

FROM FEMININE WRITING TO FEMININE PAINTING

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BY

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ABSTRACT

FROM FEMININE WRITING TO FEMININE PAINTING

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This thesis derives from Hélène Cixous' conception of "l'écriture féminine". Using this concept, art works created by Marina Abramovic and Tracey Emin were analyzed. In relation to the concept of "l'écriture féminine", an attempt at "la peinture féminine" is proposed. Under the concept of "la peinture féminine" art works were created.

Keywords: Feminine writing, sexual difference, phallogocentric language, body.

ÖZET

DİŞİL YAZIDAN DİŞİL RESME

İtir Tokdemir

Grafik Tasarım Bölümü

Yüksek Lisans

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Bu tez, Hélène Cixous'nun dişil yazı kavramından yola çıkarak hazırlanmıştır. Bu kavram göz önünde bulundurularak Marina Abramovic ve Tracey Emin'in eserleri incelenmiştir. Dişil yazı kavramına benzer olarak dişil resim kavramı önerilmiş ve bu kavrama dair olarak sanat yapıtları üretilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dişil yazı, cinsel farklılık, fallogosentrik dil, beden.

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1. INTRODUCTION

“What is my place if I am a woman?”(Cixous 75)

This thesis serves as an organized documentation of a research process about the feminine way of expression. The main objective of this thesis is to write an “essay” about feminine painting. This “essay” includes art works which I produced during my studies. I am searching for an alternative to the phallogocentric language.

While writing this “essay”, I borrowed Hélène Cixous’ conception of “l’écriture féminine”. Cixous uses words to explore alternative ways of expression to the phallogocentric language. In addition to words, I am working with colors and paper. I believe this process of exploration is a lifelong venture. In the book *Newly Born Women*, Cixous states that “the ‘Dark Continent’ is neither dark nor unexplorable: It is still unexplored only because we have been made to believe that it was too dark to be explored” (68). She invites women to ‘write their bodies’. “How is it possible to free one’s self from the learnt things which are all made by patriarchy and how can a person express his or her self without phallogocentric language which neglects emotions” are the concerns of this thesis.

In this study I am discussing Freud’s theory of sexuality and Lacan’s theory on the construction of the Symbolic, to understand how femininity is constructed and how females have a problematic relationship with the Symbolic. Moreover, I am analyzing the Women’s Liberation Movement, in order to discuss how “equality”

between sexes is understood by some feminists. They try to change feminine characteristics into masculine ones in order to achieve equality. This is why they differentiate from post-structuralist feminists.

After these discussions, I am focusing on “l’écriture féminine”, and Hélène Cixous’ works, which includes extensive criticism of psychoanalysis. In this part, I describe these criticisms and references both to Freud and Lacan. I also discuss Derrida and Cixous’ references to him. Following her texts, I will discuss “l’écriture féminine”.

In the next section I concentrate on Hélène Cixous’ essay called “Without end, no, State of drawingness, no, rather: The Executioner’s taking off”. This article is about the importance of the processes of writing/drawing. In the same way as she deals with language, she analyses drawing and discusses “what attracts us in a drawing”. In the article, she emphasizes that drawing is beforehand and it is without an end.

Creation is continuous. I relate my works to this idea. While searching for my own ‘language’, I created lots of drawings, paintings, prints, three dimensional works. I didn’t start to create these works in a ‘certain time’. There is no beginning and there will be no end for this process.

I believe Marina Abramovic and Tracey Emin are important artists and good examples for “la peinture féminine”. I discuss the work of artists Marina Abramovic and Tracey Emin under the concept of feminine writing. Not only their works but also their attitudes, life styles, and their sincerity towards their work are very important for any discussion of the feminine way of expression. Also their approach to liberation from patriarchy is very different. This also gives the opportunity to

discuss the fact that feminine way of expression is not homogeneous or classifiable into codes. However, it is one unconscious resembling another.

These are followed by my own art works, in which, I have installed prints from my body and sculptures together. In this chapter, I discuss the material, process and I am proposing an attempt at feminine painting. Moreover, I discuss the changes in my approaches after reading Hélène Cixous.

The liberation from phallogocentric language is not an easy act. When you start to achieve your own language, the situation with the audience becomes a problem. The audience wants to see art works which are clean, framed, and emotionally harmless, because when they encounter chaos they are afraid. If they encounter a woman's body, they want to see something beautiful. Tracey Emin's situation is an example for this, which I discuss in the *Searches for Freedom* chapter.

In these studies I am trying to reflect Hélène Cixous' conception of "l'écriture féminine" into "la peinture féminine" in order to show that women can express themselves better in their own language.

2. The structure of the “Symbolic”

Before discussing Hélène Cixous writings and her conception of “l’écriture féminine”, psychoanalysis and the formulation of sexuality should be discussed because feminism, “l’écriture féminine” and Hélène Cixous’ work criticize psychoanalysis, “which offers a universal theory of the psychic construction of gender identity on the basis of repression” (Weedon 42). First, I will discuss how Freud formulated sexuality. Then in the following section I will concentrate on Lacan’s theory of the ‘Symbolic’. After briefly covering psychoanalytic approach to masculine and feminine, I will discuss the Women’s Liberation Movement and how it changed femininity into masculinity by defending the equality between sexes.

2. 1. Freud’s theory of Oedipus complex:

In contrast to earlier views of gender, childhood and sexuality, which saw gender identity as inborn and sexuality as an effect of puberty, Freud stated that individuals were sexual beings from birth. As written by Weedon in the article “Freud’s theory of the Acquisition of Gender”, Freud asserted that infants were initially neither feminine nor masculine but ‘polymorphously perverse’ and able to develop either normal feminine or masculine traits or neither. This will happen in the first five years of the infant, and the baby will repress the “other” features of its bisexuality in order to create its sexuality. In the book *Interpretations of the Flesh –Freud and Femininity*, Teresa Brennan says that, femininity is a riddle because it occurs in men as well as women, “in the boys case however the feminine situation he desired would

once again have 'castration' as its phantasmatic consequence, a phantasy which would lead him to repress the feminine attitude" (14).

Freud suggested human sexuality develops in three stages; the oral stage, the anal stage and the phallic stage, plus the latency period. Juliet Mitchell summarizes Freud's theories about a baby's birth and sexuality in three sensual stages; both sexes think they have a penis in the beginning (The Omnipresent Penis), although they have an urge to penetrate something, they do not conceive a vagina. The need of a receptacle makes the baby create a second theory, "baby is a lump of excrement", both man and woman can give birth (The Cloacal Theory), the possible sight or imagined sight of sexual intercourse and the basic aggressive urges leads to a third theory created by the baby: sexuality is a battle, the stronger male wounding the weaker female (The Sadistic Theory).

