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### Frida Kahlo's Transpicturality Revisited: Transmedial Dispositives, Representation, and Anti-Representations\*

My paper aims to offer a short panorama – theoretical as well as analytical – of the diverse strategies of transmediality<sup>1</sup> related to the work of Frida Kahlo. I would like to place my approach in a large epistemological context and in the context of post-structural cultural theory. From the perspective of transmedial and transcultural constructivity, I am going to focus my attention on the *Diary* and some paintings of Frida Kahlo.

Particularly, I am going to define some fundamental concepts of the media debate and work out not only the special relationship between the linguistic signs and their medial performance, but also discuss the power of art in creating different worlds which transcend the place of enunciation and which belong to disciplinary fields outside of art. With this approach, I moreover aim to point out the knowledge that is inhabited and transported by the arts, its relevance for the constitution of knowledge in an epoch, and, relating to this, the necessity of a transdisciplinary approach.

In the case of Kahlo, I also want to contribute towards overcoming the restricted popular and biographical interpretation of Kahlo's work, which has had very regrettable and damaging results. Here, I am going to describe shortly the transmedial and transpictural dispositives in the *Diary* and in some of her paintings. I will show how Kahlo's work, in the tradition of the

\* This essay summarizes results of two of my courses given in the semesters of summer 2006: "Diskurse der Hybridität: Die Eroberung von Mexiko: Cortés, Malinche, Chroniken – Texte – Theater – Tanz – Kunst – Frida Kahlo" – and of summer 2007 "Transmediale Körper- und Kultur-Strategien bei Frida Kahlo: Tagebuch – Malerei – Briefe – Essay."

<sup>1</sup> I introduced the concept of 'transmediality' in relation to 'hybridity' and 'transculturality' in 2001-2002, and I developed this theory systematically in the following years.

European avant-gardes of art and read through the conceptual line Artaud-Derrida-Deleuze, creates a new concept of the body in the sense of a *corps-sans-organe* (formulated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Capitalism et schizophrénie: L'Anti-Œdipe* of 1972), which I have described as a 'pseudo-prosthesis' ("Reflexiones sobre fundamentos").

### 1 Some Basic Concepts: Transdisciplinarity, Transtextuality, Transculturality, and Transmediality

The scientific work in the humanities can be reformulated in four areas or strategies as transdisciplinarity, transtextuality, transculturality, and transmediality. These terms with the prefix 'trans' represent an amplification and extension of terms with the prefix 'inter' because the prefix 'trans' is placed at a supra-epistemological level. The different objects are found here in an interdependent relation: one term is the basis for the next.

#### Transdisciplinarity, Transculturality, Transtextuality

The term 'transdisciplinarity' (or 'transversal sciences and approaches') refers on the one hand to the utilization of models with a provenance from very diverse disciplines and theoretical approaches – coming, for example, from theatre, history, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, structuralism, poststructuralism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, and theories of culture and communication. On the other hand, transdisciplinarity means the use (or appropriation) of units, fragments, or particular elements of these disciplines and theoretical models by which the object to be analysed and interpreted is decodified. The term 'transdisciplinarity' does not mean comparative studies or interdisciplinarity because in those models the methods of one discipline are usually not transcended. The term 'transdisciplinarity' includes and carries diverse recodifications because the use of methods and postulates of other disciplines always requires a de- and reterritorialization of those neighbouring disciplines.

The term 'transculturality' refers to the use of models, fragments, or cultural goods that are neither generated in one's own cultural context – in the local base culture – nor through one's own identity, but which come from another culture and belong to another identity and language, so that in this way a field of very heterogeneous actions is constructed. For the description of such a multiple and complex process, the prefix 'trans' is adequate because of its global and nomadic character and because it

overcomes the binarism which is implicit in the prefix 'inter'. The circulation of culture at all times, but particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, is characterized by very diverse cultural codes and by a high rhizomatization, so that it cannot be read any longer as a dialectic, but only as hybrid.<sup>2</sup>

The term 'transculturality' is similar to the term 'transculturation' applied by Cuban sociologist and anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s (255, 258), but only in terms of "transmutaciones de culturas" (254). Epistemologically, transculturality is different since it does not imply transit as a permanent condition, and, secondly, because Ortiz's term in some way still relies on binary oppositions that are historically determined. Binary oppositions are strange or unfamiliar to our concept of transculturality. Ortiz defines his term '*transculturación*' as "*desculturación*" and "*inculturación*" (255), that is, as a process of "pérdida o desarraigo de una cultura precedente" (260) which then leaves room for a new culture. This process, which he calls "neoculturación" (260), is the result of a transcultural process. In this understanding, transculturation is a unilateral process, whereas transculturality in our thinking does not imply a loss or cancellation of the own nor is there a final homogeneous result. On the very contrary, there is a continuous and hybrid cultural process. Hybridity, thus, is contrary to thinking of culture as a homogeneous and hierarchical system, as it was the case in modernity when culture was an elitist concept, particularly in the European avant-garde.

Furthermore, "pérdida" and "desarraigo" indicate an assumption of the existence of homogeneous or pure cultures and an understanding of the process of the crossing of cultures as the destruction of cultures. But still, it is of enormous value that Ortiz uses the term '*transculturación*' to call attention to a very central process in the formation of Cuba and of Latin America and other regions of the world in order to characterize and describe history, culture, ethnicity, and economics.

Ortiz's definition of *transculturación* is absolutely valid from a historical point of view. The discovery and conquest of the Americas was in the first moment destruction. The definition of *transculturación* changes, however, during Ortiz's argumentation. Sometimes *transculturación* means recodifications, including local cultural elements, especially when he refers

<sup>2</sup> I reject the term 'multiculturalism' due to its many negative political and ideological implications.

to a “doble trance de desajuste y reajuste [...] y al fin, de síntesis, de *transculturación*” (255). But there is another difference between Ortíz’s term ‘*transculturación*’ and my own of ‘transculturality’: my term does not mean a synthesis, but a (non-dialectic) tension between two or more elements within a hybrid strategy (“*Jenseits von Postmoderne und Postkolonialität*”).

My notion of transculturality does not mean destruction or alienation, but de- and reterritorialization are implied. That is why transculturality is very closely linked to transtextuality as far as the dialogue or recodification of subsystems and particular fields of diverse cultures or of different discourses of media and of knowledge are concerned. The ‘trans’ means that we do not first have to ask for the origin, for the authenticity or compatibility of the use of cultural goods coming from other regions. Only the aesthetic power, the social and cultural function of cultural goods (and not their pre-figuration), and their productivity represent the important points for our attention.

Finally the prefix ‘trans’ does not imply an activity that dissolves or darkens the cultural differences, with the result of a culture without a face and dominated by hegemonic phenomena of globalization. To the contrary, globalization reinforces challenges or provokes difference and alterity. The prefix ‘trans’ does not imply a levelling of culture in favour of consumption, but instead it implies a non-hierarchical and nomadic dialogue that joins different identities and cultures.

### Transmediality

Based on two fundamental terms in the actual discussion of theory of culture, the terms ‘hybridity’ and ‘transversality,’ which imply transdisciplinarity, transculturality and transtextuality, the concept of transmediality may be introduced. It does not mean the simple interchange of two or more different medial forms, but a multiplicity of medially autonomous relations between very different media systems. Transmediality deals with very different forms of expression or dialogue between different signs and media systems such as video, cinema, television, dance, theatre, and painting, but also literature, oral communication, or electronic media.

Transmediality is very closely related to cultural objects because of their global circulation at least since modernity, but particularly in the postmodern era, in so far as all fields of life, sciences, arts, and literature are affected. Medial processes are therefore at the centre of any kind of reflection in the context of a theory of culture since modernity, every day

more dominated by media and visual dispositives. In postmodernity, medial processes attain an absolutely nomadic and decentred character. Jean-François Lyotard speaks in this context of *signifiés à la dérive* and Deleuze of ‘pleats’ that have a hybrid and rhizomatic organisation. Transmediality means always transgression, subversion, proliferation, dissemination.

Transmediality is not a mere accumulation of different media, nor is it a mere synergetic-medial process, nor a superposition of medial forms of representation, but – as in the phenomenon of hybridity – a conscious process and an aesthetic strategy that does not lead to a synthesis of different medial elements but to a dissonant and highly tensional process. Transmediality includes transcultural, transtextual, and transdisciplinary processes.

We always find the phenomenon of transmediality when different and autonomous media systems compete and struggle with each other and often create a meta-medial text in the form of the staging of quotation, collage, montage, or parody. Transmediality is very close to transtextuality as far as both terms deal with the interchange of media forms, the first with all kinds of media forms, the second just with literary forms. It appears, therefore, that the concept of transmediality is not equivalent to that of intermediality or intertextuality. Moreover, transmediality is a transcultural phenomenon because since the Renaissance transmedial processes have been transnational.

Finally, regarding transmediality and hybridity, the epistemological relation between the terms lies in the dissolution of barriers for cultural practices and is the result of overcoming the meta-discourses of, for instance, literary genres, normative poetics, or aesthetic schools. Both transmediality and hybridity operate at the interfaces of genres, cultures, sign and media systems – “in-between” or “unhomely” in Homi K. Bhabha’s (1-3; 9-11) terminology. Hybridity is inherent to transmediality, transtextuality, and transculturality; it is the epistemological basis, the meta-theoretical house of the ‘trans.’ Transculturality can only be discussed and practiced within the epistemology of hybridity.

