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Zusammenfassung

Diese Diplomarbeit untersucht Friedrich J. Kieslers (1890-1965) Engagement in der Filmkultur, das von Seiten der Wissenschaft bislang weitgehend vernachlässigt wurde. Beginnend mit Kieslers *Film Guild Cinema* (1929) als Einstiegspunkt, versucht die vorliegende Arbeit starre disziplinäre Grenzen aufzulösen und auf die Schnittstelle von Film und Architektur zu fokussieren. Kieslers *Film Guild Cinema* erscheint so als eine Arbeit, in der die Architektur das Kino erhellt, aber auch umgekehrt das Kino die Architektur in neuem Licht erscheinen lässt. Danach folgt ein Überblick über bedeutende Projekte, die Kiesler vor dem *Film Guild Cinema* realisierte, wie das Bühnenbild zu *R. U. R.* (1922-1923), die Raumbühne (1924) und die Raumstadt (1925), welche sowohl unter architektonischem als auch unter historischem Aspekt analysiert werden. Im Vergleich zu Kieslers Werken, Schriften und Theorien wird im Anschluss eine Reihe zeitgenössischer Avantgardefilme analysiert, wie *Rhythmus 21* (Hans Richter, 1921), *Symphonie Diagonale* (Viking Eggeling, 1924), *Ballet Mécanique* (Fernand Léger, 1924) und *Anémic Cinéma* (Marcel Duchamp, 1926). Dies eröffnet die Möglichkeit, Kieslers Position sowohl historisch als auch theoretisch zu lokalisieren. Außerdem bietet die Diplomarbeit einen Exkurs zum *Little Cinema Movement* und widmet sich dem Eröffnungsprogramm des *Film Guild Cinema* und seiner Rezeptions, die Kieslers Auseinandersetzung mit der ihn umgebenden Filmkultur nochmals aus einem anderen Blickwinkel reflektiert.

Anliegen der vorliegenden Diplomarbeit ist weder die Wiederentdeckung eines vergessenen „Meisters", noch unternimmt sie den Versuch, Kiesler als „Avantgarde-Genie" zu klassifizieren; vielmehr ist es das Ziel, das Potenzial der wechselseitigen Beziehungen verschiedener Disziplinen – insbesondere von Architektur und Film – einer Neubewertung zu unterziehen. Es bleibt zu hoffen, dass mit "Friedrich J. Kiesler's Involvement With Film Culture" ein erster Schritt in Richtung einer Betrachtung von Kieslers Werk unter kinematographischem Gesichtspunkt geleistet und dadurch ein Beitrag zu einem bislang zu Unrecht vernachlässigten Thema geleistet wurde.

Abstract

This thesis investigates Friedrich J. Kiesler's (1890-1965) involvement with film culture, which has largely been neglected and never seriously paid attention to by scholars. Starting with Kiesler's *Film Guild Cinema* (1929) as its entry point, the thesis first employs a crossover strategy so as to dissolve rigid disciplinary boundaries and look into the intersection between film and architecture, so as to spotlight *Film Guild Cinema* as a space where architecture enlightens cinema, and a place where cinema enlightens architecture, an arena where architecture and cinema mutually affect each other. Thereafter, looking back retrospectively (and in an unconventional biographical manner), an overview is offered to exam certain essential prequels, precursors and predecessors from the so-called most fruitful years of Kiesler's life. Key projects such as the *R. U. R.* backdrop design (1922-1923), *Space Stage* (1924), *City-in-Space* (1925) are examed in succession. Following architectural and historical analysis, by introducing the florescence of the film industry as historical background and at the same time taking early abstract film culture as content, the study attempts to draw up a coordinate of some early avant-garde films. Analyses are conducted of *Rhythmus 21* (Hans Richter, 1921)*, Symphonie Diagonale* (Viking Eggeling, 1924)*, Ballet Mécanique* (Fernand Léger, 1924)*, Anémic Cinéma* (Marcel Duchamp, 1926) in comparison with Kiesler's works, writings and theories, through which the thesis will locate Kiesler's position on this discursive coordinate both historically and theoretically. In addition, the thesis also offers views on the *Little Cinema Movement* and *Film Guild Cinema's* inaugural program and its reception, which reflects Kiesler's involvement with film culture from another angle.

The purpose of this thesis lies neither in rediscovering a master lost in history, nor in trying to certify Kiesler as an avant-garde genius who happened to be intimately involved with film culture; rather its aim is to pay close attention to reviewing the potential of "inter-relations" and "inter-influences" among various disciplines. My hope is that through this thesis, we can reactive the "future" issue that scholars were so devoted to 40 years ago, but then however dropped, and re-develop it into the topic "Frederick Kiesler's involvement with Film Culture", thus bringing it to the attention of those working today in the relevant areas.