In the first theory, the world is the baby; in the second one, the baby makes the world, and in the final one, the baby is excluded from the world. These theories confirm sexual ambivalence or the persistence of bisexuality. While a little girl waits for her clitoris to change, she perceives herself as castrated. She cannot be afraid of that anymore. "Freud announces only that she does not tolerate the loss of a penis without seeking recompense" (Brennan 12). This she finds in the desire for a child from her father: "desire a baby from him as a gift" (12). The only reason she has for giving up the Oedipus complex is because her wish is unsatisfied. This leads to superego deficiency.

Brennan points out that Freud has two theories of femininity. Freud claimed that the psychosexual development of girls was ‘precisely analogous’ to the Oedipal impulses of boys (9). The boys first desire their mother and wish to do away with their fathers, while girls desire their fathers and wish to dispose their mothers. After 1923 Freud changes his idea on femininity, and his second theory is called the analogy theory. As described by Brennan, in the second theory the girls also first desire their mother (10).

Freud’s explanation for a girl’s repression of phallic sexuality and her turning from mother to father is “penis envy”. For Freud, “penis envy can result in a masculinity complex in a broader sense” (Sarup, 1992 45). In this situation, she starts to behave like a man. Secondly, penis envy can lead to a sense of inferiority, this feeling extending from herself to all women. Another specific consequence of penis envy is jealousy, which plays a more active part in the mental life of women than that of men.

Freud held to his belief that the “vagina was only, in the major cases, discovered for what it was at puberty” (Mitchell 105). Actually in Freud’s theory of female Oedipus complex, girls have to go through lots of changes to become normal adults such as from clitoris to vagina, from attraction to female bodies to attraction to male bodies, and from active sexuality to passive sexuality. Freud defined masculine as active and feminine as passive.

2.2. 'Symbolic'

Lacan mapped his concept of the symbolic on Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex. He believed that the identity is a constructed thing; first from the imaginary to the mirror stage, and then from the mirror stage to the symbolic stage. He argued that language is very important in the construction of identity. When the symbolic is entered by the language, there is a deep 'divide' that occurs in our unconscious self. This divide separates language and emotions. According to Lacan, there will always be an attempt to close or bridge the distance between the self and Symbolic. Before discussing the language and Symbolic in a broader sense, the terms imaginary and symbolic should be discussed.

The Word imaginary is a term used to describe the pre-Oedipal identification of the infant with its mirror image. In this stage, the infant is neither feminine nor masculine. In the mirror stage, the self is formulated by the "other". Lacan's emphasis here is on the process of identification with an outside image. "The other is the position of control of desire, power and meaning. Desire, the precondition of subjectivity and motivating principle behind language, is an effect of lack. The lack of the power to control satisfaction, meaning and the law and the split nature of subjectivity create the need to symbolize control through language" (50).

With mirror image of the child's ego splits into I which is watching and I which is watched. "Because of that split, the unitary and imagined control which the child's identification with the mirror image brings is the imaginary" (51). The second split

happens within the entrance of the symbolic order, after the resolution of the Oedipus and castration complex. This split is between 'I' which speaks and the 'I' which is represented by the utterance.

The infant's relationship to the 'ideal-I' constructed in the mirror stage is problematic. The mirror image makes the infant passive and constrains it. "This feeling of constraint leads to anxiety on the infant's part, which in turn leads it to project its aggression on to another in the real world. Both the dynamics of projection and aggression, infant's understanding of where it ends and where it begins, are resolved or potentially resolved with the invention of the 'symbolic father' of language" (Brennan 70).

A boy can more easily represent the difference from his mother, because of his possession of a penis. The inference is that the lack he is representing is 'the separation from his mother'.

In Lacanian theory, signification is not a process of infinite free play. However, in Derrida all the meanings are temporary and relative. For Lacan the meaning and the symbolic order are a whole, which are fixed in relation to a primary, transcendental signifier. This signifier is called the phallus, the signifier of the sexual difference, which guarantees the patriarchal structure of the symbolic order.

The look into the mirror and the realization of the lack, is the main point which leads the woman's problematic relationship with the Symbolic system. Lacan's description of the Symbolic places women and men in different positions within the Symbolic

system in relation to the phallus. In this placement, men are near to the centre and women are further from that center. Poststructuralist feminists such as Hélène Cixous believe women are closer to the margins of the Symbolic order; therefore they are closer to the Imaginary, to images and fantasies. As a result of being away from the centre, they are further from the idea of absolute fixed and stable meaning than men are.

Feminists like Luce Irigaray, Nancy Chodorow, and Hélène Cixous concentrated on the importance of the pre-Oedipal phase of psychosexual development of the female. That is the time before 'femininity or masculinity' when the infant is in a symbiotic relationship with her mother. For Irigaray and Cixous, it is the time which the femininity has not become man-made.

2.3. Women's Liberation Movement:

In this section I want to focus on the Women's Liberation Movement. The earlier feminist struggle led to a new female type emerging in the United States in the 1920's. This image of "Modern woman" has shaped the view of people about the changing sexual roles. In America, women united to protest the injustice. The movement actually started in the late 1960's and early 1970's. The women's liberation movement developed independently from liberal feminism. According to Hesler Eisenstein, "The sex roles analysis of the early 1970's was taken up and given a wide circulation in the media and the academy, and had evoked a widespread but selective response in many quarters. As a result, women were being encouraged to

overcome the defects of their feminine conditioning, and seek to enter those areas of public life previously closed to them” (xi)

They were fighting for the “equality” between the sexes. I want to focus on this movement because it is important to understand the difference between the approaches served by Hélène Cixous and other feminists.

Before 1960’s women had limited rights. Women seemed trapped in the house. After that, they were given the right to change their status in life. The women’s movement of the 1960’s made considerable changes for women related to basic rights, in the home and in the workplace. Before, there were no women bus drivers, firefighters and so on; moreover, women professors, doctors, scientist and lawyers were few. Women in the United States fought vigorously for reproductive and political rights. They also fought against being symbolized as beauty and sex objects. With the women liberation movement and fights, women started to gain equality. When their discourse is analyzed it is obvious that people of that time were unhappy with looking after their children, sitting at home and similar domestic activities. Betty Friedan is one of the people who argue that “equality” does not mean “women should act like men” in her latter studies.

Betty Friedan emerged as the spokesperson for liberal feminism in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. “According to revisionist liberal feminists like Friedan, sexual equality of conditions, or egalitarianism, wrongly assumes that women and men are the same and not “different”. This particularly means that women, thinking that they are the same as men, no longer feel free to have children” (Zillah Eisenstein 190).