### 2 Body Art: Frida Kahlo – Object – Auto-Scenification – Performance in the *Diary* and Paintings

Research on the œuvre of Frida Kahlo (6 July 1907 – 13 July 1954) was and still is dominated by a very biographical, feminist, and, to some degree, popular approach. This has changed somewhat over the past years, as

indicated by several contributions of different origins, such as post-modern and postcolonial approaches as well as approaches from inter- or transmedial theory.

The œuvre of Frida Kahlo – her *Diario*, her letters and her paintings – has been and remains the object of all kinds of assignments and attributions, which has led to a serious and arbitrary reduction of the real dimension and transcendence of her work and its place in the history of art. Every sentence, every drawing, every painting has been reduced to some particular situation in her life. In this way, the most important aspect of her work, its complex transmedial and transpictorial structure, which leads to the richness and importance of her artistic world, is if not overlooked, then obscured by this kind of biographical approach.

In my essay it is impossible to address all of these problems, and for this reason, I want to just limit my observations here to some fundamental divergences from the biographical approach to Kahlo's work. But my principal aim is to work out the transmedial and transpictorial elements in Kahlo's work in the context of an epistemology based in transmedial, transtextual, and transpictorial dispositives, and thus to support another kind of interpretation of Frida Kahlo's work.

We can begin with some statistical information. To consider the image and commonplace of 'Kahlo's suffering' as the consequence of her accident or of her very turbulent relationship with Diego de Rivera as the most important motif in the *Diario* as well as in her paintings, is empirically wrong. Kahlo only drew her accident once (and she never painted it). In the *Diario* we find in only two places some lines about her illness (94-96, texts which date from 1910-1953 and 1950-1951), and we have eight paintings which directly or indirectly deal with her accident, illness, or other misfortunes in her life: *Hospital Henry Ford* of 1932; *Recuerdo o el corazón* of 1937; *Las dos Fridas* of 1939; *El sueño* of 1940; *La Columna Rota* of 1944; *Sin esperanza* of 1945; *El árbol de la esperanza, mantente firme* of 1946; and *La venadita o el venado herido* of 1946. We find these among one hundred other paintings with different motifs. Besides that, there are those paintings that we can call the 'destiny paintings' where autobiographical elements serve only as a starting point because the important aspect is the very elaborate inter- and transpictorial process with an enormous diversity. But I ask: Is not everything that an artist does autobiographical and, for that reason, is it not tautological to try to explain a work on the basis of autobiographical aspects? For this reason I ask myself: Where does this focus on the biographical come from? Some possible reasons are surely Kahlo's charismatic personality and her talent for public auto-scenification, or performance of herself, which was able to satisfy all kinds of stereotypes

and clichés; the energy and stoicism she exhibited throughout her life; and the consequences of her accident, her love life, her apparent emancipation as a woman that broke with a number of norms in the way she behaved or dressed. The scenification in men's clothes or in the Tehuana dress, or the very exuberant and overloaded way she wore her jewellery – all that fascinated and still seems to fascinate critics, intellectuals, and artists who see something exotic and archaic in Kahlo's art.

Her life was a great dramatic adventure, professionally as well as politically, emotionally and privately, and impossible for a large number of women of her time. Her painting was a provocation and a break with tradition – for example, to paint the interior of bodies, tormented and dismembered bodies; to paint the genitals and erogenous zones in a very crude and grotesque form; to show the materiality of the body, the aborted foetus. We have something cannibalistic here. The critics have often chosen a voyeuristic attitude and have seen things that are definitely not there, such as in some interpretations that contextualize her pain directly and casually with some paintings or drawings, and with that the critics have contributed to a dehistoricization of Kahlo's work.

Kahlo has been transformed into a public object of mystery, desire, and challenges, and Kahlo herself at first contributed to this kind of interpretation: to see her work only from the perspective of her life. And we have to remember that André Breton has been the one who famously established two directions of research, on the life of Kahlo and on her relation to surrealism (144).

That is a very diffused line of interpretation which is nowadays represented by many scholars that characterize Kahlo's work as an absolute and exceptional symbiosis between authenticity and representation, the origin of which is in the fascination produced by her intense life, her experience, her pain, and her suffering. And on top of that her work is a very good example to interpret and to understand female nature. The feminists see in Kahlo a comrade. But on the one hand Kahlo was not really a feminist; she was a woman that was very dependent on and adapted to Diego de Rivera, and she performed her submission rhetorically and in the paintings. At the same time, she was extremely emancipated in her work. In addition, feminism (or post-feminism) is a discourse, a theory, a form of life, and a dispositive, and I see little of that in the work of Kahlo. She projected and performed many different and contradictory images of herself and that is one of the many reasons why Kahlo's work creates a desideratum.

The interpretation of the work of Kahlo as a painted life or autobiography in colours has become contested: for example with the exhibition of Kahlo's work in Hamburg in 2006 (see Westheider and Müller) as far as it criticizes,

as does Carlos Fuentes, a popular mystification and mythologizing of Kahlo (Adlung 7). Fuentes's interpretation is not free from a strong biographical tendency, but at the same time he makes a notable contribution to the interpretation of Kahlo's work in that he points out the very important aspect of the auto-scenification and performance power of Kahlo, of her public appearance that was performed, as though in the theatre, in an optic and acoustic way (Fuentes 7). It is important, nevertheless, that Fuentes underlines the absolutely medial character of Kahlo's public appearances that shows a very narcissistic character and the constructivity of her person as art, rather than only in biographical terms. We can interpret these appearances as performances in the genuine sense of the term.<sup>3</sup>

Fuentes sees the autobiographical material transformed into art, even if he says that "what she lives is what she paints" (trans. ADT) and if he asks as well how Kahlo transformed her personal suffering into art, not impersonal, but of course shared (13<sup>4</sup>). Beyond that, Fuentes establishes a transpictorial relation of Kahlo's work with the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch, Pieter Bruegel the Elder (also mentioned by Kahlo in her *Diario*), Francisco de Goya, Rembrandt, and Vincent van Gogh, and he adds that her art belongs to late surrealism (14-15).

After this brief overview of some lines in the interpretation of Kahlo's work, we now want to make some observations, starting from the conviction that the structure of any work of real art is determined by an 'intention' of the structure and the result of an interaction of diachronic and synchronic systems, as the Russian formalists proposed in the twentieth century in order to get rid of simple biographism and to give the work of art its autonomy and importance. In this context, we consider the concepts of transtextuality and transmediality, defined at the beginning of this essay, useful instruments of analysis in order to objectify our academic task.

For this purpose, we choose the essays collected by Emma Dexter and Tanya Barson (2005) and the catalogue edited by Ortrud Westheider and Karsten Müller (2006) as a starting point for the analysis. Initially, however, we want to point out that the diversity of Frida Kahlo's work can be interpreted in a first step as a transformation of biographical material, that is, of complaints, suffering, failures, and disillusionments, into art, expressed in an

<sup>3</sup> Concerning the relation of performance and Kahlo's artistic practice, see de Toro, "Las 'nuevas meninas' o 'bienvenido Foucault.'"

<sup>4</sup> "Lo que vive es lo que pinta" and "¿Cómo transformó Kahlo el sufrimiento personal en arte, no impersonal, pero sí compartido?" (Fuentes 13).

infinite proliferation of masques that we call a serial-aleatoric process or strategy. This means an open, nomadic, and fragmentary system of elements of very different provenance and with very diverse structures.

Westheider's essay on Kahlo and the European avantgarde ("Frida Kahlo und die Avantgarde in Europa") offers us a good material base and has the aim to move the interpretation of Kahlo away from the topically surrealist and biographical, and to contest the naïve or strategic affirmation of Kahlo that she did not know that her painting was surrealist (10, and see Herrera, *Frida: Una Biografía de Frida Kahlo* 323). Similar to the task of a detective, Westheider in her impressive work reconstructs accurately in a very convincing way the cultural and artistic context of Kahlo's work and what she really knew about the European avant-garde, what she did not know, and which local references she made. The result is very clear: Kahlo generally had broad knowledge of the history of art, including the European avant-garde of her time. Kahlo, according to Westheider, received the avant-garde through two sources: the French one, mediated through Diego de Rivera, who not only lived in Paris but worked there with different painters from 1907 to 1921; and the other source is the German-French artist migration of the 1930s to New York, which included painters and art critics like Wilhelm Valentiner, George Grosz, Louise Nevelson, and Julien Levy.

Important about the approach of Westheider is not only that she gives evidence for several references to the Mexican cultural context of Kahlo's work but much more that she shows, down to the most minute details, that Kahlo's painting is the irrefutable product of a very consciously elaborated and complex art process. For example, the theme of the *memento mori* (from the painting tradition of the French School of the eighteenth century, with a long European tradition that began in the Middle Ages) was included in the catalogue of the surrealist exhibition in 1936 in New York (*Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* at the Museum of Modern Art), which was – according to Westheider – in Kahlo's possession while it is not known whether she visited the exhibition. The *memento-mori* motif is recodified by Kahlo in her local cultural context in the painting *Diego and Frida* (fig. 1, 315), so that a transmedial and hybrid cultural artifact with all the elements that became typical of her whole work is produced.