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I.   Introduction

1.1 Thesis

Friedrich J. Kiesler (1890-1965), known as a visionary architect, scenic designer, environmental artist, sculptor, painter, writer, poet and philosopher, always worked among disciplines and was far ahead of his own time. His crossovers between and among various media dissolved rigid disciplinary boundaries, and challenged conventional ways of thinking and practicing within distinct art fields.

A large number of studies have been conducted on Kiesler and his works, writings and theories, and among those, many are focused on his biomorphic *Endless House* and *Endless Theater*, his principles of *Correalism* and *Biotechnique*, his "beyond abstract" *Art of This Century Gallery*, his involvement in *Surrealism, De Stijl*, and other art movements, and even his intimate friendship with Marcel Duchamp. However, compared with these, Kiesler's two realized architectural projects, *Film Guild Cinema*[1] and *Shrine of the Book*, have been paid rather too little attention. Surely, Philip Jonson's description of him as "The Greatest Non-Building Architect of Our Time"[2] seems to be a fair and sober assessment of Kiesler, satisfactory too for those later scholars who are interested in Kiesler studies. One way or another, *Film Guild Cinema* is a project that simply can not be ignored while even acknowledging Kiesler as a "Non-Building" architect; rather, it should be highly valued within the total context of Kiesler's comprehensive development. Taking this as the point of departure, and while retrieving, reading and researching Kiesler, the following archive certainly drew my attention (Fig. 1. 2.), triggering thoughts of researching not only *Film Guild Cinema*, the first building ever designed and built by Kiesler, but also exploring further manifestations of its links to early Film Avant-Garde, and subsequently to media studies and theories.

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[1] "A Movie House in Space and Time: Fredrick Kiesler's Film Arts Guild Cinema, New York, 1929" by Laura M. McGuire, was merely the only extensive study taking *Film Guild Cinema* as an object. The article was published in *Decorative Arts, 14/2, Spring-Summer* 2007, pp. 45-78.

[2] Johnson, "Three Architects", 1960, p. 70.

[3] Swan, "Sidelights of New York." In: *The Saratogian*. January 28, 1929. p. 4.

[4] Swan, "Life in New York." In: *The Morning Herald, Gloversville and Johnstown, N. Y.* January 29, 1929. p.

— Film Guild Cinema – as Entry Point
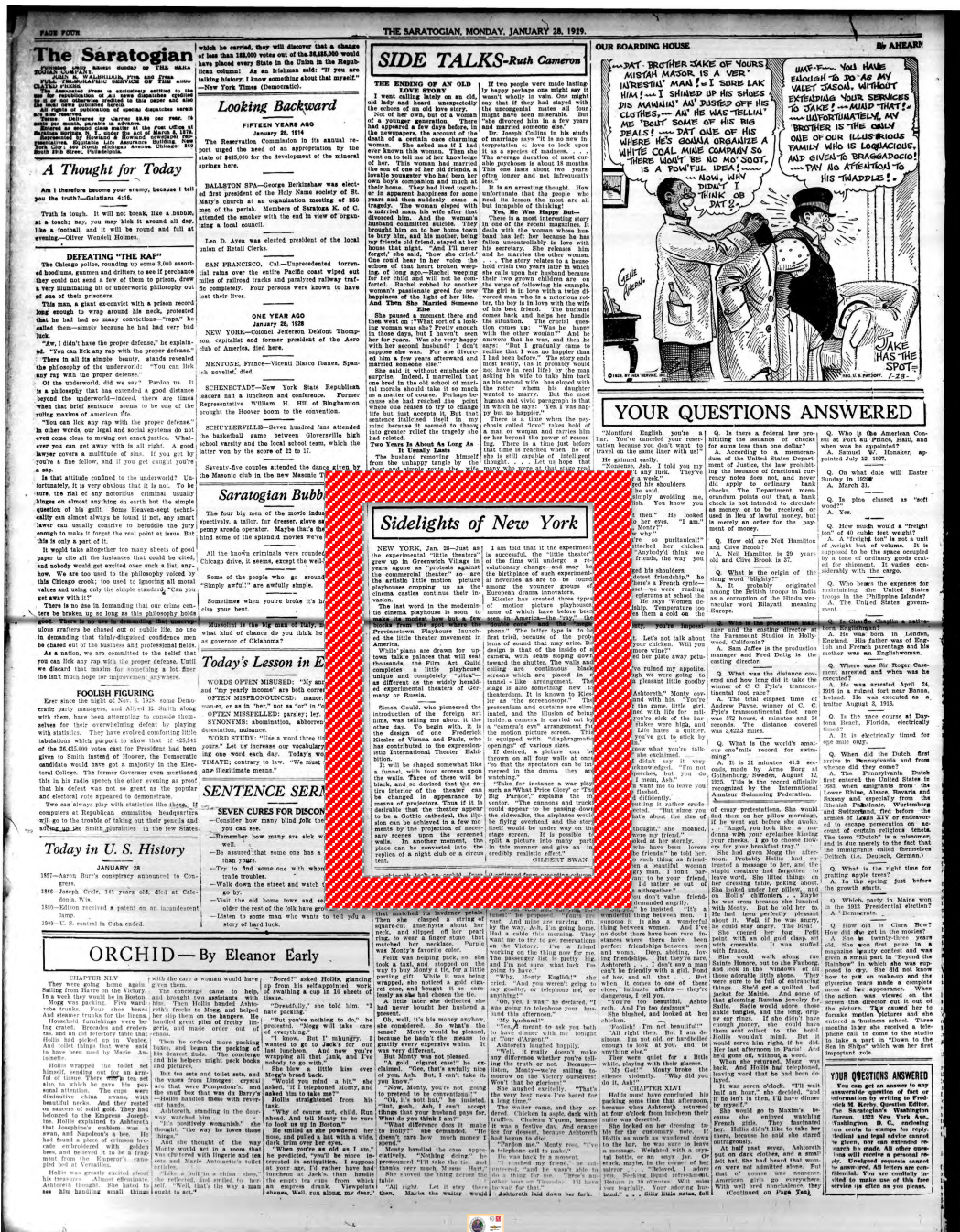
Figure 1 Sidelights of New York. *The Saratogian*, **Monday, January 28, 1929. Gray Scale.**[3]
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[3] Swan, "Sidelights of New York." In: *The Saratogian*. January 28, 1929. p. 4.

