

4. Autonomic Vision

Form does not follow function

Function follows vision.

Vision follows reality.

Frederick Kiesler

“Whatever the truth may be,” Kiesler proposed in his incomplete and unpublished book *Magic Architecture*, “with the erection of the first hut” there was a “Split in the Unity of Vision and Fact.”¹ Alongside completing his gallery exhibition designs in New York City and Paris in the 1940s, Kiesler wrote his book *Magic Architecture: the Story of Human Housing*, to discuss the aesthetic and psychological aspects of shelter design. From his studies of nests, caves, huts, and pyramids to skyscrapers, Kiesler observed that in building a world of artificial environments, humanity constructed shelters that distinguished humans from each other and their natural surroundings.² “Nature is Architecture,” he imagined until humanity became “individualized,” and began to link “cause and effect in time and space.”³ As humanity learned to discern differences in their

¹ Frederick Kiesler, *Magic Architecture: The Story of Human Housing*, most complete version, unpublished, undated, Part 1, Chapter 9, pg. 1, 3. As held in the Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive, Vienna. Similar to Kiesler, Gottfried Semper, Karl Botticher, Karl Shinkel, Quatremère de Quincy, Viollet-le-Duc, Sir Banister Fletcher, Adolph Loos, and Le Corbusier to name only a few architectural writers all had similarly supposed a first hut or tomb to validate their ideology when writing their history of architecture. See Joseph Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History* (New York: Modern Museum of Art, 1972).

² Kiesler's book *Magic Architecture: the Story of Human Housing*, is far more incomplete than *On Correalism and Biotechnique*. The introduction “The Unity of Vision and Fact” poses the book as a study and history of unity in architecture. The book is broken into ten major parts, each with introductions and varied chapters. Part 1 comprises nine chapters that focus on the split between vision and fact. Part 2 has eight chapters and is on “Animal Architecture and Man's Ability to Build.” Part 3 has four chapters and is titled “Awareness of the Miraculous: From Animal Housing to Magic Architecture.” Part 4, “Art and the Unknown: The Superfluous becomes a Necessity,” has nine chapters on cosmology and primitive architecture. Part 5, “Slums for the Body: Dream Architecture for Rituals,” has ten chapters and covers the history of architecture from Egyptian Pyramids to Gothic Architecture. Part 6, “Painting as Dream Architecture” has eight chapters and comprises a study of architecture through painters from Durer to Piranesi. Part 7, “Magic Architecture,” has four very unfinished chapters. Part 8, “Realism of Wealth” has two unfinished chapters on fashion and the Rococo. Part 9, “The Poets Architecture” has four chapters titles which includes the intention to study glass architecture by Scheerbart and a building by Franz Kafka (“Description of an imaginary town underground”). Part 10, “Flares of a New Unity of Vision and Fact” briefly explores the “Socio-Architectural Utopias and the Reality of Industry” and includes chapter descriptions on Fourier, Taut, Shinkel, the Eiffel Tower, The City-in-Space, the skyscraper, the Woolworth Building in New York and Ruskin, Morris, Functional Architecture, and Surrealism. Part 10 has an epilogue on the Space House.

³ Kiesler, *Magic Architecture: The Story of Human Housing*, most complete version, Part 1, Chapter 8, pg. 7, 9, 5.

world around them, Kiesler explained people “detached” more and more from their family or group, until they broke apart from any “natural adherence”.⁴ For Kiesler, “architecture must wait” for humanity to again become unified with their environment, if they are ever to bring their dreams together with the facts of reality.⁵

In the past, Kiesler recalled, humanity lived predominantly autonomically without the ability for abstraction. Sensations, qualities, feelings and affects guided amorphous relations where “instinct, intuition, imagery and thought,” were “unified within the nucleus of experience,” that could not “be split and isolated.”⁶ An “energy of a common origin” bound intelligence and feeling, and “the play of that flow” created an ideal universe of “magnetic fields of great exuberance.”⁷ For Kiesler “everything [was...] ever-present”—nothing was completely dead—“time [was]... feeling space, and space the objectification of emotion.”⁸ Humanity ideally existed immanent to all matter without limits or boundaries. “There [was]... only one Reality,” Kiesler maintained, “and it [was]... the result of a constant interchange of the visible and the invisible, the dead and the alive. They inter-penetrate[d]. They depend[ed] upon each other. All objects, all configurations [were]... felt transparently,” he argued.⁹ Humanity purportedly had a pre-history where everything existed in continuity.¹⁰

To re-integrate society with the environment, Kiesler proposed to coordinate art and science into a unified building practice. He deduced that for primitives, the “Imagery

⁴ Ibid. Part 1, Chapter 9, pg. 2.

⁵ Ibid. Part 1, Chapter 9, pg. 4.

⁶ Ibid. Part 1, Chapter 8, pg. 4.

⁷ Ibid. Part 1, Chapter 9, pg. 1.

⁸ Ibid. Part 1, Chapter 8, pg. 5, 6; emphasis in original.

⁹ Ibid. Part 1, Chapter 8, pg. 6; emphasis in original.

¹⁰ For Kiesler nature provided enclosure--“trees, rocks, mountains, rivers, the ocean and the sky [were]...all a part of man’s ‘shelter’, he argued, “they [were]... the archi-tectonics of the great structure of the seen and felt universe.” In an ideal past, nature’s all-nurturing atmosphere guided humanity in the space of pure feelings and emotions. “Soft and elastic,” they “yield[ed] to pressure” and “envelop[ed] one’s body continuously.” Ibid. Part 1, Chapter 8, pg. 7,8.

of Art... heal[ed]... the breach in the Unity of man and nature,” and for contemporary society, a synthesis between art and science would again align humanity with their surroundings.¹¹ Contemporary architecture he argued “must represent a conquest over technical difficulties,” in the “aim of unfolding the inherent power of imaginative living,” where there is “no longer a separation between the world of vision and fact.”¹² To “eliminate the barriers between art and technology,” Kiesler proposed to correlate “structure, equipment, furnishings, sculpture and painting” to create an “organic fusion between the physiological and psychological demands” of human existence.¹³ “The Hygiene of Functional Architecture,” where modern architects “cleaned building[s] inside and outside of ornamental growths... (Loos),” or where the “human house was nothing but a machine (Corbusier),” for Kiesler did not reconstitute unity.¹⁴ As an outgrowth of his research on *Design-Correlation*, Kiesler proposed instead to combine “Science that resurrected fact” with “Surrealism that resurrected vision” to design continuous worlds of immanent feelings.¹⁵ Kiesler had formed strong relationships to the Surrealists by the 1940s, which afforded him great opportunities to explore the correlation between vision and fact through a series of significant gallery exhibition designs.

¹¹ Ibid. Part 4, Intro., pg. 3. “It was in Art that primitive man found the link between the known and the unknown,” he argued. (Ibid. Part 4, Intro., pg. 3). Through “myth and magic” “objects and qualities become efficacious by being fused with power” which “reaffirm[ed]... the vibrant dynamism of the world” and “fortifies the ego with the impression that there is magically potent brilliancy in the world.” (Ibid. Part 4, Intro., pg. 2) “No longer a man of the herd” collective spirit is kept alive through visual symbols—a sort of “psycho-plastic expression” which binds him to the natural environment of animals, rocks and trees. (Ibid. Part 4, Chapter 5, pg. 1-2.)

¹² Ibid. Introduction, pg. 4.

¹³ Kiesler, “On Correalism and Biotechnique,” 1938, most complete unpublished manuscript, 49.

¹⁴ Kiesler, *Magic Architecture: The Story of Human Housing*, most complete version, Part 10, Chapter 8, pg. 1; emphasis in original.

¹⁵ Ibid. Part 10, Chapter 8, pg. 1, and Part 10, Chapter 9, pg. 1.