In her serial-aleatoric system we find the moon, the natural elements, the trees with interwoven branches (fig. 1, 315). Other transpictorial relations, to consider only a few, are *George Grosz as Dada Death in Berlin* (1918) of George Grosz and the reformulation by Kahlo in *Girl with Death Mask* (1938) (fig. 2 and 3, 316), for which she follows the Mexican cult of death, as for example that of José Guadalupe Posada in the *Dapper Skeleton* (fig. 4, 317). This case shows a further transpictorial relation to the general motif of

death in the *Dance of the Death* of Hans Holbein the Younger, for example, or with the *Vanitas* of Philippe de Champaigne (fig. 5 and 6, 317).

In another example, Westheider finds a relation between *The Couple in the Bedroom* of George Grosz, the *Murder by Sexual Impulse* by Otto Dix and *A Few Small Nips* by Kahlo. But to my point of view, two paintings about abortion are also connected to this expressionist aesthetics (fig. 7 to 11, 318-319).

Similar to the transpictural relations within the work of Kahlo, we also note the motif affinity with Herbert List's *Instructing View of the Thorax* of 1944/1999 (fig. 12, 320), painted after Kahlo's works such as *The Two Fridas*, 1939 (fig. 13, 320), and with Max Ernst's *The Anatomy*, 1921 (fig. 14, 321).

Furthermore we have also pictural-palimpsestic relations to the Christian tradition of Saint Sebastian as in the case of *La venadita o el venado herido*" (1946) or to the mystical tradition in visions and experiences of Spanish mystics in the context of the *transverberación*, the perforation of the heart of a saint, like we find as a reminiscence in the painting of the *The Two Fridas* (fig. 13, 320).

With these very few examples, which need to be commented upon further, we did not want to fall into the other extreme of decontextualizing Kahlo from her own cultural location and recontextualizing her in the European cultural tradition since the Middle Ages or in the avant-garde, or of seeing her as an imitator of these traditions; that would repeat the same reduction and error that we were complaining about concerning the merely biographical and surrealist approach. We wanted simply to show that Kahlo's art is inscribed, as all great art is, in a general historical context of a specific epoch and that this work is a tremendous cultural translation, recodification, and transformation, as well as, in the end, the foundation of a specific art, that of Frida Kahlo. As a matter of fact, Kahlo is also a pioneer in many senses and ways because she painted with an aesthetics that in some cases only later became mainstream, as we saw in the case of Herbert List and as we are going to see in the cases of René Magritte and Francis Bacon further on in this essay.

Now we want to come to the *Diario* and to some paintings, to see how Kahlo produces installations and performances with a trans- and metapictural status.

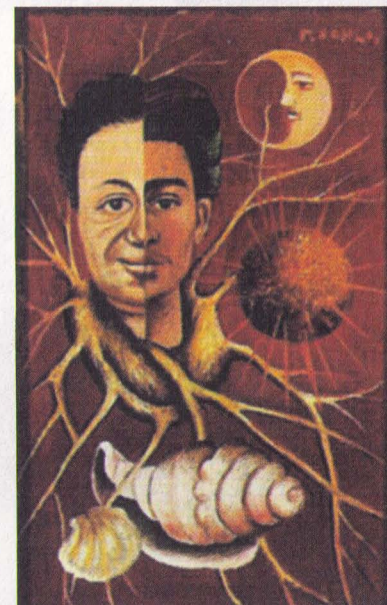


Fig. 1: Frida Kahlo, *Diego and Frida*, 1944  
© Westheider et al. 2006, 15.



Fig. 2: George Grosz,  
*George Grosz as Dada Death in Berlin*, 1918  
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.

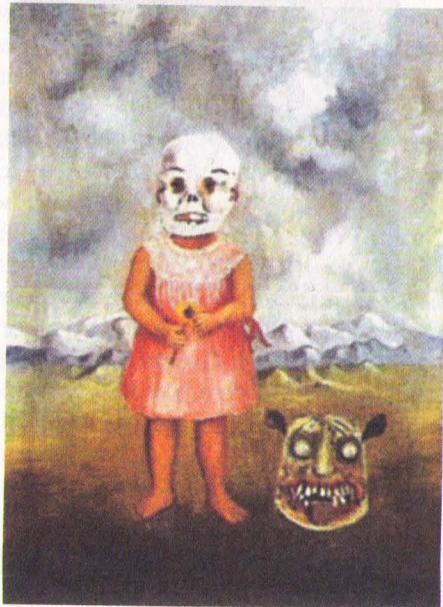


Fig. 3: Frida Kahlo,  
*Girl with Death Mask*, 1938  
© Banco de México Diego  
Rivera & Frida Kahlo Trust/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.



Fig. 4:  
José Guadalupe Posada,  
*Dapper Skeleton*, 1910.



Fig. 5:  
Hans Holbein the Younger,  
*Dance of the Death*, 1493.

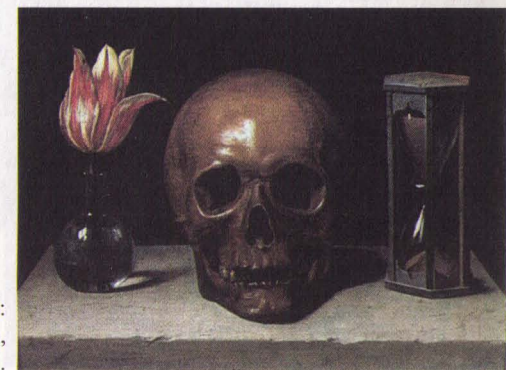


Fig. 6:  
Philippe de Champaigne,  
*Vanitas*, 1671.



Fig. 7: George Grosz,  
*The Couple in the  
Bedroom*, 1915  
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Fig. 8: Otto Dix,  
*Murder by Sexual  
Impulse*, 1922  
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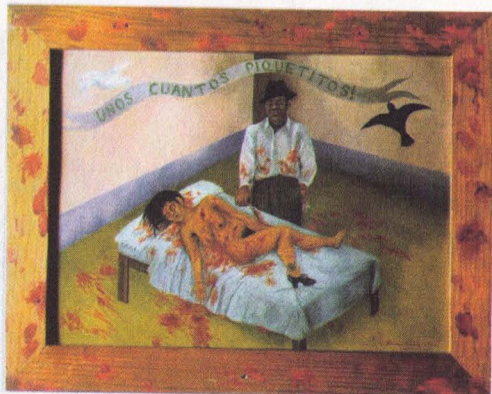


Fig. 9: Frida Kahlo,  
*A Few Small Nips*, 1935  
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Diego Rivera & Frida  
Kahlo Trust/VG Bild-  
Kunst, Bonn 2008.

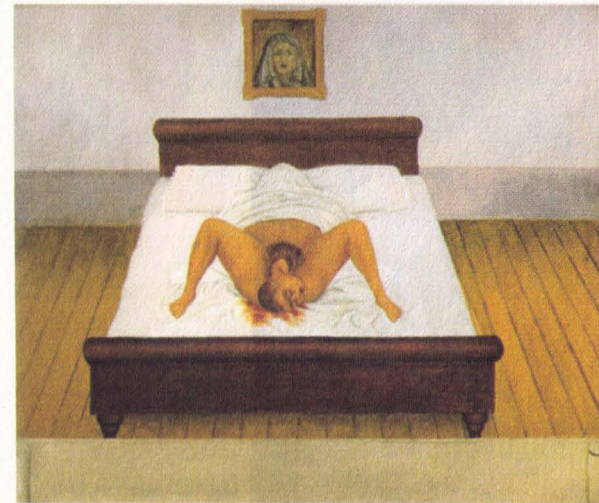


Fig. 10: Frida Kahlo, *My Birth*, 1932  
© Banco de México Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo Trust/  
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Fig. 11: Frida Kahlo, *Hospital Henry Ford*, 1932  
© Banco de México Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo Trust/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.





Fig. 12: Herbert List,  
*Instructing View of the Thorax/  
Belehrender Blick in den  
Brustkorb*, 1944/1999  
© Westheider et al. 2006, 116.

