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Themes of the liminal, the absurd and the unstable in the sculpture of Eva Hesse

by

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Research submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

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Acknowledgements

I dedicate this degree to Luca and Mikey, my beloved children, who encouraged and supported me throughout. When the world turns upside down, mountains can be moved. This work is my gift to you.

My friend, Ghazala Khan, with whom I spent long hours in deep discussion and navigating the liminal in search of new directions; and supervisor, Jeremy Wafer, who encouraged me to explore and not to limit myself to preconceived ideas and expectations.

Declaration

I, Antoinette Louise Sears, declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

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Introduction

The creative component of the research project explores, through the medium of sculpture, the notion of the liminal, with a particular focus on themes of the absurd and the unstable as characteristics of liminality. These themes may be useful for investigating and providing a valuable source for critical assessment, so as to allow for the opening of and extending of debates on reading and thinking about art regarded as 'in-between' the poles of a binary opposition. Broadly, it seeks to explore the historical trajectory of the 1960s artist Eva Hesse in relation to these themes, and how it resonates with my own sculpture-making and development. The aim of the written research is, therefore, through engaging with a close critical and theoretically informed reading of selected examples of Hesse's work, to identify themes and approaches which may inform and advance the understanding of my own work produced in the context of this study. Connections will be drawn to the way in which these themes facilitate a favourable space in which the making of art flourishes. As far as viewers are concerned, such work may encourage the viewer to be an active participant in a dimension of human experience potentially not yet encountered, thereby liberating viewers' fixed and rigid perceptual constructs. Entering into a discussion of the themes of liminality, the absurd and unstable, serves this aim.

My work will be documented by means of a catalogue and an exhibition of sculpture, including a theoretical component, in which a critical evaluation will be provided as it relates to the sculpture and artistic practice of Eva Hesse, as well as my own, inspired by the processes of Hesse. As a way of organising a discussion of Hesse's art, as well as my own work, I will identify three stages of development, with the middle stage being liminality, in order to unravel the nature of the absurd and unstable. As the notions in question are

characterised by concepts outside of dominant art language, applying these notions, by way of the three stages of development, may result in a new perceptual experience, bringing new knowledge for increased possibilities of reading and understanding of Hesse's oeuvre (Hesse, Nixon and Nemser; Jackson) , and consequently my own processes of sculpture-making.

Reflecting on Eva Hesse in the 1960s, Lippard writes, "the times were chaotic and so were our lives. We have each invented our own history, and they don't always mesh; but such messy compost is the source of all versions of the past" (*Six Years* vii). In this milieu, existing authoritative structures were confronted and challenged, and artists searched for ways to find "…what art was and what art could do" (xv), and worked from individual perspectives to escape "cultural confinement"[1] (vii). In this climate, artists endeavoured to discover new meaning in their art for and by themselves by retreating from the dominant narrative of High Modernism (Greenberg, *The collected essays volume 3*; Battcock), and to cross boundaries that determined art's ontologies for themselves in the present, where, for example, artists cast their focus to the latest developments and inventions in materials for the manufacturing industry or innovations in technology (Lippard, *Six Years* vii, xi).

Industrial and technological innovations in art from about 1965 onwards relates to a shift between the fields of sculpture and painting, as well as in the traditional art materials and industrial materials used to make artworks. This shift was evident in conceptual and process artists re-addressing the boundary between art and non-art; painting and sculpture; themes of stability and instability; and order and chaos. This took place through a methodological intervention in media, focusing on exploring non-traditional materials and non-gallery spaces[2] to discover new processes for making art "…in which the idea is

[1] Sol LeWitt wrote in 1969: "conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach … illogical judgements lead to new experience" (Lippard, *Six Years* vii).
[2] Eva Hesse participated in a show, *9 in a Warehouse*, 1966, which was hosted, as the title suggests, in a warehouse, and not a gallery.

paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or 'dematerialized' [sic]" (Lippard, *Six Years* vii).

Eva Hesse was a key figure who participated in this shift of sculptural and material practice,[3] where the artist was not only methodological when it came to ontological questions about art's categorical imperatives, but also strove to expand then-dominant Minimalism's aesthetic approach of "anti-aesthetic, anti-expressive and anti-subjective" (Best 1). The core focus of this research is to investigate Eva Hesse's shift in practice at the time of her most productive output (1965-1970), where she explores 'nothingness' and absurdity with each new sculpture that she produced.[4] Central to this search was to find "…something else, answer some question, or find some new form or thought" (Hesse et al. 10), where, she recounts, "I remember I wanted to get to non-art, non-connotative, non-anthropomorphic, non-geometric, non, nothing, everything, but of another kind, vision, sort, from a total other reference point" (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 165).

Through engaging with selected examples of Eva Hesse's work, I will argue that the shift of sculptural practice located certain works of Eva Hesse in a space that may usefully be termed the liminal, based upon the above two statements that concern the notions of 'nothing', absurdity, and the unstable, in the context of liminality.

Much has been written about Eva Hesse and her work since its making, somewhat overemphasising her psycho-biography over the last two to three decades (Best; Corby; Wagner; Chave cited in Cooper; Fer cited in Hesse et al.), where, to understand the work, the traumatic life circumstances of the artist have been used to 'decode' its potential meaning. It

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[3] Hesse theorist Joanna Greenhill's (Pollock and Corby) perception of Hesse's work during the 1970s: "everything in Eva Hesse's work was different from what I had experienced before… it revealed a new space in sculpture […] The works in this exhibition were made of materials and involved processes which were not previously part of the language of sculpture" (138).

[4] Eva Hesse died on 29 May 1970, age 34, from a second surgical procedure on her brain.

may be argued that in an attempt to interpret work that is (made) difficult to narrativise, a "fallacy of intentionality" (Palermo, "Introduction: intention and interpretation" 2) has been imposed on the artist in the hermeneutic of her work.

The concept of liminality helps to assess "…the relation between critical periods in the life history and the learning process…" (Van Gennep xiv), and how paradigms that no longer relate to the past facilitate transition and resultant change. As the research will show, the majority of critical theorists seem to have overlooked Hesse's own statements, in which she focuses on the absurd and what she referred to as 'non' and 'nothing' (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 165). These are primarily characteristics of liminality, which Horváth indicates to be the irresolute realm of the absurd, senseless and fallacious – where 'unity' is 'destroyed' (Horváth 43). The research set out to establish a connection between the liminal, the unstable, 'nothing' and the absurd as it relates Hesse's work.

The research is approached with the following important questions in mind: in what way do psychoanalytic interpretations and assumptions based upon Hesse's biography (Corby; Wagner) limit the potential of Hesse's work, and to what extent can the liminal provide greater interpretive insight into it?

As mentioned previously, the current study suggests that psychological assessments are insufficient to advance insight into Hesse's work. Psychoanalysis does little to increase our understanding of an individual's rites of passage, or events of transformation, in the way Arnold Van Gennep (xvi-xviii) has observed in human behaviour, where individuals, even societies, develop and change through rites of passage. It will be argued that, in order to develop a working hypothesis, the evolution and transitions in Eva Hesse's work, as well as my own sculpture, will be read through the liminal, as characterised by the breaking of established cultural, scientific, social and other boundaries, and the questioning of authoritative stances, as well as that which is taken-for-granted as being 'real' and true

(Thomassen 2, 3). According to Bjorn Thomassen, liminality, as a stage of transition in which limited thinking and perceptions are suspended, facilitates "…novelty and imagination, construction and destruction" (1). This transformative concept lends itself well to contemplating Eva Hesse's work as that of going through a rite of passage towards the transformation of existing images, into completely new work.

In order to probe and assess the way in which this is achieved, and whether or not the proposed notion of the liminal reveals itself, and how it is operant in Eva Hesse's work as well as in my own work, theories will be explored by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep *The rites of passage*, the originator of the term, and Victor Turner *The forest of symbols*, which revived Van Gennep's research. These authors allowed for an opening of and extending of debates on viewing socio-economic, cultural and individual experiences in the work of Bjorn Thomassen in *Liminality and the modern: Living through the in-between* (2014) and Ágnes Horváth in *Modernism and charisma* (2013). These authors applied Van Gennep's research on liminality to assess socio-economic and cultural concerns of contemporary 21st century society. Reference to post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha, writing on liminality in *The location of culture*, will be limited to Bhabha's distinction between liminality and marginality.[5]

The research will be confined to the pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal condition concerning the themes of the absurd and unstable, pertaining to the work and statements of Eva Hesse. However, the scope of the research does not include Hesse in relation to liminality as it pertains to Modernism or Minimalism, nor the liminal conditions of contemporary society, culture and economics, as these liminal conditions are complex, and lie beyond the current scope.

[5] Discussed in Chapter 2.

The artworks selected for discussion are confined to *Metronomic Irregularity II* (see fig.1), *Right After* (see fig. 6) and *Untitled, Rope Piece* (see fig. 25) in order to contextualise the transitional nature of work from 1966 to early 1970. Analysis of these works will explore whether the proposed notions of the liminal, absurdity and instability may be a valuable way to approach the interpretation of Hesse's work.

As a way of organising a discussion of Hesse's work, I will identify the three stages of Arnold van Gennep's (11) tripartite model of rites of passage, namely: 'The Departure' (separation from the known paradigm), 'The Threshold or Liminal' (transitional stage) and 'The Resolution' (incorporation and regeneration).

To explore the work of Hesse, Chapter 1 explores relevant aspects of Modernism and introduces liminality, while Chapter 2 covers *The Departure* and *The Liminal*; Chapter 3 deals with my own work, and documents by way of photographic evidence the journey undertaken, culminating in an exhibition at The Point of Order at Wits University. Chapter 4 discusses *The Resolution*, with respect both to my work and that of Eva Hesse, and concludes the outcome of the artworks discussed as being transitional in nature.

Chapter 1 Modernism and Liminality

A brief discussion will locate Hesse's departure from binary divisions in the time of Modernism's decline, in relation to Minimalist, conceptual and process artists, while also addressing areas previously overlooked, thought of as nonsensical, or otherwise regarded as non-art (Jackson; Hogarth; Lippard, *Six Years*; Thomassen).

Modernist aesthetics' exclusion of contradictions and ambivalence caused the opening up of a space that may be regarded as liminal, due to artists addressing and challenging notions of what art is, and consequently crossing boundaries into areas not regarded to be art,

and ones that are, as a consequence, not regarded as valuable. The notion of liminality will be introduced and defined as it relates to instability, the absurd and the conceptualisation of 'nothing', including problems with terminology encountered by theorists, such as confusing margins with threshold spaces (Van Gennep; Turner; Lippard, *Six Years*; Thomassen; Horváth; Jackson; Bhabha)

Chapter 2 The Departure

The discussion will focus on Eva Hesse's response to mainstream discourses, such as absurdity, and the notion of 'nothing' within the dominant culture of the 1960s, specifically addressing the piece, *Metronomic Irregularity II* (see fig. 1). The investigation will briefly discuss the differences between Minimalism and Hesse's work, and her departure from the dominant aesthetics of the time (Lippard, "Eccentric abstraction"; Lippard, *Eva Hesse*; Nemser interview, Hesse et al.; Best; Rothkopf cited in Sussman and Hesse; Meyer cited in Sussman and Hesse). The artist's emphasis on the absurdity of combining contrasting visual elements, such as soft and hard, or ordered and chaotic, as early critics observed (Lippard, *Eva Hesse*), will be examined. The notorious "blank spaces" and 'nothing' spaces contrasted with weight (Rothkopf cited in Sussman and Hesse; Fer; Fer cited in Hesse et al.) will be reflected upon in order to introduce the departure point as it relates to the rite of passage. These critical theories, as well as interviews with Hesse herself (interview with Nemser cited in Hesse et al.), will be interrogated in relation to critical theories on Hesse after 2000 (Best; Rothkopf cited in Sussman and Hesse; Meyer cited in Sussman and Hesse).

The departure from dominant aesthetics will be addressed to account for the situation that is considered 'either this or that', in contrast to the concept of 'neither this nor that'; it is also important to locate this space in relation to Hesse's work and what its function may be in the artist's work (Jackson; Lippard, *Eva Hesse*; Turner; Rothkopf cited in Sussman and

Hesse; Thomassen; Meyer cited in Sussman and Hesse; Best; Nemser cited in Hesse et al.; Horváth; Van Gennep). The distinction between the concepts of marginality and liminality (Bhabha; Thomassen; Turner; Van Gennep) will also be included.

Chapter 2 The Limimal

The major work, *Right After* (see fig. 6), will be closely examined, applying the themes of the notion of 'nothing', where a gap appears in its focus on neither painting nor sculpture that locates this work in an extra-ordinary territory. (Meyer cited in Sussman and Hesse; Horváth; Godfrey cited in Sussman and Wasserman; Jackson; Lippard, *Eva Hesse*; Fer cited in in Sussman and Hesse). The extremes she experienced and her ability to relate these to the notions of absurdity and 'nothing' were part of Hesse's life experience, as indicated in her diaries, and interview with Cindy Nemser (Hesse et al.; Turner; Horváth; Thomassen). Included will be critical reviews relating the concept of 'nothing' to a blank space (Fer cited in Hesse et al.), and critics' acknowledgment of change and transformation of her later work during 1969 and 1970 (Meyer cited in Sussman and Hesse; Fer cited in Hesse et al.; Lippard, *Eva Hesse*).

It will be argued that liminality can help to gain insight into Hesse's statements of intent towards making what she called 'non, nothing' as art (Thomassen; Horváth), where borders are crossed into a realm that is allegedly invisible and where the transformation of one material into another brings about something completely other (but not its opposite) (Horváth; Meyer cited in Sussman and Hesse). As the concept of 'nothing', an extreme form of absurdity, is perceived as potentially chaotic for its material instability that threatens meaning and reason, the discussion will consider value that is added by the 'nothing'; by the presence of a 'second reality' (Horváth 81, 82) that emerges as a result of unresolved

contradictions and breaking expectations (Horváth; Pollock and Corby), which is seemingly evident in Hesse's work after 1966.

Several possibilities are discussed as to what is made visible in the in-between realm that the piece *Right After* (see fig. 6) presents, and the critical frameworks of Ágnes Horváth. The following critical theorists will be considered in this regard: Briony Fer (cited in Sussman and Hesse; Hesse et al.), Griselda Pollock (Pollock and Corby), James Meyer (cited in Sussman and Hesse) and the artist's 1970 interview with Cindy Nemser (Hesse et al.).

Finally, work that creates the possibility of new interpretive methodologies will receive some attention (Petzinger cited in Pollock and Corby; Horváth).

Chapter 3 My own sculptural work

This chapter will comprise a documented catalogue of creative work as a product of this study. The medium of various types of copper wire and nylon line knitted and crocheted with the assistance of five knitters as well as other copper wire pieces that are left free to dictate its own direction during the process of its making, will be exhibited at the gallery The Point of Order at Wits University. The purpose is to engage in liminality, with specific reference to the themes of instability and nothingness, informed and supported by the theoretical discussion of the sculpture of Eva Hesse, as a means to discover new forms not previously contemplated.

The relevance of Eva Hesse's innovation and new ideas for art materials and sculptural practice and resultant forms through processes during the 1960s, will be tested to determine how these are relevant in a contemporary creative environment in my own sculpture practice (Horváth; Thomassen; Turner; Van Gennep).

In interrogating my own work, the issues Hesse dealt with are included in the discussion. These both inspire and cast light on my own work in terms of her work processes, interest in materials and making 'nothing' as opposed to a representation of something. Self-reflective questions that Hesse asked: to "find something else…" (Hesse et al. 10) and asking the questions "how to achieve by not achieving? How to make by not making? It's all in that" (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 165)[6] will be considered as well as my own self-reflective questions and statement that inspired and developed my work process.

I then more deeply consider the prospect of my work as transformative in nature. (Lippard, *Eva Hesse*; Millar cited in Felcey et al.). Bjorn Thomassen's notion of the 'unquestionable truth' (128), put forward by him as necessary for such transformations to take place, receives discussion in relation to Eva Hesse's intentions and statements, as well as my own.

Chapter 4 The Resolution

This chapter aims to arrive at a clearer understanding of the sculpture of Eva Hesse, as well as my own work, by addressing the events encountered in relation to the Departure (pre-liminal) and Threshold (liminal) phases. Drawing from work by critical theorists on both the concept of the liminal and the art work of Hesse (Thomassen; Van Gennep; Horváth; Turner; Lippard, *Eva Hesse*; Meyer cited in Sussman and Hesse) the outcome, purpose and meaning in the resolution phase will be discussed, as pertaining both to my own and Hesse's work. Specifically, the aim will be to link the notion of the absurd and invisible, nothing made visible and the discovery of one's 'unquestionable truth' (Thomassen). The notion of a 'third' principle will be explored to ascertain what becomes visible in work that is allegedly absurd

[6] Eva Hesse catalogue statement for *Contingent* (see fig. 21) at Finch College, Art in process IV, 1969.

and unstable (Horváth 54). The concept of ‘the resolution’ is discussed as a means of transition for the viewer in his or her interaction with the work (Horváth; Turner; Jackson; Russ cited in Jackson; Todorov cited in Jackson; Bennett; Sartre cited in Jackson; Hesse et al.; Meyer cited in Sussman and Hesse; Pollock cited in Pollock and Corby; Lippard, *Eva Hesse*)

In conclusion, a new understanding and reading of incommensurable work, the transformative potential of encountering and enduring the ‘nothing’ or void and its subsequent unstable and absurd nature will be presented in relation to Hesse’s work, and my own work will be tested against it to see how these themes operate to inform the work.

Chapter 1

Modernism and Liminality

1.1 Locating Eva Hesse in Modernism

At the root of Modernism lies the quest to "demarcate a difference from the past" (Thomassen 9), including its classical past forms; to expand and open up new perspectives and boundaries. To be modern was to re-imagine the current, diverse, disparate, distinct and different from what went before. It was progressive in its continuous appropriating and altering itself "...it had no definite form and no definite end result [...] it was about change and movement, speeding up, dissolving and transforming everything at hand" (9).

Modernism was therefore in a perpetual liminal state, until, during the 1960s, it resisted its own ethos of expansion and change. As Foucault (Thomassen) noted, the modern world "…was characterised by closing off everything that lay beyond the boundaries of rationality" (11). The period of High Modernism during the late1960s provides an example of this 'closing off' of anything not regarded as falling within its field of vision. By 'closing off' and excluding experiences, thoughts, images and persons outside of its dominion, these gathered on its margins and beyond, reaching critical mass between 1966 and 1972 (Lippard, *Six Years*). Even though Modernism, from Manet to the New York School, was "multifaceted and diverse", at its height it "ossified into dogma" (Huyssen, cited in Edwards 222).

