects in becoming, stories without definitive beginnings or ends, indeed as *nomadic narratives* (Tamboukou "Re-imagining the narratable subject").

Narratability and the self: The subject does matter in narrative research and not merely as a textual effect, but as embodied and grounded. Indeed, I see narrative research as a site for the deployment of embodied knowledges and as a stage for narratable selves to make connections. Here I have drawn upon Cavarero's (33) articulation of the narratable self, one which emerges in the process of the auto/biographical exercise of memory, and in the embodied and unreflective experience that the self has of being narratable; the narratable self has a unique story without being reducible to the content of this story. In this light, the idea of the narratable self opens up space for the researcher to oscillate between pathos, the force of relational narratives, and distance, the problem of identification with or 'over-investment' in the subjects of her investigation that Israel has so pithily identified in her work.

Narratives, imagination, politics: Narrative research is immanently situated within the political, an argument that is exemplified in the history of how feminist research has heavily drawn on, discussed and problematized women's narratives and narratives about women. As the political is configured in Hannah Arendt's thought, speech and action are the modes par excellence 'in which human beings appear to each other' (177), revealing as it were the uniqueness of the human condition. Indeed, action in the presence of others is a sine-qua-non condition for the emergence of the political subject. However, Arendt has pointed out that action as a fleeting moment in the passage of time is lost, if it is not transformed into a story. Following Foucault and Arendt, for the narrative researcher, stories should not be conceived as only discursive effects, but also as recorded processes wherein the self as the author/teller of his/her story transgresses power boundaries and limitations and follows 'lines of flight' in its constitution as a political subject. For me, it is this very process of storied actions revealing the 'birth' of the political subject that is the political in narrative research.

Within the political, narratives have opened up to the importance of the imaginary in what counts as research, a Spinozist formulation of imagination as a path giving access to the realities of the social world (Lloyd 63). In my own work, I have mapped an extremely divided and contested field opened up by women narrating their stories of becoming a subject. Indeed what I have traced is a diverse range of subject positions for female subjects to imagine themselves inhabiting, but also for 'the subject of feminism' to emerge from.

Bringing together the three themes discussed above, namely nomadism, narratability and the political imaginary, I now want to show how these tropes have informed my current research with women artists' life

writings, particularly focusing on my work on Rosa Bonheur and Anna Klumpke (Tamboukou "Genealogies of relating narratives").

Stories of the feminist imaginary

Rosa 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. In 1908, nine years after her 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[1]*. What is particularly significant about Klumpke's document is its unique blending of two women's lives in what is an auto/biographical text par excellence (Stanley "The Auto/biographical I"). In following nomadic lines of Klumpke's auto/biographical narrative, I have drawn on Cavarero's theorization of the *narratable self* and its connection to the political in Hannah Arendt's philosophy as delineated above.

Cavarero (1) has asked: 'does the course of every life allow itself be looked upon in the end like a design that has a meaning?' In exploring this question within Klumpke's life document, I have been interested into how subjects themselves intervene in the shaping of their lives as 'designs that have a meaning'. In this context it was the very process of the production of the story Klumpke wrote that I focused on, exploring its conditions of possibility as well as its effects. As already discussed, I was not interested in whether Klumpke's representation of Bonheur's life or of her own life was true or false. Anyway, questions and issues around representation, context, truth and memory are now well identified and richly discussed in the field of auto/biographical narratives (Smith and Watson). What was more interesting for me was to explore the way 'the truth' of this particular life document had been constituted and the effects of it upon its readers, then and now. In this context, following the narrative sequence of the document was the least interesting thing in the analysis. As a matter of fact, sequence is continuously disrupted in the document: it starts from the moment that the two women first met, and not only does it go backwards and forward but also makes continuous leaps from one life to another, further connecting their lives with the lives of other women, most notably Bonheur's mother and her life-long companion Natalie Micas. As poetically put in the document:

> 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 [...] I'll tell you everything without holding anything back. (Klumpke 79)

Indeed, the way Klumpke has written this life document can best be described as nomadic, bringing together many different voices, following storylines that ultimately remain open-ended and irresolute, taking abrupt bifurcations, dispersing its meaning in a variety of non-hierarchically organized levels of narrativity and even decentering its narrative characters. To do that, Klumpke has drawn on a rich variety of sources: diary entries, letters, reflections, official documents and a unique collection of drawings and paintings.[2] What brings together these diverse sources of life writing documents is the desire of the narratable subject for her story to be told.

