

EVA HESSE : *A Retrospective*

Exhibition and catalogue organized by Helen A. Cooper

Essays by Maurice Berger
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Details from Eva Hesse's working drawings, 1967, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of the Eva Hesse Estate; and notebook sketches, 1965–70, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, gift of Helen Hesse Charash

EVA HESSE: A "Girl Being a Sculpture"

Anna C. Chave

*The man who does not know sick women does
not know women.*
S. Weir Mitchell

Around 1967 Eva Hesse was musing about a "girl being a sculpture," a phrase she jotted on a dance program. She may have made a slip of the pen, of course, while intending to ponder a "girl being a sculptor."¹ But the slip, if it was one, is telling, for Hesse cared deeply about both these possibilities: whether or how she could inscribe her femininity in her art, and how she could establish herself as a practitioner in a medium dominated by men. In her diary in 1965, she worried, "Do I have a right to womanliness? Can I achieve an artistic endeavor and can they coincide?"² And in a letter to an artist friend the same year, she anguished over whether

we are unique, I mean the minority we exemplify. The female struggle, not in generalities, but our specific struggles. To me insurmountable to achieve an ultimate expression, requires the complete dedication seemingly only man can attain. A singleness of purpose no obstructions allowed seems a man's prerogative. His domain. A woman is sidetracked by all her feminine roles from menstrual periods to cleaning house to remaining pretty and "young" and having babies . . . She's at disadvantage from the beginning . . . She also lacks conviction that she has the "right" to achievement. She also lacks the belief that her achievements are worthy. Therefore she has not the steadfastness necessary to carry ideas to the full developments. There are hand-fuls that succeeded, but less when one separates the women from the women that assumed the masculine role. A fantastic strength is necessary and courage. I dwell on this all the time. My determination and will is strong but I am lacking so in self esteem that I never seem to overcome.³

Reading *The Second Sex* helped sensitize Hesse to her predicament. Simone de Beauvoir had shown that historically "woman is object" not subject, Hesse noted in her diary, adding that woman "has been made to feel this from first experiences of awareness. She has always been made for this role. It must be a conscious determined act to change this."⁴ In the brief span of her activity as a sculptor, between 1965 and 1970, Hesse resolutely pursued such change, overcoming the obstacles that faced her as a young woman making her mark in avant-garde circles in New York. She succeeded, not by assuming "the masculine role," but by shaping an alternate role—a feat she accomplished before the flowering of the women's movement, which took place only after she died. Nor was Hesse a self-identified feminist, though she confided to her diaries her resentment at the slights she suffered from fellow artists, dealers, and critics on account of her sex. An often coquettish woman, the sculptor was highly attentive to her figure, her attire, and her attractiveness to men. "I have

this awful trait in competing with 'male' artists, which is to say almost everyone. Then [as if] that's not bad enough I compete then as a 'woman' with women in 'female' area. It is another major area to be thought about."⁵ To assuage her dual professional and personal insecurities, Hesse liked to tell herself, "My work is good, I am pretty, I am liked, I am respected."⁶

Though she did not regard herself as a feminist, Hesse became a crucial figure for numerous feminist and female artists to follow, as her work effectively anticipated some feminist mandates that were formulated only after her death. Layered as it is with abstract references to female anatomy—with forms suggestive of breasts, clitorises, vaginas, fetuses, uteruses, fallopian tubes, and so forth—Hesse's art might be considered a visual demonstration of *écriture féminine*, the practice of a woman "writing the body" recently espoused by some French feminists. *Écriture féminine* was conceived as a counter to a patriarchal regime in which women figure as "scene, rather than subject, of sexuality"; transposed into visual terms, it could serve as a counter to a visual regime in which "the female body is constructed as object of the gaze and multiple site of male pleasure" such that female spectators are assigned to "a zero position, a space of non-meaning."⁷ As promulgated by Hélène Cixous, *écriture féminine* involves a subversive "act which will not only 'realize' the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality . . . ; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal."⁸ While refusing, in her art, those stock, disembodied or two-dimensional figures of feminine sexuality—the siren or whore, the Madonna, the virgin, and the *femme-enfant*—Hesse found new and different terms with which to articulate a feminine

Fig. 65
Contingent, completed 16 November 1969
 Fiberglass, polyester resin, and latex over
 cheesecloth
 Each of eight units, 114–168 x 36–48 in.
 (289.6–426.7 x 91.4–122 cm)
 Collection, Australian National Gallery, Canberra

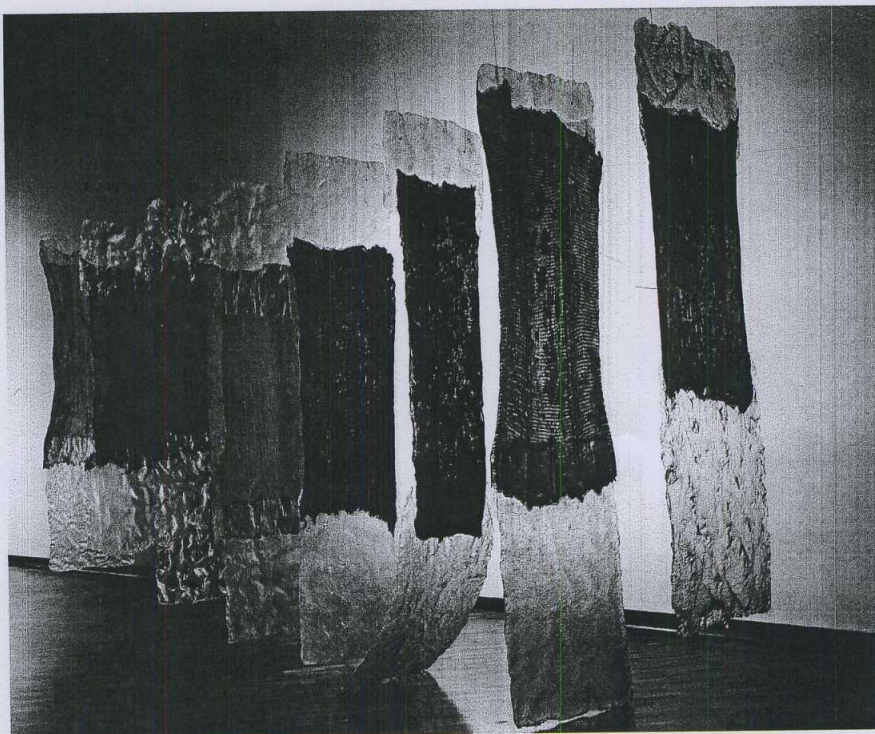




Fig. 66
Tori, August 1969
 Fiberglass and polyester resin over wire mesh
 Each of nine units, 30–47 x 12½–17 x 11¼–15 in.
 (76.2–119.4 x 31.7–43.2 x 28.6–38.1 cm)
 Philadelphia Museum of Art, purchased with funds
 contributed by Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Korman, Mr.
 and Mrs. Keith Sachs, Marion Boulton Stroud, Mr.
 and Mrs. Bayard T. Storey and various funds

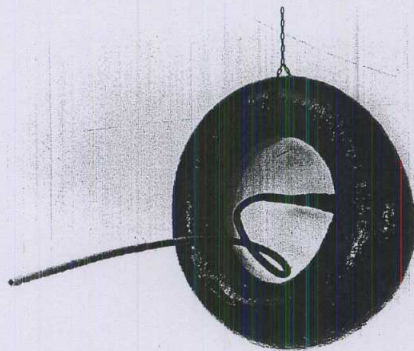


Fig. 67
Total Zero, February 1966; destroyed by request of
 the artist, 1970
 Rubber, plastic, epoxy, acrylic paint, polyurethane,
 metal, and papier-mâché over inner tube
 27 x 27 x 36 in. (68.6 x 68.6 x 91.4 cm)

sexual subjectivity. But the “goods” in question in her sculpture prefigure less a body vibrant with libidinal feeling than a body in pain: a body—not always female, but often bigendered, and sometimes male in its sexual markers—mutilated, dismembered, or flayed.

