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THEATRE OF THE SELF

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THEATRE OF THE SELF

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THEATRE OF THE SELF:

**THE WORKS OF FRIDA KAHLO AND
JO SPENCE**

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2) THE PICTURE OF HEALTH? by JO SPENCE. 1984. PUTTING MYSELF IN THE PICTURE, by JO SPENCE.

3) WORKING FOR THE MEDIA BY JO SPENCE. 1982. PUTTING MYSELF IN THE PICTURE, by JO SPENCE.

4) HENRY FORD HOSPITAL. by FRIDA KAHLO. 1932. FRIDA KAHLO: THE BRUSH OF ANGUISH BY MARTHA ZAMORA.

5) DIEGO AND I by FRIDA KAHLO. 1949. FRIDA KAHLO: THE BRUSH OF ANGUISH BY MARTHA ZAMORA.

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INTRODUCTION

"Imagine looking into a mirror. Instead of an act of pleasure or confirmation, or of vanity, think of it as an act of anxiety. Imagine then that every time you opened your mouth you were aware of the potential for giving the game away, knowing you might be found out, seen through. That you face the world as a masquerader. This was the story of my life from as early as I can remember as the daughter of working class parents: pushed to be socially mobile through education, fashion, social contacts, love affairs, work. Unconsciously encouraged to assimilate, to pass into middle class culture-yet underneath still remaining someone else. But who?" (1)

Jo Spence and Frida Kahlo are two examples of artists, who have created images in an attempt to uncover their own private psychic reality, and to express psychological disturbances within their lives. Jo Spence who deals with encounters of shame and personal taboo thresholds, for example, death, cancer, sexuality, intellectual inadequacy, physical ugliness and aging. Frida Kahlo who worked with her experiences of physical disability, constant pain, sterility, sexuality and death.

I was attracted to these artists work because I find it easier to understand and relate to a woman's mentality as opposed to that of a man's. This is possibly because I have or will have to go through some of the conditioning and construction processes that most women go through during their lives. Although I would never claim to be aware of all the different and subtle elements of conditioning, I would hope that I am not completely ignorant on the broader issues which revolve around the constructions of female and male sexuality.

It was interesting to research Jo Spence's work, which developed from the use of traditional portrait photography through to the exploration of her bodily illnesses and sexuality. I also found Frida Kahlo's work fascinating, mainly due to her use of paint to express a life of physical and emotional pain.

It is important to understand that although Frida Kahlo and Jo Spence were from different political, cultural and social backgrounds, both worked independently of each other yet the two were concerned with similar working issues. (2)

In the following chapters I will discuss the similarities between the works of both women. There are in fact differences which I do not ignore but because I deal with the healing and theatrical aspects of their work, this for me constitutes the similarities. Both of their work is based on real life experiences. This is what attracts most people to their work, whether it is that people can identify with some aspect of it and can learn from it, irrespective of a political, social, or personal viewpoint. I can also accept that I absorb a certain amount of their work as a cathartic experience as an artist. The concept of self-healing by these women through their work is another aspect which I find interesting. However, I think it is important to realise that Frida Kahlo would never have been able to heal her physical illness, she could only attempt to force herself into acceptance of it; whereas Jo Spence employs and understands the power of the mind over body where cancer is concerned. These are issues which I will concentrate on in the following chapters.

The work which these artists created enabled them to achieve a visual language of acts and roles, various personalities and power displays. It allows them to be heard and to be seen, which can then be accepted, refused, or changed by them according to their needs. I find it difficult to understand why both women felt the need to contrive a theatrical self-presentation of themselves, and how they were to benefit from this activity. Was this as a means to understand the forces that had constructed them?

Reading Susan Sontag's writings on photography, in particular her essay on the image, assisted me in understanding the unconscious reasons why these women felt the need to depict images of themselves in order to accept themselves.

Frida Kahlo's and Jo Spence's lives may sound tragic, certainly Jo Spence's life transcended pain, perhaps Frida Kahlo could have reached this point too, if she had lived longer and found through her work self-liberating. Their work allowed them true liberation from their anger, which stemmed from their position as women within the societies that influenced their opinions and values. My understanding is that Frida Kahlo before her death did acquire some degree of acceptance towards her physical illness and

sterility. I believe Jo Spence has come to terms, has accepted and has achieved a higher awareness of herself. She is now at peace with herself in the knowledge of what she wants out of life and how she will live it.