Figure 2 Life in New York. *Gloversville and Johnstown, N. Y. Morning Herald* 1929 Gray Scale.[4]
© New York State Digital Library

Within two consecutive days, the 28th and 29th of January 1929, two press articles on *Film Guild Cinema*, and both written by the same journalist, Gilbert Swan, appeared in both *The Saratogian* and *The Morning Herald, Gloversville and Johnstown, N. Y.* The quoted texts below are excerpts from both newspapers illustrated above (Fig. 1. 2.), for the reader's convenience:

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[4] Swan, "Life in New York." In: *The Morning Herald, Gloversville and Johnstown, N. Y.* January 29, 1929. p. 10.

NEW YORK, Jan 27 – Just as the experimental "little theaters" grew up in Greenwich Village in years agone as 'protests against the commercial theater,' so are the artistic little motion picture playhouses cropping up as the cinema castles continue their invasion.

[…] The Film Art Guild completes a little playhouse, unique and completely "ultra" – as different as the widely heralded experimental theaters of Germany or Russia.

Simon Gould, who pioneered the introduction of the foreign art films, was telling me about it the other day. To begin with, it is the design of one Frederick Kiesler of Vienna and Paris, who has contributed to the expressionistic International Theater Exhibition.
[…]
I am told that if the experiment is successful, the "little theater" of the films will undergo a revolutionary change – and may be the birthplace of such experimental novelties as are to be found among the younger groups of European drama innovators.

Figures 1 and 2 are only the result of fortuitous glimpses into mass media – daily newspaper – archives. Academic studies and documents regarding these events might also be found and that reflect the interrelationship between the perspectives of both architectural and media historian perspectives.

On the first day of February 1929, *Film Guild Cinema*, the small artistic motion picture playhouse located on West 8th Street Greenwich Village, opened according to Lisa Phillips "[…] to an impressive crowd that included such luminaries as Theodore Dreiser, Otto Kahn, George Gershwin, Walter Lippmann, John Dos Passos, and Alexander Archipenko. Reported as the first theater in America designed solely for the projection of cinema, it was a press sensation."[5] According to Phillips' side note on this, "There were hundreds of nickelodeon theaters in New York, though they were all undoubtedly traditional proscenium theaters. The *Film Guild Cinema*, 52 West 8th Street, was New York's first modern movie house. Today it is the English Street Playhouse, though no trace of Kiesler's original design remains."[6]

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[5] Phillips, "Architect of Endless Innovation", 1989, p. 16. Phillips cited from: Jeffrey Holmesdale, "At The Film Guild Cinema: Two Days". In: *The New York World*, February 02, 1929.
[6] Ibid. p. 16.