Critics detected images of the body, including the artist’s own, in Hesse’s sculpture from the first, despite her art’s abstractness. “Hesse worked *out* from a body identification into a physical identification with the sculpture itself, as though creating a counterpart of herself,” Lucy Lippard argued.⁹ Her work’s “sexual metaphors . . . take their spur from closely lived experience. They are always a function of the actual events of a life painful from the first,” was Robert Pincus-Witten’s overly literal assertion.¹⁰ For her part, Hesse wanted to make objects that were erotic and darkly humorous; she referred in her diary to “abstract objects that produce unmistakable sensations attachable to, though not necessarily interpretable as the erotic,” citing a phrase of Lippard’s.¹¹ The “sick” and “weird humor” at play in her “crazy forms” is that of the grotesque, as she aimed to keep her work in the “ugly zone” and out of the “beauty zone.”¹² At once repellent and alluring, the grotesque body, as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White define it, is identifiable for its emphasis on “orifices and symbolic filth . . . , [and the] physical needs and pleasures of the ‘lower bodily stratum’,” the sexual organs.¹³

Not all of Hesse’s sculptures are explicit in their sexual references. The eight fiberglass, latex, and cheesecloth draperies that compose *Contingent* of 1969 (fig. 65; see also plate 113), while looking like a ghastly array of giant, soiled bandages or, worse yet, like so many flayed, human skins (distantly evocative of the Nazis’ notorious use of human flesh to make lampshades), might be seen as sexually undifferentiated. In *Repetition Nineteen III* of 1968 (plate 104), the dented, fiberglass canisters could be construed as simultaneously vaginal and phallic, but only in a vague, abstract way.¹⁴ By contrast, the stiff, sausage-like forms recurrent in Hesse’s art, as in *Several* of 1965 (plate 88), are comically obscene in their flagrant phallicism. Conventionally, of course, it is men who have the opportunity to buy the flesh of women, as if it were so much meat; but here a woman has deviously and crudely equated men with meat, while casually tacking these penile forms to the wall like so many vulgar hunting trophies. And in *Tori* of 1969 (fig. 66; plate 112), the nine scattered, slit, cylindrical units fabricated of a loosely flesh-like, translucent fiberglass create an effect as of dismembered, squashed, and discarded female genitalia. By reducing the body to its genitals, Hesse in a sense usurped the male role of the pornographer and graffitist, who render men metonymically as “pricks” and women as “cunts.”

In the “stylisation of graffiti,” as Angela Carter observes, “the male is positive, an exclamation mark. Woman is negative. Between her legs lies nothing but zero, the sign for nothing, that only becomes something when the male principle fills it with meaning.”¹⁵ “Total Zero” was Hesse’s scathing nickname for the woman her husband lived with after leaving her; and it was the title she gave a contemporaneous sculpture (fig. 67) comprised of an inner tube to which she grafted a long, twisted, phallic rod that punctured the space in front of it. Like the units in *Repetition Nineteen III*, *Tori*, and numerous other works by Hesse, *Total Zero* featured a description of a hole or void—an image bearing multiple associations, though the sexual or biologic,

and the emotional or psychological are what suggest themselves here. In 1960, Hesse had recorded experiencing "A vacant, absent feeling . . . A void which [word illegible] to be filled. In either case it is loneliness and emptiness which I constantly feel," at a time when she was pondering her "link with mother": a link central to the formation of her feminine identity.¹⁶ For a while this sense of emptiness, "the feeling I had just that I could do and be nothing," a zero, stymied her artistically.¹⁷ But by the end of the decade, "a really big nothing" became precisely "one of the things that I so much wanted to be able to do": that was her description of what she liked about the tangled rope piece, *Right After* of 1969 (plate 111), in its initial stages.¹⁸

Using flexible and pliable materials conducive to random shapes or shapelessness, and creating objects that have no fixed arrangement or order—works that others could rearrange at will, as in *Repetition Nineteen III* and *Untitled* of 1970 (fig. 68; plate 115)—Hesse purposely conjured a vision involving what she termed "non forms, non shapes non planned."¹⁹ Sensing herself at times a nonentity made the sculptor want her work to be "non-work," as she declared in 1968; or, as she put it in more complicated terms the following year:

*I wanted to get to non art, non connotive,
non anthropomorphic, non geometric, non, nothing,
everything, but of another kind, vision, sort.
from a total other reference point . . .
that vision or concept will come through total risk,
freedom, discipline.
I will do it.*

*...
it's not the new. it is what is yet not known,
thought, seen, touched but really what is not.
and that is.*²⁰

Ultimately, Hesse's painful sense of emptiness and annihilation, of being "helpless. Insufficient. Stupid," and of "Always feeling what I do is wrong," became fodder for the art that was her only "weapon."²¹

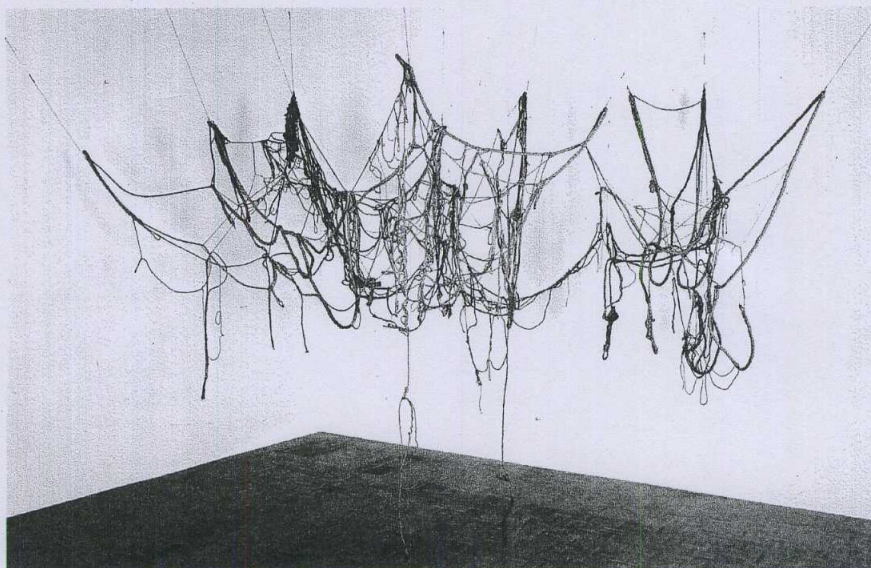
Rather than use her art to refuse the sociohistorically invisible position of being a woman, Hesse worked to attest to that very sense of vacancy or absence and the pain it entails. For that matter, testimonies of pain are rife in the art and literature of women in the modern period in general, and have come to serve as tacit markers of the authenticity of expression of the "Other," the marginalized or repressed.²² Those female artists and writers who endured exorbitant suffering and died relatively young, whether or not by their own hands, have lately commanded a special veneration in our culture, moreover: besides Eva Hesse, there are Frida Kahlo and Diane Arbus, or Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton, all of whom made pain a central theme of their work. It is as if martyrdom were the price demanded of women who demonstrate their creativity in defiance of patriarchal constraints and norms, as if the woman who successfully seizes and wields the phallic pen must pay with her life for assuming a male prerogative.

While female artists who report effectively on women's misery occupy a special

place in the affections of many feminists, some other feminists have argued that such reports may actually help to reinforce “the association, within patriarchal configurations, of femininity with the pathological,” to borrow a phrase from Mary Ann Doane. “Disease and the woman have something in common,” Doane observes; “they are both socially devalued or undesirable, marginalized elements which constantly threaten to infiltrate and contaminate that which is more central, health or masculinity.”²³ There is, moreover, the risk that in enacting a kind of self-mutilation in their art—as Hesse might be said to have done—female artists may reinscribe ideas of an endemic female masochism. In art by women where “pain is not opposed to pleasure but becomes a privileged signifier in the field of sensations which the artist coordinates in the name of self-expression,” what emerges may be less the sexual body, than a body “whose guarantee of truth is grounded in the painful state,” as artist and critic Mary Kelly suggests; and “this type of art practice is not necessarily in opposition to the dominant discourse of art.”²⁴ If we have begun to hear appeals for more salubrious content in the work of female artists, however, we cannot deny our lasting interest in stories of another kind: ghoulish tales of the spirited, gifted young woman who struggles to find her voice only to have it choked off by disease—disease that she makes, for as long as she is able, a centerpiece of her art.