FOOTNOTES:

(1) SPENCE, JO. ("COULD DO BETTER..") VARIANT NO. 8. 1990. P. 28.

(2) FRIDA KAHLO born in 1907 and died in 1954. JO SPENCE born in 1938 and as of March 1991 is alive and working.

Since 1984 Jo Spence has been evolving a new photographic practice, that of phototherapy. This practice enables her to create a new range of images through which she then reassesses or rereads her own past. Jo Spence works in conjunction with another female artist, Rosy Martin, and together they have the ability to create a safe space in which to examine their past, without judgements or interruptions. This enables each of them to change, review, let go and move on. As Rosy Martin says:

"The work takes up and questions many of the major themes of photography itself, challenging the concept of the "decisive" or "perfect" moment, and the "truth" of the photographed image. It exposes the image production process, works against the grain of existing mythologies of family photographs looks at every day events and small details, challenges "fixity" and rigid social roles. Phototherapy is about photographing feelings, and is a means of shifting the understanding of concepts and abstract theory from the cerebral intellect to the gut " (1)

"The process of phototherapy is essentially collaborative; it is not something which is either done to you, or for you" (2)

The confinement and control of to-day's medical institutions is what drove Jo Spence and Rosy Martin away from conventional healing methods with the aim of looking at other methods, of healing and controlling their illnesses.

The project on health was carried out over the period of time between the discovery of Spence's breast cancer and her use of traditional Chinese medicine. Spence began to use her camera as an instrument through which to investigate her illness, not just to be an object of investigation by the medical profession. Her aim was to take an active role in her illness (see illustration no. 1). Spence took photographs of her body which she had written about previously and fragmented it in the images so as to make the viewer aware of how he or she usually views an image of a body. Spence then placed these images together in order to take control and responsibility for them. Jo Spence kept her camera by her side throughout her stay in hospital, taking photographs of the doctors and nurses activities and how they were treating other female patients. Having her camera there made the nurses and doctors more aware of how they were treating her and

what they were doing to her, (see illustration no. 2). Here her earlier political and social awareness came in helpful. Jo Spence was using her camera as a documentary tool, to record and later investigate her cancer, her hospital experiences and doctor patient relationships. It was her way of staying in control of this situation, to have a power over the doctors. She used their apprehension towards the camera and took advantage of her power to make them more aware that they were dealing with individuals. By using the camera she was able to record them being violent to her body and her being violent as a response. It was a tool which she could then use as a weapon, but later as a record to remind herself of what did happen, and how she dealt with these situations. She could then learn from this and use the photographs later on for different circumstances.

Phototherapy is revealing, it particularizes and personalizes, it shows everyday events, thereby validating them. It is revealing, but reveals only that which the sitter is comfortable with and looks at the past, present and future. Phototherapy unlocks perceptions that one has of oneself, and gives permission to change. It opens up questions and allows self-exploration; it encourages self-acceptance, self-love and self-knowledge. Phototherapy is a two way dialogue where both the sitter and the photographer are working to expose emotions and trying to give these feelings a visual form. Phototherapy is a deconstructing process, however, instead of just deconstructing, the sitter also builds up a whole new set of images, through which he or she can reconstruct oneself again. Through this medium one can find new ways of perceiving the past, new ways of facing up to the fears, losses, hopes and desires that are within people; so that it is possible to change.

"We are all locked into past histories of ourselves of which we are largely unaware, but by using reframing as a technique anything can potentially be turned on its axis, words and images can take on new and different meanings and relationships and old ideas can be transformed" (3).

Although phototherapy takes up questions of major themes of photographic criticism, like the concept of the 'decisive' or 'perfect' moment and the 'truth' of the photographed image, the way it looks into fine details and everyday life, and the way it can remodel the past. Its main purpose and conquest is for the sitter to question, challenge,

understand, accept, love, heal and eventually benefit from the therapy. Spence uses phototherapy primarily as a means to heal herself, both her body and her mind, through questioning and rereading events and experiences. This in turn encourages her to be honest and open, to realise and be aware, accept and understand the feelings which she could not previously decipher.