The Modernist aesthetic after 1945 narrowed down Modernist aesthetics to the virtually exclusive and authoritative voice of Clement Greenberg (*The collected essays volume 3*), upholder of Kantian aesthetics and defender of Cold War political binaries. To strengthen its resolve and self-righteous position, the fixed and ordered borders that affirm binary division of space set up opposite points of view one against the other, thereby

reinforcing isolation and marginalisation. Eva Hesse was one such person under scrutiny for her art, in the late 1960s/early 1970s, which involved assessment of who she was as a woman, specifically as a Holocaust refugee, who had suffered physically and emotionally from a traumatic childhood and adult life (Hesse et al. 1-4).

Despite this, during the latter half of the 1960s Eva Hesse and a group of artists[7] known for their work exhibited at the *Eccentric Abstraction* show in 1966, which featured Hesse's *Metronomic Irregularity II* (see fig.1). The work was unique for its "incongruity" (Lippard, "Eccentric abstraction" 100) in its orderliness, yet chaotic nature; stability yet instability; and hardness yet fragility, specifically when seen in relation to the dominant movement, that of Minimalism's austerity and rigidity of forms. Lucy Lippard writes that the notable factor regarding this exhibition was to be that of work that focused on "…neither one element nor the other… opposites are used as complementaries rather than contradictions; the result is a formal neutralization [sic] or paralysis" (Lippard, "Eccentric abstraction" 100).

The artists on *Eccentric Abstraction* seemed to have exposed the resistance and possible fear of an oeuvre not identifiable with the Greenbergian Modernist aesthetics. These were rooted in hierarchical categories that demanded that abstract art "…confirm instead of subvert[ing] tradition" (Greenberg, *The collected essays volume 3* 83-84) even though the essence of Modernity itself may be regarded as a rupture from what came before. Herein, another field seemed to have opened up, located in-between what is understood as meaningful and recognisable by authoritative critical theorists, such as Clement Greenberg (Battcock) and Michael Fried (Battcock), in which opposites are reinforced: where one pole is the expected, while the other is the rejected. Ágnes Horváth states that this in-between location assumes "forbidden knowledge" (5) that has been overlooked and avoided due to its "invisible, underground or outcast character" (5). As opposites here are not defined as an

[7] Amongst others, Louis Bourgeois, Alan Saret and Alice Adams, the latter two discussed in Chapter 3.

either/or concept, but rather "complemented", implying neither one element nor the other, this forbidden space is perceived in terms of aesthetics, as decayed, corrupted and a disintegration of values held dear. This perception exposed Eva Hesse to criticism of her art and speculation on her personal life. So much so, that the intrigue and potential in furthering the domain of sculpture through her work remained hidden for decades.[8] Yet, Hesse's artwork, framed in contradiction and ambivalence in relation to the anti-aesthetic Minimalist oeuvre[9], may announce that very space that is avoided and held as ridiculous: "…that which cannot be said, that which evades articulation or that which is represented as 'untrue' and 'unreal'" (Jackson 37). These issues will be explored in Chapter 2, discussing two major works: *Metronomic Irregularity* (see fig. 1) and *Right After* (see fig. 6).

1.2 Establishing the notion of the liminal in the contexts of absurdity and instability

The notion of liminality was introduced by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in 1909, as he noted the significance of change and transitions that societies and individuals share and experience, and how uncertainties are endured. Van Gennep observed that all individuals and societies undergo a series of passages that mark transitions in the form of a succession of stages with endings and beginnings that transforms a "relatively fixed or stable condition" (Turner 93) or status, into another.

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[8]The limited critical languages fashioned during the 1960s, 70s and 80s to assess Hesse's work is evident in the titles of these articles, such as '*Heartache amid Abstraction*', '*Fragile Artist's Agonized Life'* [sic], '*A portrait of the artists: Tortured and talented*', '*The James Dean of Art*', '*Eva Hesse: A 'girl being a sculpture'*, '*Growing Up Absurd'*, (Wager, Hesse et al. 93), '*Cockroach or Queen'*. The article *Eva Hesse: last words*, written by Robert Pincus-Witten in Artforum (November 1972 74–76) was perceived by sculptor Walter Erlebacher in 1991 as "…nothing short of 'necrophilia': those of us that knew the lady, wondered what was with him'" (Hesse et al. 94). Lucy Lippard writes that this damage was reinforced by Pincus-Witten's statement in Artforum (November, 1972) regarding Hesse's "pathetic last diaries for a serious critical examination of the work" (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 180). James Meyer states that "Hesse's posthumously published journals have inspired a virtual cottage industry of criticism based on a psychologizing [sic] of the artist and her works. Such readings risk the presumption that one can 'know" Hesse and her art based on a decoding of personal testimony" (Sussman and Hesse 62). Mel Bochner goes so far as to say, that the publication of the diaries "… actually damaged the understanding of the work" (Hesse et al. 39).

[9] Discussed in Chapter 2.

Arnold van Gennep developed an approach consistent with the study of social change, by devising a category of *rites of passage,* by means of which to explain these transitional events. These he observed during initiation ceremonies in various cultures, including in Europe (154), whereby individuals grow and develop through transformation by "… passing from one defined position to another which is equally well defined." (3). Van Gennep observed a fundamental pattern or order, which to him seemed universal in all societies; that it was "significant for the very nature and meaningfulness of *life*" [emphasis original] (Thomassen 3). The rites of passages were categorised into three stages to indicate the transformation and change in individuals, namely: 'rites of separation' or 'detachment' from a previous worldview and experience, followed by 'transition rites', after which followed 'rites of incorporation', where a new reality is achieved. The middle or transitional stage in a passage is called a liminal or threshold period; while the rites of 'incorporation', 'aggregation' and 'consummation' or 'post-liminal', where resolution is found, is the third phase of the passage (Van Gennep 11; Turner 94).

Victor Turner's notion of liminality, based upon Van Gennep's research, is extended into the context of 20th century societies, where the notion may imply any change that can be "applied to single individuals and larger groups or whole societies, and arguably even entire civilizations" (Turner 90). The concept can be applied to social theories of the modern (Thomassen 1) as a means to understand society (Thomassen 191) as Turner believed "that much of our [western] conceptual thought derives from human elaborations of in-betweenness" (87) in which uncertainty and seeming chaos resides. Ágnes Horváth in *Modernism and Charisma*, and Bjorn Thomassen in *Liminality and the modern: Living through the in-between*, have recently reiterated the notion of Van Gennep's liminality, contextualising the in-between state of contemporary society and individual experience.

Homi Bhabha writes of liminality in his book, *The location of culture*. However, Bhabha does not speak of liminality as a *transition*, having crossed a boundary into another stage of a passage, but of a 'beyond' or "intervening space" (10) which "… signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future…" (6). Thomassen writes that this does not describe liminality, but rather the marginal, that marks a permanent location of arrival, and not liminal *transition* (5). Thomassen argues that Bhabha seems to write of the liminal as one and the same as marginal or a borderline. However, even though they share notions of boundaries, the liminal is not on the margin; it is located specifically in an in-between space that is transformative[10] (Thomassen 5). Thomassen questions Homi Bhabha's analysis of liminality that it "…entertains *difference*" [emphasis original] (9), and cautions critics in cultural studies and anthropology regarding the use of the term liminal, that it is not a "normative ideal" (10), as Thomassen states:

> Liminality is not something simply to be celebrated or wished for. Quite the contrary, liminality needs to be duly and carefully problematized [sic], and this is particularly important in a period such as ours, which instinctively adopt a celebratory attitude towards anything that represent novelty and constant innovation… (8).

Ágnes Horváth concurs that even though the liminal opens to new solutions, particularly in cases where crises undermine individual values and expectations, liminal situations in the modern era are "periods of uncertainty, anguish, even existential fear; a facing of the abyss or the void" (2). Doubt, despair and hopelessness (113) are not to be desired, chosen wilfully, or

[10] Liminality should not be occupied permanently (Thomassen 12) lest perceived nothingness and chaos would "undermine the stability and very texture of social life." These implications are unfortunately not in the scope of this research.

be encouraged, as Bhabha seem to imply, but emerge at a critical point of heightened stress and extreme life conditions, estranging the perceived self and identity.

Persons such as Eva Hesse, who experienced crises and who stated emphatically that her life was "extreme",[11] become "…sensitive and emphatic towards that which is shunned or judged for not falling into the category of authoritative viewpoints and acceptable responses and behaviour" (Horváth 2). One may surmise that Hesse was acutely aware of and vigilant to the confusing realities within her that were experienced as contradictions;[12] for the inner world of perception and feeling could not be explained by that which is regarded as the norm or allegedly had no existence, other than being absurd and perceived as nothingness. The latter presumes the sense that there is no real meaning to be found.

The notion of a rite of passage is a paradigm that exists when the order of things no longer makes sense, and no measure exists to cast light upon it. Ágnes Horváth explains that that which is not commonly accepted, functioning 'in-between' two opposites, produces a crisis to be confronted, as it disturbs and fractures the status quo, (38) which pushes modern day individuals to the limit of their perceptions and perception of their experience (2). This is the moment where life as it was previously known is changed or transformed into an entirely alternative paradigm (Horváth 2). This is experienced as "… facing […] the abyss or the void" (Horváth 2) and such a condition may result in a situation fraught with emotional instability, ambivalence and doubtfulness[13] as there is nothing known, upon which to rely.

The notion of the liminal, therefore, may be a valuable tool to locate the work, as "… a prism through which to understand transformations in the contemporary world…" (Horváth et al. 1). The aim of the research is to trace the apparent disturbance or aggravation of

[11] "There isn't a thing in my life that has happened that hasn't been extreme – personal health, family, economic situations…" (Meyer cited in Sussman and Hesse 60).
[12] As she reiterated in diaries and the interview with Cindy Nemser (Hesse et al. 1-24)
[13] Hesse speaks of her insecurities and doubts in her diaries (Corby).

established order, a prerequisite for threshold or liminal conditions (Horváth 3), by illuminating its developmental and transformative implications in Hesse's social environment, work and personal life, as well as in my work and thinking about my own art practice.

Theorists who tackle Hesse's work echo the same ideas as the liminal theorists, connecting liminality to Hesse's work. One can see the correlation between Lucy Lippard and James Meyer in their understanding of her work, and the set of concepts they use, which connects to the notion of the liminal. Meyer describes the neither/nor construct in Hesse's work which "…suggests a 'ridiculous' feeling or quality that cannot be otherwise grasped" (Sussman and Hesse 73) and is "…something without definition…" (73). Meyer thereby recognises Hesse's engagement with the 'nothing' as her having been "…interested in the gap, in the quality of 'nothing' or inarticulateness from [neither/nor] pairings" (73) that may be regarded as 'nothing' (73) and the unintelligible and obscure, for, it may be surmised, this is in-between the known and acceptable and its opposite other. Here the neither/nor construct relates to (but is not referred to) Van Gennep's notion of liminality, as previously discussed.

Lippard echoes a liminal construct when she writes that the dichotomies in the 1966 exhibition *Eccentric Abstraction* do not set up a tension or conflict of opposites in a closed semiology of either one thing or another. Instead, the emphasis is on "…neither one element nor the other, nor the encounter between the two. Opposites are used as complementaries rather than contradictions… that achieve a unique sort of wholeness" (Lippard, "Eccentric abstraction" 100). Here, the absurdity of opposing forms, "neutralize [sic] each other" (Lippard, "Eccentric abstraction" 100) as neither is underscored and "meaning is paralyzed [sic]" (Meyer in Sussman and Hesse 63). James Meyer re-explains Lippard, and claims that "Neither is emphasized [sic]" (63), thereby indirectly raising the liminal. This implies that the either/or construct dissolves or dislocates opposing rationale in favour of nothing being

opposed or contradicted. In being neither a thing, nor a no-thing, Hesse's view may be confirmed, indicating a liminal theme: "as a thing, an object, it accedes to its non-logical self. It is something, it is nothing". (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 130, 131). Neither something, nor 'nothing' gets preference.

Linda Norden equally alludes to liminality, when she states that Eva Hesse's work is "uncategorizable [sic] … [and] continually stymied reviewers and complicated efforts at description" (Hesse and Barrette 52), while James Meyer observes that Hesse's work of the late 60s moves even further "…beyond the strict logic of the neither/nor… her work becomes more inscrutable…" (Sussman and Hesse 74), which is indicative of the themes explored here.

The acknowledgement of the gap in Hesse's work, which is potentially transitory and transformative in nature, is noteworthy from Hesse's critics. Something appears in the gap, but there is also nothing recognisable or discernible there. Of this 'something there, but not there', Fer writes "…despite its spare elegance, [there] is also a kind of disturbance, by virtue of its hardly being there" (Sussman and Hesse 61) while Lippard says that whatever unintelligible image *Right After* (see fig. 6) is, "…it almost isn't there at all" (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 152). What the "it" is, may be something concrete, such as the ropes, but also nothing, as the ropes are indicative of nothing. Critics notice that as a result of the way in which Hesse produces her work, which focuses on innovative material rather than representation, a new analytical language is surpassed, where operative concepts in the analysis of traditional painting or sculpture brings no further insight.

The above thought process regarding Hesse's work may be related to the incongruousness that indicates liminality, as confirmed by Victor Turner, who argues that the inter-structural nature of a liminal state is where "opposite processes and notions in a single representation characterize [sic] the peculiar unity of the liminal: that which is neither this nor

that, and yet is both" (99). This description may indicate that Hesse's post-1969 work is located in the liminal, as the research will argue. However, liminality requires specific conditions in terms of Van Gennep's rite of passage, where the liminal 'neither this nor that' 'or 'maybe both' (Turner 98) amounts to the unclassified 'nothing', necessitating "… no recognized [sic] cultural typography, and are at the very least 'betwixt and between' all the recognized [sic] fixed points in space-time of structural classification" (98).

Even though identity, as one such construct, is suspended in the state of being neither/nor, this does not mean it is in a liminal state. For, if there is no transition and transformation is not reached, thereby redefining the image or status from one mode into another completely unrelated, it is not liminal (Van Gennep 10; Turner 102). Turner notes that Van Gennep observed that the middle part of the passage, the transition or liminal stage, "is not simply a developing movement easing toward progress, but a transformation of any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognized [sic]" (94), "into *an entirely other and new condition"* (94) [emphasis added]. This transformation necessitates passing through a door on the boundary between the "…foreign and domestic worlds…" (Thomassen 13), which may be translated as the unknown and known: whereupon, once the boundary is crossed, one becomes part of another reality altogether (Thomassen 13). Van Gennep states that this transition to another world can be understood as an "opening of the doors" (x), which implies a fixed threshold or boundary which is crossed, thereby opening to another state or reality.

It is essential, therefore, to step outside and abandon the known paradigm and to view the work from another perspective entirely, entering at point zero or 'nothing' as Hesse claimed to find: "another kind, vision, sort… from a total other reference point. Is that

possible?" (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 165).[14] I propose that this be understood as the liminal, as this may be a location loaded with radically 'new' meaning, or a specific location completely unrelated to the previous reality (Turner 98).

What is useful in terms of applying the theme of liminality to Hesse's work, is to consider the concept of transcendence. It is not a choice, nor can it be willed; it is rather an event or experience "we undergo" (Thomassen 190). Hesse mentioned the extremes in her life, to which she responded (Hesse et al. 9) but these very "extremes and boundaries" that are part of human existence (9) are what each person responds to in comparable ways. Van Gennep noted that the rites of passage – such as the liminal, where the transformative is experienced – are filled with hardship and anxiety which give new meaning to events. As Thomassen writes, "…the anxiety and doubt that characterises liminality is ultimately overcome by shaping the subject, who through a series of tests is brought to reflect on his or her self, in the search of a new identity and role to take up on the return to his or her society" (Thomassen 117). It is with this aspect of transcendence in mind, that the research will assess two artworks of Eva Hesse's in Chapter 2.

[14] Eva Hesse catalogue statement for Contingent (see fig. 21) at Finch College, Art in Process IV, 1969.

Chapter 2

Themes of instability, absurdity and liminality in selected work by Eva Hesse

2.1 The Departure: *Metronomic Irregularity II*, 1966[15]

Metronomic Irregularity II, 1966, (see fig. 1), spanning four and a half metres across, offers the recognisable Modernist paint canvas format of three square wooden boards against a wall, leaving two square gaps in between, mirroring the boards exposed. Instead of using each board as a picture plane, inter-tangled wires hover horizontally, seemingly chaotic and unstable, uninterrupted and unsupported across all three 'canvases' and wall, attached only at opposite ends through holes drilled in the boards. It is suspended flimsily, as if just struck to echo sound. The countless wires, writes Lucy Lippard (*Eva Hesse* 79), stand in for paint, as the work did not 'fit' the category of sculpture or painting as determined by the aesthetics at the time.[16] This work hovers between two dimensions (flat boards) and three (attached wires), between the emptiness of the wall and the presence of the wires.

The empty space between the three boards revealed as two squares the exact size of the boards, is imposing, and demands attention. It consequently becomes part of the sculpture (see fig. 2). These 'empty' spaces are significant, and carry equal 'weight' in relation to the boards, which Rothkopf (Sussman and Hesse 188) observes to be "sculptural material", that engages the gallery space. This engagement accords the empty spaces in between the actual work "sculptural weight" (188) which act as "voids filled" (188).[17] These contradictions and

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[15] Eva Hesse's major new work in 1966, *Metronomic Irregularity II,* (Cooper 40) exhibited during September/October 1966 at the Eccentric Abstraction Exhibition, Fischbach Gallery, New York.
[16] Greenberg's narrative of Modernism and Minimalism (Battcock).
[17] *Metronomic Irregularity I* (see fig. 3) may also be included in the commentary of the second version in discussion. The third version does not make use of the gallery wall, instead it has a board in-between the 'canvas' boards.

dichotomies that the empty wall and ‘filled’ wall set up require investigating as these appeared as an absurdity in the work’s time.