For Eisenstein the point that Friedan argues is that, when feminist defends the equality, they become antimotherhood and antifamily people. “By differentiating women from men in the name of biological and hence “natural” difference, the hierarchal relations of society are defended against the greatest “excess” of liberalism, namely, feminism” (190). It is important to differentiate between “equality” and “sameness.” For sure women and men should be treated equally in justice, business and social conditions. However, it is important not to forget femininity and masculinity are different. Women should not quit their motherhood in order to be the “same” as men. There is another important thing to discuss about the binary opposition of femininity- masculinity. If the repressed one is changed from feminine to masculine, then the situation will be reversed. As cited by Hester Eisenstein, Gerda Lerner claims, if women’s experience was taken as the norm, then men and maleness become the Other.

Like Kate Miller, Betty Fredan, blames Freud for helping to organize a counter-revolution against the women emancipation. The theory of “penis envy” made women escape from their socially correct feminine behavior.

The theory of penis envy shifts the blame of her suffering to the female daring to aspire to a biologically impossible state. Any hankering for a less humiliating and circumscribed existence is immediately ascribed to unnatural and unrealistic deviation from her genetic identity and therefore her fate. A woman who resists “femininity,” e.g. feminine temperament, status, and role, is thought to court neurosis, for femininity is her fate as ‘anatomy is destiny’ (Eisenstein 7).

I believe women can find their place having equal rights, by expressing themselves by an alternative language. This can happen in the language. Hélène Cixous stresses that the liberation will start from the language, right here and right now.

3. From “l’écriture féminine” to “la peinture féminine”

3. 1. Hélène Cixous and the conception of “l’écriture féminine”

Western thought and basically structuralism are phallus and logo centered (phallogocentric). Post-structuralist feminist writers are against the idea of anatomic destiny which is proposed by psychoanalysis. Hélène Cixous stresses that women should be free from the closure of the psychoanalysis.

The structure of language is centered on the phallus, which produced the word “phallogocentric.” “The meaning of the term phallus must be distinguished from the word penis”. The penis is an organ of the body; phallus is the signifier, function or metaphor. “Lacan says explicitly that the phallus is not a fantasy, not an object, but least of all an organ, penis” (Sarup, 1992, 93). The phallus is the signifier of a lack. According to the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud, although males possess a penis, no one can possess the symbolic phallus. The theory formulated by Lacan serves Symbolic as phallus, this shows that the language is a patriarchal system.

Derrida’s idea is that the structure of language relies on spoken words. He stresses that the spoken words are privileged over written words, and produced the word “logocentric” to describe Western culture in general. What holds that speech-thought (the *logos*) is a privileged, ideal, and self-present entity, through which all discourse

and meaning are derived. The system privileges not only speech over writing but presence over absence, identity over difference, fullness over emptiness, meaning over meaninglessness, mastery over submission, life over death. This logocentrism is the primary target of deconstruction. Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray combined the two terms and created the word phallogocentric.

Hélène Cixous is mostly associated with “l’écriture féminine”- feminine writing. The theory of the “l’écriture féminine” is constructed as “other” writing. Cixous’ vision of “l’écriture féminine” has insinuations for the process and purpose of writing. For Cixous, it is the effort to write the other but in ways which repudiate to neglect the difference of the “other” in order to glorify itself. Cixous believes writing is revolutionary. Feminine writing is

a place (...) which is not economically or politically indebted to all the vileness and compromise. That is not obligated to reproduce the system. That is writing. If there is a somewhere else can escape infernal repetition, it lies in that direction, where it writes itself, where *it* dreams, where *it* invents new worlds (Sellers xxix.).

It is self exploration and writing of the self. Writing is like a shadow of life, Cixous writes in order to overcome her “loss”. She says;

I believe that one can only begin to advance along the path of discovery, the discovery of writing or anything else, from mourning and in the reparation of mourning. In the beginning the gesture of writing is linked to the experience of disappearance, to the feeling of having lost the key of the world, of having thrown outside. Of having suddenly acquired the precious sense of rare, of the mortal. Of having urgent to regain entrance, the breath, to keep the trace (Sellers introduction).

Cixous became familiar with many of France's leading intellectuals, such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida. Her relationship with Derrida in particular remained strong. Moreover, her writings have references to Sigmund Freud and Martin Heidegger. "Cixous reads and writes at the interstices of Lacan's theory of language - that of the chain of signifiers and not of phallus- and Derrida's *différance*" (Conley 9). Her focus on reading and writing are from a 'feminine border'. Her work is influenced by the anti-essentialism of Derrida's deconstruction and she brings together his notion of logocentrism and phallogentrism. "She argues that masculine sexuality and masculine language are phallogentric and logocentric, seeking to fix meaning through a set of binary oppositions, for example father/mother, head/hearth, intelligible/sensitive, logos/pathos, which rely for their meaning on a primary binary opposition of male/female (or penis/lack of penis) which guarantees and reproduces the patriarchal order" (Weedon 63-4).

While Cixous explains what is important in her writings or anybody's writing, she uses the quotation from Derrida's *Dissemination*;

A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game. A text remains, moreover, forever imperceptible. Its laws and rules are not, however, harbored in the inaccessibility of a secret; it is simply that they can never be booked in the *present*, into anything that could rigorously be called perception.

And hence, perpetually and essentially, they run the risk of being definitely lost. Who will ever know such disappearance?

The dissimulation of the woven texture can in any case take centuries to undo its web: a web that envelopes a web, undoing the web for centuries; reconstituting it too as an organism, indefinitely regenerating its own tissue behind the cutting trace, the decision of each reading (Conley 8).

Derrida stated that “a text remains imperceptible”, a characteristic which cannot be arrested. It remains elusive. “There is no hidden secret to be revealed, no truth to be extorted, but there is always that part of the text, the imperceptible, the writerly, the unconscious dimension that escapes the writer, the reader” (Conley 7).

“*Différance*, not a concept, not even a word, but the movement of something deferred or something that differs, escaping an assignation, a definition. *Différance* does not have a punctual simplicity, that of the point, the period, of the *sujet un*, identical to itself, an author-head-god. What passes from one language to another, from one sex to another, in translation, as always a question of *différance*. Sexual *différance* replaces difference; movement supersedes stasis and Hegelian differences recuperable into dialects.” (Conley 8).

Différance is a pun in French. The pun happens from two meanings of the French word *différer*. One of the meanings is “to defer” (To put off; to postpone to a future time; to delay the execution of; to delay; to withhold) and the other is “to differ”. While it is neither a concept nor a word, it is neither active nor passive. It is identity and not identity. It points out a middle voice. With the difference meaning is possible. It indicates the process of reading and writing.

