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ENVISIONING THE THIRD DIMENSION

Edited by

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CHAPTER TEN

ANNA C. CHAVE

STRIKING POSES

THE ABSURDIST THEATRICS OF EVA HESSE

"Once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes," Roland Barthes remarked in *Camera Lucida*. "I constitute myself in the process of 'posing,' I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image." Preparing to meet the camera's lens spelled anguish to Barthes, who stressed the sense of vulnerability, even mortification that a sitter can experience at the hands of the photographer. Wishing to compose his features to express a sense of "delicate moral texture," but uncertain how to "work upon my skin from within," Barthes settled for " 'let[ting] drift' over my lips and in my eyes a faint smile which I mean to be 'indefinable,' in which I might suggest . . . my amused consciousness of the whole photographic ritual: I lend myself to the social game, I pose, I know I am posing, I want you to know that I am posing." Barthes lamented these artifices, however, because he retained an ideal of the photographic portrait as an image that would "always coincide with my (profound) 'self.'"[1]

The dread common to the ritual of posing might obtain less often when the sitter is a visual artist. In such situations a more symmetrical power relation inheres – one of an encounter or even a collaboration between two persons versed in crafting images. Whether by instinct or by calculation, many artists have played effectively to the camera's lens, exploiting the artifices of posing to project a self-image deemed beneficial and to place their efforts in a flattering light. Even as a neophyte, Eva Hesse, for one, sensed how photography could help position her enterprise in an appealing way. Faced with the camera's lens, the attractive Hesse often beamed smiles or grins, comparatively atypical expressions for so-called modern masters to assume. (Consider the serious or brooding countenances of such photogenic figures as Auguste Rodin, Henri Matisse, and Jackson Pollock.) Her countenance might have helped Hesse to disarm a public habituated to male artists, yet conditioned to being won over by a glad female face.[2]

Not only the fact of Hesse's gender but also the distasteful aspects of her work easily could have prompted public resistance to her endeavors. Much of Hesse's art charts the territory of the grotesque, with its at once abjectly

repellent and broadly comic dimensions. By its gaps and fissures, distention and protruberances, disproportion and exorbitancy, and the skinlike or fascialike latex and fiberglass materials that she favored, Hesse's morphology often seems to allude to the lower and inner strata of the body – orifices, organs, and sites of digestion, elimination, and reproduction. Her art tends to invoke a complex dialectic of repulsion and attraction, with the former often predominant. For example, the vaguely chandelierlike gestalt of *Connection* (1969, BB no. 93),[3] with its suspended, shimmering fiberglass surfaces, might not fully check the viewer's impulse to recoil from what, on closer inspection, emerges as viscously blobby tendrils reminiscent of entities glimpsed, for instance, in a poultry processing plant.

An ebullient and permissive atmosphere permeated the youth culture and much of the vanguard art community of New York during the 1960s. Yet this blithe era would not have meshed with the harsher dimensions of Hesse's own life experience as a woman, born a Jew in Germany in 1936, and bereft of all but, in the end, one member of her family. In the social context in which she found herself, the whimsicality of her art – its ridiculousness, silliness, and absurdity, to use her own terms – was potentially more a lure for the public than its gruesomely visceral aspect; and by hamming for the camera, perhaps Hesse aimed to deflect or cloak the more difficult elements of her work. Her tactic, not dissimilar to that of the dramatist Eugène Ionesco, was to go (as he put it) "right down to the very basis of the grotesque, the realm of caricature . . . to the point where the sources of the tragic lie. To create a theatre of violence – violently comic."[4]