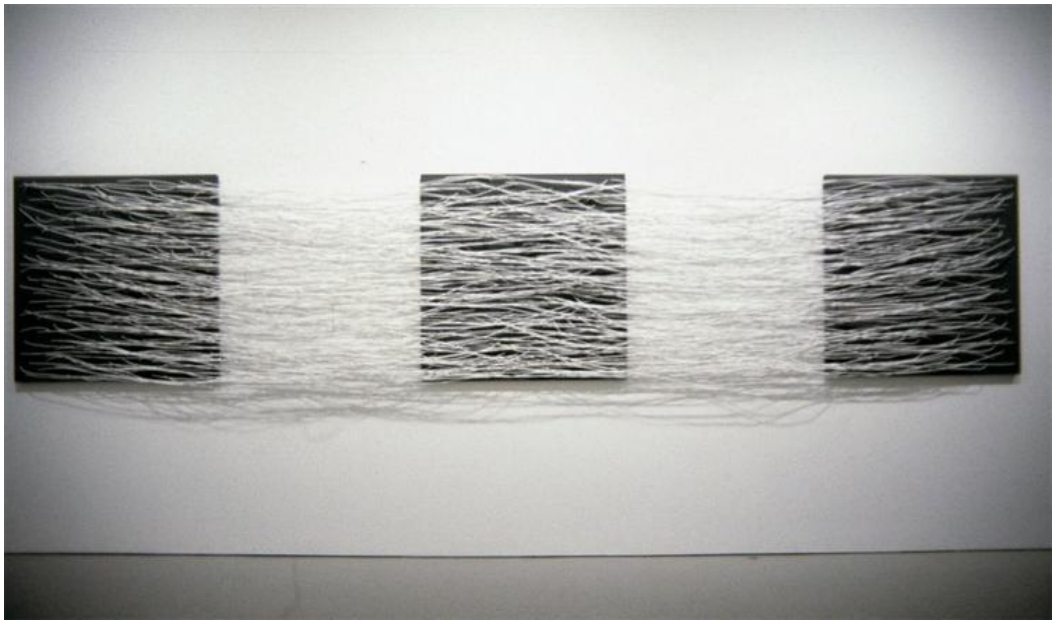


Figure 1. Eva Hesse. *Metronomic Irregularity II*. Paint and Sculpt-metal on wood with cotton-covered wire. 305 x 457 x 25. Museum Wiesbaden, Germany, 1966.



Figure 2. Eva Hesse standing in front of *Metronomic Irregularity II*, 1966.

The acknowledgement of the empty spaces between the boards is an important 'new' way of perceiving forms that have been set up to take into consideration the so-called empty space as a contrasting element. Briony Fer refers to Hesse's "blank space", but in this sculpture, the 'blank space' is "activated" by the interaction between the wall, the 'strings' and the shadows cast by the latter across the former (Fer 120). This actual and imagined space that sets up a dichotomy, but does not emphasise opposites, seems to disturb and disorientate in a Beckett-like absurdity.[18] In this case, it functions to disorient and transport the viewer across the boundary of a painting, activating the third dimension towards sculpture, which in a sense it is also not. But, perhaps it is both, for there is nothing but the wall, which engages the viewer in 'nothing', as well as the wall framed as a square, which is 'something'. This neither/nor dichotomy, as well as the 'filled' and 'activated' blank space is regarded as an absurdity (Hesse et al. 9) and, as Hesse argues, her intention was to go by way of the absurd in order to arrive at "…non-art, non-connotative, non-anthropomorphic, non-geometric, non, nothing… From a total other reference point…" (Pollock and Corby 161; Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 165).

Hesse's "incongruity" that also "compliments", according to Lippard ("Eccentric abstraction" 100), in which there exists a preference for the inconsistent and seemingly disconnected, in relation to the expected austere and anti-form structures of Minimalism, can be partly explained by what the artist called "weird humor [sic]" (Hesse et al. 62) of which the artist wrote to Sol Le Witt. As Hesse stated, absurdity was what she was seeking:

> Absurdity is the key word. […] It has to do with contradictions and oppositions. In the forms I use in my work the contradictions are certainly there. I was always aware that I should take order versus chaos, stringy versus mass, huge versus small… (Hesse et al. 60).

[18] Discussed further on.

In Hesse's case, the absurd situation that unfolds as a result of the contradictions in her, resemble Samuel Beckett's characters in *Waiting for Godot,* Vladimir and Estragon. She refers to these as "a key to understanding me" (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 185). Here she sees the humour in their tension of neither doing, nor not doing. The concept of setting up opposites as evident in *Metronomic Irregularity II* simultaneously; focusing on neither a 'canvas' nor a sculpture, neither a wall nor a board, offers a liminal situation. Where there is no conclusion, only confusion or where nothing is done to correlate with what is said. Contradictions of this nature confirm and open an unconfirmed non-space or "void" (Horváth 58) that exists in-between contrasting elements. Here I argue that this is where *Metronomic Irregularity II* should be located: an inconclusive, incongruent and contradictory piece that fulfils Hesse's aim to achieve "non, nothing…" (Pollock and Corby 161; Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 165).

According to Hesse herself, the neither this/nor that paradigm may be perceived as "…it is not the new, it is what is yet not known, thought, seen, touched but really what is not. And that is." (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 165).[19] This paradigm created by the work in question is what makes Hesse's work in general so extraordinary. It is a space of profound creative innovation, because, as Turner states, it can be understood as "… a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (97). Perhaps a characteristic of this location is its establishment of an empty space (squared wall) and immediately filling it with 'sculptural weight' (fragile wires cutting across). What may be evident herein is Hesse's evolution from the Minimalist aesthetic of purely fixed geometric, anti-form, anti-expressive shapes that may 'record' empty space as an absence (Fer 165), which reinforces contrast or an either/or paradigm.

Hesse undoes the Minimalist binaries in opposition, and refuses to engage with, for example, austerities and opposites. With every sculpture since *Hang Up* (see fig. 3), which

[19] Hesse statement for the show *Art in process IV*.

Hesse claimed to be the first absurd piece, "…where my idea of absurdity or extreme feeling came through" (Hesse et al. 7), the artist began to pre-empt the possibility of reference,[20] by juxtaposing opposites.[21] Here neither the one nor the other is favoured, where the emptiness in-between the boards of *Metronomic Irregularity II* complement and neutralise one another, offering the extremes of the opposites, and at the same time balancing it out with the wires strung across both wall and boards, unifying the square board and the square emptiness.



Figure 3. Eva Hesse. *Hang up*. Acrylic paint on cloth over wood: acrylic paint on cord over steel tube. 1829 x 2134 x 1981. The Art Institute of Chicago, 1966.

[20] According to James Meyer, Theodor Adormo observes 'negativity' of a neither/nor framework ridiculousness as "'suspicious of all identity'. Its logic is one of 'disintegration'" (Sussman and Hesse 73).
[21] Such as the fixed square panels, vibrating chaotic wires against the wall and nothing between the squares but wall space and wire cutting across.

As the theme of the absurd is characteristic of liminality, it may be useful to identify whether this piece, *Metronomic Irregularity II* is situated in the liminal.

If the liminal 'nothing' lies on the other side of the boundary of a recognisable 'some-thing', (but not its opposite) then the boundary needs to be considered. Being at the boundary where the 'thing' threatens to become a no-thing as it "…extend[s] out into something that doesn't exist yet – almost like falling off" (Nemser cited in Hesse et al. 10), by implication this means that one can go no further, to a point where there will be 'nothing' there. Bhabha cites Heidegger, who notes that "… as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing" (1). This 'presencing' is alluded to by Briony Fer, who notes that "there is a sense of limbo, or of meaning about to be declared" (Hesse et al. 61). Lippard similarly draws our attention to a deeper sensibility that *Metronomic Irregularity II* reveals, as she writes that Hesse "accomplishes an idiosyncratic, unfixed space [where] energy is repressed, or rather imprisoned, in a timeless vacuum tinged with anticipation" (Lippard, "Eccentric abstraction" 100).

Even though the marginal is not the liminal, they overlap, as the margin, the site for the initial inroad to the liminal, provides an opportunity for detachment or departure from images and thinking that exist in the mainstream. The upshot is that marginality opposes or resists mainstream culture, while liminality instead transforms it.

Standing on the margin is the beginning of the rites of passage, where the aim is to separate from the known, through moving towards the furthest outer edge of the known/unknown. Standing at the margin may be likened to Clement Greenberg's statement that Minimalist art is "far out" (Battcock 182) from the fixed and ordered theories of binary division that reinforces opposition, as Greenberg required art to be (182). Hesse, in her work during the 1960s, and perhaps evident in *Metronomic Irregularity II*, may have imminently separated herself from the known Minimalist aesthetic which characterises the formal three

geometric boards, and its either/or construct by way of introducing the absurdly inexplicable and unreasonable contradicting "unravelling… allusive... informal… unformed" alongside it (Levin 71). The Greenbergian term of 'far out' which is assumed to be located at the margin of binary opposites, seems to be the beginning for Hesse of the oeuvre of the absurd that was to evolve into 'nothing' until the last sculpture in 1970, which was to become unique to her.

Briony Fer insightfully observes that "…the three versions of *Metronomic Irregularity* (see fig. 4 and fig. 6), and in particular, the second and most successful, provided the prototype for the extra-ordinary suspended webs of *Right After*, 1969" (Hesse et al. 67) (see fig 6). It is my view that this 'prototype' that is 1966 *Metronomic Irregularity II* may also be termed the 'exit' work, where Hesse's expressive, emotive quality most profoundly detaches itself from the anti-expressive aesthetics of Minimalism (Best 67), to cross the threshold in work produced over the following four years.

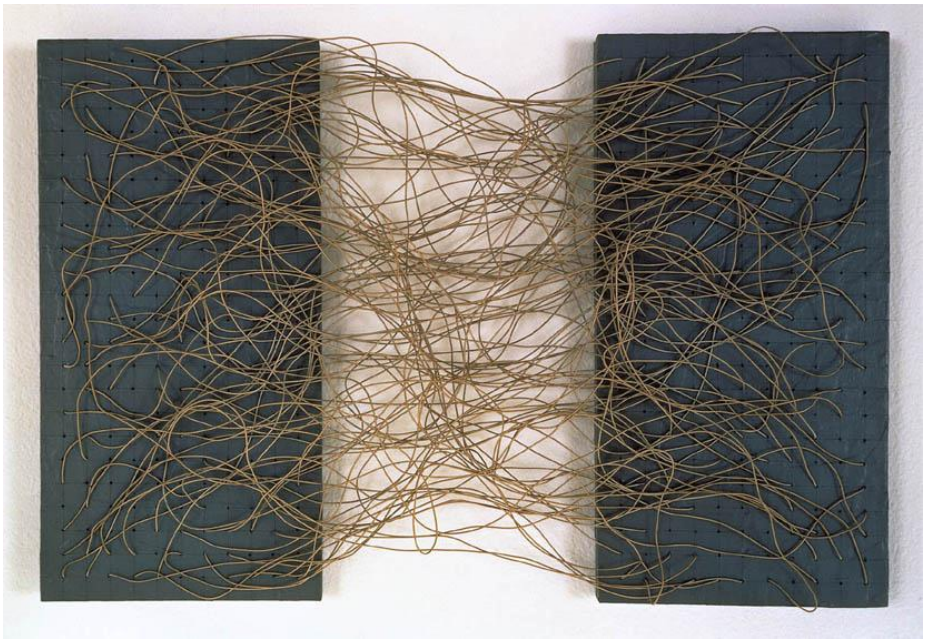


Figure 4. Eva Hesse. *Metronomic Irregularity I.* Paint and Sculpt-metal on wood with cotton-covered wire. 305 x 457 x 25. Museum Wiesbaden, Germany, 1966.

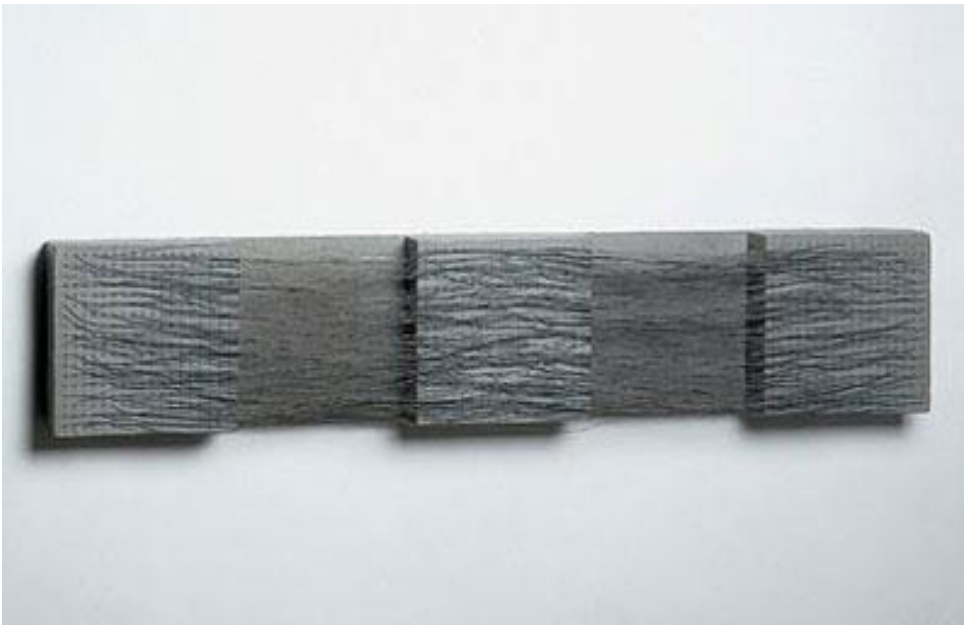


Figure 5. Eva Hesse. *Metronomic Irregularity III*. Paint and Sculpt-metal on wood with cotton-covered wire. 254 x 127 x 64. Private Collection, Los Angeles, 1966.

2.2 The Liminal: *Right After* 1969[22]

I remember I wanted to get to non-art, non-
connotative, non-anthropomorphic, non-
geometric, non, nothing, everything, but of
another kind, vision, sort.
From a total other reference point. Is that
possible?
I have learned that anything is possible. I know
that, that vision or concept will come through

[22] The title *Right After* refers to the first piece Hesse started 'right after' her first surgery in 1968. (Barrette 222) Started towards the end of 1968 and completed July/August 1969.

total risk, freedom, discipline.

I will do it…

question how and why in putting together

can it be different each time? Why not?

How to achieve by not achieving? How to make

by not making?

It's all in that. [23]

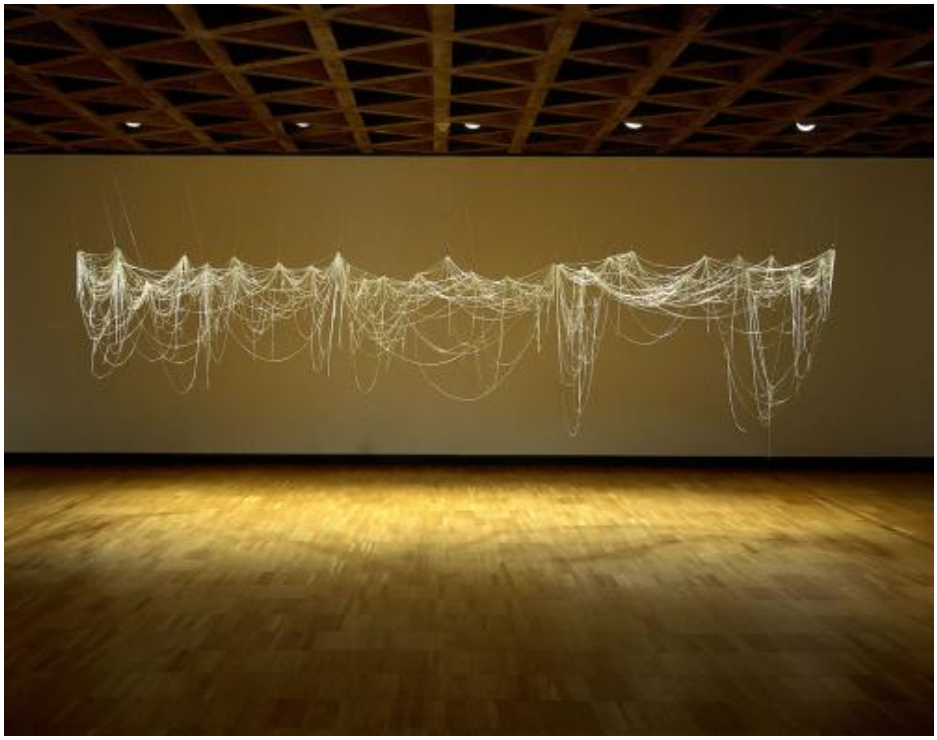


Figure 6. Eva Hesse. *Right After*. Fiberglass and polyester resin with metal hooks. 1524 x 5486 x 1219. Milwaukee Art Museum, 1969.

Right After is a fragile, flexible, colourless fiberglass cord structure, made rigid from dipping it in colourless casting resin. These two unrelated units converted the limp cord into another

[23] Eva Hesse catalogue statement for Contingent (see fig. 21) at Finch College, Art in Process IV, 1969 (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 165).

substance that is solid matter. What manifests is an absurd form, and unstable as a sculptural item. As far as liminality is concerned, the whole is broken into units not related to its original state where the incommensurable grows ever larger, with the units each procuring a new presence, which is indicative of the realm of the unstable and absurd, associated with liminality (Horváth 21, 55). This seems to be the case with *Right After* (see fig. 6).

The combination of materials and use of form in this way is a transformation from limp cord into a hardened filigree construction informally hung from metal hooks. The strands folded over the hooks are encased, or glued onto the hooks by resin, to create a thick mass of solidity; in addition, some of the looping fibres are single strands, not covered by the colourless resin (see fig. 7), defying the sense of heaviness (Godfrey cited in Sussman and Wasserman 35). Its presence is unquestionable, as it cuts across the space by almost five and half metres, strands hanging in loops from the hooks, which creates a gravitational tension. *Right After,* writes Godfrey, is "…more of an environment than an object…" (Sussman and Wasserman 43); it is a looping fibreglass cord covered in resin that is now a solid unit, where the cord and resin covering cannot be distinguished because both are colourless.

A dichotomy is set up between a mobile yet unstable form and a static fixed web structure: one may expect such a flimsy piece to wave about in a breeze, rather, as described by Fer it possesses "…an uncanny stillness…" (45), where, due to its rigidity and stiffness from the resin covered cords, the absurdity of it is unmistakable. Furthermore, the complexity of fluid resin hardening when dry, and the rigid piece as a final result, engenders a simultaneous appearance and sensibility of pliability and solidity. One never knows quite what it is as it is transformed into something else, neither rigid nor fragile but in-between and also both (Turner 98).