Evocations of disease are rife in Hesse’s art, with its pervasive suggestions not only of mottled and yellowing skin and of extruded and exposed female anatomy—the internal externalized as it is in surgery, or due to gruesome accidents, or acts of violence—but of medical paraphernalia, such as surgical hose, bandages, restraints, and blood-pressure cuffs. Hesse was no stranger to medical procedures: it is well known that she died tragically young (at the age of thirty-four) of a brain tumor first diagnosed in 1969. But it is not so well known that she was more or less seriously ill throughout her life, and that she almost always viewed herself as sick.²⁵ “I am now 28 afraid to say almost 29 and really fear never getting well,” she wrote in 1964; “I seem to have felt like this since 8 years old.”²⁶ Her diaries are riddled with notations

Fig. 68
Untitled, completed March 1970
 Latex over rope, string and wire
 H. each of three units, 144, 126, and 90 in. (365.8, 320, and 228.6 cm); width varies with installation
 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York;
 Purchase, with funds from Eli and Edythe L. Broad, the Mrs. Percy Uris Purchase Fund and the Painting and Sculpture Committee



such as "I am sick again! Went to doctor second day of uncomfot instead of three weeks later. Sulphur pills and penicillin shot"; and "Last Wed. depression also recurred. Sun eve. and Monday—all day—Also real physical infections and pains"; and "I am very sick. I know it but don't know what to do . . . Like I feel I'm cracking up and would almost be relieved if it would happen already."²⁷

For years, Hesse tried to preserve her equilibrium by taking anti-depressants.²⁸ But she had a sense of herself as exceptionally feminine and, for a woman whose mother had been mentally ill, the feminine was equated with the pathological—especially, though not exclusively, with "mental sickness" and dependency.²⁹ In the 1950s and early 1960s, femininity in general was associated with helplessness and childlikeness, but Hesse carried it to an extreme: "I must always compete with another woman and prove like my mother that I am incapable and sick. Is this still in my mind synonymous with femininity?"³⁰ The answer was yes. At times, she virtually prided herself on her illness: "sickest—competition? competitive—how much I suffer—my value, like by how sick I am," one note reads.³¹ She felt that she was fated to die a suicide, as her mother had, and contemplated killing herself.³² For that matter, the bandaging effects found occasionally in Hesse's art—as in *Hang Up* of 1966 (plate 91)—may bespeak her sense of identification with the woman she sometimes referred to as her "mummy," evoking a dead body bandaged head to foot.³³

Hesse sometimes suspected that there was a relation between her emotional illness and at least some of her physical problems, that her suffering was, to an extent, self-generated.³⁴ In therapy for many years, and fairly fluent for a layperson in the language of psychoanalysis, Hesse identified herself as subject to both masochism and hysteria. In hysteria, which is often called "the paradigmatic female disease, the body is in sympathy with the psyche to the extent that there is no differentiation between them," as Doane has explained; "Illness affects and defines her whole being."³⁵ In his famous case study of "Dora," Freud described how, for the hysteric, "falling ill involves a saving of psychical effort; it emerges as being economically the most convenient solution when there is a mental conflict (we speak of a 'flight into illness')."³⁶ Freud identified the hysterical symptom, further, as "the memory-symbol of the operation of certain (traumatic) impressions and experiences . . . a substitute, produced by 'conversion', for the reactivation of these traumatic experiences by association."³⁷ He associated the traumas in question specifically with memories of—or, by his revised account, fantasies of—seduction by the father. While Hesse's childhood traumas were more diverse, she answered Freud's description of the hysteric in this, as in other particulars; for she was plagued by guilt and "fear of incestuous relationship to father," imagining herself having wishfully prompted her mother's suicide by displacing her father's attentions during her chronic, childhood illnesses: "I was sick and bad and therefore got father"; "My father left my mother. She killed herself."³⁸

A diminutive woman, Hesse associated her feelings about her childlike stature with her family history: "Shame of height is shame of incest. An obvious (seen) shame covering for a hidden shame."³⁹ In a monograph on Hesse, her friend Lucy Lippard stressed the artist's childishness; and Hesse often examined herself about her juvenile behavior: "I really feel I keep blocking my growth. Why? What does being adult

entail. Responsibilities, maturity, decisions, and a sense of being oneself.”⁴⁰ Hesse’s impulse to arrest her own development may be illuminated by some dreams she recorded in her diaries—dreams evincing her experience as a Jew who escaped extermination by leaving Nazi Germany on a children’s train. On her return to Germany in 1964 with her husband, the sculptor Tom Doyle, Hesse had a “frightful dream” of herself and Doyle being captured and tormented: “I could no longer control myself,” she recalled, “but was warned once more to behave. They said if I were not a child they already would have killed me.”⁴¹ Being a child had been Hesse’s salvation, and she was understandably reluctant to surrender that protected status: “I never want to let go of what is past, the child and the trauma—to regain them maybe to have my mother and father and relive it,” she poignantly noted.⁴²

Besides her terrible nightmares, Hesse suffered serious physical problems during her sojourn in Germany, including a bout with pains in her legs so severe that she could barely stand, let alone walk. She hoped these intense pains were psychosomatic, not a “permanent physical handicap.”⁴³ In either event, they for a time prevented her from reaching her studio: “Still pains in legs,” she noted on 4 July (Independence Day) 1964; “Responsibility still scares me to a point where it incapacitates me.”⁴⁴ She hoped to find a way to channel her anguish into her art: “And if I work that will most probably change into another kind of feeling. And if it remains it is better placed there, than back into myself.”⁴⁵ As it happens, it was in Germany that she succeeded in creating the first mature works of her career once she turned from painting to sculpture, beginning with painted reliefs. The first of those, *Ringaround Arosie* of 1965 (plate 79), involved imagery at once innocent and faintly sinister, as the nursery rhyme itself is. “Ashes, ashes, we all fall down” could, after all, be a child’s description of a scene of mass murder; and the two pale, target-like, coiled circles that compose the relief, each with a swollen nipple or navel-like protuberance at its center, are both surrounded by a fiery red circle and an ash gray ground.⁴⁶ *Ringaround Arosie* was a germinal work for Hesse also in being the first completed object in which she used cord, in this instance cord salvaged from the floor of the factory where she was working: “The string was really what got her going,” Doyle recalled.⁴⁷

Hesse’s distress over her inability to “stand alone”—an inability that became physicalized and medicalized during her stay in Germany—eventually found expression in her art. Many of her sculptures involve limp or pliable materials, such as cord and latex, which are dependent on other materials and on outside supports to stand or hold their shape, and so their integrity and identity. Indeed, Hesse often had trouble with her work collapsing or falling, for in her preoccupation with her own “need to have *someone to lean on*,” she made art which needed in turn to lean on something.⁴⁸ “I must get strong enough to stand alone,” Hesse admonished herself in her diaries; “I must live independent of anyone. That is sickness—the part of leaning child.”⁴⁹ Toward the end of her life, in interviews with Cindy Nemser, she emphasized that “the best artists are those who have stood alone.”⁵⁰ But Hesse was ambivalent about the prospect of autonomy; and in her extensive use of cords and strings—the material most prevalent in her art—she found a metaphor for the ties that bound her, for good and ill, to others.⁵¹ (For that matter, bondage, as a sado-masochistic sexual practice, involves both pain and pleasure, or pain as pleasure.)

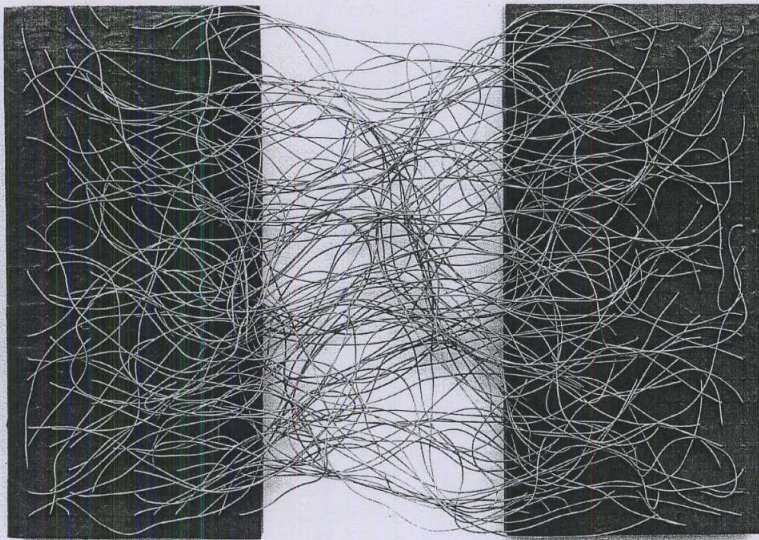


Fig. 69

Metronomic Irregularity I, 1966

Acrylic paint and Sculp-Metal over two wood panels
connected by cotton-covered wire

12 x 18 x 2 in. (30.5 x 45.7 x 5.1 cm)

Wiesbaden Museum, Germany

Of her relation to Doyle, who philandered, mistreated her, and abandoned her, Hesse described herself as “angry—because I am so tied, and not tied”; and she urged herself to “Break those fucking bonds. I am strangling and strangle those around me. Unfortunately those around me are also the ones I love.”⁵² While she yearned to “stand alone,” she also felt deeply that “What counts most [in making art] is involvement and for that to happen one must be able to give lots. Just like with a person.”⁵³ When her father’s death followed close on Doyle’s desertion, she despaired “I cannot much longer stand being alone.”⁵⁴ What sustained her were ties to such close friends as Sol LeWitt, Mel Bochner, Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt, Lucy Lippard, and Dan Graham: ties maintained through extensive personal and telephone contact. And material ties, of one kind or another, became a central feature of Hesse’s art. *Metronomic Irregularity I* of 1966 (fig. 69; plate 96), for instance, with its chaotic network of cotton-covered wires anchored into pegboard-like panels, might evoke a dysfunctional, overloaded switchboard, bespeaking the sculptor’s fears of losing contact with others—just as she had been separated from her family as a young child and, later, lost her mother and her father in turn. Thus she once had a nightmare of finding herself alone, “tangled in blankets . . . deeply drugged or gassed,” and making the dread discovery that her “phone was cut (wires dead).”⁵⁵