In a photograph taken of Hesse in 1965, near the end of a year's sojourn in Germany (financed by a patron of her husband's, the sculptor Tom Doyle), she backs up against the wall with her arms reaching skyward in the global "Don't Shoot!" plea (BB, p. 18). Her diaries record that Hesse had been having ghastly nightmares about the camps for months and suffering inexplicable pains in her legs so severe at times that they kept her from walking. In this picture, however, she belies the implied urgency of her gesture by her relaxed body and soft smile. The man "shooting" was after all a friend, Manfred Tischer, and he was collaborating with her on the cover of the brochure for the first public showing of her new painted reliefs. Other photographs from this session show a poker-faced Hesse connecting more physically with her newly physicalized pictures and even animating their abstractly cartoonish somatic allusions. Seen with the outsized, bosomlike scheme of *2 in 1* (BB no. 7) propped on her lap and tucked beneath her chin, she might almost be a child mischievously sporting an enormous purple brassiere, while the protruberant bolt punctuating the mammary shapes, with a suggestively inflamed, tiny red ball at its tip, betrays her Dada-like gift for discovering the subliminally sexual or organic in the mechanical.[5]

In the photograph that Hesse and Tischer ultimately chose for the brochure's cover – one as studiedly frontal and symmetrical as the others – *Ringaround a Rosie* (BB no. 1) functioned almost as a prop in a formalized or schematic pantomime of childbirth, as Hesse's knees spread to accommodate what emerges in this context as the glyphic form of an infant.[6] For

that matter, the work's title refers in part to a friend, Rosalyn Goldman, who had lately become pregnant. The rugged ash-gray background to the simple, suggestively swelling forms and the fiery or blood-red border that defines them might equally remind one, however, of the old nursery rhyme's subtly dire chorus, "ashes, ashes, we all fall down," with its allusion to the piles of bodies immolated in British charnel houses during the plague. In other words, *Ringaround a Rosie* quietly, unexpectedly charms and repels. As Hesse liked to say, she was "always working with contradictions and contradictory forms which is my idea also in life, the whole absurdity of life, everything for me has always been opposites."[7]

For Hesse to have pressed her reliefs into service as photographic props is less surprising if one considers that her first, isolated departure from painting was a sort of theatrical prop made in the summer of 1962 for the erstwhile Ergo Suits Travelling Carnival organized in Woodstock, New York, in part by Allan Kaprow, pioneer of the participatory situational theater of the so-called happening. Hesse's contribution to a slated *Sculpture Dance* was "a tube of soft jersey and chicken wire, and it just sort of flopped around, a soft, kind of funny piece with something hanging off of it," in which two men performed in lieu of the artist herself.[8]

The intersection of sculptural and performance practices broached by the historic avant-garde would be widely recharted in the United States during the 1960s by artists as diverse as Yayoi Kusama, Robert Morris, Bruce Naumann, Claes and Pat Oldenburg, and Robert Rauschenberg. Within the youth and countercultures burgeoning at that time, a new ideal of an "effervescent" and "intrepid" or "unruly, festively promiscuous, candid, and confident" body had taken shape.[9] In the would-be outrageous scripts framed by the happenings' authors, however, women were often relegated to fundamentally conventional, erotic roles and to domestic spheres and materials. For female practitioners, new subject positions and greater freedoms often beckoned instead from the more female-identified field of modern dance and choreography, where Yvonne Rainer, a figure admired by Hesse and others, emerged as a leading light during the 1960s. (Rauschenberg and Morris danced with Rainer, as did Morris's former wife, Simone Forti, Carl Andre's then lover, the sculptor Rosemarie Castoro, and Julie Judd, wife of Donald.) Rainer liked to toy with, to probe, vacate, or invert received sexual roles. In a duet from *Terrain* (1963), for instance, she and Trisha Brown spoofed the stylized, formulaic eroticism of both Classical ballet and burlesque bump-and-grind routines by intermixing the two while naughtily clad in black Hollywood-style push-up bras and net stockings.