In *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919-1945*, Jan-Christopher Horak contributed the following text, which allows us to have even more detailed insights on the event those 1929 newspapers addressed. According to Horak:

> In February 1929 Symon Gould opened the *Film Guild Cinema* on Eighth Street. Designed by Frederick Kiesler, it was in the eyes of its architect the 'first 100 per cent Cinema in the world'. The New York Film Art Guild's inaugural screening in 1929, which was attended by numerous dignitaries, including Theodore Dreiser, presented two avant-garde films by Americans, *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928, Watson/Webber) and *Hands* (1928, Stella Simon), along with a Soviet feature, *Two Days* (1927). The premiere led the National Board of Review to name *The Fall of the House of Usher* in its 'a Calendar of Progress,' noting that: 'Amateur experimentation reaches a sudden peak in this abstract film.'[7]

— *Architecture & Cinema: Mutual Enlightenment*

Evidently, the opening of *Film Guild Cinema* captured considerable attention and was widely discussed at the time; the fact that it has also been studied and well-documented by both architectural historians and media scholars curious about the topic. Apart from the just-mentioned enthusiasm towards *Film Guild Cinema*'s inaugural screening, in a digitally published Princeton Ph.D. dissertation under the title *Modern Architecture in the Age of Cinema*, Lutz Robbers indicates that investigations into relations between architecture and film began in the early 1970s, and reached their peak in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[8] Under the circumstance that so far neither in Mies van der Rohe's architectural practices nor in his written statements or relevant documents no notable references to film have been uncovered, subsequently, Robbers was able to explore Mies' hidden role as a "Filmkämpfer von außen" ["film-fighter from outside"][9] — the title comes from a short article published in the German film industry daily *Film-Kurier* in 1931. Distinct from Mies's seeming insulation from film, Kiesler's involvement with film was always ambiguously and intimately, far beyond Mies's undercurrent kind of passion as Robbers has described. Sporadic traces can be found from time to time in both Kiesler's architectural projects and his writings that were published during his lifetime or after his death. To give a brief yet incomplete retrospective

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[7] Horak, *Lovers of Cinema*, 1998, p. 23. Horak cited from: "The Motion Picture: A Calendar of Progress". In: *Theater Arts Monthly* 13, No. 9, September 1929, p. 644.

[8] Robbers, *Modern Architecture*, 2012, p. 2 and p. 31.

[9] Ibid. p. 1. Robbers cited from: "Wie Mies van der Rohe zum Film kommt? – Keine schwer zu beantwortende Frage: Als Mensch, der zu den geistigen Dingen der Zeit Stellung nimmt, befaßt er sich selbstverständlich auch mit Fragen des Films." "Filmkämpfer von außen." In: *Film-Kurier*, January 01, 1931, Beiblatt zum Filmkurier.

view: besides the *Film Guild Cinema*, an architectural project literally linked with film, working simultaneously on different fronts, Kiesler designed numerous stage backdrops throughout his entire life, among those, in December 1922 in Berlin, his innovative application of film projection within an electro-mechanized stage design for Karel Čapek's futuristic science fiction theater piece *R. U. R.* (Rossum's Universal Robots)[10], has generally been acknowledged by scholars as the first film projection ever applied in the German theater[11]; then there is Kiesler's statement to be found at the very beginning of Viking Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale* (1924; Fig. 3.): "Made in 1924 by Viking Eggeling, *SYMPHONIE DIAGONALE* is the best abstract film yet conceived. It is an experiment to discover the basic principles of the organization of time intervals in the film medium"; in 1926, Kiesler was a committee member of Film Guild's advisory council, a distribution company called Film Associates, Inc., a group that decided which films to present[12]; and finally for avant-garde film history, an extremely valuable 35mm nitrate print of Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* (1924), was found in Kiesler's "weekend" house in New York in 1975 by Lillian Kiesler, his second wife, who "brought it to the attention of Jonas Mekas, the noted filmmaker and founder of Anthology Film Archives, […] who determined that the print — which contained hundreds of splices — was quite likely the original print that was shown, under her husband's direction, at the film's premiere in 1924."[13]

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[10] Lesák, "Visionary of the European Theater", 1989, p. 40.

[11] Warren, "Friedrich Kiesler and Theatrical Modernism in Vienna", 1994, p. 82. Note: While Warren noted that *R. U. R.* was shown in December 1922, many other scholars account for it in 1923. This is still to be further investigated.

[12] Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 51.

[13] http://www.antheil.org/film.html (Accessed on: August 08, 2014)

Figure 3 Film Still from experimental animation film *Symphonie Diagonale* (1924), Viking Eggeling.