Hesse used various kinds of cord, wire, surgical hose, steel tubing, and strips of fabric in myriad ways: dyeing it, coating it, knotting it, forming it into webs, wrapping and binding with it, tensing or loosing it, anchoring it, letting it dangle, and suspending with it. The cloth-covered cords and wires in *Laocoon* of 1966 (fig. 70) form a web of abstract vipers teeming over and out of a tall, openwork cage, while the title recalls the most famous figure of suffering in the canon of Western sculpture: a father who, with his two sons, is strangled to death by a snake, punished for having foreseen and told the truth about the dangers lurking in the Trojan horse.⁵⁶ Hesse may

have seen an analogue to her own family situation in this theatrical Hellenistic sculpture (which she saw during her stay in Europe); for her father alone among the members of his family had foreseen Hitler's threat in time to escape, and while enduring serious afflictions of his own, had become the primary caretaker for his two children after their mother's desertion and suicide. In Hesse's version of the subject, however, there are no human figures, but only the rigid, orderly skeleton of a cage overrun by abstract, slithering snakes.

"Spent afternoon dying cord," Hesse noted in her diary in 1966. "5:30 Phaler came. He is very bright, verbal great . . . I unfortunately get caught in the web. The only web I know inside my dumb guts— . . . Lock myself in a cage. I darken it besides."⁵⁷ Surrounded mainly by loquacious men—artists such as LeWitt, Bochner, and Smithson, who bandied about concepts for hours at a time—Hesse saw herself as inarticulate and unlettered, and even wondered, in her sense of alienation from language, whether men were innately more intelligent than women.⁵⁸ "Sometimes I feel there is something wrong with me. I don't have that kind of a precise mind . . . I don't know if I stand alone but I don't stand on a kind of—I don't have that kind of a system," she worried.⁵⁹ In the end, however, Hesse purposely separated her practice from the explicitly theorized work of her peers: "I can't go on a sheer program. And at times I thought 'the more thought the greater the art,' but I wonder about that and I do have to admit I think there's a lot that I'll just as well let happen," she told Nemser.⁶⁰ For that matter, her resistance to implementing in her own art the kind of simple, totalizing systems favored by LeWitt, Carl Andre, and Donald Judd may bespeak her greater experience with the effects of totalizing systems; for within the New York artists' community to which she belonged, Hesse was uniquely aware of the damage totalitarian regimes can do. The work of Andre, in particular, reminded her of "the concentration camp. It was those showers where they put on the gas." Such was her chilling reaction to his stark "plains," with their square, flat, metal plates lined up on the floor.⁶¹

Hesse refused the rigid, strong, industrial materials employed by her minimalist peers (as well as the orthodox sculptural materials of stone and bronze), favoring such soft substances as fibers, fiberglass, and latex—materials not identified with major sculpture. Working with malleable materials lent itself to avoiding fixed and systematic form. "Finished my two last pieces . . . *Laocoon* and titleless [one] so far. Cords everywhere. Will do one that does not come from a form, that is endless totally encroaching and irrational. With its own rationale, even if it looks chaotic," she noted in her diary in 1966.⁶² While many of her peers stressed formal and conceptual order, (phallic) rigor and closure, Hesse was privileging (feminine) permeability and a structure that could be "ordered yet . . . not ordered"; "chaos . . . structured as non-chaos."⁶³ She referred to Jackson Pollock's poured pictures, with their tangled skeins of paint, in discussing the process of making her tangled rope pieces.⁶⁴ But however chaotic Pollock's paintings may appear, they were entirely fixed in their (dis)order once the painter completed them, whereas much of Hesse's work is necessarily reordered each time it is installed: in a radical gesture, she left many of her works perpetually open to the participation of others in (re)composing them.

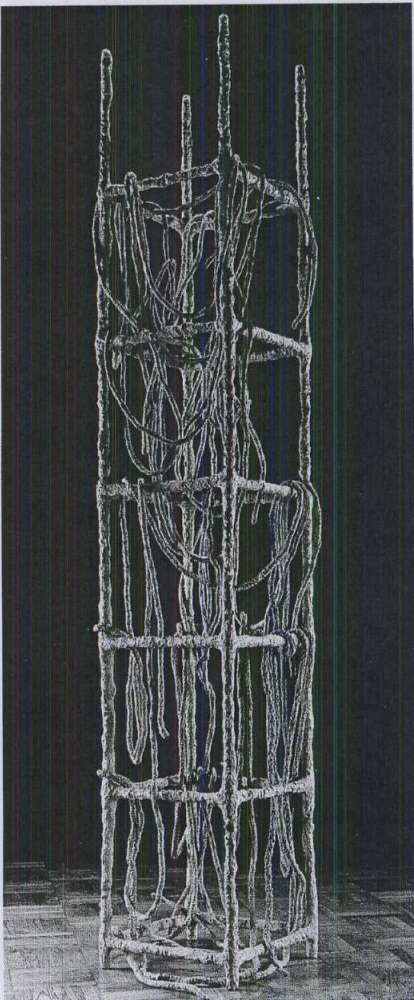


Fig. 70
Laocoon, completed June 1966
Acrylic paint, cloth-covered cord, wire, and papier-mâché over plastic plumber's pipe
130 x 23½ x 23 in. (330.2 x 59.7 x 58.4 cm)
Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College,
Fund for Contemporary Art and gift of the artist and
Fischbach Gallery

If Hesse tended to favor malleable and comparatively fragile materials over hard and durable ones, and if her work often projects a vulnerability inimical to the work of her peers, such factors did not necessarily prevent her art from exhibiting a degree of toughness. There is, for example, a subtly menacing quality to the big, irregular “webs” Hesse wove, due in part to the conventional association between spiders—those web-spinning arachnids—and treacherous women, especially older (virgin) spinsters who ensnare unsuspecting men. As it happens, around the time she was spinning these sculptural webs, Hesse felt herself in a state of sexual decay: “I feel myself, my insides, outsides, I am 30, I am living alone, all the time, lonely, celibate.”⁶⁵ If the spider symbolizes the frustrated female as would-be man-eater, however, it can also be emblematic of the productive female artist; thus, for instance, the poet Emily Dickinson “imagine[d] herself as a spider silently spinning out her subversive spells.”⁶⁶

Spinning and weaving, sewing and knitting, wrapping and bandaging: working with fiber is conventionally women’s work, and Hesse—like many women of her generation—learned as a matter of course how to sew, knit, and crochet.⁶⁷ Historically, needlework has signaled women’s confinement in the household and the limitation of their accepted creative outlets to activities that are, in the first instance, domestic chores.⁶⁸ From one perspective, then, Hesse’s extensive use of fiber might be seen as a symbolic concession to the constricting roles of dutiful daughter and wife. But in becoming a professional sculptor—one who courageously refused both academic and avant-garde orthodoxies—Hesse effectively declined such stultifying roles, while inverting the means and materials of women’s work into a mode of self-empowerment. Her rope pieces are not like dainty, controlled displays of needlecraft, but like needlework gone berserk, like a madwoman’s overgrown macramé project. Literature provides some precedents for the willful needlewoman: such “powerful weaving women” as the fairytale characters of “The Three Spinners,” or the “Fates or the Norns, remind us of figures like Philomel and Penelope, both of whom also exercise their art subversively and quietly in order to control the lives of men,” observe Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.⁶⁹ As they sever the thread of human life at will with a snip of their shears, the Fates especially exemplify the potential threat of the (spider-like) figure who spins, ties, and cuts her threads.

Spinning and needlework may conjure diverse and contradictory associations both for the worker and for the recipient of her labors, in short. But in the poems of Emily Dickinson, as Gilbert and Gubar have pointed out, the “stitch of art” emerges as “provident and healing, ‘a stitch in time’.”⁷⁰ And Hesse also hoped that her bound, laced, and knotted cords would have an anodyne effect on one who had chronically endured “Tearing apart insides—outsides damages unknown. Repairs possibly possible not . . .,” as she once incoherently described her feelings.⁷¹ Symbolically, Hesse sought to bind the wounds of “The Eva who grew up sick and unhappy in the sickest of environments, but therefore must make a new world where this does not exist.”⁷² As with the art of Joseph Beuys, which she admired, we may discern a ritualistic attempt in Hesse’s work to find liberation in the present by dressing the wounds of the past.⁷³ Whereas Beuys framed the sufferings he endured as a downed Luftwaffe pilot in a global, political context, however, Hesse, who was a tiny child at

the onset of the war, framed her own art in more narrowly personal and more formal terms. Though she was highly conscious of her identity as a Holocaust survivor—a consciousness fostered by the scrapbooks her father scrupulously kept for her of the political events of her girlhood—for Hesse the political was above all experienced as personal through the drastic effects it had on her own and her family's well-being.

