

USES OF THE HUMAN BODY AS THE  
OBJECT OF THE ARTWORK AND ITS  
PICTORIAL SOLUTIONS

A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF FINE ARTS  
AND THE INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS  
OF BILKENT UNIVERSITY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

By  
Gaye Sağlam  
June, 1993



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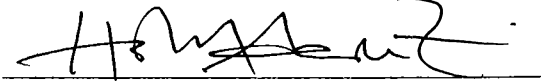
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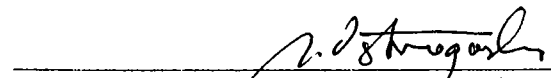
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## ABSTRACT

# USES OF THE HUMAN BODY AS THE OBJECT OF THE ARTWORK AND ITS PICTORIAL SOLUTIONS

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Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Halil Akdeniz

June 1993

This thesis tries to discuss the conditions of the relationship between art work and its producer together with the question of 'outside' of the artwork. This declaration is to discuss and to think about the artwork after the experience of making the artwork. The thesis is stated in a manner which opens the possibilities to analyze the representing and non-representing approach of the producer/painter during the experiencing process of painting, the act of creating a body. The theoretical usages consist of the attempt to construct a new way of evaluating the human body as an artwork. This work/act of painting developed in the isolated field of the process of artwork, therefore, tries to objectify the thoughts of the producer within her psychological/physiological approach.

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Keywords: Body, Process Painting, Representation

## ÖZET

# İNSAN BEDENİNİN SANAT OBJESİ OLARAK KULLANIMI VE RESİMSEL ÇÖZÜMLEMELERİ

Sefa Sağlam

Resim Bölümü

Danışman: Doç. Dr. Halil Akdeniz

Haziran 1993

Bu çalışmada, sanat yapıtı ile üreticisi arasındaki koşulların tartışılması amaçlanmıştır. Bu tartışma, üretim tecrübesinin ardından üretilen üzerine geliştirilen düşüncelerle ortaya çıktı. Çalışmanın konusu, sanatçının temsili ve temsili olmayan tavrının değerlendirilmesi için bir araç konumundadır. Teorik kullanımlar insan bedeninin sanat üretimindeki değerlendirmesine yönelik yeni bir tavrın geliştirilmesine yardımcıdırlar. Çalışma, sanat yapıtı ile yapımcısı arasındaki sınırlı alan içerisinde gelişir. Böylelikle, belli bir tavrıdaki sanat yapma eylemi sırasında geliştirilen düşüncelerin somutlaştırılması amaçlanmıştır.

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Anahtar Sözcükler : Beden, Süreç Resmi, Temsiliyet



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The media I use for expression is painting. However, I shall make an attempt to convey the conceptual basis of my work through the media of literature. I will try to communicate my experience in the act of painting, thereby my participation in an act of creation where the artwork adopts an independent entity. Here, this state of artwork is termed as 'The Body'. This concept has nothing to do with the Art Historian terms of Body Art or Performance Art. By itself, the term 'body' has nothing to do with the 'human body' directly. This text illustrates the results of the act of the painting, the experience of duration and the process of making the 'artwork'. It is 'thinking about the body that is the work' The term 'The Body' means that art work is an independent and self determining entity in itself. I am constructing this text by thinking about the works and results after the duration of the experience. As an unrepresented picture the body was only a feeling in front of the works. I believe neither this text nor other explanations can define this feeling of process. I take the place of the observer who observes her own work as something very foreign which constructs itself. Thus, I set out to offer some discoveries in reading a new work of art.

The process of painting is a production by the 'I' body, and watched by the 'observer' body that stands together. The creator becomes the viewer of his own art object.

The first chapters cover some explanatory texts about the character of the art works. As I show and write on my own works, I enter the field of discussion about



the most fundamental question about picturing; the representation and non representation in painting. Choosing a topic which is framed with the concept 'body' is used in a way to discuss this methodology. This discussion is more of a self thinking about self acting which begins in the process of making artwork, that I try to investigate in the first part of my thesis; "The Representation of the Body."

The act of painting with its very simple meaning as stroke and applying the color, is the surface of the canvas that includes all the undetermined and uncertain needs of representation and production as (an act of painting) production.

The chapter "Flesh and Desire/The Body of the Producer" include the routes that I took and, my own experience rather than giving examples from other artists who have used the human body. ( The human body as subject matter can not be limited with only choosing the examples and placing them in a way which were meant as turning points.)

I use theoretical texts constructed on and from other artistic experiences in order to clarify my own complex and ambiguous thoughts evoked by the problems in front of the canvas. Whether this clarification is at all possible or necessary obviously is a questionable matter in itself.

Choosing the body as a concept or artwork which takes the place of artistic characteristics, was reasoned by the way of reading the artwork as a text, a field of artistic discoveries and areas. "The Text of the Body" is the second part which tries to discuss the artwork including "The issue of the Art Object as Text". In the last chapter the 'explanations' are loosely structured on the previously used texts and discussions of other artists works. This again is done in an attempt to clarify what perhaps is not clarifiable.

## 2 THE REPRESENTATION OF THE BODY

### 2.1 Picturing of the Body Without Representation

The question, "How can we reconstruct the body when today we are talking about the "body without organs", about its fragmentation and its disintegration in the age of the simulacrum?" , will help clarify various problems related to question of bodily representation. Antonin Artaud describes the 'body without organs' in an essay from the nineteen forties as follows: "The body is the body/it is never an organism/the organism is the enemy of the body." Therefore, the body of Artaud is free. It has no mouth, no teeth, no stomach. The 'body without organs' is a nomination which Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari use in their well-known book Anti-Oedipus.

In Anti-Oedipus The 'body' was used as a specific-aesthetic concept. Clemens Carl Haerle indicates that the concept 'body without organs' is the diverging point which separates the aesthetic theories of Deleuze-Guattari and those of Immanuel Kant. The theories of the latter remain within the sphere of representation since the transcendental forms of sensibility depend on time, space, and the cogito. This separates it from the pure empirical and phenomenal material which fills space. Contrarily, 'the body without organs' disrupts the Kantian aesthetics from within: "It shows that in our sensibility, which in itself is pure pulsation and internal, there is an approvation with which the body is replaced by a deep and nearly unrealizable power" .<sup>1</sup>

The 'body without organs' is formed not only by flesh but by the combination of flesh and nerves together. It is charged with a current which cannot take the place of the visible living body. This is not the body from science's detached perspective

as Jeff Rian describes:

*From the perspective detached from science, the body is a biomechanical organism comprised of self, ego, superego, Id, skeleton, sensorium, musculature, defences, will, education, memories, habits, language, etc. It operates in a cultural medium that creates the context of its self-perception. This sounds oddly Cartesian, yet, as cybernetics has taught us, the constant communication between conscious and unconscious processes disallows objective differentiation. The cultural medium is a constituent of our perceptions, shaping the context of self-awareness .<sup>2</sup>*

I will return to the topics of self-awareness and unconsciousness; but first, I will show that it is possible to talk about a new kind of body and bodily representation.

The 'body', in what we call body-art, is rather the use of the body as an individual apparatus. Jeff Rian adds that we know body art from the early seventies, as a species of performance art, which was essentially a crossbreed or hybrid art form artists translated across media. The body is a microcosm reflecting the macrocosmic body politics. Rian says that artists like Kiki Smith, Charles Ray, Robert Gober, Matthew Barney, Sue Williams, Lorna Simpson and many others (including Cindy Sherman, with her recent orgiastic carnage montages) echo the psychological and social stress engendered by the commercialization of atom stacking, nanotechnology, AIDS, abortion, genetic engineering, plastic surgery, artificial intelligence, and an over saturation of the media. And, on the other hand, body- art has been an expressionistic answer to conceptual art's actualization of space, time, and material, and a way to be physically involved.<sup>3</sup>



With regard to the art of painting this form of art is trying to break with the stereotyped socially-oriented perception of images which must come closer to the 'body without organs', and which, as Paul Klee has said, should make visible the non visible or the visible and non visible together.<sup>4</sup>

The fragmentation of the body is related today to the development of the technological means of communication and usage of instruments which has led to the 'thingification' of the body. This fragmentation results from the replacement of technological tools by our organs. The instruments interposed between the organs and the external world, narrow down the space between the body and the external world and transform perceptions into selectable objects. This is a kind of thingification. On the other hand, the media spans its gaze on the organs of people in whose place viewers wish to be. The organs are transformed into the objects of impossible ideals. The media becomes a substitute for the 'flaneur' whom Walter Benjamin describes in his Passagenwerk as the person who goes out into the streets to sit in Cafe's to watch people passing by, becoming a viewer.

Here I am talking about the media as a creation of man which takes his place. It possesses its own 'view' or outlook which is neither individual nor subjective but an indeterminate gaze. In other words, I am talking about the function of the media as a viewer or a watcher. While the viewed object undergoes transformations in content, the subject becomes fragmented. The reconstruction of the body necessitates the development of a 'gaze' similar to that of the media. What has to be resolved is the attitude of the maker (who looks at materials to be transformed into surfaces) that develops with the first contact with materials. Even the artist's obligation of looking at his own work as a stranger provokes a fragmentation of the artistic subject. The

artist who sets a distance between himself and his work, brings about his own fragmentation. This is perhaps done to keep alive a constant awareness or consciousness. The conscious and unconscious sides act together in the artist, forming a control mechanism which checks the works.

Michel Foucault indicates that texts contain certain signs that refer to the author, indicating a plurality of personalities:

*In a mathematical treatise, the ego who indicates the circumstances of composition in the preface is not identical, either in terms of his position or his function, to the 'I' who concludes a demonstration within the body of the text. The former implies a unique individual who, at a given time and place, succeeded in completing a project, whereas the latter indicates an instance and plan of demonstration that anyone could perform provided the same set of axioms, preliminary operations, and an identical set of symbols were used. It is possible to locate the third ego: one who speaks of the goals of his investigation, the obstacles encountered, its results, and the problems yet to be solved and this 'I' would function in a field of existing or future mathematical discourses. We are not dealing with a system of dependencies where a first and essential use of the 'I' is reduplicated, as a kind of fiction, by the other two. On the contrary, the 'author function' in such discourses operates so as to effect the simultaneous dispersion of the three egos.<sup>5</sup>*

The making of art is an act which is produced by the 'I' body and watched by the 'observer' body that stand together. The creator becomes the viewer of his own art

object. If this act initially stems from an idea that has determined a form, observation precedes production. In this case, form appears in the mind in its finalized state. The artist becomes a kind of viewer and the thingification of the artwork from which we had formally talked about takes place. The creation pre-determines in the beginning with all its limits, dimensions and proportions. The surface of the canvas is already occupied by the project before it is painted. In this case, the artist acts with the whole tradition of art history behind him. This attitude turns the act of painting into an illustration of something which has already been seen. We may then ask how it is possible to create an art object which would not be the illustration of an idea. In an interview with David Sylvester, Francis Bacon tried to explain the factor which relates him to an illustrative stroking of the color:

*Can you analyze the difference, in fact, between painting which conveys directly and painting which conveys through illustration? This is a very, very difficult problem to put into words. It has something to do with instinct. It's a very, very close and difficult thing to know why some paint come across directly into the nervous system and other paintings tell you the story in a long diatribe through the brain. <sup>6</sup>*

An art object, even if it does not refer to familiar forms, is finally the manifestation of an attitude. In order to reach differences of sensibility and the field of disintegration of the 'body without organs', the art of painting must be freed from the snare of personal phantasms and open cliché's. Here the illustration of ideas should be perceived as the design of thoughts.



