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The American Context, 1926–1934

Introduction

Frederick Kiesler often said that the years of 1922, 1923 and 1924 were the most fruitful of his life. Less often but with no less truth, he commented that his first ten years in the United States were the most difficult of his life.[1] Until he became the Scenic Director for the Juilliard School of Music in 1934, he was forced to maintain several shifting sources of employment. The support for his major theatre design projects evaporated for political and economic reasons. The project he was able to build was hampered by financial difficulties. He did not have the opportunity to design any stage settings during the decade and had to apply his design ideas to commercial display. His avid pursuit of this latter interest resulted in a text on store design and display techniques.

There are two reasons for the trying times which Kiesler experienced; the editors of the *Architectural Forum* touched upon both in their 1947 article on Kiesler. One, Kiesler came to the United States to stay ten years before any of his contemporaries were driven from the continent by the repressive acts of the Third Reich. "There was only one drawback: Kiesler was so far ahead of America that nobody knew what he was talking about."[2] And two, this situation was complicated by language difficulties. On his arrival, Kiesler knew little English and had to work through interpreters. Moreover, he was given to expounding his ideas to the press in the romanticized rhetoric of the art revolution and, as the *Forum* editors indicate, his serious discussions were

> sprinkled with abstruse concepts and coined words . . . which to Kiesler with his multilingual mind and limitless imagination are quite simple and lucid. . . . But as Kiesler explains them . . . they are apt to give the average person nothing more constructive than a raging headache.[3]

Both of these reasons were in evidence in Kiesler's first encounter with America, The International Theatre Exposition of 1926.

The International Theatre Exposition, 1926

The Little Review editors had organized the support of the Exhibition through the generosity of Otto Kahn who underwrote the cost of the transportation and was to provide $250 a week in support of the project. News coverage was arranged to cover each phase of the Exposition beginning with Frederick and Steffi Kiesler's arrival in the United States.

> Full of grandiose dreams of an American adventure, Kiesler stepped briskly off the Leviathan on one of New York's rawest January days. An icy wind was cutting across the deserted pier. There were no reporters and no cameramen; only the two lady editors huddled together, recalls Kiesler, "like birds on a Siberian snow field." The little Austrian was a bit dashed, but merely inquired about the advance publicity and asked to take a look at the exhibition hall. There was none of either.[4]

The difficulties, however, were only beginning. After a month's wait for an appointment, Otto Kahn informed the Austrian Director of the Exposition that as he, Kahn, understood the situation, he was only paying the transportation cost; the $250 per week would not be forthcoming. *The Little Review* together with the Theatre Guild, an original supporter of the Exhibition, joined forces with the Provincetown Playhouse, The Greenwich Village Theatre and the Neighborhood Playhouse to acquire financial support and a suitable location.[5] Originally, the groups hoped to rent Madison Square Garden, but the fee of $400 per day was prohibitive. Arrangements were then made to secure two floors of the Steinway Building and to schedule the Exposition coincidentally with the opening of the building. The Steinway owners would gain exposure for their facilities through those who would be visiting the Exposition. The rental of the space for the three weeks of the Exposition was, therefore, only $1,500.[6]

With the financial crisis somewhat alleviated, Kiesler undertook many of the same duties he had performed for the Vienna Exhibition of 1924. He constructed display structures similar to those used in Europe.[7] Upon these he arranged the 1,541 exhibits he had brought from the continent and 302 new exhibits which illustrated the current vogue in American scenic design.[8] For the Exhibition he assembled a red, white and blue catalogue in which there were seven articles, the longest of which was a translation of Kiesler's "Debacle of the Modern Theatre" which had appeared in the 1924 catalogue in Vienna. There were a limited number of illustrations, and almost two-thirds of the work consisted of advertising. The pages were divided into three equal spaces, and apparently the advertising was sold by the third of the page. Kiesler attempted to artfully modulate the configurations that could be made by dividing the pages into thirds. Some facing pages were identical divisions; others were layed out as opposites of each other. The number of full page advertisements and those in which the style was dictated by the

purchaser caused the entire composition to be less pleasing than the 1924 catalogue; however, Kiesler did retain the graphic device of printing in two directions on the same page; the technique was most often utilized to distinguish the Exhibition listings from the advertising and the articles. Unfortunately, the catalogue was not finished by the printer until after the Exposition opened.