The whole narrative is actually framed by the complex subtlety of what Cavarero has theorised as the I/you/we relationship. Within the milieu of love and sisterhood within which the text is being situated, Bonheur is actually telling Klumpke: I exist because you exist to listen to my story—and the stories of the 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*' (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 maybe, if we consider that the author is after

all Klumpke, 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.

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 feels most strongly emotionally attached to in the twilight of her life. In her own words: 'I could never tell anyone of the male sex how the pieces of my life fit together' (Klumpke 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 in Italy, particularly drawing on experiences of the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective: 'The gift of the written story which connects thoughts and saves one from letting herself go is an exquisite image of what we have tried to explain, that is, that in women's struggle, the symbolic revolution—the representation of oneself and of one's fellow women in relation to the world—is fundamental and must come first (Milan Women's Bookstore Collective as cited in Cavarero 55).

Although what we encounter in Bonheur's testament is the desire of a unique woman for her story to be told by her lover and friend, this isolated practice is in a different socio-historical context 'translated' as a significant feminist practice interrelated in the network of feminist consciousness-raising groups. As Cavarero has put it: 'The insistence on *the relationship between women, on the contextuality of the practice* and on *"starting from oneself"*... therefore finds a fundamental source in the consciousness-raising groups. Its uniqueness consists in a horizon that sees politics and narration intersect' (60) [emphasis in the text].

Rosa Bonheur's life, unique and unrepeatable as it was, left its trace through the story that her sister/friend/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. Indeed, *The Artist's (Auto)biography* 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 xv).

Researchers dealing with narratives have consciously taken up the task of rewriting stories. Over the years there will be different and diverse audiences of these stories, as well as different 'makings of them'. Situating myself as a feminist researcher, I have thus raised the question: how is it possible to go on rewriting 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.

Problematizing narratives

Coming to the question of how narratives can be problematized, I want to return now to Israel's argument and look more closely at how she has worked with narratives:

Interrogating the relation between names and stories: One of Foucault's long-lasting legacies is the theme of how authors and their corpus become the organizing principle of discourses and knowledge. Israel takes this proposition a step further within the specific field of biographies, historiographies and their uneasy encounters, and she looks into how stories, discourses and textual selves are interwoven in this epistemic ordering. Using the trope of the name she problematizes the relation between nomination and narrational thinking in writing about how 'a name denotes a subject in a story and masks other names and narratives [...] how names and stories constitute a character by signification and by evasions ' (6). The different names of the stories that comprise Emilia Dilke's archive have indeed given Israel an exemplary case to work with in fleshing out her argument. In this light, selves and stories are being constructed by historically specific discourses and figuration and narration become constitutive modes of historical processes. Here of course there is always the question of which of these discourses becomes dominant, creating and sustaining regimes of being 'in the true' (Foucault, "Order of Discourse" 60). There is also the question of the war of discourses—regarding who possesses the truth around authors and texts, who signs and how a signature

becomes recognized and therefore legitimized. These questions open up a field for analyzing narrative modalities of power, a theme I will discuss later.

Being attentive to the productive role of stories: When Israel writes that 'stories participate in wider historical projects of constructing cultural and political efficacies for bourgeois men' (8), the question she poses is about what stories do, not what they are or what they mean. To do that, she works on the surface of stories and discourses, focusing not on their meaning but on how they are organized and how they relate to each other in producing regimes of truth and indeed the subject herself. Meaning in Israel's analysis 'is not a hidden essence within texts but is produced by readers; surfaces, masquerades, metaphors, and images make as well as reveal meaning; selves are made and remade and unstable and discontinuous; culture matters deep down and immeasurably' (17).

Being attentive to the productive role of stories in their interrelation, Israel works both as an archivist and an analyst. Her archive is rich and encompasses a wide range of stories, including autobiographical documents-journals, letters, diaries, biographies and memoirs, formal and informal histories, literary and philosophical texts, journal and newspaper articles, paintings and commentaries on them, academic texts and treatises, reviews and critiques, prefaces and epilogues, to name but the most obvious. In this context, stories are being continually analysed as events throwing light into the complex interrelation of discourses as effects of specific historical and cultural milieus and as forces shaping history and shaping the social.

Resisting sequence, coherence and closure: When Israel argues that she uses Emilia Dilke as 'a point of entry into a range of historical and contemporary issues and an incitement to consider the relations—contradictions and reversals as well as homologies and importations—of diverse political, intellectual, social, and aesthetic histories' (8), sequence or closure in Emilia Dilke's stories are irrelevant to this kind of analysis. Indeed Israel argues for the possibility of reaching historical understanding through partiality, finally concluding that 'resisting false closure offers more not less knowledge and pleasure' (18).