Figure 1: Francis Bacon, Portrait of Isabel Rawsthorne, 26-3/4X18-1/8 in, 1966, Oil on Canvas, Photograph by John Deakin

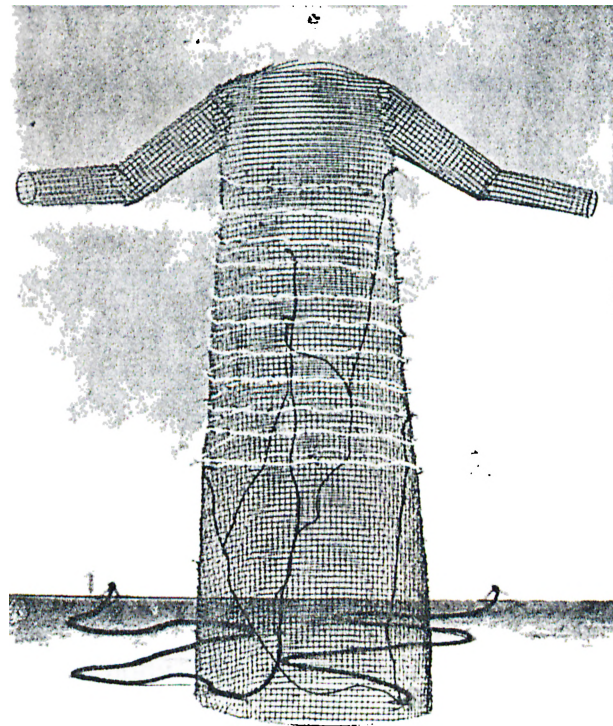


Figure 2: Jana Sterbak, "I Want You to Feel the Way I Do...", 1985, Wires and Electrical Circuits,

The aim of using the terms 'body' and 'art object/artwork', is to elaborate at this point the problems pertaining to representation. These terms in no way refer to the art-historical terms of body art and performance art. I am not trying to establish a linear historical determination of one type of art object, either the term 'body' has nothing to do with the human body directly. A study which concentrates directly on the human body could have comprised iconographic solutions and subject researches. In an art-historical sense, the term 'body' may take place within the sphere touching problems of representation.

When a body is represented in some way, we usually arrive at visions similar to the physical body. A two-dimensional surface could depict a body-like picture which would not directly represent the human body.

In the sculptures of the Canadian artist Jana Sterbak, the traditional human body is replaced by clothing, which is the reflection of its historical and socio-cultural situation. In Sterbak's work dated 1985, and called "I Want You to Feel the Way I Do...", the viewers enter an exhibition sphere where an energy uncontrolled by them manifests itself.

The Dress constructed by attaching nicrom wires to one another, seems under the influence of exterior forces, without requiring movement from the body within. The suffering of the dress suggested by the reddening wires cannot be prevented and the force of the witch Medea can still be felt in spite of the absence of the body emphasized by the remaining 'implied' body. The work called 'Vanitas; flesh Dress for an Albino Anorexic'(1987-88) by the same artist, represents the body of ephemerality and emptiness. It puts forth the body as flesh, and flesh constitutes the Dress which dresses the body. The Dress is created by stitching sixteen kilograms of beefsteaks



Figure 3: Jana Sterbak, "Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorexic", 1987-88.

together. Firstly, it was used by a pure-looking young girl, after that, it hanged in the exhibition space. In a while, the dress perceived its existence more clearly and begins to shrink and smell. Nancy Spector sees the flesh Dress as a metaphor for the anorexic's inability to cope with society and the demands upon women, to fit an image it also suggests that Sterbak's nicrom dress symbolizes woman as robot, constructed and controlled by men for their pleasure.<sup>7</sup>

Shrinking and smelling, the flesh/body has lost its purity and beauty. The Flesh Dress is at the same time the way of trying to reproduce the flesh, which is one of the most consumed foods, with its unrevoked form into a dress. But it lost the pleasure to consuming, together with its metaphor of an altered woman's body, which lost its charm of youngless.



## 2.2 Flesh and Desire/The Body of the Producer

The act of making art can be appreciated as a double-faceted action; first, as a making that sets itself against the symbols and living mechanisms. In other words, as ‘pure painting’, only by stroking, applying the color. Secondly, as a ‘viewing act’, which comes after the first one. That means that the act of making art involves a binary ‘I’ as involving the subject and object together in one act; setting himself to the viewer of himself: De-doublement.

At this point, it can be said that after that act which may be described as ‘thinking with the body’, the thinking of the act begins. A kind of artistic production as thinking with the body; Nachdenken (Thinking about something after something). The body functions as an energy which goes back and forth from one side to the other. It functions as the expression between the producer and the work of art which is produced. The artist, inscribes herself as an expression. Michel Foucault explains that today, writing is delivered from this kind of inscription, of expression:

*First, the writing of our day has freed itself from the necessity of ‘expression’; it only refers to itself, yet it is not restricted to the confines of interiority. On the contrary, we recognize it in its exterior deployment. This reversal transforms writing into an interplay of signs, regulated less by the content it signifies than by the very nature of the signifier. Moreover, it implies an action that is always testing the limits of its regularity, transgressing and reversing an order that it accepts and manipulates. Writing unfolds like a game that inevitably moves beyond its own rules and finally leaves them behind. Thus, the essential basis of this writing is not the*



*exalted emotions related to the act of composition or the insertion of a subject into language. Rather, it is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears'.<sup>8</sup>*

In painting, we can see this type of 'in-scription' in the example of Jackson Pollock at work in front of his canvas. Pollock inscribes himself as 'bodily gesture', as an act which has become totally purged from internalize. This act takes the place of the subject matter of the work. Elizabeth Franks explains that Jackson Pollock wanted to center a problematic in the inhibiting and retarding effects of brushwork:

*The stops and starts of loading, unloading, reloading the brush raised a specter of psychic censorship inimical to Pollock's idea of automatist directness and authenticity. Pollock evidently developed his 'willful actively directed drawing with paint' to circumvent the constraints of drawing as contour to encourage a more direct contact with the unconscious.<sup>9</sup>*

The 'unconsciousness' appears again. Here, Pollock arrives at an unconsciousness with traces that come from endless acting and constitute a gesture:

*When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I am doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc...It is only when I loose contact...that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well'.<sup>10</sup>*

We see that there is a self awareness in the process of making the work which is, in Pollock's words, "being in the painting." The artist promotes the 'work of art', and the artwork begins to evolve by itself, to in the point where the artist disappears.

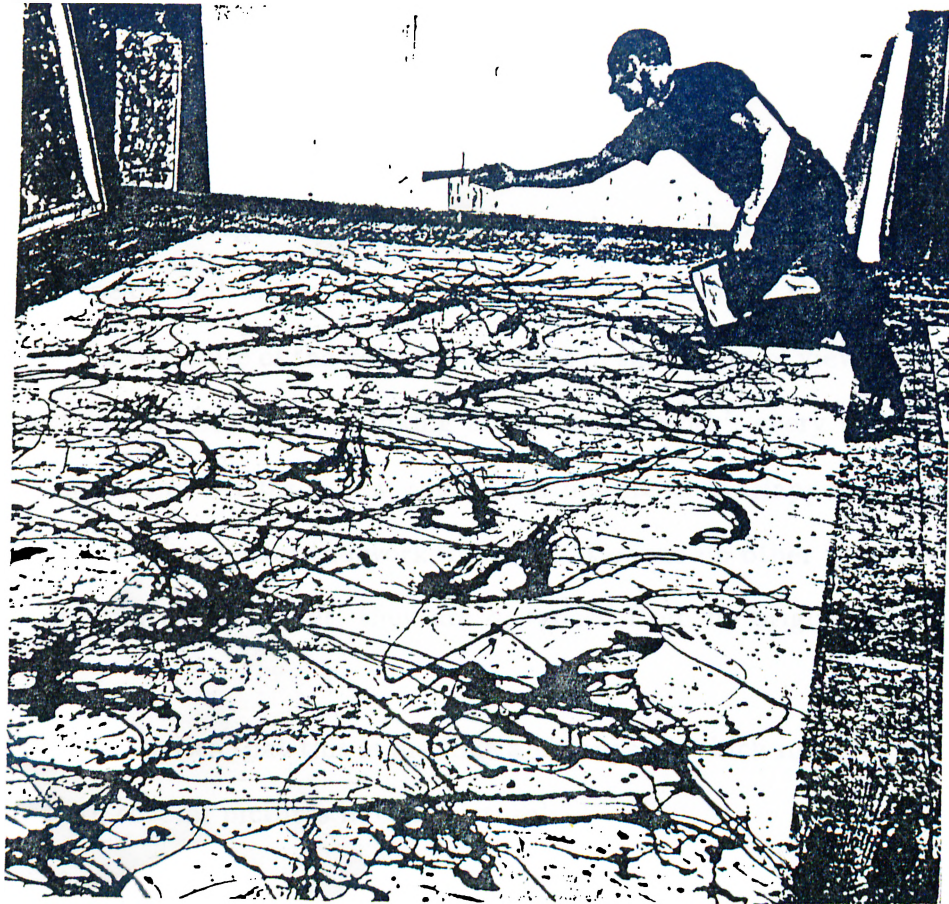


Figure 4: Pollock at Work, 1950

The touching, stroking, hitting and grinding in the *Fingerpaintings* which Arnulf Reiner has made in the nineteen seventies, are determined totally by touching gestures. After the 'Bleeding Wound' from 1948, he begins to apply the color on the canvas with his hands. The act of grinding caused bleeding in the artist's hands, upon which he switches to card-board from canvas because it is smoother and softer. It became much easier to smear layers of color on this new medium.

After bleeding his hands from the act of grinding, he begins to smear the colors so that they overlap on the card-board. He preferred a softer material. By combining water or oil with it, this ground blends with color forming a unitary ground-color structure. This direct ground-color effect brings to light an erotic element, a kind of *Liebesdialog* (Love Dialogue).

The photographic image which Arnulf Reiner chooses in order to make better paintings, disappears and loses its function as the originator of the artwork. The endlessly repeated structure of the gesture continues in the period of viewing. Because the unique act has no limits by 'thinking about the artwork', every stroke evolves into a new picture and invites a new one. Each picture is overlapped by another picture. This overlapping makes the work 'infinite'. It opens up other possibilities for new inventions, and at one point, they are distanced from its origin and from the producer.

