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PARATEXTS TO FRIDA KAHLO'S OEUVRE: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE VISUAL AND THE TEXTUAL, THE SELF AND THE OTHER, FROM THE SELF-PORTRAITS TO THE DIARY ENTRIES

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***Abstract***

This article examines the relationship between the visual and the textual in Frida Kahlo's paintings and writings. It argues that an understanding of this relationship would offer a better picture of Kahlo's oeuvre. The article begins with an examination of the dedicatory inscriptions in the self-portraits, engaging with Gérard Genette's concept of paratext and Philippe Lejeune's autobiographical pact, as a prelude to the study of the relationship between text and drawings in the diary. In a close reading of the diary, informed by Jacques Lacan's theories of subject formation and object relations, the article goes on to show that the workings between the visual and the textual represent the split that constitutes the subject in both the self-portraits and the diary. In the first instance, the subject is riven between seeing oneself and being seen by others. In the second, the subject, partly visualized, partly 'textualized' (*photo-graphié*, as Lacan puts it) constitutes itself through the game of metonymy and metaphor in the chain of signification of the diaristic narrative. Metonymy and metaphor in the diary represent Kahlo's desire for the Other which Diego embodies for her. The article concludes that the Other plays a generative role in Kahlo's painted and written self-portraits and that the scenography of the Other contributes to the form and content of the diary as a textual self-portrait.

### ***Introduction***

Despite the generic classification that the title of *The Diary of Frida Kahlo* readily provides, one would expect that for someone like Frida Kahlo, who lived to paint, what is now called her ‘diary’ should have resembled more a painter’s sketchbook and that it would have contained the preliminary compositions of her works of art. It is surprising that, among the numerous practice drawings, sketches, figures, grotesques and still-lives, only two could be said to be preliminary studies.<sup>1</sup> What is, conversely, even more striking is that in lieu of a simple personal record of daily events, which would have better suited the generic title, one finds instead a diaristic narrative that reframes the same fixation with self and others, which Kahlo first expressed in her (painted) self-portraits.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps for that reason some biographers of Frida Kahlo, bordering on traditional ‘l’homme et l’œuvre’ criticism, have sought to present her diary and her other writings (poems, dedications, personal notes and letters) as an autonomous literary corpus.<sup>3</sup> In this article, it is argued that the relationship between image and text that constitutes the self-portraits and the diary is indispensable for a complete understanding Kahlo’s ‘life and works’. Beginning with a discussion of the dedicatory inscriptions in Frida Kahlo’s self-portraits, engaging with Gérard Genette’s concept of paratext and Philippe Lejeune’s autobiographical pact, this article focuses, through the lens of a psychoanalytical reading, on Kahlo’s use of the Other to compose a textual self-portrait.

*El diario de Frida Kahlo: un íntimo autorretrato* (1995) vacillates between a retrospective narrative covering a lifetime of personal feelings and images and the more conventional record of dates and biographical events that one would expect to find in a diary.<sup>4</sup> Even in those few entries which constitute the most intentional attempts at a diaristic narrative, Kahlo appears more interested in how her life fits the course of historical and political

events than in the routine of everyday life. For the most part, the diary therefore takes the form of a retrospective narrative by means of which Frida recasts her past life to fit her own rhetorical purposes. In the eight-page semi-autobiographical section entitled 'Esquema de mi vida' (plates 151–60, pp. 281–85), for example, she alters the year of her birth (1907) to coincide with that of the Mexican Revolution (1910). Diary entries like these fall under Philippe Lejeune's all-encompassing definition of autobiography (a '[r]etrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality'),<sup>5</sup> within which he subsumes the subgenre of the diary (*le journal*) and on which he establishes the concept of autobiographical pact:

Autobiography (narrative recounting the life of the author) supposes that there is identity of name between the author (such as he figures, by his name, on the cover), the narrator of the story, and the character who is being talked about. What we have here is a very simple criterion, which defines at the same time as autobiography all the other genres of personal literature (journal, self-portrait, essay).<sup>6</sup>

Commenting on and complementing the concept of autobiographical pact, Genette draws attention to the fact that most of the elements that underwrite Lejeune's definition of the genre of autobiography and its subgenres are situated within the liminal space of the text that he calls the paratext, which he subdivides into peritext and epitext.<sup>7</sup>