The Galleries

“An end must be brought to the divorce between architecture and painting,” exclaimed the incinerating writer for *View* magazine, Nicolas Calas and Kiesler, in their 1947 Blood Flames Surrealist exhibition catalogue.¹⁶ Attacking Le Corbusier’s “pure architecture” of austere white walls, which “ostracize” painting and Frank Lloyd Wright’s substitution of pictures for views out to natural landscapes, Calas and Kiesler proposed a new integration between art and architecture for their exhibition designs.¹⁷ We must challenge the typical gallery, they argued, with its “tame groves of polished objects” and “trimmed plants,” that “look of any other expensive object produced for conspicuous consumption.”¹⁸ Instead, they proposed “organizing the field of vision” with interrelationships broad enough “to include in one continuum the feeling of painting, sculpture, walls, ceiling, floor and spectators.”¹⁹ Unimpressed with Le Corbusier’s long-time effort, as Kiesler reminds us, to introduce “painting into the... white bleakness of functional design by tinting walls with paint hues of colors and hanging paintings by Fernand Leger”—Kiesler presented an alternate approach to functional design at his Blood Flames Surrealist show.²⁰ [Fig. 4.1]

The Blood Flames exhibition opened at the Hugo Gallery on East 55th Street in New York City on March 3, 1947. The exhibit featured paintings by Roberto Matta, Achile Gorky, Wilfredo Lam, and Gerald Kamrowski; sculptures by Isamu Naguchi, Helen Phillips, and David Hare; and mosaics by Jean Raynal. Calas, the curator for the

¹⁶ Nicolas Calas and Frederick Kiesler, *Bloodflames 1947*, [Exhibition cat.] (New York: Hugo Gallery, 1941), 16, as held in the Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archives, Vienna.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

show was the instigator behind the exhibition.²¹ He chose the sculptures, paintings, and mosaics while Kiesler designed and painted the architectural layout for the space. Kiesler spent only two and half days painting and installing the actual exhibit.²² Yet, despite the speed with which Kiesler finessed the event, the Blood Flames Surrealist exhibition marked a moment of clarity within the scope of Kiesler's larger life-long project—his endless project. The Blood Flames Gallery realized Kiesler's vision to correlate a seamless organization of disconnected parts into one continuous elastic space. [Fig. 4.2]

Surrealist Architect

Prior to designing his Surrealist gallery exhibitions, Kiesler had limited involvement with the Surrealist group. He was close friends with members Jean Arp and Tristan Tzara in Europe during the 1920s, but when Kiesler moved to New York, those relationships became distant. Save a series of brief reunion meetings while the Kiesler's traveled to Paris in the fall of 1930, Kiesler's relationships to Surrealist members was not decisive until he began associating with Duchamp in the late 1930s.

Kiesler had been generally acquainted with Duchamp prior to the 1940s; however, their relationship could hardly be construed as close.²³ Steffi worked for Katherine Dreier at the Anderson Gallery managing an exhibition of modern art in 1927, and during that

²¹ See Henry McBride, "Modernism Rampant: the New Sculptors and the New Painters Exalt the New Freedoms," *The New York Sun, Art[section]*, Friday, March 7, 1947. p. 29, Blood Flames Box, Blood Flames Clippings Folder, from the Hugo Gallery Exhibition scrapbook, Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive, Vienna.

²² Kiesler started working on the exhibition design at the Hugo gallery in 1946, and although he had great creative freedom—there was little budget. The show did not garner much intrigue from the gallery owner Alexander Jolas; it was not a priority, and thereby was given very little conceptual guidance. To be successful with this exhibition Kiesler had to focus his effort to only a few carefully considered moves. Most of the work was envisioned ahead of time in conceptual gouache drawings, which Kiesler had shown to Calas, in August, 1946. See letter from Frederick Kiesler to Alexander Jolas, April 15th 1947, Briefe M, Mappe 3, as held in the Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive. See also Steffi Kiesler Diary, as held in the Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive.

²³ Kiesler and Duchamp purportedly first met at the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*. See Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jaques Caumont, "Frederick Kiesler and the Bride Stripped Bare," in Frederick Kiesler 1890-1965, ed. Yehuda Safran (London: Architectural Association, 1989).

time Kiesler volunteered to design a museum of modern art for Dreier and the Société Anonyme that was never completed. It has been inferred that Kiesler and Duchamp worked together during the planning stages of this museum design, and it is known that Duchamp and Kiesler did attend the same dinner party once in 1933, and again in 1936.²⁴ However, it was not until the success of Kiesler's article on Duchamp's Big Glass, published in *Architectural Record* in 1937, that Duchamp took much notice of Kiesler.²⁵

[Fig. 4.3]

Duchamp's Big Glass

Kiesler's contact with Duchamp was predominantly through Dreier. Kiesler had visited Dreier's house to make photographs of Duchamp's glass painting on January 28, 1937.²⁶ Kiesler had also contacted Man Ray who had worked with Dreier alongside Duchamp at the Société Anonyme to talk over matters regarding a portrait of Duchamp Kiesler had seen in Man Ray's hotel room while at the Barbizon Plaza in New York, February 8, 1937.²⁷ Kiesler hoped to use these images of Duchamp's paintings and sculptures for his upcoming Design-Correlation article. Upon successful publication of the article, Dreier invited Kiesler and Stefi to her home in West Redding Connecticut July 1937 in hope to discuss Duchamp's response.²⁸ Dreier received a letter from

²⁴ See Steffi Kiesler Diary, as held in the Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive. See also Mark Linder, "Wild Kingdom" in *Autonomy and Ideology: Positioning an Avant-Garde in America*, ed. R.E. Somol (New York: Monacelli Press, 1997).

²⁵ Frederick Kiesler, "Design-Correlation: from brush-painted glass pictures of the Middle Ages to [the] 1920's." *Architectural Record*, v. 81 (May 1937): 53-59.

²⁶ See Steffi Kiesler Diary, as held in the Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive.

²⁷ See Letter Frederick Kiesler to Mr. Man Ray, February 8th 1937, Frederick Kiesler Papers, Box 4 of 7, Correspondence 1937 Folder, Smithsonian American Archives of Art, Washington D.C.

²⁸ See Letter Katherine S. Dreier to Frederick Kiesler, July 9th 1937, Frederick Kiesler Papers, Box 4 of 7, Correspondence 1937 Folder, Smithsonian American Archives of Art, Washington D.C.

Duchamp who had seen “the wonderful article (Architectural Record) on the Glass.”²⁹

Dreier was extremely excited for Kiesler, as she had “never heard him [Duchamp] use such praise.”³⁰

Kiesler’s interpretation of the “Big Glass” was unexpected. It did not focus on the meaning of symbols presented in Duchamp’s painted sculpture but creatively on the technique of its manufacture and subsequent fracture. [Fig. 4.4] In contradistinction to glass as a transparent surface that physically separated and visually linked space, Duchamp’s “painting” of an “opaque picture” suspended in mid-air negated as Kiesler argued, “the actual transparency of the glass.”³¹ The painting “floated in a state of eternal readiness for action, motion and radiation.”³² The image suspended in “tension,” produced what Kiesler had been striving for in much of his own work since his relationship with members of *de Stijl* in the 1920s. As Kiesler wrote,

nature distinguishes between framework and tensional fillings, both elastic and interdependent, while we build rigidly, inflexibly, lifelessly. The manner of joining parts of similar or of different densities in this interdependence is tantamount to nature and to artifice. Contour design is nothing else but joint. A contour is the illusion of a spatial joint of forms. Joints are dangerous links; they tend to dis-joint (everything in nature is joined and a group of joints is form). Hence, all design and construction in the arts and architecture are specific calculations for rejoining into unity, artificially assembled material, and the *control* of its decay.³³

For Kiesler, joints are dangerous because they are susceptible to “dis-joint”. As all architecture is effectively constructed through assembly, he argued, “building design

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Kiesler, “Design-Correlation: from brush-painted glass pictures of the Middle Ages to [the] 1920’s,” 55. See also Frederick Kiesler, “Design-Correlation, Marcel Duchamp’s “Big Glass,” *Frederick J. Kiesler: Selected Writing*, ed. Siegfried Gohr and Gunda Luyken (Stuttgart: Verlag Gerd Hatje, Ostfildern, 1996), 40.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid. 57-58. (my italic)

must, therefore, aim at the reduction of joints.”³⁴ Kiesler believed Duchamp’s work supported a new and organic “contouring”—that built more closely to nature—“with the aim of continuity”.³⁵ [Fig. 4.5] Duchamp’s joints held the composition together despite the fracturing of the glass plane. Kiesler argued Duchamp’s work suggested new ways to manufacture more similarly to nature’s way of building by “cell division”.³⁶ Duchamp’s method of “precise form articulation” created “ligaments of steel-or-what-not” that “divide[d] all shapes and at the same time link[ed] them!”³⁷ Duchamp’s technique Kiesler compared to the structure of an “x-ray-graph” of a leaf where “the veins...are merely the extensions into the leaf of the chief elements of the stem,” which “help to create *turgor*”.³⁸ [Fig. 4.6] The veins on each leaf grow to support the skin—networked together in cellular tension. Similar to studies by Goethe and Francé on plant morphology, Kiesler looked to the relationship between art and science in nature to discover new ways to construct continuous forms that might control inevitable fracture.