Roland Barthes writes that this is just like a palimpsest which involves writing in writing, there are several pictures in one 'picture':

*Just as in a palimpsest there is writing in writing, so in a 'picture' (it matters little where or not the word is accurate) there are several pictures: not only (in Requichot) because canvasses are rewritten or replaced as partisa objects within new ensembles, but because there are as many works as there are levels of perception; isolate, enlarge, and treat a detail, you create a new work, you cross over centuries, schools, styles, out of the very old you can make the very new. Requichot has practiced this technique on himself: 'Looking at a picture very closely, you can see future pictures in it: has happened to me, I've cut up big ones and tried to isolate the parts that look interesting.'*<sup>11</sup>

I will return to this 'isolation' of fragments in a picture in the text about my own works. But on the other hand, this kind of 'several pictures' as painting within paintings, which Barthes described, had their plurality stemming from the differences





Figure 5: Arnulf Reiner, " Fingerpainting", 102X73-1/2 cm, 1975, Oil on Card-board



Figure 6: Arnulf Reiner, " Fingerpainting", 102X73-1/2 cm, 1981, Oil on Card-board





Figure 7: Bernard Requichot, "Spiral", Ink on Card-board

of the viewer's changing levels of perception. In another text by Barthes, about the 'spirals' in Requichot's painting,<sup>12</sup> the artist has arrived at a kind of repetition in the picture and leads the way to the 'infinite'. Barthes said that, "the difficulty of finishing implicates reproduction itself, unless it is the abolition of figure, brought about by a whole interplay of historical determinants, which compels the non-realization of art's 'end'"<sup>13</sup>. He adds that this entire conflict may reside in the two meanings of the word 'representation'. Currently this term designates from which the classical work derives, a copy, an illusion, an analogical figure, a resemblance-product; but in the etimological meaning, representation is merely the return of what has been presented. But there is a moment where the two meanings coincide. He speaks about two kinds of figurative painting. Most of them never represent (copies) anything but only seek a name ( the name of the scene, of the object), but this kind of painting 'still' represents something; ."..either language itself ( this is, one might say, the position of the canonical avant-garde) or the inside of the body, the body as inside, or still better: enjoyment"<sup>14</sup>. And this is what Requichot does:

*Requichot's painting starts from his body: the body's inside works within it uncensored; whence this paradox: this oeuvre is 'expressive' it expresses Requichot (requichot expresses himself in it, in the literal sense of the word, presses on the canvas the violent juice of his interior synthesis), and therefore seems, in a first impulse, since this subject is precisely seeking to abolish the age-old contrast between 'soul' and 'flesh', since he makes every effort to put before us a new substance, an unheard-of, revulsed, 'disorganized' body (no more organs, no more muscles, no more nerves, nothing but vibrations of pain and of pleasure), it is the subject himself (the subject of classical ideology) 'who is no longer here' : the body dismisses the subject and Requichot's painting then joins the extreme avant- garde: 'the one which is not classifiable' and whose psychotic character society denounces because thereby at least society can name it. <sup>15</sup>*

This 'disorganized' body is related to the internally of the body in Anti Oedipus. They are possibilities to claiming, expressing the 'body' in another point of view.

In an interview with Friedhelm Mennekes, Arnulf Reiner explain the process of his 'obscured paintings' as follows:

*...they take a very long time to come into being, sometimes years; it doesn't happen quickly. A picture is prepared and then I go at it again and again. It has to be looked at and examined over years. And thereby there are always small corrections which have to be made, which then lead to a certain peace and quit.*

*Repetition, perseverance, escape from detail, renouncing of an effect, this means*

*that asceticism and mortification on the level of the media of creation lead to contemplative conditions in the picture. Although the artist himself is busy and active, a great silence is gradually born within picture.* <sup>16</sup>

That is a kind of explaining about the ‘will to independency’ of the art work. I think, an interpretation about the German artist Gotthard Graubner’s Farbraumkörper<sup>17</sup>, characterized the work of the artist as a independent, living organism: ”The picture receives the character of the body, of the being with its own life.”<sup>18</sup>

In his article ‘The Organization and Experience of the Picture in the Color-Space Bodies of Graubner’ Bernd Growe added that Graubners ‘color bodies’ and ‘color-space bodies’ do not relate alone to problems of color, but to solutions in pictorial problems of a fundamental kind. He continues that if it is correct to say that the conception of the work centers on the organism has been abrogated in the modern period, Graubner shows in his ‘color-space bodies’ that under the conditions of the too, and without further being able to bring out traditional artistic methods (e.g. composition), the work can still be a ‘body’.<sup>19</sup>



In Gotthard Graubner's paintings, the materiality of the color, its pigment and its consistency, disappear into the 'color- space-bodies' : "They are soaked up and nothing but the pure effective energies of the color are released."<sup>20</sup>

Graubner himself described the reception of the 'color-space-bodies' as an 'afterbreathing'<sup>21</sup> of the color, as a bodily acting for being alive. Let us turn to the disappearance of the producer which gives the work live. Roland Barthes explained that in one point, art takes its own theory in hand, that it 'speaks itself':

*It can no longer do anything but 'speak itself', reducing itself to the speech which it might offer upon itself, if it consented to exist: desire being expelled, discourse returns in force: art becomes 'talkative' at the very moment it ceases to be erotic. Ideology and its effects are banished, certainly; but at the price of 'aphanasis', the loss of desire, in a word, castration.*<sup>22</sup>

But he added that Requichot himself describes his work not as an erotic action but as an erectile movement and 'what follows':

*I am talking about that simple rythm which for me makes a canvas start up slowly, then gradually become more involving, and by a thrilling crescendo leads me to an effervescence on the order of an orgasm. At this climax, the painting abandons me, unless it is I, at the limits of my power, who let it go... If I then know that my painting is finished, my need to paint is not, and this paroxysm is followed by a great disappointment!* <sup>23</sup>

When I return to the representation of the body as gesture, the interpretations of Roland Barthes about Requichot's paintings will open a way to explaining this act as painting:

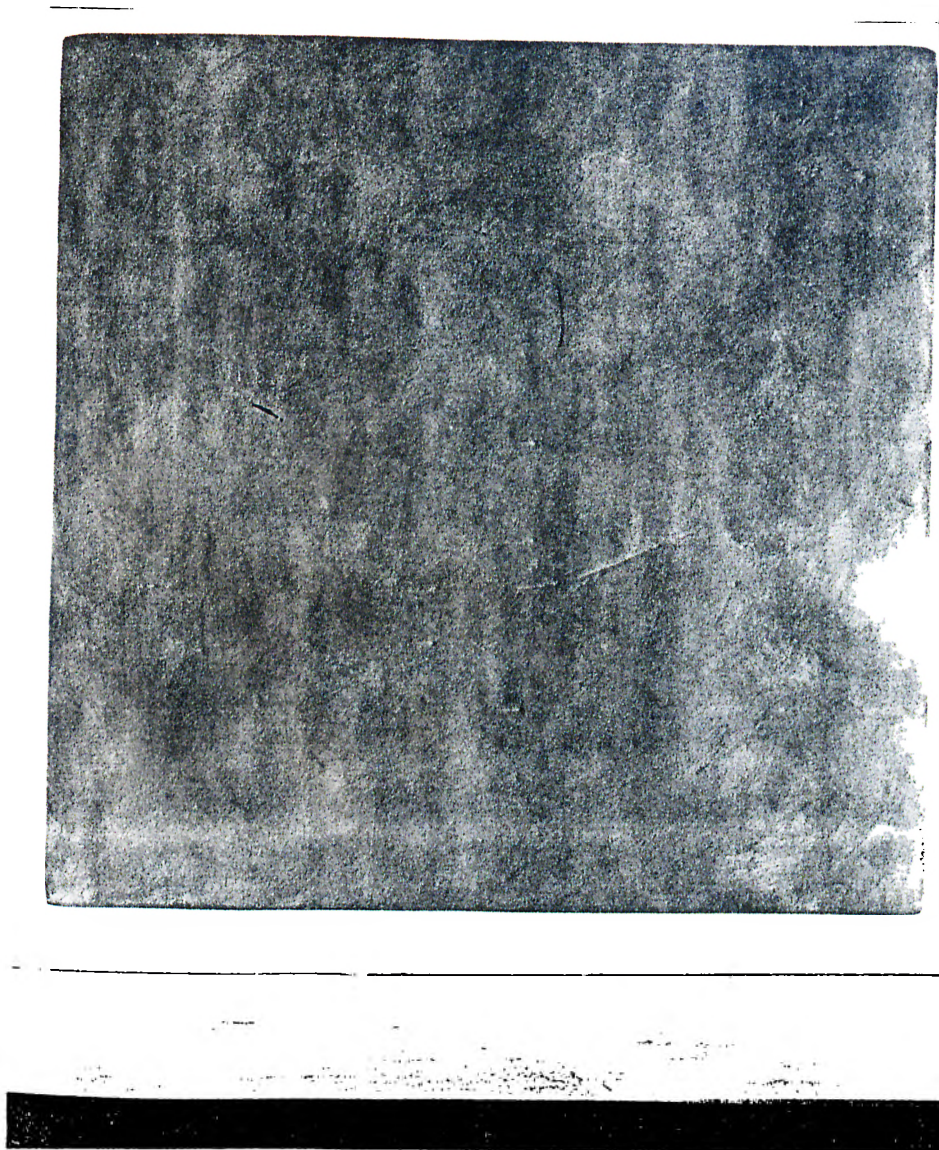


Figure 8: Gotthard Graubner, "Untitled Color-Space Body", 183X130X15 cm, 1984, Aceton on Canvas on Synthetic-cotton on Canvas.

