

## The Subjectiles at Work: The Secret Art of *The 9 Fridas*

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### Abstract

*The 9 Fridas* was one of the feature productions of the 2014 Taipei Arts Festival, which was produced by Mobius Strip Theatre Company in association with Hong Kong Repertory Theatre and staging at The Wellspring Theater in Taipei on September 5-7. Directed by Phillippe Zarrilli and scripted by Kaite O'Reilly, the production of *The 9 Fridas* attempted to portray Frida Kahlo (1907–1954) from a wide variety of perspectives. What it evoked, for me, went beyond the theme “ways of looking” designated by the festival organizer and directed our attention to what I term “the subjectiles of Kahlo.” In his work, *To Unsense the Subjectile* (*Forcener le subjectile* 1986) collected in *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, Jacques Derrida takes issue with the untranslatable word “subjectile,” coined by Artaud, and attempts to illustrate layered implications of the word and thus Artaud’s thoughts and artistic secrets.

This paper is concerned with Frida Kahlo, a woman artist of many layers and secrets, and *The 9 Fridas*, a production that claims to offer an alternative interpretation and a refashioned representation of Frida Kahlo. The image of subjectile is inessential to the overall scheme of the paper. It serves both as a method for thematic study and as a tool for aesthetic exploration, and through which we can closely examine the secret and the performance of Kahlo’s life and art as manifested in the script and the production of *The 9 Fridas*. In this paper, first of all, I will explore the Subjectiles of Frida Kahlo in the “Introduction.” Its purpose is not only to highlight the layered complexities of Kahlo’s life, paintings, and legacy but also to chart some trajectories projected from *The 9 Fridas*. Next, of all the layers and subjectiles, I intend to tease out four unique aspects of *The 9 Fridas* for discussion, such as the play’s textiles, affectiles, disabilitiles, and actiles, in the hope that we can read both the play and Kahlo’s life and paintings anew as well as have a full grasp of O’Reilly’s script and Zarrilli’s psychophysical approach to acting in *The 9 Fridas*.

Keywords: Phillippe Zarrilli, Kaite O’Reilly, Frida Kahlo, *The 9 Fridas*, subjectile, psychophysical acting