Hesse separated herself from many of her peers by neither venturing to dance nor joining in the giddy melee of the happening scene, and she did not, in any way, involve her nude body in her work. Yet, unlike some other of her more reticent contemporaries and associates, such as Donald Judd and Andre, she had an ideal of the artist as one whose "art and his statements and his person are so equivalent" that "[h]e and his work are the same," as she described it; an ideal she recognized in the examples of Claes Oldenburg and Andy Warhol. With Rainer, Marcel Duchamp, and Ionesco,

FIGURE 10.1

Hermann Landshoff, *Eva Hesse with a Sleeve Sculpture* (photographed in her Bowery studio in New York), c. 1969. [photograph: © Estate of Eva Hesse; courtesy of Robert Miller Gallery, New York]

of whom she also spoke admiringly, she felt that she shared her sense of "total absurdity."[10] Together, this proclivity for the absurd and this ideal of the identity of artist and art would be epitomized by the series of photographs Hesse posed for with her work, especially those produced by Hermann Landshoff during a session in her Bowery studio around 1969 (Figs. 10.1, 10.3, 10.4, and 10.5). Although Landshoff's middling talents as a photographer have kept him shrouded in some obscurity, his images of Hesse vividly amplify her own vision and cast her sculptures in a revealing light, almost as so many props for a pantomimic theater of the absurd.

FIGURE 10.2

Henry Groskinsky, *Eva Hesse behind a Rope Sculpture.* (published in *Life Magazine*, February 27, 1970) [photograph: Henry Groskinsky, *Life Magazine*, © Time Inc.]

Throughout the one extensive interview that Hesse gave during her lifetime (in 1970, not long before she died), she harped on this affinity for the absurd. She framed her own blighted life story – the escape from the Nazis as a toddler; the suicidal mother; the loathed stepmother, also named Eva Hesse, who had been treated for a brain tumor precisely one year prior to the sculptor's treatment for the same disorder – as paradigmatic of absurdist drama and mentioned her sense of connection to Ionesco and to Samuel Beckett, in particular. Although the interest of Hesse and other artists in

FIGURE 10.3

Hermann Landshoff, *Eva Hesse with a Rope Sculpture* (photographed in her Bowery studio in New York), c. 1969. [photograph: © Estate of Eva Hesse; courtesy of Robert Miller Gallery, New York]

what is generally called the theater of the absurd has yet to be investigated in depth, that tragic farce *Waiting for Godot* (the first American performance of which occurred in 1956) is known to have deeply affected Pollock; and, within Hesse's own generation, Beckett notably impressed Frank Stella, Robert Smithson, and Vito Acconci, among others.

On one level, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* may be read as a meditation on the hope for salvation through the agency of grace, where that hope emerges as a more or less delusory evasion of the harsh realities of the human condition.[11] "These people are there and they are doing nothing and yet they go on living," Hesse remarked, adding portentously, "[t]hey

FIGURE 10.4

Hermann Landshoff, *Eva Hesse with* Several *(1965)* (photographed in her Bowery studio in New York), c. 1969. [photograph: © Estate of Eva Hesse; courtesy of Robert Miller Gallery, New York]

go on waiting and pushing and they keep saying it and doing nothing. And it really is a key – the key to understanding me. . . . Only a few understand and could see that my humor comes from there, my whole approach."[12] As Hesse pointed out, her absurdism emerged in her penchant for extreme contradiction, such as in the pronounced dichotomy between the interior and exterior aspects of the boxlike *Accession* works of 1967 and 1968 (BB nos. 57, 58, 74, and 75), where the interiors were randomly hairy looking and extravagantly textured, and the exteriors were plainly, rigidly, and mechanically ordered. This typically Hesse-ian intermixture of the organic and the mechanical exemplifies what has been

FIGURE 10.5

Hermann Landshoff, *Eva Hesse with* Ingeminate *(1965)* (photographed in her Bowery studio in New York), c. 1969. [photograph: © Estate of Eva Hesse; courtesy of Robert Miller Gallery, New York]

called, with reference to Mikhail Bakhtin, "the grotesque of hybridization, the intense interfusion of incompatibles which was such anathema to classical reason."[13]

