

## The European Context

### Introduction

The life and times of Frederick Kiesler in Europe are of great importance to a study of his theory and later works, for it was during these years that he was provided with the raw materials of twentieth century art and theatre. From these materials Kiesler sculpted his theory—a theory which, while similar in many aspects to those of his contemporaries, was uniquely shaped by him. This chapter recounts the prominent events of Kiesler's life and work before his immigration to the United States in 1926. The theoretical bases of Futurism, Expressionism, Constructivism and De Stijl are discussed as they are reflected in Kiesler's designs.

The lack of information on Kiesler before 1920 multiplies the difficulties of seeking the influences on his work and thought.<sup>1</sup> From the year of his birth until the end of the First World War, the record of Kiesler's life is obscured by contradictory information. A consideration of his date of birth illustrates this difficulty. Frederick Kiesler was born in Vienna to Julius Kiesler and Rose Marie Meister on September 22 in either 1890, 1892, 1896, or 1898. The last of these dates is derived from a 1949 editorial on Kiesler in *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* which states that Kiesler was 27 years old when he installed the Austrian exhibit at the Paris World's Fair of 1925. Simple subtraction renders the 1898 date. This date is unacceptable, because Kiesler consistently states that he undertook formal art training at the age of 15. If this is true, his fifteenth birthday would have occurred in 1913. If he was 15 in 1913, he could not have completed the minimum of three years art training indicated in Rigdon's *Encyclopedia* and have subsequently been conscripted into the Austrian Army in 1914 in order to serve three years before the end of the War in 1918.

The year 1896 is given by four major reference sources.<sup>3</sup> *The Architectural Forum* article of 1947 on Kiesler states that he was 51 in that year.<sup>4</sup> Subtraction renders 1896 as the date of birth. The date is one which might well be preferred by historians as it allows for all of Kiesler's youthful endeavors to fit into the amount of time available without years of unex-

plained activity. Using this date, Kiesler would have entered the art school in 1911, remained for one year, completed his year at the "Technische Hochschule" by 1913 and taken his master's in 1914, just in time to be conscripted and serve the duration of the war as he says he did. The completion of his school training in a single year may be questioned; however, when he applied to the school, his work was of such quality that he was admitted to the master classes reserved for the fifth year students.<sup>5</sup> If this is true, he could have completed the program in the time allowed.

Two other reference sources offer a date of 1892 as the year of his birth.<sup>6</sup> This would have allowed Kiesler to enter art studies in 1907 and spend four years in the school before advancing to the Hochschule in 1912. The Hochschule would have conferred the equivalent of a bachelor's degree at age 20. This would have given Kiesler time to gain an advanced standing in some classes and yet follow the remainder of the curriculum.

Mrs. Lillian Kiesler, the artist's second wife, in her preparation of exhibitions of Kiesler's works, uses the year 1890, a date she states came from Kiesler himself.<sup>7</sup> The use of this date means that in 1905 at age 15 Kiesler would have undertaken schooling and taken six years to complete the program, entering the Technische at 21 and the masters studies at 23. All of this might seem an excessive amount of time except for the fact that Kiesler was not supported by his father and had to work in architects' offices and win scholarships to attend classes at all. This prerequisite may well have more than offset the advanced standing he was given.<sup>8</sup>

All of the suggested years of birth are plausible. The verification of significant influences during the early period of his life is more difficult to support, and it is only from judging Kiesler's later works and comments that insight is gained into the sources which may have helped to crystallize his theories.

### **1890-1922**

Throughout his life Kiesler was variously admired or disliked for two traits which seem to stem from his childhood. Kiesler was a devoted rebel both from the social-artistic and romantic points of view and was a man with a great capacity to love. Rose Meister Kiesler died when Frederick was about one year old, and his care was given over to the housekeeper, whom he recalls vividly as a large woman who believed his rearing was limited to feeding, bathing and the birch rod for unseemly behavior. While Julius Kiesler held great affection for his youngest child, he was apparently a strict disciplinarian and not given to display of emotions. His feelings must have carried over to Kiesler's older brother, for he reportedly took advantage of every opportunity to exert a tyrannical rule over a brother who was not only younger but physically unequal. The elder brother, knowing that Frederick's

greatest pleasure was drawing, sought to limit him to the use of crayons and pencils on Sunday afternoon.<sup>9</sup>

A serious child, Kiesler reports an incident while he was in the backyard of his father's house drawing: his housekeeper/surrogate mother was kneading bread on the back porch apparently to watch Frederick while continuing her usual chores. The gardener approached to talk to her and, because of the heat, removed his jacket. Finding no ready hanger, he drove a nail into a nearby tree. The young Kiesler, already interested in natural science, having had his curiosity aroused by a gift of Goethe's *Metamorphosis of Plants*, examined the tree. He describes the tree as being wounded and bleeding a clear liquid. To Kiesler, the action of the gardener was a loveless gesture of cruelty and was long remembered.<sup>10</sup>

Kiesler's reaction to his childhood was to rebel and to love and respect other living beings. His acts of rebellion included running away from his strict Austrian day school when the opportunity presented itself, and, finally, quitting the business school in which his father, then the chief magistrate of Vienna, had enrolled him. This last act apparently severed Kiesler's relationship with his family as he does not speak of them ever again in any of his writings or interviews. The life style of the revolutionary was to be his the rest of his days, and one which he enjoyed.

Lucia Dlugoszewski became acquainted with Kiesler during the early 1950s and remained his friend when she commented "Kiesler was in another way a European romantic—not so much in his architecture and his sculpture as in his desire for a life style. Kiesler was extremely romantic in his desire for a life style."<sup>11</sup> The desire for this romantic life style is evidenced in his behavior and language. His use of romantic phrasing and word choice, combined with a clever sense of metaphor, at times obscures and seemingly contradicts his serious, well-founded theoretical statements. Yet, examined closely, the romantic is firmly based in his theory. Misunderstandings of his language are responsible for the rejection of Kiesler's theories by pragmatic critics.

The lack of love in his childhood, which caused him considerable pain, must have convinced him, though probably not by rational means, that having and giving love would be more pleasant and, in fact, the better way for everyone to live. He sought love in his relationships with his friends. Perhaps the lovelessness he equated with the "establishment" made him more readily accept the socialistic ideas and promises of the post-war years. A new order concerned with social justice might well be imbued with the loving qualities found lacking in the old regime. Kiesler's understanding of the pain caused by the pressure of society to conform to established norms and of the cruelty evident in man's dealings with other living things may account for his affinity with the Surrealist movement; it sought to free man's unconscious desires from social restraints. Kiesler wanted more than

freedom of the unconscious; he wanted freedom from fathers, brothers, and other authorities dictating his way of life.

Upon leaving Vienna's renowned business school, Kiesler applied, armed with his drawings, to the Academy of Plastic Art (Akademie der Bildenden Kuenste) where the quality of his work won admittance to the master classes which were normally reserved for the fifth year students. In spite of his son's success, his father refused to support Kiesler's studies, and so Frederick financed his schooling by winning all of the school drawing prizes; he also worked odd hours as a draftsman in the offices of architects. In the process he obtained a scholarship to the Technical High School (Technische Hochschule),<sup>12</sup> where he completed a program in 1913. Lillian Kiesler reports that to add a flourish to the examination proceedings of the Technische Hochschule, the examinee sketched the portraits of the examiners as they administered his oral evaluation.

The following year Frederick Kiesler was the recipient of the Master of Arts degree from the Academy of Fine Arts.<sup>13</sup> This completed the architect's formal education which had, of course, been accompanied by an informal one—one which occurred in the back room of the Cafe Museum,<sup>14</sup> where young artists and intellectuals gathered both to consume and serve the invigorating draught of philosophy, politics and art. Also present during these discussions was a student of philology at the University of Vienna, Steffi Fritsch. Though they met during their student days, Steffi Fritsch and Frederick Kiesler were not married until his return and release from military service. Conscripted in 1914, probably late in the year, Kiesler was trained and sent to the front for two years. His precise duties have not been recorded, but he returned to Vienna to spend the last year of the war with the press corps. Kiesler mentions in occasional articles that his interest and involvement in the theatre and his conception for his theatre in the round dates to 1916, a time at which he was involved in some activity on the war front. Any attempt to find the relationship of these events without further evidence would be frivolous speculation.

After the war, Vienna was a city caught in the midst of change and depression. The Empire had fallen; in quick succession the nations of the Empire became independent; and in October 1918, Austria was in revolution. With the dethroning of the monarchy came the call for a constitutional convention, a convention which brought forward a republican constitution and established the new government in March of 1919.<sup>15</sup> The shortages of the war era continued, and the winter was one of the worst in the city's history. Kiesler declares that the salvaged winter boots he gave Steffi won her heart.

The couple began their marriage with the Social Democrats in power, Kiesler on the dole, and Steffi working in an antique book store. As the government put into practice its working principles, social welfare programs

were established. One of these was slum clearance and rehousing, which brought Kiesler work as an architect under his former teacher, Adolphe Loos. Although now both employed, the Kieslers remained high in their Vienna apartment house, kept warm by a collection of 2,500 books and a red tiger cat. They shared the floor with two writers, Franz Werfel and Franz Kafka. While the times were not rich in any monetary way, they were rich in the times remembered. One of the features of the gatherings at the Kieslers' was a marionette theatre for which Kiesler built puppets which he assigned to visitors who then played the roles in plays or sang the roles in the operas they chose to perform.

### ***R.U.R. 1922-1923***

From his private puppet playhouse, Kiesler moved to Berlin to undertake the production of Capek's *R.U.R.* Exactly how this came about is obscure. Some of those friends who played at Kiesler's apartment were persons of the theatre. One actress, Elizabeth Bergner, was especially close to the group, but there is no indication of any connection with Berlin. Kiesler mentions being convinced to go to Berlin by Viertel, who stayed in Kiesler's Vienna studio for a period.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, Sinclair Dombrow, writing for *Theatre Arts Monthly*, remarks that Dr. Eugen Robert was the producer of the Berlin *R.U.R.*, and that "for the first act, Dr. Robert commandeered the Viennese painter, Frederick Kiesler."<sup>17</sup> He implies that Dr. Robert sought out Kiesler, but how or why is unspecified, and why only for the first act? Kiesler claims to have designed the last scene also. Perhaps both were influencing factors, or perhaps only Viertel should be credited. Nonetheless, it is certain from a number of sources, excluding Dombrow, that Kiesler designed the 1923 production of *R.U.R.*, and it is upon that production that Kiesler's theatre career depends for its base.

There are four historically significant points connected with this production which should be discussed now: (1) the use of film, (2) the use of a tanagra aparata, (3) the use of neon lights, and (4) the use of a moving setting (see Plate 1).

### ***Film***

The first issue concerns the initial utilization of film as part of the theatrical experience. Kiesler has claimed that this contribution to scene design was made in 1923. However, the *Catalogue for the International Exhibition of New Theatre Technique*, in which Kiesler first wrote about the design, dates the production in December of 1922.<sup>18</sup> It is easily understandable that if the majority of the performances were given after the first of the year, that through years of generalized discussions, the date would be considered to be

1923. At any rate, the late 1922 date indicates that the production occurred either then or early in 1923.

Although the film used for the segment was not made for this particular production, but was found and utilized by Kiesler,<sup>19</sup> it was integrated into the script, thereby introducing a technique which would be used by businessmen of the future—a tour of a factory via closed circuit television. The film must have been used at the point about midway through the first act where, in the Paul Selver translation, the General Manager says:

*Domin* Come here to the window.