However, as already mentioned above, defying the imperative of sequence is a 'heretic' move par excellence in the field of narrative research and the question consequently arises: should narrative analysis be concerned with this type of question or should it stick to its traditional narratological tasks? The answer I think can never be a generic one, but always located within the specific analytics. In Israel's case, 'Names and stories' has to be read to get a feeling of the richness that these kind of questions bring to the field, refreshing and problematizing —I argue— traditional biographies, historiographies and their uneasy encounters, suggesting new ways of reading and writing history, and I would add from my own perspective, sociology as well.

A genealogical approach to narratives

Israel's insightful analytics and her particular work with narratives as tools for (re)writing history makes connections with genealogical trails in narrative research in the social sciences; and it is some points of this convergence that I want to highlight below as the final part of this dialogic exchange.

Working on the surface of narratives: Drawing on its Nietzschean tradition, genealogy rejects the search for hidden meanings or truths. In this line of analysis, the genealogist does not look beyond, behind, or under the surface of narratives. The aim is, rather, to look more closely at the workings of those narratives. Instead of going deep, by looking for origins and hidden meanings, the analyst is rather working on the surface, constructing 'a polygon or rather a polyhedron' (Foucault, "Questions of Method" 77) of various minor processes that surround the stories of the archive she is working with. What is to be remembered is the fact that the more the analysis breaks down practices, the easier it becomes to find out more about their interrelation, though this process can never have an absolute conclusion. Abandoning the search for an ultimate truth does not, however, mean rejecting truth altogether. As Foucault puts it: 'I believe too much in truth not to suppose that there are different truths and different ways of speaking the truth ("Aesthetics of existence" 51). It is these different ways of 'speaking the truth' that a genealogical approach to narratives reveals so forcefully.

Within a genealogical framework, then, my work on the archive of women artists' auto/biographical narratives has been explored, not in terms of hidden meanings, not as the search for truth about what these women 'really' thought or felt about art, work, love, and human relations, but rather regarding what they wrote about themselves and the world, how they made connections and sometimes created oppositions with the then-prevailing polyvalent fin-de-siècle discourses which existed around femininity and gender relations. This is the point of remaining on the surface of narrative analysis: it is the act of treating narratives as multiplicities of meanings, and of creating a map of how different stories connect with other stories, discourses and practices in shaping meanings and in constituting the real and ultimately the subject herself.

While I argue that the genealogical approach of working within the maze of stories, discourses and practices is a way of making sense of the social, for Israel the making of, competition amongst, and the reading of, stories are history, and in both our cases 'the truth [of a story] maybe the least interesting thing about it'. In thus working with Klumpke's auto/biographical document, I attempted to chart its narrative matrix, theorize it as an assemblage of narrative lines, power relations and forces of desire, a textual entity constructed from heterogeneous auto/biographical sources and emerging as an effect of socio-historical processes. In this light, I worked toward unpacking the construction of its truth regime along the following lines: a) the blending of different life-writing genres—autobiography, biography, diary writing and letters—in the flow of the narrative; b) the way multiple voices, different lives and different times were brought together by way of women's love, constituting a polyphonic and relational narrative par excellence; c) the force of the art of painting the self in underpinning and sustaining the truth of writing the self and d) the powerful interplay of dominant gendered discourses and feminist counter-discourses. The following extract from Klumpke's autobiography, recounting a conversation between herself and Rosa Bonheur while taking a walk in the forest, emits signs of the narrative lines I have traced:

> In the quiet of that beautiful forest, Rosa Bonheur went on: 'How often I used to come here with my dear Nathalie. Together we'd relive the events in our lives that she wanted to write about. She didn't have a painter's eye for nature's subtle hues, but she could really write. If Nathalie hadn't been ill so much, she would have written my life story. You are the one Anna, I want to entrust with this task. 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.'

Amongst the themes that I have already discussed, what the above auto/biographical extract brings forward is the question of authorship, which leads the discussion to the next genealogical problematic: who speaks or writes, whose story is it?

The problem of the author: A genealogical approach to narratives inevitably raises the problem of the author, the move of displacing or desacralizing the 'author-function' as a convention of discourse (Foucault, "What is an author" 209).