Genette's publisher defines the concept of paratext as

those liminal devices and conventions, both within and outside the book, that

form part of the complex mediation between book, author, publisher, and reader: titles, forewords, epigraphs, and publishers' jacket copy are part of a book's private and public history.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of Frida's diary, the author's name or initials in the text are forms of an auctorial peritext, while the title and subtitle of Frida's diary are part of publisher's peritext. Like the author's letters, statements attributed to the author, and recollections of events associated with the author, diaries make part of an author's 'private' or 'intimate' epitext and, according to Genette, 'designate any message bearing directly or indirectly on an author's own past, present, or future work, which the author addresses to himself, with or without the intention of publishing it later'.<sup>9</sup> The paratext is therefore generally textual. As Genette puts it, 'Most often the paratext is itself a text: if it is not itself *the* text, it is already *some* text.'<sup>10</sup> Although Genette limited his application of the concept of paratext to literary works,<sup>11</sup> I propose in the following discussion of Kahlo's painted self-portraits that this definition of paratext would be particularly applicable to a work of art, as a prelude to the discussion of the diary, where designs, illustrations or photographs make up the most ostensible elements of the paratext of that piece of work.

### ***The self-portrait dedications: image and paratext***

The application of the concept of paratext to Frida's artworks is particularly pertinent, for many of her paintings contain textual inscriptions about the specific circumstances that led to the creation of the piece, or about the person(s) to whom a specific work was dedicated. However idiosyncratic, Frida's inscription of dedications in her self-portraits originates from the traditional Mexican art form of the votive *retablo* or *ex-voto*. Originally

a piece of religious iconography placed behind an altar, which combined image and text on a rectangular sheet of tin, the *retablo* became a popular method for a devotee to express his or her thanks for a divine intervention in a personal situation.<sup>12</sup> In its traditional form, the *retablo* generically comprises an apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a depiction of a traumatic event (an accident, a catastrophe, an incurable illness, etc.) which the devotee survived, and a narrative naming the person(s) who commissioned the *retablo* and expressing their gratitude to the Virgin for the miraculous cure or recovery.<sup>13</sup> This is the established tradition which informs Frida's idiosyncratic method of writing dedicatory inscriptions on self-portraits and the present application of the concept of paratext to her works.

There appears, however, to exist only one example of Frida's use of the traditional *retablo* technique. The example in question represents the bus accident in which Frida was involved in 1925. It contains her parents' thanks to Our Lady of the Sorrows for saving their daughter's life:

Los esposos Guillermo Kahlo y Matilde C. de Kahlo dan las gracias a la Virgen de los Dolores por haber salvado a su niña Frida del accidente acaecido en 1925 en la Esquina de Cuahutemozin y Calzada de Tlalpan.  
(*Retablo*, 1943, oil on metal, 19 × 24 cm, private collection, USA).<sup>14</sup>

It appears that in the production of this artefact Kahlo or someone else may have used a pre-existing *retablo* of a crash between a streetcar and a bus, and depicted her own accident over the original image. In her biography of the artist, Hayden Herrera speculates that

[Frida], or one of her students, altered a few details [of the pre-existing *retablo*] so that the bus's sign [read] 'Coyoacán,' the street car [read] 'Tlalpan' and the girl sprawled on the tracks ha[d] joined eyebrows like Frida's. They also added a dedicatory inscription.<sup>15</sup>

This remains a likely hypothesis in light of how Kahlo adapted the technique of the *retablo* in her self-portraits.

Frida borrowed the narrative element of the *retablo* and used it in various forms to contextualize the self-portraits she dedicated to significant others.<sup>16</sup> As early as 1931, she began to use the narrative element of the *retablo* to dedicate her self-portraits to friends:

Aquí nos veis, a mí Frieda [*sic*] Kahlo, junto con mi amado esposo Diego Rivera, pinté estos retratos en la bella ciudad de San Francisco, California para nuestro amigo Mr Albert Bender, y fue en el mes de abril del año 1931. (*Frieda y Diego Rivera; o, Frieda Kahlo y Diego Rivera*, 1931, oil on canvas, 100 × 79 cm, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art).<sup>17</sup>

Retaining the votive nature of the *retablo*, Kahlo presents herself in her self-portraits as either the Virgin or the beneficiary of a miracle cure.<sup>18</sup> In a full-length self-portrait dedicated to her friend and former lover Leon Trotsky for his birthday, she appears floating on stage, in much the same manner as the Virgin of Guadalupe has appeared in the scene of the traditional *retablo*. In her hands, the artist holds a note containing the dedication:

Para León Trotsky con todo cariño dedico esta pintura, el día 7 de noviembre

1937. Frida Kahlo. En San Angel. México. (*Autorretrato dedicado a Leon Trotsky; o, 'Between the Curtains'*, 1937, oil on canvas, 80 × 70 cm, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D. C.)<sup>19</sup>

In a self-portrait dedicated to her doctor Leo Eloesser (1881–1976), who cured a fungus that affected her hands, Kahlo assumes the rightful position as the recipient of a cure. As a sign of gratitude, she dedicates her self-portrait to Dr Eloesser using a 'hand-held' *retablo* banner stating:

Pinté mi retrato en el año 1940 para el doctor Leo Eloesser, mi médico y mejor amigo. Con todo mi cariño. Frida Kahlo. (*Autorretrato dedicado al Dr. Eloesser*, 1940, oil on masonite, 59.5 × 40 cm, private collection, USA)<sup>20</sup>

In perhaps the longest entry found in all her self-portraits, written on a scrolled banner at the time of her fortieth birthday (which she celebrates as her thirty-seventh one), the paratext takes the form of an autobiographical narrative:

Aquí [*sic*] me pinté yo, Frida Kahlo, con la imagen [*sic*] del espejo. Tengo 37 años y es el mes de Julio [*sic*] de mil novecientos cuarenta y siete. En Coyoacán, México, lugar donde nació. (*Autorretrato con el pelo suelto*, 1947, oil on hard fibre, 61 × 45 cm, private collection, Des Moines, Iowa)<sup>21</sup>

It is widely believed that it was around this time that Frida started to keep a diary.



*The diary and its paratexts*

The gold monogram 'J K' on the red leather cover of Frida's diary indicates that Frida's diary was originally a blank diary book bound for someone else. Frida's biographer, Hayden Herrera, notes that

The red leather volume with the initials 'J. K.' imprinted in gold on the cover (it was said to have belonged to John Keats) was purchased in New York by a friend and given to Frida with the hope that filling it might offer her some solace at a time when she was sick and lonely.<sup>22</sup>

The different 'author's name' on the cover does not detract, however, from Lejeune's concept of autobiographical pact, for the pseudonym 'changes nothing in the identity'.<sup>23</sup> It is very likely that the very friend who thought that keeping a diary would be salutary to Frida also believed that a blank volume containing someone else's name would be an apposite safeguard. As the publisher's peritext shows, there is no doubt that the 'diary' is Frida Kahlo's 'intimate self-portrait', even though, quite interestingly, the published facsimile of the original diary includes the original red leather cover with someone else's monogram.

The original title page of the diary opens with a black-and-white photograph of Kahlo lying on her back, presumably dead, as the trifoliate wreath of blue and yellow forget-me-nots suggests. It has been suggested that whoever took that photograph used Manuel Álvarez Bravo's famous photograph of a murdered striking worker (*Striking Worker Murdered*, 1934) as a model.<sup>24</sup> Although the similarity of Frida's pose to that of

Manuel Bravo's worker is remarkable, the photograph on the title page best recalls the photographs of Frida's mirror image taken around 1945 by Bravo's wife, Lola.<sup>25</sup> As Lola's mirror-image photographs show, Kahlo exhibited a fascination with her specular image that went beyond a secondary form of narcissism: she used mirrors not only to look at herself but also as a medium to paint her self-portraits, as her *Autorretrato con el pelo suelto* (1947, oil on hard fibre, 61 × 45 cm, private collection, Des Moines, Iowa) corroborates.<sup>26</sup> In the context of her paintings, the self-portraits represent Kahlo's desire not only to be seen as a picture but also to be read as a book, which the *Diary* would finally actualize. In both cases, as I discuss below, photography mediates this transformation.