*Helena* What?

*Domin* Come here. What do you see?

*Helena* Bricklayers.

*Domin* Robots. All our work people are robots. And down there can you see anything?

*Helena* Some sort of office.

*Domin* A counting house. And in it—

*Helena* A lot of officials.

*Domin* Robots. All our officials are robots.

[*factory whistle blows*]<sup>20</sup>

There are five reasons for the selection of this point in the script. First, there is no earlier or later point when Domin is explaining the history of the Robots where the film would not be a distraction rather than an enhancement of the text, and, second, the scene needs to be short enough for the length of the film as Kiesler describes it. Third, at this point the dialogue could be changed to reflect the action of the film, as it apparently was from Kiesler's description of the segment, without damaging the intent of the dialogue. It hardly matters whether or not the robots are bricklayers or officials in an office so long as the great variety of tasks which the robots perform at the factory is demonstrated. Fourth, the scene would be enhanced by the audience seeing what Helena sees. Last of all, the use of the factory whistle to stop the direction of the dialogue and change direction of emphasis serves also as a practical device for stopping the restricted amount of film.

Kiesler's claim to be the first theatrical designer to integrate film within the setting is mentioned only in passing in art journals and by Rigdon's *Encyclopedia*, all of which probably received their information from Kiesler. Therefore, it has been necessary to search theatre and film literature in order to determine who historians consider to have made the initial contribution and to evaluate their positions in the light of evidence they might not have considered.

Oscar Brockett, in discussing the "Soviet Experiment," speaks of S. M. Eisenstein's March 1923 production of Ostrovsky's *Enough Stupidity in Every Wise Man*, a free adaptation of the play. Brockett says, "He treated the stage as an arena, above which, characters balanced on tightropes while exchanging dialogue. Part of the action was shown on film."<sup>21</sup> This, according to film historians, is an incorrect statement. The statement implies that part of the action of the play was produced on film and shown while the action of the play progressed. But according to the editors of *The Complete Films of Eisenstein*, "he [Eisenstein] includes in this production a short satiric film, *Gloumov's Diary*, as an interlude."<sup>22</sup>

Eisenstein says that

an important element in the plot is the diary in which Gloumov notes all of his adventures . . . . We handled the complex subject of the adventurer's psychological game, as he adapts himself to the different people he meets, in an unconventional way by means of conventional costume changes.<sup>23</sup>

This refers to the staging of the scenes as they were done for the production of which Brockett speaks. Eisenstein continues: "In the film diary, we went further. By a risky extension of the idea and the use of fading techniques, Gloumov transforms himself into whatever object is desired by each person."<sup>24</sup>

It is clear that the scene of Gloumov was played twice, once on the stage and a second time on film. The film portion was most likely shown just after or before the act in which the diary sequence was played on the stage; as Jean Mitry says in his book on Eisenstein, the film "reacted—with the 'actual' situation of the stage Gloumov."<sup>25</sup> What the reaction was Mitry does not say.

The question arises as to the purpose of the film in the production. According to Brockett, the production was much on the order of a circus: several events occurred as a montage, allowing the audience to make connections between the various actions. Yet, apparently, while the film was shown no other events were performed; it was offered as an interlude, an occurrence between two other events. Why was the film given this significant position with all of the audience's eyes fixed upon it? To be in style with the rest of the production, it should have played at the same time as the stage scenes. One can argue that the diary sequence was so important to the script that it was emphasized by having the audience focus on the same series of happenings in sequence. This suggests that the audience might have focused on the stage version without distraction as they did the film. But this exceptional staging is not noted in the literature. Also, the film would likely have been shown right after the stage sequence, not during an intermission. I suggest that a large portion of the reason for the film being used was the desire by Eisenstein to demonstrate the difference between the staging

possibilities of theatre and film and to experiment with those possibilities. There is some indication that Eisenstein's producers had their reservations; for as Eisenstein good naturedly admits, they sent one Dziga Vertov to the filming as a "teacher."<sup>26</sup>

Because of the special attention given to the showing of the film and because of Eisenstein's likely desire to work with film as a creative medium separate from the theatre before moving into the medium almost exclusively, I believe that the film was not integrated within the production but used as an added attraction, utilizing the same basic material found in the script, as suggested by the editors of *The Complete Films of Eisenstein*. This lack of integration within the script is the major difference between the use of film in the theatre by Kiesler and Eisenstein; of course, Kiesler's actual use of film was approximately three months prior to that of Eisenstein.

There is another use of film in the theatre, however, which challenges Kiesler's claim. Late in 1919 the Berlin Dada movement produced a play of Walter Mehring's as a puppet presentation. The script, entitled *Simply Classical*, satirized the events leading up to the foundation of the Weimar Republic and Reinhardt's production of the *Orestia* then playing in the city. The Mehring play followed the trilogy format in three parts entitled: "The War," "The Dawn of Democracy," and "The Classical Absconding of Funds." According to Mel Gordon, the Dada performance contained many innovations which were later to become stock items in the avant garde repertoire:

An alienating gramophone Greek chorus interrupted the action of the play with political songs like "The Oratory of War, Peace and Inflation." Film was incorporated in the staging—a movie entitled "Henny Pythia" parodied the film star Henny Porten. . . .<sup>27</sup>

From the available information the content of the film appears not to be related to the subject matter of *Simply Classic* as described by Professor Mel Gordon. Certainly out of context film would be within the nihilistic tradition established by the Dada movement. The insertion of the film can be compared with the established practices of music halls to show films as part of a regular evening's entertainment, interspersed among the traditional songs, dance and comedy skits.<sup>28</sup> The use of film in *Simply Classic* is not comparable to the sophisticated degree of integration with the text which Kiesler achieved in *R.U.R.* Another, even earlier use of film, however, presents a more serious challenge to the Austrian's claim.

An earlier use of film in the theatre extended the plot of the play through the intermission, somewhat like the film of Eisenstein.

One of the most important aids that film can give to the live stage applies to the weakest part of all performances: to the interruptions where changes are made. If in the case of a



several minute interruption between two scenes because of stage technical reasons, the plot can be successfully and artistically satisfactorily continued by use of films, this would benefit the audience. In doing so it does not matter whether the films are shown crudely and unexpectedly on a film curtain with no transition, or whether they develop from the last [stage] picture and lead into the new one. Such an experiment has already been made in December of 1911 in the city theater of Posen during Berr and Guillemand's play "One Million." All intermissions were filled in with films, which fitted directly into the plot. For example, at the end of the act where an actor climbed out of the window, the film further developed the plot. The film was especially and so skillfully made for the production, that the various actors in the play and in the film could not be distinguished from one another. Such transitions are especially well suited for use in revues, operettas [musical comedies], farces, comedies, and above all in Christmas stories.<sup>29</sup>

The film was used much as the "crossover" scene in musicals. In such a scene actors play or sing in front of the curtain. Very often such scenes are not necessary to the advancement of the plot. A scene may fit into the plot without being essential to the understanding of the play. The film or played scene can become simply a device to keep the audience's attention. Whether this was the case with the production of "One Million" cannot be discerned from the available evidence. The evidence does indicate that the film was used and integrated with the action of the plot.

The major difference from Kiesler's use of film is the integration of the film with the scenic elements. The film of the Posen production was shown on a curtain during an intermission or scene change. The audience was aware that the film was a film. Kiesler's use of the film seems more sophisticated. His film screen was designed into the setting; the film was shown during an appropriate portion of the action, within the act, and was used to represent a machine of the future—closed circuit television.

A review of the available information on the use of film in the theatre establishes Frederick Kiesler as a sophisticated innovator of the use of film within a performance although he was not the first to show a film as an integrated part of a production.<sup>30</sup>

### *Tanagra Aparata*

The *R.U.R.* setting made use of another device which amazed the audience and which can be considered to represent the second use of what appeared to be closed circuit television. In the center of the upstage wall was a screen on which actors who were performing off stage could be seen. The factory manager could activate the screen by pushing a button on his desk and the voices of the actors would come through a speaker as their images came to life in miniature on the screen. The same actors then appeared on stage full size to the amazement of the viewer. The device could have been used several times during the first act when Domin calls for his secretary robot and others to come in. Kiesler makes no claim to the invention of the device, but he does

say he was the first to use it as a television-like device on the legitimate stage.<sup>31</sup>

The Tanagra Aparata was invented at the turn of the century and was used in the puppet theatre of this period. The device was a configuration of mirrors that caused a reduction in size, operating similarly to a periscope. Kiesler may either have seen the device in operation or learned of it in his research for the construction of the marionette stage in his apartment. That Kiesler consistently did historical research on projects which interested him is indicated by the approach to the articles he was to write later for periodicals. It is not unreasonable to assume that thoroughness of research was a trait learned early and a matter of habit with Kiesler.

Kiesler's use was innovative in that it differed from that of the puppet stage as it portrayed the device not as an optical illusion, but as an electro-mechanical device of the future consistent with the concept of the play. There is no evidence in the surveyed literature that contradicts Kiesler's claim to primacy in his use of it for the legitimate stage.

### *Neon Lighting*

Another of Kiesler's claims is that he was the first to use neon lighting on the stage. In his notes he describes the setting: "In the last act, for the chemistry laboratory scene of the play, I designed a whole abstract forest of neon lights brilliantly colored, projecting from ceiling, walls, floors, flashing off and on."<sup>32</sup> Again no evidence to the contrary has been located; no photographs of the scene exist in any of the Kieslers' archives. There is documentation, however, for the use of neon by the designer two years later.

Kiesler's design for *Francesca* in December of 1924 definitely made use of neon signs both as design elements and for establishing the continuity of place as the adventure of the heroine proceeded. Written evidence to the effect that anyone else used neon during the intervening period has not been discovered. Kiesler's claim, then, may well be established by his second use of the effect, if not the first.

While Kiesler was the first to use neon lighting on the stage, he was not the first to call for its use. Enrico Prampolini advocated the use of neon and other gas-filled tubes in scenic design when he published "Futurist Scenography (Manifesto)" in April of 1915.<sup>33</sup>

### *Continuous Motion*

Another Kiesler innovation of the setting for *R.U.R.* was the employment of continuous motion. The setting had a life of its own reflecting the life of the factory. The three dimensional background operated, as did the factory, without human control. Independent of the action on the stage, portions of

the set moved to reflect the actions of the factory. "The seismograph (in the middle) pushes intermittently forward. The control of the turbines (in the middle below) rotates continuously. The production tabulator springs forward."<sup>34</sup> The film screen and the Tanagra Aparata operated at the control of the manager, and the sound effects, such as the whistle, seem to have been closely coordinated with the script. The motion of the setting is important as it is an early demonstration of an idea which reoccurs later in Kiesler's works and is discussed in his theories. The setting may well stand as a first for Kiesler since no evidence has been found for an earlier setting with parts moving continuously during the performance.

### Futurism

The idea, however, is again traceable to the Futurists. Joseph Cary has summarized the scenic devices advocated in the *Futurist Manifestos: A Collection*. The second stage of futurist theatre development has been called the "synthetic theatre."

"Synthetic," first of all, in its reliance on the various nonverbal arts (painted nudes, masks with searchlight eyes, funnel ears, megaphone mouths); *continuously moving sets* and perspectives . . . the term "synthetic" more properly applies to a radical compression of time and space.<sup>35</sup>

This collection dates from 1909 to 1920. The theories of Prampolini during the early 1920s, Professor Clough states, demonstrate clearly Futurist intentions.