Western thought is dominated by metaphors. The word’s meanings are grounded in the metaphors. Derrida defends against this limiting function each of these metaphors controlling the meaning of a text. Therefore logocentrism is coercive, powerful, irrepressible desire for such a (transcendental) signified. It imposes external limits upon the internal free play of textual structures. For Derrida the text should be free from the external influences. Actually, “what passes from one language to another, from one sex to another, in translation, is always a question of the *différance*” (Conley 8).

Derrida stresses that there is a differential between masculine and feminine where one signifier always defers the other. Derrida breaks down the paternal authority, which Cixous calls the 'masculine border'. Derrida is important for Cixous because he does not claim that he discusses feminism from a feminine border. He admits that there is a textual unconscious, "who at the same time works on the unconscious other and also at the same time his own unconscious at work" (148).

Before starting to discuss and analyze the essays of Hélène Cixous, it is important to mention that feminine writing itself is a dangerous expression, which can lead to confusion. The word feminine is a word which is circulated everywhere and distorted by everyday usage. 'Feminine' and 'masculine' are, as Cixous mentions "words which refer, of course, to a classical vision of sexual oppositions between men and women - are our burden, that is what burdens us" (Conley 129). She continues "As I often said, my work in fact aims at getting rid of words like 'feminine' and 'masculine', 'femininity' and 'masculinity', and even 'man' and 'woman', which designates that which cannot be classified inside of a signifier except by force and violence and which goes beyond in any case" (Conley 129). When one says 'feminine writing' one could "almost think in terms of graphology". Instead of using masculine writing or feminine writing, she uses a writing said to be feminine or masculine. She says "I speak of a decipherable libidinal femininity which can be read in a writing produced by a male or female. The qualifier masculine or feminine which I used for better or for worse comes from the Freudian territory" (129).

In “The Laugh of the Medusa”¹ Hélène Cixous, invites and encourages woman to write because she believes that woman have been driven away from writing as from their bodies. Woman should put herself in the text and to the world and history. The women are afraid of writing. The reason for Cixous is that writing is at once too high, too great for woman, it’s reserved for the great- that is for “great men”: and it’s “silly”. She continues to say “let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you”. The readers, the critics are all scared of the true texts of women. This means that the more you write the truth about yourself, the greater barriers that will face. Although Cixous states that feminine writing is an area for both sexes, she believes that women are closer to a feminine economy than men.

Women are subjects of feminine libido. It has two reasons for Cixous. One is in a move to essentialism, she links feminine libido with female sexual organs. The other is, “Cixous gestures towards a historical perspective in which both feminine and masculine libidos are constructed in particular but not necessarily universal ways under patriarchy” (Weedon 65). Writing becomes a way to give voice to the repressed female sexuality.

By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has turned in to the uncanny stranger on display- the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor the breath and speech at the same time.

Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then will be the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth. Our naphtha will spread, throughout the world, without dollars- black or gold- nonassessed values that will change the rules of the old game (the Laugh of Medusa, 577).

¹ The essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* has common parts with the essay *Sorties* from the book *Newly Born Woman*.

Cixous' essays are difficult because she is referring to Freud and Lacan's formulations about female sexuality and about the structure of language. Following Lacan's theory, in order to enter into the Symbolic, the infant must separate from the mother's body. For that reason, Cixous says, the female body in general becomes unrepresentable in language. The female body cannot be spoken or written in the phallogocentric Symbolic order.

In addition to this, she writes on two levels at once. At the same time she uses the words literally and metaphorically. While doing that, she refers both structures and to individuals. As written by Mary Klages in the essay *Hélène Cixous: "The Laugh of the Medusa"*, "When she says that "woman must write herself," "woman must write woman," she means both that women must write themselves, tell their own stories (much as the American feminists say women must tell their own stories) and that "woman" as signifier must have a (new) way to be connected to the signifier "I," to write the signifier of selfhood/subjecthood offered within the Symbolic order".

Cixous' version of Lacanian psychoanalysis is "relatively optimistic about the possibility of transforming patriarchal symbolic order through giving women a new sense of themselves, repressed until now, and asserting different feminine meanings and values at present repressed by patriarchy" (Weedon 66). For Cixous "l'écriture féminine" also involves the description of the repressed in the history and culture. Cixous suggests that history effects present time, but past should not be repeated. The repetitions of the past will strengthen the effects of it. Therefore, a new way of writing should be made by women rather than repeating the old way. Women should write through their bodies. Otherwise, when they repeat the language centered on the phallus, they write like a man. However, it is so hard to create a new way of

expression. We were born into a world which is constructed and ruled by patriarchy, so we learn to express ourselves in their way. “How can we prevent our writing from reproducing the ways we have been taught to see and experience ourselves and the world? Even if we can block our receptive faculties and memories and live our body experiences without disturbance from numerous taboos, descriptions and images that surround us, how might it be possible to write these experiences without recourse to the language system in which such definitions are embedded?” (Sellers 9) Seller suggests that one way to get free from the constructed and learned things lies in the link between the unconscious and the body.

“Now, I - woman am going to blow up the Law: a possible and inescapable explosion from now on; let it happen, right now, in language” (Cixous 95). The Law which is used in this quotation refers to the Law of Father, which has an important role in the formulation of the subject. When the Law is broken, then all the meaning systems and “symbolic” will collapse.

The second problem about feminine writing is the impossibility of defining and theorizing it. For Cixous, this impossibility will remain, “which does not mean that it does not exist” (580). It is not possible to talk about female sexuality as uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes- anymore than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another (574).

Body is important for Cixous’ conception of “l’écriture féminine” in three ways.

“First, Cixous stresses that woman’s bodies – including our perception of ourselves and our sex-specific experiences as women have been appropriated and imaged by

men” (Sellers 6). Secondly, for Cixous language is a function of the body. Language is a translation which translates the process of what we are thinking, speaking through the body. Thirdly, the role of the mother’s body is very important in the feminine writing. Sellers says, Cixous “suggests that the rhythms and articulations of the mother’s body have a continuing effect, and she believes the inscription of these rhythms is important in preventing the codes of the patriarchal symbolic from becoming rigidified and all-powerful” (7).

In the book *The Newly Born Woman*, which is coauthored by Catherine Clement, there is an essay called “Sorties”. In this essay, Cixous questions oppositions, she says all the pairs of oppositions are couples, theory of culture, theory of society, symbolic systems in general-art, religion, family, language. It is all developed while bringing the similar schemes to light. The duality works with hierarchy. The couple represses through hierarchy (64). Cixous for exemplifying this situation uses Hegel’s Master/Slave relation.

In this couple, they need each other to define themselves. However, this leads to a threat and therefore they try to repress each “other”. There is a power inequality in the relationship. As Susan Sellers mentioned, Cixous suggests that woman has figured within this system only as the construct of man, with the result that ‘she’ has become non- existent, ‘unthinkable’ (37). Feminine writing is important because it has the capacity to circumvent the binary structures embedded in our system of thinking.