### ***Textualizing the self: I am photo-graphed***

To point up the complementary role that language plays in Frida's artwork and, conversely, that which drawings will also play in the diary, it would be useful to refer to Lacan's reference to Jean Bobon's report on the case of a female schizophrenic patient, named Isabella, who at first used only pictures to express herself.<sup>27</sup> Lacan notes that one day Isabella makes a break-through by complementing the drawing of a tree loaded with eyes with a sentence:

Beyond the tree branches, she [Isabella] writes the formula of her secret: *Io sono sempre vista*, namely something that she had never been able to say up to then: *I am always seen*. Again I must pause in order to make you see that in Italian as in French, *vista* has an ambiguous meaning, it is not only a past participle, it is also sight with its two meanings subjective and objective, that

is, the function of seeing and the fact of being seen. (*S*, x, 90)<sup>28</sup>

The point here is not that in plate 24 (p. 216) of Frida's diary one finds a similar drawing of a tree with gazing eyes but that the combination of picture with language constitutes the *modus operandi* of her oeuvre. In the diary, the opening photograph is particularly significant, for it draws attention to the splitting of the subject who not only looks and is looked at but is also 'textualized' or, as Lacan puts it in the original French, *photo-graphié*, emphasizing the etymological concept of the visual (<Gr. *photos*, light) and the textual (< Gr. *graphia*, writing):

[I]n the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture.

This is the function that is found at the heart of the institution of the subject in the visible. What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which [.^.^.] I am *photo-graphed* [*photo-graphié*]. (*S*, IX, 106)

Moreover, the ornamental frame that showcases the paratextual photograph of Frida in the title page, with its columns and ornate arches further adorned with flowers, recalls the turn-of-the-century paraphernalia of early photography.<sup>29</sup> Recalling showcases of early photography, optical theatres or praxinoscopes, Frida's framed photograph constitutes what Freud called an 'other scene' (*ein anderer Schauplatz*) and which Lacan called *la scène*, the stage on which the subject plays out his or her fantasy, which is

different from the real world (*le monde*) (*S*, x, 43). The scene, as Dylan Evans explains, designates 'a virtual space which is framed in the same way that the scene of a play is framed by the proscenium arch in a theater, where the world is a real space which lies beyond the frame'.<sup>30</sup> If one reads Lacan closely, the scene stages more than the subject's fantasy; it stages what cannot be articulated in the real world: 'You will find that the scene, understood in its proper dimension, will allow that which cannot be said in the real world to come forth' (*S*, x, 90; my translation). In what follows, I propose that the diary stages an autobiographical space (or 'scene') in which Frida moves beyond the sphere of the visual or painterly Self to a writing of the Self through the scene of the Other.

***The textualized or writerly subject: between metonymy and the metaphor***

As there exists a split between the eye and the gaze in the subject's scopic field, there also exists in the discursive field 'the fundamental split between the two signifying chains that constitutes the subject' (*S*, VIII, 205; my translation). The two signifying chains, which Lacan invokes, constitutes on the one hand the sequential, horizontal, syntagmatic combination of words in a sentence and the circular, vertical, paradigmatic selection of words. For Lacan, metonymy and metaphor entails more than 'word-to-word connexion' (*E*, 157) or the substitution of 'one word for another' (*Ibid.*) respectively. It entails a diachronic movement from signifier to signifier (which could be words and/or images) or the substitution, in the case of metaphor, of a signifier with another. For the (writerly) subject, the splitting involves a resistance or elusion of meaning. As Lacan claims, metonymy represents the subject's relationship to a signifier whose signified eludes the chain of signification (*S*, III, 221).

The first textual entry in Frida's diary, made up of a nonsensical chain of signifiers

whose meaning is constantly deferred in a word-to-word association exemplifies the metonymic process that is not very far removed from the practice of automatic writing:

no, luna, sol, diamante, manos –  
yema, punto, rayo, gasa, mar.  
verde pino, vidrio rosa, ojo.  
mina, goma, lodo, madre, *voy*.  
= amor amarillo, dedos, útil  
niño flor, deseo, ardid, resina.  
potrero, bismuto, santo, sopera.  
puntilla, máquina, arroyo, *soy*.  
metileno, guasa, cáncer, risa.  
gorjeo – mirada – cuello, viña  
pelo negro, seda niña viento =  
padre pena pirata saliva  
sacate mordaza consumo vivaz  
onda – rayo – tierra – rojo – *soy*.  
Abril. día 30 . . [*sic*]  
Niño – cuajo, suyo, rey, radio negro –  
Álamo sino *busco* – manos. hoy.  
Olmo. Olmedo. Violeta. canario  
zumbido. pedrada – blancor del gris.  
Camino – silueta – Ternura  
Corrido – gangrena – petrarca [*sic*]  
Mirasol – siniestros azules – agudo