Surrealist Gatherings

On a visit to New York in February 1938, Duchamp and Kiesler met together for dinner, and with Duchamp’s support, was soon excepted into the intimate Surrealist circle surrounding André Breton.³⁹ With the emigration of Surrealist members to New York during the Second World War, Kiesler reaped the full-benefits of his association with the group. Kiesler became the only architect recognized as an official Surrealist member, and

³⁴ Kiesler, “On Correalism and Biotechnique: a definition and the new approach to building design,” 67.

³⁵ Ibid. See also Kiesler, “Design-Correlation: from brush-painted glass pictures of the Middle Ages to [the] 1920’s,” 58. See also Kiesler, “Design-Correlation, Marcel Duchamp’s “Big Glass,” *Frederick J. Kiesler: Selected Writing*, 40.

³⁶ Kiesler, “On Correalism and Biotechnique: a definition and the new approach to building design,” 67

³⁷ Kiesler, “Design-Correlation: from brush-painted glass pictures of the Middle Ages to [the] 1920’s,” 58. See also Kiesler, “Design-Correlation, Marcel Duchamp’s “Big Glass,” *Frederick J. Kiesler: Selected Writing*, 40.

³⁸ Kiesler, “Design-Correlation: from brush-painted glass pictures of the Middle Ages to [the] 1920’s,” 57. See also Kiesler, “Design-Correlation, Marcel Duchamp’s “Big Glass,” *Frederick J. Kiesler: Selected Writing*, 41.

³⁹ See Steffi Kiesler Diary, as held in the Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive.

his penthouse apartment quickly became a central hub for collaborative Surrealist meetings, intimate dinners, and late-night gatherings.⁴⁰

Matta was one of the first Surrealists to meet Kiesler in New York. Matta visited Kiesler's apartment on June 9, 1940.⁴¹ Kiesler and Matta most likely met through their mutual friend, the English painter Gordon Onslow Ford, who had been a frequent visitor to the Kiesler's penthouse in Manhattan with his wife Marianne.⁴² Onslow Ford, Matta, and Kiesler met often together, and when Richter came to New York, he started meeting weekly with the group after May 1941.⁴³ Nicolas Calas began stopping by at that time, and Breton notably visited the Kiesler's with Onslow Ford on August 4, 1941.⁴⁴ When Duchamp returned to New York in 1942 from Marseille, the Kiesler's attended his welcoming party at Breton's apartment.⁴⁵ Duchamp soon moved into the Kiesler's home in October that same year.⁴⁶ Although Duchamp was not there often, he stayed with Kiesler until October 14, 1943 while they worked intensively together alongside Breton, Matta, and Richter on ideas, exhibitions, and several essays and projects throughout the 1940s.⁴⁷

Murals without Walls

Gorky and Noguchi, who the Surrealists especially influenced during their stay in New York, often joined Kiesler and his friends for dinner on several occasions during

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

this exciting time. Gorky and Noguchi had already been visiting the Kiesler's home for several years. Gorky and Noguchi had been dinner companions of the Kiesler's certainly since 1933 and 1931 respectively, and Noguchi likely met Kiesler through their mutual association with Fuller and Shoene.⁴⁸

In defense of his friend, Kiesler wrote an article praising Gorky's mural for the Newark Airport in 1938.⁴⁹ Kiesler supported the manner Gorky painted the mural on a canvas that floated free of existing walls. Kiesler argued that an artist must design a mural in "heterogeneous unity" with surrounding architecture.⁵⁰ As an easel painter "has control of the unity" of his work—and even chooses or designs the frame—for Kiesler the mural painter must instead consider the building his frame.⁵¹ The mural painter must design and situate their wall painting in response to their environment. Similar to what Gottfried Semper, described as the *Kunstform* as *Bekleidung*, the principle of wall dressing, Gorky suspended his mural to form a new architectural space that covered the presence of the existing wall.⁵² For Semper wall coverings reveal forms of meaning, and Gorky painted his mural intentionally Kiesler argued, to appear two-dimensional,

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Frederick Kiesler, "Murals without Walls: Relating to Gorky's Newark Project." *Art Front*, II (December 1936): 10-11.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 10.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Semper (1803-1879) developed a theory of tectonics during the same time as Karl Botticher (1806-1889), inspired perhaps from Botticher's understanding of the *Kunstform* and the *Kernform* (*Werkform*). For Botticher, ornament that decorated structure would demonstrate essentialist discourse through artistic language which, he called *Kunstformen* (art forms) the representational language of *Werkformen* (structural members). Semper elaborated the *Kunstform* as *Bekleidung*, the principle of dressing. The *Kunstform* became a mask, a wall dressing, that Harry Francis Mallgrave in his introduction to *Gottfried Semper: The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings* suggests was intended to "camouflage...the wall's material presence." As a carpet or tapestry is hung over a wall, it becomes the surface—supported by the wall—concealing the wall as clothing. For Semper believes the mask enhances the wall, almost as a "ruse," to provoke the meaning of its form. See Harry Francis Mallgrave, "Introduction," in *Gottfried Semper: The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, tr. Harry Francis Mallgrave (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 39. See also Gottfried Semper, "The Four Elements of Architecture: A Contribution to the Comparative Study of Architecture (1851)" as in *Gottfried Semper: The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, tr. Harry Francis Mallgrave (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 102-106. See also Gottfried Semper, "Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts or Practical Aesthetics: A Handbook for Technicians, Artists, and Patrons of Art (1860)," as in *Gottfried Semper: The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, tr. Harry Francis Mallgrave (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 190, 254. See also Gottfried Semper, "Prospectus Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts or Practical Aesthetics (1859)," as in *Gottfried Semper: The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, Tr. Harry Francis Mallgrave (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 177.

“outflattened” as if the room-enclosure.⁵³ [Fig. 4.7] Its two-dimensional surface focused viewer attention on the quality of paint while at the same time formed the illusion of an expansive three-dimensional atmosphere. The painting used abstract images of airplanes overlapping and gesturing in flight to create illusory space. The mural—not the wall—provided the qualitative spatial enclosure that now defined the surrounding atmosphere.

Kiesler’s article “Murals without Walls” spoke to a very important aspect of Kiesler’s research project. Similar to constructivist theater designs by Vesnin and Meyerhold, Kiesler had hoped to eliminate the wall as a spatially defining element not only in stage or exhibition designs, but also in architecture. Buildings should have “NO MORE WALLS,” Kiesler had argued, and similar to Semper, Kiesler favored temporal solutions that formed elastic spatial expressions.⁵⁴ Gorky’s floating mural created space in *heterogeneous unity* with the surrounding environment by using the functional flexibility of paintings as wall coverings. Kiesler applied a similar strategy to use artworks to form spatial environments in all his 1940s exhibition designs.

Art of This Century

With respect and understanding from within the Surrealist circle, Kiesler received an invitation from Peggy Guggenheim to design the four new gallery exhibits for the Art of This Century Gallery in New York, 1942.⁵⁵ Kiesler designed the galleries to display an array of European artwork smuggled from France during its occupation by Germany in

⁵³ Ibid. See also Kiesler, “Murals without Walls: Relating to Gorky’s Newark Project.” *Art Front*, II (December 1936): 10.

⁵⁴ Kiesler, “*Ausstellungssystem Leger und Trager*,” *De Stijl* Serie XII nos. 10 & 11 (6 Jaar 1924-1925): 146. Translated by Frederick and Steffi Kiesler in varying versions from 1925-1930, as held in the Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna, unpublished. (emphasis in original). See also Kiesler, “Manifesto of Tensionism,” in *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and its Display*, 49.