In writing genealogies of the female self in art, I have considered the author's disappearance as an immensely thrilling and exciting theme that has been radically reworked in the narratives revolving around the construction of female subjectivities. These auto/biographical narratives have constructed a space 'in the margins of hegemonic discourses' (de Lauretis, "Technology of gender" 18) for the female self in education to emerge rather than disappear. This emergence, however, has not constituted a unitary core self, but rather a matrix of subject positions for women 'writing themselves' to inhabit, not in a permanent way, but temporarily, as points of departure for going elsewhere, becoming other. In this light, women's signature did indeed become important in forging new and unthought-of identities at the dawn of that new century. However these 'new' women in writing and signing themselves were constructing fragmented subjectivities; they were charting cartographies of often inconsistent subject positions, ultimately having 'only paradoxes to offer' (Scott). In the extract below, Klumpke recounts Bonheur's ideas about marriage and it is interesting to see how the question of marriage creates a situation where the authorial intention cannot be pinned down and the narrative about marriage ultimately remains open and irresolute:

> A long time ago, I understood that when a girl dons a crown of orange blossoms, she becomes subordinate, nothing but a pale reflection of what she was before. Shes forever the leader's companion, not his equal but his helpmate [...] Sure there are some fine husbands who are eager to make their wives qualities stand out. You know

a few. Yet, I've never dared go stand before the mayor with a man. Still, unlike the Saint-Simonians, I consider the sacrament of marriage essential to society. (206-207)

As illustrated in the extract above, Klumpke's document brings together quite contradictory ideas around marriage and women's independence and Bonheur herself appears to oscillate between historically incompatible dilemmas in women's lives. Marriage as an option really becomes a conundrum: essential for society but a hurdle for women and what is interesting here is that it remains so. But the reader can't help wondering: who do we listen to in the above extract? Is it Bonheur, Klumpke or the anonymous murmur of discourse?

While, however, my work clearly problematizes the author, there is I think some distance between Israel's take on the subject as purely textual and my own position about the embodied narratable self as delineated above. What is important to remember here is that researchers are always working within situated perspectives and knowledges (Haraway 196). Narratives do many things and it is up to the researcher to decide and indeed reveal what she wants to do when drawing on them, deconstruct the specificity of her epistemic position.

Israel has quite explicitly showed that her work is concerned with developing new ways of using lives in writing history, 'roughing up' the calm waters of biography. In this light she has become more interested in the 'grammatical subjects' of stories rather than in the effects of how narratable selves are exposed within the world, the political dimension of narratives that Arendt's philosophy has opened up. My own project of drawing on women's auto/biographical narratives in writing feminist genealogies has shifted my interest from textual selves to embodied experiences of narratability; it has further geared me to explore issues of my own involvement as a researcher in the theoretical and political project not of recovering, but of re-imagining, the subject of feminism.

While working in the archives with grey and dusty life documents, I have always felt that my subjects seem to evade the limitations of language and the restrictions of overcoded signifying systems. Within the DeleuzoGuattarian framework of my analysis, the real is perceived as a coexistence of the actual and the virtual: what was, what is and what could have been create a continuum that opens up and radicalizes the future.[3] Women's worlds past and present co-exist and inhere in how I make sense of my lived experiences as a feminist researcher in ways that sometimes unexpectedly shatter my perceptions and illuminate my analysis of *moments of being* that have left their traces in life documents. I remember my visit in Bonheur's and Klumpke's house in Thomery, a village near Fontainebleau in France. It was a sunny day in early June 2005 and I was the only passenger to get off the train. The house was well signposted from the deserted railway station and it was a thirty minutes walk through a lovely wooded area. I was walking on my own thinking that maybe I was retracing some of Bonheur's and Klumpke's paths, replaying their walks as it were. This was definitely not an experience of identification with my historical subjects; it was rather an experience of making connections with life-lines of my subjects through specific space/time encounters, a complex structure of relations between material conditions, actual sensations and virtual ideas and intensities surrounding them. The experience of being in their house was equally forceful. Although rendered to a museum, it is not a stately institution. Part of the house is still inhabited by Klumpke's heirs and it is run by the community, being open only twice a week. Walking through its rooms and corridors, I was entering the materiality of the two women's lives: their furniture, their clothes, personal objects, photographs and of course their paintings. What is this strange desire that forces us to replay the past in spaces of intimacy? What are we looking for in the archive and whose past, whose time, is it when we find ourselves in houses that have become archival places? The house is indeed central in Bachelard's phenomenological *topoanalysis*, 'the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives.' (8) In his analysis,

[...] the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind. The binding principle in this integration is the daydream. Past, present and future give the house different dynamisms, which often interfere, at times opposing, at others, stimulating one another. (6)

As I have already discussed, I have been intrigued by this interference of past, present and future, but I had to move beyond phenomenology to further explore a non-spatialized, indivisible conception of time, time perceived as duration, as I further discuss.