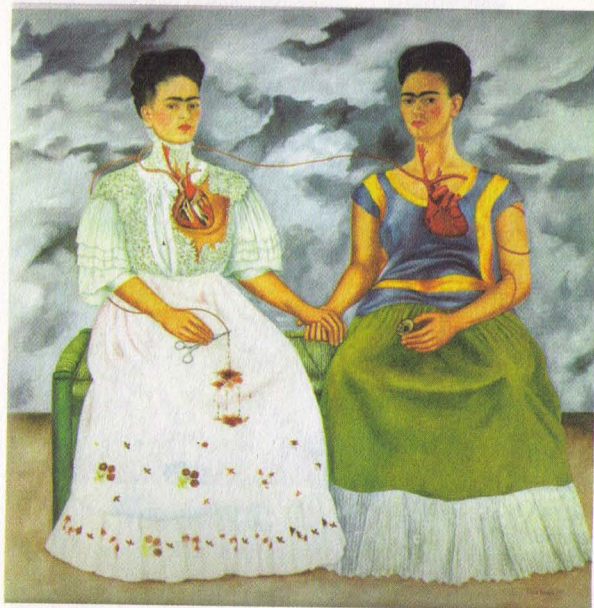


Fig. 13:  
Frida Kahlo,  
*The Two  
Fridas*, 1939  
© Banco de  
México  
Diego  
Rivera &  
Frida Kahlo  
Trust/VG  
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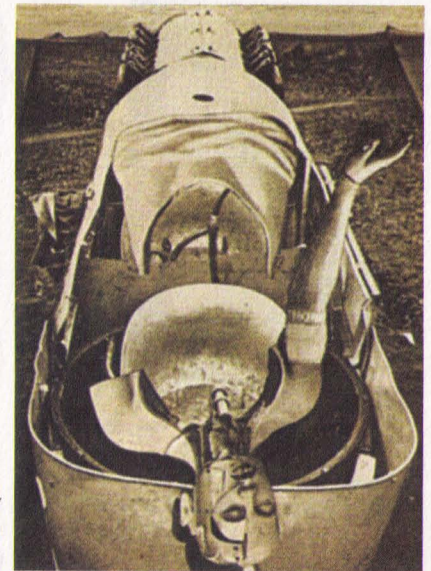


Fig. 14: Max Ernst,  
*The Anatomy/  
Die Anatomie*, 1921  
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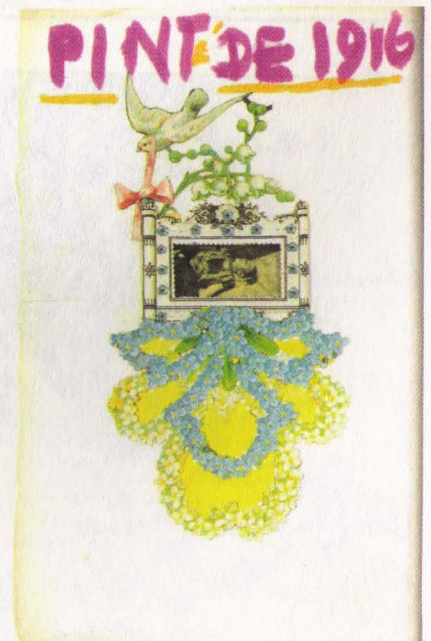


Fig. 15: Frida Kahlo,  
*Diario*, 1916  
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.



Fig. 16: Frida Kahlo, "Erotic Postcard," *Diario*  
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Fig. 17: Antonin Artaud, *Drawing (Portrait of Jany de Ruy)*, 1947  
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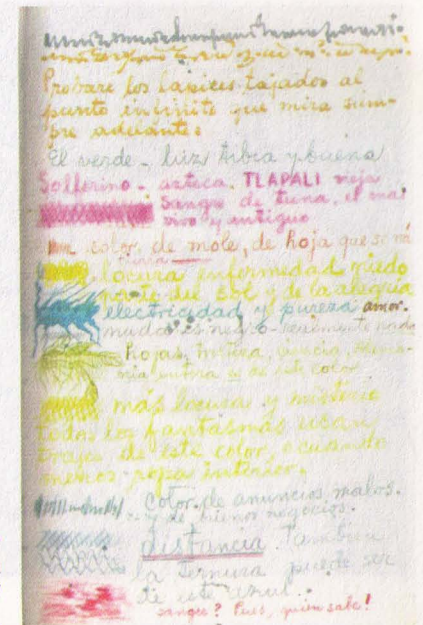


Fig. 18: Frida Kahlo, *Diario*  
© Banco de México Diego Rivera  
& Frida Kahlo Trust/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.



Fig. 19: Antonin Artaud, *Sort à Sonia Mossé*, 14 May 1939  
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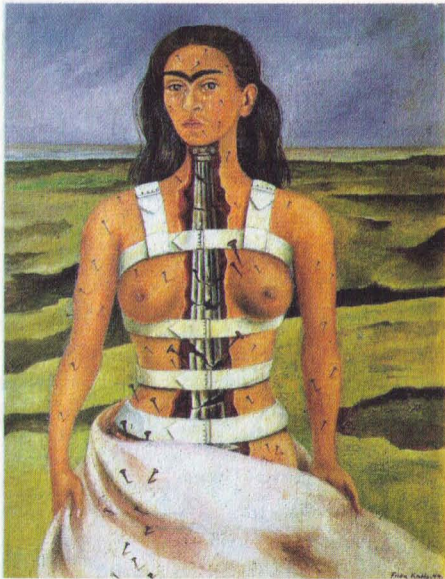


Fig. 20: Frida Kahlo,  
*La Columna Rota*, 1944  
© Banco de México Diego  
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VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.

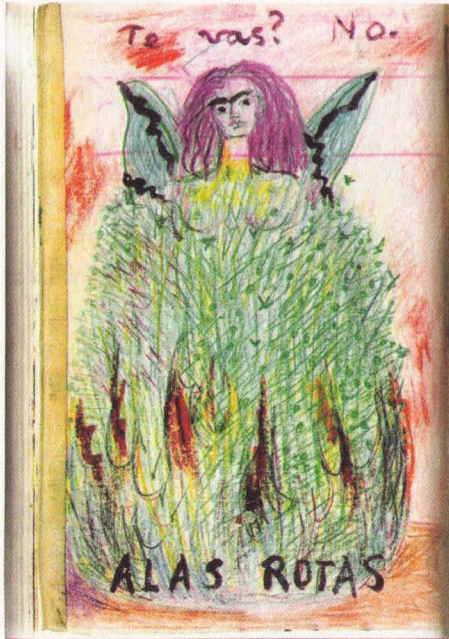


Fig. 21: Frida Kahlo,  
*Alas Rotas*, "Diario"  
© Banco de México Diego  
Rivera & Frida Kahlo Trust/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.

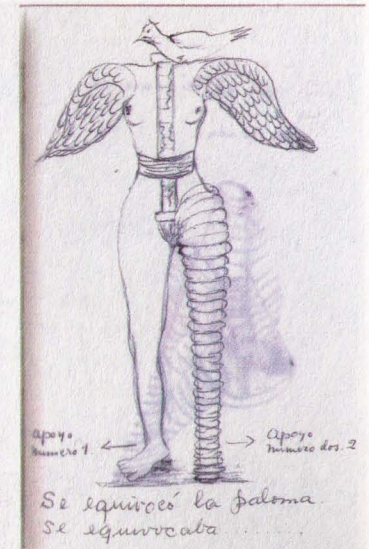


Fig. 22: Frida Kahlo,  
*"Se Equivocó la Paloma,"* *Diario*  
© Banco de México Diego Rivera  
& Frida Kahlo Trust/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.

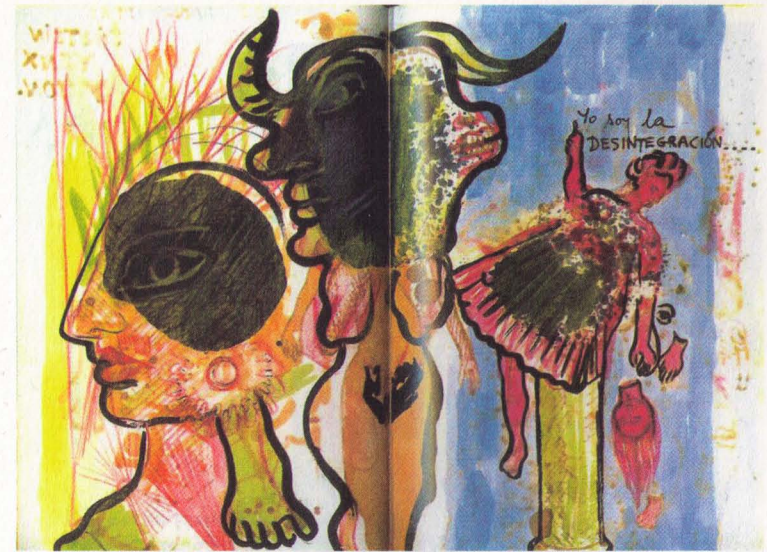


Fig. 23: Frida Kahlo, *"Yo soy la DESINTEGRACIÓN,"* *Diario*  
© Banco de México Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo Trust/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.



Fig. 24: Salvador Dalí,  
*The Burning Giraffe*,  
1936/37  
© Salvador Dalí, Fundació  
Gala-Salvador Dalí/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.



Fig. 25: Max Ernst,  
*The Swinging Woman*, 1923  
© VG Bild-Kunst,  
Bonn 2008.

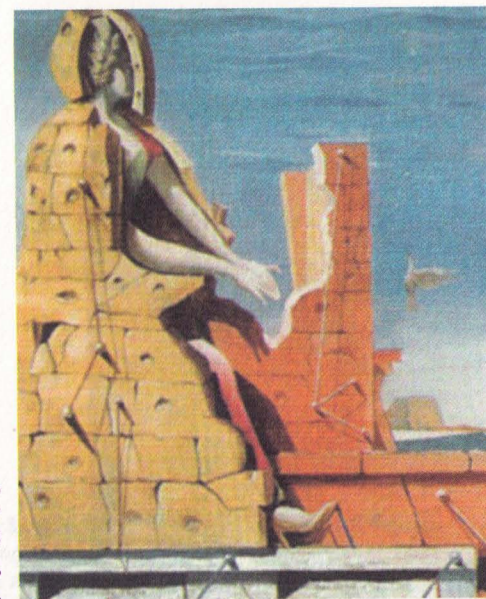


Fig. 26: Max Ernst,  
*Holy Cecilia:*  
*The Invisible Piano*, 1923  
© VG Bild-Kunst,  
Bonn 2008.