Romeros – ambajes [*sic*] – basuras – ayer  
 regazo . tumbando. *arrimo*. (plate 5, p. 203)

The first-person verb forms (voy, soy, busco, arrimo) are the only signifiers that produce meaning. They express the movement (voy) of the self (soy) and focus on the subject's quest (busco) and approach (arrimo) of the Other. As this entry shows, it is in the quest for the Other that the signifier and signified come together in the subject: 'voy .^.^. soy .^.^. busco .^.^. arrimo' (plate 5, p. 203). At these specific points 'at which the signifier and signified are knotted together', which Lacan calls *anchoring points* (*S*, III, 268), the subject expresses an identificatory quest for the Other. There is no meaningful articulation until the subject engages with the Other in a place or point where the subject can address and articulate his or her demand for love to another subject.

***Textualizing the other: writing the scene of the other***

Between the 'I' (which identifies itself with the author, narrator or character) and the reader, with whom the author establishes an autobiographical pact, there emerges in the private epitext 'a first addressee [a correspondent, a confidant, the author himself] interposed between the author and the possible public'.<sup>31</sup> In the *Diary* this addressee is essentially Frida's lifelong partner, Diego. Diego however is not a mere addressee; he represents the Other for Frida. Despite Frida's imaginary assimilation with Diego (*Frida y Diego 1924–1944 (II)*; o, *Retrato doble de Diego y yo (II)*, 1944, oil on masonite, 13.5 × 8.5 cm, María Félix Collection, Mexico City),<sup>32</sup> Diego is symbolically inassimilable. In an attempt to circumvent this, in the diary Frida transforms Diego into another scene or another place where she articulates the repressed fantasy of assimilation. As Frida puts it

in an undated love letter addressed to Diego:

Era sed de muchos años retenida en nuestro cuerpo. Palabras encadenadas que no pudimos decir sino en los labios del sueño. Todo lo rodeaba el milagro vegetal del paisaje de tu cuerpo. Sobre tu forma, a mi tacto respondieron las pestañas de las flores, los rumores de los ríos [*sic*]. Todas las frutas había en el jugo de tus labios, la sangre de la granada, el tramonto del mamey y la piña acrisolada. [.^.^] Horizontes y pasajes = que recorrí con el beso. (plate 21, p. 215)

Even when the subject tries to relate to the Other from another place – even from the place of the Other – there is no identification between the two. In its desire to become meaningful, Lacan submits, the subject has to play the game between its metonymic self and its other, metaphoric, pole:

This signifying game between metonymy and metaphor, up to and including the active edge that splits my desire between a refusal of the signifier and a lack of being, and links my fate to the question of my destiny, this game, in all its inexorable subtlety, is played until the match is called, there where I am not, because I cannot situate myself there. (*E*, 166)

Accepting Diego as a different subject, Frida conceives a relationship in which she plays a complementary role despite the fact that he fulfils many functions for her. Frida expresses her relationship to Diego metaphorically. Going beyond Jakobson's definition of metaphor as a substitution of a word for another and borrowing from Freud's work on

the interpretation of dreams, Lacan redefines metaphor as a substitution of a signifier for another (*E*, 164), in opposition to the established linguistic concept of substitution of a sign with another. The following entry in the diary illustrates the effect that the commutation of one signifier for another has on Frida's understanding of her relationship with Diego:

Diego *mi niño*

Diego *mi novio*

Diego *pintor*

Diego *mi amante*

Diego "*mi esposo*"

Diego *mi amigo*

Diego *mi madre*

Diego *mi padre*

Diego *mi hijo*. (plate 60, p. 235)

In this entry the signifier *Diego* never changes for Frida. Only the associative signifiers that characterize her relation to him as evolving change. According to Lacan, the substitution of one signifier with another represents the subject's relationship with the Other (*S*, III, 268). In this perspective, metaphor represents the very structure of love, as Lacan puts it, 'insofar as the function of the *érastès*, of the lover, who is the subject of lack, comes in place of, substitutes himself or herself for, the function of the *érôménos*, the loved object' (*S*, VIII, 53; my translation). In the entry above, Kahlo situates herself in relation to Diego as both the subject and the object of love, invoking relations that are reciprocal and expected to be characterized by requited love. Together with metonymy,



metaphor constitutes not only language, as Roman Jakobson was the first to note in the context of aphasia,<sup>33</sup> but also, as Lacan understands it, the subject.