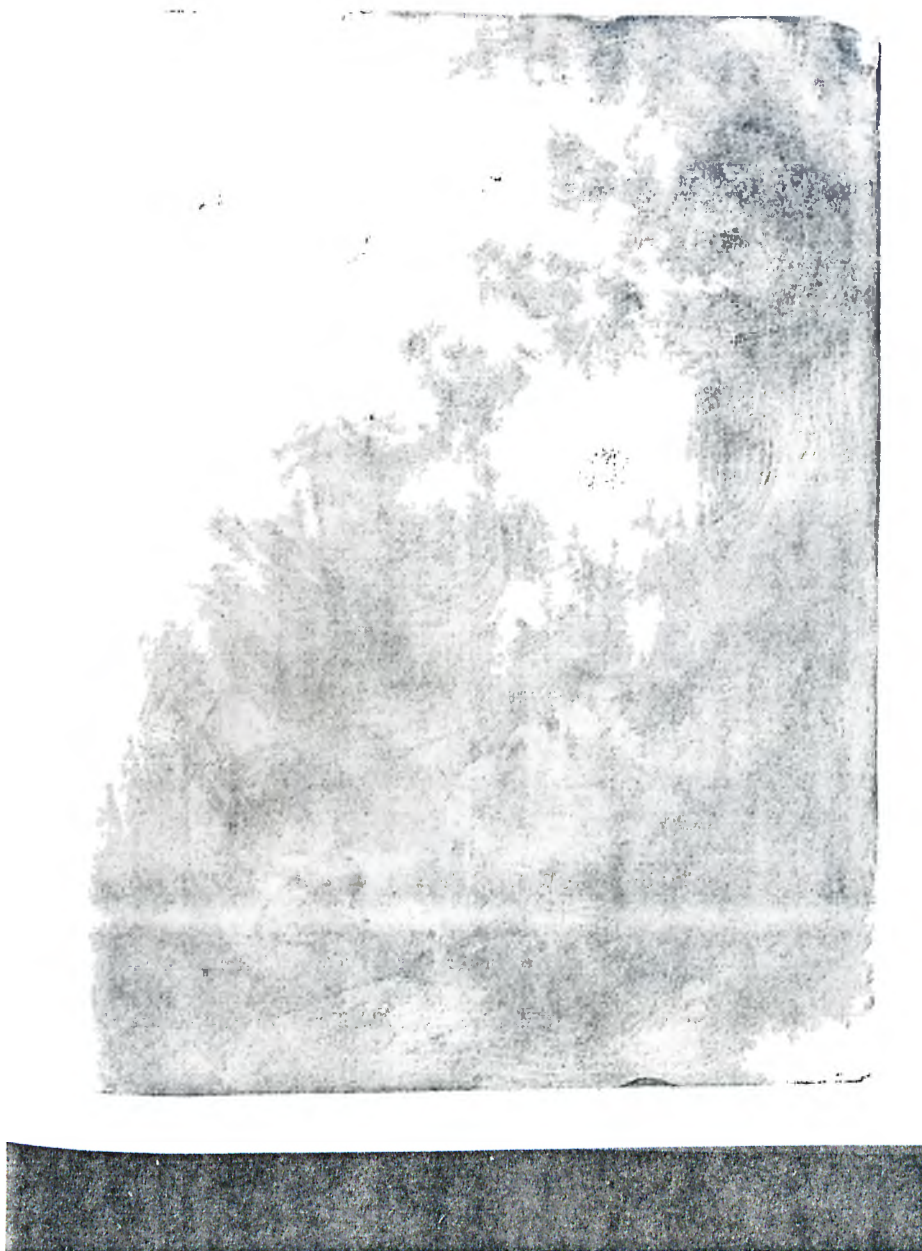


Figure 9: Gotthard Graubner, Color-Space Body "Toyama", 240X240X15 cm, 1984, Acryl on Canvas on Synthetic-cotton on Canvas.

*Many painters have reproduced the human body, but that body was always someone else's. Requichot's paints only his own: not the exterior body the painter copies looking at himself sidelong, but this from inside; his interior comes outside... <sup>24</sup>*

### 3 THE TEXT OF THE BODY

#### 3.1 The Issue of the Art Object as Text

What is the connotation between the painting and the language of the text; is this connection the picture itself?<sup>25</sup> Entering to discuss this question is more important, rather than using the text for its plastic role of composition or color, or for its other meanings. The last kind of usage does not enter a sphere of discourse which I want to dwell on as the text of the artwork or the text of the body. The text of the painting is nor the one which takes place in the painting, neither the text around the painting. The latter one includes the critics, interpretations or Cartesian classifications around the artwork.

Moreover, there is another way of placing texts around the art work which Jaques Derrida nominates as 'Parergon'. Christoffer Norris describes that this 'Parergon' is a frame, a marker of limits which qualifies the artwork in his essay about 'Truth in Painting'. About the distinction of the art work and everything that belongs to its background, he writes:

*His point -briefly stated- is that no such distinction can possibly be maintained; that there always operates a certain 'parergonal' effect whereby the founding notions of beauty, sublimity, and artistic truth themselves turn out to be constituted by a discourse which comes, so to speak, from outside and yet inhabits our concepts and our very experience of art. The 'parergon' is the frame, the marker of limits, that which establishes-or so we might suppose- a impermeable boundary between the artwork (ergon) and everything that belongs to its background, context, space of exhibition,*





Figure 10: Cy Twombly, "Untitled", 58X79 cm, 1959, Oil, Crayon, Pencil on Canvas.

*mise-en-scene or whatever.* <sup>26</sup>

Therefore, there are some limits outside the artwork which grounds the sphere of texts around the work, the 'parergon'. A given example which includes most of this 'parergon's can be the ready-made of Marcel Duchamp. The ready-made is an art object, not an artwork. It is determined as such when it takes up a place in an exhibition space; gallery or museum. The museum is a living organism which speaks for the art-object as the art- object. The art-object includes no handmaking, it is a found, re-produced object. Therefore, it has no possibility of being an art-work, which, on the other hand includes the meaning of a process of production. Rosalind Krauss explains that the ready- made object has no link with the art object and its

psychological period of existence. Duchamp doesn't make the ready-made, he only chooses it. It can not give any knowledge about the psychological position between the artist and the object. In the period of production, in the beginning the ready-made sets a distance to itself and the concept of the individualization of itself. The ready-made precludes not a specific expression that comes to the forefront with color strokes. In that case, the ready-made acquires the qualification of an art-object by being nominated as art in the exhibition space and art market.

It prefers the reproductive character of industrial production to the hand-made aesthetics of the studio work. Consequently, in the ready-made, art begins in the periphery of the object. In this way the artist moves away from the possibilities of producing; the 'hand' between the visible truth and the art object disappears. The artist handles like an office worker; puts in order the documents, stands in front of the forms which arise from coincidence and the unconscious. The forms of coincidence, of the unconscious and of the taste are at the same time the forms of the unavoidable evaluation of the art-work. When we speak about painting, art takes its own theory in hand within the unconscious, the coincidence, and taste. It possesses the conditions to speak for itself. It opens up itself. This speaking begins with a self-thinking. This point is the beginning of transforming into a text which can be read. And, when I speak about an artwork as a living organism; an organism which breathes and takes up the character of a living body, this perception -or better- this awakening gives me the possibility to use the term, "The text of the body."

At this point, the artwork moves away from the producer and shows itself. The life of an artwork as a painting is made possible with a structure that enables to be read the artwork to be read as a text. I can give the example of objectifying the process

itself in the interpretation from Roland Barthes in his text about the paintings of Cy Twombly. As Barthes describes it ;

*TW's work-others said as much- is a kind of writing; it has some relation with calligraphy. Yet this is one neither of imitation nor of inspiration; a canvas by TW is only what we might call the allusive field of writing (allusion, a rhetorical figure, consists in saying one thing with the intention of making another understood). TW alludes to writing (as he often well, to culture, through words: Virgil, Sesostris) and then he goes off somewhere else. Where? Specifically, far away from calligraphy, i.e., from that formed, drawn, deliberate, shapely writing which in the eighteenth century was called a fine hand. <sup>27</sup>*

Barthes writes about the 'gesture' in Cy Twombly's 'writings': "TW has his own way of saying that the essence of writing is neither a form nor a usage but only a gesture which produces it by permitting it to linger: a blur, almost a blotch, a negligence."<sup>28</sup> The painting of Cy Twombly is not a writing with its association of the subject matter, it is a writing because of the way how he paints; He takes up painting as a bodily activity, a gesture.

In the paintings of Cy Twombly, the body denies it in the form of the 'lines'. It is the 'fleshly body', not the 'skin' . The skin has a superficial structure which is around the intervals of the body. It's not the origin of the 'expressing' in the body. The result is the trace of the producing.



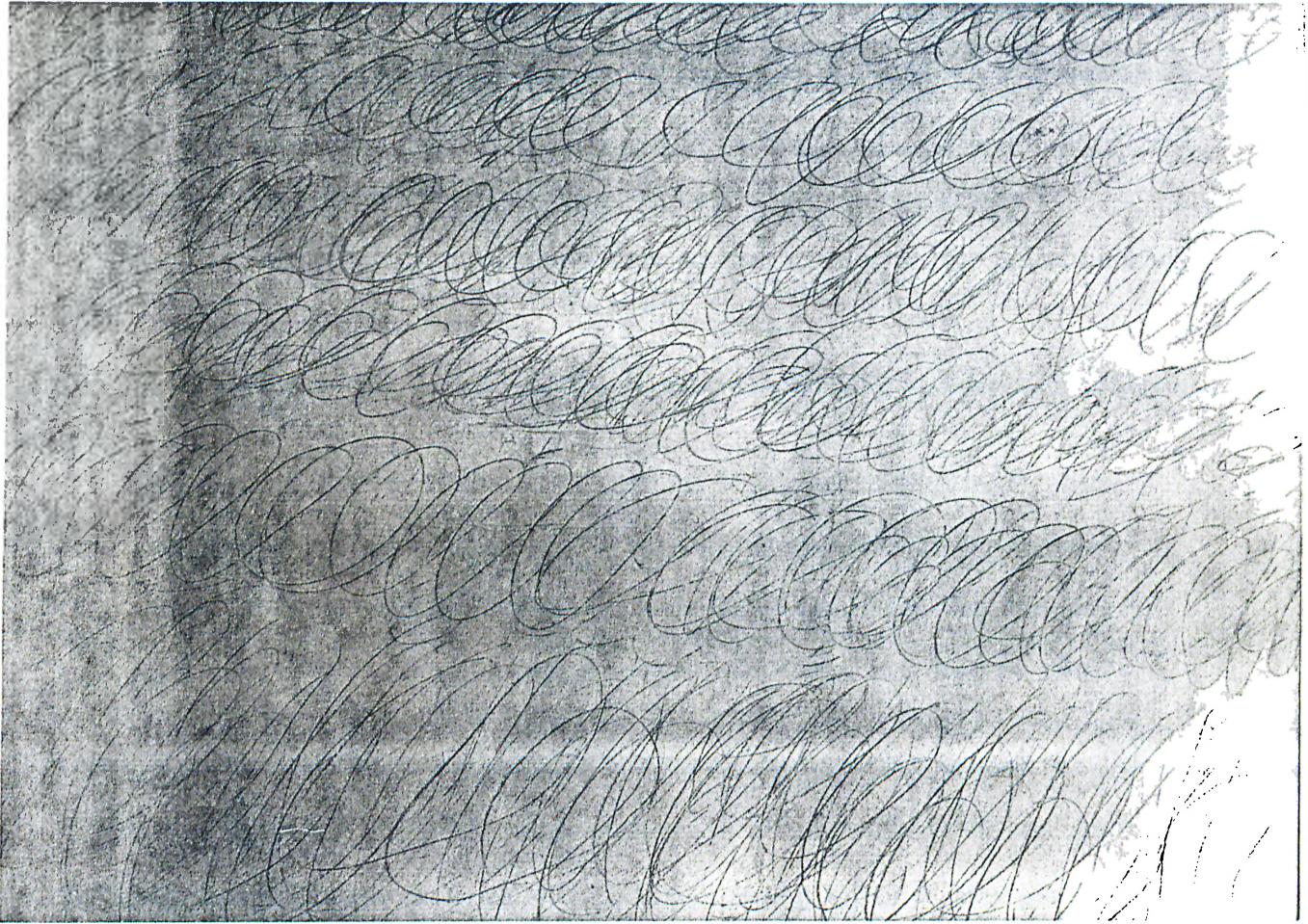


Figure 11: Cy Twombly, "Untitled", 68-1/8X87-7/8 cm, 1968, Oil, Pencil on Canvas

### 3.2 Explanations about Personal Works

The factors which separate writing and reading are similar to the ones which separate the making of an artwork and writing 'about' the artwork . Writing about one's own art offers the question, "How can I write on what I show?". Is it possible to explain painting with words when we regard painting as a non-verbal experience?

When writing about one's own works, the unconsciousness of the act of painting turns into a field of consciousness.