From another perspective, Hesse's immersion in the private spheres of the body and the self may be seen in relation to the accepted protocols of femininity: because of "the exacting and normalizing disciplines of diet, make-up and dress" imposed on women, as feminist critic Susan Bordo argues, "we are rendered less socially oriented and more centripetally focused on self-modification."⁷⁴ In a related vein, Gubar notes that, historically, "Unable to . . . obtain the space or income to become sculptors, gifted women . . . have had to work in private, using the only materials at hand—their bodies . . . women could at the least paint their own faces, shape their own bodies." As for those exceptional women who managed to do more, to become actual artists,

*many . . . experience their own bodies as the only available medium for their art, with the result that the distance between the woman artist and her art is often radically diminished; [further,] one of the primary and most resonant metaphors provided by the female body is blood, and cultural forms of creativity are often experienced as a painful wounding . . . the woman artist who experiences herself as killed into art may also experience herself as bleeding into print.*⁷⁵

Hesse not only endured grave wounds, she *was* a wound, inasmuch as the bleeding wound is "a standard Freudian symbol of femininity, representing both woman's fertility and the apparent [or supposed] imperfection of her body."⁷⁶ Whereas the male artist is said to overcome his wounds, transfiguring his suffering into his art, the female artist is denied the possibility of escape, and so of establishing the expected measure of distance between her art and her life.⁷⁷ Gubar points out, however, that "Not a few of the most exciting experiments of women artists . . . grow out of a self-conscious attempt to obliterate aesthetic distance."⁷⁸ The art of Eva Hesse unmistakably belongs in that category. In this light, her concentration on the body renders her work not apolitical, but political in another way: for the body is "a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed," as Bordo puts it. "The body is not only a *text* of culture. It is also . . . a *practical*, direct locus of social control."⁷⁹ What was specifically inscribed on Hesse's body, and what she inscribed in her art, were above all the debilitating effects of tyranny, whether sociopolitical, sexual, or physical, as in the tyranny of disease.

Hesse had lamented (to reiterate) that "A woman is sidetracked by all her feminine roles from menstrual periods to cleaning house to remaining pretty and 'young' and having babies."⁸⁰ Feeling not only subjugated but practically obliterated by the social expectations imposed on her as a woman, she protested, "I cannot be so many things. I cannot be something for everyone . . . Woman, beautiful, artist, wife, housekeeper, cook, saleslady all these things. I cannot even be myself, nor know what I am."⁸¹ As these complaints suggest, Hesse's consciousness of her femininity and her fertility, of her "bleeding wound," was enmeshed with her sense of her artistic

productivity; she recorded the arrival of her menstrual periods in the same notebooks where she made notes on her sculpture and her activities as an artist.⁸² Further, the phenomenon of the cycle, prefigured by a circle, became vital to her vision of the structure of both her life and art, as evidenced by the language she used in her diary entries, as well as by such works as *Ringaround Arosie*, *Untitled* of 1966–67 (plate 97), and *Compass* of 1967 (fig. 71).

"Coming close to answers but go in circles," Hesse noted in her diary in 1966; "Not in work. Yes in work."⁸³ A circle is (among other things) a zero, a way of configuring nothingness, as Hesse hoped to do; "all circles—grasping holding nothing 'a great gesture around nothing,'" she noted in 1966, citing a phrase used by Bochner to describe her work.⁸⁴ For Hesse the circle signified also the self-defeating emotional pattern in which she felt locked: the "vicious circle" or "painful cycle" she referred to particularly in the period when she lost her husband and her father, in 1965 and 1966. "I get depressed from such low spirit low accomplishment low everything another cycle"; "sadism, masochism same thing other side of coin—break this cycle"; "The painful cycle. The sad sickness that did not change quite enough," read several of the passages in her diaries.⁸⁵ Further, the month of her birthday, January, was the month her mother had plunged to her death, and thereafter winter's arrival precipitated a "yearly fall into the pit of darkness."⁸⁶ In her interview with Nemser in 1970, Hesse emphasized the "time element" signified by the motif of the circle: "the sequence of change and maturation"; but, she added, "I think I'm less involved in it now."⁸⁷

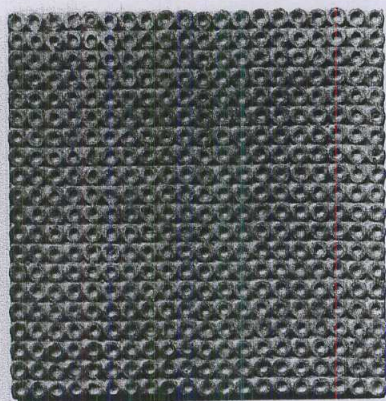


Fig. 71
Compass, 1967
 Steel washers and Sculp-Metal on wood
 10 x 10 x 1 in. (25.4 x 25.4 x 2.5 cm)
 Marilyn Cole Fischbach, New York

Among the forms Hesse became involved with instead was the freestanding, open box, as in *Accession II* of 1969 (fig. 72; plate 108). Like the minimalist artists, who made extensive use of the box (see, for instance, fig. 73), Hesse often made her boxes of commercial and industrial materials. But where her peers' boxes sharply denied the hand of the maker, being commercially fabricated with unembellished materials, hers were unabashedly subjectivized, displaying the hand labor involved in their making and alluding abstractly to the female body. Hesse's art emerged into public view around the same time as that of Judd and Robert Morris, artists who flaunted a rhetoric of virility and power in promoting a visual mode as deindividualized as possible.⁸⁸ Likewise with Pop art, which came to public attention in the same years: "I think we are talking of impersonality as style," as Claes Oldenburg put it.⁸⁹ Hesse's art stands as a tacit corrective to the minimalists' and the Pop artists' suppression and disembodiment of the (sexed) subject. But her gender also places Hesse's project in a distinct position from her peers': if it was a radical gesture for a male artist to try to deconstitute or deny his subjectivity, for a woman it was a radical gesture instead to claim and to declaim her subjectivity.⁹⁰ Critics recognized that gesture as the central fact of Hesse's art: "one reads the work as one read the person," observed Lippard. Hesse was "telling us to see her art and her life as one," noted Arthur Danto; "It is a priceless key."⁹¹

From the first, Hesse was determined to "paint *against* every rule I or others have invisibly placed," to "go against every 'major trend.'"⁹² Her resistance to the prevailing currents of the avant-garde earned her the respect of some of her peers: "In

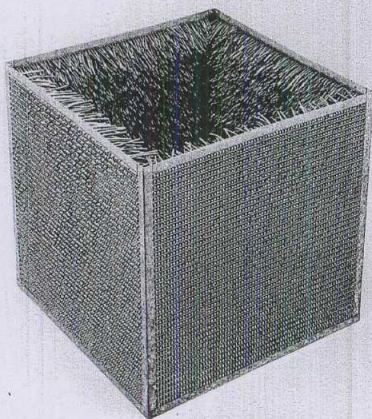


Fig. 72
Accession II, completed April 1969
 Galvanized steel and plastic tubing
 30 3/4 x 30 3/4 x 30 3/4 in. (78.1 x 78.1 x 78.1 cm)
 Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase,
 Friends of Modern Art Fund, and Miscellaneous
 Gifts Fund

that heyday of 'rigor' and 'structure,' Hesse seemed 'very radical or very eccentric,' Bochner recalls. 'She was never afraid of that. She wasn't afraid of being old-fashioned or of the work being about certain other issues, which right now looks very courageous, to be able to go up against public opinion like that.'"⁹³ The "other issues" that concerned Hesse included the politics and poetics of the body and of femininity. Thus while boxes in general are symbolically associated with the female genitalia, Hesse's *Accession* boxes are particularly sexual in their dark, hirsute, and spiky-looking interiors, which may evince the myth of the vagina dentata with its treacherous mouthful of teeth (a modern recrudescence of which is the slang term "snatch" for a vagina). Hesse toyed here with another image of a "man-trap," at once flaunting and implicitly confounding a misogynist trope, reclaiming and revising an insidious stereotype of femininity. Like much of her sculpture, Hesse's boxes appear at once repulsive and alluring as they draw the touch—however ambivalent—of the spectator. Nor were viewers discouraged from handling and rearranging the stubby ends of the knotted rubber tubing covering the insides of these boxes.