The Futurist strove to create a poly-dimensional scenic space for the stage. The scenery would then assume a panoramic and architectural aspect. . . . In other words, the "illusory effect of pictorial perspective" produced by the painted cyclorama was replaced by the three-dimensional architectural constructions which created a "living plastic reality."<sup>36</sup>

This three dimensional quality is evident in Kiesler's setting for *R.U.R.* There still remains a basic difference between the *R.U.R.* design and those of the Italian movement. The scenic technique of the Futurist scene designers followed the same direction as that of the Futurist painters.

Futurist painters insisted on the transforming of objects into a sum total of abstract forms of colors; a street, a house, a living room wall, therefore, when reproduced on the cyclorama became a synthesis of chromatic forms.<sup>37</sup>

This Kiesler did not do. Rather than abstracting from reality with an emphasis on color, he created a new reality, a future reality for the factory office of the future. The devices which he built into the setting became

symbols of both the living, continuous movement of the factory and of a future reality. In this use of symbolism the setting is somewhat closer to Expressionism than Futurism. The practical application of Futurist theories in *R.U.R.* are basic and numerous enough to suggest that Kiesler not only had knowledge of the Futurists, but that he knowingly experimented with the theories, modifying them to be applicable within his personal aesthetic. His next setting was to exemplify a more complete synthesis of these ideas.

## De Stijl

While the four innovations Kiesler made in theatrical design are in themselves significant, there was another effect of the production which must be judged of no little importance. The second evening on the *R.U.R.* performances was the beginning of Kiesler's association with the De Stijl (The Style) group. Kiesler describes the beginning of his friendship with the group's members in an interview with Thomas Creighton.

As I walked out through the stage door—a man pushed his way in. He was tallish. I remember he had on a black shirt and a white necktie and a monocle screwed in his eye;—He pushed me aside and asked: "Where is Kiesler?" I was rather astounded at this behavior of a stranger and I said, "He is right here," pointing at myself. He said (evidently surprised) "*You* are Kiesler?" and he made a sign as you do when you call your gang, you know—The gang was Kurt Schwitters, Hans Richter, Moholy-Nagy, Eli Lissitzky, Werner Graeff. They came in, grabbed me without saying a word, lifted me up, and took me 6 or 7 blocks around the corner to a club where we met Mies van der Rohe and spent the whole night talking about the future theatre (I described the "endless") and it seemed to each of us as though we were individuals who had known one another for a long, long time. And this is how I joined the group known as "De Stijl"—.<sup>38</sup>

In order to understand Kiesler's relationship with the De Stijl group, it is necessary to appreciate the aesthetic position of the group. The association was organized by Theo van Doesburg from among friends who for several years had been experimenting with Analytical Cubism and Abstract Expressionism in their paintings and sculpture. Formally established in 1917 at Leiden, the group consisted of van Doesburg, van der Leek, Mondrian, Huzzar, painters; Vantongerloo, a sculptor; Oud, Wils, van't Hoff, architects; and Kok, a poet.<sup>39</sup>

The international phase of De Stijl is generally thought to have begun with van Doesburg's propaganda tour of 1920, a tour which lasted some three years. During the period, the membership of the group changed radically, leaving only van Doesburg and Mondrian from the original membership. Of the original members, only two were Dutch; one was Russian, El Lissitsky; and two were German, Hans Richter and Werner Graeff and, of course, Kiesler.<sup>40</sup>

The aesthetic of the De Stijl can be summarized, regardless of the field of application, by its consistency of form and its color. The form was the rectangle in its various shapes and components; the color consisted of the primary hues of red, blue and yellow.<sup>41</sup> De Stijl was an immensely influential group until Mondrian's departure in 1925.

Perhaps the greatest De Stijl influence was felt in the Bauhaus. From its beginning in 1919, the Bauhaus and its leader, Walter Gropius, assumed the aesthetic of van Doesburg, the new buildings in Dessau tracing their design directly from Gropius's pen to van Doesburg's ideas. During the early twenties, it was van Doesburg who divided his time between Berlin and the first home of the Bauhaus, Weimar.<sup>42</sup> At least one Bauhaus student, Graeff, sought and achieved membership in the select group of associates.

The basic attraction between Kiesler and the De Stijl was his use of the right angle in his design for *R.U.R.* While the designer was a master of the right angle and had realized the De Stijl ideal in three dimensions by 1925, he was not devoted to the use of the right angle as the ultimate answer for architecture and furniture design. He fell out with the group, apparently, over the subject, but continued to respect the members of the group and remained friends with "the stranger," Theo van Doesburg, and with Piet Mondrian throughout his life. During the 1950s he declared the ideas of both De Stijl and the Bauhaus to be dead, but believed that they contributed greatly to the break with the purely decorative excesses of the early twentieth century.<sup>43</sup>

The importance of De Stijl was threefold for Kiesler. First, membership in the group gave him access to a ready source of publication for his own ideas, the magazine *De Stijl*. Second and more important, he was able to make the acquaintance of artists throughout Europe, giving him connections which were probably most useful in such projects as organizing the Exhibition of New Theatre Technique in 1924. Finally, by association with the group, he was incited to develop the ideas of the group to their fullest extent as demonstrated at the Paris exhibition in 1925 and later in his book on the application of modern art to store display.

### *Emperor Jones*

The Theatre Am Halle'schen-thor was what Kiesler called a very poor theatre in East Berlin in 1923, and it was the location for the realization of one of his basic ideas.<sup>44</sup> He saw the setting for the *Emperor Jones* as the first demonstration of space-time planning. Evidence has not been found to dispute his claim. The setting was shaped like a funnel and began to move on a cue in the script and continued to change the shape and quality of the space in time with the action of the play, not coming to rest until it was reassembled in its funnel shape 45 minutes later.<sup>45</sup> (See Plate 2).

The script used for *Emperor Jones* was different from the standard version found in English texts. In these texts the natives prepare silver bullets and hunt Jones in the forest. Jones fires his last silver bullet at a crocodile head; the natives find and execute him; his body is brought back to the palace where Henry Smithers waits with the native leader. In the Berlin presentation, the Emperor returns to the palace where he shoots himself with his own silver bullet.<sup>46</sup> Because of this and perhaps other radical changes in the text and the flexibility of the action during the attempted escape, reconstruction of the performance is impossible. All that remains are the production photographs and Kiesler's description of the action:

The performance began in a funnel shaped room—the floor was painted brilliantly red, the sides were painted black and the ceiling was painted black-green; rear stage one saw just a little slit of a cyclorama. There the Emperor appeared and he walked down the incline of the floor; thus space became visible. As he hears the beat of a tom-tom he tries to escape. He starts to run, and as he moves the transformation of the stage begins. The drum of time, and time merges into space.—The sides of the funnel opened up, and the ceiling opened. From the sides, flats moved across the stage, turning, moving continuously back and forth. From the ceiling, semitransparent materials in various colors were dropped and made to move rhythmically. The Emperor's fleeing figure cast fleeting shadows. It was convincing in its dream quality, but more important to me was the translation of the beats of the drums into a continuous flow of light, moving scenery and color.<sup>47</sup>

The dream quality of the visual experience, the abrupt angular distortions created by the moving scenery, and the use of highly saturated colors with strong contrast are characteristic of one of the major stylistic modes of expressionist painting. This is appropriate for what is termed an expressionistic play. In fact, the setting may be more of a classic example of expressionist scene design than *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* which has often served that purpose. The Futurist idea of the continuously moving setting was completely realized in *Emperor Jones*. Certainly the production achieved the Futurist goal of synthesis for it compressed space and time by the process of continuous movement. The design is significant not only as an historical first or as a primary example of two major stylistic trends, but because it was a further synthesis of the personal scenic style of Kiesler.

The setting also established his use of the funnel shape to thrust the action on the stage out of the proscenium and into the audience. The funnel shape appears later in Kiesler's work in more subtle configurations.

Kiesler's Berlin experiences were fruitful for him. He had created two stage designs which contributed significantly to innovation in scenic art. He had also become an intimate of the leading proponents of the international style. These relationships, and the ideas they provoked him to explore, contributed to the development of his personal aesthetic and opened channels of communication that would be of value upon his return to Vienna.

## The International Exhibition of New Theatre Technique

The new Austria had been governed by the Social Democrats for five years by the spring of 1924. The party's efforts in social reforms, housing, etc. were well established. With these matters under control, the party wanted to reassert the cultural leadership of Vienna among the crown cities of Europe. Therefore, the spring brought plans for the Vienna Music and Theatre Festival in the fall. The purpose of the Festival was a broad one. Rather than striving for greatness, the planners sought to demonstrate an overview of what was available in Vienna. The program included both the traditional music and theatre, as well as the very latest styles.<sup>48</sup>

A Dr. Bock was appointed director of the festival, and it is he who was responsible for its overall organization. The festival sought the cooperation of the established theatres and music organizations, asking each to provide one or more events in their own houses during the Festival. The State was to provide a three-part exposition: The Council Hall was to house an exhibit of the *Art History of the Viennese Folk Play and Music*; the National Library displayed *The History of Theatre 1890-1900*; the Concert House was home for the *International Exhibition of New Theatre Technique*. Each of these activities had a director responsible to Dr. Bock.<sup>49</sup> Frederick Kiesler was appointed to supervise the Concert House activities, but not without restrictions, as will be demonstrated later. Kiesler's contributions fall into five easily distinguishable categories: he was the executive organizer of the exhibition program, to include (1) the acquisition of models and drawings for display, and (2) the programming of a number of avant garde films and lectures by members of the leading edge of the theatrical wave. In fact, (3) he provided designs and promotional drawings for the Festival as a whole. Additionally, he edited and designed the catalogue for the New Theatre Technique exposition, (4) developed a new method of displaying the models and drawings of the participating designers, (5) caused his design for a theatre-in-the-round or space stage to be built, and was involved with the attempted production of at least one play upon the stage.

### *Exhibition Display*

One of the reasons that Kiesler was chosen to head the Technique Exhibit, in addition to his affinity with the aims of the Social Democrats, was the likelihood that he would be able to acquire materials that would make the exposition unique. Kiesler's international connections through both his work in Berlin and his association with the De Stijl bore fruit for the exhibition. El Lissitzky, the early exponent of Russian Constructivism in western Europe, provided a personal contact with the members of that group still in Russia, essentially Meyerhold and Tairov, both of whom attended the exposition. Van Doesburg and Graeff and Moholy-Nagy supplied connec-

tions to the Bauhaus and its theatre experimentalists. Hans Richter, a member of De Stijl and a leading German abstract filmmaker, could have made contact with other ex-Dadaists and other filmmakers. George Antheil, who joined De Stijl in 1923, might have been helpful in bringing Fernand Léger into personal contact with Kiesler. Antheil wrote the music which Léger used in his *Ballet Mécanique*, a film Kiesler featured at the exposition.

Although there appears to have been no personal link between Kiesler and the Futurist movement prior to the exhibition, it has been demonstrated that he was aware of their work. Moreover, they were one of the better self-publicized avant-gardists associated with the nationalistic movement in Italy after 1900.

The second generation Futurist, Enrico Prampolini, who was widely published in both Italy and France during the teens and early twenties,<sup>50</sup> attended the exhibition. Filippo Marinetti, also in attendance, promoted Futurism in Paris during Mondrian's early sojourns,<sup>51</sup> and possibly Mondrian met Marinetti during those years and would have been a personal contact for Kiesler.