The phototherapist's task is always to create a sense of safety in which the sitter can extend beyond the limits set by repressions, to enable her to review and reframe her held image of herself. The sitter is the one who determines the photographic image, and the process to be explored. The phototherapist offers her skills, but tries never to take control of a session or of the reading of the prints. Photographs can provide contact with the unconscious, transcending and taking and making possible the direct use of images. Symbols can be especially powerful for uncovering and transforming the unconscious. This unconscious does not operate with the language of logic but with the language of image. To unblock and celebrate the unconscious is the most difficult but most rewarding aspect of phototherapy, to work towards a psychic reality or the making visible of psychic reality. Before one can uncover, root out, and deal with recalcitrant feeling, gain control of one's emotional lives and direct them more effectively, one has to make one's psychic reality visible. Phototherapy is photographing feelings in all their rawness and is a means of shifting the understanding of concepts from the cerebral intellect to the gut; it is the acting out and thereby raises consciousness of the feelings and confusion which lead one to understand and acknowledge difficulties which one may have been denying to oneself. The therapy sessions which one goes through, the openness and vulnerability which one puts oneself through in the acting out of feelings and emotions, and then, the reading of prints and the emotional turmoil which would be felt, leaves no other option than to have a very intimate, understanding and close relationship with the therapist one is working with. However, I do think that there is a danger in any kind of one to one therapy sessions, whether that be professional or personal, as the sitter can become too reliant or too dependant on a single person to restore their confidence with their true self in public situations. Having some kind of a feminist background or some idea or awareness on women's politics, was a help to Jo Spence in her work with phototherapy, as she said herself:

"In the construction of my heterosexuality I learnt the fine details of how to stand, to smile, I learnt to take small steps, not to take up much space, to listen and not to speak, to not have opinions, to wear the mask of femininity". (4)

This kind of awareness was a help to Jo Spence when she started practising phototherapy. She knew where to start deconstructing herself, her sexuality, her ideas about her body as a whole functioning being. To reverse the process of the way she was constructed as a woman, by deconstructing herself visually, by acting out the components of her personality and sexuality, in an attempt to identify the process through which she had been put together, was made easier by her earlier political and social work. (see illustration no. 3)

Jo Spence's work at present is abundant with valid defensible issues, thoughts, feelings, questions and experiences. Her work invites political questioning, social criticism, family evaluation, understanding of one's own sexuality, and these in turn working towards an acceptance of oneself and in time a healing of oneself.

FOOTNOTES:

(1) HOLLAND, PATRICIA, SPENCE, JO, WATNEY, SIMON; (ED.). MARTIN, ROSY. PHOTOTHERAPY : PHOTOGRAPHY/POLITICS: TWO. LONDON: COMEDIA PUBLISHING GROUP. 1986. P. 40.

(2) SPENCE, JO. (PHOTOTHERAPY - PSYCHIC REALISM AS A HEALING ART) TEN. 8. NO. 30. 1988. P. 3.

(3) SPENCE, JO. PUTTING MYSELF IN THE PICTURE. CAMDEN. LONDON. 1986. P. 173.

(4) HOLLAND, PATRICIA, SPENCE, JO, WATNEY, SIMON; (ED.). MARTIN, ROSY. PHOTOTHERAPY: PHOTOGRAPHY/POLITICS: TWO. CAMEDIA. LONDON. 1986. P. 44.

Frida Kahlo who died at the age of forty eight contracted polio when she was six, had thirty-two surgical operations in total throughout her life, mostly on her spine and right foot and three miscarriages. Almost by accident she began to paint when she was nineteen.