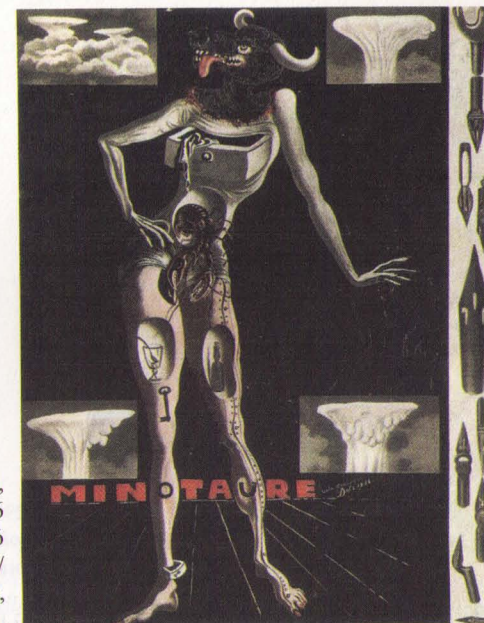


Fig. 27: Salvador Dalí,  
*Minotauro*, 1936  
© Salvador Dalí, Fundació  
Gala-Salvador Dalí/  
VG Bild-Kunst,  
Bonn 2008.



Fig. 28: Frida Kahlo, *Diario*  
© Banco de México Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo Trust/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.

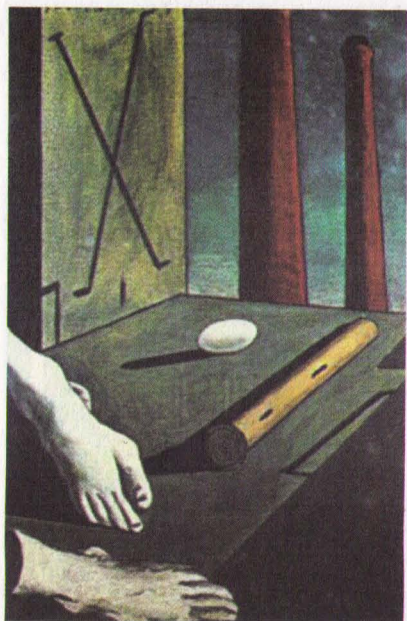


Fig. 29: Giorgio de Chirico,  
*Metaphysical Composition*  
(*Metaphysical Autoportrait*),  
1914  
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008



Fig. 30: Giorgio de Chirico,  
*The Worrying Muses*, 1918  
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.



Fig. 31: Giorgio de Chirico,  
*The Endless Journey*, 1924/25  
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.

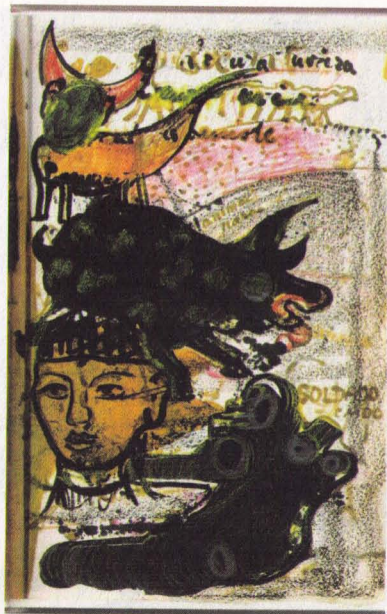


Fig. 32: Frida Kahlo, *Diario*  
© Banco de México Diego Rivera  
& Frida Kahlo Trust/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.

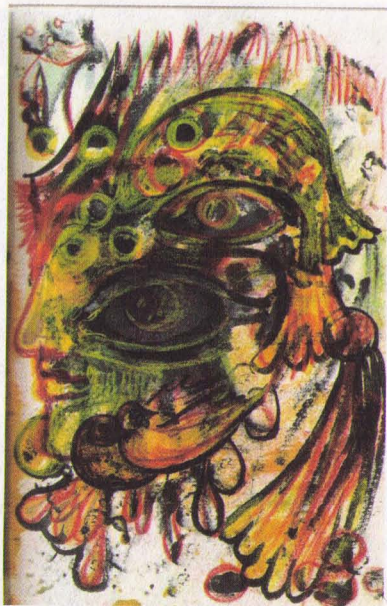


Fig. 33: Frida Kahlo, *Diario*  
© Banco de México Diego Rivera  
& Frida Kahlo Trust/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.

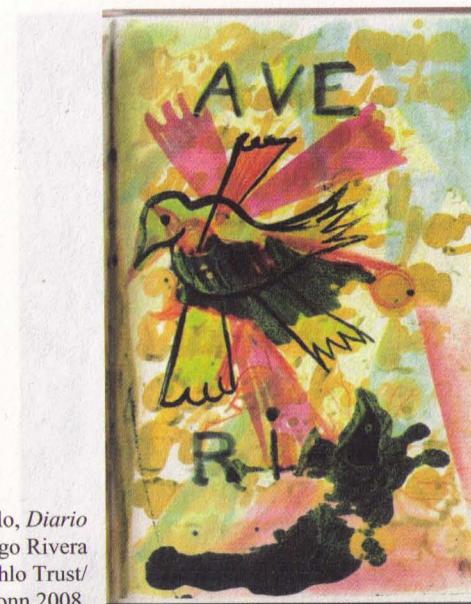


Fig. 34: Frida Kahlo, *Diario*  
© Banco de México Diego Rivera  
& Frida Kahlo Trust/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.

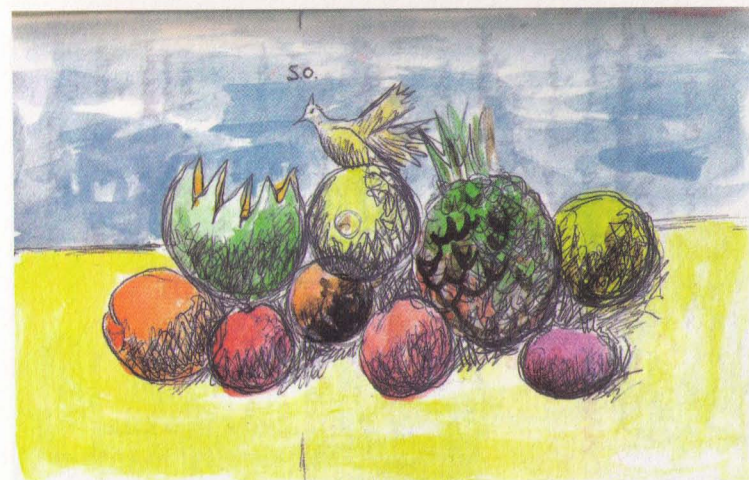


Fig. 35: Frida Kahlo, *Diario*  
© Banco de México Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo Trust/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.

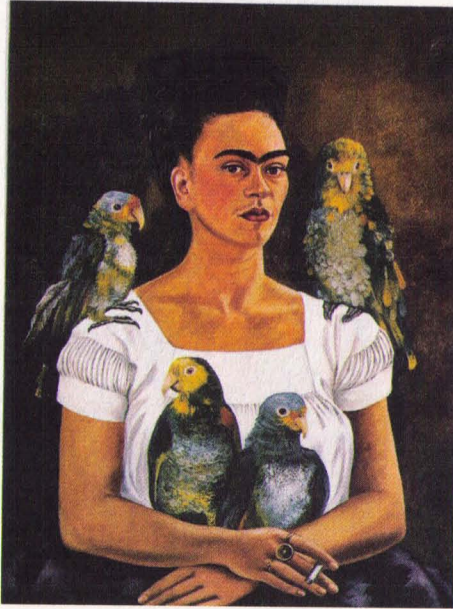


Fig. 36: Frida Kahlo,  
*Me and My Parrots*, 1941  
© Banco de México Diego  
Rivera & Frida Kahlo  
Trust/VG Bild-Kunst,  
Bonn 2008.

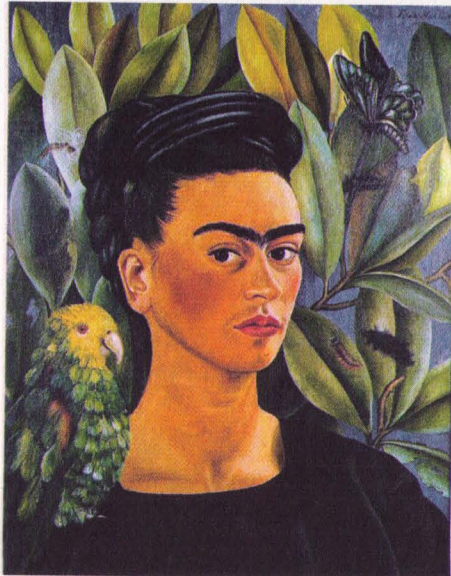


Fig. 37: Frida Kahlo,  
*Self Portrait with Bonito*,  
1941  
© Banco de México Diego  
Rivera & Frida Kahlo  
Trust/VG Bild-Kunst,  
Bonn 2008.