Beckett's sometimes bawdy gallows humor, his dogged repetitiveness, and his universe of cycles, where there is practically "nothing to be done," also find echoes in Hesse's art and in her penchant for circularity, for repetition, and for Sisyphean labors. For instance, plastic or rubber tubing had to be looped by hand through each of the tens of thousands of holes that had been punched in the sides of the *Accession* boxes. Asked to explain why she liked repeating forms, Hesse responded: "Because it exaggerates. . . . It's not just an esthetic choice. If something is absurd, it's much more exagger-

ated, more absurd, if it's repeated."[14] Endless, mindless repetition also can be associated with certain forms of domestic labor and crafts; and the production of the *Accession* boxes might equally evoke an oddly excessive three-dimensional rug-knotting project, especially if one recalls the shag carpets so popular at the time. Hesse's use of obsessive repetition thus could be seen as transmitting the subtly transgressive signals of a woman moving beyond the usual bounds, outside rational control.

Hesse's vision of an art that aspired to a condition of "non forms, non shapes non planned" or "non art . . . non, nothing, everything, but of another kind, vision, sort,"[15] and her ability to find the bizarre in the banal also helped to align her with Ionesco and Beckett, as did the ambiguously comic status of her work. When *Waiting for Godot* premiered in the United States, it was first billed as "the laugh hit of two continents" and, as such, predictably disappointed its audience. Yet Beckett's play does have humorous elements as does, more patently, a work such as Ionesco's *Bald Soprano*. "I have never been able to understand the difference that is made between the comic and the tragic," Ionesco mused. "As the comic is the intuition of the absurd, it seems to me more conducive to despair than the tragic. . . . To become conscious of what is horrifying and to laugh at it is to become master of that which is horrifying. . . . Laughter alone does not respect any taboo . . . the comic alone is capable of giving us the strength to bear the tragedy of existence."[16] Ionesco claimed the Marx Brothers as no less an influence than the Surrealists, and that Hesse's project, too, has its slapstick element is one of the interesting insights that emerges from the photographic record.

When Landshoff set out to photograph Hesse, he probably had no specific comedic or literary allusions in mind. The brother of her friend Ruth Vollmer and a fellow German Jewish refugee, Landshoff had been trying since the 1940s to make a career as a fashion photographer in New York, but he had to settle instead for a modest living in commercial tabletop photography. What he perhaps aimed for in his session with Hesse was to prove, if only to his own satisfaction, that he could keep pace with the vivid yet cleanly stylized fashion photography then being developed by such ambitious contemporaries as Richard Avedon, Irving Penn, and Francesco Scavullo.[17] With the effervescent Hesse as a model and her weird sculptures and ingeniously humble materials for props, Landshoff took his turn at what had become – at least since Man Ray had worked for Paul Poiret during the 1920s – at once a stock type of commercial photograph and a device for fashion photographers to assimilate their own endeavors and those of the couturier to the work of the avant-garde artist. By its invitations to audience participation, much of the art of the 1960s, in particular, lent itself to this formula – for instance, Claes Oldenburg's *Bedroom Ensemble* or Jean Tinguely's kinetic sculptures, which showed up in clothing layouts in *Harper's Bazaar*, Landshoff's former employer.

Stylish as she was, Hesse surely knew the seductions of the high-fashion magazines of her day, and she seemingly lent herself to what I surmise to be Landshoff's aims, looking gleeful all the while. It evidently suited her pur-

pose to stress the playfulness of her sculpture; and the session allowed her also to improvise some guidelines to the subtly complex terms of the usage of her art (albeit a guide that no responsible art institution could ever let its patrons follow). Hesse could not help but notice that "every time I've been in a place where I've seen my work there were hands on it," and she found this acceptable, "within reason."[18] The pronounced tactility of her surfaces often invites – or simultaneously repels and invites – touch, although their relative fragility forbids rough handling, such as the treatment to which the second version of *Accession* succumbed in 1968 from viewers, perhaps anticipating some primal experience, who were bent on climbing into the box.[19]