Kiesler's involvement in the organization and conceptual planning of the Exposition is evidenced by three characteristics which are identical to those he utilized in Vienna. Although no statement of the philosophical basis for the selection was published, the similarity in the number of exhibits to the number shown in Vienna and the parallel adverse criticism by the press indicate the likeness of conception. A comparison of the materials shown in Vienna with those shown in New York indicates that most of the Viennese exhibit appeared in the American. In addition, works of Kiesler and, of course, the American designers, were added. *The New Yorker* called the Exhibition "a woeful hodge-podge, brain taxing scrambled mess. . . ."[9]

The "hodge-podge" was like that of Vienna's Exhibition, and for the same cause: the aim of each Exposition was to demonstrate the wide range of scenic experimentation.[10] This range included everything from the very traditional designs for proscenium stages through the latest advances since the preceding international exhibition.[11]

The presentation of a multitude of viewpoints was carried through the lecture program also. Kiesler offered a program entitled, "The Theatre of the Actor of the Future," in which he described how new theatres could do away with scenery. His opinions contrasted greatly with those of Barrett Clark who spoke on "The Play's the Thing."[12] Other lecturers for the daily four o'clock activity included: Kenneth MacGowan, Montrose Moses, John Mason Brown, Richard Boleslavsky, Aline Bernstein, Dudley Digges, Norman Bel Geddes, Robert Edmond Jones, Lawrence Langer, Philip Moeller, Theresa Helburn, and Oliver Sayler.[13] One public discussion, entitled "Is American Stage Scenery Obsolete?" was conducted.[14] Some lectures were so popular that they had to be scheduled for a second performance.[15]

Another indication of Kiesler's influence was the inclusion of film showings. The films were coordinated with the Franco-American Society by Count de Beaumont. Two of the films were: *The Street*, dealing with the sordid aspects of Berlin life, and *Le Voyage Imaginaire* by René Clair, a surreal fantasy. The films were not screened at the Steinway Building because of the lack of space.[16]

The diversity of the exhibits, the substantial lecture program and the inclusion of film in the exposition are characteristic of both the Austrian and American expositions and suggest that Kiesler played a significant role in the concept and execution of the American exhibit.

Futurism

Each of the three major pre-opening articles on the exposition selected the actorless theatres as the main features of the exhibit. Of twelve reviews after the exhibit opened, four centered their attention on the ridiculousness of the actorless theatres; three were preoccupied with evaluating the inappropriateness of "The Theatre is Dead" rhetoric, and one rejected the whole premise of the Exhibition while charging Kiesler with wanting to do away with the actor completely.[17] The remaining four articles attempted to evaluate the entire Exposition and either categorize its contents or identify the concepts at work in the designs.

From the beginning of the Exhibition, more than half of the press chose to emphasize the spectacular "actorless theatres" and disparage the revolutionary rhetoric of the avant garde. This activity tended to place Kiesler strongly in the Futurist camp. Although the ideas were known to Kiesler and he experimented with those ideas, he was independent of the movement.

The actorless theatre, in its pure form, was the ultimate device called for by the Futurist movement. Prampolini spoke of the actorless theatre as early as 1915:

> Vibrations, luminous forms (produced by electric currents and colored gases) will wriggle and writhe dynamically and these veritable actor-gases of an unknown theatre will have to replace living actors. By shrill whistles and strange noises these actor-gases will be able to give the unusual significations of theatrical interpretations quite well; they will be able to express these multiform emotive qualities with more effectiveness than some celebrated actor or other can with his displays.[18]

Essentially the Futurist believed, as did Gordon Craig, that the actor was the most unreliable link in the performance. In fact, the first step toward an actorless theatre which the Futurist took was the design of mechanical actors much like Craig's *uebermarionette*.[19] The Futurist also approved of the light shows such as Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack's at the 1924 Theatre Exhibition. The integration of such light shows with sound to form an emotionally stimulating experience formed another intermediate step before the advent of the actor-gases.

Kiesler designed, it is true, a Futurist theatre for this intermediate step. He does not mention the Optophon Theatre before 1924, and apparently the design evolved from his contacts with the Futurists during the 1924 Exhibition. This theatre provides a central square-playing space with the audience seated on four sides of the cross-shaped building. The display of colored lights is seen in space rather than projected on any vertical surface. This experiment with the Futurist ideas is the culmination of the architecture of Futurist theatres because it moves the staging into space, out of the proscenium. The project is also Kiesler's last formal experiment based on

Futurist ideas. Kiesler seems to have satisfied his curiosity by exploring the ideas of this art movement to what he considered its fullest worth. Secure in the knowledge he had gained, he would proceed to place the ideas of the Futurists in the perspective of his other thoughts and experiments.