Questions to be asked: is it possible that Kiesler was also an "Outside Film Fighter", as Robbers argues for Mies? Or, even one step further, due to his enthusiastic involvement, was Kiesler even an "Inside Film Fighter"? What was *Film Guild Cinema*'s (Kiesler's first and almost only built building) potential involvement and function in the "*Little Cinema Movement*"? Why would Kiesler's statement appear at the very beginning of Viking Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale*? Can we imagine a Kiesler contribution to "*Symphonie Diagonale*", "*Ballet Mécanique*", and maybe even other early Dada and Surrealist or Avant-Garde films of the time? Under what circumstances did Kiesler become a committee member of the Film Guild's advisory council? And how would scholars and historians define Kiesler's role in the era of the early film Avant-Garde? Furthermore, what would be the potential inter-relation and inter-influence between Kiesler and the avant-garde artists of his contemporaries? Unfortunately until now, there exists almost a vacuum of research regarding the overlapping zone where Kiesler and architecture and film encounter each other. Doubtless, valuable research has been carried out – separately – by scholars in both fields of studies, which goes somewhat against Kiesler's principles of "*Continuity*" and *"Correlation"*, his terms for the crossover between and among artistic media, or as we might say, his bold and unrestrained transmutation of boundaries between rigid disciplines.

Consequently, taking *Film Guild Cinema* as the point of departure, finding where architecture and media studies might form a bridge and correlate with each other, as well as exploring further potential crossovers within (and out) relevant fields will be the preliminary task of this thesis. *Film Guild Cinem*a therefore becomes a point of intersection to be placed under the spotlight, a point where architecture and cinema naturally merged together – a *space* where architecture enlightens cinema, a *place* where cinema enlightens architecture, an *arena* where architecture and cinema mutually affect each other.

— *Frederick J. Kiesler's Involvement With Film Culture*

Kiesler did not succeed in building much during his life, leaving only two architectural projects behind him, *Film Guild Cinema* and *Shrine of the Book* (1965). Instead, his design activities lay mostly in theater backdrop design, exhibition design and show window design. In a lecture Kiesler delivered to the Yale School of Architecture in 1947, on the topic of his innovative use of film projection in Karel Čapek's *R. U. R.* in Berlin (1922), he recalled that although he had never been on a stage in his life before then, he undertook the challenge to do a scenic design. It was simply because during the post-war situation no architect could get work to support one's living. Kiesler states in comparison: "In Europe, you cannot get buildings as easily to design as a play to do. In America, it's easier to do a building than to get a play on Broadway. But that is again another country."[14] This coincidental "touch" of theater was the result from "violently lashed out against"[15] the theater of his time. However, he soon began his involvement with scenic design, exhibition design and subsequently various international avant-garde movements.

In his 1975 publication *The Cubist Cinema*, American film historian Standish D. Lawder made a bold assumption and connected Kiesler's backdrop for *R. U. R.*, Léger's set design for *L'Inhumaine* (1924) and Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927). From Lawder's perspective, "Kiesler's [backdrop for *R. U. R.*] represents a probable influence on Léger's design for *L'Inhumaine* and Lang's film seems to have been influenced, in return, by Léger."[16] Lawder's assumption on the potential inter-relation and inter-influence between Kiesler and

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[14] "Lecture by Friedrich Kiesler On His Use of Film In 1922 Production of *R. U. R.* by Karel Capek, delivered to Yale School of Architecture, 1947." From unpublished paper Estate of F. Kiesler. In: No author noted, *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 30.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 108.

Léger, as well as their hidden links with Lang's *Metropolis*, drew attention from a certain number of scholars, artists and designers, including Anthology Film Archives' Jonas Mekas, and Japanese designer and writer Katsuhiro Yamaguchi. Yamaguchi was succeessful in finding a bit more evidence that Kiesler used film to create extensions of environmental space; unfortunately, in this he was not successful in tracing this trail; and in 1976, the joint allies of Jonas Mekas and Lillian Kiesler had the hope of to "devoting a future issue of *Film Culture* to Frederick Kiesler and film", and wished to "collect all the relative… related materials to cover this part of Kiesler's interest and work so that it could be then brought to the attention of those who work in that area […]".[17] The "future issue of *Film Culture* to Frederick Kiesler and film", however, didn't develop much further and remained stranded. Following these sporadic traces in various archives and publications, we will start to work on the still relatively underdeveloped topic, Frederick J. Kiesler's involvement with film culture.