⁵⁵ For more on the Art of This Century Gallery see Milton Gendel, Eva Kraus, and Valentina Sonzogni, *Art Of This Century*, ed. Dieter Bogner and Udo Kittelmann (Munich: Hatje Cantz, 2003); see also Francis O’Connor, Don Quaintance, Jasper Sharp, Valentina Sonzogni, Susan Davidson, Philip Rylands, *Peggy Guggenheim & Frederick Kiesler: The Story Of Art Of This Century*, ed. Dieter Bogner (Venice: Guggenheim Museum, 2005)

the Second World War. The gallery featured a cubist exhibit, a temporary exhibit, and a surrealist exhibit, alongside an interactive show of works by Klee and Duchamp. Kiesler found inspiration for his exhibition from previous Surrealist gallery designs. Most particularly he was informed by Duchamp's "First Papers of Surrealism" exhibition that opened one week earlier on 51st and Madison in New York for the benefit of French prisoner's of war that featured miles of string threaded through various dolls, idols, ceremonial masks and work by Magritte, Chagall, and Guggenheim's husband Max Ernst.⁵⁶ [Fig. 4.8] In Duchamp's exhibition, he arguably created continuous interrelationships through the introduction of a *framework* of string that synthesized space in *heterogeneous unity* like a wall covering.⁵⁷

Kiesler's Surrealist gallery received perhaps the most attention of his four Art of This Century exhibition spaces. [Fig. 4.9] It took advantage of newly developing plywood materials used in furniture and the aerospace industry to achieve a continuous topological surface.⁵⁸ The Surrealist gallery featured a dark tunnel with two curved plywood walls set apart with paintings suspended on wooden armatures with flexible metal joints. Kiesler presented a series of images in asymmetrical rhythm that appeared to float in space before the curved spatial background. He used a layout similar to Herbert Bayer's 1930 "diagram of the field of vision" that biotechnologically studied the limits of

⁵⁶ Comparison between these two exhibitions was made by journalists at the time; see "Interiors of Chaos," *Time*, November 2, 1942, 47, Frederick Kiesler Papers, microfilm reel 127, Smithsonian American Archives of Art, Washington D.C..

⁵⁷ See Cynthia Goodman, "Frederick Kiesler: Designs for Peggy Guggenheims Art of This Century Gallery," *Arts Magazine* 51 (June 1977). See also Cynthia Goodman, "The Art of Revolutionary Display Techniques," in *Frederick Kiesler*, ed. Lisa Phillips (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1989) 57-83. See also T.J. Demos, "First Papers of Surrealism, 1942," *October*, Vol 97 (Summer, 2001) 91-119, reprinted and revised in T.J. Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007) 190-242.

⁵⁸ Kiesler owned an original copy of the 1940 "Organic Design in Home Furnishings," exhibition catalog which featured the Eames plywood furnishings. During the war, material shortages challenged Kiesler to make use of inventive materials for his gallery design. See Lillian Kiesler, "Personal Library of Frederick Kiesler," compiled by Lillian Kiesler 1993, 112-126, Frederick Kiesler papers, 1923-1993, Smithsonian Archives of American Art, New York. Original library of books held at the Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archives, Vienna.

perception.⁵⁹ [Fig. 4.10] Kiesler created a spatial atmosphere that promoted visual linkages between images by eliminating frames from all paintings to facilitate the flow between ideas.

Shadow Boxes

Interested in how images interact with the viewer in space, Kiesler constructed several shadow box devices based on his studies of the Vision Machine from his Design-Correlation research. The shadow boxes isolated art through openings in a wall or screen to force the spectator to “focus completely and unnaturally on the object itself.”⁶⁰ Similar to Duchamp’s rotating disks, *Anemic Cinema*, and precision optic devices, Kiesler’s shadow boxes focused conscious perception on a series of successive images—set to motion—to create a sense of illusionary space. One optical machine in the Kinetic Gallery used a rotary device like a magic lantern to animate a series of Duchamp’s partially opened *Boite-en-vailise* (1935-41) images.⁶¹ [Fig. 4.11] Another shadow box device set up between the Abstract and Daylight Galleries used an ocular diaphragm surrounded by a series of fisheye mirrors. [Fig. 4.12] Opening the lens one saw Klee’s *Magic Garden*, superimposed against the mirror image of the spectator and the Abstract Gallery behind. [Fig. 4.13] Closing the diaphragm, one looked up to see Kurt Schwitters

⁵⁹ Along with Alexander Dörner, Bayer designed the “Bauhaus 1919-1928” exhibit in 1938 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York where he suspended paintings from the wall and ceiling, and painted the path along the floor. See Arthur A. Cohen, *Herbert Bayer: The Complete Work* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 292. See also Beatriz Colomina, “Enclosed by Images: The Eameses’ Multimedia Architecture,” *Grey Room*, ed. Branden Joseph, Felicity Scott and Antoine Picone, Vol. 1, #2 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001) 20. See also Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998) 25–28. See also T.J. Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp, 277-278*. See also Richard A. Etlin, *Art, Culture, and Media Under the Third Reich* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) 297. See also Joan Ockman, “The Road Not Taken: Alexander Dörner’s Way Beyond Art,” in *Autonomy and Ideology: Positioning an Avant-Garde in America*, ed. R. E. Somel (New York: Monacelli, 1997) 112.

⁶⁰ Maria Bottero, “Kiesler and the American Avant-garde,” in *Frederick Kiesler: Arte Architettura Ambiente*. (Milano: L Electra, 1996) 213.

⁶¹ For more details on Kiesler’s Shadow Box devices in the Art of This Century Gallery see Milton Gendel, Eva Kraus, and Valentina Sonzogni, *Art Of This Century*, ed. Dieter Bogner and Udo Kittelmann (Munich: Hatje Cantz, 2003); see also Francis O’Connor, Don Quaintance, Jasper Sharp, Valentina Sonzogni, Susan Davidson, Philip Rylands, Philip Rylands, *Peggy Guggenheim & Frederick Kiesler: The Story Of Art Of This Century*, ed. Dieter Bogner (Venice: Guggenheim Museum, 2005)

Relief suspended within a glass picture frame that revealed part of the Daylight Gallery beyond. Moving through the door into the distant room—the image space expanded to complete the picture of the Daylight Gallery held in the mind’s eye. Then looking back towards the shadow box, the viewer visualized the Abstract Gallery contracted within the glass frame. This last framed image superimposed against a series of after-images in memory originally seen within the shadow box device. Perception fluctuated between these successive images unfolding through time—creating the sense of an elastic spatial continuum between the rooms.⁶²

The Vision Machine and the subsequent shadow box devices were designed, Kiesler wrote, as “instrument[s] to facilitate the co-reality of fact and vision.”⁶³ They “specifically...demonstrate[d] the transformation of images into eidetic visions,” he claimed, in that they stimulated a zone of optical perception between *objective* bodily sensations and *subjective* pictorial images.⁶⁴ Within this *zone of indeterminacy*, neither subjective nor objective, eidetic images constitute a virtual depository of endless images in the process of becoming.⁶⁵ They stream forth in memory between two poles of the imagination, ideas and after-images. Surrounded by a world of virtual images—the vision machine simulated automatically not only conscious perception by taking snapshots of passing reality, but the imagination as it correlated together images to create new ideas—forms.

In both devices perception worked similarly to a series of photographs seamed together in continuous articulation that have fragmented and immobilized time as

⁶² Kiesler summarizes the viewer’s experience of his shadow box devices in “Design Correlation as an approach to architectural planning,” *VVV Almanac*, ed. David Hare, New York, n. 2-3, (Mar. 1943) 78-79.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 79.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* See also E.R. Jaensch, *Eidetic Imagery*, Part I, pp. 1, 2, 13, 15, 16. As held in the Vision Machine Box, VM_Research excerpts Folder, Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive, Vienna.

⁶⁵ For more on the study of a *zone of indeterminacy* see Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 32, 36.

Bergson might have described with “fixed” moments of consciousness, while our memory “solidifies into sensible qualities the continuous flow of things.”⁶⁶ The first shadow box device created a spatial continuum limited to the imagination, while the second device actually began to activate the body-in-motion to move about between a series of continuous spaces.

