THE THEATRE OF THE SELF

By Delpha Hudson

*A diary project with a difference – Read, burn and re-write your stories for mental health*



Taking its starting point from a 30 day performance of reading, editing and burning 30+ diaries, the *Theatre of the Self* documents a personal journey through life stories and encourages us to re-think our stories for good mental health.

CONTEXT

Delpha Hudson is an interdisciplinary artist who has been making work about visibility for women and mothers for 20 years. Her work often explores Subjectivity and the Self and painting, installation, performance, film and sculpture have in the past used diary entries to explore personal stories. Writing a performance score as the starting point and conceptual framework, Delpha created the artwork over a 3 month period. She took 30 days to perform and deal with her personal archive and diaries, by reading them, cutting out anything she wanted to keep, and then ritually burning the rest.

**Performance score:**

**30 diaries (1977-2007)**

**30 days (not consecutive)**

**Each day read a diary, save something, burn the rest**

**Documented on Instagram with three photos; one photo of diary, one photo reading the diary, one photo of burning diary**

THEATRE OF THE SELF on Instagram

The 2017 project took place in a quiet Cornish meadow and was documented on Instagram. There were 3 posts for each day - 1 photo of the diary, 1 photo of Delpha reading the diary and 1 photo of burning the diary.

Some audiences were a little horrified at the idea of burning ‘precious diaries’ yet came to understand the efficacy of dealing with ‘stuff’ - and that the project is not about the destruction of archives but about the construction, and creation of our stories for good mental health.

Once the project was completed Delpha continued to research women’s autobiography & writing, diaries, psychological narrative reconstruction, and mental well-being. Some writing was produced and is online: [www.theatreoftheself.co.uk](http://www.theatreoftheself.co.uk): [http://wearewia.com/delpha-hudson-theatre-of-the-self/](http://wearewia.com/delpha-hudson-theatre-of-the-self/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)

AUDIENCES: The project is for everyone but it has especial relevance for women, diary writers, anyone who has suffered trauma and mental health issues, and anyone who would like to write a diary – differently.

RESEARCH THEMES:

*The truth is we become the stories we tell about ourselves*

* Diaries: what we leave behind, memory, truth, interpolated time, presence, transformation of self through writing and stories
* Women’s autobiography: visibility, voice, representation & writing the self
* Time-based performance, the body, fluid and multiple identities, trauma & the archive
* Historical constructs, narrative identity, narrative smoothing, & redemptive stories
* Narrative processing for mental health, psychological reparation of trauma, catharsis & reconstructing and rewriting the self
* Women’s narrative recoding of domestic stories & parenting pressure, reinstatement of value for care & domestic acts, rewriting the Self for their children and the children of future generations

THE BOOK: 2020

Taking its starting point from the 30 day performance of reading, editing and burning 30+ diaries (2017), the *Theatre of the Self* documents a personal journey through life stories and encourages us to re-think our stories for good mental health.

The idea of a short print run of books to bring project ideas to a wider public was mooted to Cultivator and in August 2020 funding was awarded for a limited edition print of 100 copies as an A6 box set of documentation & interactive mental health diaries, to be published in January 2021. Developing ideas about how these tiny books would serve as documentation, and as diaries was undertaken with editor and designer Dr. Davina Kirkpatrick, with a huge amount of support from Marc Clemens from Headland Printers, Penzance.

The documentation book includes short excerpts from diaries (1977-2010) and interpolated commentaries that explore *psychological narrative reconstruction* - how in changing the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, we survive trauma and improve our mental health.

The 4 colour-coded mental health diaries use themes explored in the project and share suggestions about ways to re-think the self and our stories. They include:

A Little Book of Smoke & Mirrors, The Body Book, The Golden Notebook, and the Little Black Book of Catharsis (with a handy match on the spine).

The project is online with box sets for sale: £19.95 and can be purchased on [www.thetheatreoftheself.co.uk](http://www.thetheatreoftheself.co.uk)

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Delpha Hudson BA MA, is based in the South West and has been making art about women, visibility, voice and value for 20 years. She has shown performance, video, and painting Internationally as well as in the UK. Her current work includes a series of paintings and films about re-writing the self. [www.delphahudsonartist.co.uk](http://www.delphahudsonartist.co.uk)

   