The success of Kiesler's organization and procurement of designs representative of the avant garde as well as more conventional designers may be noted from the catalogue of the exhibition, which listed both prominent and lesser known designers from every country in Europe and hundreds of their works.

### *Lectures and Films*

Kiesler planned several lectures, some of which were apparently repeated throughout the Festival. The opening evening included one in French by Fernand Léger.<sup>52</sup> Bela Balasz lectured in favor of the Space Stage as conceived by Kiesler and conducted discussions on the theatre of the future,<sup>53</sup> Meyerhold and Tairov spoke of constructivist theatre,<sup>54</sup> and late in the exhibition, Marinetti lectured on "Universal Futurism";<sup>55</sup> of course, Kiesler's good friend, Theo van Doesburg, graced the podium.

Léger's lecture was followed by the first showing of his film *Ballet Mécanique*;<sup>56</sup> one of several abstract films to be shown during the festival.<sup>57</sup> Three of the others were: *The Stolen Necklace*, a French film featuring dancing geometrical shapes;<sup>58</sup> an American film, *The Two Men of the World*;<sup>59</sup> and the Karl Grune film, *Arabella*, the novel of a horse.<sup>60</sup>

Kiesler's insistence<sup>61</sup> on the inclusion of film in the program probably had several motivations. He no doubt felt that film was an element that could be of expressive power in the theatre as demonstrated by its use in *R.U.R.* The manner in which abstract films made the environment, the space of a visual setting, constantly change was similar to Kiesler's designs for



*Emperor Jones*. The films, therefore, were a further embodiment of an idea which was a basic building block in Kiesler's theory. Finally, it is when watching a film such as Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* that the spaces between the changing shapes appear as factors which define the relationship of the shapes. This coincides with another of Kiesler's theories which will be discussed more fully in chapter 5. The sum of these motivations made the inclusion of film in an exhibition of New Theatre Technique essential to Kiesler.

### *Promotion and Catalogue*

Kiesler was active in publicizing the festival, as evidenced by the production of a poster which was discovered in the collection of Serge Sabarsky in 1976.<sup>62</sup> In addition to this rather ordinary means of promotion, he suggested the preparation of a film "commercial," a "public service announcement" as one might call it now.<sup>63</sup> Apparently the film was not produced as there is no mention of the film after the planning stages of the festival.

The most significant promotional device for which Kiesler was wholly responsible was the catalogue of the exhibition which he designed and laid out. The cover resembles that of the *De Stijl* magazine of earlier years,<sup>64</sup> but Kiesler takes the typical composition of rectangles and carries them inside the cover where each page is divided into rectangular shapes as in a Mondrian painting. Each page is the complement of its facing page. The type itself enhances the composition by being printed both horizontally (as it normally would be) and vertically. Unprinted portions of the page are used much as Mondrian used black lines to coordinate the various portions of a painting. Douglas McMurtrie, in his book, says Kiesler's work is "entitled to rank among the incunabula of modernist type. This catalogue—shows a conception of many principles which have been refined and developed in subsequent experimentation and inventiveness which we cannot fail to admire."<sup>65</sup>

### *New Display Method*

The huge number of exhibits could not be displayed in the traditional manner because space in the Concert House was limited. Consequently, Kiesler designed a new system of display. He composed three wooden structures which one newspaper describes as high semaphore-like arrangements of rectangular frames mounted on vertical posts.<sup>66</sup> Photographs of the semaphore structures show a skeleton on which drawings were held at eye level and models displayed at a lower height. The downward viewing angle for the models allowed the observer to explore the depth of the setting; had they been higher, the three-dimensional quality of the models would have

been reduced to the frontal quality of a drawing. The drawings suffered no loss from their relatively higher placement. Kiesler is quoted as saying that the colors of the structure had functional associations: red was used for the beams which supported the exhibits; white, he said, floated, and, therefore, may have been used on horizontal pieces to make them appear lighter.<sup>67</sup> A comparison to the designs of other De Stijl members indicates that both the basic design shape and the color choice is related to the theories of De Stijl. During 1924, Kiesler had begun to work out the ideas formulated earlier by the group in three-dimensional structures instead of the two-dimensional painting and architectural facade projects of the other members of the group. Interaction with the De Stijl ideas is also evidenced by color choice in Kiesler's real theatrical contribution to the exhibition, the Space Stage.

### *The Space Stage*

Kiesler's Space Stage must be considered his greatest contribution to the international exhibition of New Theatre Technique. The Space Stage is claimed by Kiesler as the first theatre completely in the round. Subject to some restrictions, this is apparently a valid claim, although at the time it was vigorously repudiated as a heinous crime of plagiarism. There are several steps to an investigation of the Space Stage: the first is a reconstruction of the playing space based on available records; next, a study of how the Space Stage functioned in production; and finally, consideration must be given to Kiesler's claims for the originality of his project and the restraints which must be placed upon his project to more accurately define its primacy.

The Space Stage, or Raumbühne, was a smaller version of the stage that was the core of Kiesler's first Endless Theatre. The Endless embodied the concepts of the flexible theatre which Gropius and others were to design after 1926. The truth of this consideration will be discussed at greater length when Kiesler's other flexible theatres are described in the next chapter. This temporary evasion seems required to keep the issue of the stage itself in clearer perspective.

The Endless Theatre was egg shaped and

encased in a double shell of steel and opaque welded glass. The stage (shown in white on the plan), an endless spiral. The various levels are connected with elevator platforms and seating platforms, stage and elevator platforms are suspended and spanned above each other and next to each other in space. The structure is an elastic building system of cables and platforms developed from bridge building. The drama can expand and develop freely in space.<sup>68</sup>

The Space Stage, or Raumbühne, created on the floor of the Concert House was not exactly like Kiesler's description of the stage for the Endless Theatre, but it did embody many of the ideas in a slightly different form.

Drawings of the Space Stage are not available, and the use of a ratio method of computing the size of the stage is hampered by the angles from which the available photographs were taken. The main sources of measurement, then, are the newspaper accounts of the, fortunately, much discussed Space Stage. These dimensions can be generally checked for continuity with the space that was provided. The Raumbühne was constructed on the orchestra level of the Concert House. The Concert House stage was on one side of the structure and the balcony extended from the stage on one side around to the rear of the auditorium and returned to the stage on the other side in typical fashion for a nineteenth century theatre. The Space Stage was, therefore, surrounded on three sides by an audience seating area. There is no evidence that seating was made available on the fourth side which would have been the stage of the Concert House.

*Structure.* The Space Stage consisted of two levels which were connected in various manners. The uppermost level was circular. Different reporters recorded various diameters for this level ranging between six to eight meters. Most, however, quote the size as seven meters.<sup>69</sup> A very rough ratio measurement, using figures in the available photographs, indicates an odd, rather than even, number of units of measure. This seems consistent with the seven meter figure. The upper level was four meters from the floor at the same height as the Concert House balcony.<sup>70</sup> The four meter figure is consistent with accepted balcony heights in theatres like the Concert House. Two meters below the circular level was a ring which appears to have been two meters wide.<sup>71</sup> The ring sloped towards the center of the lower level much as a racetrack does.<sup>72</sup> (See Plate 3).

The two levels were connected by an elevator which rose through the central supporting framework and could be stopped at the ring level and then be raised to the upper circular level.<sup>73</sup> Two small metal ladders placed on opposite sides of the Raumbühne as viewed from the center of the balcony also connected the two playing spaces.<sup>74</sup> The ladders were referred to in news accounts as "chicken ladders" because they appeared to be suitable for fowl roosting. A flat metal bar formed each side of the ladder, and round metal rods served as steps.

Access was provided to the ring by a ramp which began at floor level on the stage left side (audience right) of the construction and wrapped round the front of the stage becoming level with the ring on the stage right side of the construction.<sup>75</sup> This corresponds to the first turn of the spiral shape of Kiesler's original Endless Theatre plans. A wide stairway rose from the floor level in the upstage left position. The stairway ended in a small square platform attached to the upper circular playing area.<sup>76</sup>

The iron framework which supported the stage was painted red. This corresponds with the use of red as the color of the supporting members of

the display units. The wooden pieces were painted black. This is most evident in the supports that held a guard rope which was strung along the edges of the stairs, circular stage, ring and ramp. The rope itself was painted grey.<sup>77</sup> All the photographs of the Space Stage indicate that the floor surfaces were either not painted at all or a light color was used. White, though an unlikely choice for practical reasons, may well have been chosen to conform with Kiesler's idea that white was a floating color. The use of white or its approximation with unpainted wood would have contributed to the illusion that the Space Stage was floating in space. The use of these colors related to the display units and indicate an applied usage of the favorite colors of De Stijl.

The lighting of the Space Stage was also designed by Kiesler. Directly over the upper level was a large hooded floodlight which was used for general illumination. In the same position were two spotlights which could throw a highly concentrated beam of light on an individual actor. These apparently were used for special purposes during the performance of *In the Dark*.<sup>78</sup>

Lighting instruments also were mounted on poles along the ramps and beams of the construction. These might have been used to illuminate one scene which was staged under the upper platform in order to exploit the closed, trap-like environment the iron girders provided. Other instruments were mounted on poles which were specially built for the purpose. Some of the spotlights could follow actors about the stage.<sup>79</sup> The instruments were apparently grouped for control purposes as it is certain that specific areas such as the ramp could be controlled separately from other areas.<sup>80</sup>

*Criticism.* As might well be expected, the divergence of opinion concerning the Space Stage covered the full spectrum of critical commentary. It began on one extreme with those who considered that any change in the structure of the stage encroached upon the authority of the actor and poet and the theatre tradition and continued to the opposite extreme of praise for all that overthrows the old. Some critical approaches were very pragmatic, as that of the theatre workers unions, who protested the building of the Space Stage because its advent would take their jobs from them.<sup>81</sup> Some, more theoretically minded, considered the shape and possibilities of the structure and concluded that the stage would be useful for staging plays of the Greeks, Shakespeare and the extremely modern because it seemed to allow for variety in the movement of masses not considered in the typical theatre of the day.<sup>82</sup> Another group, whom the journalist Ludwig Kassak considered representative of the Viennese in general, took the Raumbühne in stride and withheld comment until the stage was used.

*Performances.* As mentioned previously, there were a number of lectures given from the Raumbühne. Some critics determined the stage to be unfit for

the purpose because only the central portion of the audience was in direct contact with the speaker, and it was hard to hear on the sides of the theatre.<sup>83</sup> Clearly the real problem in this situation was the lecturers, not the stage. The lecturers did not use presentation techniques appropriate for speaking to an audience encircling them. They spoke only to the spectators directly in front of them.

In addition to the films already indicated, there was an unusual performance given by Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack of the Bauhaus. The presentations were described only as a "reflective play of color."<sup>84</sup> No comments were made as to the content or mechanics of the presentation.

The remainder of the performances were either dance or dramatic in nature. Kiesler apparently had less influence in the selection of material for performance on the Space Stage than he wished. He commented to a Berlin correspondent that all the performances except that of Ivan Goll's *Methusalem* were happening under his protest.<sup>85</sup> Kiesler felt the other plays were not appropriate for his stage. His opposition, apparently thinking that since the stage was available, it should be used as much as possible, scheduled several performances.