"Since I was young, this misfortune, (she talks about an accident she was in at the age of 18) did not at that time take on the character of a tragedy: I felt I had energies enough to do anything instead of studying to become a doctor. And without paying much attention, I began to paint." (1)

Frida from then on painted what had not been fulfilled in her life. Her intentions were to make painful feelings about her body and life known. She did this by turning her body inside out, showing us her children that she miscarried, her broken spinal column which she injured through the accident, her bleeding body, the lovers she had whom she could not forget; and of course the influence of Mexican culture on her. As a photographer Lola Alvarez Bravo, a friend of Kahlo's, said;

"Frida is the only painter who gave birth to herself". (2)

Frida recreated herself, she reinvented as she would recover and relapse and recover again. She created a person who was mobile, not through her body but through her imagination which she directed through painting. The public Kahlo was cheerful and strong, yet afraid to be honest and open to show herself the way she felt. Kahlo was an utterly lonely person, the physical pain that she felt was always kept hidden behind a mask. It was through her painting that she opened up and told the whole truth of her pain as Hayden Herrera said of Kahlo in her book;

"The girl whose ambition was to study medicine turned to painting as a form of psychological surgery." (3)

She painted because she needed to, she found relief through it, painting was the expression of her own reality.

Kahlo's paintings consisted mainly of self portraits, it could be said that she was self-obsessed, not with self pity but strength. The honesty and bluntness with which she paints her images are anything but weak and self-pitying. Her images were taken from lived experiences, from events of her life which marked her, her own joys and sorrows. Never being able to have children affected Kahlo greatly, and came into a lot of her work in the late 1930's and early 40's. Her paintings expressed, in the most vivid and direct way possible, her reality, her sadness at not being able to carry children. One of her paintings called HENRY FORD HOSPITAL, demonstrates this sadness within her. She lies naked on a hospital bed, haemorrhaging. Her stomach is swollen for pregnancy. She is holding six veinlike red ribbons with objects floating from them, each object being symbolic of her emotions at the time of her miscarriage. The bed that Kahlo is on, is floating in an immense barren landscape, yet in the distance one can see the forms of an industrial landscape, above her on the hospital bed is a blue sky. The way Kahlo is situated on this bed and floating through this landscape suggests her distance from the outside world, the far away city on the horizon brings to mind the outer world which seems so indifferent to Kahlo's suffering; Kahlo is lying there lonely, disconnected, empty and unprotected. (see illustration no. 4). A disjointed passage from Kahlo's journal of 1944 reveals that her sadness over not having a child lasted even after she had found other things to fill her life.

"I sell everything for nothing I do not believe in illusion
... the great vacillator. Nothing has a name. I do not look
at forms ... drowned spiders. Lives in alcohol. Children
are the days and here is where I end". (4)

By projecting these sorrows onto a canvas, she was extracting them from her mind. By seeing them on a canvas she could use them as a catharsis, but also with images of herself footless, headless, cracked open, bleeding, looking at her wounded self in her painting, she could sustain the illusion of being the strong, objective onlooker to her own misfortune. You could look at Kahlo's very dramatic and blunt images of suffering and pain as an attempt to impress on others the intensity of her suffering; just as some people think that most of her operations were unnecessary and were only an attempt by her to gain attention from Diego Rivera (her husband) and friends.

In her paintings Frida was honest to herself, her paintings were her reality, she lived her life as a stage where she acted and played a strong woman sometimes verging on the ridiculously strong. At the time in 1954, with pneumonia Frida went on a protest to object to the ousting of Guatemalan president Jacobs Arbenz Guzman by the CIA. She was in so much pain she had to be strapped to the wheelchair to support her back. Her pneumonia never cleared.

Throughout all of Kahlo's paintings we can be reminded of her sterility by recurring images of foetus and dolls, painting flowers and fruit which look alive, projecting upon us the full force of her obsession with fertility. After Kahlo's first miscarriage Diego Rivera said:

"Frida began work on a series of masterpieces which had no precedent in the history of art-painting which exalted the feminine qualities of endurance of truth, reality, cruelty, and suffering, never before had a woman put such agonized poetry on canvas as Frida did at this time in Detroit." (5)

Diego Rivera was another recurring theme throughout Kahlo's work. She would paint him beside her, her helping him, him helping her, her cradling him in her arms, also painting his face as an extension of her own, both cut in half and joined together. In two of her later self portraits we see her using a smaller portrait of Rivera in the centre of her forehead, as in the painting, *DIEGO AND I*, painted in 1949, (see illustration no. 5).