Figure 7. Eva Hesse. *Right After*. Fiberglass and polyester resin with metal hooks. Detail, 1969.

Transmutation of this type presents a liminal condition and Horváth likens such transformation to the blacksmith converting a previously solid and stable element such as iron into a molten red, soft substance when heated. The base or lesser material is transformed into an entirely other 'new' and completely unrelated thing. This is not a simple change of rearranging entirely unrelated materials into a new relationship, but radical transformation that brings about innovation and a radically new form or idea using the same material.

Where one form (limp cord) is converted into an entirely new material (rigid and hardened filigree), it implies, if observed from a liminal point of view, "the extinction of the earlier state, before union. Dissolution and coagulation assume each other in liminality" (Horváth 55). This middle stage of the liminal is the most important to Van Gennep, Turner and Horváth as this is where nothing that was previously known exists. Form and material become entirely separated and autonomous from their previous state. (Horváth 55).

This aspect is indicative of the most creative stage of Hesse's journey, specifically to be seen in the last few artworks created during 1969 to 1970. Once Hesse achieved this realm in-

between, where not only dominant expectations of sculpture and its traditional materials are destabilised or vanish (Potts 288), the form itself is an unstable unit,[24] transformed from its original materiality. The artist seems to have progressed in this space, to deepen her discoveries seamlessly with every sculpture that followed, which resulted in a paradigm that

> …gives space to new forms. Now nothing is definitely posited in you, your identity is flexible, becoming the womb of anything to be born, where everything passes, but in which nothing is retained. You become a matrix of images and emotions, the one who gives birth to new sensation… you become a being of in-betweenness, neither being nor non-being, but an interval between them, yourself the liminal being (Horváth, quoting Couliano 57).[25]

The notion of the absurd applied to Hesse's later work should now be reconsidered. The artist herself challenged the description of the 'absurd' in this way: "I can't use that word anymore – absurdity. Because potentially it has quite a few associations and yet it is not anything" (Hesse et al. 18).

Beyond the absurd, where extremes result in contradiction and confusion, and reinforce an either this or that notion, here an "orderly disorder" is to be found that may be relevant to Hesse's work. It may be useful to consider Michael Bennett's *Reassessing the theatre of the absurd* in this regard, which discusses the notion of absurdity in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (27-51). In this regard, Bennett refers to William Demastes' notion of chaos, which is an element of the absurd, as "… a place of opportunity, a site of interactive

[24] The instability of a work such as *Right After* is evident in that it cannot be re-hung exactly the same each time it is exhibited – its height and width would change depending on curators. The photographic evidence of the piece hanging in Hesse's studio in 1969 is different to the manner it was hung in the Jewish Museum, New York in 1969, and again when installed at the Milwaukee Art Museum in 1980s and again at Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven in 1992 (Sussman and Wasserman 28-31, 44).

[25] Hesse's claim that her life and art are one (Hesse et al. 6) indicates that not only was her art liminal, but she was a 'liminal person'.

disorder generating new orders and of order transforming to regenerative disorder" (17). I argue that the validity of the seemingly chaotic and fragmented piece *Right After* (see fig. 6) lies in a transformative realm, where the disorderliness is engaged while also presenting a rigid structure hung in a straight orderly line. Here, an entirely new type of disorder is presented that is expansive and broadening in the normal sense that chaos is understood, transformed into something entirely else.

Hesse opens up a transformed meaning in this way, where *Right After* (see fig. 6) is neither stable nor unstable; neither rigid nor frail; neither a painting, sculpture nor drawing – it is in fact nothing, but may also be all of these. The result is her critical contribution to sculpture during the latter half of the 20th century: an art form located in-between a space from which creative exploration of ideas and forms are in essence incubated. This led to a manifestation of an ever advancing and progressive visual language for artists of the future, the resolution of which is discussed further in Chapter 4.

The loss of recognisable reference points, through the random title and the unspecified image related to it, may result in a loss of familiarity and comfort because of the consequent sense of unease and estrangement that is introduced (Jackson 179).

The 'nothing' which is a result, and which is by implication invisible, may reveal a representation of a 'second reality' (Horváth 81, 82). As the work in itself is incommensurable in its instability and absurdity, a response from the viewer gazing upon the image is required, to bring value to the 'nothing'. For example, the artist chose to exaggerate elements such as repeating the looping ropes of *Right After* (see fig. 6) for five metres – which may be regarded as an absurdity of scale. Meyer observed the value of this when he writes: "…exaggeration or in-betweenness… It is what *happens* [sic] when a shape is joined with another, enlarged, repeated. An effect cannot be depicted; it can only be implied, pointed

to, never stated, never shown" (Sussman and Hesse 60) and that "…it is not a thing but the sensation of the thing" (60).

It is my own sense too that what is invisible, and regarded as nothing, cannot be depicted or shown, only implied or pointed to through the repetition and exaggeration of the loops continuing for five metres. It is notable that Hesse stated that "if something is meaningful, maybe it's more meaningful said ten times… it's much more greatly exaggerated, absurd, if it's repeated" (Hesse et al. 11).

As a result of the repetition of the looping cords and the transformation of limp material to a solid structure, value is created for the absurdity of 'nothing' through the viewer's interaction with it. Griselda Pollock also recognises in Hesse's work new meaning that emerges in the notion of 'nothing', echoing Horváth's 'second reality representation', wherein the viewer's response may be included as part of the work. Pollock perceives "… nothing is not no-thing… It moves viewers to respond in many different ways; to disturb, to excite, to be overwhelmed, to be stirred, to be troubled […] to be affected. Questions are asked, but, here, perhaps it does not pose answers" (Pollock and Corby 44).

Viewers are therefore prompted to arrive at answers from individual experience and insight, not from reference to dominant values and attempts at essentialising the work. The effect of the absurd in Hesse's work may not be clear and may therefore suggest multiple readings, leaving it up to the viewer to unravel. This view is in direct contradiction to Michael Fried's critique in Artforum, June 1967 of Minimalist art (and assuming the form of art thereafter, Post-Minimalism) as objects that fail to engage the viewer and that any interaction is thus remote: "…distancing him, isolating him…" (Battcock 140).

The fact that the instability of the structures is reinforced by abolishing the inner structure or "armature" (Potts 288) that long-established and conventional sculpture required, further necessitates that the work be understood in a different way. Alan Potts suggests

reading it as "image form" (288). This 'image' is neither a painting nor a pictorial image in "real' space" (Krauss cited in Hesse et al. 54), nor is it a sculpture. This incongruous in-between space of Hesse's engagement with the immediacy and tactility of the medium evokes a "re-imaging" (Potts 302).

These various understandings of reading the absurd and unstable, 'non, nothing' which cannot be predetermined or defined, reflects the artist's genius that brought her to a profound space of discovery. Instead of following the norm of attempting to represent something in the outer world, she opted to find the impossible from what lies in an inner world, perhaps emerging from her life experience. The impossible, named 'nothing', is where Hesse stepped out onto the threshold to go beyond what she knew to "… find some new form or thought" (Hesse et al. 10), thereby opening a door into an entirely other, but not opposite, reality not considered before. This reality may well be called virtual (Potts 289), or a phantom image, an invisible "sensation of the thing" as Meyer writes (Sussman and Hesse 60) or something that does not exist yet, or all of these; situating it in a liminal incommensurability.

One may thus conclude that an encounter[26] with a piece such as *Right After* (see fig. 6) provokes a response, awakens awareness, and arouses emotion in viewers who may experience unease and discomfort or a strangely familiar presence, even if it is undefinable and seems to represent 'nothing'. Of Hesse's work completed in late 1965 and 1966, Renate Petzinger says the following, applicable here as well:

> …stripped completely of their original meaning, they are literally stood on their heads, encrypted or completely abstracted […] the objects evoke

[26] Griselda Pollock urges a reader's position to be an "encounter" when looking at the art of Hesse (Pollock and Corby 20), as well as suggesting this in the title of her book: *Encountering Eva Hesse.*

> in the viewer a dual sense of familiarity and mystery… a pre-existent something from the realm of non-art that caught Eva Hesse's probing eye, prompting her to take it along and transform it into something very different, which in turn gives rise to new analogies and speculations." (Pollock and Corby 164).

Horváth states that a central feature of the liminal is that when fixed borders are dissolved, a "rebirth" ensues through abandoning imitation or any previously known identity (Horváth 41). The middle stage of the passage is to transform from one state or situation into another by incorporating extreme or heightened imagery, forms, rites and situations, and in so doing, evoke another reality (41). Hesse's reference to her extreme life situations as comparative to her art, in which she attempts to find "absurd opposites or extreme opposites" (Hesse et al. 10), as a means to discover another unknown reality, may well have dissolved the fixed borders of dominant discourse and form. Here, psycho-analytical readings of the work may reveal only a partial truth, if any, as the absurdity, instability and extreme characteristics may be explained away, focussing instead on Hesse's life situations rather than the work in its own right.

So, what does this space in the piece *Right After* (see fig. 6) reveal through the lens of the liminal theme? Bjorn Thomassen writes that liminality involves complete autonomy from what has gone or been known before:

> On the one hand liminality involves a potentially unlimited freedom from any kind of structure. This sparks creativity and innovation… where nothing really matters, in which hierarchies and standing norms disappear, in which sacred symbols are mocked at and ridiculed, in which authority in any form is questioned, taken apart and subverted… Human experiences of freedom and anxiety (they belong

> together) are condensed in liminal moments… On the other hand liminality also involves a peculiar kind of unsettling situation in which nothing really matters, and yet, deeply paradoxically, meaning often becomes over determined… sign or action can only take place once frames are lost, once signs circulate in a void without stable reference points. The nothing and the endless belong together…" (1).

Hesse, it appears, speaks of something similar, of what she terms 'the nothing', in this extract from June 1968:

> I would like the work to be non-work. This means that it would find its way beyond my preconceptions. What I want of my art I can eventually find. The work must go beyond this. It is my main concern to go beyond what I know and what I can know. The formal principles are understandable and understood. It is the unknown quantity from which and where I want to go. As a thing, an object, it accedes to its non-logical self. It is something, it is nothing (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 130, 131).[27]

Hesse's statement resonates with Thomassen's sense of the liminal quoted above, as a space where the artist's "creativity and innovation is sparked" anew with every fresh attempt to construct a piece, furthering the notion of nothing. Every new sculpture made after *Right After* (see fig. 6),[28] where "sacred symbols" that are, for example, paint on canvas against a wall and sculpture in solid material firmly based on the floor, are "mocked at and ridiculed" (Thomassen 1) in favour of her "main concern" for the work to go beyond the known toward

[27] Press release statement by Eva Hesse, June 1968, issued by Lippard for the opening of Hesse's *One-Woman Show* at the Fischbach, NY

[28] *Contingent* (see fig. 21); *Untitled/ Wall piece* (1970); *Untitled/ Rope piece* (see fig. 25); *Seven Poles* (1970).

'non-work'. As Hesse confirms on another occasion: "… it's not the new. it is what is yet not known, thought, seen, touched but really what is not. and that is…" (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 165).[29]

Ágnes Horváth states that in order to make visible the liminal in-between, a justification and reasoning from existing codes, frameworks and classification need to be suspended and a "leap into the void" (19) needs to take place. It is therefore necessary to "dissolve identity" – the domain of forbidden territory – to destroy the unity expected in dominant cultural paradigms necessary for understanding.

Entering the domain of 'nothingness' or void, the nothing or unconsidered and unsaid may be brought to the fore and made visible when underscored. Here the established discourses on, for example, the absurd, are seen to remain inconclusive, and may result in "false suppositions" (Horváth 21).

The following chapter discusses my work in relation to the research results of this chapter and the discussion of Hesse's work. Exploring these findings by way of making art works in copper wire in relation to the themes of the absurd (nothing), the unstable and liminality will be the focus of chapter 3: 'My own sculptural work and practice'.

[29] Eva Hesse, catalogue statement in *Art in process IV* (New York: Finch College Museum of Art, 11 December 1969 - 26 January 1970) where *Contingent* (see fig. 21) was exhibited.

Chapter 3

My own sculptural work and practice

3.1 Introduction

As a reflection of my own work, I set out to make work in response to a possible liminal space, which would feature unstable structures with no reference to anything known and also to veer away from mainstream trends that advocate abstraction that reinforces opposites. This included being open to possibilities which were unknown or not yet known to me, in which fixed forms are challenged in order to find a creativity completely outside of my known paradigm. I was in search of an aesthetic that also challenged my own perceptual constructs, and resolved to produce work with no preconceived outcome, so that the work could be allowed to dictate its own direction during the process of its making.

I focused on two self-reflective questions that Hesse posed. These allowed her to make art on her own terms, and to reach her desired space of creating 'nothing', which, as the research has shown, was transformative and authentic. The first question I followed, during what we might call the detachment phase of the rite of passage, was to "find something else…" (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 10). The second question assisted me (possibly) to cross the boundary into transformation, and execute the last four pieces, *Scribble #1* (see fig. 30), *Scribble #2* (see fig. 31), *Touch* (see fig. 32) and *Weave* (see fig. 33) discussed in this chapter, where my consideration in making was to ask Hesse's question "… How to achieve by not achieving? How to make by not making? It's all in that"[30] (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 165).

[30] Eva Hesse catalogue statement for *Contingent* (see fig. 21) at Finch College, Art in process IV, 1969.

3.2 My sculptural work

Test pieces 2014 and 2016

Eva Hesse did not elicit assistance from others in the making of her small test pieces (see fig. 8), which, as Richard Dorment, in reviewing the exhibition at Edinburgh of Hesse's *Studiowork* (2009) observed, "…are intimidate manifestations of the artist's thought processes… seeing what might happen if she tried this or that material or technique, without necessarily thinking of the end result" (The Telegraph, 10 August 2009). This process is similar to the randomly found pieces, sourced from nature and collected over the months from the research's inception, as well as the knitted test pieces (see fig. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13) that I initially created as experiments with forms, textures and new processes, which had neither beginning nor end result in mind. Dorment likened Hesse's test pieces to "free association" (The Telegraph, 10 August 2009), which served as an important starting point for sculptural work to be produced.



Figure 8. Eva Hesse. *Studio work*. 1966-69.

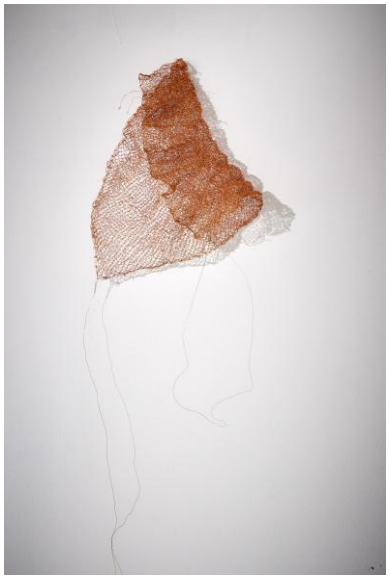



Figure 9 and 10. Antoinette Sears. *Test pieces*. 800 x 300 x 20/300 x 400 x 60. 2014.




Figure 11, 12 and 13. Antoinette Sears. *Test pieces.*

850 x 700 x 150/500 x 90 x 60. 2016.

For the purposes of my own 'free association', triangles, circles and rectangles were used in the initial experiments for the *Test pieces* (see fig. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13), which were comprised of knitted copper. The triangles were shapes with which I had worked since my undergraduate years, and they were a natural point of departure to begin the project. These

works were small and easily shaped, and held their shapes well without collapsing or stretching due to gravity. However, after reflection on the outcome of these pieces, the works seemed to lack presence, as they were so small. The decision was thus made to include skilled knitters and crochetiers to fabricate works from these *Test pieces* or maquettes that were to be knitted as large as possible, while still considering the time and resources which were available.

The contribution and skill of the knitters and crochetiers was also included in order to de-centralise myself from processes with which I had previously experimented (before the research project), in order to avoid previous forms which might emerge as newer versions of old. Another purpose was to suspend self and 'authorship' in favour of strengthening the potential of 'new' work to be produced (Felcey et al. 21). The challenge at the outset of the research was to cross my own boundary, which I first needed to establish, and to detach myself from my own ideas that seemed fixed in current aesthetic influences and past experience.

In view of this, Bongi Moyo, Prieska Musewe, Memory Mutarara, Busi Ndlovu and Sisa Ncube[31] were employed to contribute to the creative process in the form of knitted and crocheted pieces in copper wire; this to introduce an element of chance into the work. Some of the knitted pieces were typically started by me, and handed over to the knitters, who were asked to continue knitting triangles, rectangles and circles. The crocheted pieces were constructed in circular and rectangular shapes. The brief was to construct these pieces as large as possible and only to end the work at my instruction, which coincided with the culmination of the research (three months prior to submission date).

[31] The project lasted 18 months (November 2013 to May 2015), during which each knitter received a monthly wage regardless of the time it took her to complete her piece.

3.3 The Detachment phase

Once the very large knitted pieces were returned to me by the knitters, I was initially surprised, but also delighted, at the tremendous weight and limp character of the knitted copper wire, which testified to the material's transformative and potentially changing and unstable nature. This factor began another creative stage, as I decided to remain true to the nature of the material and not to place an internal structure to bulk it up. The large knitted pieces were left to remain 'nothings' that became 'something'; to hang, drape, suspend, lay flat, roll or fold, relying on gravity to dictate their final structure.

The instability of the sheets or drapes of heavy material was characterised by the resistance and gravity which shaped its form once suspended; *Suspend* (see fig. 15), hung up; *Five* (see fig. 20), hooked up; *Hooked* (see fig. 18), folded in on itself; *Wrap* (see fig.14), *Draw without Drawing* (see fig.16) and *Invisible visible* (see fig. 19) pinned against the wall. Furthermore, the various choices of installation dictated the eventual size and nature of the shapes and forms. These factors will be discussed as they pertain to each piece.



Figure 14. Antoinette Sears. *Wrap*. Knitted copper wire. 1500 x 450 x 450. Installation at The Point of Order, Wits University, 2014.

This piece (see fig. 14) consists of five layers of triangular shapes of various sizes. Folding the top ends of the triangles in on themselves created a cape or shawl. The decision to layer triangles into each other was made in order to purge the representation of a garment and to create a voluminous hanging object. However, this was not entirely successful, as reference to a cape seemed recognisable, probably due to it being life size. I decided not to resist this outcome, but rather to install this work at 'shoulder level', suspended from the ceiling, to reinforce the protective nature of a cape into which a viewer can readily step. The strands of copper wire hanging loosely to the floor are an outcome of the knitting process, which were not cut off. Further strands were added to enhance the loose ends visible during the knitting

process. This aspect of loose ends that are indicative of the process was to become a feature in works to follow. Once this piece came into being, I realised that representational work originates from preconceived ideas, even if the original idea was not that of a cape. This work established the need for any subsequent pieces to be knitted much larger to attempt to eradicate the representation of anything. The first piece after *Wrap* was *Suspend* (see fig. 15), thereafter *Draw without Drawing* (see fig. 16) and *Invisible visible* (see fig.19), all of which were made triangularly, as discussed individually below.