Fig. 38: René Magritte,  
*The Large Family*, 1947  
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.

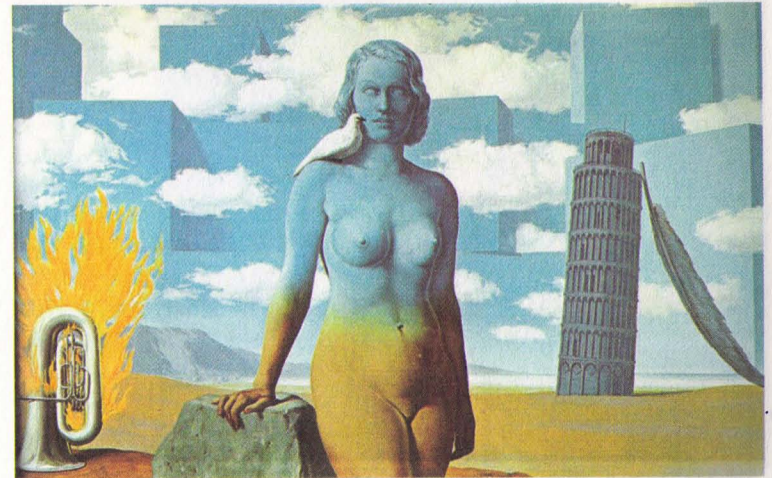


Fig. 39: René Magritte,  
*The Enchanted Field X*, 1953  
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.



Fig. 41: Francis Bacon,  
*Self-Portrait*, 1973  
© The Estate of Francis Bacon/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.

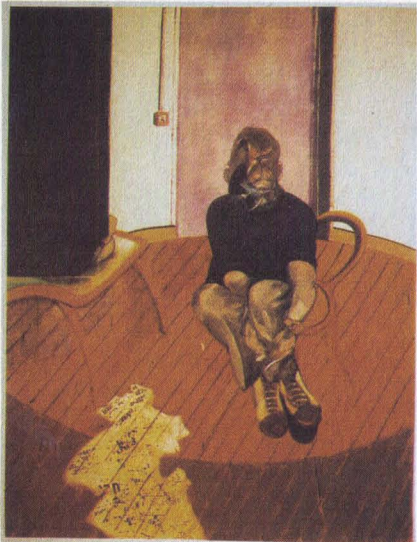


Fig. 40: Francis Bacon,  
*Painting*, 1946  
© The Estate of Francis Bacon/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.

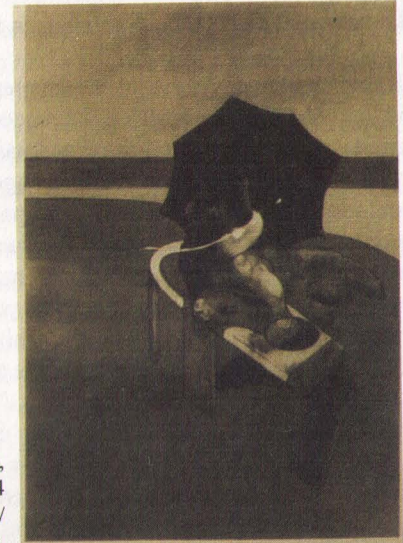


Fig. 42: Francis Bacon,  
*Triptych-MayJune 6*, 1974  
© The Estate of Francis Bacon/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.



Fig. 43: Frida Kahlo,  
*Self Portrait on the Borderline Between Mexico and the United States*, 1932  
© Banco de México Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo Trust/  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008.



### 3 Transmedial and Hybrid Strategies in the *Diario*: 'Scripture'

Kahlo wrote her *Diario* in the last ten years of her life, from 1944 to 1954, and she produced with it a new concept of the genre of the diary, a permeabilization between writing and painting, as well as new concepts of writing and painting that seem to change their function and status. They become interchangeable. Writing and painting are organized due to their gestural-visual power and their performance of representation: the painting transforms itself into writing and vice versa. Both structures build an infinite world of signs that find themselves in a permanent tension in what I would like to call 'scripture' ('*escriptura*'), which maintains the autonomy of the media and underlines their performative and transmedial process.

Because of this 'scripture,' Kahlo's *Diario* does not exhibit the usual characteristics of the genre since, for example, there is no day-to-day registration of the narrative. Moreover the diary lacks immediacy and succession since we do not have a coherent chronology, as Kahlo makes clear from the first page: "Pinté de 1916." The date does not fit the time in which Kahlo began to write, which was in 1944. Yet the reader takes 1916 as the beginning of the writing of the *Diario*. Moreover, some letters are included *a posteriori*, and in some cases they perform as letters and dialogues. With this strategy Kahlo intentionally shows that she is not going to produce a diary in the strict sense, but a performance, a simulation of a diary that is a new form. At the same time, this shows the constructivity and the procedural character of the *Diario*. Of course, Kahlo's *Diario* shares the auto-referentiality of a consciousness that is her object of representation, and so the *Diario* is connected to her individual experience and can be taken as a personal testimony. But the *Diario* is not only a document of memory, neither a mere intimate report nor a sort of special cathartic valve nor a sort of auto-psychoanalysis, but an aleatoric series of colours and signs with multiple significance. She sends the referential signal in such a way that the testimony is secondary to the structure and the intimacy attains media status and is transformed into a visual phenomenon. The *Diario* is no longer only the reflection of the evoked 'real' – that is, the mere autobiographical – but the sum of strategies of distancing (*Verfremdung*). The life, the assumed real in the auto-bio is transformed into graphy (*grafía*), which corresponds to the structure of graffiti, an indivisible mixture of letter and image. For this reason, texts and images in the *Diario* cannot be considered separate: It is no longer possible to make such a differentiation in this context, and they appear in similar numbers in the *Diario*.

The themes in the *Diario* are very diverse and heterogeneous. We have political, personal, and cultural statements; letters; the representation of the body; the author's dialogue with her own painting and with that of other painters; a list of terms to which she attributes signifiers; and a play with words from the Nahuatl, like *xocolatl* or *xolotl*, through which Kahlo opens a pluricultural and ambivalent world. We have metatextual and metapictorial statements that we find sometimes in the title of drawings and in some concepts. The different media in text-image or picture-writing find themselves in a constant tension, resulting in a 'scriptural' diary, or a *diario de imágenes*. The pictures in the *Diario* often have their origin in the paintings; or, conversely, lay the foundation for subsequent paintings. They are autonomous designs or drafts, ornaments, collages, and artefacts. We have pictures, texts, text with colour spots, pages where both writing and image come very close together, and pages where the title brings together image and writing. This process is by definition transmedial because it keeps the tension and autonomy between the different sign systems and produces a typographical dissemination by using diverse types and sizes of letters and colours and kinds of pen, wax pencil, ink, and watercolour. The typography has a privileged place because this has a modelling function on the macro and micro level and it is, in this way, a constitutive principle for the production of meaning. So the *graphy* (*grafía*) – the paper, the colour, the structuration of pictures and writing – visualizes and structures the view in different ways.

Scenification – Metatextuality – Metamediality – Metapictoriality:  
'Scripture,' or, the 'Painting-Diary'

The *Diario* begins with an auto-quotation or auto-meta-reflection and with the deconstruction of the genre of the diary. We see a painting framed within the page with the possible intention to give to the different and heterogeneous fragments a unity as composition: the first fragment is a letter in the colour fuchsia with the date 1916; the second is a dove interweaved with a pink band or ribbon on the pillar of the frame; the third are flowers in the form of a garland; the fourth is a frame that could be made out of porcelain or painted wood; the fifth, the lineal frame that frames the photography; the sixth is a photograph of Kahlo; and the seventh, a flower arrangement. The date has been interpreted biographically: Kahlo would have wanted to remember the beginning of her poliomyelitis at the age of six, and by doing so she insinuated – as we already stated – that she was born in 1910, and not in 1907, in order to make her birth coincide with the

beginning of the Mexican Revolution. We have a semanticization and mythical scenification or performance of the date. Another very popular version of this fictitious birth date is the reference that we find at page 82 of the *Diario*, where Kahlo writes about an “*amiga imaginaria*.” This temporal anachronism has also been interpreted as an expression of the ‘irrational’ – for many critics, particularly those who approach Kahlo’s work from a biographical perspective, the terms ‘surreal’ and ‘irrational’ are equivalent – part of Kahlo’s consciousness, as a mistake that shows her carelessness for the “rational facts,” and as a “manifestation of her sense of unreality” in the frame of a “collage [...] with sentimental character” as we read in an interpretation by Sarah M. Lowe (202). Such an approach represents one of many very problematic interpretations, often based on popular psychoanalytic speculations on the *Diario*, which place Kahlo on Freud’s divan and leave the reader confused.