The image of a seductive but dangerous box is of course familiar from the ancient myth of Pandora's box. Pandora is the equivalent figure in Greek mythology to Eve (or Eva) in biblical history: the first mortal woman.⁹⁴ Zeus created Pandora to punish Prometheus for stealing fire and intelligence from the gods for man; and she arrived on earth armed with a box holding all the terrors and ills that could afflict humanity. Though warned by the gods to keep her box sealed, Pandora succumbed to curiosity—as Eve did in tasting the apple—and so doomed humanity to suffer ever after. Feminine curiosity thus emerges as an uncontrollable and transgressive desire to investigate, an impulse bound to culminate in disaster, while female sexuality is implicated as the source of all evil.

As for Hesse, she was determined to make the "wrong" box. In fact, she worried that *Accession* was "too right. I'd like to do a little more wrong at this point."⁹⁵ What was "wrong" about *Accession II* was not only its odd, oddly sexual intermixture of geometric and biologic morphologies, but the extreme obsessiveness that visibly attended the box's facture: the hand-tying of knots in plastic tubing threaded through more than 30,000 holes. "That's obsessive repetition," Hesse noted; "but then the form it takes is a square and it's a perfect square. And then the outside is very, very clear . . . The inside looks amazingly chaotic."⁹⁶ The sculptor recognized that obsessive or "endless repetition"—which surfaces often in her art—"can be considered erotic" (an observation she took from Lucy Lippard).⁹⁷ But obsessive activity also entails, as Catherine Clément has argued, a kind of exceeding and caricaturing of "limits in the direction of law, constraint, and conformity . . . In adding more to the rigidity of structures, and in adding more to ritual, he [the obsessive person] works destructively."⁹⁸

Finally, Eva's Pandora's box—the box she opened in all her art (figuratively speaking)—is not only the taboo box of a woman's sex, but also a voice box courageously, mischievously articulating a feminine critical subject. "It just seems to me that the 'personal' in art if really pushed is the most valued quality and what I want so much is to find it in and for myself," Hesse noted in her diary in 1964.⁹⁹ If anyone could push

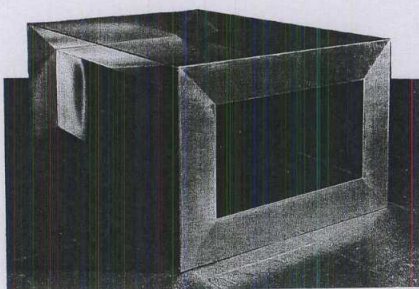


Fig. 73
 Donald Judd (b. 1928)
Untitled, 1968
 Stainless steel and plexiglass
 33 x 68 x 48 in. (83.8 x 172.7 x 122 cm)
 Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art,
 New York; Purchase, with funds from the Howard
 and Jean Lipman Foundation

it, she could; for she was, or became increasingly, a woman with nothing to lose. "All my stakes are in my work," she determined; "I have given up in all else. Like my whole reality is there—I am all there."¹⁰⁰ Not only Hesse's gender but also her family history help account for her insistence, even after she became too frail to shape her own work, on the presence of an authorial subject, visible in the idiosyncratic, irregular, and handmade quality of her sculpture's forms and surfaces. For Hesse, the specter of the extinction of the individual subject in the technological era could never be just a sociopolitical abstraction to be met with further abstractions. The prospect of obliteration had been a concrete and pressing one for her almost from the moment she was born, owing first to the genocidal programs of the Nazis and then to an onslaught of family and personal calamities. Hesse knew something—more than most of us ever will—about desperation, terror, and pain: "That terror stands so in my way. It is a haunting paralyzing experience, one of which I stand in dread of occurring, and when it happens it is even worse than what I anticipated."¹⁰¹

The subject whose survival Hesse emphasized in her art, then, was not a model being—healthy, whole, and integrated—but one prone to disintegration, as was her art. "My life is falling apart," she noted in her diary in August 1966; and, soon thereafter, "Some of my work is falling apart"; or, as she pithily observed to Cindy Nemser when she knew she was dying, "Life doesn't last, art doesn't last."¹⁰² The noisome scent of decay which seems to emanate from Hesse's sculpture helps explain its chilling effect on viewers, as it plays on our fears of contamination and dissolution, on our gnawing sense of our own mortality. "The relationship between images of disease and the representation of internalized feelings of disorder is very close," Sander Gilman has observed.¹⁰³ But it may be especially close for women, for there are "ways in which patriarchal socialization literally makes women sick, both physically and mentally."¹⁰⁴ Besides the innumerable pains associated with the routine functioning, and the frequent dysfunctioning, of the complex plumbing of the female reproductive system (seemingly a favorite source for Hesse's imagery), there are the pains which follow from women's inferior social status and the indoctrination that prepares them to assume that status.¹⁰⁵ As Gilbert and Gubar argue, "To be trained in renunciation is almost necessarily to be trained to ill health, since the human animal's first and strongest urge is to his/her *own* survival, pleasure, assertion."¹⁰⁶ From a certain perspective, then, a female artist is virtually bound to be a pathological figure, one who may well center her art around her pathology; for she has been "literally or figuratively crippled by the debilitating alternatives her culture offers her."¹⁰⁷

Critics sympathetic to Eva Hesse's art often hesitate in relating her life's story, foreseeing that the exceptional interest of the artist's biography may eclipse the, nonetheless exceptional, interest of her sculpture. Yet we cannot accurately account for Hesse's art without examining the story of her life; for, in a real sense, she made her art out of her illnesses, which substantially defined her identity as a woman and (to a lesser degree) as a Jew, as one of the disempowered and despised.¹⁰⁸ "A steady motif in the feminist literature on female disorder is that of pathology as embodied *protest*," notes Susan Bordo; "—unconscious, inchoate, and counterproductive protest without an effective language, voice, or politics—but protest nonetheless. American and

French feminists alike have heard the hysteric speaking a language of protest, even or perhaps especially when she was mute."¹⁰⁹ In desperation, the hysteric expresses with physical symptoms those emotions she feels incapable of, and discouraged from, expressing in any other less debilitating way. But Eva Hesse was as much Pandora as Dora; as much an irrepressible rebel as a sickly figure of suppressed rebellion. She spoke not only mutely and pathetically, with her body, but also audibly and eloquently, with her body through her art, as a "girl being a sculpture."

"By writing herself," Hélène Cixous envisioned, "woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into 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 breath and speech at the same time."¹¹⁰ In exploring the body of the ailing figure, and especially that of the ailing woman, through her sculpture, Eva Hesse found not only her subject, but also her own, differently pitched voice, and the courage to raise it: "My work . . . is my strength, my energy . . . It draws upon all my faculties," reads a typical, heartening entry in her diaries.¹¹¹ Not only in spite of, but because of, the ailments and afflictions that dogged her too brief life, Hesse succeeded in performing "a radical act of remembering."¹¹² She demystified or demythologized the female body by inverting or revising, with a sly, gallows humor, some of the degrading or alienating images used to represent it. At the same time, Hesse succeeded in *remythologizing* the female body by articulating, in her own inventive and vivid terms, elements of that which is so often denied or repressed about feminine experience: its repugnant and piteous inheritance of pain.

Notes

I am grateful to Ann Gibson, Lisa Saltzman, and William Taylor for their comments on the manuscript of this essay.

1 Cited in Lippard, 15, and 215 n.5.

2 Diary entry of March 1965, cited in *Ibid.*, 34. Eight years earlier, in a letter to her psychotherapist, the twenty-one year old Hesse—then enrolled in the art school at Yale—had similarly queried, "are my needs for developing artistically and intellectually incompatible with my role as a woman? Am I incapable of satisfying man's needs of supremacy? Must I take an actor's prompting from a director? Is my role to be there when a man wants me? Why am I a masochist . . . ?" (letter to Helene [Papanek], 20 Dec. 1957, Eva Hesse Archives).

3 Letter to Ethelyn Honig, cited in Lippard, 205.

4 Diary entry of Thurs., 19 Nov. [1964]. Hesse felt she had found a "spokesman" in the French writer, and she urged Honig in the same letter (cited above) to read *The Second Sex*, which she was just finishing; see Lippard, 205.

5 Diary entry of Wed. [May 1966].

6 Cited in Lippard, 70.

7 Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 27, 149, 75.

8 Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," in *New French Feminisms*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 250.

9 Lippard, 197.

10 Pincus-Witten proposed, for instance, a cause-and-effect link between the "'uterine' motif" in Hesse's mature (post-1964) work and the gynecological problems she suffered in 1960 while at Yale; see Robert Pincus-Witten, "Eva Hesse: More Light on the Transition from Post-Minimalism to the Sublime," in *Eva Hesse: A Memorial Exhibition* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1972), n.p. A somewhat more convincing example of such a reading: "Cutting gestures, surely not unrelated to Hesse's cutting her hair at this time, play a very important role in the series of *Accession* boxes" (Barrette, 138).