Richter’s *Stalingrad* scroll featured in the Daylight room of the Art of This Century Gallery, demonstrated the effects of these optical techniques. [Fig. 4.14] In Richter’s scroll, images situated in dynamic patterns produced tension *unconsciously* in the continuous movement of the eye with the “accumulated energy” released as Richter described “into actual movement.”⁶⁷ “Sensation lay in the stimulus which the remembering eye received by carrying its attention from one detail, phase or sequence, to another that could be continued indefinitely.”⁶⁸ As Richter explained, “in this way, the eye [was]... stimulated to an especially active participation, through the *necessity of memorizing*.”⁶⁹ As the eye was directed between a series of images and their after-images in memory, haptic stimulation is impressed upon the viewer—and then released through movement of the body-in-motion.

Surreal Impressions

Surrounded in a room of distracting images, Kiesler employed these visual and spatial tactics in all his 1940s exhibition designs to stimulate the imagination and affect the *aconscious* mind and body to wander. The Abstract Gallery featured a series of

⁶⁶ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 306.

⁶⁷ Hans Richter, “Easel-Scroll-Film,” 81.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

images suspended off the wall—wrapped within an enclosure of a sinuously curved spatial backdrop.⁷⁰ [Fig. 4.15] “Geometrically severe” art was often displayed in Kiesler’s post impressionist exhibition designs with a “distracting jumble of effects,” remarked MoMA director Edgar Kaufmann Jr in his review of the exhibition.⁷¹ With the eye set to distracting images of wonder, the body moved habitually—autonomically—about the galleries. The “viewer...[was] led around the room by the eye, and shown objects singly, but in no special sequence,” Kaufmann explained.⁷² [Fig. 4.16] Passing into the Surrealist gallery space between two curved plywood shells over and under a looming plywood ceiling and sinuous linoleum floor—pulsating lights moved in rhythmic distracting succession to focus concentrated attention upon the individual images while a roaring sound of an approaching train was heard in the background. “It’s dynamic, it pulsates like your blood,” Kiesler described.⁷³ The flickering movement imposed by “the lights going on and off automatically” in the Surrealist Gallery, Kaufman suggested created an equally complicated effect.⁷⁴ Too shocking the automatic feature had to be permanently switched off.

Kiesler’s Blood Flames Gallery exhibition at the Hugo Gallery streamlined these visual effects. The exhibition pulled the spectator immediately into a vortex of distracting images upon entering the room. [Fig. 4.17] “My eyes have never bulged farther from their sockets,” Abstract Expressionist painter and newspaper critic Ad Reinhardt exclaimed, as he attempted to “resist...being ushered into the anguished, amorphous

⁷⁰ See Edgar Kaufmann, “The Violent Art of Hanging Pictures,” *Magazine of Art*, March 1946, 108, Blood Flames Box, Blood Flames Clippings Folder, from the Hugo Gallery Exhibition scrapbook, Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 109.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ “Isms Rampant: Peggy Guggenheim’s Dream World Goes Abstract, Cubist, and Generally Non-Real,” *Newsweek*, 66, Blood Flames Box, Blood Flames Clippings Folder, from the Hugo Gallery Exhibition scrapbook, Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive, Vienna.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

world of some of the pictures.”⁷⁵ “Matta’s dental equipment, Kamrowski’s digestive tracts, and Lams sexual jungle,” he began to argue grabbed one’s focused attention. [Fig. 4.18] Matta’s pictures even “appear[ed] able to move about and to pinch you with metal fingers and crush you with metal arms,” described another critic.⁷⁶ Angled on the ground, twisted on the wall or hanging from above, the arrangement of works forced the eye and in turn the body to shift back and forth. [Fig. 4.19]

Lured towards the central image of Lam’s *Eternal Presence*, the viewer entered a peep show chamber, as one critic abashedly remarked, to stand “bride-like under the white-veiled canopy as long as my neck could take the strain of staring at the ceiling.”⁷⁷ [Fig. 4.20] Induced to sit in one of Kiesler’s modular chairs to view the painting, the body cranked and twisted to one side while looking up at the image to arrive at any momentary semblance of comfort. [Fig. 4.21] Shifting automatically back about the gallery spaces, individual images caught one’s focused conscious attention, while a path—delineated as a mobius strip—an endless strip—throughout the space invited the eye, and in turn the body, to unconsciously move about the room within a labyrinthine maze. [Fig. 4.22] Moving from image to image—from moment to moment—time merged into an expansive space. Similar to Kiesler’s Saks Fifth Avenue show window designs, he created environments of contraction through image and of expansion through undulating surface. Individual works of art seamed together by the *a*conscious autonomic

⁷⁵ Ad Reinhardt, “Neo-Surrealists Take over a Gallery” *New York, PM.*, Tuesday, March 11, 1947, 10, Blood Flames Box, Blood Flames Clippings Folder, from the Hugo Gallery Exhibition scrapbook, Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive, Vienna.

⁷⁶ Henry McBride, *The New York Sun*, Art[section], p. 29 Friday, March 7, 1947, Blood Flames Box, Blood Flames Clippings Folder, from the Hugo Gallery Exhibition scrapbook, Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive, Vienna.

⁷⁷ “Pictures On Ceilings,” Art and Antiques [section], *New York World-Telegram*, Saturday, March 8, 1947, 6, Blood Flames Box, Blood Flames Clippings Folder, from the Hugo Gallery Exhibition scrapbook, Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive, Vienna.

motion of the viewer moving along the path of exhibition. Content of fantastic imagery alongside the surging darkness of the room served to support a *virtual* dreamlike state of surrealist awakening, where the dreaming self became a relaxed self—open to suggestion—among a flow of internal *remembrances*.

In his catalogue review of the Blood Flames show, Calas claimed that both the art works and spectators became “monads in a continuum whose lines have been traced by Kiesler’s magic wand. [Fig. 4.23] Pictures, statues, [and] spectators are carried by a colorbow into new situations which are to serve as starting point for...personal metamorphosis.”⁷⁸ Kiesler constructed his galleries as an array of part objects seamed together in continuum. In this continuum, subjects and objects meld together in endless articulation.

Kiesler’s Surrealist galleries posed investigations using cinematographic techniques of perception to diffuse the boundaries between subjects and objects in all his exhibition designs. Similar to Bergson’s theories of perception, Kiesler had examined the structure of memory [*Gedächtnis*] to reconstitute experience [*Erfahrung*] by creating a potential environment that induced after-images. Kiesler was attempting as Bergson described in his lesser-known work, *The World of Dreams*, to understand how memories “spring forth” as after-images incited by sensation and stimulation that produce dreams.⁷⁹

For Bergson dreams were the products of after-images immanent to matter that spring forth when the conscious mind has become relaxed and we “stop willing.” In autonomic—aconscious—states “disinterested” and surrounded by bodily sensations—

⁷⁸ Nicolas Calas and Frederick Kiesler, *Bloodflames 1947*, [Exhibition cat.] (New York: Hugo Gallery, 1941), 16. As held in the Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archives, Vienna.

⁷⁹ Henri Bergson, *The World of Dreams*, tr. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958), 39. I am not convinced Kiesler extensively read Bergson, but instead was influenced by the work of Eggeling and Richter as they were inspired by Bergson. In an unpublished interview held at the Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation in Vienna, when accused of being inspired by Henri Bergson, Kiesler responded by stating one does not need philosophy to create art and architecture.

visual, aural and tactile, Bergson understood that a dreamer is caught in *suspended animation*, open to a flow of suggestion from both *external* and *internal* stimulus. As Bergson argued, “a dreaming self is a relaxed self. It welcomes most readily incidental, *distracting*, remembrances not characterized by effort.”⁸⁰ As the conscious mind relaxes to some extent and attention begins to wander, after-images of memory—remembrances—start to flow forward. These remembrances enter into consciousness in response to visceral, aural, and visual stimulation. As Bergson had observed, conscious perception contracts to make select cuts from an immanent field of images (matter), while in *after-image* memory reconstitutes spatial experience—cinematographically.

For Bergson however, the cinematographic effects of spatial perception present “us with a series of pictorial, but discontinuous, views of the universe” which concerned him immensely.⁸¹ Selected images choreographed in memory seam together a *false sense of spirit and reality* he believed.⁸² Bergson instead imagined an ideal state of being not limited to the false experience of cinematographic perception, where “subject and object would unit in an extended perception, the subjective side of perception being the contraction effected by memory, and the objective reality of matter fusing with the multitudinous and successive vibrations into which this perception can be internally broken up.”⁸³ Bergson believed “we [could] touch... reality...in an immediate intuition” and thereby “grasp them [instantaneous visions of the real] in one relatively simple intuition, an endless number of moments of endlessly divisible time.”⁸⁴ Bergson hoped humanity could “eliminate all memory” and live immanently in an autonomic state of

⁸⁰ Ibid. 56. (my emphasis)

⁸¹ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 70.