Also with Kahlo's painting of fruit, we can see how she was using them to represent her pain, her melons and pomegranates are cut open, revealing juicy, pulpy centres with seeds, forcing us to remember her wounded self-portraits and her association of sex with pain. Sometimes she peels off just a little of a fruit's skin, or she would puncture tiny flagpoles into the skin, reminding us of arrows, thorns and nails that torture her in other self portraits that she painted, even seeing drops of juice on the fruit could remind us of tears which Kahlo so often painted on her own face in self portraits. (see illustration no. 6).

Her paintings are a constant reminder to us of the agony she went through both mental and physical. They were her expressions of her pain and sorrow, love and joys. She lived out her reality through these paintings. Where she created herself and her life in an honest way.

The year that she died, she told a friend;

"My painting carries within it the message of pain ...
Painting completed by life. I lost three children Paint-
ings substituted for all of this. I believe that work is the
best thing." (6)

FOOTNOTES;

- (1)Herrera, Hayden. FRIDA. Bloomsbury. London. 1984. p.63.
- (2)Herrera, Hayden. FRIDA. Bloomsbury. London. 1984. p.75.
- (3)Herrera, Hayden. FRIDA. Bloomsbury. London. 1984. p.74.
- (4)Herrera, Hayden. FRIDA. Bloomsbury. London. 1984. p.148.
- (5)Herrera, Hayden. FRIDA. Bloomsbury. London. 1984. p.144.
- (6)Herrera, Hayden. FRIDA. Bloomsbury. London. 1984. p.148.

CHAPTER 3

Jo Spence began creating art by dealing with a wide spectrum of issues. Her earlier work dealt with her life as a woman growing up in a family during the Second World War, and having to conform to what a male dominated society expected of a woman at that time, how she lived out her conception of what being feminine was to her and her relationships to other women and men. It is only recently, since Spence discovered that she has breast cancer that she has begun to consciously use photography and her creative ability as a photographer to control her life and illness. Unlike that of Frida Kahlo who knowingly used the creation of images through painting to express her pain and to understand her life. Both of these women, each having matured through different cultures, where the traditions of female oppression were strongly held. Kahlo and Spence were conscious of the way they were constructed and conditioned into what being 'feminine' was to each of their cultures. Being aware of their conditioned sexualities made it possible for them, through their different mediums to deconstruct themselves in their work. To act out or re-enact part of their lives was very important to both artists in their work. Kahlo acted out her reality on canvas, understanding and expressing her pain and sorrow through images in her painting. Likewise, Spence re-enacting in front of her camera, deconstructing herself in order to reconstruct herself. Both women needed to understand themselves, and through understanding how they were constructed, able to take control of their lives. Kahlo used the slow and tedious medium of paint to depict her anxieties. Aside using the images that she created as a catharsis for herself, she used the actual physical motion of painting as a relaxation therapy. This was before her physical capabilities deteriorated so much that she even found it painful to sit up in a bed. Jo Spence on the other hand uses photography, a fast, direct and immediate image making process, where re-enacting has to be spontaneous, where the sitter has no time to think or hesitate. As phototherapy is revealing and is based on the idea of exposing the true self to the camera, the sitter has to have complete and utter trust in the therapist. Through the re-enacting of everyday events the sitter is exposing the construction of the natural, is exposing the construction of ones emotions and feelings. By exposing and exploring them, it validates them and eventually the sitter can then learn to accept and enjoy them.

In Kahlo's society women at a very young age were conditioned into believing that they were the more caring, more concerned and thoughtful sex, and that role was the right or expected role to take. Kahlo grew up believing this, and therefore found it difficult to accept, that due to her physical condition she could not take this role and was therefore not 'feminine' as the society would understand 'femininity' to be. Similarly with Spence (as cultural conditions have not changed dramatically since Kahlo's time with that aspect of conditioning) who tried to develop her own acceptance of her physical self and her need to feel and express her own want of control over her life. Both of these women learnt to do this through the creation of images;

" As primitive people fear the camera, as they are scared that it will rob them of part of their being, people in industrial countries seek to have their photograph taken, feel that they are images, and made real by photographs."
(1)

This I find an interesting thought, which could be applied not only to Jo Spence who uses her camera to make and create new images but also to Frida Kahlo, who also invented images of herself which she could identify with.