As binary oppositions suggests, women are always associated with passivity in philosophy. Cixous uses the “sleeping beauty” tale to explain the passivity. Beauty sleeps like a dead women. She is beautiful but passive and desirable. The prince is so sure that she has been waiting for him forever. “She has the perfection of something finished. Or not begun” (66). He kisses her, with his kiss she awakes. “He leans over her... Cut. The tale is finished. Curtain. Once awake (him or her), it would be an entirely different story. Then there would be two people, perhaps. You never know with women. And the voluptuous simplicity of the preliminaries would no longer take place” (Cixous 66). The rest of the story is well known.

In the “Sorties”, Cixous argues about Freud’s and his followers ideas about femininity. She questions why men are afraid of being a woman. Why do they refuse femininity? She says that these questions stump Freud. “The bare rock of castration. For Freud, the repressed is not the other sex defeated by the dominant sex, as his friend Fliess (to whom Freud owes the theory of bisexuality) believed; what is repressed is leaning toward one’s own sex” (85). Cixous posits a form of bisexuality as an alternative to the destructive masculine hegemony.

Bisexuality is conceptualized as “neuter”; Cixous says it is a fantasy of a complete being. It replaces the fear of castration. It veils sexual difference. However it is not wholeness in two halves but it is wholeness within one. Women are associated with bisexuality; men having been trained to aim for glorious phallic monosexuality.

Cixous stresses that writing belongs to women. Meaning that women admit that there is an ‘other’. While becoming woman, she has not erased the bisexuality latent in the

girl as in the boy. “Femininity and bisexuality go together, in a combination that varies according to the individual, spreading the intensity of its force differently and (depending on the moment of the history) privileging one component or another. It is so much harder for man to let the other come through him. Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me – the other that I am and am not, that I don’t know how to be, but that I feel passing, that makes me live – that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me, who? –a feminine one, a masculine one, some? – a several, some unknown, which is indeed what gives me the desire to know and from which all life soars”. (Sorties 86). In other words, woman has an opportunity to express herself better. She is able to accept the other without repressing it.

3.2. State of Drawingness

-When do we draw?
- When we were little. Before the violent divorce between Good and Evil. All was mingled then, and no mistakes. Only desire, trial, and error. Trial, that is to say, error. Error: progression.
As soon as we draw (as soon as, following the pen, we advance in to the unknown, hearts beating, mad with desire) we are little, we do not know, we start out avidly, we are going to lose ourselves (21).

In this section I want to concentrate on the article “Without end, no, State of drawingness, no, rather: The Executioner’s taking off” by Hélène Cixous. In the article, she focuses on the creating process. In fact, this process is the main concern of my works. It can be said that this article points out the connections between writing and drawing, which is necessary for discussing feminine painting.

Cixous writes about drawing because it is “before”; it is “essay”. It is not organized beforehand. The creation is happening with desire. It is like forgetting everything you know. For Cixous, it cries out. It has no last word, “truth always has the word before” (Cixous, 1998, 29). It has no last word because it is continuous. The true drawing is without end, without limitations, it is like the world in its continuous movement with a natural drunkenness.

Actually, writing and drawing are similar for Cixous. She calls them “twin adventures, which depart to seek in the dark, which do not find, and as a result of not finding and not understanding, (draw) help the secret beneath their steps to shoot forth” (21). In order to discover we need to try harder. We shouldn’t be afraid of errors, “I seek the truth I encounter error” (22). We shouldn’t be afraid to be judged by ‘great’ critics.

For Cixous, the reason of the effectiveness of the drawings is not the contours, “*but what escapes the contour*” (24). The emotion is important in the drawings, which can be felt between the lines. For instance, in *Battlefield*, there are multiple lines which were made to show the emotion.



Figure1: İtir Tokdemir, *Battlefield*, 2005. Sketch: mixed media on 21x 29.5 cm.

4. The Search for Freedom

In this chapter I am going to discuss the works of Marina Abramovic and Tracey Emin. I will discuss them under the concepts of liberation, femininity and Hélène Cixous' ideas on "l'écriture féminine". The two artists work in different mediums, and their styles are dissimilar. However, they both try to liberate themselves from patriarchy, in order to express themselves better.

4.1. Marina Abramovic:

The reason I chose Marina Abramovic is because of her approach to body and her proposal of freedom. Marina Abramovic is a performance artist who pushes the boundaries of physical and mental. She questions her control of her own body, the relationship between the audience and the body of the performer and the codes of the system. "Her profound and ambitious project is to discover a method, through art, to make people more free" (eyestorm 2003). This can be interpreted within the context of feminine writing.

Abramovic perceives body as a site which moves. In her point of view, body is a boat. In her works the boat serves as a symbol of distancing. "Distancing (disappearing) from the shore (of the land) toward the invisible line of the sea

(water), and the sky (air), and thus can be recognize as a mytheme² of death” (Pejic 26).

The body metaphors such as boat, house, and site are used in the art works of Marina Abramovic. Also Hélène Cixous writings refer to body as a house;

The house I live in is my own,
I never copied anyone...
She has not been able to live in her “own” house, her very body (Sorties 68).

In all these body metaphors there is a connotation of a shelter; being is sheltered in the body. For Abramovic body is a boat which needs to be emptied from everything that had been culturally encoded. This body of Abramovic needs to be liberated from language, from the “Symbolic”. This aim is obvious in her performance, called *Freeing the Memory* 1975, where she speaks the words that come to her mind without stopping. Actually, excessive usage of a thing leads to meaninglessness. By speaking words to one another continuously, Abramovic made them meaningless. As stated in the article “Being in the Body on the Spiritual in Marina Abramovic’s Art”, speech is always the ‘quoting’ of those words which already ‘exists’, then Abramovic tries to liberate herself from speech” (27).

In the works of Abramovic there is an effort for escaping language; whereas, Cixous proposes that language can be the starting point for alternative economies, for example feminine way of writing.

² In the study of mythology, a mytheme is an irreducible nugget of myth.



Figure 2: Marina Abramovic, *Freeing the Memory*, duration: 1, 5 hours, 1075, Dacis Gallery, Tübingen.

“Serpent mythology is arguably the most widespread mythology known to mankind, and the serpent has been attributed with a variety of sexual characteristics and ‘desirable’ traits: from the phallic male force, to potent femininity” (eyestorm). In the performance *Dragon Heads*, there is a strong reference to the Medusa myth.

The Medusa has been used in an essay by Hélène Cixous. She questions Freud’s psychoanalytic theories, and Cixous states that Freud incorrectly turns “Medusa into a monster by associating the snakes of her head with women’s denial of castration” (Wiens). Within “l’écriture féminine”, Cixous sees Medusa as a beautiful woman laughing.