⁸² See Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 59, 71.

⁸³ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 70-71.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 70.

pure perception and pure memory in pure duration.⁸⁵ No longer subject to quantified spatial dimensions of false perceptions, Bergson imagined humanity would again “arrest and retain that which is virtual” outside “cause” and “effect” and exist within an “extended *continuum*” in immediate “action” and “correlation” of mind, body and soul.⁸⁶

Similar to Kiesler, Bergson believed a split had occurred between reality and vision, and hence his study on *Matter and Memory*. However, according to Benjamin, Bergson’s invocation of pure state of automatism only proved to form a theory of “fictitious characters who ha[d]... completely liquidated their memories” as if in a horror story by Edgar Allen Poe to live “their lives as automatons”.⁸⁷ Bergson’s philosophy, if even desirable according to Benjamin was realistically unattainable.

Kiesler’s gallery designs ultimately did not function precisely to what Bergson had in mind. They instead performed more similarly to Benjamin’s interpretation of Proust, who had at one time endeavored “to produce experience, as Bergson imagines it, in a synthetic way under today’s social conditions.”⁸⁸ In Kiesler’s galleries, viewers were distracted and motivated into semi-autonomic states of awakening where images presented through shock effects might pass to the psyche. “Parried by consciousness,” in a state both conscious and unconscious, these incidents as Benjamin argued would not sterilize poetic experience [*Erfahrung*], but instead associate with the unconscious in memory.⁸⁹ Viewers would experience qualities, feelings, and affects in correlation to experience through surreal recollection. According to Paul Valéry, as Benjamin had argued, “recollection is...an elemental phenomenon which aims at giving us the time for

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 232, 244.

⁸⁷ Benjamin, *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, 330.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 315.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

organizing ‘the reception of stimuli’ which we initially lacked.”⁹⁰ In Kiesler’s Surrealist galleries, a series of distracting if not shocking image events juxtaposed in *heterogeneous unity* hoped to invoke immanent viewer participation for surreal recollection that initiated psychic benefits of dreaming.⁹¹

Kiesler had long been interested to satisfy the *physis* and the *psyche* of the dweller, and adamantly spoke against modern functionalism in favor of an architecture that might produce more favorable psychic conditions.⁹² In his research practice, Kiesler hoped to heal the split between reality and dreams by inducing intensive, qualitative, spatial atmospheres through cinematographic techniques for curative effect. There is a cathartic effect to dreams, which is not so different to the experience felt from watching television or certain films. As the body rejuvenates at rest, the psyche works out unresolved stress. Similar to Benjamin, who realized some “films trigger a therapeutic release of unconscious energies,” Kiesler began to organize and structure catharsis through the production of dream machinations.⁹³

Kiesler used shock effects to stimulate autonomic experience through dreams, which aligned to Breton’s longtime interest to derive a state of automatism in Surrealist practice. Breton’s Surrealist Manifesto of 1924 defined surrealism as “pure psychic automatism” in spontaneous creative production without conscious moral or aesthetic

⁹⁰ Ibid. 318.

⁹¹ For Freud, Bergson and Otto Rank dreaming is a state in which our conscious mind remains to some extent active. It is occupied in dream work as the body slows down to rest. Bergson did not differentiate between dreams, daydreams and perception except in terms of time. For Bergson, dreams occur as time is suspended and attention loses focus. Regardless of whether one has their eyes open, the dreaming self is a conscious self, responding in accordance to different rates of action. Bergson believed we are always conscious—to some extent—whether asleep or awake—and dreams are merely an extension of normal perception. Both Freud and Rank also proposed that we are conscious—while dreaming. For Freud dreams provided distraction for the conscious mind to allow the body to stay at rest. For Rank dreams reminded the conscious mind that we “are alive, not dead asleep, for the dreamer thinks and feels as though awake.” See Bergson, *World of Dreams*; See also Sigmund Freud, *On Dreams* tr. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1952 renewed 1980); see also Otto Rank, *Seelenglaube und Psychologie* (Wien: Franz Deuticke, 1930); English translation, *Psychology of the Soul* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998) 79.

⁹² Frederick Kiesler, “Pseudo-Functionalism in Modern Architecture,” *Frederick Kiesler 1890-1965*, ed. Yehuda Safran, (London: Architectural Association, 1989), 57.

⁹³ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version,” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 3, 1935-1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings, tr. Edmund Jephcott, and Howard Eiland (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002) 118.

self-censorship.⁹⁴ Breton and Philippe Soupault had wrote the first automatist study, *Les Champs Magnetiques*, in 1919 and Breton elaborated their proposal in “The Automatic Message” as published in *Minotaure*, 1933.⁹⁵ In their practice, the Surrealists studied “autonomic, involuntary habit[s]” to derive ways to evade the “control of the thinking man” to produce more creative art, which informed their research into automatic writing and its machines.⁹⁶ In inducing autonomic states, Breton hoped to access “eidetic (aesthetic) image[s]” that would transform the study of everyday objects into “infinitely changeable” art forms.⁹⁷ Breton had a “direct interest” to deprive “the distinctions between [the] subjective and objective”—to activate the unconscious through habits of the autonomic nervous system.⁹⁸ Breton and Kiesler’s similar interests in autonomic states of sensation and action supported strong mutual affinity.⁹⁹

Although likely informed by similar interests in automatism as Breton, Kiesler developed his study of eidetic images in his Laboratory of Design Correlation from *Eidetic Imagery* by E. R. Jaensch.¹⁰⁰ Kiesler and his students had transcribed extensive pages of Jaensch’s book alongside compiling a seven-page study of automatism, habits, and eidetic imagery titled “Continuity of Optic Perception, semi-conscious Sight and the

⁹⁴ André Breton, “Manifesto,” in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, tr. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, 1972) 26. For a study of automatism and Surrealism see Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993) 3, 221.

⁹⁵ See André Breton, “*Le Message automatique*,” *Minotaure* 3-4, (December 14, 1933); English translation, “The Automatic Message,” in André Breton, Paul Eluard, Philippe Soupault, *The Automatic Message, The Magnetic Fields, The Immaculate Conception*, tr. Antony Melville (London: Atlas, 1997) 7-32.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 22.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 32.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Similar to Kiesler, Breton’s automatist study recognized William James and his interest in F.W. H. Meyer’s study of the imagination, automatism, and subliminal processes. As Breton suggested: “Among Freud’s antecedents I continue to think that, in spite of unfortunately widespread ignorance of his work, we remain more indebted than we generally believe to what William James so aptly called the gothic psychiatry of F.W.H. Meyers [...] I need not labour the point that we have a direct interest in resolving what William James actually called *Meyer’s problem* (strictly psychological), at least as much as in resolving the problem of the (artistic) exchange value we can put on such a form of non-directed expression, or that of the role of (moral) compensation played by automatism. Breton, “*Le Message automatique*,” 17, 32. See also William James, “Frederic Myers’s Service to Psychology,” in *The Works of William James: Essays in Psychological Research*, ed. F. Burkhardt, and F. Bowers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986) Although it should be noted that within Surrealist literature and its critique there is debate at the extent to which Meyer’s theories impacted Breton’s original ideas on automatism. See Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 3-4.

¹⁰⁰ See E.R. Jaensch, *Eidetic imagery and typological methods of investigation their importance for the psychology of childhood, the theory of education, general psychology, and the psychophysiology of human personality* (New York : Harcourt, Brace, 1930) Kiesler transcribed Part I, pp. 1, 2, 13, 15, 16, Vision Machine Box, VM_Research excerpts Folder, Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive, Vienna.