1.2 Current Status of Research on the Topic

— The Corpus

Film Guild Cinema, as one of the Art Playhouse where early Avant-Garde films were shown, will first be studied in this thesis, from its historical context, as well as from an architectural perspective. Avant-Garde films from the 1920s were films made by early experimental filmmakers, many with whom Kiesler intimately collaborated. Although personally Kiesler never made any films himself, still, there is something to be discovered. Hans Richter's *Rhythmus 21* (1921), Viking Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale* (1924), Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* (1924) as well as Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma* (1924-1926) will be reviewed in succession in comparison with Kiesler's artistic projects or analytic essays, and thereby discover potential "inter-relations" and "inter-influences" between Kiesler and his contemporaries in their collaborations and correspondence. Additionally, selected issues of science, technology and philosophy from the same epoch will also be briefly reviewed in order to trace the potential impact those other fields may have had on these works, as well as to observe the interests they might have shared in common, for instance, in nature, kinesis, mechanism, aesthetics, etc. Finally, the *Little Cinema Movement* in New York, which *Film Guild Cinema* and its owner Symon Gould was closely connected to will be the third topic to be discussed for its historical background, and to try to explore Kiesler's involvement not

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[17] Transcribed from "A Radio Broadcast Interview with Mrs. Kiesler: Friedrich Kiesler's Involvement with Films – Leger, Ruttmann, Warhol". In: *A Tribute*, 1977, pp. 27-28.

only as the architect of the cinema, but also in his role (less publicly known), as a committee member of Film Guild's distribution organization Film Associates, Inc. Instead of a routine biography, an overview of selected topics will be offered to exam certain key prequels, precursors and predecessors from Kiesler's European years and their relation with those design works, "the most fruitful of his life"[18], his *R. U. R.* backdrop design (1922-1923), *Space Stage* (1924), *City-in-Space* (1925). This chapter will intentionally be placed after the architectural analysis of *Film Guild Cinema*, for easier comparison.

— *Selected Critics on the Corpus*

As mentioned above numerous studies have been conducted on Kiesler and his work, among those, many are focused on his biomorphic projects *Endless House* and *Endless Theater*, his principles on *Correalism* and *Biotechnique*, his *Art of This Century Gallery*, his involvement with *Surrealism* and *De Stijl,* and so on. Compared with other Kiesler projects or objects, *Film Guild Cinema* is not often in the spotlight and never yet truly the point of focus. *A Movie House in Space and Time: Fredrick Kiesler's Film Arts Guild Cinema, New York, 1929* (2007) by Laura M. McGuire seems to be the only extensive study on the topic, and which offers detailed analyses from various points of view. Thus it is the first full-length essay on the subject. Nevertheless, the author looks at the Film Guild Cinema from an architectural and design perspective, rather than also being interested in its relation with the early Film Avant-Garde, and to subsequently connect it with media studies and theory.

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[18] Crighton, "Kiesler's Pursuit of an Idea", 1961, p. 110; Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 41.

Architecture as Art-(dis)-Play-House

In his dissertation *Endless Innovations: Frederick Kiesler's Theory and Scenic Design* (1982), R. L. Held conducted a comprehensive study on Kiesler. Examining the rich life like Kiesler's could not have been an easy task, and the foundations Held formed via numerous first-hand materials and well-structured organization, offer a guide-like system for any further reference. Especially the chapter *The American Context, 1926-1934,* contributes retrospective information on projects such as *R. U. R.* backdrop, *Space Stage*, and *Film Guild Cinema*. Although Held's departure point seems to be theatre and scenic design, still, many relevant themes were discussed. *Film Guild Cinema*, as well as media theory-related information is limited or condensed. In addition, Held's organization provides a valuable reference for this thesis.

The publication *Frederick Kiesler* (1989) assembles essays from a number of notable and widely recognized Kiesler experts such as Dieter Bogner and Lisa Phillips. With a F*oreword* by Tom Armstrong; "Architect of Endless Innovation" by Lisa Phillips; "Visionary of the European Theater" by Barbara Lesák; "Kiesler and the European Avant-garde" by Dieter Bogner; "The Art of Revolutionary Display Techniques" by Cynthia Goodman; "Part of the Cosmos: Kiesler's Theatrical Art in America" by Jeanne T. Newlin and "Environmental Artist" by Lisa Phillips, together with distinctly compiled and illustrated chronology of Kiesler's life, the essays not only provide a comprehensive elaboration of his wide scope of activities, but also provide enlightenment on Kiesler's influential role in modern art movements in general. Of course, *Film Guild Cinema* is mentioned many times in several essays, but never serving as a central point.[19]

John Warren's *Friedrich Kiesler and Theatrical Modernism in Vienna* in *Theatre and Performance in Austria: From Mozart to Jelinek (Austrian Studies IV)* (1994), is an essay provided by the Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation. What especially benefits this thesis is its demarcation of the post world war I political and financial background; this is well integrated with Warren's encyclopaedic research regarding the *International Exhibition of New Theatre Techniques* in Vienna (1924), and can be hardly found elsewise.