Figure 3: Marina Abramovic, *Dragon Heads*, 1993.



Figure 4: Marina Abramovic, *Dragon Heads*, 1993.



Figure 5: Marina Abramovic, *Dragon Heads*, 1993.

4.2. Tracey Emin

The reason I chose to discuss Tracey Emin and her works is because of her personal, sincere and honest approach to art. While discussing her style and some of her works, I want to concentrate on how she combines words with her sincere works. Her style of discovering a new language “of her own” is recalling Hélène Cixous’ conception of “l’écriture féminine”, which I will discuss later in this section.

Tracey Emin is an autobiographical artist. She is very sensational. With her works and behavior, she becomes a celebrity. In her works, she depicts her private life and her emotions very sincerely and openly. Her confessional art exposes all kind of things about herself that most people would be ashamed to reveal. These include abortion, rape, self-neglect and confusion.

In the first issue of Tate Magazine, there was an article about Tracey Emin called “Something’s Wrong: Melanie McGrath on Tracey Emin”. There it is written that

Tracey Emin is narcissistic, but not in a sense that she loves herself. “I mean that Tracey Emin loves an image which may or may not be herself, but of which she can never be sure. I mean that Emin only half recognizes her own projection. And this, of course, is why her work is so lonely, so furious and so demanding of attention” (McGarth). When you look at Tracey Emin’s work you see the artist struggling to reach herself, compelled by her own self-consciousness to fail and condemned by the self-same thing to begin again.

There are many reasons for her to become a sensational and famous artist. For instance, she appeared on a Channel 4 television program in 1997. It was an important show about that year’s Turner Prize. Emin appeared drunk and she claims that the reason for her situation was of the painkillers she was taking for her broken finger. She had sworn at, and insulted the panel members. Then she said she wanted to go home to her mum and left the program. In 1999, two years later, she was nominated for the Turner Prize, which she didn’t win but she exhibited *My Bed* in Tate Gallery. The work was also sensational because it includes private aspects of the artist’s life. Emin has been criticized for “being nothing more than a biographical documentarist”, concerned only with the ordinary details of her narcissistic personality.



Figure 6: Tracey Emin, *My Bed*, 1998. Mattress, linen, pillows, rope, various memorabilia, 79x211x234 cm.



Figure 7: Tracey Emin, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept with 1963-1995*, 1995. (exterior)

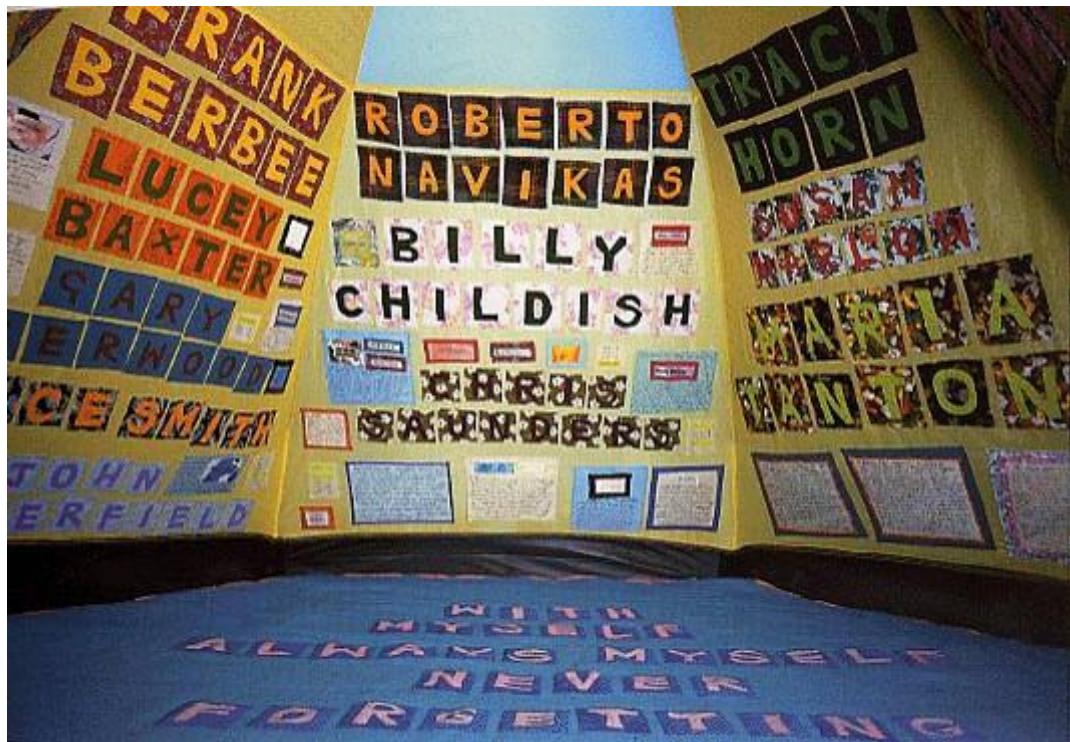


Figure 8: Tracey Emin, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept with 1963-1995*, 1995. (interior)

Her work *Everyone I Have Ever Slept with 1963-1995* was exhibited in the show *Minky Manky* at the South London Gallery. It was a blue tent, which inside all the names of people who she slept with are sewed. These names include sexual partners, relatives she slept with as a child, her twin brother, and her aborted fetuses.

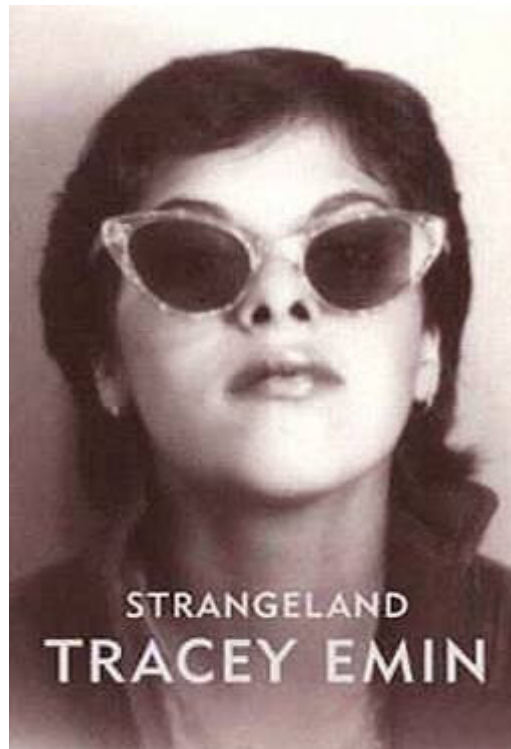


Figure 9: Front Cover of the book *Strangeland* by Tracey Emin, published by Hodder and Stoughton 2005.