Psychic Image”.¹⁰¹ As his relationship with Surrealist members developed in the 1940s, Kiesler incorporated a wider range of psychoanalytical studies into his research and writing. Although interested in Freud in his early career, most of Kiesler’s books on Freud including *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, which included *Interpretation of Dreams*, *Totem and Taboo*, and *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, were obtained after 1938.¹⁰² Upon working with the Surrealists, Kiesler also read Freud’s *Leonardo Da Vinci; A Study in Psychosexuality*, and José Corti’s *Surrealisme et Psychologie*, and began to refer to Freud more often in his writings.¹⁰³

Although Kiesler was enamored by the science of “pragmatic naturalism” in *Magic Architecture*, he clearly articulated that the mythological aspects of his theories of art and life derived from not only the natural sciences but also psychoanalysis. As he explained, “pragmatic naturalism...leaves us, as it often does, with the feeling that we have made art too resolutely functional, too outward looking, too optimistic,” and although “psychoanalysis may be misleading as psychology...the ‘pleasure principle’ and the desperate ‘instincts’ of sex and death give myth a dramatic richness unknown to contemporary pragmatism.”¹⁰⁴ Kiesler effectively found scientific research that had dominated his interests in the 1930s too limiting. In respect to complex emotional and physical needs and desires latent in the study and practice of architecture, Kiesler turned to analysis and application of Freudian psychoanalysis and a theory of drives in his work.

¹⁰¹ “Continuity of Optic Perception, semi-conscious Sight and the Psychic Image,” 1-7, unpublished, undated, unknown author, Vision Machine Box, VM_Research excerpts Folder, Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive, Vienna. (emphasis in original)

¹⁰² See Lillian Kiesler, “Personal Library of Frederick Kiesler,” 112.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 113, 115.

¹⁰⁴ Kiesler, *Magic Architecture: The Story of Human Housing*, most complete version, unpublished, undated, Part 1, Chapter 4, “The Enigma of Birth”. See also in prior draft of text: Frederick Kiesler, “The Enigma of Birth,” *Magic Architecture* (u.p., u.d), Part Four Chapter Four, 4/128, held at the Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna

Freud originally introduced his theory of the sex and death drives in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as a response to trauma of the First World War.¹⁰⁵ In addition, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud also evolved his study of dreams beyond pure wish fulfillment as he posed in his *Interpretation of Dreams* to include the study shock (that notably informed Benjamin's theories on memory and perception). Upon writing *The Ego and the Id*, Freud completed his revisions to his theory of the sex and death drives, which Kiesler began to incorporate into his automatist ideas while working with the Surrealists and writing his book *Magic Architecture* in the 1940s.

For Kiesler and the Surrealists, the automaton was "associated with each of the two classes of instincts," as understood by Freud: the death instinct—"the task of which is to lead organic life back into the inanimate state," and Eros—"the sexual instincts," which "aims at complicating life and at the same time preserving it."¹⁰⁶ The Surrealists, as Marcel Jean had explained, originally borrowed the word automatism "from psychiatry [as it]...designates involuntary, unconscious psychic- poetic happenings."¹⁰⁷

Automatism, also according to Jean, "contained the passion mixed with anguish of human beings in their relationship with machines that seem always to be on the point of liberating themselves from their creators and leading an autonomous existence."¹⁰⁸

Although fearing the machine and its inevitable autonomy is latent in the passion for automatism, it provided the ultimate fantasy for humanity's liberation from its mortality.

Similar to Mumford who dreamed of a biotechnic period where humanity would one day merge completely with technology, or the fear and exuberance of robots

¹⁰⁵ Peter Gay, "Freud: a Brief Life," in Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, tr. Joan Riviere and James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), xx.

¹⁰⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the ID*, tr. Joan Riviere and James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1960), 38.

¹⁰⁷ Marcel Jean, *History of Surrealist Painting* (New York: Grover Press, 1967) 118.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

expressed in Capek's R.U.R. play—automatism aimed to produce doubles, the inanimate automatons, which both Freud and Otto Rank posed as symbols of repetition for immortal fantasy against death.¹⁰⁹ Conflating the inanimate double in unity with animate being, automatism for Breton, Mumford, Bergson, and Kiesler—even if conceived altogether differently—hoped to achieve a state of “Nirvana”, or paradise lost.¹¹⁰ Automatism relied on the magical promises of technological progress to create a post-human fantasy of primordial unity. Breton's “vow...to return to a habitable world” he declared in exile from Europe in *VVV* magazine, 1942 corresponded well to these paradisiacal claims.¹¹¹ Surrealists were purportedly homeless, as Breton and his friends left Europe, which conjured nostalgic images of the *uncanny* in their repressed fantasies to return to an ideal home.¹¹² Similar to Kiesler, the Surrealists under Breton hoped to recreate paradise lost which inspired their interests working together in New York during the war and in Paris immediately thereafter.

Halls of Superstition

Upon the great success of both the Art of This Century and Blood Flames Exhibitions, Kiesler traveled to Paris to help finish Duchamp's design for the first international surrealist show since 1938 held at the Galerie Maeght in Paris, 1947. The Halls of Superstition would prove Kiesler's last Surrealist exhibition. With the end of the fighting, Kiesler went to Europe with great enthusiasm to produce a remarkable

¹⁰⁹ See Otto Rank, *Der Doppelgänger* (1914, 1925); English translation, *The Double, A Psychoanalytic Study*, ed. Harry Tucker (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971)

¹¹⁰ For an analysis of Breton, Surrealism, automatism and Nirvana, see Hal Foster. *Compulsive Beauty*, 5.

¹¹¹ See André Breton, “Declaration VVV (1942), reprinted in *What is Surrealism?*, ed. Franklin Rosemont (New York: Pathfinder, 1978) 337. See also Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp*, 204, 279.

¹¹² See Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny” [Das Unheimliche] (1919). From Standard Edition, Vol. XVII, trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1955; see also Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992) 17-44; see also Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 7-17; see also Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp*, 203.

collaborative work. The “main purpose,” of the exhibition Kiesler recalled, “was to have artists and sculptors make new works to be integrated with new architecture, lined and bound together by a poet’s vision.”¹¹³

The International Exposition of Surrealism was an enormous undertaking that combined over 125 paintings, photographs, and sculptures from over 19 nations.¹¹⁴ Breton had replaced Marxist and Communist ideals with his fascination with dreams, and the International Exposition hoped to reunite the Surrealists upon their return to Europe.¹¹⁵ Arriving in Paris however, Kiesler found the collaborative spirit after the war completely lacking. “When I followed the call from New York to France to transform the two floors of the Maeght gallery in Paris into a world of surrealism” he recalled, “I encountered with the exception of A. Breton, who headed the idea, and Monsieur Maeght, who lent his place for it, nothing but resistance after resistance from the participating painters, sculptors and workmen to the work to be done.”¹¹⁶ Paris, Kiesler explained was filled with “perpetual melancholia.”¹¹⁷ The city withheld cooperation and failed to deliver materials and labor. “What a call to adventure in the plastic arts,” Kiesler remembered, and yet “no one cared to participate. Agony, despair, resentments all around.”¹¹⁸ The political and economic life of Europe seemed hopeless at the time to Kiesler, and the biggest obstacle he felt to the collaborative spirit proved the “personal

¹¹³ Frederick Kiesler, “Art: Or the Teaching of Resistance,” Commencement address give by Frederick Kiesler at The Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois June 12 1959, and presented at the “Art and Education” Conference, The University of Michigan, Oct 18, 1958. pp. 6, Txt 01 Man/Typ Various A, Folder Art or the Teaching of Resistance lecture Materials, Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive, Vienna.

¹¹⁴ “Remembrance of Things Past”, Art Section, *Time*, July 21 1947, Expo 1947 Box: Halls of Superstition, Clipping exp_47 clip folder Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive, Vienna.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Frederick Kiesler, “Art: Or the Teaching of Resistance,” 6.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

jealousies” of the artists and their “idiosyncratic personalities” as the artists refused to work together on their ideas.¹¹⁹

Placed in charge of the design for the Halls of Superstition, Kiesler began to coordinate works by Juan Miro, Duchamp, Matta, Tanguay, Max Ernst, Hare, and Marie Martins. Kiesler’s solution to the discord was to allow the artists to work together as “free coordinates” he explained.¹²⁰ He gave them enough leeway to produce their own individual works, yet enough of a framework to maintain a successful result. Kiesler and Breton provided the conceptual framework—a vague notion of superstition, and Kiesler collected all the works within an endless ribbon of space. As he remembered,

they all followed the composition of the so-called paintings (they were actually free coordinates) without obvious resistance. They were given enough leeway within the framework of the original concept *not to feel dictated*, but most important: the poet’s idea of expressing together the impact of “superstition” was powerful enough to mouthshut any stubbornness to collaborate. Once they were involved in their individual craft they became more and more linked to the idea, and to the complex intricacies of the whole complex.¹²¹

In his gallery design, Kiesler gave the artists enough freedom not to feel overly controlled as they conformed to Breton’s ideas. Kiesler created a loose framework that linked the disparate artists together within an “enveloping architecture”.¹²² “The seduction by a poet” and the blindfolded enthusiasm of a belief in chance “converted sordid resistance into *blinding* correlation,” Kiesler explained.¹²³ Despite recent fascist politics of war however, Kiesler remained hopeful individual spirit might flourish under a unified organization.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 7.