Figure 15. Antoinette Sears. *Suspend*. Knitted copper wire. 2200 x 300 x 2200. 3200. Installation view at The Point of Order, Wits University, 2014.

Comprising a much larger triangle than *Wrap* (see fig.14), this piece was folded over and hooked on either side to hang along a wall. The undulations in the surface broke the monotonous flat nature that knitting produces, which I found visually pleasing. However, the piece 'looked like' a blanket, which was once again edging toward accidental representation. Even though the work was completed in 2014, it was only in 2017 that the decision was made

to suspend one end to the ceiling and block the other side perpendicularly against the wall, to give the impression that the piece juts out of the wall. The installation of the work may have purged the work of representing anything, as intended. Gravity pulling the piece downward while stretched upward with the tight copper wire creates a tension that is not expected from a drape. The shadow cast against the wall extends the piece, as it veers off in another direction, other than where the wire is fastened to the ceiling. These factors, together with the ‘emergence’ out of the wall and the seemingly soft material - prone to gravitational pull yet also consisting of the hard properties of copper wire - brought the piece into an in-between space. Thus it may be perceived as an absurd piece of nothingness; the constructed part goes in one direction, while the shadow which is cast suggests a concrete object. It shows intricate detail of the knit, while veering off into another direction.



Figure 16. Antoinette Sears. *Draw without Drawing*. Knitted copper wire. 3500 x 1100 x 400. Installation view at The Point of Order, Wits University, 2016.

After the work *Suspend* (see fig. 15) came into being, it was decided to make all further knitted and crocheted works in as large a scale as possible. This was to enter an unknown direction, which would further purge any representation and allow for the potential of the material to dictate the direction. To knit this piece (see fig. 16) took almost a year. The very long flat conical shape of the piece *Draw without Drawing* (see fig. 16) presented a bold presence once attached along the wall, with folds rippling down the piece. Because the shape

is awkward for a triangle, this was in itself interesting. Displaying it as an awkward and uncannily shaped picture plane against a wall contribute to its strangeness. The large surface area seemed to invite a disruption to its surface. Here, fragments of copper found-fragments were inserted randomly, while others were thrown at the piece, to stick wherever they landed. The fragments eventually found their way along the base of the piece. As I was looking for the unknown to reveal itself, this factor reinforces the impermanence and instability of the piece, as every time it is to be installed, it will have a different 'picture' on the surface, whether on the base or further up, over which I have no control. The idea that the fragments need to be re-attached every time the piece is displayed, as these will fall off with movement, further emphasises its impermanence, and its lack of connotative reference, representing only itself. The spontaneity that these attachments require further contribute to crossing my own boundary of needing to achieve or 'make' something specific.

The natural, uneven surface and folds of *Suspend* (see fig. 15) and the work in question are present as a result of the knitting process, which adds to the natural outcome of the work. Compared to the smaller work *Wrap* (see fig. 14), which has a smoother surface and as a result required manipulation of curves and folds to shape a more pleasing result, steered me toward seeking for an outcome where the work shapes itself. Larger work where the process of knitting creates deep folds and a natural unevenness on the surface, would become integral in works that were to follow, for this effect presents itself naturally and requires no intentional manipulation. The following work, *Vessel* (see fig. 17) is the result of this decision.



Figure 17. Antoinette. Sears. *Vessel*. Knitted and crocheted copper wire. 1800 x 2150 x 2100. Installation view at The Point of Order, Wits University, 2014.

The two large round crocheted pieces, two metres in diameter (four metres circumference) and rectangular knit could appear to be a vessel or container when hung up along the edges. Here, all three pieces are layered one into the other, while the loose knit inner layer potentially reduces the obvious ‘sieve’ or ‘net’ association. Connotation is inevitable, as each viewer will make of it as he or she wishes; however, the added layers hopefully increase the

absurdity and uselessness of the object as a suitable container. The outer shell (darker copper that seems to provide an illusion of support) adopts a cone shape when strung up. The third inner layer, knitted and not crocheted, has a looser weave with natural volume. This layer was loosely scrunched to make the inner well seem soft and teased out against the consistently even and smooth outer shell. This contrasting element focuses neither on the outer shell, nor the inner, and may therefore contribute to destabilise associations with anything represented. The sharp v-shaped point at the bottom was developed during the process of crocheting, which was begun at the point and spiralled outwards to the edges. This point was inverting while being made, and upon hanging the piece, it became a focal point. Barely touching the floor, the relationship between floor and sculpture becomes evident. The piece seems to grow out of the floor rather than descend into the floor's surface. The point, almost touching the floor, also seems to hold the structure up, as if by illusion.

This piece was hung four times before its installation at The Point of Order and adopted a different form and character at each installation. Sometimes a narrow shape, sometimes wide; it depended on the points available on the ceiling that would dictate what forms the structure of this piece would adopt. Furthermore, depending on the light cast on the piece and the environment that it is in, the shadows change to reflect either on the floor or on the wall, and sometimes on both. The character (soft or hard-edged) of the shadows also varies, depending on the intensity of light as well as the lighting arrangement at each installation. These factors add to the already unstable nature of each hanging, fluctuating the form as well as the designs of the shadows cast.

This type of inconsistency and instability is an interesting element of the piece, which is further increased by the fact that the material collapses into a heap once loosened from the ceiling. The dichotomies between stable and holding its form (when installed) and unstable and collapsed into a pile (when undone from its suspension lines, or when stored) is subtle, as

this is only evident when taken down for transport and storage. The most obvious instability, compared to the expectation of a stable work made in metal, stems from the fact that the form and shape is never the same with each new installation, as if the work becomes another version of the previous one, while remaining the same piece. This feature set off a creative process into which I wanted to tap and further develop. The indeterminacy and element of surprise was a fascinating and new direction for me, leading me away from expected norms, in which sculpture requires a fixed identity and needs to be re-installed the same as before in order to be validated.



Figure 18. Antoinette Sears. *Hooked.* French knitted copper wire. 1650 x 1800 x 200. Installation view at The Point of Order, Wits University, 2016.

The two tubular shapes of *Hooked* were simply hung from a nail on the wall, as only one nail was available. Even though this was for practical purposes and not for aesthetic reasons, it is a favourable addition to a work constituted by chance and not by decision. Here, gravity prevented it from collapsing in on itself, due to the lightweight quality of the weave. This was the only piece that successfully translated from the *Test pieces* (see fig. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13) into a large work, where the natural tubular shape held its own form.

Once again, the piece changes with every installation, as the tubes on the floor may be arranged differently at each hanging. The tubes along the wall may also vary with each

installation due to gravity dictating their draping, not manipulation. What was noticeable during the installation at The Point of Order was that the work could be seen to begin at the top and travel downward, or start at floor level and travel upward. It may also be perceived as neither, which reinforces its transformative potential. The simplicity of a piece so large, in the sense that it does not require an armature and no internal support, suggests an ethereal quality that may not easily be achieved with large works. This fact was noted as highly meritorious, but as the aesthetic I was in search of was aimed at not directing outcomes, it was not part of the research.



Figure 19. Antoinette Sears. *Invisible visible*. Knitted nylon line. 2900 x 1700 x 550. Installation at The Point of Order, Wits University, 2016.

To test the quality of a different material as a knitted piece, nylon line was used for this piece. It took almost two years to reach its current state; however, it should be said that it is incomplete, as knitting was halted due to the research coming to an end. It was judged not to necessitate any further interaction, other than to display it on the wall, allowing gravity to dictate its final shape. The loose, untrimmed lines of the knit create a soft, fragmented, unfinished and therefore unstable quality as well as three-dimensionality, especially when compared to the tight quality of weave of the copper pieces. The loose lines across the surface manifest as part of the knitting process, as the lines were easily knotted and tangled while in the process of being knitted, but then not cut off. This factor contributed to the piece without the need to embellish or continue working on it. Installed, the work gives the sense of an animal skin hanging along the wall; and, while this idea is rather grotesque for such a fragile piece, it contrasts strongly with the soft, white, translucent surface that seems alive with movement and sensual because of its delicate surface. The name chosen for this work relates to the near invisibility of the piece against the white wall, which connects to the theme of liminality. Here, transformation of one thing – the near invisible drape against the white wall without light reflected on it - into an entirely other, as light reflects its intricate shadows, is evident. These shadows add another dimension to the work, 'drawing' the detail of the knit onto the wall, creating a three dimensionality to the flatness against the wall. The detail that the shadow casts is not visible without light shone upon it, reinforcing its transformative nature.

The sense of gravity pulling the piece down from its nails is exaggerated due to the surprising weight of this piece, as it drapes down into naturally formed folds and spills onto the floor. This spontaneous drape will not be re-duplicated at subsequent installations, reinforcing the instability of the piece, which will be different every time. This factor may change according to interpretation. No further work with nylon line was made as works of

this nature are time consuming; however, this type of work may be resumed after the research, for the purpose of exploring its unpredictable outcome.



Figure 20. Antoinette Sears. *Five*. Grid knitted copper wire. 3900 x 1800 x 500. Installation view at The Point of Order, Wits University, 2016.

Five rectangular shapes of varying lengths were knitted on a grid, a type of weaving device, with no preconceived idea in mind as to what this piece would or should be or how it should

be arranged. There was not much to do with these five rectangular knits but to hang, roll up or lie flat. Arrangement options included draping the pieces on the floor or against a wall; suspended close together, further apart, or next to each other, as if picture planes; or by placing them in a similar manner to the arrangement in Hesse's *Contingent*. Hesse's *Contingent* (see fig. 21), regarded by the artist as an important work,[32] while also noting its unmistakably absurd strangeness, instability and seeming 'nothingness', strikes me as a 'familiar unknown'. Consequently, I chose to arrange the five shapes to mimic *Contingent*, as this work is no longer visible for public viewing. It is packed in crates in a gallery in Australia because it is brittle, oxidised, deteriorating, and so unstable that it cannot be exposed to light. The materials Hesse used did not last, which increases the sense of absurdity of *Contingent* as an artwork in the process of decay. The five copper rectangular shapes in my work may not decay to that extent, but they may oxidise and darken, or could end up in storage, packed away due to their collapsing character when not installed. This eventuality taps into the theme of the liminal, as a result of avoiding assimilation into the mainstream in the pursuit of 'something else' that is not representative; it is unstable to the point that it exists but is not visible to viewers, and hidden. These factors echo the unknown in Hesse's established style, reinforcing my source of inspiration. This established style of unknowingness will be discussed further on.

The shadows cast on the wall in between the copper shapes mirror the drapes, creating another dimension that may be regarded as absurd in the sense that the cast shadows fill the 'empty spaces' as discussed in Chapter 2 concerning Hesse's *Metronomic Irregularity II* (1966). This new dimension created by shadows relates to the instability and absurdity that the work presents, revealing that the copper shapes alone do not constitute the piece. The direct light on the sculpture and light from outside lighten the shadow, while, during the

[32] Contingent (see fig. 21) appeared on the cover or Art Forum, May 1970.

evening, the shadows are more distinct and darker. These shadows may also vary each time the work is installed due to lighting that may be placed differently, which contributes to the instability of the piece.



Figure 21. Eva Hesse. *Contingent*. Cheesecloth, latex, fiberglass. 3500 x 6300 x 1090. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 1969.



Figure 22. Antoinette Sears. *Rolled*. Knitted copper wire. 1650 x 1800 x 200. Installation view at The Point of Order, Wits University, 2017.

Knitting for the piece *Rolled* (see fig. 22) was completed in 2015 and, since then, has been stored rolled up. In 2017, it seemed complete as a work of art when thrown onto the floor, still partially rolled up. The undulations and folds are part of the knitting process, as well as a result of being stored in a bag too small for its size. The rolled up part bulks up the flatness that is typical of the manner presented by a knitted piece, which also creates contrasting elements.

The sense of completeness, without having to manipulate it with an inner structure or attempting to push it into another shape other than when it was taken out of the storage bag, evokes the theme of liminality, where no preconceived ideas influence the outcome. The unstable nature appears when it is picked up and returned to the storage bag to transport, where, when re-installed, the exact shape will never be duplicated. This means that the form, shape and identity of the piece will manifest as a different piece each time it is exhibited.

What is interesting is that the work, as in the case with the piece *Five* (see fig. 20), was made and then stored, thereby occupying a liminal space where it was nothing; it vanished from sight. Once opened up and thrown onto the floor, it transformed into an artwork. This resolution out of liminality, that re-stabilises the unstable in-between stage, once the work is installed, will be discussed in 'The Resolution', Chapter 4.

As far as installation is concerned, the choice was made to install *Rolled* in close proximity to *Vessel* (see fig. 17), because the latter equally slumps onto the floor and is rolled up once uninstalled. This reinforces the fact that it is the installation that creates the form and shape, or brings the piece to exist as a regenerative form, since both knitted and crocheted pieces are hidden, rolled up and impermanent in the state in-between the making and the final installation where the pieces resolve into works of art. These similar materials are presented as collapsed (*Rolled*) and shaped into a form in hanging (*Vessel*).



Figure 23. Antoinette Sears. *Tied.* Crocheted copper wire, oxidised. 1400 x 650 x 650. Installation at The Point of Order, Wits University, 2017.

As one of the pieces which was crocheted to be used as material for potential art works or to include with other forms in 2014, this was the only piece that did not resonate with me, due to its oxidised surface and small dimension. Readdressing the piece in 2017, it was simply hung from a nail, and the flaring out of the limp sheet caught my attention. This piece was almost abandoned, until it was decided to suspend it with nylon cord, which reinforced its three-dimensionality as a form in space that could spin on its own axis when moved. The potential movement of the piece as well as its stillness present two different elements at work in one sculpture. Here the liminal theme of neither moving nor being still is expressed, yet both are reinforced. The decision to hang it very close to the floor was an extension of the work,

Vessel (see fig. 17), where the lowest point activated a relationship with the floor, stabilizing the seemingly floating, unstable piece. This factor was further expressed in the piece *Touch* (see fig. 32), which is discussed in the next section.

When assessing the work as a body of sculptural pieces, the above-mentioned work made it evident for me that with my own work I had unexpectedly stepped into an arena of instability and absurdity that such limp forms hold.[33] Instability was not what I set out to achieve, as I had not yet realised that this was what shifted known objects into an unknown paradigm. Rather, it appeared as a result of having no internal structure to hold the knit in shape. The sheer weight of the copper knits caused the material to slump when pulled by gravity, underscoring its unstable and absurd nature. The notion of creating 'nothing' from material that represented nothing, opened a new door for me so that the act of folding, suspending, rolling and so on thereafter drew my interest. Once these verbs became evident in the works already made, they became a point of departure in the process of making, similar to Hesse's own word associations with the word 'nothing': "…non art, non connotive (sic), non anthropomorphic, non geometric, non, nothing…" (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 165). Word associations bestowed to Hesse by Mel Bochner in the form of a calligraphic artwork entitled *Portrait of Eva Hesse* (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 204) (see fig. 24) illuminate a new language that was evident in the artist's process. This is an important aspect to my process and development and is discussed in the following section.

[33] See the discussion of Hesse's work in Chapter 2.



Figure 24. Mel Bochner. *Portrait of Eva Hesse*. Ink on graph paper. 110 x 110. Private Collection, Mel Bochner, 1966.

3.4 The Liminal phase

Upon deeper reflection of the knitted works hanging in my studio, I observed that the forms relied on gravity to shape them and as the material was left to fall wherever it wanted to this reinforced the notion of instability and the non-specific. However, they were either 'somethings' or 'nothings', but did not seem to translate to anything in-between. Conversely, the play of gravity, especially in Hesse's work *Untitled/ Rope piece* (see fig. 25), made after *Right After* (see fig. 6), left the work hanging irregularly and chaotically, as it fell *during* the process of making. This seemed to be an essential part of Hesse's oeuvre, which may be one of the means by which the artist exited the realm of the expected known, and produced the extra-ordinary transformative 'nothing' works. In *Untitled* (see fig. 25), leaving the raw material coated with latex and filler to gravity, with no preconceived notion of where and

how it should hang, or what the surface should be during its making, seems not only to highlight the unexpected and unknown reality, but brings about a completely other result. This may be the means by which Hesse reached a transformative (liminal) character in her work.



Figure 25. Eva Hesse. *Untitled/Rope piece*. Latex and filler over rope and string with metal hooks. Dimensions vary. Whitney Museum of American Art, N. Y, 1970.



Figure 26. Robert Morris. *Untitled*. Tan felt (9 strips). Each strip: 3048 x 203/ 120 x 8. Saatchi Gallery, London, 1968.

As for my own work, the knitted pieces catalogued above in "The Departure" reminded me of the 1960s artist Robert Morris, who also worked with gravity to manifest the forms of his soft, collapsing felt materials (Sussman and Hesse 74) (see fig. 26). However, Morris set out with a preconceived notion to create an abstract 'anti-form' (Morris), reinforcing the binary opposition between representational art and anti-form. Conversely, Hesse seems not to have created later work (1969-70) with this notion in mind. Instead, the work *Untitled,* 1970 (see fig. 25) was to be neither form, nor anti-form: material constituted in the studio and left as it was *while being made*, seemingly without preconceived notions as to its outcome. Thereafter it hung in the gallery as it hung in the studio, without a concern for its aesthetic value or attempting to make 'sculpture' that is abstract or anti-form or anything at all.