The artwork may lose its possibilities of coincidence, taste, and artists ignorance:

*We have the implementation of a structured experience, elaborated throughout a relation in which the point of ignorance is an active element: ignorance not being intended here as 'an absence of knowledge, but like love and hate, as a passion of being; for it can, like them, be a way in which being takes shape'.<sup>29</sup>*

Here in a writing about the work of Gerhard Richter, Birgit Felzer continues her statement about ignorance as follows: "Ignorance is intended as a passion that opens, that structures experience, not a systematic unknowing, but the wager of a point of unknown, of non-knowledge- that the Incomprehensible may arise."<sup>30</sup> This non-knowledge opens the way of developing the painting itself as distant from the producer. This developing makes the work different after, while or before starting to paint again: It is possible to meet a new and a different thing after an effort of trying to make the work, whether as copying something or progressing. I was mentioning the 'speaking of the painting' before; this 'speaking' is confusing for the producer in a new form, a discovery. Birgit Pfelzer writes that the activity of Gerhard



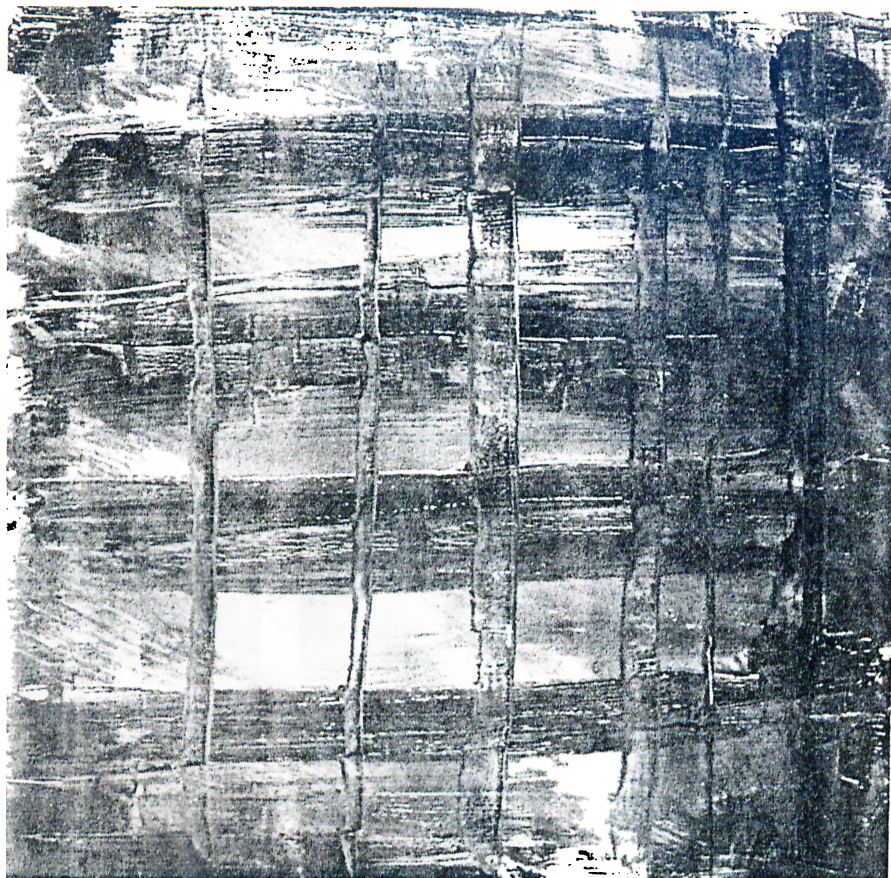


Figure 12: Gerhard Richter, "Abstract Painting (755-4), 61x61cm, Oil on Canvas, 1992.

Richter records the movement of opening, closing of the unconscious where something is always assuming the function of crossing out, cancelling, erasing.<sup>31</sup> In Richter's painting, these are the elements of "enclosing the real as that which is impossible to say; the unrepresentable."<sup>32</sup>

The producer of Art object obviously is conscious of the History and Chronology of Art Objects. Loaded with this data, looking out his/her own work s/he in a way perceives the work as the last point in art history. This consciousness and knowledge leads the artists into a sphere of constant comparisons. The producer, again and again, becomes aware of the similarity between his works and the other. It seems that in this way another de-doublement occurs. This de-doublement is different from the first one. One could say that it creates another layer over the de-doublement

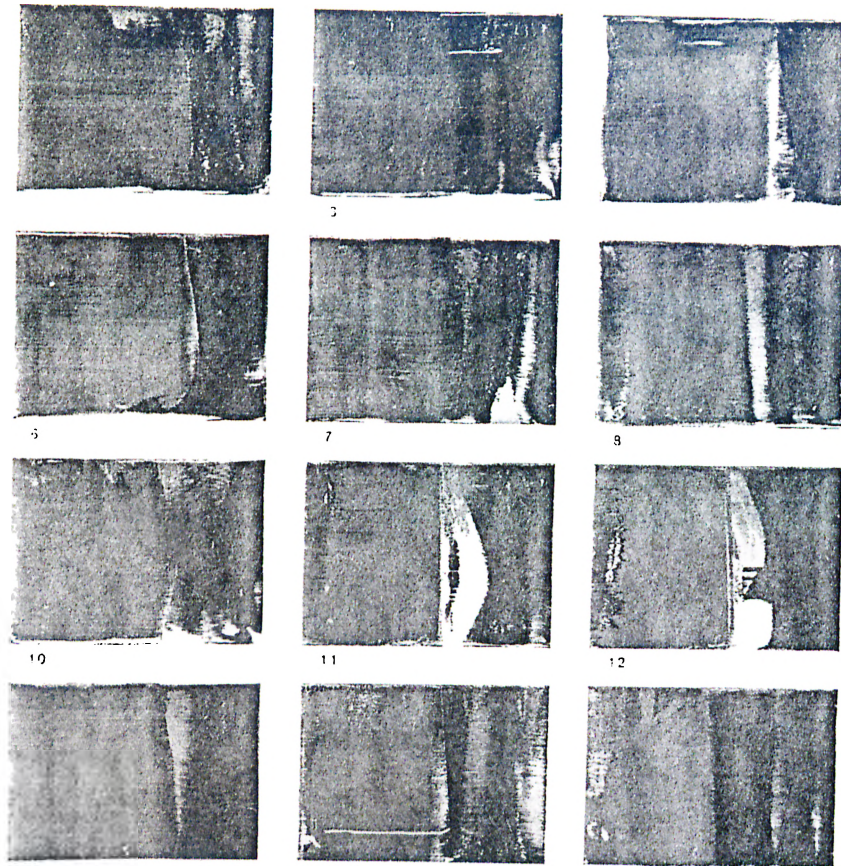


Figure 13: Gerhard Richter, "Edition for Parkett, Green-Blue-Red", 789-1 to 789-115. 11-7/8x15-3/4 in, Oil on Canvas, 1993.

that occurs while the artist is in the process of painting. When the artist assumes the position of the writer, he/she stands against the openness of the work. The object which claims to be work, loses its possibility of being an 'open work'. That 'losing' determines at the same time the consuming period of an artwork: It sets a handicap in front of the things which can be said-or more importantly-thought of the artwork. This consuming period can be prolonged when one lessens the use of the form as a direct reference. This kind of directness relates more to a 'showing' of the object rather than discuss something or ask something about it. The latter possibly extends the viewing period of the artwork.

In a painting which doesn't refer to something acquainted before, sets the question 'How to paint?' rather than 'What to paint?'. The artist leaves all the acquaintances

of a tradition of reproduction behind him/her and deprive himself/herself from showing his/her skills for direct reproduction.

Namely, from the support of the skill which shows that he/she can depict the object. The artist loses the confirmation of picturing the object as well as he/she can. At this point, crossing out, canceling and erasing takes the place of reconstitutive elements. This crossing out, canceling and erasing moves the painting in to the area of abstraction. This abstraction invites the question of where the paintings separate from each other; or with its similarities in the history of art. The producer as viewer and someone knowledgeable determines the way the painting moves in a comparative manner. Especially, in the series of one artist's work, the paintings are, from one point, all the same, from another point, all different. How can the artist act independently with this awareness of the similarities in the history of art? On one hand the enlarging of visual knowledge has opened the way of new formal possibilities, but on the other hand, this enlarging of visions offers the awareness of similarities. Hence, the impossibility of reaching to the idea before creating the artwork necessitates the comparison between the end results. This kind of comparison with the history brings with it a self-sensorship; some forms are preferred to others. Even at the first interaction with the canvas, the form on the surface becomes the finished art object with its discourse around and behind, limiting self-originated possibilities. The finished abstract painting is the one which is hung in the gallery or museum. Before that, in the studio, the artist makes again and again painting into another painting. He/she does not work with one piece. The painting is different in every step of covering the paint with paint. I will return to this point after describing the evaluation of my work from nature/object originated to painting-originated works. My recent works,



which I try to create for two years, have differences with the earlier paintings. The most important difference is that these paintings have not a starting point, an idea at the beginning. The earlier works were created in front of a subject- matter , constituted ways of re-creating it in the frame of a canvas. These ways were searched within measures, comparisons, proportions and other ways of defining the nature. This kind of re-creating hasn't got something from direct reflections of the visible object; rather, the chosen subject matter was a material, a medium for thinking about painting or drawing, or about the relations of perception with elements of representation: point, line, paint, mark...At the beginning, these elements had dressed the object from which they originated. They constructed the three-dimensional object into a two dimensional one. This opened up the possibilities to create an image like the object, using a method and materials which have quite a different structure. This perhaps was the biggest handicap towards this aim.

The possibilities that were used mobilized a naming of the real. This kind of representation failed to ask the questions; how and why do we begin to create a work ? It was a way of learning the structure of the object in the way of drawing and painting. The elements of this process were not speaking themselves. They spoke behind the thing which they tried to create or which they used to create. The losing of the will to know something about the object, has opened a sphere of expressions rather than investigations of forms.

The "Skeleton Painting" is one of the paintings which offers a way out far from this kind of descriptive investigations . The line loses its decisiveness form that of the skeleton. it dissociates itself from the object, followed up to makes a stand against the description of the object. It has an unwillingness towards knowing.



Figure 14: Sefa Sağlam, "Skeleton Painting", 80X100 cm, 1990, Oil on Canvas.

Becoming untied or unfastened of the investigative line, the medium of description becomes a metaphorical or ironic vision for this transformation . This solution and alienation from the visible takes place in the paintings where the living human body was used as a model. In the paintings "Surc 1" and "Surc 2", the representative elements, lines, marks, surfaces etc., begin to float, drift, but to become loose, unraveled or unfastened. That doesn't seem like a fragmentation; but more like pulling something different from the back to the front of the painting. Something else takes the place of the human body image. This description is only a "nachdenken" about what I am doing, while I am watching my own work.

These two works, ("Surc 1" and "Surc 2") look as if they are squeezed in a space (or gap) between something that is recognizable and something that is unconscious. They are ambiguous works, undetermined in the way of pushing and pulling the colors, organizing comparing the forms. They express the human body as the human body itself or and/as other unknown experiences. The grey sits like a haze in front of the color and stiffness the ambiguous structure of the image.