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[19] Texts within quotation marks are essay titles. In: *Frederick Kiesler*, ed. L. Phillips 1989.

Within the anthology entitled *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings* (1996), which includes Kiesler's "published and unpublished, undiluted and uncut writing" as Lillian Kiesler put it[20], Kiesler himself provides first hand research material on *Film Guild Cinema*. In "Building a Cinema Theater", information is condensed within the two pages of this 1929 text, and definitively helps us follow Kiesler's own narrative and build up our basic understanding of his project.

As mentioned, McGuire's "A Movie House in Space and Time: Frederick Kiesler's Film Arts Guild Cinema, New York, 1929", published in 2007 in *Studies in Decorative Arts* is apparently the only and most comprehensive article (in English)[21] to take a close and multi-perspectival look at *Film Guild Cinema*. The article starts with a close and thorough description about its architecture in comparison with Contemporary American Cinemas of the same period, followed by the introduction of *Precursors of the Film Guild Art Cinema*, including Kiesler's early *Set Design* back to his European period, *De Stijl* influences, as well as *De Stijl in America*. It finally goes on to analyze *Film Guild Cinema* as "A Four Dimension Cinema*"*, and concludes with a discussion of Kiesler's understanding of "America, Consumerism and the New Art", and "Architecture as Experience in Film Guild Cinema".[22]

Finally, reading Robbers' dissertation *Modern Architecture in the Age of Cinema: Mies Van Der Rohe and the Moving Image* (2012), his argument of "*Filmkämpfer Mies*" has inspired the thought of taking one topic into consideration, namely, is Kieler also a "Film Fighter", maybe even an "Inside" one?

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[20] L. Kiesler, Foreword to *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 7.

[21] According to Kiesler Foundation, judging by their knowledge McGuire's "A Movie House in Space and Time" is the only and most comprehensive article about *Film Guild Cinema*.

[22] Texts within quotation marks are subheadings in McGuire's essay, "A Movie House in Space and Time", 2007, pp.45-78.

Film as Content

It was pleasantly inspiring when Kiesler's name was found in Louise O'Konor's study *Viking Eggeling 1880-1925. Artist and Film-maker, Life and Work* (1971). This might give a faint hope for the decryption of why Kiesler's statement would be found at the beginning of Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale*. Upon this point, expectation also increased on "unveiling" how Kiesler might appraise those architecture diagrams, legends or engineering drafting specifications such as the elements and figures appearing in *Symphonie Diagonale's* "language system", which Eggeling created as a kind of "topological transformation" through motion pictures. The answer would be found in an unexpected discovery, a brouchure from the Museum of Modern Art, namely, *A Tribute To Anthology Film Archives' Avantgarde Film Preservation Program. An Evening Dedicated to Frederick Kiesler* (1977).

Standish D. Lawder's *The Cubist Cinema* (1975) focuses on the "interrelationship between film and modern art, predominantly painting" between 1895 and 1925, which is exactly the period when Kiesler actively involved himself with the international avant-garde art movements, the exact time too reviewed in this essay. As Lawder notes in the preface, his principal concern lies in between "a history of cinema" and "an orthodox art-history study".[23] Lawder takes a "crossover" point of view to look into the area of intersection between film and modern art. This encourages one's aspiration to dissolve rigid disciplinary boundaries and to investigate the relations between architecture and cinema, one of the subjects of this thesis. The book is also one of the key resources for *Ballet Mécanique*, and, again, it was Lawder's assumption to connect Kiesler's *R. U. R.* backdrop, Léger's set design for *L'Inhumaine,* and Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis*, which leads the finalization of this thesis. The only pity is that as a film historian, Lawder did not continue to follow the traces he had discovered and contributed more on this topic. On the other hand, this is understandable, because why would a film historian be interested in an architect in the first place?

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[23] Lawder, *Preface* to *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975.

Katrina Martin's essay "Duchamp's Anémic Cinéma" (1975) provides a platform for looking into the film's linguistic aspect and the themes beyond, especially for deconstructing Duchamp's trademark puns. Based on this piece, we are able to review the "spiral theme" linking Kiesler and Duchamp's works. Likewise, *The Figure of the Spiral in Marcel Duchamp and Frederick Kiesler* is an essay from Helmut Klassen included in the publication *Transportable Environments 3* (2005); as the title suggests, the author remarks upon and draws parallels between Duchamp and Kiesler's interpretations of time and space, particularly in the figure of the Spiral.