Evidently Kiesler was moving away from the Futurist influence though he retained some of their concepts and language. Of the more than 1,800 exhibits shown at the International Exposition, two were actorless theatres: the Optophon and Prampolini's "Synthetic Scene." Other than the marionettes from other countries, Prampolini was the major exhibitor of Futurist design, showing 47 drawings and photographs. While this was an unusually high number of exhibits for a single participant, it was not large compared to the other stylistic trends displayed.[20] In organizing the Exhibition, Kiesler seems not to have given emphasis to the Futurist cause. Further, when asked to comment on the actorless theatres which had been much advertised by an "amused press," he commented: "It is touched upon, but it is not here important. Of course, it is a logical development."[21] He was perhaps seeing the Futurist ideal as a logical development but not one that would occur soon. Much sooner he expected to realize the kind of modern theatre which could be played upon his Space Stage.

> We await the new poet," he stated ". . . the new actor of the theatre will be the poet-actor, for the greatest playwrights were poets—Shakespeare, Moliere. . . . Out of all this constructivism—the inspiration of mechanic—must come a new form of drama.[22]

Kiesler then was seeking a theatre which he thought would be appropriate for the spirit of the twentieth century, one which contained a live actor.

Theatre for a New Society

He sought theatre that neither feared the machine age, as elements of Expressionism did, nor glorified technology as did the Futurists, but a theatre that brought man and his technology into a relationship based on the reality that the mechanical was the basis of civilization in the early twentieth century. He believed that the "mechanic" and human elements must be brought together in a new spatial arrangement which reflected the new relationship existing between man and the machine.

That Kiesler and his associates sought more than a new theatre is quite evident in Kiesler's revolutionary rhetoric:

> The Theatre is Dead.
> We are not working for new decoration.
> We are not working for new literature.
> We are not working for new lighting systems.
> We are not working for new masks.

> We are not working for new stages.
> We are not working for new costumes.
> We are not working for new theatres.
> We are working for the theatre that has survived the theatre.
> We are working for the sound body of a new society.
> And we have confidence in the strength of newer generations that are aware of their problems.
> The theatre is Dead.
> We want to give it a splendid Burial.[23]

Obviously Kiesler was not concerned with new techniques. Techniques are only characteristic external changes representing a return to the theatre that has survived the centuries of their separation from the audience and confinement in the "peep-hole" stage. The "sound-bodied" society was for Kiesler one that was in continuity with its environment in the total sense of the word. Kiesler was well aware that technology had changed the environment of the twentieth century and sought a theatre that would reconcile man with the new conditions. He thought traditional theatre was dead because, for him, it did not satisfactorally portray man's new relationship to a new age. He also realized that he and his friends were only able to begin the change in the theatre and society; future generations must complete the work.

The desire to give the theatre of the past a grand burial stems from an understanding of the ritual function of a burial. The ceremony of burial is supposed to allow healing forgetfulness to begin for the survivors. Thus the development of new relationships to one's environment can begin sooner and be more readily accepted if the old theatre is buried. This is exactly what Kiesler wanted to have happen with the theatre. The burial of the old should encourage the growth of the new. The critics of 1926 failed to discover the intent behind Kiesler's words. They were content to demonstrate the theatre was not dead because Belasco, Cohan and others were still actively producing and had no intention of being buried.[24]

Working with the Princess Matchabelli as interpreter, Kiesler attempted to explain the performances of the new theatre. He began by explaining his concept of the stage not as a picture but as a space constructed to meet the demands of the action.[25] This was understood and clearly reported by the media. However, when Kiesler chose the term "fourth dimension" to describe the effect of the theatre, communication ceased. One of the more thoughtful critics tried to discuss the fourth dimensional theatre as the element of time.[26] Kiesler, however, meant something different by the term, and his connotation of these words demonstrates his modification of the Futurist use of the term.

In *L'atmosfera scenica futurista*, a 1923 publication of *Noi*, Prampolini discussed the phases of Scene-Synthesis.[27]

> (His) third and final phase advocated the replacement of painted scenery by "architectural constructions" created by a combination of moveable and changeable shafts of light in space animated by the constant movement of objects. Because of this new element, motion, the "dramatic action acquired a fourth dimension."[28]

His idea of continuous motion in scenery is one with which Kiesler agreed, but he extended the idea to the actor. "The fourth dimension, according to . . . the inventor of the 'Space Stage' is the will and the emotion. In order to portray these in fourth dimensional action, one simply 'throws them out as radio waves.' "[29]

The exact meanings of "will" and "emotion" in this quotation are not clear. Possibly he means the use of the actor's "will" to affect the "emotion" of the audience by a means other than vocal or physical representation. Whether Kiesler is speculating on parapsychological phenomena, cannot be definitely stated. However, Kiesler later did exhibit an interest in such phenomena by including an account of one such episode in his book, *Inside the Endless House.* Mrs. Kiesler stated during an interview that Mr. Kiesler occasionally performed psychic parlor tricks such as reading notes inside of sealed envelopes which he did not touch as entertainment for his friends.