11 Undated entry [after Spring 1967], on loose sheet attached to small, six-ring

- notebook. This and other passages on three such notebook sheets consist of Hesse's reading notes (unattributed) from Lippard's article "Eros Presumptive," *Hudson Review* (Spring 1967); copying in slightly abbreviated form a passage on Claes Oldenburg, in whose work Hesse had a not unexpected interest, she noted: "as eroticism his work is abstract. The stimuli arise from pure sensation rather than direct association with objects depicted"; see also Lippard, 217 n.32. Others whose work dealt with the body, the erotic, and the grotesque in this period include Bruce Nauman, Lucas Samaras, Paul Thek, and Lynda Benglis; Hesse knew Thek and Benglis (the former was a friend), and she explicitly admired Samaras and Nauman.
- 12 The first three phrases cited in this sentence are from a letter from Hesse to Sol LeWitt, 18 March 1965, cited in Lippard, 34; the last two phrases, from the Hesse/Nemser transcript.
 - 13 Other characteristics of the grotesque body, also relevant to Hesse's work, include "impurity . . . , heterogeneity, . . . protuberant distension, disproportion, exorbitancy, . . . decentred or eccentric arrangements, . . . materiality and parody" (Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986], 23). For a discussion of the grotesque in relation to Hesse's work, see the essay by Robert Storr in the present publication.
 - 14 Hesse herself was ambivalent about assigning specific sexual referents to individual sculptures. *Repetition Nineteen* was made of "empty containers and you have that sexual [connotation]. It is anthropomorphic," she noted to Nemser. At a different point in the same series of interviews, however, in response to Nemser's perception that *Repetition Nineteen* evokes both male and female genitalia, Hesse fervently denied, at the same time as she contradictorily acknowledged, her awareness of such allusions: "I don't see that at all. I'm aware that that can be thought of as that even in the process of making them. But I am not making that. I am not saying female/male when I work at it . . . even though I recognize that that is going to be said. You could say that this is erect and some of them are semi-erect" (Hesse/Nemser transcript).
 - 15 Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 4.
 - 16 Diary entries of Wed. [13 July 1960] and Tues., 12 July [1960].
 - 17 Diary entry of Mon., 13 July [1964].
 - 18 Hesse/Nemser transcript; Hesse felt that she lost this effect in the finished work. Lippard also related Grace Wapner's recollection of the sculptor finding an object in the street that impressed her, calling it a "nothing" and saying that what she wanted to make was "nothings" (56).
 - 19 Cited in Lippard, 172.
 - 20 Both statements were issued publicly. The first, of June 1968, was included with a press release for Hesse's exhibition at Fischbach Gallery (*Eva Hesse: Chain Polymers*, Nov.-Dec. 1968); reprinted in Lippard, 131. The second is from Hesse's catalogue statement for *Art in Process IV* at Finch College Museum of Art (Dec. 1969-Jan. 1970); reprinted in Lippard, 165. Hesse exhibited *Contingent*.
 - 21 Diary entries of 2 a.m. [24 Aug. 1966]; "Sat., Aug. 13 or 14" [1966]; and 2 a.m. [24 Aug. 1966].
 - 22 "Surrounded as she is by images of disease, traditions of disease, and invitations both to disease and to dis-ease, it is no wonder that the woman writer has held many mirrors up to the discomforts of her own nature" (Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979], 57). I am also indebted to Gilbert and Gubar for the epigraph to this essay (43).
 - 23 Mary Ann Doane, "The Clinical Eye: Medical Discourses in the 'Woman's Film' of the 1940s," in *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleimann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 152.
 - 24 Mary Kelly, "Re-Viewing Modernist Criticism," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 97. Kelly refers in particular to the performance art of Gina Pane, and credits Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman for anticipating some of her insights.
 - 25 At the age of two, illness caused Hesse to be separated from her sister when they were sent from Germany to safety in the Netherlands on a children's train. The suicide of her mother, who jumped from a window when Hesse was ten, caused her to "throw up daily" and to refuse to go to school. This horrifying experience also prompted her initiation into psychotherapy, which she would continue for much of her life. While a student at Yale, Hesse suffered from excessive bleeding

- and excruciating cramps during her menstrual periods, for which affliction she underwent an operation. In Germany, in 1964–65, she developed crippling pains in her legs and debilitating fatigue, which were diagnosed (according to Hesse) as a result of circulatory problems and abnormally low blood pressure; during the same sojourn she recorded contracting German measles and pneumonia. From 1969 until her death in 1970, she suffered from problems caused by her brain tumors and the treatments she received for them. She had had premonitions of her own “untimely, premature death” in dreams set in surroundings that evoke Nazi Germany, through references, for instance, to her being in a “camp-like place” where she was being “pursued, tortured, poisoned” (see diary entry of 6 a.m., Sun. [March 1960]). And she traced some of her own chronic maladies to her family’s plight: “Problem of my past; of my past sickness—of the scars of my early beginnings. The deep-rooted insecurity which has made any relationship, meaningful one, impossible—” (entry of 12 Dec. 1960).
- 26 Diary entry of Mon., 19 Oct. 1964.
 - 27 Diary entries of 17 Feb. [1961]; Tues. [April 1961]; and 6 March 1965.
 - 28 Hesse recorded in numerous diary entries between 1964 and 1966 that she was on “strong drugs, anti-depressants”; she at times specifically mentioned taking librium.
 - 29 “Equate femininity with mental sickness” (diary entry of Fri. [March 1960]); in the same diary, entry of 13 June 1960, Hesse wrote, “I am like my mother who was dependent, ‘feminine’ and she was sick. Somewhere, somehow, this is important!”
 - 30 Diary entry of 7:30 a.m., Tues. [April 1961].
 - 31 Undated entry in spiral notebook/Memo Book.
 - 32 “I do now think I am just like my mother was and have the same sickness and will die as she did. I always felt this. I have almost never had a day in my life since memory allows me to recall—had a day without this kind of suffering described today. I know I am more of a person than this sickness allows me to be—I can never see without a mucked up vision” (diary entry of 12:30 a.m. [27 March 1965]). That Hesse contemplated suicide emerges in correspondence between her psychotherapists when she suffered a breakdown while at Yale; see letter from Helene Papanek to Dr. Lawrence Friedman at the Yale University Health Services, 30 March 1959, Eva Hesse Archives. There is no record of her ever having attempted suicide.
 - 33 *Hang Up* features a long, looping steel tube extruding from an empty stretcher “all tied like a hospital bandage, like if someone broke an arm,” as Hesse described it (Hesse/Nemser transcript).
 - 34 For instance: “Why do the cuts and bruises I receive not clear up faster and totally. My symptoms are real, my fears one of a hypochondriac” (diary entry of Tues. [26 Jan. 1960]). Also, “I am slowly getting both sicker in mind as well as body. I wish it were all psychosomatic, but it exists and I am no Dr. to judge” (entry of Sat. eve. [19 Feb. 1965]); and in the same diary, “I have no more energy to struggle with the way I make myself suffer” (entry of 8 Jan. 1965).
 - 35 Doane, “The Clinical Eye,” 173. Hesse’s references to her “hysteria” or “hysteria fit[s]” may be found in half a dozen diary entries dating between 1960 and 1966.
 - 36 Sigmund Freud, “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria” (1905), in *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (New York: Macmillan/Collier, 1963), 59–60 n.27 (note dated 1923).
 - 37 Sigmund Freud, “Hysterical Phantasies and their Relation to Bisexuality” (1908), in *Ibid.*, 149.
 - 38 Diary entry of Wed. [31 Aug. 1966]; undated entry [Jan. 1967]; and entry of Mon. eve. [Nov. 1966]. Also, “closeness of relationship with father, alone,—probably sexual and otherwise” (entry of 14 Sept. [1960]); and “Shame of having father to self—incest” (undated entry [Jan. 1967]). (There is no unambiguous evidence of an actively aberrant sexual relationship between them.) Noted Freud, “The motives for being ill often begin to be active even in childhood. A child... notices that the whole of their [the parents’] affection is lavished upon it once more whenever it arouses their anxiety by falling ill. It has now discovered a means of enticing out its parents’ love” (“Fragment,” 61).
 - 39 Undated diary entry [Jan. 1967].
 - 40 Diary entry of Sat., 21 Nov. [1964].
 - 41 Diary entry of 25 March [1965].
 - 42 Diary entry of Thurs. eve. [19 Jan. 1961].
 - 43 Diary entry of Fri., 3 July [1964].
 - 44 Calendar/diary entry of 4 July [1964].
 - 45 Diary entry of Wed., 1 July [1964].
 - 46 Lesley K. Baier notes that the nursery rhyme in question “originated with the Great Plague in London, when young and old were indiscriminately struck down. Bodies were tossed into the charnel houses and burned” (note to the author, Oct. 1991). Hesse named the work for a friend, Rosalyn Goldman, who had recently become pregnant; see Barrette, 20.