¹²¹ Ibid. (my emphasis)

¹²² Ibid. 6.

¹²³ Ibid. 7.

Similar to Richter and Eggeling who had hoped to establish a universal language through abstract art that might reconstitute world relationships fractured catastrophically during the First World War, Kiesler hoped to satisfy the physiological and psychological needs of a war-torn society by healing the split between vision and fact. Yet in light of the horrific consequences of extreme nationalism, fascism, and ethnic cleansing during the Second World War, any attempt to reconstruct totalizing unity at that time proved suspect. War had been traumatically destructive, as had attempts to reconstruct world structures under unifying nationalist dogma that became fascist. Kiesler's attempt to fuse vision and reality in a state of automatism suggested a frightening proposal—a return to primordial instincts devoid of intellectual debate, criticism, personality, diversity and choice.

Art historian T.J. Demos recently criticized Kiesler for his attempt to recreate an affective atmosphere of primordial unity in his 1942 Surrealist Gallery exhibition.¹²⁴ Kiesler according to Demos created an environment that enabled Surrealist homesick fantasies approaching nationalist if not fascist dogma. Although Kiesler was hardly a fascist, and had little power, money, or control, he did perhaps too ideally believe in the promise of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* to synthesize humanity and its surrounding environment into a perfect work of art. Extrapolating ideas from theater for his exhibition designs, and ultimately his architecture, Kiesler wanted desperately to coordinate people and their surroundings within a semblance of order and control. “We, the inheritors of chaos, must be the architects of a new unity,” he insisted; and Kiesler's passion to incorporate

¹²⁴ Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp*, 212-220.

multiplicity in spatial continuity, dominated his ideas regardless of the historical, cultural, or political context—the *environment*—in which he worked.¹²⁵

The Halls of Superstition ultimately proved to Kiesler his most complete work of art since his City-in-Space project, and it attracted over 1,500 curious Parisians to climb the twenty-one gallery stairs on opening day.¹²⁶ [Fig. 4.24] Breton had hoped the exhibit would evoke “a primordial concern to retrace successive stages of an initiation,” where in order to begin the journey visitors had to overcome their “superstitions”.¹²⁷ Each visitor first had to enter Kiesler’s Halls of Superstition before seeing the larger exposition. “To cure man of his anguish” as Arp suggested, Kiesler led visitors into the Hall past Kiesler’s *Anti-Taboo Figure* of a large plaster arm and hand with pointed thumb.¹²⁸ [Fig. 4.25] There Kiesler confronted the visitor with his *Totem for All Religions*. [Fig. 4.26] As he described in *Magic Architecture* these figures represented life as a continuity of cycles where,

death as we understand it does not exist. Death is rather a punishment, a damnation. It is an act of being ordered into Exile; from there you watch your family; from there you participate in their lives. You become part of their Totem, or you impose Taboos. You either take revenge or help them. Particularly through dreams you take an active hand in their everyday affairs.¹²⁹

Referring to Freud’s study *Totem and Taboo*, Kiesler’s *Anti-Taboo Figure* announced Surrealism’s afterlife—their return from exile to participate in everyday Parisian affairs—through both dreams and totems. In light of recent tragedy, Kiesler’s Totem spoke to all religions dispersed throughout the world from Babylon to Tibet, including

¹²⁵ Nicolas Calas and Frederick Kiesler, *Bloodflames 1947*, Exhibition Catalogue (New York: Hugo Gallery, 1947) 16.

¹²⁶ “Remembrance of Things Past”.

¹²⁷ André Breton in *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme: Le surréalisme en 1947*, Exhibition Catalogue (Paris: Galerie Maeght, 1947) 135. As cited by Cynthia Goodman in “The Art of Revolutionary Display Techniques,” 71.

¹²⁸ Jean Arp, “L’oeuf de Kiesler et la Salle des Superstitions,” *Cahiers d’Art*, 22 (1947) 283. As cited by Cynthia Goodman in “The Art of Revolutionary Display Techniques,” 73.

¹²⁹ Kiesler, *Magic Architecture: The Story of Human Housing*, most complete version, Part 1, Chapter 8, pg. 5. (emphasis in original)

Buddhism, Hinduism, and Orthodox beliefs.¹³⁰ Kiesler built his Totem ideally to protect freedom of religion while shunning taboo and the superstitions that form prejudice and enable fear.

In the Hall of Superstitions Kiesler's intertwining curvilinear ribbons enveloped the works in one cohesive endless space. [Fig. 4.27] Endlessness served the organizational strategy to seam the ceiling, floors, and walls together with the artwork into one continuous free-flowing form. Crocus-yellow bands broke turquoise cloth walls that surrounded and supported the various works.¹³¹ [Fig. 4.28] Ernst painted *Black Lake* the "Feeding-Source of Fear" along the ground, while a scantily clothed woman lounged in the spotlight as she "nourishe[d]...anguish".¹³² [Fig. 4.29] *Waterfall* by Miró "congealed by superstitions," cascaded along the ribbon.¹³³ [Fig. 4.30] Hare suspended his *Anguished Man Sculpture* beneath the color bow, while Matta composed *Whist* with the "luck of the owl, crow, bat, woman" open to view from a hole in the wall.¹³⁴ Surrealist fantasies of sex and fear—desire, consumption, and anguish were *correlated* into a total work of art. [Fig. 4.31] The Halls of Superstition performed as a unified environmental sculpture, but unlike Kiesler's past exhibitions, the series of art works composed a narrative theme. The Halls of Superstition despite conflict among the artists performed one ambition—to relieve passersby of their fear and suffering by evoking their dreams and superstitions.

¹³⁰ See Frederick Kiesler, *Totem for all Religions*, 1947, as published in Cynthia Goodman, "The Art of Revolutionary Display Techniques," Fig. 77, pg. 73.

¹³¹ "People in the News," as held in Expo 1947 Box: Halls of Superstition, Clipping exp_47 clip folder, Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive, Vienna.

¹³² See Frederick Kiesler, *Black Lake*, Photograph, Paris 1947, Box: Halls of Superstition, Expo 1947 Reproduction Folder, Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive, Vienna. See also *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, 134. As cited by Cynthia Goodman in "The Art of Revolutionary Display Techniques," 73.

¹³³ See *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, 134. As cited by Cynthia Goodman in "The Art of Revolutionary Display Techniques," 73.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

In the post-war context, however the Halls of Superstition proved a complete failure; the critics agreed the, “observers discounted the big talk”.¹³⁵ If Surrealists hoped to shock society, their effort appeared delusional if inept. “After the gas chambers, [with] those heaps of bones and teeth and shoes and eyeglasses, what is there left for the poor Surrealists to shock us with?” reacted one critic.¹³⁶ The surrealist exhibition in Paris was “a most depressing spectacle” John Devoluy of the *Art News* also explained.¹³⁷ “In spite of its fantastic presentation, its elaborate catalogue, and its literary hoop-la, it misses fire entirely,” Devoluy bluntly complained.¹³⁸ For Europeans who survived the war, the Surrealist antics seemed incapable of affecting any value, and hardly proved revolutionary. Paris had become accustomed to shock—they had survived the war, and any nostalgic fantasy of uncanny recollection that hoped to repeat repressed fantasies of paradise lost through *haunting visions* and *immanent affections* no longer sufficed.

¹³⁵ “Remembrance of Things.”

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ John Devoluy, “Art News in Paris,” as held in Expo 1947 Box: Halls of Superstition, Clipping exp_47 clip folder, Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation Archive, Vienna.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*