An interest in parapsychological experiences, and possibly in their cultivation and use in the theatre, may well mark the vocalization of Kiesler's integration of new ideas and possibilities with those he had already explored. The direction of these new ideas points to Kiesler's ability to integrate with the Surrealist movement in the 1940s.

Results of the Exhibition

While Kiesler's advanced ideas and his difficulties in making those ideas clear in English did not win popularity with the press critics, the ideas did capture the imagination of certain spectators at the Exposition for various reasons and with various results for the next few years of Kiesler's life. His partnership with the Princess Matchabelli brought him into an association with others who formed a new school of theatre art. The school was supported by a Brooklyn banker who gave Kiesler his first commission to design a theatre. Kiesler was invited to become a member of the Art Film Guild and an associate of the architecture firm headed by Harvey Wiley Corbett.

Kiesler recalls Corbett approaching him during the Exposition. "Although I don't understand your plans," Corbett began, "you Europeans seem to design so abstractly. I am fascinated by them and I would like to try to build the Endless Theatre. Won't you join our firm for a year or two?"[30] Kiesler remained with the firm on a retainer of $1,000 a year until 1928. The Endless, however, was not realized.

International Theatre Arts Institute

Another of Kiesler's endeavors was even more ill-fated. During the course of the Exposition the Princess Matchabelli and Kiesler became friends, perhaps sharing similar thoughts on theatre as well as a dim financial future. On the 14th of March they announced the formation of a school, The International Theatre Arts Institute.[31] Kiesler commented, "We need a theatre of the people and the theatre of today is not of the people. . . . Scenery of the old school theatre was born in the spirit of imperialism and could not prevail in a country where democracy and liberty were dominant."[32] After this startling introduction, he stated that the school was not to devote itself to the establishment of a particular "ism" but "to crystalliz(ing) the beauty of the present age."[33] Kiesler clearly establishes with this statement that he was the leader of the school organization, for what he was advocating as the direction of the institute is precisely the direction his own work had taken in the productions of *R.U.R.* and *Emperor Jones* and the Space Stage.

The school was to approach this synthesis from all paths. Kiesler was the first to build a laboratory space for the theatre productions, providing an area for the practical application of studies. The studies themselves were to be approached from three points of view: first, the psychological, headed by Princess Matchabelli; second, the scientific, supervised by Dr. Bess Mensendieck; and third, the artistic, under the direction of Kiesler. New works were also to be sponsored as opportunities for actors and writers "to unfold greater possibilities." Kiesler was also responsible for this phase of the program.[34]

Plans for the school grew through the summer of 1926 to include plans for two performing companies (one dramatic and the other lyric),[35] dance instruction[36] and lectures in theatre history.[37] The Institute was furthered by its acceptance as a member of the Independent Theatre Clearing House, another organization sponsored by Otto Kahn. The greatest contribution came from Ralph Jonas, president of the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce. He donated the use of a house on Ramsen Street as a home for the Institute. Jonas also commissioned Kiesler to design a theatre center for erection in Brooklyn Heights. Kiesler's commission was to be $50 a week until the building of the theatre, at which time he would receive a substantial sum.[38]

The seemingly well-established school and the commission from Jonas may well mark a turning point, a point of no return, for Kiesler in America. At this time Kiesler severed his ties to Europe by refusing a position offered him by Erwin Piscator in Berlin[39] and devoted his time to the American projects. Unfortunately neither project was to be fully realized, although both are significant in understanding Kiesler's theories and architecture.

As previously quoted, Kiesler traced his ideas to the "fruitful years" of 1922 to 1924. Although he may well have conceived his ideas during that period, a reading of his manifestos indicates that he refined and defined

those ideas more clearly as the years passed. The formation of the Institute appears to have been a major step in that process. The Institute provided Kiesler with an opportunity for involving a group in the exploration of the ideas which were to later be articulated in his theoretical statements. Kiesler's emphasis on the importance of history, his general approach to design, and even embryonic versions of his theoretical terminology appear in the Institute's catalogue.