- 47 Quoted in Lippard, 28.
- 48 Undated diary entry [Feb. 1960]. The "problem of support was a central theme in her sculpture and was intertwined with her recurrent dependence on other artists for technical assistance," observed Bill Barrette, a former studio assistant of Hesse's (Barrette, 84).
- 49 Calendar/diary entry of 20 June [1965]; and diary entry of 7 March 1966.
- 50 Hesse/Nemser transcript.
- 51 "It has been observed that Hesse was always anxious about being 'connected' emotionally to other people, as articulated formally by her relentless use of cords and elements which gropingly reach out to the viewer," noted Linda Shearer, relating an insight gleaned from Hesse's psychotherapist, Dr. Samuel Dunkell ("Eva Hesse: Last Works," in *Hesse: A Memorial*, n.p.).
- 52 Diary entry of Wed. [1964-65?], on loose sheet inserted into diary begun on 2 Nov. 1960; and diary entry of 28 May [1964]. Ambivalence emerges also in Hesse's repeated (though not invariable) misspelling of the word "abandonment" as "abondment."
- 53 Diary entry of Fri., 19 June [1964].
- 54 Diary entry of 17 Aug. 1966.
- 55 Diary entry of 1:30 a.m., Thurs. [18 April 1966].
- 56 In naming this work, perhaps Hesse also had in mind Clement Greenberg's famous essay, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," published in 1940.
- 57 Diary entry of Tues. [May 1966].
- 58 "I wonder if men are more intelligent, more capable of abstract thinking, more able to be intellectual," mused Hesse, according to Cindy Nemser, "My Memories of Eva Hesse," *Feminist Art Journal* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1973): 13.
- 59 Hesse/Nemser transcript; see also Lippard, 200.
- 60 Hesse/Nemser transcript.
- 61 Ibid. This reaction to Andre's work did not keep Hesse from admiring it, however.
- 62 Diary entry of Sat. [May 1966].
- 63 Hesse/Nemser transcript; and Eva Hesse, statement in "Fling, Dribble, and Dip," *Life* 68 (27 Feb. 1970): 66, cited in Lippard, 172.
- 64 Hesse/Nemser transcript; see also Lippard, 172.
- 65 Undated diary entry [Oct. 1966].
- 66 Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman*, 525.
- 67 In 1964, Hesse amusingly described making her husband a scarf that sounds as if it anticipated certain of her sculptures: "Needless to say we bought the most wild wool we could find. Of this they had only five skeins. I keep unraveling so I can hope-
- fully get required length. The width keeps diminishing till now it can get no skinnier" (diary entry of Sat., 21 Nov. [1964]).
- 68 That needlework has paradoxically provided "a source of pleasure and power for women while being indissolubly linked to their powerlessness" has been shown by Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 11.
- 69 Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman*, 521. "More bitter than death [is] the woman whose heart is snares and nets; whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her, but the sinner shall be taken by her," warns Ecclesiastes 7:26 (cited in Ibid., 524).
- 70 Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman*, 639; also: "both in the subtle subversiveness of her sewing and in the striving toward wholeness her sewing expressed, Dickinson was enacting and exploiting a traditional metaphor for the female artist . . . women have used their looms, thread, and needles both to defend themselves and silently to speak of themselves . . . they have sewed to heal the wounds inflicted by history . . . they have sewed . . . to hide the pain at the heart of their lives" (641-42).
- 71 Diary entry of Mon., 19 Oct. 1964.
- 72 Diary entry of Sat. [May 1966].
- 73 According to Doyle, Beuys' "ideas—the felt and the 'fat corners' intrigued her" (quoted in Lippard, 33).
- 74 Susan R. Bordo, "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault," in *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, ed. Alison M. Jaggar and Bordo (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 14.
- 75 Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity," in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 296-97.
- 76 Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman*, 330.
- 77 The canonical study regarding the suffering of the male artist is Edmund Wilson's *The Wound and the Bow* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1941).
- 78 Gubar, "'The Blank Page,'" 299.
- 79 Bordo, "The Body," 13. (Bordo credits Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu for informing her observations.)
- 80 Cited in Lippard, 205 (see note 3 above).
- 81 From a diary entry of 4 Jan. 1964, cited in Lippard, 24-25.
- 82 Regarding Hesse's attitude toward motherhood, Barrette suggests she suffered from frustrated maternal longings (20), but her diary writings from the period when she was active as a sculptor reveal

- that she was ambivalent about having children, and there is no evidence that she ever attempted to become pregnant.
- 83 Diary entry of 2 a.m., 24 Aug. [1966].
 - 84 Diary entry of Fri. [July 1966].
 - 85 Diary entries of 16 Feb [1965]; Fri. [22 Apr. 1966]; and 4 Aug. 1966.
 - 86 Diary entry of 12 Dec. 1965, cited in Lippard, 56.
 - 87 Hesse/Nemser transcript.
 - 88 See Anna C. Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine* 64 (Jan. 1990): 44-63.
 - 89 Quoted in Bruce Glaser, "Oldenburg, Lichtenstein, Warhol: A Discussion," *Artforum* 4 (Feb. 1966): 22.
 - 90 "Because the female subject has juridically been excluded from the polis, and hence decentered, 'disorinated,' deinstitutionalized, etc., her relation to integrity and textuality, desire and authority, is structurally different," argues Nancy K. Miller, "Changing the Subject: Authorship, Writing, and the Reader," in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 106. See also Kaja Silverman, "The Female Authorial Voice," in *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).
 - 91 Lippard, 17; Arthur C. Danto, "Growing up Absurd," *Art News* 88 (Nov. 1989): 119.
 - 92 Passage "written Oct. 28 [1960]" and evidently transcribed into the diary begun 2 Nov. 1960 some days later; diary entry of 5 Feb. 1965, cited in Lippard, 32.
 - 93 Lippard, 199.
 - 94 That "the parallel between Pandora and Eve was a favorite motif of Milton's" is noted by Dora and Erwin Panofsky, *Pandora's Box: The Changing Aspects of a Mythical Symbol* (New York: Pantheon, 1956), 64; the Panofskys show also how an association between the mythical box and the female genitals has been invoked by numerous artists, including Paul Klee.
 - 95 Hesse/Nemser transcript.
 - 96 Ibid.
 - 97 Undated entry [after Spring 1967], on loose sheet attached to small, six-ring notebook. The observation is one of many Hesse noted from Lippard's article, "Eros Presumptive"; see note 11 above.
 - 98 Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, "The Untenable," in *In Dora's Case: Freud, Hysteria, Feminism*, ed. Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 289.
 - 99 Diary entry of Fri., 19 June [1964]; see also Lippard, 25.
 - 100 Diary entry of 12 Dec. 1965, on loose sheet stapled into diary inscribed 26 Mar. 1965.
 - 101 Diary entry of April 1968, cited in Lippard, 126.
 - 102 Diary entry of Mon., 29 Aug. 1966; diary entry of Sun. eve. [4 Sept. 1966] in same notebook; and Hesse/Nemser transcript.
 - 103 Sander L. Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 3.
 - 104 Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman*, 53.
 - 105 "The statistical overrepresentation of women among the mentally ill has been well documented by historians and psychologists . . . By the middle of the nineteenth century, records showed that women had become the majority of patients in public lunatic asylums. In the twentieth century, too, we know that women are the majority of clients for private and public psychiatric hospitals, outpatient mental health services, and psychotherapy; in 1967 a major study found 'more mental illness among women than men from every data source'." (Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture: 1830-1980* [New York: Penguin, 1987], 3).
 - 106 Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman*, 54. In a related vein, Barbara Johnson observes (in discussing the heroines of stories by Nathaniel Hawthorne and Charlotte Perkins Gilman) that "The cost of [women] attaining a valued status in the world is to become an object in someone else's reality and, hence, to have, in fact, no status in the world . . . Femininity, in other words, is by nature a 'normal ill'" ("Is Female to Male as Ground is to Figure?" in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Richard Feldstein and Judith Roof [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989], 262).
 - 107 Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman*, 57.
 - 108 On Jewishness and illness, see Sander L. Gilman, "The Madness of the Jews," in *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).
 - 109 Bordo, "The Body," 20.
 - 110 Cixous, "The Laugh," 250.
 - 111 Diary entry of Sat. eve. [11 March 1961].
 - 112 Doane, "Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body," *October* 17 (Summer 1981): 25.