In the following entry, Frida wonders ‘Porqué le llam[a] [su] Diego?’. She seems to realize that ‘nunca fué ni será [suyo]. Es de él mismo’ (plate 61, p. 235). In perhaps the most introspective entry of the diary, entitled ‘Origen de las dos Fridas’ (plates 82–83, pp. 245–47), Frida similarly realizes that her true other is her self. This entry re-enacts the play between metonymy and metaphor, for Frida’s *recuerdo* (memory text) is a screen memory for the traumatic experience of contracting polio that kept her away from all her friends when she was six years old. In lieu of the actual childhood event, she speaks about the imaginary friend she created to compensate for the lack of company and interaction. The text reads as a signifier of another text and it plays that role *au pied de la lettre*, which Lacan defines as ‘the localized structure of the signifier’ (*E*, 153):

Debo haber tenido seis años cando viví intensamente la amistad imaginaria con una niña .^ [sic] de mi misma edad mas o menos. En la vidriera del que entónces [sic] era mi cuarto, y que daba a la calle de Allende, sobre una de los primeros cristales de la ventana. [erasure] echaba ‘bajo’ y con un dedo dibujaba una ‘puerta’ .^.^.^.^. [sic] Por esa ‘puerta’ salía en la imaginación, con una gran alegría [sic] y urgencia, atravezaba [sic] todo el llano que se miraba hasta llegar a una lecheria [sic] que se llamaba PINZÓN .^.^. Por la O de PINZÓN entraba y bajaba INTEMPESTIVAMENTE *al interior de la tierra* [sic], donde ‘mi amiga imaginaria’ me esperaba siempre. (plates 82–83, pp. 245–46)

At the centre of this revelation one finds the place of the Other and the setting of the

'other scene', the scene of fantasy, framed on the structure of the real world. As Lacan words it, 'Fantasy is framed beyond the pane of a window that opens' (*S*, x, 89; my translation). The imaginary (visual) frame of the scene of fantasy has a foothold in the real world (on a window pane), and the world where the fantasy takes place is accessible through the symbolic register of language. Little Frida delves into her imaginary world to meet her imaginary friend through the 'O' of the word 'PINZÓN'.

In the fantasy scene, it does not matter that the word *pinzón* denotes the name of the dairy store in Frida's imaginary world or anything else in the real world. The importance of the word, rather, lies in the role it plays as a signifier in the setting of the scene. Lacan claims that in the scene of fantasy 'signifiers make a network of traces through which the passage from one cycle to another is henceforth possible, which means that the signifier generates a world, the world of the speaking subject' (*S*, x, 91–92; my translation). This final example of how the textual part of little Frida's other world is as significant as its visual one drawn alongside the text corroborates the hypothesis that I have tried to substantiate throughout this article, which proposes that, alongside the visual, the textual contributes to the significance (not necessarily the signification) of Kahlo's oeuvre. This means that, despite the complementation of image and text, metaphor and metonymy still resist signification.

### **Conclusions**

Going beyond the meaning that the Lacanian readings of Frida's commutative combinations of image and text may engender, a conclusion should draw attention to how these commutations of text and image imbue Frida and her oeuvre with significance. This does not mean to answer the question of who is Frida and what her

paintings and writings mean, but rather how they mean and interact in the signifying chain. Image and text, text and image go together and, more than anything else, they represent the play between the self and the other in Frida's oeuvre. For example, the ex-voto of Frida's tramway accident (*Retablo*, 1943, oil on metal, 19 × 24 cm, private collection, USA), built on the scene of another person's accident, institutes the paradigm for all the self-portraits with dedications. As the monogrammed red leather cover of the diary also indicates, the self-portraiture of the diary is also built on the identity of an other person's name (J. K.), which foregrounds the importance of the Other in the composition of the diary. Third, the title-page photograph of Frida (plate 4, p. 202) emulating Manuel A. Bravo's photograph of a murdered worker, showcased in an ornamental cardboard frame, also structures not only the scene of Other in which Frida steeps her fantasy but also the self–other relationships she creates with Diego and herself in the context of the diary.