In the preface to the description of his courses, Kiesler says: "In theory the study of the antique is the basis for the development of the modern theatre and the modern performance of today."[40] About one-tenth of the weekly class time was devoted to the studies of antique settings. Moreover, a history course offered by John Mason Brown was a requirement of the theatre students. Also included under the design section was the study of realistic drawing techniques, reflecting Kiesler's belief that a student has to learn traditional art techniques and theories before he can understand the art modes of the present.

Dr. Mensendieck conducted a class in body education. The catalogue description indicates that the major study point was to be the movement of the body in accordance with what were called natural laws, which might be understood as the restraints or dictates placed upon the body by the mechanical nature of its parts. This approach is related to the bio-mechanics of Meyerhold with which Kiesler was already familiar and foreshadows his approach to design during the 1930s.

Brooklyn Theatre

While the Institute contributed to the consolidation of Kiesler's ideas, it did not aid his financial difficulties, for to judge from appearances the school did not thrive. The actual demise of the endeavor has not been recorded,[41] but the failure of the Brooklyn Heights building to materialize is well remembered by Kiesler as his introduction to the realities of American politics. The editor of *Architectural Forum* recounts the experience:

> When he [Kiesler] unfolded the cherished plans on his benefactor's gleaming mahogany table, he was as excited as a debutante at her coming out party. Here, for the first time in America, was a truly flexible theatre which could be used for movies, plays, concerts and large and small entertainments with equal acoustic and visual excellence. Here was the first in-theatre restaurant, the first provision for underground parking. As Kiesler talked, he noted that the banker was looking about the room, blowing smoke rings from his large black cigar and generally paying little attention. "You seem not to be interested," Kiesler remarked. "To be honest I'm not," replied his rich friend with a smile. . . . "Now, I will tell you the truth." . . . "When I saw your exhibit, the Democratic Party needed a project which would interest Brooklyn voters. Since Governor Smith was not elected President, I'm afraid the project has no meaning." For the first time in his life Kiesler tried to hit somebody twice his size.[42]

In a number of ways the project simplifies and renders practical, in terms of salability to a prospective builder, the ideas expressed in the Endless Theatre of 1924. Both theatres were designed with multiple activities in mind. The Brooklyn project was also like the Place de la Concorde design as it was to be a community meeting place with services other than readily available performances. The theatre has a proscenium style stage house between two auditoriums, one approximately twice the size of the other. The Stage could be divided to allow the use of one or both theatres coincidentally. The drawings indicate the possible existence of a double revolving stage, one turntable within another. The large auditorium is structured in such a way as to allow for the removal of the orchestra seats to construct a theatre in the round.[43] Whether or not this function did exist is not clear, and a more thorough examination should be part of a study of Kiesler's theatre architecture. The 1926 project served as a model for two other designs by Kiesler: The Woodstock Theatre and the Empire State Music Festival Theatre.[44]. The Woodstock Theatre was designed so close in time to the Brooklyn Theatre that it is appropriate to make a brief comparison. The Empire State Music Festival Theatre will be considered later in the text. (See Plate 7).

Universal Theatre at Woodstock

The artist community of Woodstock, New York, sponsored a competition in 1929 in order to acquire a design for the theatre which they planned to build. Kiesler submitted his plans for the Universal Theatre and won. Unfortunately, the stock market crash caused the building funds to disappear practically overnight. Undaunted, Kiesler continued to promote the idea and saw three major articles published on the Universal Theatre before 1933 although the project was never realized.[45]

Similar to the Brooklyn Theatre, the Woodstock placed the stage house between two auditoriums. The stage house featured a turntable and a movable cyclorama which stored off-stage-right when viewing from the larger house. The stage house was designed so actors moving to dressing rooms and green rooms never had to cross the traffic patterns of a scene shift. The larger auditorium could be reshaped into an arena by pivoting the orchestra seats to the sides and moving the seating of the smaller auditorium across the stage to the edge of the proscenium of the larger house. The orchestra seats, when in the proscenium configuration, were surrounded by a peripheral stage. A balcony or grandstand seating area was located behind and above this peripheral stage. In the place of the orchestra pit were 11 seats which could rotate 360 degrees to blend with any configuration. The larger theatre could then be utilized as a proscenium house; the proscenium could be closed and a play performed on the peripheral stage surrounding the stage

much like that of Oscar Strnad's Ring Theatre, or the seating could be moved to form an arena. The balcony was available for additional seating for any of the configurations. The smaller auditorium could only be used as a proscenium style theatre containing 84 seats. These combined with the 116 grandstand seats and the 195 in the orchestra area allowed a maximum capacity of 395. Another 140 persons were accommodated with temporary seating or as standing room only. The Woodstock Theatre differed from the Brooklyn not only in the degree of flexibility it allowed but by being designed as an outdoor theatre. According to the plans, the smaller auditorium was completely open. The larger house, however, was constructed of steel and aluminum pipe over which a cover could be affixed to shelter the audience.[46] (See Plate 8).