The outcome of the knitted works mentioned in the departure stage did not resonate with me fully, to the extent that I was pleased to have 'found something else'. The problem seemed to be that it was somewhat pre-conceived, as it was knitted into a fixed shape to which I was confined. Here, material already constituted (the knitted shape) was used to

create forms that manifested only once hung, rolled, suspended, and so on. Furthermore, the work looked similar to that of other artists whom I had researched for inspiration, such as Hesse's contemporaries' works, for example, Alice Adam's *Big Aluminum* 1965/66 (see fig. 27) or Alan Saret's *Forest Close* 1969/70 (see fig. 28). As such, I was concerned to be recycling images from the past into the present.[34]

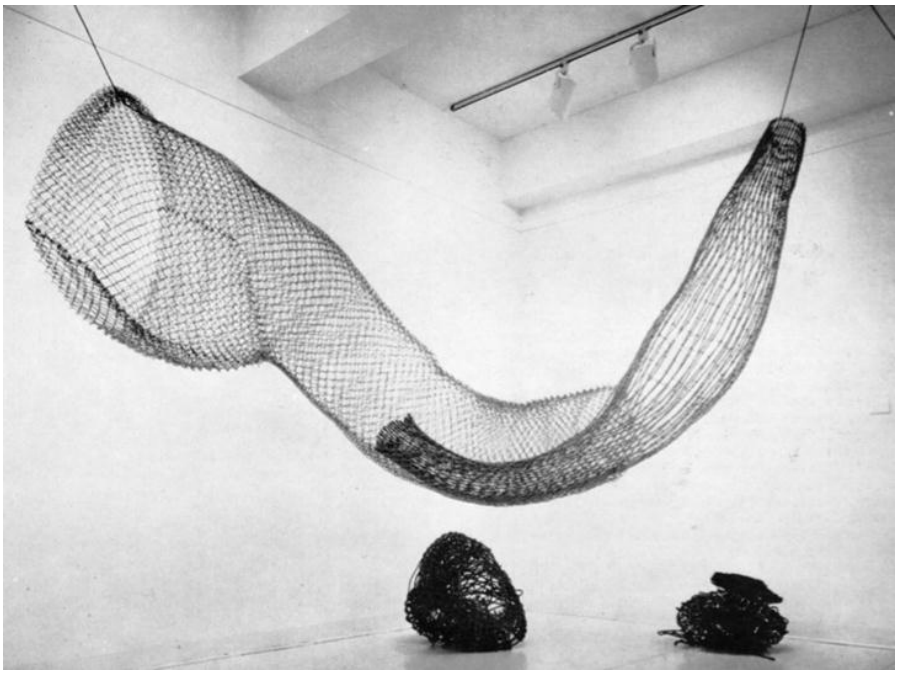


Figure 27. Alice Adams. *Big Aluminum*. Installation view of *Eccentric Abstraction Exhibition*, 1965; Fischbach Gallery, New York, September 20–October 8, 1966; Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 1965/66. (Photo: Fischbach Gallery, New York).

[34] This is an important observation, and will be revisited in the conclusion to this chapter.

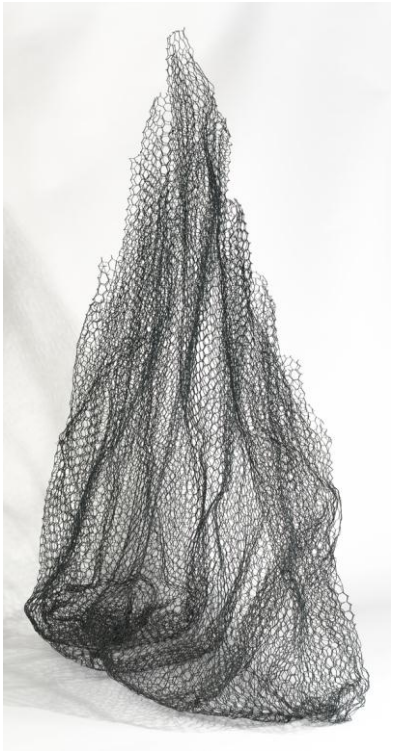


Figure 28. Alan Saret. *Forest Close*. Vinyl coated netting. 1778 × 1219 × 813. Johnson Museum of Art, New York, 1969/70.

On the one hand, it was evident that I may have departed from work processes that I had used previously, such as where inner support structures held unstable material together in *Andromeda* (see fig. 29). However, on the other hand, the work was not reaching a state of genuine transformation into an entirely other type of form. I decided at this point that I may still be engaged in the known or pre-liminal phase, somewhat recycling versions of what I had done in 1996,[35] (see fig. 29) not unlike others such as Adams and Saret. Nevertheless, what was interesting was that I was certainly tapping into a visual language established in the Eccentric Abstraction style, in which artists distance themselves from mainstream ideas and forms and engage in an unknown dimension, but more of this later.

[35] During the Advanced Diploma in Fine Art in 1996.



Figure 29. Antoinette Sears. *Andromeda*. Galvanised mesh wire, steel and stainless steel shavings, lights. 1200 x 3100 x 1300 . Installation at Gertrude Posel Gallery, Wits University, 1996.

Theoretically, the argument toward liminal transformation in Eva Hesse's work seems clear from the research, but from the artist's practice, I remained perplexed as to how Hesse was able to cross boundaries in the manner that she had done. Within the liminal are to be found new structures of absurdity, instability and nothingness, but these cannot be preconceived or invented, as existing images require transforming whatever has gone before. In order to allow for something new to appear, I decided at this point to stop 'making' or thinking towards what I wanted to achieve through experimenting, and to cease with pre-conceived visual decisions altogether, to the extent that this might be possible.

Once the decision was made to stop making, which meant that no further work for the research was to be produced, I was reminded of Bochner's absurd *Portrait of Eva Hesse* (see fig. 24), which seems to reflect her work processes rather than her aim to create something

absurd or non-nothing. In view of this, I adopted a new perspective from which to approach art objects, so as to bring relief to my day-to-day creative life, and to ease the pressure to create and make, perform and achieve. I decided to formulate a personal epigram, as a manner of extension of Bochner's keywords of Hesse's work (see fig. 24). The epigram is as follows: 'just stop making, creating, thinking, discussing, doing, controlling, aspiring, achieving, hoping, guessing, wanting, fearing, deciding, waiting, worrying, caring, debilitating, assuming, speculating, wondering…' (see fig. 36). With these words in mind, it was no longer necessary to make further work and I accepted the work already made as final.

At this point, I came across and contemplated the following question from Hesse, which I found compelling, concerning the dilemma of no longer making objects.

"… How to achieve by not achieving? How to make by not making? It's all in that"[36] (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 165).

Once the decision was made to stop making further work, and with the epigram in mind, a memory arrived of an interest to which I was irresistibly drawn. The interest had been sparked prior to the research but never pursued. It is regarding a visual form that holds no meaning or value, which is neither sought out, nor preconceived. I am simply irresistibly drawn to certain objects or shapes that I stumble upon, for no overt or explicable reason, certainly not in a way that can be conventionally narrativised in terms of arts discourses.

I opted to open myself up to this realm, which I would like to think of as located in the invisible, irrelevant and not contemplated as art. This lies not in making at all, but rather in *encountering*. This change of mind-set allowed me to see materials that were not ready-made objects, but rather to allow the material, and the interesting ways in which metal wire forms itself when left discarded, to be in the state that it is without manipulating it

[36] Eva Hesse catalogue statement for *Contingent* (see fig. 21) at Finch College, Art in process IV, 1969.

unnecessarily. For, as far as I am concerned, the ‘image’ is complete and requires no further development. This does not include simply any discarded material, but only those items that fascinated me; those that were not made to be a sculptural piece but rather which hold a valuable expression of what resonates deeply within me. Ultimately, each piece is nothing, means nothing and belongs nowhere – it is associated with the nameless, the unsayable, the unknown, the hidden, the unfamiliar, the formless and shapeless.

Added to this, I am interested in challenging expected norms of ‘valuable’ and ‘real’, yet not escaping them per se. In so doing, rather than aiming for *another* real, that may lie at the polar opposite, I would opt for neither ‘something’ nor ‘nothing’, drawn to the limitless possibilities of such indeterminate forms.

The four last works were the result of this new perspective of making/not making art. I felt drawn to various bundles of scrap metal discarded in the studio, collected during the 1990s. The pieces *Scribble #1* (see fig. 30), *Scribble #2* (see fig. 31) and *Touch* (see fig. 32) simply came into being upon my acknowledgement of the material’s indeterminate state on the shelf with other scrap material, and of accepting as it was. The materiality of the copper wire of these works dictated its shape, and my noticing and thereby authenticating it, dictated its value.

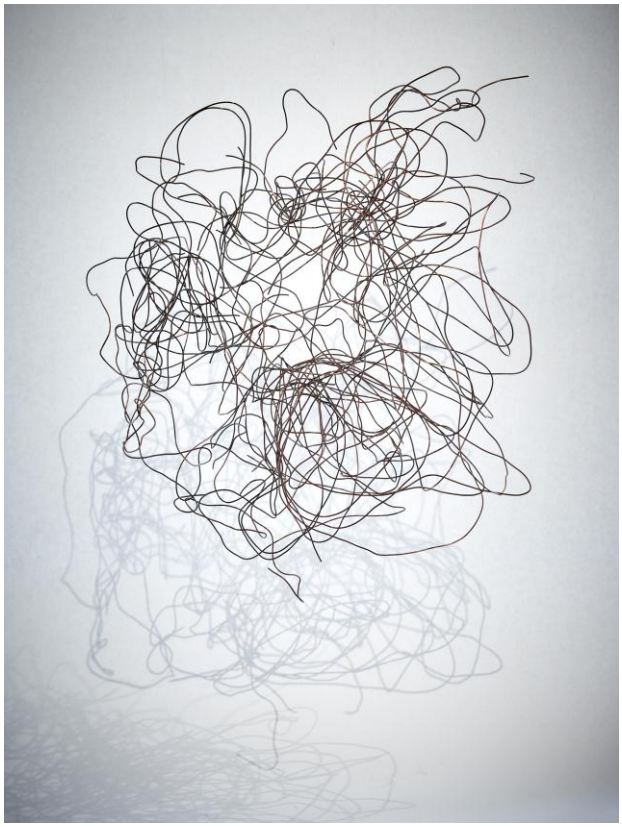


Figure. 30. Antoinette Sears. *Scribble #1*. Copper wire. 750 x 600 x 300 but may vary. Installation at The Point of Order, Wits University, 2017.



Figure. 31. Antoinette Sears. *Scribble #2*. Copper tubing and wire. 900 x 900 x 500 but may vary. Installation at The Point of Order, Wits University, 2017.

The scrap copper wire (*Scribble # 1*) and tubing (*Scribble # 2*) were pulled apart to separate the tight bundles and were sanded down to partially reveal the original copper surface. The tubed pieces were short, and required some interweaving to become stable as one piece. Hanging the work from the ceiling with nylon cord, to give a sense of it floating in space, contradicts the heaviness of the material. The abdication from achieving and making something specific or non-specific or perhaps both, and welcoming the unknown event to shape the piece, became a new work process with which to progress.

Another new feature which appeared was the fact that these works, more so *Scribble # 2* (see fig. 31), are so unstable that the form will alter its shape and appearance each time it is installed far more radically than those mentioned previously , namely *Vessel*, 2014 (see fig. 17) and *Hooked*, 2016 (see fig. 18). To reinforce this eventuality, it was decided to use this element and make it part of the piece – so that every time it is installed, it would be an entirely other work, yet the same material and installed the same way. In so doing, the piece transforms with every installation, and adopts a shape that is dependent on a form that emerges spontaneously. This factor is transformative not only in the eventual appearance of the piece, but also in my work process where the same sculpture will be exhibited as another form: the epitome of "without making".

Immediately after these two works came into being, the piece *Touch* (see fig. 32) 'happened'.

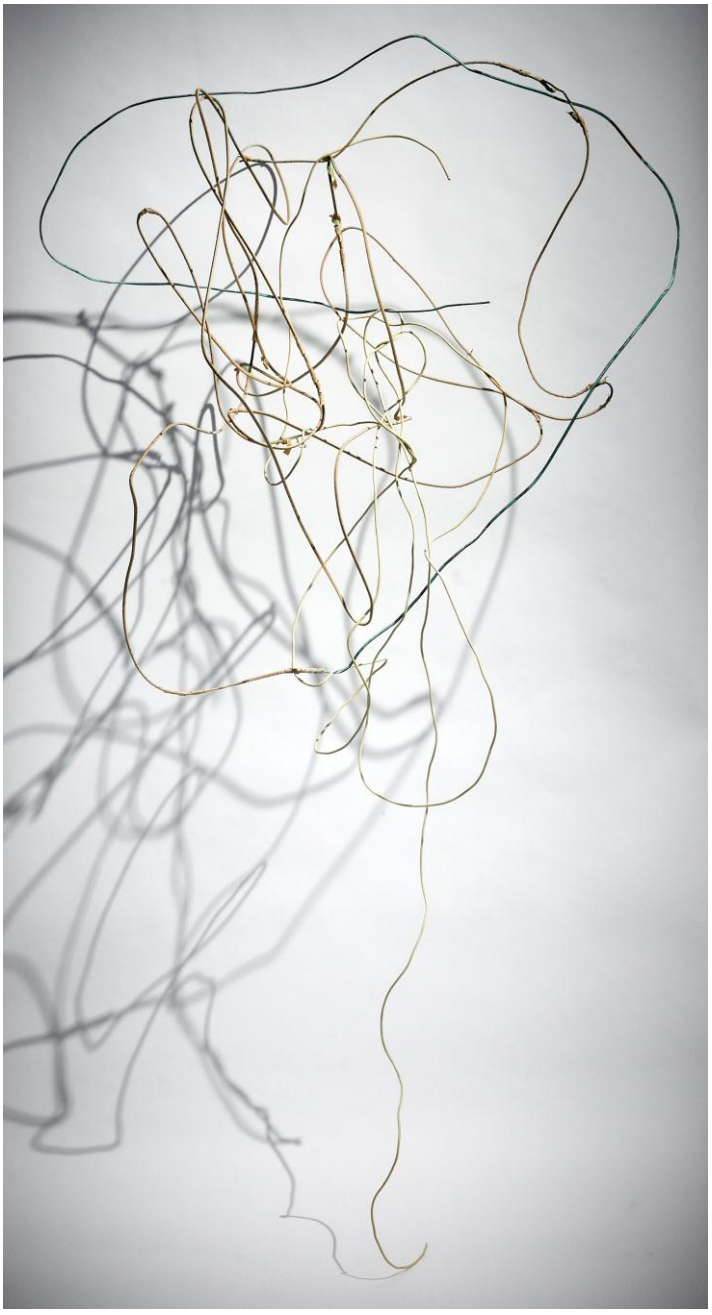


Figure 32. Antoinette Sears. *Touch*. Paper covered copper wire, patina, telephone cable. 2000 x 900 x 700. Installation at The Point of Order, Wits University, 2017.

This piece was originally copper wire covered in scrap paper, tangled in telephone cable. The torn off paper in some parts came about due to wear and tear. My attention was drawn to the similarity in hue of the paper and cable as these two materials were intertwined with one another. To liven up the piece, the exposed copper between the paper covering was brushed with patina and the 'lines' pried apart from its tightly stored state. Thereafter, the loose lines

were hung against a wall. For a while it remained there; however, it seemed too flat an object and lacked an emotive quality, or, in particular, a feeling that resonated with me. The moment it was suspended from the ceiling, attached with near-invisible nylon line, it bulked out into an ethereal, three-dimensional 'line-drawing' floating in the air, relying on the tension of the wires cutting across each other to hold it together. The draping telephone cable reaching the floor appeared by accident and was left to drape, relying on gravity to shape it. The cable touching the floor is linked to the pieces *Vessel* (see fig. 17) and *Tied* (see fig. 23), where these two threaten to touch the floor.

In this case, the draping cable anchors the open, floating shape to the ground, stabilising the fragility and near-collapse of the form. Here, as with Hesse's *Untitled/ Rope Piece* (see fig. 25), the unstable form is grounded by the loose cord touching the ground, and 'anchors' the fragile and unstable piece to the floor, giving an illusion of stability and support. Both Hesse's *Untitled/ Rope Piece* and my *Touch* are also unstable to the point where they will not hold the same form when moved from one installation to another.[37] This may even change form over a short time while hanging, as it did in the studio, which is due to the 'lines' spaced so far apart and the paper covered wire which is soft and which bends easily out of shape. Here, a seemingly impossible form, made of materials too soft to hold their own shape when hung, is neither stable nor unstable, neither sculpture nor not sculpture (and maybe both). It is nothing, made without making - a feature of liminality and absurdity. Without the forerunners of *Scribble #1* (see fig. 30) and *Scribble #2* (see fig. 31), this work would not have been realised. It is the former two that set a platform for authentic work of this nature; that which is not made, but which has merely appeared.

[37] As the case with Hesse's piece *Right After*, 1969 (see fig. 6)

The experience of crossing the boundary between the known - or using a material that is stable for sculpture - and the unknown, using an unstable material, in the pieces *Touch* (see fig. 32), *Scribble #1* (see fig. 30) and *Scribble #2* (see fig. 31) was not an epiphany. It was without will or force, did not 'arrive' through choosing either this or that, or planning or having any pre-conceived idea in mind. It was a time where "certainties" and "the taken-for-granted order of things dissolve" (Horváth 2, 3); where whatever evolves from the characteristics of the material (not an idea) becomes the form for a work of art. The experience and resultant work is the authentic neither/nor that requires no contemplation. There are no opposite notions such as either this or that, as the work is located in a space of irrelevance (Horváth 3, 4).

What is potentially exposed here is a reality that may evoke prejudice and suspicion, denial and mistrust, as a response to the forms that are made manifest. However, these insecurity-driven responses due to pressure to conform and achieve, needed to be suspended in favour of accepting a unique space devoid of value to anyone but myself. Anxiety and inner turmoil that such pressure may bring, are potentially the very ingredients to transform individuals into "extremely receptive and sensitive occasionists" (Horváth 134), which may change perceptions and directions. What is 'real' for others is no longer real for those in a liminal absurd experience. What is unknown for others is no longer unknown in liminal incommensurability. Once accepting insecurity, distrust and reluctance (as a result of anxiety and insecurity), the outer chaos, as I experienced it, was replaced by "…an order of the inside…" (Thomassen 118), which as Thomassen states, is "…a founding characteristic of liminality" (118). Thomassen confirms this to be part of a transformative experience wherein it is essential to "…radicalize and [bring] to exhaustion doubt and scepticism through personal… reflexivity" (118).

The transformative pieces that emerged manifested out of my personal epigram, the result of self-reflection. When I set out to follow this, it necessitated detaching from all contemplation, investigation and forms of research. This eventuality, as a result of the epigram, emerged from being in a state of Godot-style absurdity of being in nothing, looking for nothing, wanting nothing, aiming for nothing, not planning, not caring. Neither judging it as chaotic, non-, nothing, not art, let alone not good art. The piece of nothing, *Touch* (see fig. 32) nudged me over the boundary that held art and non-art in its grip for me, into the unknown and irrelevant that is the liminal space via Hesse's question: "how to achieve by not achieving? how to make by not making?" (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 165).