The opening evening ceremony featured a classical ballet by two polished dancers who performed only on the circular level. Their performance did not attempt to exploit the possibilities of the Space Stage and need not be further considered. The company of Gertrude Bodenwieser performed three dances as a featured event on the tenth of October. The first two, "Dance Around the Golden Calf," and "The Demon Machine," were not created for the Space Stage but adapted from their repertoire. The final dance was created for the Space Stage. It was a parody of film, life, art and the romantic audience. The critic of *The Day* notes that the whole stage was used and the performance brought calls for an encore.<sup>86</sup> With less enthusiasm and more perception, the *Vienna Morning Newspaper* commented, "The movement on three levels allowed a sharper rhythmical pattern." Either the ramp or floor of the concert house must have been considered a level in addition to the platform and ring. Continuing, the critic observes, "The composition and decomposition of group movements, and the contrasting of symmetrical and asymmetrical series movements, (and) the direction of the dance lines in the form of the spiral are technique problems."<sup>87</sup>

Both critics found that the Space Stage was capable of being expressively used for dance and that problems in the performances could be solved by the development of techniques to control movement on the Space Stage. Kiesler's concept was, therefore, somewhat vindicated.

However, some of the dramatic events planned apparently did not materialize. *European Week*, a review by Walter Mehring, and *Leonce and Lena*, by Buchner, were mentioned early in September,<sup>88</sup> but there was no critical comment concerning their performances which seems unusual since

the other dramatic performances generated numerous reviews. In all probability the plays were not performed. Also, the play Kiesler most wanted to see performed on his stage, which had in fact been planned and rehearsed since July, was not performed. Two days before the performance was to occur, the Viennese puppet theatre, The Gong, announced that they held the performance rights to *The New Methusalem* and would allow the Exhibition performance only if they were paid 17 million Kronen.<sup>89</sup> The performance was canceled. The director of The Gong later claimed, in spite of the publicity, that he had not known of the Exhibition's plans until just before the scheduled performance date. The director also stated then that The Gong had given permission for the performance without charge. The press retorted that the original request for compensation was actually in writing.<sup>90</sup> However, even if The Gong had relented after presenting its demand in writing, there was no time before the closing of the Exhibition to reschedule the event and reestablish a working relationship within the company. By the 11th of October, the actors had brought suit against the festival for denying them the moral success which they were sure their performance would achieve.<sup>91</sup> Chaos prevailed; the play Kiesler saw as representative of scripts which would best demonstrate the use of the Space Stage remained unproduced. The effectiveness of the Raumbühne can only be investigated by examining Paul Fischaur's play *In the Dark*—a production with which Kiesler apparently was not intimately concerned.

*In the Dark* was staged by Renato Mordo and opened October 3, one week later than scheduled. The story concerns a man who steals for the love of a woman, is betrayed, and takes his revenge. As one critic remarked, the play is plausible but nothing new.<sup>92</sup> The structure was equated with *Morn Til Midnight* by George Kaiser, and the dialogue reminded one reporter of Strindberg.<sup>93</sup> Various scenes of the play were considered to be well staged by the critics, though there was seldom any agreement on details among them. The one certain point is that Mordo attempted to make use of the entire stage and exploit the inherent features of its construction. The scenes in the living room, the eventual murder and most of the remaining scenes were staged on the upper, circular playing space. The street scene was played on the ramp. The Man and some of his friends performed on the ring, while the Cashier's room was set under the circular platform with the girders of the stage surrounding it.<sup>94</sup> It is possible that the elevator, lowered to the center of the ring level, would have provided the required space and allowed a swift scene change.

The general critical response to the play was mixed—some critics calling it well constructed and tightly organized with effective dialogue while others emphasized the obvious influences on the playwright. The comment on the staging of the play was not divided: in turn, the several reviewers listed their objections to the Space Stage. To begin, the lighting allowed the actors to be

in the dark when they should have been lighted; furthermore, the lights were lowered only halfway during the intermission, allowing the actors to be seen moving off the stage.<sup>95</sup> How much of this can be attributed to poor design is debatable. Actors have been known not to be where they were blocked on the stage, and some concern for their personal safety might have motivated a request for some light on the four-meter-high structure while they exited at act breaks.

The criticism of the stage itself must be taken more seriously. The *Berliner Boersen Courier* commented that the central theatre did not fit together with the vertical order. The vertical interfered with the viewer's ability to see all the action.<sup>96</sup> Indeed the one major criticism in other reviews was the difficulty in seeing the scenes staged on the ring and under the circular playing space. A characteristic of the Endless Theatre designed earlier was that the audience area was to move around the stage allowing each viewer to see all the sides of the stage.<sup>97</sup> The speed at which the audience would have to move to keep up with the action might be excessive for comfort. This does not seem to be a practical solution to the problem presented.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, Kiesler had an idea for the use of transparent screens which could be rearranged during performances to create separations of spaces. Such devices were not used for *In the Dark*. *The Worker's* critic observed that the Space Stage was limited by its inflexibility of shape and ability to change.<sup>99</sup> Kiesler's ideas for the "Endless" included the ability to rearrange the playing spaces and audience areas; this flexibility was a characteristic of the stage designs which could not be reproduced in the concert house.

*Evaluation.* Evaluation of the Raumbühne as a playing space rests almost exclusively on the two performances just described, the Bodenwieser dance and the Fischaur play. The dance was successful, requiring an encore; the staging of the play was perceptively criticized. What quality of the Space Stage design was responsible for the different levels of performance? The answer lies in the difference between the emphasis within the dance and the play. The dance was based on movement; it exploited movement to the utmost. The play provided a series of episodes which were confined in their movement possibilities. That the basis of the design for the Space Stage was movement is consistent with Kiesler's practice. His interest in movement is demonstrated by his interest in film, but more importantly by the productions of *R.U.R.* and *Emperor Jones*. The principle of movement illustrated by these settings is evidenced in the Raumbühne, but the Space Stage is different in that the source of the movement is the actor. The actor, therefore, becomes more completely integrated with the setting or stage. The actor has to coordinate his movement with that designed into the setting, bringing the movement of his body into a harmonious relationship to the potential movement of the stage, in what Kiesler would call "continuity." A

critic of the dance remarked that new techniques for control of the dancer's body are required to make this continuity take place on the Space Stage.

There is a definite similarity to the Bio-Mechanical theories and the constructivist productions of Meyerhold. It seems likely that Kiesler became acquainted with these ideas through El Lissitzky, known as the apostle of constructivism to the West,<sup>100</sup> during their discussions of 1923 while both were members of De Stijl and while the "Endless" was being finalized. Kiesler's approach differed from that of the Russians in its grandness of scale. Tairov and Meyerhold used their studies of Bio-Mechanics as a basis for designing settings; Kiesler's innovation builds a whole theatre on similar principles.

A potential for movement consistent with that inherent in the design of the Raumbühne must have been Kiesler's motivation for supporting the production of Goll's *Methusalem* as opposed to *In the Dark* or any other play. It is doubtful that he would have had enough prior knowledge of the Bodenwieser dance to allow comment upon its appropriateness for the Space Stage. The dancers were invited performers who would have conducted most of their rehearsals in their own studio.

#### *First Theatre-in-the-Round*

Kiesler's Space Stage was his most important contribution to the New Theatre Technique Exhibition; its structural configuration and its use as a performing area for both dance and drama are documented with both textual and visual evidence. Both the shape and use of the Raumbühne give support to Kiesler's claim of having built the first (modern) theatre-in-the-round; the actual realization of the structure with the audience on three sides, however, reduces the effectiveness of this support.

The theatre-in-the-round certainly has an ancient history dating from the ritual circles of primitive tribes to the sophisticated staging of plays in the middle ages, as described by Richard Southern in rich, conjectural detail. After the Medieval period, the use of the central stage virtually was nonexistent. During the latter part of the nineteenth century an interest in the development of stage configurations other than the proscenium evolved.

*Reemergence of arena.* The first attempts at new forms followed the discovery of the alternatives available to earlier producers. The reconstruction of Elizabethan-style stages by Tiech, Immerman and Poel led the experimentation. Another significant step toward removing the proscenium was presented by Norman Bel Geddes in 1914. The stage was located in one corner of a square building with the audience arranged on two sides.<sup>101</sup> Theatres such as Reinhardt's "Grosses Schauspielhaus" extended the playing space into a circus style arena in front of a large thrust stage. The



proscenium stage house invariably backed the thrust and was the origin of much of the action. In 1922, Kenneth MacGowan and Robert Edmond Jones published a book entitled *Continental Stagecraft*, based on their recent travels in Europe. They reportedly brought America up-to-date on the latest stage configurations.

In the penultimate chapter, the two authors considered the possibilities of playing completely in the round. They were inspired by a one-ring, intimate circus on Montmartre, the Cirque Medrano. MacGowan enthused, "Copeau could go straight there from the Vieux-Colombier, and throw his *Scapin* into the ring without a second's hesitation. It would bowl over Paris and half the theatre world."<sup>102</sup> Jones designed a setting for *The Merchant of Venice* utilizing the space of the Cirque Medrano.<sup>103</sup> These ideas suggested using the playing space as a flat, circular area. MacGowan recalls a project setting by an American artist who in 1914 designed *The Cenci* to be played in a prize ring, which would be a slightly raised, square stage.<sup>104</sup> This last conception was for a particular play utilizing an appropriate "found" space; it does not advocate a theatre-in-the-round as a structural form. The "toying," as Glenn Hughes calls it,<sup>105</sup> of MacGowan and Jones does advocate such a form. The Jones drawing illustrates how a present space may be adapted to the purpose; it does not formally present a design for an entire theatre based on the concept. Such designs, however, were not far from realization.

*Arenas at the Exhibition.* Two years after the publication of the ideas of MacGowan and Jones, and without any apparent connection, three designs for round theatres were presented at the Music and Theatre Festival in Vienna where the Space Stage was constructed. The designs were: The Theatre of Spontaneity, by J. L. Moreno and associates; The Ring Theatre, by Oscar Strnad; and The Endless Theatre, by Frederick Kiesler.

Oscar Strnad's stage was a ring surrounding the seating area. Scenery was to be placed on the ring, actors were to perform there, and the whole ring stage was to rotate before the viewer's eyes.<sup>106</sup> He presented the design for the Ring-Stage along with designs for two productions, *Hamlet* and *A Mid-Summer Night's Dream* at the Exhibition.<sup>107</sup> Strnad was a Viennese professor and would, at least, have known of both Kiesler and Moreno. No connection, however, is known which might have brought him into a working or friendly relationship. Moreno, however, did lecture at the time on his ideas for the theatre; it is entirely possible that Strnad might have attended one of his lectures. Yet, Strnad's conceptual basis is unique. His concept is to surround the audience with the environment of the play, to envelop them in the world of the play which is presented all around them. Strnad's scenery remains illusionistic, and he features no center stage. He has taken the scenic style prevalent on the European stage and given it a new

shape. He created a round theatre, but not a theatre-in-the-round. Moreno, however, sought a totally new theatre in his theory.<sup>108</sup>

*Moreno's theatre.* The theatre of Dr. Jacob Levi Moreno (referred to in the literature as *Das Stegreiftheater*), consisted of a central playing space and four-side stages set in the audience and surrounded by more seating areas.<sup>109</sup> There were apparently two versions of the theatre, both featuring a vertical stage. The drawings and models of the *Stegreiftheater* were originated in collaboration with Paul Honigsfeld, who actually executed the graphic representations. The first version of the stage was depicted in the newspapers, the Exhibition catalogue, and in *Das Stegreiftheater*.<sup>110</sup> These illustrations show the stage simply as a circular space in the center of the auditorium at the top of stairs which descend to the audience level. The stairs formed a concentric circle around the stage. (See Plate 4).