The Film Guild Theatre

Neither of Kiesler's flexible, multipurpose theatres were built; his only actualized theatre architecture of the period was a special purpose construction for the cinema. The further result of Kiesler's efforts at the Exposition was his association with the Film Guild. During February of 1926, the Guild organized a distribution company called Film Associates, Inc. The company would screen a film once in New York and then make it available to other theatres. An advisory council was formed to select the films to be shown. The committee was "composed of Kenneth MacGowan; Gilbert Seldes, Lawrence Langner . . . Jane Heap . . . Christian Brinton . . . Sheldon Cheney . . . and Frederick Kiesler."[47]

In this association Kiesler was able to make his ideas known. When the Film Guild undertook the construction of a theatre, Kiesler became the architect. Opening in February of 1929, the Theatre was reputed to be the first "designed solely for the projection of the cinema."[48] The theatre seated 485 and, unlike contemporary theatres, surrounded the audience with projected images. The walls and ceilings sloped toward the front screen and were black projection screens; Kiesler designed special machines to project on the black surface. Still or moving pictures could then be shown on both walls and the ceiling as well as the main screen. The main screen was unique not only because it could be adjusted in both size and shape but because it was curved in such a fashion as to counteract the angular distortion which occurred for a viewer not seated directly in front of the screen.[49] (See Plate 9).

Kiesler's plans were never fully realized. A shortage of funds prevented the fabrication of the special projectors for the ceiling and walls.[50] The building was eventually sold and remodeled. Although the structure with its fine acoustics still exists at 53 West Eighth Street in Greenwich Village, little remains of Kiesler's innovative concept.[51]

Art Applied to Display

The thousand-dollar-a-year retainer from Corbett's architecture firm and the fifty-a-week retainer from Jonas for his ongoing theatre plans did not provide the Kieslers with sufficient income during the years just after their arrival in the United States. Steffi Kiesler obtained a position in the foreign language department of the New York Public Library, and Frederick Kiesler sought employment in commercial art. His first commission occurred coincidentally with Kiesler's eviction from the apartment they were renting. To complete his commission, Kiesler convinced the new tenants to allow him to use his drawing board, which had been confiscated by the landlord, so he could complete the designs. The commission was to redesign the windows of Saks Fifth Avenue store. Kiesler did not decorate the windows but developed an entirely new display system.

> At the time windows were always constructed as separate units made of expensive Tudorish wood paneling. Kiesler's then-startling innovation was to rip out all of the partitions between windows and run a continuous background panel the full length of the store. Other features which set the window-dressing world on its collective ear were the use of stark white as a background color and the substitution of one or two dramatic items for the usual jumble of merchandise. Saks expected to change these windows in two or three weeks, but the permanent architectural background proved so flexible that it was retained for nine years.[52]

Kiesler was successful in this field of applied art and was able to present many of his ideas and actualize a number of his designs. In 1930 Kiesler published his first book, *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display*. In the book he published his thoughts on nature and art, the manifestos of earlier years and many architectural drawings for "horizontal skyscrapers" and department store buildings. He presented his theatrical work as examples and discussed his approach to designing for the store, including the application of special lighting techniques. The architect commented on the utilization of non-traditional materials citing European examples. Near the end of the text, he speculated on the uses of television for the display of rare art works and as a promotional medium for the display of merchandise.

The book was considered especially good because of its practical nature. One critic commented that it should "prove a debunking factor in the muddled state of modern American decorative art."[53] The book is important in this study because it demonstrates another step in the refinement of Kiesler's theories. Douglas Haskell in his review is able to discern Kiesler's intent: He says, "The effort to achieve a perfect union between the two things hitherto segregated as 'art' and 'technology' makes the school to which Mr. Kiesler belongs a paradoxical and fascinating one."[54] The development of a

theatre which embodies the new technologic age in which man exists was advocated earlier by Kiesler. This concept was not understood when Kiesler first came to America to a large extent because of the manner in which Kiesler expounded the idea. Four years later, he expressed the same basic concept applied to a different aspect of the culture in a practical and understandable fashion. The book also indicated that Kiesler had gone beyond the ideas of pure functionalism, what Kiesler later called "pseudo-functionalism."[55]

Functionalism gave emphasis to the practical requirements of a building or object; thus a space was to be shaped and finished with regard to the necessities of the contents of that space. For example, a room then would be square or rectangular; the walls might be covered with easy-to-clean ceramic tile; the ceiling might be finished in rough acoustical material for the elimination of distracting sound; the light source would be the most economical one possible, providing the requisite number of footcandles for the efficient performance of the tasks to be undertaken in the space. The space, in short, would be engineered according to the task to be performed.