The construction of this first page of Kahlo’s *Diario* represents not only a sort of aesthetic program or medial strategy, but is also valid for Kahlo’s paintings, so that both diary and paintings build a sort of unity, a dispositive. Here, we find all the typical elements of Kahlo’s art and her composition strategies. We have, firstly, the autonomy of elements; secondly, the tension between them; thirdly, heterogeneity (different colours, types of letters, photographs, drawings, and painting); and, fourthly, the seriality of the diary entries (fig. 15, 321).

From the beginning of the *Diario* the paintings make painting with the letters, and the letters make letters with the painting;<sup>5</sup> the tenderness, delicateness, and softness of the garland flowers contrasts with the exuberance of the Mexican floral arrangement; the constructivity of the frame contrasts with natural elements and with the dove; and the photograph contrasts with and comes out of the frame made out of lines. All elements find themselves at the interfaces of different systems and build a transmedial system. Besides that, we have a duplication of the painting in the painting, of the frame in the frame, where the photograph gets lost in profundity or the abyss; we have a dissolution of the barrier between the painting and the frame, a meta-reflexive decentring of the composition with the function to show the spectator or the reader an aesthetics of transgression. We have a double scenification: on the one hand, the scenification and a *mise en abyme*

<sup>5</sup> That is the anti-mimetic and mimicry process that Deleuze and Guattari describe in relation to the notion of ‘rhizome’ (*Rhizome* 29-30).

of the composition as montage and, on the other hand, the infinite pleasure of Kahlo in performing herself and her body.

In this context the photograph has a predominant function in this composition and in the whole of Kahlo’s work. It is a starting point of reflection, a source of inspiration. Art, diary, painting, montage, quotation, and meta-pictuality build an artefact and proclaim a program, and that is why the interpretation of this first page is also representative for the whole work of Kahlo in a particular sense: many objects are not representations, but they are what they show. This means that they are presentational (Barthes, *Le plaisir du texte* 88-91; *La chambre claire* 69-71) and not a projection of a mimetic reality. Neither are they a metaphor nor an allegory, neither a substitution nor something secondary; they are what they are. Perhaps now we can understand better Kahlo’s statement that her painting is not surrealistic – that she does not dream, but paint her reality – because the object imposes itself onto reality, overcoming mimetic reality. It is not reality, but a hyperreality: Kahlo as an object of art.

Another example of a masterly scenification-montage is the erotic photo-postcard inserted in the middle of text (fig. 16, 322). Again, Kahlo uses a photograph as medial reference: here we see a half-nude woman contemplating herself in a mirror and sensually touching her body. Do we have a private scene or one in a brothel? Kahlo keeps this ambiguity of the photo-postcard.

We have here a tripling of the woman: the original is placed on the first level, and she is duplicated through the reflection. The installation gives the whole composition a spatial and visual character; it introduces a sort of third dimension. With this process of reproduction of the woman, we obtain a potentialization of sexual and erotic elements and of the desire of the spectator.

The original is then painted by Kahlo and re-drawn so the photo-postcard is transformed in part into a painting, but without losing its autonomy. The words around the medial installation, and drawn with different typographies and in different colours, build another pictural composition. The text does not have a direct relation to the montage; only the lexemes “*sexo*,” “*amor*,” “*sonrisa*,” and “*ternura*” belong to the erotic semantic field. The big red letters are at the same time pictural and a transparent palimpsest, which allow the spectator to see some details and to discover different levels.

This montage has an evident reference: *Las Meninas* of Diego Velázquez, in which the painter takes both roles, that of the painter and that of the spectator, in order to show that what is normally hidden from the observer is the creative process. The mirror composition makes the spectator or observer a hedonist voyeur.

Another reference we find is to the drawings of Antonin Artaud (Derrida, *Artaud le Moma* 15), specifically to the *Portrait de Jany de Ruy* (fig. 17, 322; Thévenin and Derrida 229). Kahlo uses the same aesthetics and technique in her *Diario* as Artaud in his drawings: the face is on the upper right side also retouched with blue colour and framed by letters which are not directly related to the portrait.

Also, as the next and last example, another page of Kahlo's *Diario* shows a great affinity with Artaud's compositions in a dissemination of typography and signification. Kahlo attributes to the colours different moods or emotional states in a very symbolist manner. Some words dissolve in muddled and crinkly lines (fig. 18 and 19, 323).

#### Scenifications – Masks – Interpictuality – Transpictuality

The paintings of Frida Kahlo can be classified into at least four groups: first, those of a big panoramic format with a narrative-scenographic character and with a strong dramatization, in which we have motifs relating to Diego de Rivera or to her physical pain, her infertility, or her Mexican identity; second, paintings of a corporal presentation in the total or partial form, in the general tradition of the portrait with very clear recodifications and with a strong self-portrayal, in which Kahlo presents herself with different kinds of posture, clothes, jewellery, flora, and fauna, playing with different perspectives; in all of these paintings, Kahlo's face is like an immutable mask that contrasts with the drama of the described situation which represents enormous pain, and the immutable face does not emphasize the suffering, or its transformation into a mask; third, the scenification of cultural concepts motivated by her experience in the USA (1930-1933) and Paris (1939), in which she plays with the cultural differences, with politics, mythologies, and identity concepts; and fourth, the painting about still life. This classification is not to be taken as dogmatic; the four categories are permeable. For instance, we have pictures that belong to two groups, like *The Broken Column – La Columna Rota* – which belongs to groups one and two. The painting *The Broken Column* (1944; fig. 20, 324) has been generally and exclusively interpreted as a reflection of Kahlo's ill body. The Ionic column has been interpreted as the pole that lacerated Kahlo in the tram accident. Prignitz-Poda holds that *The Broken Column* is "a precise inventory of her state, the visual realization of the three

events in her life that most deeply shook and wounded her" (trans. ADT/eds.<sup>6</sup>), that is, poliomyelitis, the tram accident, and the love affairs of Rivera. The column would also represent the "masculine and feminine" (trans. ADT<sup>7</sup>). The sort of corset that wraps her body was the corset that she really wore at that precise time and was represented in the paintings and drawings (Herrera, *Frida Kahlo: die Gemälde* 101). Another interpretation – that cannot be overlooked – is that the column represents the phallus motivated by Kahlo's beautiful breasts (Herrera, *Frida Kahlo: die Gemälde* 101<sup>8</sup>; Prignitz-Poda 210). Herrera writes that Kahlo "at first had painted herself completely in the nude; however, after she decided that her genitals acted as a distraction, she painted them over with a hospital sheet" (trans. ADT/eds.<sup>9</sup>). Herrera writes of a Mexican Saint Sebastian (*Frida Kahlo: die Gemälde* 101<sup>10</sup>) as she deduces from the nails in Kahlo's body. And we are amused when Prignitz-Poda understands this apparent reference literally and refuses the existence of a "San Sebastián mexicano" (210, note 1).

Another affirmation that recreates the fantasy of the reader is the statement that this painting "implies the horrors of a surgical procedure" (trans. ADT/eds.<sup>11</sup>). It is relevant in order to place the painting as art in the centre of our considerations that Herrera herself has to admit that the painting "expresses the feeling of the artist **after** the first surgery" – "the horrible pain of her suffering" – although the picture was painted in "1944 before the surgery" (trans. ADT/eds., emphasis added<sup>12</sup>). This means that the painting of Kahlo has little to do with the surgery and that the connection

<sup>6</sup> "eine präzise Bestandsaufnahme ihres Zustands, die bildliche Umsetzung jener drei Ereignisse in ihrem Leben, die sie zutiefst verletzten und erschütterten" (Prignitz-Poda 210).

<sup>7</sup> "männlich und weiblich" (Prignitz-Poda 210).

<sup>8</sup> "Die Säule reicht vom Unterleib bis zum Kinn und wirkt phallisch; die sexuelle Bedeutung wird durch die Schönheit von Fridas Körper und Brüsten noch augenfälliger" (Herrera, *Frida Kahlo: die Gemälde* 101).

<sup>9</sup> "Zunächst hatte sie sich völlig nackt gemalt; nachdem sie jedoch fand, ihre Genitalien wirkten als Ablenkung, übermalte Frida sie mit einem Krankenhaus-Bettlaken" (Herrera, *Frida Kahlo: die Gemälde* 101).

<sup>10</sup> "mexikanischer Sankt Sebastian" (Herrera, *Frida Kahlo: die Gemälde* 101).

<sup>11</sup> "läßt auf die Schrecken eines chirurgischen Eingriffs schließen" (Herrera, *Frida Kahlo: die Gemälde* 101).

<sup>12</sup> "Obwohl *Die zerbrochene Säule* das Gefühl der Künstlerin nach der ersten Operation [...] ausdrückt, ist es 1944, vor diesem Eingriff, entstanden und vermittelt den schrecklichen Schmerz ihres Leidens" (Herrera, *Frida Kahlo: ein leidenschaftliches Leben* plate before 225)

between individual reality and art is not given in an imperative way like these biographical approaches want to suggest, in this way reducing the great art of Kahlo to a mere biographical exorcism.

All of Kahlo's work has, of course, biographic elements, but they are transformed into artistic material as already mentioned, into 'clay for making art,' which then enters into dialogue with the world of art, like Jorge Luis Borges in many interviews used to say (Borges), and consequently they have to be considered as material for strategies of interpictureality, or intramediality, transpictureality, or transmediality.