The second version of Moreno's theatre was presented as a frontispiece to his own translation of *Das Stegreiftheater* (1947). The illustration depicts the Viennese Model, 1924, which was exhibited at the Festival. In a photograph the central playing space is a circular pit about 4 feet deep, judging roughly from the number of steps to the bottom. In the center of the depressed area is a circular playing area which rises from the floor of the pit to a height, again roughly estimated at four and one-half feet above the lowest level of the audience area. There is a platform which bridges the gap between the center stage and the audience on one side—just below audience level. A side set of stairs rises from the audience on another side. Opposite these is a stair unit which descends into the pit. Across from the platform is a partial stair unit which might provide access to the raised circular playing space. The stage, though not as soaring as Kiesler's four meter platform, is a vertical composition.

Jacob Moreno was an advocate of improvisational theatre, a theatre of spontaneity in which the audience became actors on the stage and throughout the auditorium.<sup>111</sup> The scenery for the theatre would vary with the course of action the audience chose to improvise; therefore, the scenery did not illustrate a specific environment, but was flexibly utilitarian. There was no need to define a historical period, for the play always took place in the here and now. The moving of the action into the audience was enhanced by "special stages which are built on every level of the amphitheatre."<sup>112</sup>

The origin of Moreno's concept came from the physical structure which formed almost naturally around the storyteller. He remarks:

One of my favorite pasttimes was to sit at the foot of a large tree in the gardens of Vienna and let children come and listen to a fairy tale. The most important part of the story was that I was sitting at the foot of a tree, like being in a fairy tale—. It was not as much what I told them, the tale itself, it was the act, the atmosphere of mystery, the paradox, the unreal

becoming real. I was in the center, often I moved up from the foot of the tree and sat higher on a branch; the children formed a circle, a second behind the first, a third behind the second, many concentric circles—.<sup>113</sup>

The story telling had developed by 1911 into a children's theatre where the children, who apparently knew the tales well, spontaneously took parts and adapted the tale as they went.<sup>114</sup>

The actual determination of the structure for a theatre space was not undertaken until 1922 when an adult theatre of spontaneity was opened. There appears to have been two stages to the development of the playing space. The first step was the stage as it appears in the *Theatre of Spontaneity* text of January 1924. Therefore, during the year 1923, it is reasonable to assume that this configuration was the preferred model. The second version of the stage used the vertical composition for the central stage and was prepared especially for the exhibition by Honigsfeld and Peter Gorian under the direction of Moreno.<sup>115</sup> Moreno thus had created a theatre-in-the-round as it is customarily defined. Both the basic idea and the development of Kiesler's Space Stage are quite different from the evolution of Moreno's.

*Kiesler's theatre.* Kiesler's Raumbühne seems to have always been vertical in conception—at least there are no known drawings using the flat stage configuration. The concept seems to have been developed to some degree by December of 1922 or January of 1923, because Kiesler discussed it on the evening he became a member of De Stijl. The Space Stage, as constructed for the Exhibition, had to make certain concessions to the Concert House architecture. In addition to those mentioned earlier, the flat playing surface of the top level must be considered. In the drawings of the Endless Theatre from which the Space Stage is derived, the upper level does not end in a flat playing area but is extended by means of a spiral ramp from the upper level into the ceiling above the audience. The stage can, therefore, be distinguished from the flat and vertical models of Moreno.

The concept of the stage is the exploration of the spiral movement in space. Although this is a natural form upon which the artist built, it is quite different from the natural form which served as a basis for Moreno. The natural form of Moreno is a social formation; Kiesler's is a natural form of movement. Kiesler says of the spiral form:

The secret of the spiral's irresistible hypnotism: continuous rebirth on new planes without losing contact with former ones. An expansion of steps without a halt. Continuous motion from within its own force.<sup>116</sup>

Kiesler's stage is an artful abstraction of movement in space. In this way it demonstrates its difference from the constructivist ideas to which it is related.

An earlier, similar project was designed by Vladimir Tatlin for construction at the Third International Exhibition in 1919-1920. It was a spiral tower which culminated in a circle almost parallel to the angle of the spiral. The spiraling surface was supported by vertical uprights which created a forest of skewed legs under the structure. Tatlin was obsessed with space as the primary concern of the sculptor.<sup>117</sup> However, the visibility of the supports ties the feet of the spiral to the ground. It does not explore space as the creator desired. The settings of the constructivist scene designers use the same concept of showing the undecorated supports of their acting machines. Kiesler's spiral does not use supports to the ground but is held in place by tensioned cables to the structure above, relying upon the tension within the spiral structure for further strength. His spiral, therefore, appears to soar through space without support. It is free to be the crystallization of movement in space.

*The controversy.* The concepts of these three innovators of the theatre-in-the-round are quite different. Strnad appears to simply move the illusion of the proscenium stage into a round theatre. Moreno expresses a concept of social interaction. Kiesler explores in abstract fashion the flow of movement in space, an exploration with some previous history. The three innovators were contemporary not only in the presentation of their theatres but in the time of their development, essentially 1922 through 1924. During that period the three certainly had time for the formal and informal exchange of ideas. Moreno conducted lectures on the Theatre of Spontaneity which Strnad might have attended and Kiesler did attend.<sup>118</sup> The young actress Elizabeth Bergner, who took part in the puppet productions in Kiesler's apartment, was a member of Moreno's children's theatre. Kiesler's friend, Franz Werfel, tried to develop drama in a spontaneous fashion with Moreno's later company.<sup>119</sup> Of course, by 1924 Moreno's book was also available.

Strnad can be eliminated from consideration as the inventor of the theatre-in-the-round in as much as the accepted definition of the term requires the playing space to be in the center of the audience. The problem, then, is reduced to the considerations of history involving Moreno and Kiesler. This history culminated in a legal suit; the evidence of which must be considered as pertinent in determining the validity of Kiesler's claim that he built the first theatre-in-the-round. During the opening ceremonies of the Exhibition, when Kiesler was announced as the creator of the Space Stage by a Dr. Feder, the president of the Festival, Moreno shouted from the crowd, "I announce, in public, Mr. Frederick Kiesler is a plagiarist and a scoundrel."<sup>120</sup> The police restored order when they took Moreno into custody and removed him from the Concert House.<sup>121</sup>

The results of the plagiarism attack were several. First, a group of Kiesler's friends and critics came to his defense with a public statement:

After comparing the exhibited Stegreiftheater project with Kiesler's Space Stage, the undersigned as specialists in the field of theatre and architecture, voice the opinion that only laity unfamiliar with the theatre could lend an ear to the absurd accusation of plagiarism against Frederick Kiesler. They firmly reject every attempt made to lessen the significance of the enterprise. . . .

Members of the Board of Works: Professor Joseph Hoffmann (teacher of Kiesler), Hans Fritz (architect), Ferdinand Leger, Enrico Prampolini, Karl Heinz Martin (journalist and critic), Albrecht Blum (from the organization of actors), Oscar Maurer Fontana (theatre critic).<sup>122</sup>

Second, Moreno opened a Theatre of Spontaneity in one of the Vienna theatres performing what he called "Living Newspapers" on or about October 13, using a structure similar to the Space Stage in the auditorium.<sup>123</sup> Lastly, Frederick Kiesler brought a legal action against Jacob Moreno in order to clear himself of Moreno's charge.<sup>124</sup>

The court hearing was held in January 1925. Kiesler's attorney presented the argument that the projects were as similar as "a crocodile and a radio station," taking the remark from the theatre critic, Hans Liebstoekl.<sup>125</sup> He continued by noting that Kiesler had published his ideas in the Berlin papers in 1923. Moreno replied that Kiesler had attended his lectures and had seen drawings of Honigsfeld and had access to his book, *The Theatre of Spontaneity* (1924).

Unfortunately, trial records in Austria are destroyed after 30 years.<sup>126</sup> Kiesler claimed that decision was in his favor.<sup>127</sup> The 1947 revision of Moreno's book makes no claim to primacy. A decision which would exonerate Kiesler of plagiarism could do so on the basis of his project simply being conceptually different from Moreno's, not necessarily first. The ready opportunity for an interchange of ideas makes it impossible to say that Kiesler or Moreno was the first to conceive of the theatre-in-the-round as a playing space for twentieth century drama. One can only say that Kiesler was the first to design a theatre-in-the-round based on the concept of movement in space. Kiesler's claim to primacy in instituting the central stage is much stronger when based on actual construction as a playing space rather than on conceptual origins which were never built.

*Evaluation of Kiesler's claim.* Evidence does not indicate that any stage in the round was constructed prior to 1924. Of the three concepts for a theatre-in-the-round brought to the exhibition, one was realized in modified form. It was the Raumbühne of Frederick Kiesler. The stage was under construction during the summer of 1924 and was used for performance beginning with the

opening of the Theatre Technique Exhibition about the 22nd of September, as has been previously documented.

The stage was not completely surrounded by the audience, though the stage was constructed for the performance to be seen from all sides and was not connected to the stage house nor did it make use of it in any way. The seating area of the Concert House was restricted to the U-shaped balcony. A portion of the audience extended to a point behind the Space Stage on either side. The angle of the audience envelopment of the stage must have been nearly 300 degrees based on the normal structure of the period playhouse. The stage of the Concert House filled the gap between the two ends of the balcony. The seating of audience on the stage would have required the building of a seating unit which would have raised them to the height of the balcony, about three meters from the stage floor, to allow for the optimum viewing of the activity on the stage. This would by no means have been structurally impossible. That the task of placing audience seating on the stage was not undertaken must have had a rationale. Kiesler certainly would have known that such a seating area would have placed his Space Stage truly in the center of the house. No comments are made on the subject in either Kiesler's notes or in the newspaper accounts.

There are several partial considerations which may have influenced the decision not to use the stage as a seating area. Journalistic criticism indicated that the Concert House was filled to overflowing with displays.<sup>128</sup> This is accounted for by the avowed organizing principle of the Exposition, which was that the smallest innovation of technical development was important to the total effect of the scene.<sup>129</sup> The broad representation of designs and innovations from various industries was necessary to the realization of this principle. The space provided was obviously inadequate. Kiesler apparently had to make a choice in organizing the space between the complete realization of his theatre-in-the-round or the best utilization he could achieve for the Exhibition. While this may or may not have been a considered choice, it was one that had to be made. The stage of the Concert House could have been used for the demonstration of several exhibits. Quite possibly it was utilized for the showing of the various films presented. A projection screen could have easily been hung in the proscenium arch over the Concert House stage without interfering with the displays; this was the best location for viewing from the balcony because the Space Stage was below the sight line to the projection screen. In fact, there was probably no other place to locate such an awkward fixture. The erection of audience seating on the Concert stage would have interfered with the displays and, of course, the on-stage portion of the audience would not have been able to view the films.

In spite of the fact that the audience did not entirely circle the stage due to the limitations of the Concert House, Kiesler should be given credit for the construction of the first theatre-in-the-round. The design of the Space

Stage, its placement well forward on the orchestra level (which allowed a significant portion of the audience to view the actors from a position opposite to that of the remainder of the viewers), its lack of connection with or use of the stage house in any way, seems to justify Kiesler's claim.<sup>130</sup>

As director of the Exhibition of New Theatre Technique, Frederick Kiesler made a significant contribution to the growth of new ideas. The exhibition provided not only a demonstration of all that was new in theatre but a meeting place for the avant garde to directly exchange ideas. Meyerhold, Tairov, van Doesburg, Gropius, and Prampolini were brought into close proximity; Kiesler personally made innovative efforts in typography, display techniques and stage design; the construction of his Space Stage as modified from the Endless Theatre project was the first theatre-in-the-round to be built and acted upon. His work at the exhibition was instrumental in his being provided with two new opportunities, one of which was to greatly change the course of his future.