Kiesler required what he called the "psycho-functions" to be considered. Clearly, he meant that in addition to the task performed, the design must consider the psychological requirements of the human being performing the task. Even critics like Haskell, otherwise imaginative, reacted to the strangeness of "psycho-functions" as a consideration in applied arts by dubbing them a "thumping slogan."[56]

This concern for the human element as a major consideration in the design of any environment foreshadows later developments and is one of the basic tenets of Kiesler's world view.

An additional refinement of Kiesler's theory is indicated in a typescript which he published the same year. In the three pages of the pamphlet Kiesler metaphorically defines Correalism as continuity. He then defines Biotechnique as the method of applying Correalism.[57] The practical application of Kiesler's principles in his book of 1930 and the paper on Correalism support the contention that while Kiesler may well have conceived his theory during the "fruitful years," as he claimed, he continued to refine and articulate the thoughts more precisely until he defined them in communicable terms in an article appropriately entitled "Correalism and Biotechnique" in 1939.

Some of the designs which illustrated *Contemporary Art* were drawings for furniture which might well have advanced Kiesler's career on another front. During the next several years he designed furniture, including lighting fixtures, chairs, tables, sideboards and hanging desks for both furniture companies and private individuals. Many of the pieces are currently maintained in private collections. Mrs. Kiesler has catalogued his furniture designs and maintains numerous photographs of his work. At the height of his endeavor in this field, Kiesler lectured in several states on functionalism

and simplicity in furniture design.[58] The Moderage Company sponsored the building of the Space House and its furnishings both designed by Kiesler. This design demonstrated the flexibility of a house that could be reshaped by the movement of curtains to allow a single space to perform several functions. Kiesler employed various textured materials throughout the dwelling to open or enclose spaces as the owner might wish. While the model of the house did not realize Kiesler's plan, it did demonstrate the principle of time-space architecture in a single family shelter.[59] The structure is important in the consideration of Kiesler's architecture. Also the articles he wrote on the Space House utilized his theoretical vocabulary and further refined the meaning of the term Biotechnique.

Summary

After the close of the International Theatre Exposition of 1926 and before the end of 1933, Kiesler realized few of his projects and only partially completed others. Yet those years must be considered important, for during them he designed two flexible theatres, The Brooklyn (1926) and the Woodstock (1929), which became models of future flexible theatres such as the Harvard University Loeb Drama Center; he innovated a display system for stores; partially constructed the Space House (1933), which is an early prototype of his famous endless house of the 1960s; and he significantly advanced the formulation of his theories. The year 1934 was a turning point in Kiesler's life for it brought him back to the theatre.

Chapter 3

1. "Kiesler's Pursuit of an Idea," pp. 110, 113.
2. "Design's Bad Boy," p. 88.
3. Ibid., p. 140.
4. Ibid., p. 89.
5. *The New York Evening Post*, February 6, 1926.
6. *Variety* (New York), March 31, 1926.
7. Clipping (New York), March 6, 1926; *The World* (New York), February 28, 1926.
8. Frederick Kiesler, *International Theatre Exposition* (New York, 1926), pp. 32, 36.
9. "The Art Galleries," *The New Yorker* (March 13, 1926).
10. Stark Young, "The International Theatre Exposition," *The New Republic* (March 17, 1926).
11. *The Tribune* (?) (New York), March 5, 1926.
12. Clipping (New York?), 1926, in Kiesler's scrapbook.
13. *The New York Sun*, March 14, 1926.
14. *The Tribune (?) (New York),* March 5, 1926.
15. *The New York Sun*, March 14, 1926.
16. *Moving Picture World* (New York), February 27, 1926.
17. Pre-opening articles: *New York Evening Post*, February 6, 1926; two unidentified clippings (c. February 10-14). Actorless emphasis: David Carb, "The New Decor of the Theatre," *Vogue*, I (March, 1926); John Anderson, *Evening Post* (New York), March 6, 1926; *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), March 7, 1926; William McDermott, *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland), March 10, 1926. Rhetoric: E. W. Osborn, *The Evening World* (New York), March 10, 1926; *The New York Evening Post*, March 13, 1926; *The Tribune* (New York), March 15, 1926. Rejection: Henry McBride, *The New York Sun*. Evaluation: *The Washington Post*, March 14, 1926; Stark Young, "The International Theatre Exposition," *The New Republic* (March 17, 1926); Clipping (New York), March 13, 1926.
18. Prampolini, *Futurist Scenography* in Kirby, p. 98.
19. The futurist connection to Craig is further demonstrated by the appearance of futurist articles in Craig's magazine, *The Mask*, published in Florence, Italy, a rallying point for the nationalistic movement.
20. Frederick Kiesler, *International Theatre Exposition* (New York, 1926), p. 19.
21. *The New York World*, February 28, 1926.
22. *The Tribune* (New York), March 7, 1926.
23. Kiesler, *International Theatre Exposition*, 1926, p. 5.
24. *The Tribune* (New York), March 15, 1926.