Figure 15: Sefa Sağlam, "Surc 1", 110X130 cm, 1992, Oil on Canvas

Wire Swarms was the material which I preferred as the model of the works after "Surc 1" and "Surc 2." This material, the wire led the way to a kind of spiral that is very close to the spiral of Roland Barthes described about the work of Requichot. It signifies the 'infinity' of a line and also the act of making art by repeating itself:

*"The corporal meaning of the repeated spiral is that the hand never leaves the paper until a certain pleasure is exhausted ( meaning is transferred to the general figure; each of Requichot's drawings is new)." <sup>33</sup>*

The similarity of the meaning of 'spiral' in Requichot's work, and that of mine, is that my effort in the paintings after "Surc 1" and "Surc 2" have opened up a 'corporal' way of expression. The wire swarm has again metaphorical forming role as the step between the paintings as corporal activity, and the earlier paintings . The spiral offers a possibility that is necessary for 'gesture' paintings. The producing has replaced the representing. What is left is not the body as an 'individual', but the body which is 'handled'. The work that does not represent painting has an unfinished structure in which the energies involved in a particular work are merely transferred at a certain moment to the next work. Therefore, all paintings seem very similar and continue themselves , with a flow of energy.

Is it possible to present a painting as an unfinished object? Rosenberg frequently describes the canvas as 'an arena in which to act' and speaks of art which is 'not an object, but an action':

*"For de Kooning, problems of painting do not exist in isolation; they arise inside the moving mixture of the painter's experience. Hence there is no*



Figure 16: Sefa Sağlam, "Surc 2", 110X130 cm, 1992, Oil on Canvas





Figure 17: Sefa Sağlam, "Wire Swarm", 80X100 cm, 1992, Oil on Canvas.



Figure 18: Willem de Kooning, "Woman", 1948.

*final goal which a painting may reach, as there is no ultimate fact of which it can be the equivalent.*"<sup>34</sup>

In that case, it is possible to see the artwork as an object bearing the sign of the activity which has 'duration'.

At this point, I was aware that this 'duration' was the same or very similar thing which Alwynne Makie describes as one of the elements of the creative process which Abstract Expressionists discussed; "The idea of the work as 'duration' rather than as object."<sup>35</sup> This similarity and other similarities offered the possibility of 'unmaking'. The 'unmaking' stands opposite to production and handling of the work. The work stops until the 'new idea'. Which form is worth to be created?

Eliminating this 'new idea' is the risk of the creation in abstract painting. The

necessity to go on, eliminates this kind of awareness, or better; the artist tries to disassociate the knowledge from her work in favor of the process. It can be said that this disassociation may result in the artists losing her direction in the work. He/she is not directing the work. He/she is "in the painting."<sup>36</sup>

Ernst van Alpen gives the example of Francis Bacon's work in which the painting 'of' the body coincides with perception 'by' the body. He added that they both unmake the body:

*"Representation, then, becomes a mode of decomposition. This conception of representation is also evoked by the stains of paint which appear in many of Francis Bacon's works. They figure as the marks of painting-accidents. As such, they represent painting as an activity which is not, or is only partly, directed by the painter. It is not the painter who paints, but the accident, an external factor. In addition to this self-reflective reading of the stains of paint, these painting-accidents can also be read as amorphous bodies. The figures' dissolving bodies can be compared to these stains of paint. There is a contiguous relationship between the paint, the material of the representation, and the expressed content-the bodies."*<sup>37</sup>

I think that the point of losing the direction of the painting, offers the way for the work to being a 'body'. That is the beginning of the 'breathing' of the work as an independent living organism.

The "Disappointed Torso" (figure 19), is a good example for showing the awakening of the body as paint, as oppose to body as a representation of the model. The yellow in the middle represents the torso while the light rose colors are formed by

pushing the paint with finger-tips. These finger-tips confronted the torso and come out from it. The painting begins with the torso and ends with the trace of bodily and the gestural expressions. The painting is a field which shows all of these , but I am not starting with something that was thought before. In that case, is it an illustration? Maybe it is an illustration in the way of expressing the emotion or representing the energy.

The paintings after the "Wire Swarm" continue in relation to the infinity of the subject matter as spiral. This infinite shows itself in overlapping of the paintings within. As brushstrokes overlap, they constitute a new painting every time: The painting in painting. It creates a new work by every stroke but in the same process, I erase every painting. These two acts come together.

The "Bruchstuck"<sup>38</sup> is the metaphorical result of painting creating itself in the painting. First, I began to paint a paper surface, large enough for me to handle. The point was a water soluble plastic powder which I combined with water and glue as a binder. That was a painting in which I got loose from the questions of 'how to begin an artwork?'. On the other hand, it is never possible to eliminate this question. The unlimited overlappings of color on color was used to render the paint into a strongly built structure. This hard and easily broken structure of the big piece led me to break it into parts. This was not my choice in the beginning of the work. It was more the necessity of the material itself which began to break into pieces. I broke up small pieces from the original, big one. The big painting created new and smaller / paintings; more 'Bruchstucke' than 'Fragments', because the word 'Bruchstuck' refers to 'breaking' (bruch) and pieces. While the word 'Fragment' has a more stabilized meaning 'Bruchstuck' also includes the act of breaking. It was a





Figure 19: Sefa Sağlam, "Disappointed Torso", 135X150 cm, 1992-93, Oil on Canvas.



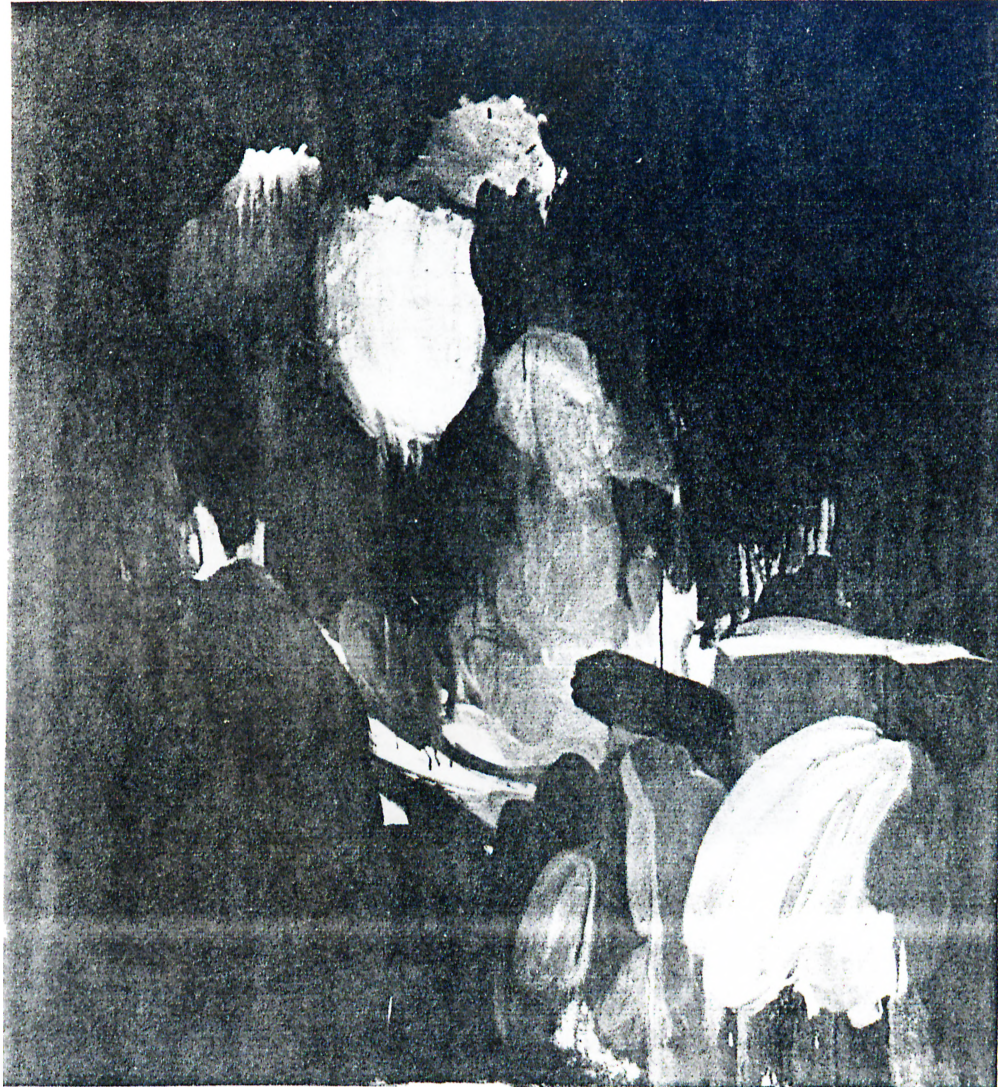


Figure 20: Sefa Sağlam, "The Travelling Hand 1", 135X150 cm, 1992-93, Oil on Canvas.



Figure 21: Sefa Sağlam, "Bruchstück", 17X10 cm, 1993.

way of seeing different pictures within a very familiar picture on which I had worked a long time and tried to isolate some parts, cut up small ones.

Lastly, I wish to add some thoughts about the 'gesture paintings' which I continue to produce. I started to think that painting can never show the trace of the pure gesture as the palette does. The palette is the ground on which the artist sets his/her place and direction with that of the painting. By trying to make some non-representative paintings by way of repeating the painting in itself, I came to a conclusion that this kind of a process can never achieve the directness of a palette.



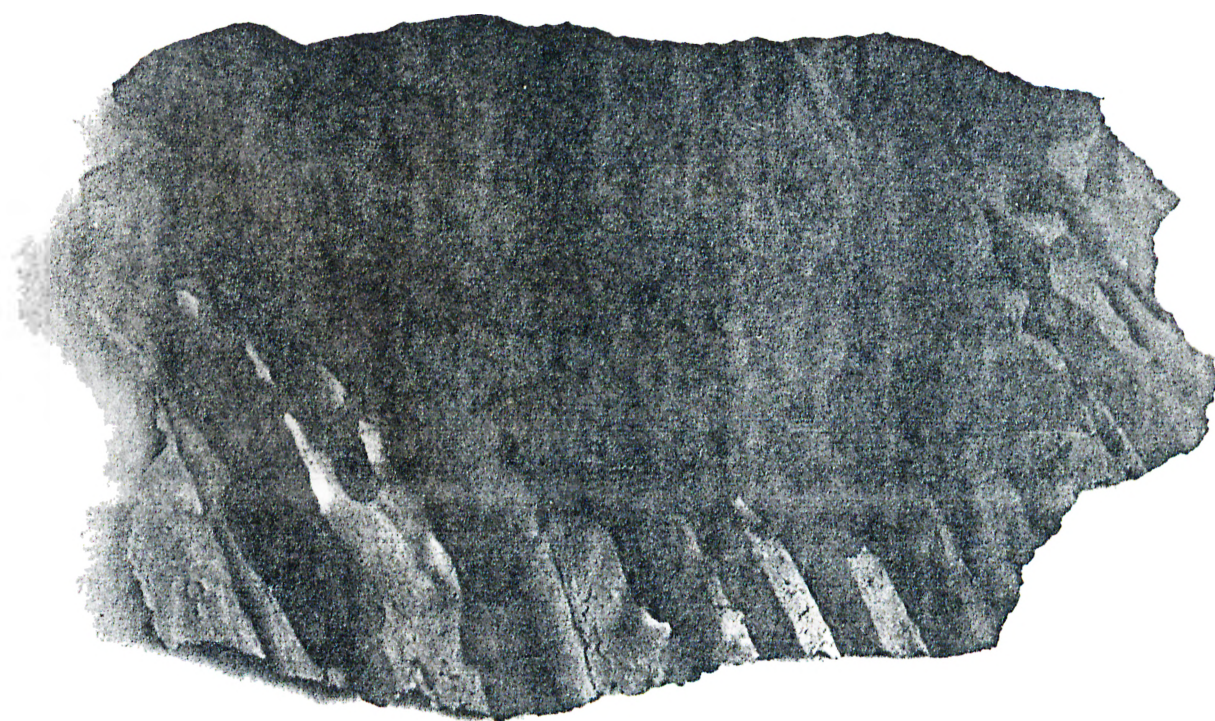


Figure 22: Sefa Sağlam, "Bruchstück", 25X35 cm, 1993.