These scenes constitute not only the imaginary stage where the subject plays out its fantasy, but also reductions of a fuller story which writing seeks to mediate. They represent, as Lacan proposes, images of something that the unconscious must articulate and put in play through the dialectics of the transfer (*S*, IV, 120). Writing the scene of the Other in the diary indeed releases, as Kahlo confesses, 'palabras encadenadas que no pudimos decir sino en los labios del sueño' (plate 21, p. 215). What emerges in the writing of the diary, as Lejeune has also proposed, is an autobiographical space (or 'scene') whose autobiographical truth value is governed by an 'individual's phantasm', based not on the certainty of the autobiographical identity of the real person and the protagonist-narrator, but on the ambiguities and uncertainties of a phantasmatic pact.<sup>34</sup> The *Diary* is thusly paratextual in the scheme of Kahlo's oeuvre. Her paintings widen the reader's reception of the diary. The textual entries hark back to the paratextuality of the

painted self-portraits. The drawings and sketches in the diary in turn accentuate the  
visuality of the text, undermining the mastery of mimetic representation to highlight the  
performativity of the visual and the textual in Frida Kahlo's oeuvre.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Namely '1947 Agosto, el cielo, la tierra, yo y Diego' (plate 73, p. 241) and 'Origen de las dos Fridas' (plates 82–85, pp. 245–46) were precursors to paintings: *El abrazo de amor de El universo, la tierra (México)*, *Yo, Diego y el señor Xólotl* (1949, oil on masonite, 70 × 61 cm, private collection [Eugenio Riquelme, Mexico City]) and *Las dos Fridas* (1939; oil on canvas, 174 × 173 cm, Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City) respectively. All references to Frida Kahlo's diary come from *El diario de Frida Kahlo: un íntimo autorretrato* (Madrid: Debate, 1995). Plate references are to the facsimile of the diary (plates 4–171); page references are to the 'Transcripción del diario con comentarios' (pp. 202–87). References to Frida's paintings, including year of production, material, dimensions and collection, come from *Frida Kahlo: Das Gesamtwerk*, ed. by Helga Prignitz-Poda, Salomón Grimberg and Andrea Kettenmann (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1988).
- <sup>2</sup> For a discussion of Frida's obsession with herself and others in the context of her paintings, see for example Clara Orban, 'Bruised Words, Wounded Images, in Frida Kahlo', in *Text and Visuality: Word & Image Interactions 3*, ed. by Martin Heusser et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 162–71 (p. 163); Grannit Ankori, *Imaging Her Selves: Frida Kahlo's Poetics of Identity and Fragmentation* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002), pp. 95–110; and Irma Dosamantes-Beaudry, 'Frida Kahlo: Self–Other Representation and Self Healing through Art', *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 20 (2001), 5–17 (pp. 9–12).
- <sup>3</sup> See for instance *The Letters of Frida Kahlo: Cartas Apasionadas*, ed. by Martha Zamora (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1995); and *Escrituras de Frida Kahlo*, ed. by Raquel Tibol (Mexico: Plaza y Janés, 1999; repr. 2004). Raquel Tibol in particular claims that Frida's diverse writings ('cartas, recados, mensajes, confesiones, recibos, corridos, solicitudes, protestas, agradecimientos, imploraciones y otros textos mas elaborados') make up for 'una tacita autobiografía y la ubicación de Frida dentro de la literatura

confesional e intimista del siglo xx mexicano' (p. 27).

<sup>4</sup> In his magisterial study of the diary, Alain Girard has similarly noted that there exists no diary [*journal intime*] in a 'pure state' and that it shares one or several characteristics with other genres. It is at once a first-person narrative of daily events and introspective analysis of the self (*Le journal intime* [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963], p. 6). For a survey of other characteristics of the diary in modern literature, see Peter Boerner, 'La Place du journal dans la littérature moderne', in *Le journal intime et ses formes littéraires: actes du colloque de septembre 1975*, ed. by V. del Litto (Geneva: Droz, 1978), pp. 217–23 (pp. 219–21).

<sup>5</sup> Philippe Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Pact', in *On Autobiography: Philippe Lejeune*, ed. by Paul J. Eakin and trans. by Katherine Leary (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 3–30 (p. 4).

<sup>6</sup> Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Pact', p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 2, n. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Publisher's paratext (p. 1 of the flyleaf), in Genette's *Paratexts*, p. i.

<sup>9</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 387.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3, n. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Ramón A. Gutiérrez, 'Sacred Retablos: Objects that Conjoin Time and Space', in 'Art and Faith' in Mexico: *The Nineteenth-Century Retablo Tradition*, ed. by Elizabeth N. C. Zarur and Charles M. Lovell (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), pp. 31–37 (pp. 31–34).