25. *The Evening Post* (New York), March 13, 1926.

26. *The World* (New York), March 16, 1926.

27. The article was reprinted in the catalogue of the Vienna exhibition edited by Kiesler, page 67. This establishes Kiesler's knowledge of the contents of the article.

28. Clough, p. 148.

29. *The Tribune* (New York), March 15, 1926.

30. "Kiesler's Pursuit of an Idea," p. 113.

31. *The World* (New York), March 15, 1926.

32. *The New York Times*, March 15, 1926, p. 19:1.

33. Ibid., March 16, 1926, p. 23:2.

34. Ibid.

35. Program notes for The Independent Theatres dinner by Princess Matchabelli, speaker. Portion of program notes included in Kiesler's personal papers.

36. Program notes, Independent Theatres dinner.

37. *The New York Times*, August 28, 1926.

38. "Design's Bad Boy," p. 89.

39. Ibid.

40. *International Theatre Arts Institute* (catalogue), 1926, p. 5.

41. I have written to Princess Matchabelli in the hope that she may have comments on the fate of the school.

42. "Design's Bad Boy," p. 89.

43. Frederick Kiesler, "Theaterprojekte," *Bauen und Wohnen*, No. 11 (1951), p. 2.

44. Thomas De Gaetani, "A Theatre Flexible and Spacious," *Progressive Architecture* (February, 1962), p. 168. The building is of historical significance not only for Kiesler, but for a study of flexible theatre architecture. The total theatre of Walter Gropius is considered in texts as the model for flexible theatres. Thomas De Gaetani in his review of *The Theatre of the Bauhaus* by Oskar Schlemmer discussed the Endless Theatre and Gropius's knowledge of the design. A careful study of the Brooklyn may indicate that Kiesler actually designed two flexible plants before the publication of "The Total Theatre" in 1927.

45. Frederick Kiesler, "The Universal," *Show*. Frederick Kiesler, "A Festival Shelter: The Space Theatre for Woodstock, New York," *Shelter* (New York, 1932), pp. 42-47. Morton Eustis, "A Universal Theatre," *Theatre Arts*, XVII (June, 1933), pp. 447-57.

46. *Show; Shelter*, pp. 42-47; *Theatre Arts*, pp. 447-57.

47. Clipping (New York), February 13, 1926.

48. *The Brooklyn Examiner*, May 17, 1929, p. 20:1.

49. Douglas Fox, "The Film Guild Cinema," *Exhibitors Herald-World*, March 16, 1929, p. 15.

50. Interview with Mrs. Lillian Kiesler, January, 1977.

51. A visit to what is now the Eighth Street Playhouse makes this apparent.

52. "Design's Bad Boy," p. 90.

53. Harry Adsit Bull, "Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display," *International Studio*, XCVII (December, 1930), p. 84.

54. Douglas Haskell, "Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display," *Creative Art* (May, 1930), sup. p. 109.

55. Frederick Kiesler, "Pseudo-Functionalism in Modern Architecture," *The Partisan Review*, XVI, No. 9 (July, 1949), pp. 733-42. "Pseudo-Funktionalismen," *Paletten*, III (1963), pp. 92-96.

56. Haskell, p. 110.

57. Frederick Kiesler, "Correalism" (New York: Kiesler, 1930), p. 2.

58. *The New York Sun*, January 6, 1934.

59. Frederick Kiesler, "Notes on Architecture: The Space House," *Horn and Hound*, 1934.