Besides her works which also contains words, her writings are all done sincerely, honestly. She published her book *Strangeland* (2005), it is divided into three sections called, “Motherland”, “Fatherland” and “Traceyland”. The book is written in first person and takes a look to her life from childhood to adulthood. Jeanette Winterson stated that “her latest writings are painfully honest, and certainly some of it should have been edited out by someone who loves her, nevertheless, *Strangeland* is more than Tracey’s diary, just as her bed and her tent and her blankets are more than private displays that happen to have attracted a lot of attention”. She transferred her private life in to public. She shared her secrets, notes, sketches with public. Actually when she wrote her very personal experience she was not just giving voice to her self, but lots of others.

In the same article “The Times: Books; Tracey Emin”, Winterson argues about the judgments made about women artists. She wrote, “Antony Gormley is taken seriously when he talks about the body, in particular, his own body, as the centre of everything. When Tracey does it, it is often re-interpreted as publicity-seeking display, or self-obsession”. As Hélène Cixous mentioned in her essays, people are afraid of the true texts of women. They don’t want to encounter with emotion and chaos. For instance they don’t want to see confusion in an art work. However if we are dealing with sincerity, art work can have the traces of the artists psychological situations.

The way Tracey Emin uses words with in her works are together creates her own language. This language is not a phallogocentric one. It is feminine. She, in her works tries to express and find herself. She questions life and the patriarchal system. She puts the truth of herself and her life.



Figure 10: Tracey Emin, *Automatic Orgasm*, 2001, appliquéd blanket.



Figure 11: Tracey Emin, *Helter Fucking Skelter*, 2001, appliqué blanket.



Figure 12: Tracey Emin, *Volcano Closed*, 2001, appliquéd blanket.

5. An Attempt of Feminine Painting

I painted my body. From now on every move I make, every pace I take will leave traces on the paper. Where does this urge come from? From my body, from inside, I want to 'say' but not just with words. There is a vigorous effort. The body prints were started in small scales, first just some parts, then it grew, expanded, and filled up the space with the movement, the silence, the color, the rhythm. I call them freeing. "Freeing" from the 'voice' which is telling me how to draw, how to compose, how to create the beautiful. In a broader point of view it is liberation from the system, which tells me how I should live.



Figure 13: İtir Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 14: Itir Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.

My body feels the paint, covered with wet paint, it recalls ritualization. There is a process of preparation, then time stops. Shapes emanate.

First there was hesitation. I was not so sure what I was dealing with. It didn't matter which medium I was working with, I was interested in the process in which the body and the medium interact. For instance while working with latex I was interested in the movement of the body while pouring the mixture of paint and latex. "Body speaks the truth". It is so challenging. It would be so hard to discuss what I am trying to do from the beginning, without Hélène Cixous' essays. It is hard to explain these kinds of art works with phallogocentric language.



Figure 15: Itır Tokdemir, *Crouching Woman*, 2006. Latex and paint on canvas.

70x30 cm.

I am combining words with drawings and body prints in order to create my works. I went through a process from “only doing sketches not for public display” to sharing them all. I was shy about sharing some of works because I was afraid of hard reactions. This process taught me to be brave about showing my works. Now I am able to combine the visible and the invisible –the works which I did secretly and the ones I was brave enough to show. This work has been produced during this research process. I have learnt that I shouldn’t be afraid of chaos.



Figure 16: Itır Tokdemir, *Stuck*, 2005. Sketch: mixed media on 21x 29.5 cm.

The reason I chose to work with my body has several reasons. First of all, it is important to mention that, while making the body prints you can be in between the

state of consciousness and unconsciousness. I am not trying to say that these works should be done without awareness, but I try to direct attention to the act of doing art “as an urge coming from inside”. Sometimes the “voice” should be hushed.

In one of her interviews Cixous said “We are made of repression, and the unconscious is nothing but that. However, one may attempt to write as closely as possible to the unconscious, to the area of repression... I want to write as freely as possible” (Conley 151).



Figure 17: İtir Tokdemir, *Silence*, 2005. Sketch: mixed media on 21x 29.5 cm.

The combination of traces, words and small drawings have an effect of sketchiness. They are not “perfectly” finished, because it is a process, it is continuous. I am continuing to leave traces, to write down words and to draw.

I usually work on “kraft” paper. I am emphasizing the sketchiness of the works created. I have always used “Kraft” paper for sketches in my life. I remember myself sitting on a big size “kraft” paper and drawing when I was small. As Hélène Cixous writes in her article “Without end, no, State of drawingness, no, rather: The Executioner’s taking off”, when a person seeks truth, she/he encounters error. With “kraft” paper seeking is possible, because it gives chance to multiple lines and prints.

In this process, I did the body paints and prints with black, white, grey, gold and silver colors. The body was used as a brush. The movement of the body is important for writing, painting and drawing. I did lots of body prints using different mediums. In the installation I used a big size studio. I covered up the floor with kraft paper. From the middle of the room to the walls I left my foot prints. It is like an exposition. It is like exploration.

On the walls I installed my body prints. There are three different approaches to living brushes. First group of works are more like paintings; backgrounds are painted by hands, and the second group is prints, the body printed itself and third group is prints with frames. Third group is ‘clean’, their emotions are different. Every work has different emotion.

I include two sculptures made from body molds in the installation. The molds were taken from my body. The crouching figure is on the centre of the room. It is ‘still’ in a room full of traces of movement. It is sitting in silence.



Figure 18: İtir Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 19: İtir Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 20: İtir Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 21: Itr Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 22: İtir Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 23: İtir Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 24: İtir Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 25: İtir Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 26: İtir Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 27: İtir Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 28: İtir Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 29: İtir Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 30: Itır Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 31: İtir Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 32: İtir Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 33: Itır Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 34: Itır Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 35: İtir Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 36: İtir Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.