The palette is at the same time the witness of the artwork. It was produced in a decentered place outside the artwork. Once it is upright, the palette stands up and begins to be a painting. Like the 'Spiral', the hand never leaves the ground during the Palette Paintings. It is a way to have the hand at work for a long time, without breaking up the action or lifting up the hand. The following pages show the works which are still in progress.

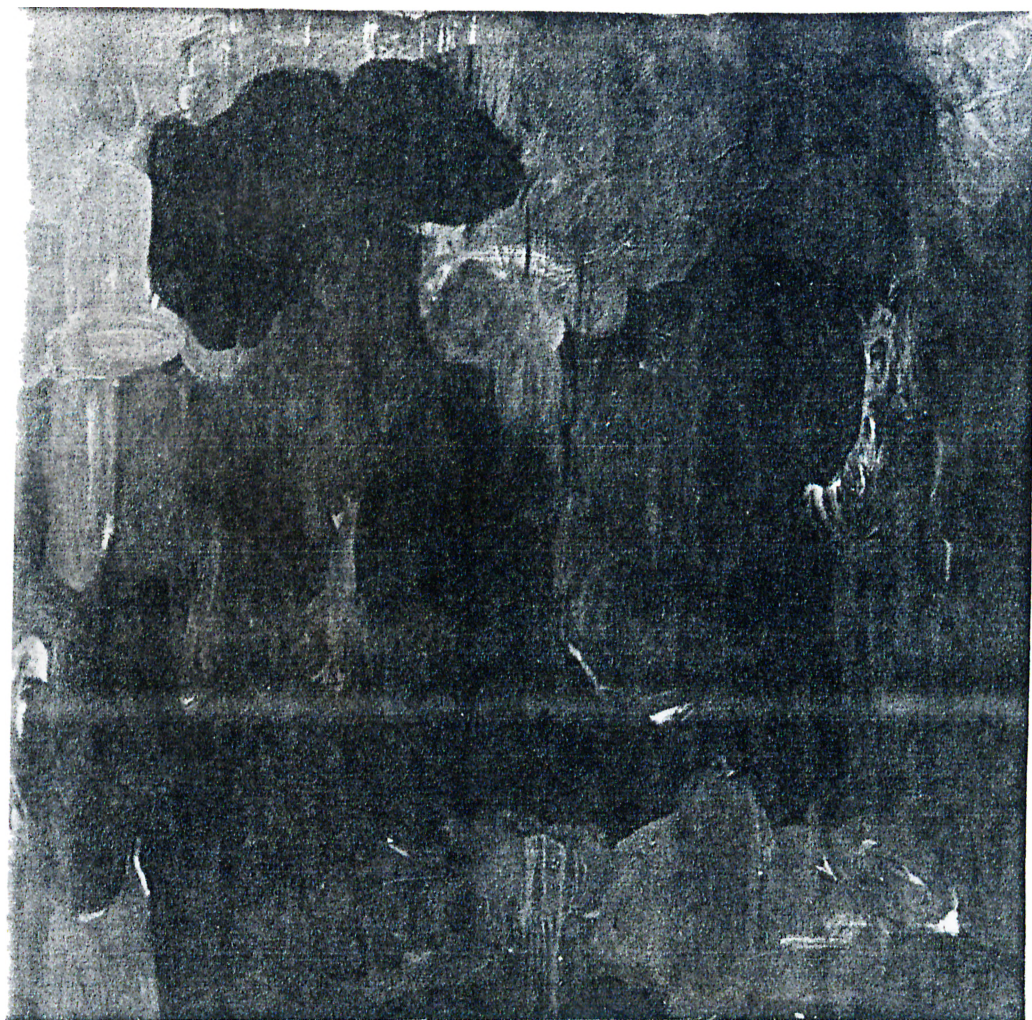


Figure 23: Sefa Sağlam, "The Travelling Hand 2", 135X150 cm, 1992, Oil on Canvas.



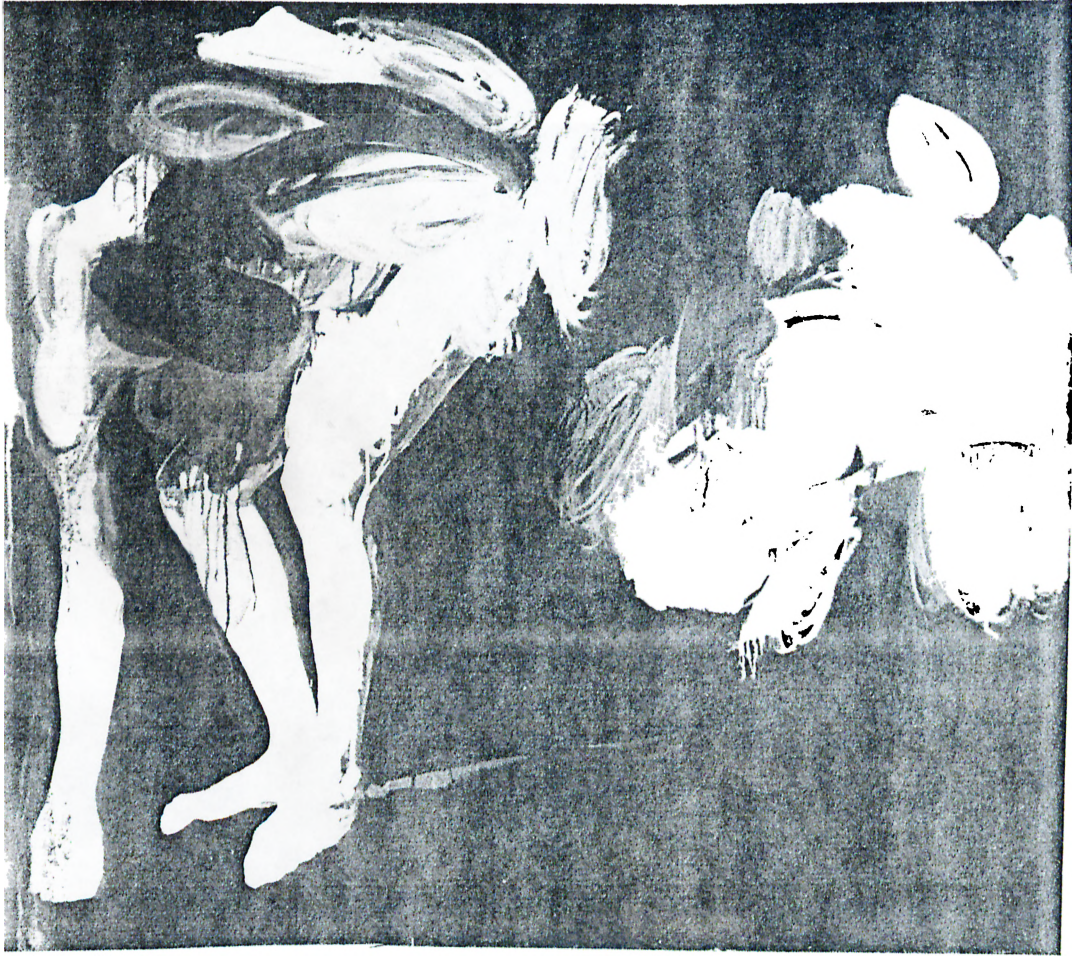


Figure 24: Sefa Sağlam, "The Travelling Hand 3", 115X130 cm, 1993, Oil on Canvas.





Figure 25: Sefa Sağlam, "The Travelling Hand 4", 115X130 cm, 1993, Oil on Canvas.



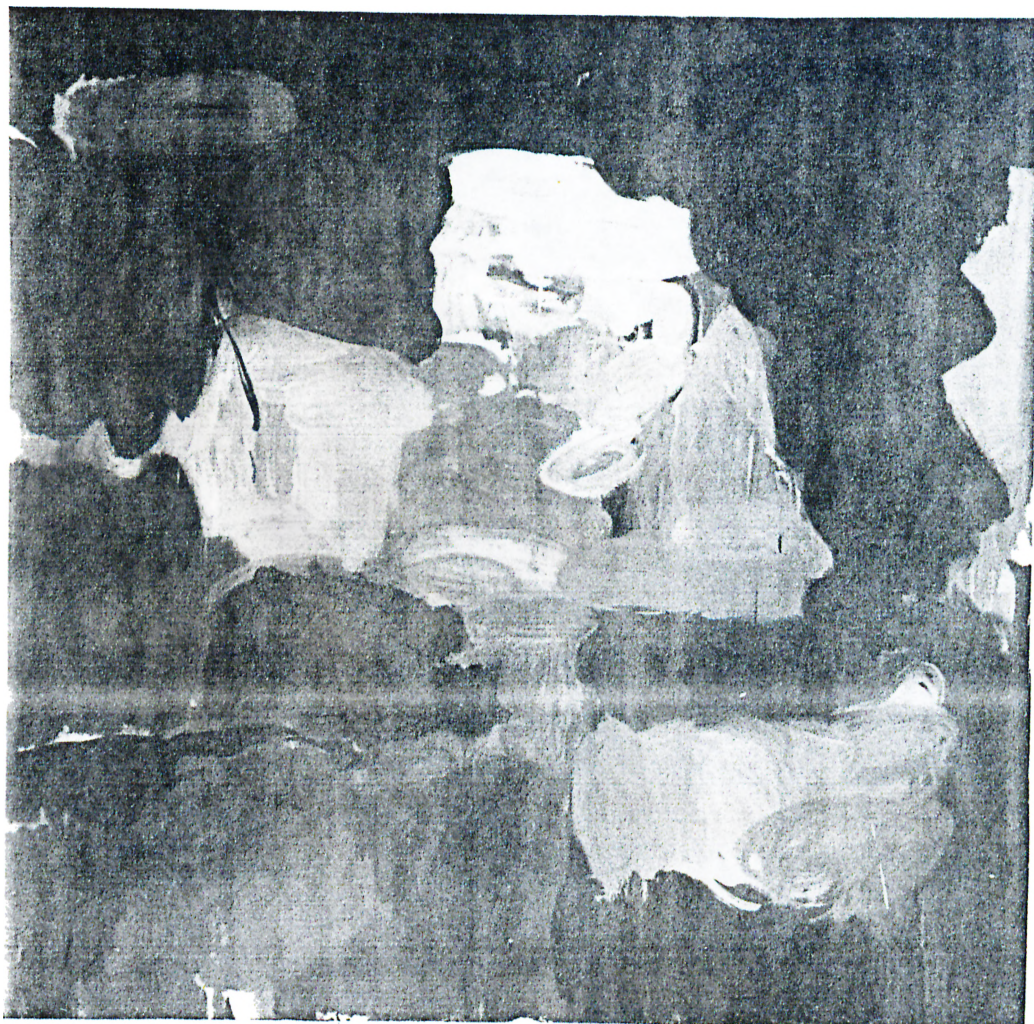


Figure 26: Sefa Sağlam, "The Travelling Hand 5", 115X130 cm, 1993, Oil on Canvas.