Like some other artists of her time who meant to undermine the elitist decorum of the protocol of art display and spectatorship, Hesse had some trouble establishing desirable limits for the handling of her art, and the session with Landshoff offered a way to suggest such limits. Hesse knew well that her sculptures were fragile. At times, they exasperated her by collapsing in her studio, and some collectors, worrying aloud about their impermanence, had hesitated to buy them. In her diaries, Hesse confessed to ambivalent feelings; she didn't mean for her sculptures to be briefly ephemeral – in that sense, they never were like theatrical props – but, at the same time, she wasn't sure that she cared if they endured very long. At a moment when her own mortality had become prematurely and brutally undeniable, she could coolly state that "life doesn't last, art doesn't last, it doesn't matter." But then she hedged: "I feel if I make something I would like a photograph – then I could give it away or sell it. But I would like some record."[20]

Hesse did and did not want to see her art treated with some offhandedness; seemingly, she hoped that the very means and terms of the objects, their evident malleability and vulnerability, might elicit an appropriate, gently exploratory approach. Hers is often an art that begs to be quietly fingered; art with soft, dangling, loose, and scattered components that tend to refuse a definitive form and flirt with the *informe*; art that effectively confers on whoever chances to install it the status of being the artist's close collaborator. The exceptional permeability of the borders of Hesse's corpus might be seen as analogizing the relative permeability of the feminine body or, in any case, as broaching an alternate, comparatively antiauthoritarian, antiterritorial model of sculptural practice. Further, with her numerous so-called sleeve sculptures, one of which she intended as a multiple of 100, Hesse made art that was actually meant to be molded around the arms of viewers, who perforce would sacrifice their spectatorial detachment. Landshoff photographed her in the most elaborate of these works, where the blood pressure cufflike form of the sleeve expands to something like an outsized Chinese finger-torture trick or an abbreviated straitjacket (see Fig. 10.1). With her body draped oddly sideways and backward over an armchair, her legs and feet riding stiff and high off the floor, and a wild look in her eyes, Hesse teasingly performed for Landshoff's lens the role of the hysteric – the sick woman who says pathetically, obsessively, and outlandishly

with her body what she cannot say with her voice, and so (as some feminists have lately appreciated) wreaks havoc with the strictures and niceties of feminine deportment.

Elsewhere I argue that works such as the *Accession* boxes analogize the female body as it is has been discursively constructed as a sirenlike figure, alluring and entrapping, with a Pandora's boxlike "snatch."[21] A parallel case is the suspended rope sculptures of 1969 and 1970 (BB nos. 96 and 101), where an Arachne-like Hesse spun crazed webs that obliquely or slyly evoke a misogynist bromide. Her strategy here may be compared with that later formulated by the radical French feminist, Hélène Cixous, who observes: "If woman has always functioned 'within' the discourse of man, . . . it is time for her to dislocate this 'within,' to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of."[22]

Yet another metaphor of the feminine that Hesse might be seen as having reclaimed is that of the proverbial "tie that binds" or "apron strings," emblematic of the umbilical cord. The cords that recur in her work often assume a severed, limp, dangling form, also intriguingly suggestive of a fuse, for example, the model for *Accretion* of 1968 (BB no. 77), with its stacked, cardboard tubes not unlike dynamite sticks, or the Roman candle-like test units for *Repetition 19, II* of 1967–8 (BB nos. 63 and 64). This image suited Hesse by virtue of its contradictions – a fuse is a device for exploding, yet *to fuse* means to unite, and, at times, her sculptures' fuselike elements extend toward viewers as if in invitation to take hold. "I was always aware that I should take order versus chaos, stringy versus mass, huge versus small," explained Hesse, "and I would try to find the most absurd opposites or extreme opposites . . . I was always aware of their absurdity and also their formal contradictions."[23]