The ability to produce images about our world and our lives is a powerful instrument to use; it depersonalizes our relation to the world; as Susan Sontag says about photography;

" Like a pair of binoculars with no right or wrong end, the camera makes exotic things near, intimate; and familiar things small, abstract, strange, much further away. It offers, in one easy, habit forming activity, both participation and alienation in our own lives and those of others - allowing us to participate, while confirming alienation."
(2)

This in my opinion can also be said of Kahlo's painting and of the way in which Kahlo and Spence were allowing themselves to confirm alienation, to block away memories and feelings, to hide what they wished hidden from the world. They could participate in

issues they felt necessary to deal with, yet still being aware of the isolated thoughts in their minds and using both visual and mental memories to come to an understanding of themselves. The feeling of being exempt from calamity by looking objectively at the images Spence and Kahlo produced, and on examination of the pains, sorrows and joys they have depicted, in looking at them although they may have accepted the emotions in part, as their reality these images suggests and strengthens the feeling that they are exempt. Mainly, it is because you are 'here' and not 'there'. As Susan Sontag says;

"In the real world, something is happening and no one knows what is going to happen. In the image world, it has happened, and it will forever happen in that way." (3)

It is in my opinion the choice of the image maker, whether to accept the image as reality or to alienate it from their lives, either way they will be the ones to choose, to accept or to deny.

Both Kahlo and Spence through the use of images found a reality which they could accept and were comfortable with. But what is the reason in having to create personal images? Is it because today we are constantly being bombarded with so many new images through the media, that these images cannot possibly fulfil our needs? Or is it that to be fulfilled now we must create new images, through which we can experience our own reality, because, in the actual process of making images we find a way for us to imprison reality, or enlarge a reality that we feel to be shrunken. As Susan Sontag believes;

"One can't possess reality, one can possess (and be possessed by) images, " (4)

And as Susan Sontag quotes of Proust:

" One can't possess the present but one can possess the past." (5)

To possess is to control and to control is to regulate, and for Kahlo and Spence to control, regulate and understand themselves was to keep themselves sane. Having to possess images to find a reality that they can live with, is slightly morbid, unless they can

transform the reality they created using images into some form of a reality that they can learn to live life. Jo Spence has achieved this to some extent, yet Frida Kahlo never achieved this through her life, possibly because she was in so much physical pain, especially later on in life; yet right to the end she continued to paint. She created images that she could reveal herself through, images that were her reality, which she could possess and control and that kept her mind active enough to stay sane.

Frida Kahlo and Jo Spence were constantly shadowing and denying aspects of themselves and of their sexualities which should never be denied and never be hidden. It was only through the re-enacting and reconstruction of themselves through painting and photography that they accepted and came to understand themselves. By using a theatrical representation of themselves, they gradually came to terms with their individual characteristics.

FOOTNOTES:

- (1) Sontag, Susan. ON PHOTOGRAPHY. Penguin. London. 1982. p.139.
- (2) Sontag, Susan. ON PHOTOGRAPHY. Penguin. London. 1982. p.147.
- (3) Sontag, Susan. ON PHOTOGRAPHY. Penguin. London. 1982. p.149.
- (4) Sontag, Susan. A SUSAN SONTAG READER. Penguin. London. p.356.
- (5) Sontag, Susan. A SUSAN SONTAG READER. Penguin. London. p.356.

CONCLUSION

The images that Kahlo and Spence have created in their work are strong, confident and very blunt. Kahlo's collection of work tended towards fantasy which then became her reality, and assisted her in accepting her physical body, her longings and desires. Spence's phototherapy went beyond this, developed to the extent where she healed herself through the images that she created. By reliving in front of the camera, scenes from her personal history that she perceived as crucially determining for the present state of her body and mind. I hope that I have conveyed the importance of these women using a theatrical self-presentation as a means to create images, and to then use these images to control their lives and their illnesses. To deliberately depict oneself as a puppet in one's art is a brave endeavour in itself, as the artist is faced with an image of herself, which she alone has to deconstruct and reassemble. She then has to obtain a new set of images, roles and personalities to use and re-enact through; to create something which can positively help in the understanding of the psychic and one's physical illness.