<sup>13</sup> Victor Fosado, 'Les tableaux votifs – les alliés de Frida', in *La Casa Azul* (The Hague: Museum Palaeis Langue Voorhout, 1993), pp. 177–87 (p. 177); Orban, 'Bruised Words',

p. 165; Helga Prignitz-Poda, *Frida Kahlo: Life and Work* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2007), p. 30; and Gerry Souter, *Frida Kahlo: Beneath the Mirror* (New York: Parkstone, 2007), p. 63.

<sup>14</sup> Frida Kahlo, *Das Gesamtwerk*, ed. by Prignitz-Poda et al, pp. 266 and 285.

<sup>15</sup> Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), p. 455, n. 74.

<sup>16</sup> Souter, *Beneath the Mirror*, p. 63; Prignitz-Poda, *Life and Work*, p. 30. For a discussion of Frida's use of the *retablo*-like paratext in other paintings, see Orban, 'Bruised Words', pp. 165–70.

<sup>17</sup> *Das Gesamtwerk*, pp. 98 and 236. A digitized reproduction of this self-portrait is available at <<http://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/15228>>.

<sup>18</sup> Fosado, 'Les tableaux votifs', p. 179.

<sup>19</sup> *Das Gesamtwerk*, pp. 109 and 240. A digitized reproduction of this self-portrait is accessible at <<http://nmwa.org/collection/detail.asp?WorkID=1432>>.

<sup>20</sup> *Das Gesamtwerk*, pp. 135 and 248. A digitized reproduction of this self-portrait is accessible at <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/28433765@N07/4308192989/>>.

<sup>21</sup> *Das Gesamtwerk*, pp. 160 and 258.

<sup>22</sup> Herrera, *Frida: A Biography*, p. 263.

<sup>23</sup> Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Pact', p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> *Das Gesamtwerk*, p. 56. A digitized reproduction of Manuel Bravo's photograph is available at <<http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=105184>>.

<sup>25</sup> See for example 'Frida Kahlo Lying in Bed, Vertical Reflection on Canopy Mirror' (c. 1945) and 'Frida Kahlo Lying in Bed, Angular Reflection on Canopy Mirror' (c. 1945), in *Lola Alvarez Bravo: The Frida Kahlo Photographs*, ed. by Salomón Grimberg (Dallas, TX: Society of Friends of the Mexican Culture, 1991), pp. 42–43.

<sup>26</sup> Salomón Grimbart, 'Frida Kahlo: The Self as an End', in *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*, ed. by Whitney Chadwick (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), pp. 83–104 (p. 83).

<sup>27</sup> See Jean Bobon, *Psychopathologie de l'expression: rapport de psychiatrie présenté au Congrès de psychiatrie et de neurologie de langue française, Anvers, 9–14 juillet 1962* (Paris: Masson, 1963), <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/12384053/Jean-Bobon-Psychopathologie-de-l'expression>> [accessed 8 December 2010].

<sup>28</sup> All references to Jacques Lacan's works come from the *Seminars of Jacques Lacan*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 1978–), III (*The Psychoses, 1955–1956*, trans. by Russel Grigg, 1993); and XI (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Alan Sheridan, 1978). For those seminars not yet translated into English, my translations come from *Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, 27 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1973–), IV (*La relation d'objet 1956–1957*, 1994), VIII (*Le transfert 1960–1961*, 1991, repr. 2001); and X (*L'angoisse 1962–1963*, 2004). References to the referenced seminars (whether in English or French) appear in the body of the article accompanied by volume and page numbers. References are also taken from from *Écrits: A Selection* (henceforth *E*), trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977).

<sup>29</sup> *Das Gesamtwerk*, p. 57.

<sup>30</sup> 'Scene (scène)', *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 168.

<sup>31</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 371.

<sup>32</sup> *Das Gesamtwerk*, pp. 151 and 255. A digitized reproduction of this painting is available at <<http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/surrealism/images/FridaKahlo-Diego-and-Frida-1944.jpg>>.

<sup>33</sup> Roman Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic



Disturbances’, in *Fundamentals of Language*, ed. by Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle (The Hague: Mouton, 1956), pp. 53–87.

<sup>34</sup> See Philippe Lejeune, ‘The Autobiographical Pact (Bis)’, in *On Autobiography: Philippe Lejeune*, pp. 119–37 (p. 125).