Figure. 33. Antoinette Sears. *Weave*. Tinted copper wire and copper fragments, stainless steel pegs. 850 x 700 x 150. Installation at The Point of Order, Wits University, 2017.

Hesse had noted of her work, "all I wanted was to find my own scene […] inner peace or inner turmoil, but I wanted it to be mine" (Hesse et al. 62).

Once the moment arrived at which I was potentially at a threshold with the above-mentioned three works, each of which I felt reflected the theme of the liminal, the unplanned, unintended piece *Weave* (see fig. 33) evolved as a natural and necessary extension. I felt that I could set myself apart from social conventions and my own illusions about what my work was meant to look like, or from the contemporary cultural expectations in the art context and market. After specifically the piece *Touch* (see fig. 32), I felt comfortable that I had found my own scene, whatever that consisted of, or as far it could be said to be mine.

Weave (see fig. 33) consists of bright pink, fine copper wire found at least two decades previously as scrap metal. It had lain for many years in a container, tied and entangled into a tight bundle, until it caught my eye toward the very end of the research. I pried it apart with no ideas or hopes for it to be a potential work, and as I did so, discovered small bundled pieces of cut fragments that were tangled in the web of fine wire. There, in the moment of delight and of being irresistibly drawn to its delicate charm, I knew this work to be the end of all work I had previously done. The mass of wire was stretched out as far as possible, being mindful not to destroy the small bundles, as these threatened to break apart; this reflected the exact instability and absurdity that may be avoided by some artists for fear that it cannot be regarded as an official artwork that is meant to last. As I hung it against the wall for practical purposes, partially to protect it from disintegrating, and partly to protect its fragility from harm, the weave-like 'cloth' or drape found its position. The piece is so fragile that transporting it would necessitate great care, which reinforces its instability and chaotic nature. At the same time, the fact that it is copper wire, a material that is somewhat rigid, lends itself to the paradigm of neither firm nor fragile, neither craft nor art, neither weave nor tangled chaos, neither a picture plane, nor a sculpture, but also all of this: it is transformative in nature[38].

The experience of the liminal that I feel this work, as well as *Touch* (see fig. 32) and *Scribble #2* (see fig. 31), may be, offered a space where there is nothing significant to make, do, be or become, and no dictating voices from the past or present to guide or interfere. The space provided an uncanny gap for art on my terms. I welcomed this unsettling arena of supposed disorder, chaos and irrelevance, even though it was going against all that I had

[38] When transported and handled to be installed at The Point of Order, the piece began to stretch, threatening to lose its shape that was held together by the loose tangled 'weave'. In order to stabilize it for hanging on the two pegs jutting out of the wall, a single fine wire was woven from left to right to reinforce the top corners from which it was to hang.

known, learnt and practiced, for its value offered nothing to go by and contained no familiar references. The seemingly chaotic and unstable nature of *Weave* (see fig. 33) brought a stillness and order: as a result, I felt at one with the stillness within and the resonance with the work without.

3.5 Reflection

When looking in retrospect at the body of work I produced, as well as perhaps the work of Eva Hesse, it seems that in order to cross the boundary or margin out of known paradigms for transformation to take place, it is necessary to distance and detach oneself from the known world. For this to take place, knowledge of the external world that based upon what we perceive, expect and imagine to be, need to be suspended (Thomassen 128). Thomassen writes that in order to reach a meaningful and genuine experience that is transformative, "a story, a memory, a platform from where we can point at…" (189)[39] is essential. These stories, platforms or even epigrams require one to "…turn the gaze inwards [and] establish from within an unquestionable truth and construct a system of order that flows from there towards the world…" (Thomassen 128).

Establishing one's 'unquestionable truth', perhaps but not exclusively, by way of impossible questions and absurd notions such as making nothing or an absurdity, seems, according to the research thus far, crucial for the possibility of transformative and radically new work to manifest. The 'unquestionable truth' as it pertains to me was triggered by Hesse's question: "how to achieve by not achieving? How to make by not making? It is all in that" (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 165) and answered by way of my own epigram (see fig. 36). The question Hesse poses seems impossible and absurd as it cannot be answered within known

[39] As the research has shown, and in the abundant literature about the artist's life that includes her life story and memories, as well as statements, this is the point of departure that Hesse is reported to have chosen.

paradigms, which necessarily means that it needs to emerge from becoming sensitive to things ignored or disregarded.

To transform or to pursue transformative work requires an investigation of oneself and effort to attain that which is unknown to one, while still being open to its arrival. This was the case with the last four works in this research. Their success may be due to my becoming "attuned" (Horváth 37) with what I regarded as important to me, as previously mentioned. Horváth states that, since this space is not known, one may not trust what emerges. However, even though it might seem a form of chaotic disarray, therein lies the 'unquestionable truth',[40] which may be read as infinite in possibilities and latent in potential, yet overlooked in favour of a more secure place of knowingness.

Returning to the point made previously, that the knitted pieces looked like works by Saret (see fig. 28) and Adams (see fig. 27), it may be useful to investigate 'attunement' as it pertains to my work process. Three years prior to the emergence of *Weave* (see fig. 33), I collected source material of artists working with liminal, absurd and unstable themes (which included fragility, nothingness and a focus on materiality), especially from the 1960s *Eccentric Abstraction* and *9 in a Warehouse* group of artists.[41] I was surprised, while compiling the images for the dissertation, to come across Alan Saret's fragile and unstable works, such as *Untitled*, (see fig. 34) which looked very similar to *Weave* (see fig. 33). The choices made for the last piece, *Weave,* resurfaced after having seen the Saret work three years before. I did not remember this work and realised that it linked to the way I work and that my own work, style and choices seem to tap into this artist's oeuvre.

[40] Discussed further in this essay.
[41] Louis Bourgeois, Alice Adams, Alan Saret, Keith Sonnier.



Figure 34. Alan Saret. *Untitled*. Tin coated copper wire. 1041 x 305 x 279, ca. 1975.

What is interesting is that I had tuned into the fertile time of these 1960s artists, particularly as my style of working exemplifies the in-between. It seems that I had become familiar with this language over time.

This suggests the theme of liminality appears when assimilation into the mainstream is avoided, and that my work seems to be grounded in an established mode that Hesse, Saret and Adams practised. It may be a language of in-betweenness that favours fragility, instability and absurd features. This factor will be taken up in the following chapter.

What opened up for me (specifically in the last four works with a liminal theme) was my own unquestionable truth, which previously I had not considered as valid or necessary. That, at the core of my sculptural practice, lies what I did not consider to be associated with making art: that I genuinely preferred not to ‘make’ things to present as art objects but rather to find or encounter things to exhibit that are otherwise - that is art to me. I felt drawn to seemingly irrelevant objects that resonate with me personally, and that are complete as they

are discovered. It is upon this conclusion that the title of the catalogued exhibition at The Point of Order[42], Wits University, which forms part of this research, was chosen to be "Without making" (see fig. 35).

In the following chapter, The Resolution - the third phase that completes the cycle of the rite of passage of transforming one thing not into its opposite but into an entirely other reality - discusses the way out of liminality into re-aggregation.

[42] See Appendix 1 for sculptures included in exhibition at The Point of Order, Wits University, from 23 February to 17 March 2017.

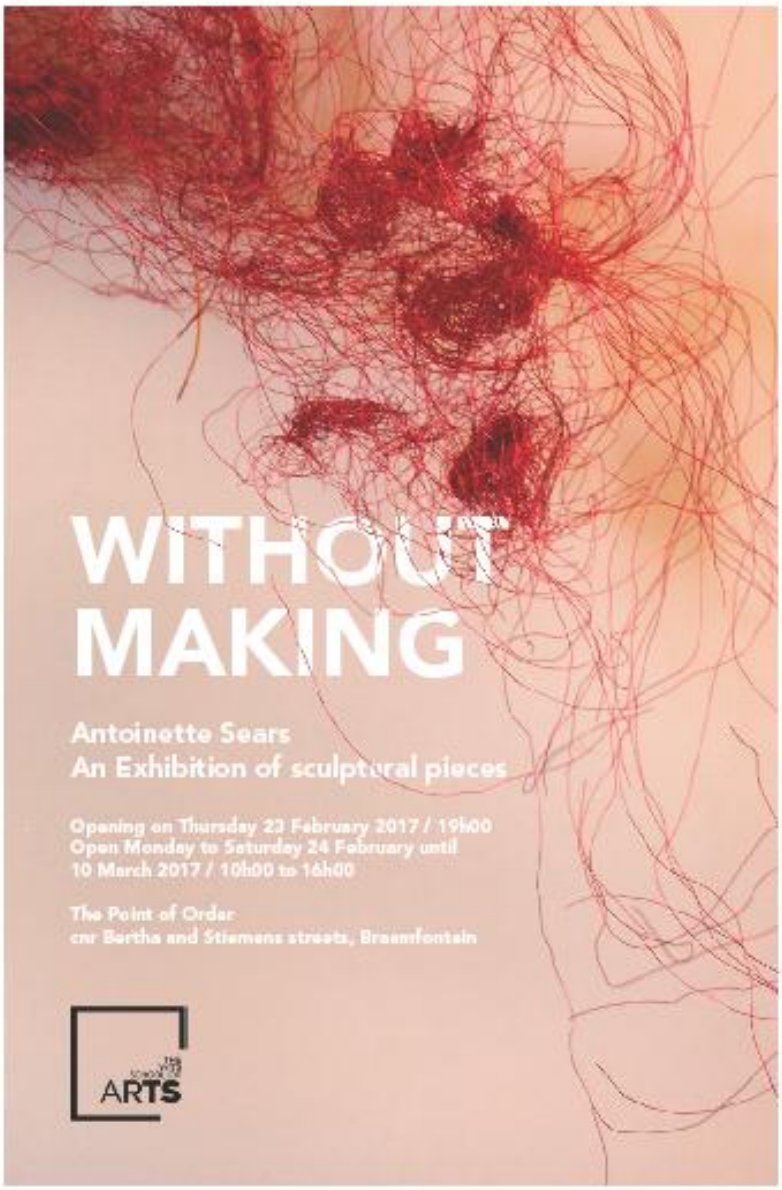


Figure 35. Invitation to the Exhibition *Without Making* at The Point of Order, Wits University, February 2017.

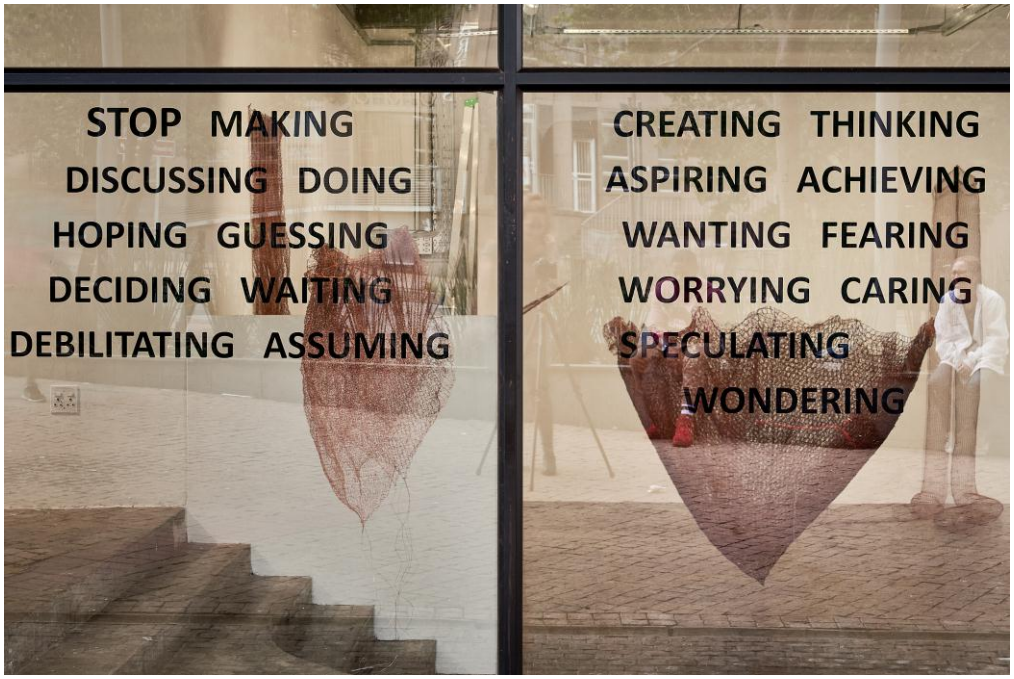


Figure 36. Vinyl text displayed during the exhibition installation on the window of The Point of Order, Wits University, 2017.



Figure 37. Installation view of sculpture at The Point of Order, Wits University, 2017.

Chapter 4

The Resolution

If the movement of the rite of passage is from "one position to another" (Thomassen 14), then the newly discovered, transformed state needs to be incorporated back into the world, surfacing as a new presence. This could be likened to returning from a journey (Van Gennep 23) enriched with new skills, knowledge or images, despite setting out without definitive answers or direction. Liminality is not a single, isolated event,[43] but is located as the middle part of a progressive cycle, without which it is not an in-between location. Thomassen states that:

> if moving into liminality can best be captured as a loss of home and a ritualized rupture with the world as we know it, any movement out of liminality must somehow relate to a sort of home-coming, a feeling at home *in* the world and *with* the world, at the levels of both thought and practice (17).

Eva Hesse's determination to make art "…of another kind, vision, sort, from a total other reference point" (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 165), may have culminated in her own successful arrival and home-coming, through making art on her own terms, and presenting it to the public,[44] where the artist was acknowledged as a major contributor to sculpture. Her commitment to resolving the questions, intentions and challenges that she set out to overcome

[43] A few critical theorists refer to liminality as an in-between space without including the pre-liminal and post-liminal stages, for example, Homi Bhaba.

[44] Doug Johns (Pollock and Corby 93-94), Hesse's fabricator of several resin works, claims that two critical moments in her career were when *Right After* (see fig. 6) was exhibited at a major show at the Jewish Museum, where she was the only woman amongst leading Minimalist artists to receive recognition, while another determining moment was when *Contingent* (see fig. 21) was the cover image for *Artforum*, May 1970.

in both life and art by way of her own course, and to make "…art [that] is the art of the artist personally" (Hesse et al. 22, 23) may have made her "feel at home in and with the world", even if that world is absurd and extreme. So too with the 2017 works for the research that emerged;[45] there was a feeling of having arrived at a place, within and without; a feeling of coming 'home' to stability, comfort and familiarity in the world around me, based on my own terms, which was enormously rewarding. As Horváth surmises about the liminal resolution: it is "generative" (113) of mind, body and spirit. In this case, the newly manifested work brings new perspectives and direction for future work to develop and manifest.

Lucy Lippard echoes the three stages of the rites of passage (without stating them in those terms) of the work of Eva Hesse, that the artist "…took exactly what she needed from the art around her, transformed it, and gave it back" (*Eva Hesse* 196). This implies that the artist completed the journey where the new role, skill, image and idea (Thomassen 92) is revealed and new identification with, for example, a potentially new form of art, is offered.[46] Furthermore, the 'giving back' is at the core of human social association and relations with each other (215), which is meant to enrich one another's life. Living a life which includes enduring instability in the search for meaning, or engaging in experimental processes to manifest new visual forms, and subsequently resolving the unknown, can be shared with others so as to bring encouragement and potentialities not considered by individuals. As in the case of Hesse, one can contribute enormously to changing aesthetics and, therein, reinforce an ever-advancing artistic innovation to press onward. This aspect will be the

[45] *Scribble # 1* (see fig. 30); *Scribble #2* (see fig. 31); *Touch* (see fig. 32) and *Weave* (see fig. 33).
[46] Eva Hesse, in presenting her work to the world in galleries after the work *Right After* (see fig. 6) "…reflect[ed] a shift of [her] position within the social order" (Thomassen 92), where boundaries in Hesse's art context have been redrawn through acceptance of an art form radically new, recognised officially through the rite of re-aggregation (92). This recognition came in the piece *Contingent* (see fig. 21) which appeared on the cover of the May 1970 issue of Artforum. This set a precedent, from 1970 onwards, of challenging the processes and outcomes of art as previously deemed acceptable.

discussion of this chapter, while the experience I had with post-liminality will also receive attention.

The first question is *what* is answered, or made visible, or resolved in the sculpture that explores absurdity and which makes no sense, using unfixed forms and structures: the 'nothing', which is by implication invisible? As Turner states, the liminal stage is "… structurally, if not physically, 'invisible'" (93) for whatever lies outside a fixed set of categories is not visible, cannot be spoken, and may be regarded as irrelevant. This fixed set of categories relates to Sophistic dogmatism that conditions society in its one-sided approach[47], a sensibility that what is real is what we "see, touch, sense and possess" (Horváth 57) and is the only reality worth considering. However, the diverse and new that is located outside this boundary "where no common measure exists" (Horváth 60), is not necessarily nothing or empty.

Hesse critic, James Meyer, states, "Even 'nothing' must assume a form…" (Sussman and Hesse 74) and suggests that the non-non becomes "visible if not comprehensible" (74). This observation echoes a liminal theme, where transformation results. This location reveals 'nothing' in itself, but when manifested, continue to potentially reveal knowledge, even if not known or contemplated before. As argued in Hesse's case, this may also apply to my pieces, *Touch* (see fig. 32) and *Weave* (see fig. 33), where the invisible or 'nothing', the unspoken and silenced, may become visible, revealing 'something else' that is outside the bounds of mainstream expectations. As Hesse states, her own work "…could be called nothing or an object or any new word you want to call it" (Hesse et al. 23). However, to what end is the 'nothing' made visible?

[47] Plato (245C) defined "non-being … 'lacks something of being' (Horváth 59), and therefore, 'no-thing' lacks 'some-thing'".