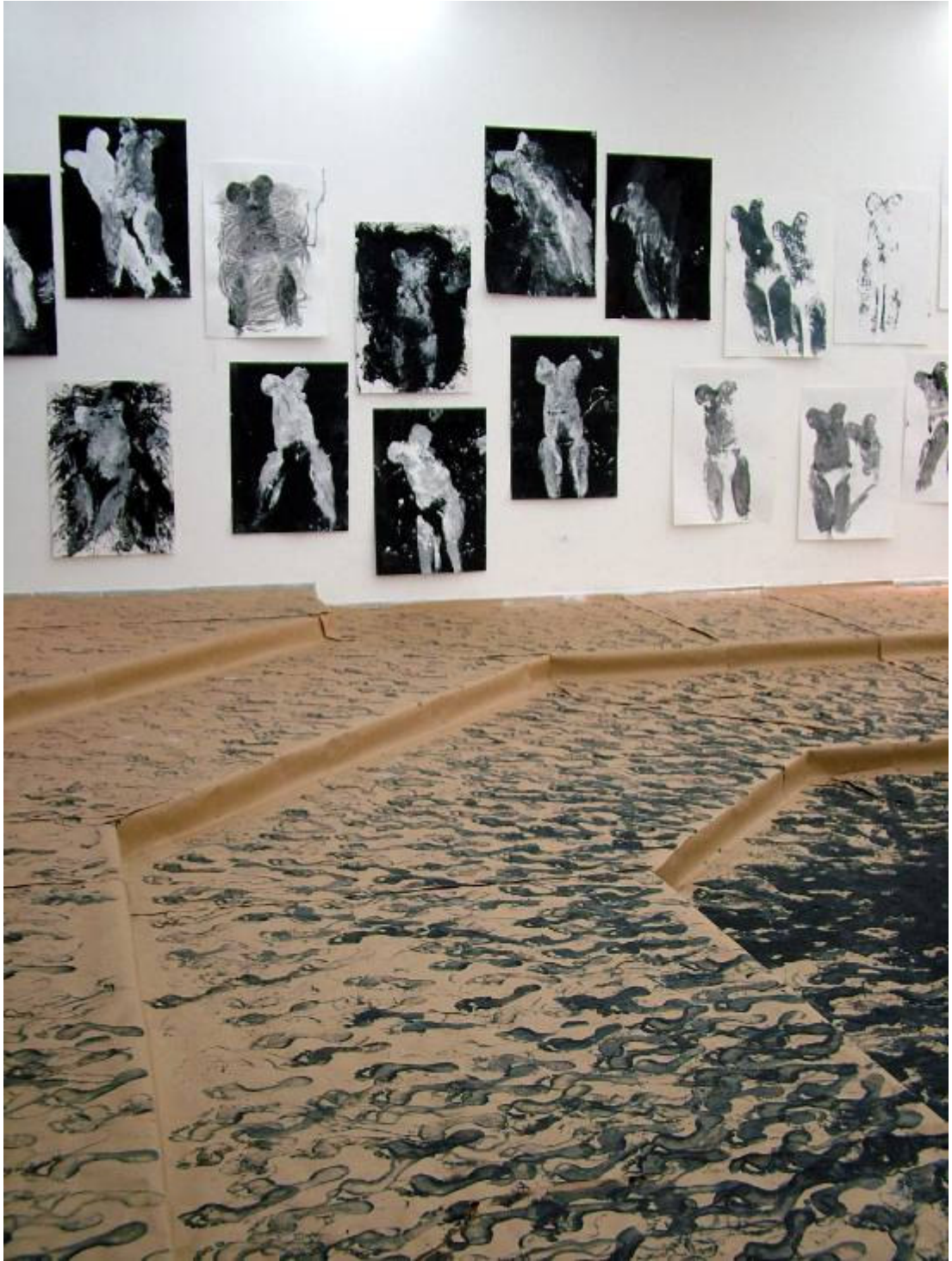


Figure 37: İtir Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 38: İtir Tokdemir, Body Paint, 2006. Acrylics on paper. 70x100cm.



Figure 39: Itr Tokdemir, Installation, 2006. Acrylics on paper, plaster.

6. CONCLUSION

Throughout the history, women artist tried to express themselves and represent women experiences in their art works. They question sexual roles, they criticize male dominancy and they try to find a place in art. Lots of women philosophers, and writers analyzed the feminine condition.

In this study, I tried to put forward how the formulation of sexuality and femininity are problematic under the concept of psychoanalysis. Freud said about the development of sexuality that, infants were initially neither feminine nor masculine traits however they are ‘polymorphously perverse’ and able to develop either normal feminine or masculine or neither. It will happen with the repression of the ‘other’. Because of the castration complex boys will be able repress their feminine traits. Freud’s definition for a girl’s repression of phallic sexuality and her turning from mother to father is “penis envy”. Following Freud’s Oedipus complex, Lacan formulated his theory of Symbolic. The meaning and the symbolic order are fixed in relation to a primary, transcendental signifier which is called the phallus. Freud’s ideas on “penis envy” and Lacan’s construction of ‘Symbolic’ are problematic for femininity.

Following that I tried to differentiate post-structuralist feminists like Hélène Cixous from others by exemplifying the Women’s liberation movement and their aim to masculinize women in order to reach “equality”. Next I discussed Hélène Cixous and her conception of “l’écriture féminine”. While discussing her conception, I point out

her criticisms of Freud and Lacan. Cixous argues that masculine language seeks to fix meanings through a set of binary oppositions. She uses Derrida's *différance* while discussing the logocentrism and phallogentrism.

Women should write themselves in order to express themselves in the phallogocentric world. It is important not to lose the feminine condition while expressing. Hélène Cixous' thoughts are very important for that point. She stresses women should write women. In other words women should express themselves with feminine characteristics.

It is impossible to neglect the patriarchal system and its impositions. Most of the women artists try to find a way to deal with this problem. As exemplified by the works of Marina Abramovic and Tracey Emin, liberation from the phallogocentric language can be possible with creating an alternative language. Abramovic frees herself from language by excessive usage of words, while Emin uses her own language to communicate. They both are sensational. They both have lots of admirer and there are lots of people who are against their art.

As a person who deals with art, I am also trying to find a way to express my self and my ideas to communicate. Without an alternative language I feel myself stuck and speechless. When I first read Hélène Cixous I felt "yes, I am not alone", "there are lots of people who are living the same things as I am", "they are also confused and try to find a way to express them". Most importantly Cixous' call which encourages women to write themselves helped me to keep my faith in what I am doing and helped me to continue my research.

In my studies, I am getting help from the conception of *écriture féminine*. It is a philosophy that contributes to the growth of expressing women's experiences and feelings. Reading Hélène Cixous, helped me to give a shape to my approach and instructed me to find myself. These studies made me brave and comfortable in making and sharing my art. Now, I know I am on the right track.

In my works, my body is my brush. I use my movements to create paintings, drawings, sculptures and so on. Body either in movement or motionless is a trace. It creates a language. What it leaves behind is emotion. Every "body print" is different from the other. Every single one has a different movement or different color combination. Using the conception of "*l'écriture féminine*" I proposed an attempt at "*la peinture féminine*". Cixous' article "Without end, no, State of drawingness, no, rather: The Executioner's taking off", helped me to move from the conception of "*l'écriture féminine*" to "*la peinture féminine*". The next step of my project will be to mix prints with drawings of the body and words. I believe that will also suggest lots of new possibilities.

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