In February 1970, *Life Magazine* featured "Fling, Dribble and Dip," a report on the legacy of Pollock among a generation bent on extending his radical methods into even more startling dimensions, arenas, and materials; for the first and last time in her life, Hesse became a presence for a mass audience. She went on record briefly then, noting that "[c]haos can be structured as non-chaos. That we know from Jackson Pollock." For the photographer Henry Groskinsky's benefit, she posed gripping and peeking out from behind one of her giant snarled nets, like a treacherous, overgrown spider scouting her prey[24] (Fig. 10.2). Slightly earlier, Landshoff had shot her lying supine and rigid on a chaise beneath some of the raw materials for this piece (see Fig. 10.3). Here, the ropes piled over her body suggest less bondage and discipline play or the villainous trussing of the damsel to the railroad tie than a gargantuan serving of spaghetti with the hapless Hesse herself as either the dish (if not an added comestible) or a mass of exposed, proliferating viscera. (For that matter, the chaise in question is of the type conventionally used by the psychoanalyst to whom one "spills one's guts," in the vernacular.)

In a loosely Oldenburgian and carnivalesque way, gigantism and grotesque

suggestions of eating and digestion are rife in Hesse's sculptures; by posing with them for the photographer, she could point up the ambiguities and absurdities of their scale, which appeared all the more extreme relative to her own small stature. By the way she chose to pose next to *Several* of 1965, Hesse forced a contradiction between the profuse phallicism of the work, with its dangling cluster of elongated sausage shapes, and the pure innocence of its author, enveloped here in a voluminous, white, chadorlike veil, her features carefully composed in an expression of Madonna-like beatitude (see Figure 10.4). Posing in a droll hat with the two fat sausages of *Ingeminate* of 1965 in her outstretched arms and the long rope linking them looped inexplicably around her neck, Hesse invoked a type of cheerfully sexy foodmonger (see Fig. 10.5). Several years later, Linda Nochlin would famously spoof this erotic convention when she answered a nineteenth-century nude apple saleswoman with her own farcical, nude banana salesman.[25] Hesse's conceit, however, was perhaps even more subtly seditious because her salesgirl doubles as a happy man-huntress flaunting her penile trophies.

The daft scenarios Hesse improvised for the camera seem subdued in comparison to some of the feminist high jinks that would soon follow – for instance, Lynda Benglis's notorious publicity photograph of 1974, in which the notion of appropriating the phallus took a far more literal turn as she vamped in the nude with a double dildo[26] – yet it bears underlining that, during the quarter century since her death, Hesse's example has proved to be the leading point of reference among her successors in the development of a female authorial presence in the arena of sculpture (which is not to imply that her influence has ever been restricted to that sphere). Even the more senior Louise Bourgeois might have been affected by Hesse. There is the age-old case of the breast as metonym of the feminine or, more particularly, the image of an unnatural proliferation of breasts; in Surrealism, the multibreasted object emerged as a sexual fetish or toy, as in Hans Bellmer's cornucopic plaster *Top* (a.k.a. *Diana of Ephesus*).[27] In *Addendum* of 1967, Hesse, in contrast, neatly lined up a row of seventeen desensualized gray hemispheres with dark cords trailing from their centers that are loosely reminiscent of streams of insidiously blackened milk (BB no. 52). In the related case of *Ishtar* of 1965 (BB no. 21), where twenty gray mounds are paired and superposed, the dangling gray strings overlapping each other also distantly strangely evoke sober sets of strippers' tassels.[28] For her part, Bourgeois would play out this conceit in 1970, posing in a long, multibreasted bib of latex, whose use as a sculptural medium suited to wearable art was pioneered by Hesse.[29]

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus declares that "[a]ll existence for a man turned away from the eternal is but a vast mime under the mask of the absurd. Creation is the *great* mime."[30] As posed photographs of Hesse help to indicate, she recognized something of herself in certain standard protagonists of the absurd – in the downtrodden rebel or the dogged, oblivious fool who was joyful only in the meaningless act of creation or miming – but she significantly compounded her own acts of mimickry through her protofeminist gestures. As Luce Irigaray would later argue:

> To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself . . . to "ideas" about herself that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make "visible," by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. It also means "to unveil" the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply resorbed in this function. *They also remain elsewhere.*[31]

The absurdist theater's carnivalesque mixture of tragedy and farce provided Hesse with a model for a complexly layered mime all her own, for effects at once ludicrous and pathetic, effects with subtly feminist valences. Historically, the arenas of the grotesque and the carnivalesque have generally been hostile ones for women, who often find themselves demonized and caricatured, for instance, as hags or as grossly pregnant. But Hesse proved what feminist literary and social theorists have since underlined – that the carnivalesque can also function as a site of resistance or "insurgency."[32] "It is no accident, then, that transgressions and the attempt to control them obsessively return to somatic symbols," Peter Stallybrass and Allon White observe, "for these are ultimate elements of social classification itself."[33] For a female artist, furthermore, the grotesque allows circumvention of the dominant, ingratiatingly decorative, feminine ideal. Hesse's diaries reveal that in her personal life, she deeply felt the pressures to conform to that ideal; yet in her studio, where she felt always most integrated and confident, it would never impinge.

Hesse cherished an ideal of a perfect identity between the self and the work of art, more or less as Barthes longed for a fit between the photographic portrait and his "profound" self. Whereas Barthes perceived his self to be characteristically "light, divided, dispersed; like a bottle-imp . . . giggling in my jar," he knew that photographic images were ineluctably "heavy, motionless, stubborn."[34] Hesse probably had no less diverse or complex a self than Barthes; and her divided self had to negotiate a plethora of constricting roles imposed specifically on account of her gender, roles that too often threatened to compromise the leading part that she meant to play – and did improbably manage to play – as a professional artist. "A woman is sidetracked by all her feminine roles," Hesse moaned, "from menstrual periods to cleaning house to remaining pretty and 'young' and having babies."[35] Unlike Barthes, however, Hesse thought to milk the artifice entailed in the act of posing because she knew that, in this photograph-hungry culture, few are destined to be represented by a single image, in any case. Enacting what nowadays might be called a "masquerade" (in view of the discourse surrounding the heavily exposed work of Cindy Sherman), Hesse deployed her body in some degree of disguise or travesty as one prop among others, thereby hyperbolizing and complicating a tropology of the feminine.

Mary Russo points out that "[d]eliberately assumed and foregrounded, femininity as mask, for a man [drag, in other words], is a take-it-or-leave-

it proposition; for a woman, a similar flaunting of the feminine is a take-it-*and*-leave it *possibility*. To put on femininity with a vengeance suggests the power of taking it off."[36] The photographic record that Hesse contrived to leave illuminates not only, importantly, the absurdist dynamics of her sculptural achievement – its deft interfusion of the appalling and the appealing – but also her ingenuity in reforming while performing some of the very roles she resisted through a mischievously twisted pantomime of the feminine.