#### ***Francesca, 1924***

The first opportunity was almost immediate; Kiesler was commissioned to design a production of B. F. Wedekind's *Francesca*. The play was to be directed by Karl Heinz Martin who was one of Kiesler's defenders in the Moreno case. The production was significant for Kiesler because it was to be produced at the Raimund Theatre and would star the well-known performer Tilla Durieux.<sup>131</sup> This, combined with the production's later performance in Berlin, was to bring Kiesler closer to the public acceptance which Leopold Jessner enjoyed.

Wedekind's play illustrates the life of a Faustian female. Francesca makes an agreement with Mephisto, in the guise of an insurance agent, that she will be his lover if she can do whatever she likes and enjoy all the pleasures of life. Francesca cannot overcome her place as a woman in the order of the world and, in the final scenes, marries a good man who is a painter of Madonnas. Francesca becomes his model as well as his wife.<sup>132</sup> The production stressed the ironic vein of the script capturing, as one critic said, the spirit of Wedekind if not his whole.<sup>133</sup>

The setting was beyond a doubt an experiment by Kiesler in the use of constructivist principles. The setting was similar in concept to the Space Stage but less formal in appearance. The structure was a vertical composition of steps, broad at the base, narrowing at the top, which stood about three times as high as a person and culminated in a platform raked at slightly less of an angle than the stairway. A winding metal staircase was situated at the stage right end of the platform. An elevated playing space was provided under the platform. The whole structure was placed on the proscenium stage of the Raimund Theatre, not in the round.<sup>134</sup> The supporting structures of

the platform were visible as were the ropes by which scenic pieces were flown.<sup>135</sup> The wings of the stage were also open to the view of the audience.<sup>136</sup> The actors moved with gymnastic-like movements "similar to those of the Russians."<sup>137</sup> The setting is the culmination of Kiesler's consideration of constructivist ideas. (See Plate 5).

While he continued to share the concern of Tatlin with the primacy of space as an artistic element, Kiesler subsequently abandoned the constructivist means of presentation. None of his later settings makes use of the constructivist techniques observed in *Francesca*. That this setting is an outstanding example of constructivist scenography is demonstrated by its use as an unattributed textbook illustration in explaining the constructivist style.<sup>138</sup> By December of 1924, Kiesler had completed his exploration of the constructivist means of exploring space. The next year he was to realize the completion of his experiments with De Stijl techniques. The occasion was to be the Paris World's Fair of 1925.

### **Paris World's Fair**

Josef Hoffmann was appointed the chairman of the Austrian section of the World's Fair. As a matter of Hoffmann's personal policy, he appointed young artists to various design tasks which he certainly could have reserved for himself. Because of Kiesler's successful direction of the Exhibition of New Theatre Technique and, no doubt, because of affection for his former student, Hoffmann selected Kiesler to design the International Theatre section in the Grand Palais. He told Kiesler:

Do the very best you can—Don't tell me your ideas or show me your plans. I rely on you. But don't forget to invite me to the opening of your section.<sup>139</sup>

Kiesler's work at the Fair is illustrated in four major achievements. He presented at the Fair two sets of drawings—one for the Optophon Theatre, the other for the Place de la Concorde; he realized in space the concepts of De Stijl; and he recreated the exhibition of scene designs he had assembled for the Vienna exhibition.

### *Optophon Pavilion*

The Optophon Pavilion "was a horizontally stretched building more or less in the form of a cross. Where the four wings met in the center was a mobile-machine for partly abstract or realistic visual and phonetic plays which would run automatically." The building was never built, and Kiesler later stated that the plans were lost.<sup>140</sup> However, a copy of the plans, much disfigured by being printed over, appeared on the cover of the *Little Review* for the Winter of 1925-26. (See Plate 6).



The importance of the theatre is that it illustrates the culmination of Kiesler's experimentation with Futurist theatrical ideas. He must have become more intimate with these ideas during Prampolini's visit to the 1924 Exhibition, at which time he was a houseguest of Kiesler. A discussion of Kiesler's relation to the Futurist Movement is considered in the following chapter.

### *Place de la Concorde*

The Place de la Concorde drawings originated from Kiesler's study of that geographical location in Paris. He believed the architecture and decoration of the area to be entirely inappropriate for its name. His design for the restructuring of the area was a spiral several stories high supported by four arches. The lower floors were dedicated to the development of shops. The floors above were a series of space stages which could be viewed from the surrounding ramps. The larger stages could be used for extremely large assemblies. The top of the spiral was closed, forming a vast circular area suitable for sporting events.<sup>141</sup> The conceptual basis of the Place de la Concorde comes directly from the Endless Theatre of 1923-24. As the Paris design expanded the idea into a community center for multiple activities, including theatre, which are integral to the Endless Theatre of the 1960s, the project is of importance in the consideration of Kiesler's theatre architecture.

### *The City in Space*

Having had the building of the Optophon rejected on the basis of a lack of funds, Kiesler sought to disguise his realization of the De Stijl ideal by building it as a display system for the theatre projects.<sup>142</sup> The system was a model for "The City in Space" project. The model "was a suspended framework constructed on a tension system without foundations or walls and without a static axis."<sup>143</sup> According to Kiesler, the actual City was to be supported by steel girders several hundred feet above the ground. High speed elevators would carry the citizens to and from the City. Platforms for aircraft would be built within the City. The ground beneath the structure would be used for gardening and public parks.<sup>144</sup>

Both art critics and the leaders of the movement considered the model shown at the Fair to be the fulfillment of the De Stijl ideal. In his book on the art of the twentieth century, R. Banham says: "In creating this space structure, he (Kiesler) has reached the end of the possibilities of an aesthetic—It represents the ultimate condition of the ideas of De Stijl—."<sup>145</sup> When Kiesler arrived at the opening of the theatre section, Theo van Doesburg and Mondrian were present. Earlier Kiesler and van Doesburg had quarreled, presumably over Kiesler's defection from the group. Upon

seeing Kiesler, van Doesburg hurried to him and said, "You have done what we have all hoped one day to do. You did it."<sup>146</sup>

Although in future years Frederick Kiesler was to illustrate how the concepts of De Stijl could be applied in various arts and was to make use of them when he believed them to express the qualities requiring expression, he had completed his exploration of the aesthetic in 1925. Later he was to state that though De Stijl and the Bauhaus were needed earlier to overcome the "fatness" of the decorative styles of the turn of the century, they were no longer appropriate. The replacement, he implied, for the right angle is the curved continuousness of his endless structures—beginning with the Endless Theatre of 1924.<sup>147</sup> By the summer of 1925, Kiesler had left his home with the De Stijl group and was not to go home again except for short visits.

### *Exhibition Recreated*

The assignment to reconstruct the 1924 theatre technique exhibits provided Kiesler with the opportunity to travel to the United States—a trip which did much to change the course of his career. Present for the World's Fair was the editor of *The Little Review*, Jane Heap. She was impressed by the completeness of the collection of designs Kiesler had assembled and wrote the Theatre Guild to help support the magazine's efforts to bring the exhibition to New York with Kiesler as its director.

### **Summary**

With the acceptance of this commission, Kiesler left the European environment where he had been recognized as an innovator in scenic design, including neon tubing as a stage lighting instrument, continuously moving scenery keyed to the action of the play, and the first theatre-in-the-round. Left also were his experiences in applying the aesthetics of the expressionist, constructivist, and De Stijl movements, to both theatre and other arts. He carried with him to New York his own evolving aesthetic which he had been developing in his early scenic designs and in the Endless Theatre as well as the aesthetic of the Futurists which he was still exploring.

Frederick Kiesler, his wife Steffi and hundreds of packing crates sailed from France in December of 1925. They were to be greeted by the New Year in New York with very unexpected surprises.

# Notes

## Chapter 2

1. Barbara Lesák, a student at the University of Vienna and editor for a Viennese publishing house, is presently working on a study of Mr. Kiesler's European works and may be able to provide information on his early life when her study is available.
2. Frederick Kiesler, "Manifeste du Correalisme," *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* (June, 1949), p. 80.
3. Paul Cummings (ed.), *A Dictionary of Contemporary American Artists* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1966), p. 187; Dorothy B. Gilbert (ed.), *Who's Who in American Art* (New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1966), p. 282; *Metro International Directory of Contemporary Art* (Milano: Metro, 1964) (English and Italian), p. 192; Walter Rigdon (ed.), *The Biographical Encyclopedia and Who's Who of the American Theatre* (New York: James M. Heineman, 1965), p. 591.
4. "Design's Bad Boy," *Architectural Forum*, LXXXVI (February, 1947), p. 88.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
6. *McGraw-Hill Dictionary of Art*, Volume 13 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), p. 314; Anna Rothe (ed.), *Current Biography, 1944* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1945), p. 338.
7. An interview with Mrs. Lillian Kiesler, January, 1977.
8. At the time of this writing the question is not resolved. The author has written to Mrs. Lesák and the Akademie der Bildenden Kunste in hopes of documenting the date. Mrs. Lesák confirms 1890 as the date but states no reference. The Akademie der Bildenden Kuenste has not replied.
9. "Design's Bad Boy," p. 90.
10. Alison Sky and Michelle Stone, *Unbuild America* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), p. 150.
11. Museum of Modern Art, *Recollections of Frederick Kiesler* by Lucia Długoszewski, Kiesler Archive (typescript of recording), p. 24.

12. "Design's Bad Boy," p. 90. This article serves as the basis for the early years of Kiesler. Exceptions will be footnoted.
13. Walter Rigdon (ed.), *The Biographical Encyclopedia and Who's Who of the American Theatre* (New York: James H. Heineman, Inc., 1965), p. 591.
14. The Cafe Museum is located on the Karlsplatz and, by interesting coincidence, was designed and built by one of Kiesler's instructors at the Technische Hochschule, Adolphe Loos.
15. Edgar Johnson, *An Introduction to the History of the Western Tradition* (New York: Ginn and Company, Vol. II), p. 671.
16. Thomas Creighton, "Kiesler's Pursuit of an Idea," *Progressive Architecture*, XVII (July, 1961), p. 111.
17. Sinclair Dombrow, "Post Expressionism: The Search for Productive Unity," *Theatre Arts Monthly*, VIII (January, 1924), p. 26.
18. Frederick Kiesler, *Internationale Ausstellung Neuer Theater Technik* (Wien: Kunsthandlung Wurthle, 1924), p. 20.
19. Interview with Mrs. Lillian Kiesler, January, 1977.
20. E. B. Watson and B. Pressey (eds.), *Contemporary Drama: Nine Plays* (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1959), p. 278.
21. Oscar Brockett and Robert Findlay, *Century of Innovation: A History of European and American Theatre and Drama Since 1870* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.), p. 328.
22. John Hetherington (tr.), *The Complete Films of Eisenstein* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1974), p. 10.
23. *The Complete Films of Eisenstein*, p. 10.
24. S. M. Eisenstein, *My First Film*, quoted in *The Complete Films of Eisenstein*, p. 10.
25. Jean Mitry, *S. M. Eisenstein* (Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1956), p. 27.
26. Eisenstein is not wholly sarcastic in this reference, for Vertov was the "father" of Russian filmmaking.
27. Mel Gordon, "A History of Performance (1918-1920) Dada Berlin," *The Drama Review*, XVII, No. 2 (June, 1974), p. 114.
28. Philippe Garner, *The World of Edwardiana* (New York: Hamlyn, 1974), p. 78.
29. Friedrich Kranch (ed.), *Bühnentechnik der Gegenwart*, Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1931, Vol. II, p. 151.
30. Kiesler's integration of film could be viewed as an "adjunct to the realistic drama" as E. T. Kirby defines it in his preface to part IV of his book *Total Theatre*. Kirby says: "Motion

pictures have been used on the stage almost since their inception in the 1890's to produce effects such as storm or fire or to reproduce scenes which could not be staged. But these, like the projected settings, are adjuncts to the realistic drama. . . ."(p. 244).