The notion of a 'third' principle (ironically in the third stage of the rite of passage) may be likened to the alchemical conversion of a base metal such as copper into gold, which refers to the transformation of a lesser or past state, considered as 'nothing' (noteworthy), into a greater state that is not its opposite, but far more valuable (Horváth 54). The outcome of such an event has a "metaphysical equivalent" (Horváth 54) that brings about a "revelation" (55) that was not known before the event. Eva Hesse's fabricator, Doug Johns, insightfully states that the changing and transformative nature implicit in the sculpture due to its instability and fragility, which has caused disintegration of the work over the last forty-five years and more, was the artist's "invocation of the fourth dimension in her sculpture" (Pollock and Corby 94), implying that another dimension is present. Meyer describes it similarly: "what you see is not what you see" (Sussman and Hesse 72) and he writes of the absurdity of Hesse's non-non, nothing work to "point to, or produce, a feeling… without denoting what this (which cannot be named) is..." (72). In fact, he states that what is "revealed" in the invisible is the "sensation of the thing" (Sussman and Hesse 60), as discussed previously. It may be said, then, that the invisible 'nothing' invested in the sculpture such as *Right After* (see fig. 6) or my own *Touch* (see fig. 32) and perhaps *Weave* (see fig. 33) is not so much what is or is not portrayed in the work, nor an idea, but rather it offers an open-endedness, allowing the viewer to interact with and respond to the work.

At this juncture, a transfiguration or shift, a "…reversal of expectation…" (Bennett 111) occurs, wherein the absurdity or ambiguities of the indefinable that have no apparent answer, are opened up for viewers. This urges a "creative dialogue" (Pollock and Corby 101) between the work and the observer (as opposed to a rationalising dialogue that seeks categories and naming). The "lingering effect" (Bennett 112) that provokes a response from the viewer for its uncertain and inconclusive residual effects that the absurd, destabilised or 'nothing' evokes, encourages viewers to find another way of dealing with the work that does not rely

on hierarchical and authoritative interpretations, such as the manner in which art historically, as well as the lives, circumstance and times of artists define and limit the meaning of the work (Pollock and Corby 20).

This open-endedness introduces a wide range of potential interpretations, depending on the viewer's depth of engagement and probing. Irene Bessiere claims that "… opening spaces where unity had been assumed… traces a space within a society's cognitive frame. It introduces multiple, contradictory 'truths': it becomes polysemic" (Jackson 23). This may mean that prior knowledge and representations may not support interpreting or analysing extra-ordinary or absurd themes. Instead, what is necessary is to transcend the dominant worldview that insists on clarity, order and accessibility. The viewer is called upon to make sense of it as their worldviews guide him or her.

The nature of the post-liminal state or resolution can well be described as having turned mainstream culture 'upside down', where the destruction of the "…opacity of the well-oiled machine of acceptable images, the latter which arrests the viewer into an enslaved stupor of acceptance of what dominant culture has decided is 'right' and 'real'…" (Jackson 173) reveals an entirely new aesthetic paradigm. A re-framing of images is able to penetrate; images that may resist 'analyses' coerce viewers to participate in a re-evaluation of what is taken for granted.

The tri-partite model of the Van Gennep's rite of passage, which makes sense of liminal, absurd and unstable themes, is an effective model to understand how such images can potentially turn the world 'upside down'. Paul Ricœur's theory may be useful to contemplate in the context of both Hesse's and my own sculptural pieces that relate to the absurd: this being that "discourse orients, disorients, and reorients" (Bennett 113). The orientation may be likened to the departure phase, such as seen in Hesse's *Metronomic Irregularity II* (see fig. 1) and my knitted pieces in 'the departure' stage, which seem to

allude to something that "begins its presencing" (Bhaba quoting Heidegger 1). Hesse's *Right After* (see fig. 6) and, to some degree, my work *Touch* (see fig. 32) is so puzzling and absurd that it disorients the viewer (the liminal phase). The re-orientation, says Bennett "… is left up to the reader … [who] must pick up all the pieces of our now deconstructed world and put them back together to try to reinstate order, stability, and sense" (113). This re-orientation relates to the re-integration phase of Van Gennep's tri-partite model, as discussed.

It is my view, therefore, that Eva Hesse uncovered her intention to find "…something else, answer some question, or find some new form or thought" (Hesse et al. 10). However, contrary to the findings and discussion above, one of the critical debates of what this is, is applied psychoanalytically by Briony Fer in *Bordering on a blank: Eva Hesse and Minimalism*. She separates the 'formal principles' of Hesse's art that are readily understood as a work of art and the 'underlying inarticulacy' as a psychoanalytic product, wherein the artist was, according to Fer, "…invoking the dimension of the 'something else', the unconscious" (Hesse et al. 66). Through the lens of the liminal, it is my deduction from the research that there is no such separation, that in the post-liminal, a "unique sort of wholeness" is achieved, that both Hesse critic, Lucy Lippard ("Eccentric abstraction" 100), and liminal critic, Ágnes Horváth (Horváth 24, 39), have noted. The 'something else' may possibly have flowed from an awareness in Hesse, which is evident in her statements of intent, that may not have been as unconscious as Fer implies. This location is the space that Turner defines as "…a re-definition of a state, position or image" (102) wherein the purpose of crossing of the boundary "…is to unite oneself with another world" (Thomassen 13); a world based on the artist's own terms, as Hesse claimed to do (Hesse et al. 22, 23). Whether Hesse realised or not that the source of the images is from the unconscious or conscious is a moot point; however, it is clear from her interview with Cindy Nemser, (Hesse et al. 1-24) that the intention was to discover 'another world' in which to practise art.

Therefore, Hesse's 'something else' in the work that does not clearly refer to anything familiar by referencing any known idea, may be left to viewers themselves to discern. However, when looking at Hesse's work as a viewer myself, and contemplating my own work, what may become visible is an opening up of the ambiguities and absurdity that are in-roads to new and rich places in the artist, as well as in the viewer's world. The reason is perhaps that it embodies "…the imaginary, the spiritual, imaginative, sensed, and felt, in the internal landscapes of the mind, showing these as real… because [it is] layered with meaning, demanding interpretation and engagement from viewers" (Wisker 402). Eva Hesse's quest to find 'something else', stimulates the opening of an avenue where something "from a total other reference point" (Lippard, *Eva Hesse* 165) is to be found, not only within the artist, but for the viewer alike. It is also this factor which inspired me to research Eva Hesse so as to attempt to locate and share in this space that the artist left us upon which to contemplate and reflect.

This open-endedness, which includes viewer participation, has great value as it deepens meaning beyond the psycho-analytical emphasis on biography, precisely because of it being invisible. Viewers are thus prompted and encouraged to excavate their unique and individual inner knowing, as opposed to relying on their "…own known narratives…" (Pollock and Corby 20) and known adopted conventions and analytical norms, such as information about the artist's biography. Griselda Pollock perceives the interaction as allowing the viewer to enter into a "… intersubjective… encounter" (20) that is inclusive of the viewer to 'complete' or continue resolving the work as decades go by since the time of its making. This 'intersubjective encounter' produces an entirely new way of interacting with artworks to find a resolution, or to continue the quest for meaning despite the lack of answers that it brings, in a performative sense.

Moving away from interpreting the work as a psycho-biographical study of a wounded person making 'art' therapeutically,[48] Werschkul confirms the existence and potential value of an invisible realm that does not include the psychoanalytical binaries of unconscious vs. conscious knowledge Werschkul notes that "art is not the private, internalized psychic wound but the potential of reaching beyond out and away from the self" (Pollock and Corby 201). This point of view speaks to a space of liminality, where the corporality and materiality, intellect, thoughts, feelings and ideological endorsements are overridden. Werschkul seems to liken Hesse's absurdity[49] and notion of 'nothing', to deal instead with "…what traditionally in art history has been referred to as the spiritual, subjectivist, or immaterial aspects of art" (Pollock and Corby 201). In other words, that which is invisible is the very space to which viewers are called to respond. It may be said that incommensurable work allows for reflection and self-reflection, as the start or trigger of a "spiritual quest [that] is always accompanied by sacrifice… dying to the old state of things, to make way for new insight and creation" (Horváth 51).

What is critical for transitioning the viewer from one paradigm to another, uncontemplated space, is the necessary breakdown of certainties, which allows individuals and societies to transform (Horváth 2). The void created as a result of this disconnect with the familiar is characteristic of liminality. Here, Horváth likens the work of Jacques Callot (1592-1635), who takes fear, disorder, chaos and the void to be the object of his art, to that of the 'primary reality' of physicist Isaac Newton's philosophy. This principle may be likened to

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[48] This view may throw into question the last forty years or so of unrelenting psychoanalytic value-judgements applied to interpret the work of Hesse, such as by Hilda Werschkul (Pollock and Corby), who re-addresses the myth that developed since the 1970s articles and subsequent literature (Wagner; Fer in Hesse et al.; Corby; Best; Chave cited in Cooper). This suggested that Hesse's work altogether and exclusively dealt with the artist's trauma, mental anguish, grief, and woundedness, derived from information from her diaries and biographical circumstances – where it is alleged that the latter is manifested in the artist's drawings and sculptural pieces. Such interpretations, based on her biography, outweigh and limit the potential value the work holds in its own right.

[49] For example *Hang up* (see fig. 3).

Hesse's work, equally addressing these issues pertaining to absurdity and instability. The 'primary reality' is the void (the absurd, unstable, in-between stage) itself that "keeps things in infinite movement and power'" (Horváth 88). From a practical perspective with regard to the void, when moving through the liminal, it is not experienced as a static area where 'nothing' happens, but it is an energised space that moves not away and not toward anything known but exists in-between an incommensurable unknown. Once the latter, or 'something else', is resolved, an entirely new paradigm with insurmountable reward of new knowledge is entered, and is regarded by Van Gennep as a space of regeneration (Thomassen 3; Turner 94).

Eva Hesse, I argue, resolved the challenging notion of making visible the invisible 'nothing', which brought her to a new, meaningful manner of making art and of offering it back to the world, where viewers are able to receive it and share in the resolution.[50] While Hesse's task is complete, her work stands as a masterpiece of personal vision, addressing questions and intentions that manifested an entirely new oeuvre, and this includes her vision and philosophy.

It has been my experience, as the research has shown, that the resolution of a liminal transformation opens up a location which holds an immeasurable possibility of change for any responsive individual - artist and viewer alike. This may unfold, provided the liminal state of neither this/nor that is traversed. The void that is encountered, which may be experienced as insecurity, anxiety and suffering,[51] (Horváth 93) needs to be endured. Having the courage to endure the liminal is potentially an enormously creative space, which facilitates being as a hollow reed from where images, thoughts, ideas and skills emerge that

[50] Van Gennep observed that incorporation rites include, for example, sharing (20) the newly created or transformed event, entity or individual, and celebrating the liberation from the past or previous state, thereby confirming new patterns and solutions produced (24).

[51] These experiences are due to uncertain possibilities and dissolution of known meaning (Horváth 5-7).

are not yet manifested in the experienced world of an individual. Once this stage is passed through, one may return from such a journey, in the resolution phase, with new knowledge, ideas or visual images that did not exist before, or that a person in the liminal phase has not accomplished or possessed before.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The anthropological model of liminality[52] is not a superior alternative to comprehend the themes of neither this nor that, absurdity and instability in Hesse's work, but it is certainly a useful model amongst other interpretative frameworks such as psychoanalysis. Gregor McLennan suggests that the notion of liminality as the in-between stage of a rite of passage journeyed through, "…offers a wider canvas and a more inclusive sense of the richness of social experience…" (82) that opens up a more inclusive debate on assessing our own worldviews and those imposed upon us, and those we impose on each other. The notion of liminality offers new ways of seeing that challenge known and trusted frames of reference, such as the norms of Eurocentric binary thinking's need for the presence and separation of its opposite 'other'. The effort that it takes to cross the boundary to another reality, as opposed to being on the margin, which is still familiar (the departure stage), may be likened to knocking fervently on the threshold door, whilst at the same time choosing to detach from what is known, until the crossing takes place. Detachment in this sense is a suspension of all without and within, while the liminal instability is underscored as a result of letting go of all prior learning and knowledge. Eva Hesse herself claimed to have done this,[53] and the epigram, related to a sense of detachment which I devised for my transition into another reality, also brought this about. Trusting the process that has no order or logic or connections to the known is key to transformation from one state or image to another.

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[52] As Van Gennep proffered, and Horváth and Thomassen expanded upon.

[53] "… my idea now is to discount everything I've ever learned or been taught about [formal problem solving of composition or form] and to find something else. So it is inevitable that is my life, my feelings, my thoughts…" (Hesse et al. 7).

The resolved work is clearly a manifestation of absurdity or chaos that is only absurd and chaotic when looked at from the dominant view, but where meaning is found in inconsistency. The state of nothingness is still open to question, but answers may not be associated with reason and prior knowledge. The biography may be necessary to track the extremes encountered in Hesse's life as it informs the relevancy of a rite of passage, which requires 'extremes', absurdity, inconsistencies and crisis that was part of Hesse's life, but it may not be an adequate source for understanding the work.

However, how do viewers relate to the work that is 'intriguing' but 'difficult' (Best 90) if not through the biography of the artist, as Susan Best suggests, for want of an existing analytical framework?

Arnold Van Gennep, in his closing paragraph of his book *Rites of Passage*, insightfully extends his liminal theory of arriving in a location that does not prefer one opposing view (or image) over another, where old patterns die and 'regeneration' or new patterns emerge, to be likened to endings and beginnings, death and rebirth. The new that emerges by way of a rite of passage exists as a connective tissue between all things (viii):

> …the series of human transitions has, among some peoples, been linked to the celestial passages, the revolutions of the planets, and the phases of the moon. It is indeed a cosmic conception that relates the stages of human existence to those of plant and animal life and, by a sort of pre-scientific divination, joins them to the great rhythms of the universe (194).

Transitions that bring one from one knowledge base (the old or past) to another (the new) seem to require a necessary ingredient, namely that of tuning in to one's unquestionable truth as discussed in Chapter 3. This may be, amongst other things, that in the 'nothing', lies

something that the artist is looking for, similar to the operations of the "great rhythms of the universe" (Van Gennep 194) where the old makes way for the new, and which is fundamental to human progress and growth. If resolution of the incommensurability of Hesse's work toward a reading of and attempts to understand the work lay not in the work itself, nor in her biography, then perhaps Eva Hesse herself indicates the way towards connecting to the work. It follows that perhaps in terms of my own work, such a reading seems feasible:

> "Don't ask what it means or what it refers to… Don't ask what the work is. Rather, see what the work does". (Sooke, The Telegraph, 27 July 2015)

Echoing Van Gennep's theory that we all share in phases and passages that constitute the nature of the universe, and are therein connected in the changes, chances and transitions that we all share, the reading of Eva Hesse's work and hopefully my own, is open to assessment to all, and available to all to decide what it *does* for them, and what it is that connects us within with what is familiar, universally.

The resultant understanding will be different for all who view it; however, the artist will inevitably be encountered when viewing the work through verbal and written statements, epigrams and claims that contribute to an 'unquestionable truth'. The latter may inform not only the work, but what lies *in-between* the work and the artist.

For some who adhere to structures imposed by the dictates and hierarchical views of the dominant order which they support – those which bring order through preconceived sets of interpretative styles or personal preferences - the reading of Hesse's work may be perceived as mirroring a very troubled and traumatised person making traumatic work.[54] It may also inform viewers of a wounded female artist, attempting to mend and make

[54] Even though the flaw in this type of analysis is that it does not account for new images, but seems to insist on what makes sense in the dominant sphere, such as critics post 1970 (see footnote 15).

comprehensible her past through producing unstable and chaotic forms. (Chave in Cooper; Corby; Wagner) The work may also be ridiculed rather than critiqued,[55] and countless other speculative interpretations[56] may indicate the so-called intention and meaning of the work. Yet, even though it may be none of these assumptions, nor others that may follow in the future, it may well be all of them too (Turner). This being the case, then perhaps to further the potential of understanding, it is *not* to the work that one ultimately needs to look, as its incommensurability potentially disconnects the viewer from known paradigms. Neither should it be to look at the artist's biography to decipher the work, as these readings open up as a sort of case study confined to Hesse alone, reinforcing restrictive models that categorise and exclude.

When Hesse asks the viewer to "see what the work does", rather than what it means, it is necessary for the viewer to determine what it does to them. The artist's statements regarding Hesse which have received attention here,[57] or the title of my research exhibition "without making", as well as the epigram, may combine to be a prompt for the viewer or critic to search within. Here, Cindy Nemser's suggestion to Hesse that "…art is a searching tool…" (Hesse et al. 10) may lead the way to the quest for whatever lies within.

The research argues, therefore, that what lies in-between the manifestation (the work), and the one who made a stand in her relentless and uncompromising search (the artist), may be what connects us meaningfully to the work, which is also within us. And in this 'invisible', hidden, indeterminate, absurd place that seems to be where we may find such connection, the work 'does' something: it opens a door that invites each viewer who encounters it, to cross the threshold boundary out of his or her known paradigm, and to step into a unique space within that has never before been contemplated. This may be a space of

[55] See footnote 8.
[56] The bibliography accounts for most of the extant critical assessments of Eva Hesse's work.
[57] Which the research proposes to be Hesse's 'unquestionable truth'.

incommensurable liminality where there is nothing to uncover, yet everything considered, as nothing can be accounted for. It may be an unknown reality or a void where all seems as naught, and yet which may potentially transform and alter our realities and perceptions.

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Appendix 1

WITHOUT MAKING

Antoinette Sears

Themes of the liminal (that which is neither this nor that), the absurd and the unstable.

Stop making, creating, thinking, discussing, doing, controlling, aspiring, achieving, hoping, guessing, wanting, fearing, deciding, waiting, worrying, caring, debilitating, assuming, speculating, wondering…

"Don't ask what it means or what it refers to … don't ask what the work is. Rather, see what the work does."

Eva Hesse c. 1969



Vessel. Copper wire crocheted and knitted.



Hooked. Copper wire woven.



Suspend. Copper wire knitted.



Invisible visible. Nylon knit

"On the one hand liminality involves a potentially unlimited freedom from any kind of structure. This sparks creativity and innovation… where nothing really matters, in which hierarchies and standing norms disappear, in which sacred symbols are mocked at and ridiculed, in which authority in any form is questioned, taken apart and subverted… human experiences of freedom and anxiety (they belong together) are condensed in liminal moments … on the other hand liminality also involves a peculiar kind of unsettling situation in which nothing really matters, and yet, deeply paradoxically, meaning often becomes over determined … sign or action can only take place once frames are lost, once signs circulate in a void without stable reference points. The nothing and the endless belong together."

Bjorn Thomassen 2014



Drawing without drawing. Copper wire knitted



Rolled. Copper wire knitted.



Wrap. Copper wire knitted.



Touch. Paper-covered copper wire, cable.



Tied. Copper wire crocheted.



Weave. Copper filament, stainless steel.



Scribble #1. Copper tubing.



Scribble #2. Copper wire.



Test Pieces. Copper wire knitted.