Troubling time/space configurations, interrogating experience: Narrative research is closely interwoven with space/time deployments, Bakhtin's chronotope being of course a significant analytic moment of this interweaving. In considering time and memory in narrative research, linear conceptualizations of time are abandoned: narrative research raises questions about how the past is contracted in the telling of stories, in what allows memory to have access to the past, in how cultural memory works in the production and indeed narration of stories. In this light, experience and its supposed explanatory capacity has been equally problematized and interrogated. Israel has specifically drawn on Scott's influential work ("Evidence of experience") to argue that interpretation makes use of narrative in its very construction, not just in its recounting.

These problematics around time, memory and experience are further interrelated with narratives of space—of how we tell and write stories about the meaning and significance of space. Narrative research is therefore instrumental in discussions revolving around the spatial constitution of human beings within the parallel configurations of spaces and places. In this analytical context, I have argued that women's narratives have charted different space/time blocks of auto/biographical geographies and imagined histories; they have painted the private and the public in different colours and have given it unthought-of configurations ("Interior styles/extravagant lives").

Unravelling narrative modalities of power and desire: My final proposition is that narrative research should be deployed in the whirl between power and desire. Desire in narrative is a theme much discussed and written about. As Teresa de Lauretis has put it: 'a story is always a question of desire' ("Desire in narrative" 12). However, how desire is conceptualized and used is itself an unresolved question analogous to that of the question of narrative. Following Deleuze and Guattari's analyses, I take desire as an autonomous and productive force shaping the social rather than being determined by it, desire as 'the real material thing [...] always constitutive of a social field' (Deleuze and Guattari 348). In the same vein, my take on power follows Foucault's conceptualization of power as a material entity of relations at play. What I want to suggest here is that narrative research is a field par excellence for the study of how economies of power and desire produce realities, segmentarities and the subject herself, but also incite deterritorializations and open up space for lines of flight to be set in motion. In this light, exploring narrative tropes of power/desire connections, unravel their modalities and deconstruct their form and content.

Making connections

In this paper I have attempted to chart heretic paths of narrative analysis in life history research. Reflecting on Israel's work of problematizing biographical approaches in historical analyses, I have focused my discussion on narrative analytics in life-history research in the social sciences by drawing on my on-going work of writing feminist genealogies. In this context I have considered the specificities of analysing life-history documents as organic parts of wider archives, both existing and being created by the researcher herself. I have argued that an approach that sees life stories as multiplicities of meanings can destabilize the narratological conventions of sequence, closure and agency, but this can be done in different ways and with different effects. In this light I have been particularly attentive to different conceptualizations of the subject—purely textual and defined within the limitations of language, as in Israel's research, or corporeal and expressive as emerging in my own genealogical work. Drawing in particular on my current project of writing a genealogy of the female self in art, I have considered nomadism, narratability and the political imaginary as theoretical themes informing the narrative analytics of my research. In this context I have deployed a set of genealogical strategies: working on the surface of narratives, decentering the author, making connections with actual and virtual storyworlds, troubling space/time configurations, problematizing experience, unravelling narrative modalities of power and desire. What I ultimately suggest is that doing narrative research opens up interdisciplinary fields of inquiries, but there is still a need to map our theoretical and epistemological situated positions, so that we can create conditions of possibility for dialogic exchanges. This paper is a move towards such transdisciplinary connections.

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Notes

[1] The original title in French: 'Rosa Boneur: sa vie et son oeuvre' [Rosa Boneur, her life and work] has however been published in Enlish as 'Rosa Bonheur: The Arist's [Auto]biography', see Klumpke, 2001

[2] Unfortunate the collection of drawings and paintings has not been included in the English translation, they can only be seen in the original French publication that is housed at Bonheur's museum-house at Thomery-By near Fontainebleau in France.

3 In Bergson's philosophy the conceptual pair of the virtual/actual is contrasted to that of the possible/real. While the possible/real pair is governed by the principles of resemblance and limitation, the virtual/actual opens up numberless possibilities of future becomings. As Deleuze explains: 'While the real is the image and likeness of the possible that it realizes, the actual on the other hand, does not resemble the virtuality it embodies' (97)