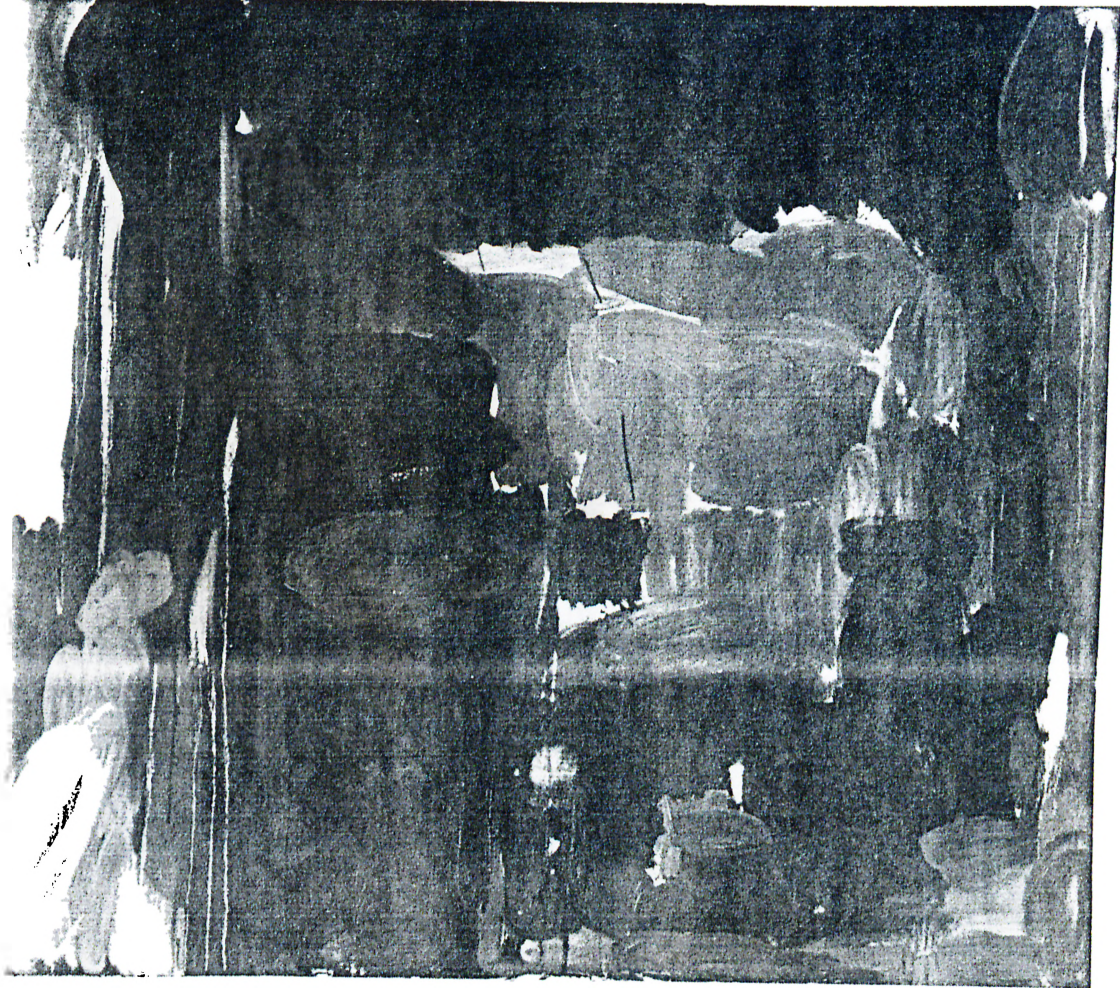


Figure 27: Sefa Sağlam, "The Travelling Hand 6", 135X150 cm, 1993, Oil on Canvas.





Figure 28: Sefa Sağlam, "The Travelling Hand 7", 135X150 cm, 1993, Oil on Canvas.





Figure 29: Sefa Sağlam, "The Travelling Hand 8", 115X130 cm, 1993, Oil on Canvas.

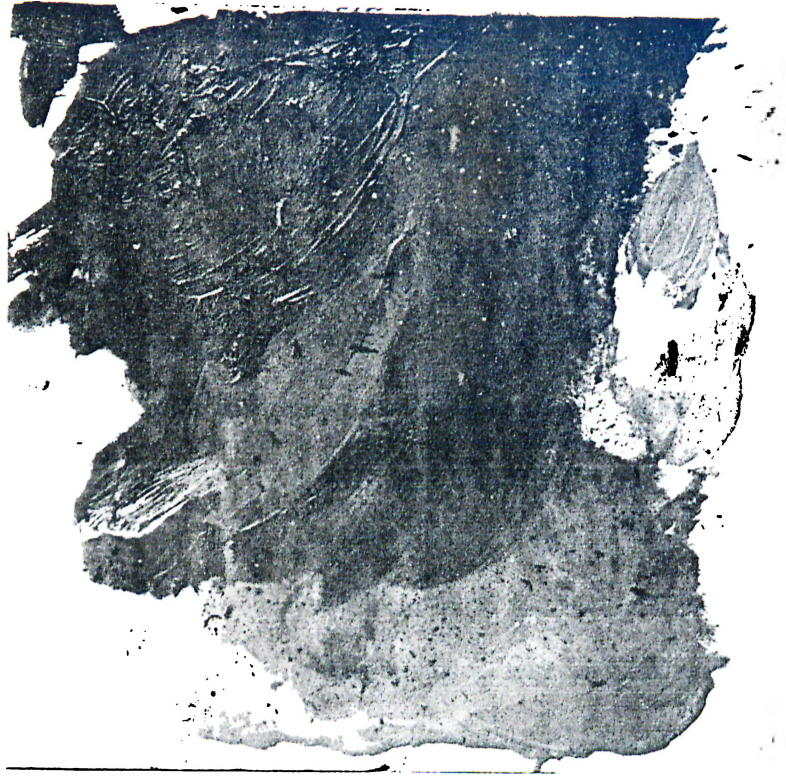


Figure 30: Sefa Sağlam , "Palette Painting ", 50X50 cm, 1993, Oil on Canvas



Figure 31: Sefa Sağlam , "Palette Painting", 50X50 cm, 1993, Oil on Canvas



## 4 CONCLUSION

In this text the theoretical framework that I tried to form offered some viewpoints on perception and on reading an art work. It perhaps helped me most in clarifying the impossible task of clarifying the painting experience. The experience as painting determines the sphere of the thoughts; the writing is based on this experience, rather than the forms of the art work which the term 'body' refers. The thesis considered in the context of the artwork begins to blend to its background. On the other hand, the artwork tries to maintain its evolution as a process and as an act of production. This writing shares the 'infinite' character of the art making, therefore it could be considered to be an 'open text' which offers a possibility to exist as a specific treatise. The whole text is a kind of 'awakening' about what the artist does during his/her 'non-verbal experience'. But, at the same time it is the 'awakening' about the contradiction between my thoughts and my artwork. This experience shows that art as an unrepresentable picturing becomes 'talkative'. Together with this talk evolves the artwork. An art work which weighs heavily toward a hand-made object rather than an object viewed by the artist. The artists eye no longer goes through the gesture of the producer. The eye sees independently. Seeing almost occurs unrelated to making. Something begins to emerge that is unknown to the artist, which the artist could not plan, which is perhaps better, cleverer. The painting begins to deliver from the inscription of the artist. It begins to produce itself as well as to refer to itself. Like writing; "it is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears."<sup>39</sup>

## NOTES

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- 2 Rian, Jeff, "What's all this Body Art ?", *Flash Art*, no. 168, 1993.
- 3 *ibid.*, p. 51.
- 4 Carl Haerle, Clemens, p. 198.
- 5 Foucault, Michel, "What is an Author ?." in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard New York: Cornell University Press, 1988, p. 48.
- 6 Sylvester, David, *The Brutality of Fact, Interviews with Francis Bacon*, Thames and Hudson, 1987.
- 7 Spector, Nancy, "Flesh and Bones", *Art Forum*, March 1992.
- 8 Thinking about something after something.
- 9 Foucault, Michel, p. 49.
- 10 Eu, A. and Staedler, Ingrid, "Jackson Pollock: Amerika's Artistic Genius or a product of his Time ?", in *Contemporary Art and its Philosophical Problems*, ed. Ingrid Staedler. pp.105-124 .
- 11 *ibid.*, p. 118



- 12 Barthes, Roland, "Requichot and his Body", in *The Responsibility of Forms*, Oxford:Blackwell, 1986, p. 223.
- 13 *ibid.*, p. 219.
- 14 *ibid.*, p. 227.
- 15 *ibid.*, p. 228.
- 16 *ibid.*, p. 231.
- 17 Reiner, Arnulf, "Arnulf Reiner im Gespræch mit Friedhlem Mennekes", in *Arnulf Reiner, Fingermalereien* Bochum: Museum Bochum, 1985, pp.92-101.
- 18 Color-Space Bodies.
- 19 Grove, Growe, "The Pictoriality of Colour-Organization and Experience of the Picture in the 'Colour-BodySpace Bodies' of Graubner", in *Gotthard Graubner-Neue Malereien (1982-1984), Farbraumkorper und Papierarbeiten, Die Bildlichkeit der Farbe*, Bochum: Museum Bochum, 1985, p. 46.
- 20 *ibid.*, p. 45.
- 21 *ibid.*, p. 51.
- 22 Roland Barthes, "Requichot and his Body", p. 234.
- 23 *ibid.*, p. 212.
- 24 *ibid.*, p. 207.

- 25 Norris, Christoffer, "Derrida's 'Verite'", in *Comparative Criticism: an annual journal*. ed. G. S. Shaffer, Cambridge: Cambridge Un. Press, 1989, pp.235-251.
- 26 The question of Jean-Louis Schefer which Roland Barthes cited in "Is Painting a Language?", from *The Responsibility of Forms*, p.149.
- 27 Barthes, Barthes, "Cy Twombly: Works on Paper", in *The Responsibility of Forms*, Oxford:Blackwell, 1986, p.158
- 28 *ibid.*, p. 156.
- 29 Felzer, Birgit, p.41
- 30 *ibid.*, p. 41.
- 31 *ibid.*, p. 43.
- 32 *ibid.*, p. 43.
- 33 Barthes, Roland, p. 240.
- 34 see Staedler, p. 167.
- 35 Van Alpen, Ernst, "Perception", in *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self*, London: Reaction Books, 1992, p. 85.
- 36 see Staedler, p. 95.
- 37 Van Alpen, Ernst, p. 196.
- 38 Bruchstück: Broken piece

39 see note 5.

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