By interpictureality or intramediality we understand the dialogue between Kahlo's paintings within the body of her own work. This is her work in the frame of a serial-aleatoric process or auto-production with variations, amplifications, and transformations of its own elements. By transpictureality or transmediality we understand the dialogue between Kahlo's paintings with paintings and painters of different epochs as well as of different media while keeping the autonomy of and tension between the different systems. Here, it is not the binary (Mexican culture vs. European avant-garde) that applies, but hybrid and nomadic relations, as is the case in *Self Portrait on the Borderline between Mexico and the United States*, 1932 (fig. 43, 335).

In *La Columna Rota* we detect, first of all, a strong stylization on the basis of the use of the Ionic column that transforms Kahlo's body into another column, or into a statue. This painting has an evident interpictureal and intramedial relation with diverse watercolour paintings in the *Diario*, such as "Alas Rotas" (fig. 21, 324) that, for its part, dialogues with "Se Equivocó la Paloma" (fig. 22, 325) in which a woman has wings, a broken column, and a sort of iron corset for the left leg. There is also a relation to the watercolour "Yo Soy la DESINTEGRACIÓN" (fig. 23, 325), in which Kahlo and some of her body parts are falling from a column. In all of these cases, Kahlo does not produce a mimesis of a column, but she establishes a rhizomatic relation with it: she 'makes column with the column' (see note 4). The term *columna rota*, that is, broken column, is the link, on the one hand, to the painting of the broken column, but also, on the other hand, to the drawing "Se Equivocó la Paloma" in the *Diario* that leaves the vagina free to the view of the spectator, in contrast to the painting. The term *rota* is also linked to the drawing "Yo Soy la DESINTEGRACIÓN" in the *Diario*. On the other hand, the term *rota* links this image to the drawing of the *Diario*, "Alas Rotas." The breast of the figure in *La Columna Rota* also links this painting to the drawings "Alas Rotas" and "Se Equivocó la Paloma."

Besides that, we detect not only the interpictureal and intramedial, but also the transpictureal relations of these drawings and paintings, which are characterized by the mixture of the human body and artefacts, with Salvador

Dalí's *The Burning Giraffe* (1936) and with Marx Ernst's *The Swinging Woman* (1923) and *Holy Cecilia: The Invisible Piano* (1923), the last of which is in a sort of corset of bricks (fig. 24 to 26, 326-327).

The principle of composition is serial-aleatoric with evident external arts references. In "Yo Soy la DESINTEGRACIÓN" we have a scenification and transformation of the mythical Minotaur – symbolic of fertility, erotic fantasy, desire, sexual pleasure, horror, and Eros and Thanatos – into a feminine or hermaphroditic Minotaur, linked to the woman-statue from which many body parts fall. Kahlo puts Greek mythology into the tradition of surrealism, like Dalí's *Minotauro* (1936; fig. 27, 327), and recodifies it into her symbolic world – and without being a surrealist painter.

The body parts that are flying around and falling are reminiscent of the image in Kahlo's *Diario* (fig. 28, 328) and of a very recurrent surrealist motif, particularly of Giorgio De Chirico's *pittura metafisica*, for example in his *Metaphysical Composition* (fig. 29, 328).

Also, the transpictureal and transmedial aspects of some of Kahlo's paintings and some of her works in the *Diario* relate to De Chirico's *The Worrying Muses*, 1924/25 (fig. 30, 329), and *The Endless Journey*, 1918, (fig. 31, 329).

Another iterative motif is that of the bird (dove or parrot) that we find in the *Diario* or in the paintings (fig. 32 to 37, 330-332). It is linked, for example, to René Magritte's surrealist dove (fig. 38 and 39, 333).

We already mentioned that *The Broken Column – La Columna Rota* – of the year 1944 was autobiographically interpreted, but the autobiographical information does not explain anything about the painting's composition. That is why Westheider (19) poses the fundamental questions: why did Kahlo paint the figure half nude in a desolate landscape? And why did she not paint her spine, but an Ionic column? And we could ask, too, why did she paint a feminine or hermaphroditic Minotaur? Some answers can be found in the context of art, in the many transpictureal and transmedial relations through which Kahlo maintains a tension between *déjà vu* and something new. We have a process of 'difference' or mimicry, as Bhabha defines following Jacques Lacan and Samuel Weber "as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (86). Lacan describes this kind of process, which I have called 'alterity,' as "a second degree of alterity" and defines it as "travesty, camouflage, intimidation" (trans. ADT<sup>13</sup>). This is contrary to Freud's harmonizing concept that 'Wo Es war,

<sup>13</sup> "le travesti, le camouflage, l'intimidation" (Lacan, *Écrits* 284).

*soll Ich werden* ('where id was, ego shall be') in the sense of *Versöhnung*, that is, of reconciliation, and Lacan adds that "mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an *itself* that is behind" ("The Line and the Light" 99<sup>14</sup>). This definition of mimicry makes clear that the concept of *mimétisme* is not to be confused with that of mimesis or simulation in the traditional sense, but in the way Derrida understands it: "we know something here which is no longer anything, with a knowledge whose form can no longer be recognized under this old name" (trans. Johnson 21<sup>15</sup>).

Kahlo is not an imitator of the European avant-garde; it is only a starting point for her to create her own world. Kahlo quoted the avant-gardes; she performs them in her locality, for example when introducing a sort of pseudo-prosthesis, a sort of machine that is not precisely the surrealist, but the Artaudian-Deleuzian-Guattarian machine, the same body-machine of Francis Bacon who shares the world of Frida Kahlo (fig. 40 and 41, 334).

We have already mentioned Artaud who conceived of a *corps sans organes* ("Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu") which is then developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (*Capitalisme et schizophrénie* 1972 and 1980) and Derrida (*Artaud le Moma* 19-22) as a desiring machine. Artaud also developed the concept of a painting as presentationality, as *coup aléatoire*. With this term, he also means an auto-reappropriation of the body, the liberation and emancipation of the body from functionality and subordination. The body is conceived as materiality and produces its own language, its own message, and its own truth. And this is also the aesthetics that we see in Kahlo's paintings: she does not subordinate the body to language, but lets the body speak for itself, as sensuality, breath, flesh, voice, as 'body-writing-image-body,' as 'body without body,' as 'body-skin-body,' as the 'disguise of the body with different serial-aleatoric masks,' as 'body-artefact-installation.' The hybrid character of the body, the hybrid process of the presentation of the body, and the aleatoric principle place it at the interface between performativity and auto-scenification, as a copy without original, as nomadic construction. The body becomes cartography, a net that offers very diverse scenifications and readings. Here, the body is the ramp of inscription, spectacularity, is performance, is action

<sup>14</sup> "donne à voir quelque chose en tant qu'il est distinct de ce qu'on pourrait appeler un *lui-même* qui est derrière" (Lacan, "La ligne et la lumière" 92).

<sup>15</sup> "nous savons ici quelque chose qui n'est plus rien, et d'un savoir dont la forme ne se laisse plus reconnaître sous ce vieux titre" (Derrida, *La Dissémination* 30).

and, finally, is a figure of theory of culture in the post-colonial context, in which history, hegemony, the Self and the Other, colonialism, decolonization, neo-colonialism, and post-colonialism are inscribed. The body is in Kahlo the place and the trace of the concretization of memory, desire, sexuality, power, and pain. Kahlo performs in her paintings what I have called 'decorporalization' and 'recorporalization' ("Hyperspektakularität" / "Hyperrealität" / "veristischer Surrealismus"), the body as signifier, similar to the paintings of Francis Bacon (fig. 42, 335). The body in Kahlo's work is beyond functionality and subordination; her body as a *corps sans organes* represents unproductivity and sterility.

Finally, the works of Kahlo, both the *Diario* and the paintings, are the product of a rich inter- and transpictural performance on the basis of a serial-aleatoric process and of intra- and transmedial strategies where diverse fragments, concepts of art, the body, and culture remain autonomous. Her work is definitely not only the expression and representation of her life, but a very intensive debate with the avant-garde of her time, and a dialogue with older painters. Her work is an admirable recodification of this avant-garde and of the painting tradition, the creation of a new form of expression. That is why the work of Kahlo is always placed at the interfaces of cultures, arts schools, poetics, and normative genres; she is, on the contrary, highly transcultural and transmedial like the multiple pictorial references that the last example, *Self Portrait on the Borderline Between Mexico and the United States*, 1932, shows (fig. 43, 335).

This painting has been interpreted, on the basis of her very negative opinions during her visit to the U.S.A., as a binary concept of culture. But if we analyse the composition carefully, we see that the Hegelian description of the new world – the one part Spanish, catholic, undeveloped, and mythical, the other Anglo-Saxon, protestant, illuminated, technically and economically successful – is overcome in the figure of Kahlo. She is not only in the middle of the composition, but she brings together elements of both cultures: on the one hand her black hair, her Mexican jewellery, and the Mexican flag, and, on the other hand, the traditional western dress, the long gloves, and the cigarette as expressions of modernity. And the cables get connected with the roots of the plants. We could, of course, interpret this painting as the aggression of the U.S. American rational and technical world against the mythical Mexican world. But for me, it seems important that Kahlo's figure is not dividing the composition, nor does she unify it, but she keeps in her body both heterogeneous and incompatible elements.

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