NOTES

1. All quotations from Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*: trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), pp. 10–12.
2. On smiling among adults (from a popular source): "There is something strangely threatening to a man about a woman who isn't smiling. A woman who isn't smiling isn't compliant; she's not under his control. 'There's a high expectation that women are to smile,' says Marianne LaFrance, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at Boston College and an expert in nonverbal communication. 'It's a standard power play – who gets to tell whom what to do with her body. Men are used to seeing smiles directed at them from women. . . . The theory developed from work with primates is that smiling is an appeasement gesture, a way of saying, 'I'm no threat to you, you don't have to worry about me. . . . [Further, smiling is] 'low power' behavior—something that people who aren't holding all the cards do when dealing with the people who are." Quoted in Lynn Darling, "Who's Smiling Now . . . (And How)," *Harper's Bazaar*, no. 3416 (July 1996): p. 97.
3. Sculptures mentioned in this chapter but not illustrated are identified by the numbers accorded to them in the catalogue raisonné by Bill Barrette (henceforth BB), *Eva Hesse: Sculpture* (New York: Timken, 1989).
4. Quoted in Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Garden City: Doubleday [Anchor], 1961), p. 91.
5. A transparency of this photograph is in the archives of the Robert Miller Gallery, New York City. Exorbitant fees prevented the reproduction of the Tischer photographs in this volume.
6. See Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), p. 37.
7. From a 1969 interview with Hesse by Cindy Nemser, available on microfilm at the Archives of American Art, reel 1475 (henceforth AAA); frame no. 67 (i.e., AAA no. 67). The published version of this passage differs only slightly; see Nemser, *Art Talk: Conversations with Fifteen Women Artists* (New York: HarperCollins [Icon], 1995), p. 182.
8. Tom Doyle, quoted in Lippard, *Eva Hesse*, p. 21.
9. Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 233, 232.
10. AAA nos. 20, 66; also, see Nemser, *Art Talk*, pp. 196, 179–80.
11. Esslin, *Theatre of the Absurd*, pp. 22 and 26.
12. AAA no. 111. (Hesse also mentioned Beckett earlier in the interview, AAA no. 23.)
13. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 47–48.
14. AAA no. 26; also, see Nemser, *Art Talk*, p. 183.
15. Lippard, *Eva Hesse*, p. 165.
16. Esslin, *Theatre of the Absurd*, p. 133.
17. Regarding Avedon's debt to Landshoff's work for *Junior Bazaar* in the 1940s, with its contrived spontaneity, see Martin Harrison, *Appearances: Fashion Photography Since 1945* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), p. 34. (For background information about Landshoff, I am much indebted to Dorothy and Leo Rabkin.)

18. AAA nos. 71, 29; also, see Nemser, *Art Talk*, p. 184.
19. The work was refabricated by the spring of 1969. Because the public has persisted in fondling and removing the cords of the remade work – occasionally even in lowering children inside – the Detroit Institute of Arts has recently deemed it necessary to box Hesse's box in a plexiglass case, according to Peter Barnett, a curator at the museum (personal conversation).
20. AAA nos. 50, 51; also, see Nemser, *Art Talk*, p. 190.
21. See Anna C. Chave, "Eva Hesse: A 'Girl Being a Sculpture,'" in *Eva Hesse: A Retrospective*, ed. Helen Cooper (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 110–12, in which I point out that Pandora has the same status in Greek mythology, as the first woman, that Eve or Eva has in the Biblical tradition.
22. Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," in *New French Feminisms*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), p. 257. (The text in question was written in 1975, and revised and first printed in an English translation in 1976.) Such tactics also loosely evoke the practice among some marginalized populations, such as young African Americans or homosexual men, of seizing terms that have been used to brand them, such as *nigger* or *queer*, and inverting them into terms of ironic endearment or affirmation.
23. AAA no. 23 (ellipsis in the original); also, see Nemser, *Art Talk*, p. 182.
24. "Fling, Dribble and Dip," *Life Magazine*, 68, no. 7 (February 27, 1970): p. 66.
25. Linda Nochlin, "Eroticism and Female Imagery in Nineteenth-Century Art (1972)," *Women, Art, and Power* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 138 (Fig. 2), 142 (Fig. 4).
26. The Benglis photograph was published in *Artforum*, 13, no. 3 (November 1974): p. 4.
27. For a reproduction, see Peter Webb with Robert Short, *Hans Bellmer* (London: Quartet Books, 1985), p. 159 (pl. 38).
28. Ishtar is a Semitic goddess of fertility and war, a variant on the Roman Diana of Ephesus.
29. For a reproduction, see Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s. History and Impact* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), p. 189.
30. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Random House, Vintage International, 1991), p. 94.
31. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 76. (Emphasis in the original.)
32. Mary Russo, "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory," in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 218.
33. Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p. 26.
34. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 12.
35. Eva Hesse, letter to Ethelyn Honig, 1965, cited in Lippard, *Eva Hesse*, p. 205.
36. Russo, "Female Grotesques," p. 224. (Emphasis in the original.)