Professor Kirby does not document his claims for the earlier use of film to produce such effects. His statement loses some credibility because of its looseness. The projection of film for large audiences was not available until 1895 with the invention of the cinematographe by the Lumiere brothers [Thomas Bohlen and Richard Stromgreen, *Light and Shadows* (Port Washington, New York: Alfred, 1975), p. 12]; Jean Le Roy projected films in the U.S. also in 1895. [Kenneth MacGowan, *Behind the Screen* (New York: Delta, 1956), p. 77.] Oskar Messter produced a projector in 1897 [Bohlen, p. 15]. As the inventors of both projectors were also film producers, they withheld the rights for the manufacture of their machines as long as possible. It seems unlikely that machines of the quality needed for projection in a large building would have been readily available before 1900. The use of film for special effects "almost since their inception in the 1890's" seems unlikely. In view of the casualness of Kirby's 1890 remark and the lack of documentation, the uses he suggests for film in the theatre are not further explored in this research. I have written Mr. Kirby in hope of acquiring further documentation of his remarks.

31. "Kiesler's Pursuit of an Idea," p. 109.
32. Lillian Kiesler, "Frederick Kiesler: Biography," p. 2 (mimeographed).
33. E. T. Kirby (ed.), *Total Theatre: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Dutton, 1969), p. 95.
34. *Internationale Ausstellung Neuer Theater Technik*, p. 20.
35. Joseph Cary, "Futurism and the French Theatre d'Avant-Garde" in *Total Theatre* (New York: Dutton, 1969), p. 105.
36. Rosa Trillo Clough, *Futurism: The Story of a Modern Art Movement* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1961), pp. 145 and 147.
37. Clough, *Futurism*, p. 146.
38. "Kiesler's Pursuit of an Idea," p. 109.
39. Alfred Barr, *Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936), p. 140.
40. R. Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (London, 1960), p. 185.
41. Barr, p. 141.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
43. Frederick Kiesler, "Design in Continuity: The World House Gallery," *Architectural Forum*, CVII (October, 1957), p. 127.
44. *Frederick Kiesler; Architekt 1890-1965*. (Innsbruck: Allerheiligen Presse, 1975), p. 22.
45. "Kiesler's Pursuit of an Idea," p. 111.

46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 22, 1924.
49. *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, July 13, 1924.
50. Enrico Prampolini, "Futurist Scenography" in *Total Theatre* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1969), p. 95.
51. Cary, in *Total Theatre*, p. 100-101.
52. *Neues 8Uhr Blatt* (Vienna), September 25, 1924.
53. *Wiener Morgenzeitung*, October 10, 1924.
54. *Neues 8Uhr Blatt* (Vienna), September 5, 1924.
55. *Der Tag* (Vienna), October 21, 1924.
56. The print used in the premiere showing of the film remained in Kiesler's care and was discovered in a closet after his death. The premiere print differs markedly from the prints circulated by the Museum of Modern Art. The Kiesler print is presently held by the Anthology Film Archives, but there is no news concerning the film's being printed for circulation.
57. *Der Tag* (Vienna), October 11, 1924.
58. "Theatrical Nonsense," (Vienna), September 28, 1924.
59. *Wiener Morgenzeitung*, October 2, 1924.
60. *Neues 8Uhr Blatt* (Vienna), September 5, 1924.
61. *Arbeiterzeitung* (Vienna), July 13, 1924.
62. Lillian Kiesler, "Frederick J. Kiesler: Biography," p. 3 (mimeographed).
63. *Arbeiterzeitung* (Vienna), July 13, 1924.
64. Barr, p. 158, illustrations 167 through 174. These show the influence of De Stijl on German typography. Some illustrations are from De Stijl, others from the Bauhaus and other sources.
65. Douglas C. McMurtrie, *Modern Typography and Layout* (Chicago: Gress, 1929), pp. 112-14.
66. *Programm Zeitung* (Vienna), October 1, 1924.
67. *Neue Freie Presse* (Vienna), September 6, 1924.
68. *Frederick Kiesler; Architekt 1890-1965*, p. 23.
69. *Arbeiterzeitung* (Vienna), July 13, 1924, quotes 6 meters as the diameter. This is an early announced figure and might not correspond to what was actually built; *Der Tag*

- (Vienna), September 25, 1924, quotes 8 meters; *Linzer Volksblatt*, September 24, 1924; *Neues 8Uhr Blatt*, September 5, 1924, lists the diameter as 7 meters.
70. *Arbeiterzeitung* (Vienna), July 13, 1924; *Neues 8Uhr Blatt* (Vienna), September 5, 1924.
  71. *Die Stunde* (Vienna), September 20, 1924.
  72. *Der Tag* (Vienna), September 25, 1924.
  73. *D. CE. Tageszeitung* (Vienna), September 5, 1924.
  74. *Frederick Kiesler; Architekt 1890-1965*, p. 19.
  75. *Der Tag* (Vienna), October 4, 1924 (drawing).
  76. *Volkszeitung* (Vienna), September 26, 1924 (drawing).
  77. *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, September 25, 1924.
  78. *Der Tag* (Vienna), October 4, 1924.
  79. *Der Tag* (Vienna), September 6, 1924.
  80. *Linzer Volkszeitung*, September 24, 1924.
  81. *Die Stunde* (Vienna), October 4, 1924.
  82. *Der Tag* (Vienna), September 6, 1924.
  83. *Ibid.*, September 25, 1924.
  84. *Ibid.*
  85. *Berliner Boersen Courier*, October 7, 1924.
  86. *Der Tag* (Vienna), October 16, 1924.
  87. *Wiener Morgenzeitung*, October 15, 1924.
  88. *Der Tag* (Vienna), September 6, 1924.
  89. *Neues 8Uhr Blatt* (Vienna), October 10, 1924.
  90. *Ibid.*, October 18, 1924.
  91. *Die Stunde* (Vienna), October 11, 1924.
  92. *Der Tag* (Vienna), October 3, 1924.
  93. *Die Stunde* (Vienna), October 4, 1924.
  94. *Arbeiterzeitung* (Vienna), October 4, 1924.
  95. *Ibid.*
  96. *Berliner Boersen Courier*, October 8, 1924.
  97. *Arbeiterzeitung* (Vienna), October 4, 1924.
  98. *Die Internationale Ausstellung Neuer Theater Technik*, p. 2. Because of the movement of the audience around the stage the theatre was called the "railway" theatre. Sometimes it was called the "scenic railway" after a train that operated in one of the Viennese parks. The name inspired a number of satirical cartoons.

99. *Neue Freie Presse* (Vienna), September 5, 1924.
100. Banham, p. 185.
101. Kenneth MacGowan, *The Theatre of Tomorrow* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1921), p. 203.
102. Kenneth MacGowan and Robert Edmond Jones, *Continental Stagecraft* (New York: Blom, 1964), p. 200.
103. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
104. *Ibid.*, p. 206.
105. Glenn Hughes, *The Penthouse Theatre* (New York: Samuel French, 1942), p. 11.
106. J. L. Moreno, *The Theatre of Spontaneity* (New York: Beacon House, 1947), p. i.
107. Frederick Kiesler, *Ausstellung Neuer Theater Technik*, p. 55.
108. *Volkszeitung* (Vienna), September 25, 1924.
109. *Arbeiterzeitung* (Vienna), October 7, 1924; *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, September 25, 1924; *Internationale Ausstellung Neuer Theater Technik*, p. 67.
110. J. L. Moreno, *Das Stegreiftheater* (Potsdam, 1923), tafel 1.
111. Moreno is noted for his contribution towards spontaneity theory, play technique and interpersonal communication. His later books emphasized the measurement and charting of interpersonal relations, operational procedures and situational analysis for clinical psychology. He originated the study of therapeutic theatre.
112. J. L. Moreno, *The Theatre of Spontaneity*, p. 31.
113. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
114. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
115. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
116. F. J. Kiesler, "Art and Architecture," *The Partisan Review* (Winter, 1946), p. 98.
117. H. H. Aranson, *The History of Modern Art* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 222-23.
118. *Der Tag* (Vienna), January 20, 1925.
119. J. L. Moreno, *The Theatre of Spontaneity*, pp. 99-100.
120. *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, October 3, 1924.
121. *Illustrierte Kronenzeitung* (Vienna), September 25, 1924.
122. *Neues Wiener Journal*, October 3, 1924. Author's parentheses.
123. *Neue Zuercher Zeitung*, October 15, 1924.
124. *Tagespost* (Vienna), October 1, 1924.
125. *Die Stunde* (Vienna), January 4, 1925.
126. Letter from Barbara Lesák, April 20, 1977.
127. Interview with Lillian Kiesler, January, 1977.
128. *Komoedie* (Vienna), October 4, 1924.



129. *Wiener Mittagszeitung*, August 16, 1924.
130. The opening of Moreno's Stegreiftheater about the 13th of October, 1924, would, presumably, utilize the stage configuration he advocated in his model or a version which could be accommodated by the space he was able to lease. If this presumption is true, then Jacob Moreno would have constructed and conducted performances on the second theatre-in-the-round—one based on his concept of actor/audience integration. There is, unfortunately, no ready evidence other than a single newspaper account for the Moreno theatre; the real configuration of his theatre is not known. The designer himself does not mention the event in the rewritten introduction and notes to the 1947 edition of his book.
131. *Neues Wiener Journal*, December 19, 1924.
132. *Ibid.*; December 21, 1924; *Illustrierte Kronenzeitung* (Vienna), December 21, 1924.
133. *Der Morgen* (Vienna), December 22, 1924; *Neues Wiener Journal*, December 21, 1924.
134. *Wiener Morgenzeitung*, December 21, 1924.
135. *Arbeiterzeitung* (Vienna), December 21, 1924.
136. *Der Morgen*, December 22, 1924.
137. *Neues Wiener Journal*, December 21, 1924.
138. Sheldon Cheney, *Stage Decoration* (New York: Blom, 1966), plate 120: bottom. Cheney uses a photo of the *Francesca* setting in the abstract, titling the illustration "unidentified." Mrs. Kiesler's photograph of the setting was acquired by Mel Gordon while in Europe. The description of the design given in news accounts, naming Kiesler as designer, compares exactly with the photograph.
139. "Kiesler's Pursuit of an Idea," p. 106.
140. *Ibid.*, pp. 109-10.
141. F. J. Kiesler, "Art and Architecture," p. 101.
142. "Kiesler's Pursuit of an Idea," p. 110.
143. Barr, p. 144.
144. *The New York Times*, September 3, 1925.
145. Banham, p. 198.
146. "Kiesler's Pursuit of an Idea," p. 110.
147. Frederick Kiesler, "Design in Continuity: The World House Gallery," p. 127.