This leads us to the concept of creating images of what has not been fulfilled in our lives, and to hope that these images can act as a substitute for a lack in oneself. It requires courage to tackle, challenge and declare these needs. However to rely on images that you create and reconstructions of your life, to cure illnesses could be dangerous. If it were possible to use image construction alongside unorthodox medical practices to heal oneself would be ideal. By using phototherapy you are healing yourself, you are understanding yourself. You are teaching yourself how to recognise, label and categorise visually, different feelings, anxieties and emotions; compared to the more orthodox way, of the psychoanalysts and the patient; the heroine and the victim. Visual identification and visual reconstruction is in my opinion a more positive and constructive remedy.

For Kahlo and Spence producing images of themselves was their method of achieving an acceptance of their lives. The images they created were records of their reality. For some, their work and their lives, the way in which they achieve their realities, through images, may sound morbid and incorrigible, but for others a joyous escape. In my opinion, it is up to each individual to decide whether it is right to escape, to live through and experience one's true feelings, whether that be joys, sorrows or physical pain through a world of images and illusions. Kahlo's work testifies, to the many qualities that marked

her as a person, and as a painter. Her gallantry and indomitable strength in the face of physical suffering; her insistence on surprise and specificity; her peculiar love of spectacle as a mask to preserve privacy and personal dignity. Most of the work that Kahlo created in her abbreviated career were self portraits, and we can witness in each piece how her extravagant and bewitching personality fed each one. Likewise, Spence whose work is so abundant, honest and sincere, with every aspect of her identity being opened and exposed to us, leaving herself bare, uncovered and public for us, in order that we may learn, develop and eventually perceive the significance of self-knowledge, enlightenment and criticism of the status quo. As S. Ernst and L. Goodison said:

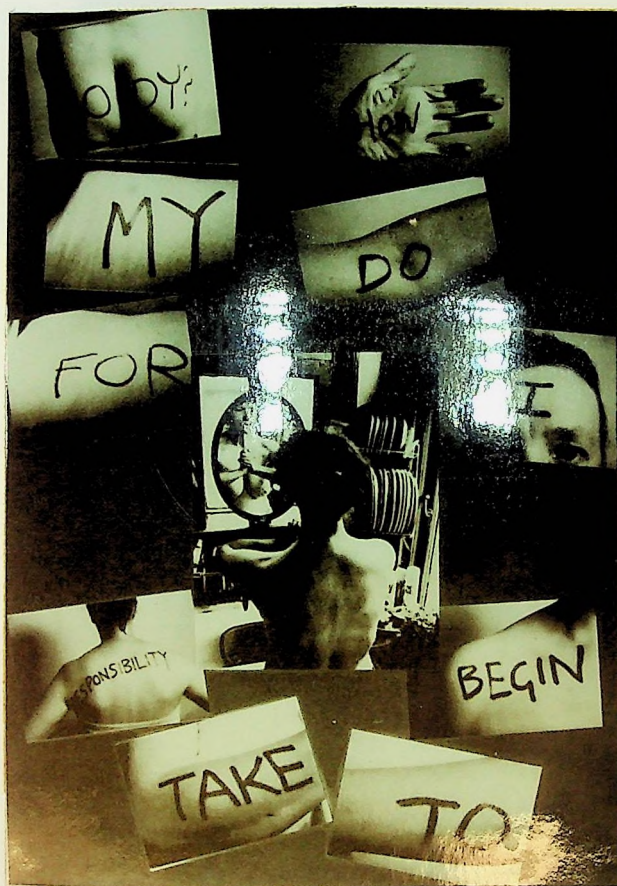
"Therapy which can preserve our sanity in a crazy world is actually helping us to remain active, enabling us to keep and extend the control we have over our lives Therapy can help us to reach beneath our conditioning, to contact the power locked in ourselves and the deep love which energizes us to act in our own common interests. The revolution we want seeks a change not just in the ownership of production but in the reclamation of our sexuality, our feelings, our relationships, our working and living conditions, our creativity." (1)

FOOTNOTES:

- (1) DS. Ernst, L. Goodison, IN OUR OWN HANDS - A BOOK OF SELF HELP THERAPHY - WOMEN'S PRESS 1981.

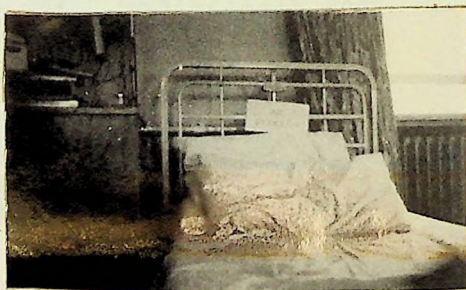
ILLUSTRATIONS

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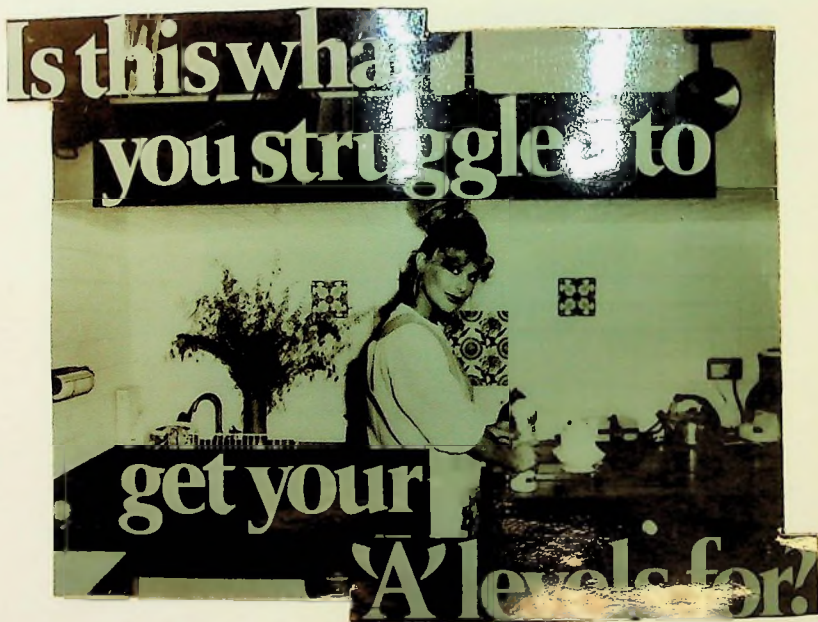
THE PICTURE OF HEALTH?

1984



THE PICTURE OF HEALTH?

1984



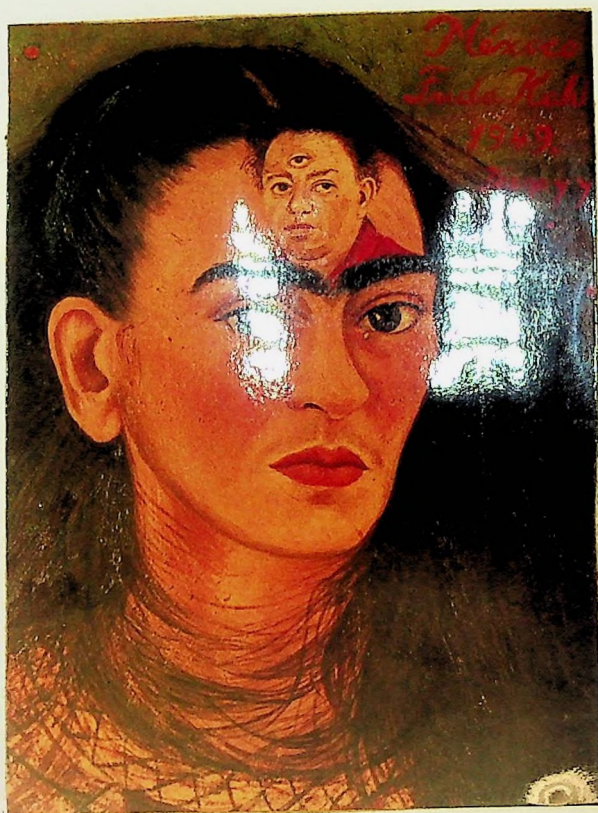
WORKING FOR THE MEDIA

1982



HENRY FORD HOSPITAL

1932



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