Dada and Surrealist Film (1996) includes a wide, extensive compilation of thirteen essays that analyze the affiliations between film and these two highly influential twentieth-century art movements. The essay by Thomas Elsaesser focuses more on Dada and the Cinema, while Judi Freeman comments on Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*, looking at the relation between Purism and Surrealism in his writing. Viking Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale*, Marcel Duchamp and films by Man Ray are also analyzed for their connections between Dada, Surrealism and film history, and thus also serve as historical background for *Film Guild Cinema* research.

Dudley Murphy, Hollywood Wild Card (2006) provides considerable unknown aspects about Dudley Murphy (1897-1968), one of the most intriguing figures in early Hollywood, and who eventually was involved in the making of *Ballet Mécanique*, together with Fernand Léger, Man Ray (cinematography) and George Antheil (music). Susan Delson's writing covers several important premieres including the film's public world premiere on September 24, 1924, at the *Internationale Ausstellung neuer Theatertechnik* (*International Exposition for New Theater Techniques*), which was "coincidentally" organized by Frederick Kiesler. Following cogent research results, Delson assumes that Kiesler might also have been responsible for presenting *Ballet Mécanique* in New York. The assumption is rather feasible, however, more evidence might still be required to support this argument. If such an inference is proven to be reasonable, it could be another support for this thesis. This is another issue to be further developed.

Jan-Christopher Horak's "The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919-1945" is excerpted in Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark's *Experimental Cinema: The Film Reader* (2002). Within the larger framework of the *Origins of The American Avant-Garde Cinema, 1920-1959*, Horak's essay traces the early European, Russian and American experimental or Avant-Garde cinema movement from both historical and theoretical perspectives, starting from the 1920s. According to him, "[j]ust as avant-garde film production created an alternative discourse on filmmaking, the 'Little Cinema' Movement provided both an exhibition outlet for avant-garde and European art films […]"[24]. Kiesler and *Film Guild Cinema* are once again mentioned, which helps to look into their potential involvement in the "*Little Cinema Movement*". As mentioned previously, this will serve as historical context for the study of *Film Guild Cinema*. In addition, Malte Hagener's PhD thesis *Strategic Convergence and Functional Differentiation – The Film Societies and Ciné-Clubs of the 1920s and 30s* (2005) functions as a beneficial supplementary resource and necessary confrontation for reviewing other film societies or movements in Europe, which were in parallel with the Little Cinema Movement's emergence in the United States.

1.3 Methodology

The collection of information via a review of the existing literature, serves to build up a basic chronological overall structure, as well as to help with defining the orientation of this thesis. This thesis will be based primarily on an analysis of secondary literature; however, the Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, located in Vienna, will provide an immense opportunity of exploring published and un-published primary materials and archives, including literature, notes, manuscripts, sketches, photographs, and more, all of which will be extremely helpful to enrich our research and to achieve thoroughness and accuracy.

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[24] Horak, *Lovers of Cinema*, 1998, p. 20.

II.   Architecture as Art-(dis)-Play-House

2.1 Introduction. Background to Building A Cinema Theatre

Following the extraordinary accomplishments he achieved at the *International Exhibition of New Theatre Techniques* in Vienna (1924) and *L'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris (1925), at the invitation of *The Little Review* editor Jane Heap, Kiesler recreated these European exhibitions at the *International Theatre Exposition* in New York (1926), which took place in the Steinway Hall between 27th of February and 15th of March 1926 with 1541 exhibits from fifteen countries.[25] As a result of the restaging of the European Theatre Expositions for the Americans, according to R. L. Held, Kiesler became associated with the Film Guild, which "organized a distribution company called Film Associates, Inc." around February 1926. "The company would screen a film once in New York and then make it available to other theatres." Together with Kenneth MacGowan, Gilbert Seldes, Lawrence Langner, Jane Heap, Christian Brinton, Sheldon Cheney[26] Kiesler was among the committee members of an advisory council founded to choose those films to be presented.

In a letter of 13 May 1928 to the German playwright, director and theater critic, Herbert Ihering, Kiesler wrote the following: "[…] After two years of crazy struggling with all kinds of however non-stop projects, optimizing comprehensive projects (one museum, cinema, theater, urban design, a new form of skyscraper) – I've got the first big contract: to build the ideal cinema."[27] That big contract Kiesler mentioned was to build a theater for the Film Art Guild. The adventurous encounter with New York ended up determining Kiesler's permanent residence in America.

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[25] Exact dates of New York *International Theatre Exposition* from Lesák, "In Quest of the Ideal Theater", 1989, p. 30.

[26] Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 51.

[27] Letter from F. Kiesler to Herbert Ihering, New York, 13th of May 1928. Berlin, Academy of Arts. Archive Performing Arts, Inv.-Nr. Herbert-Ihering-Archiv 1694. Katalog. VII. Kinematographische Arbeiten Film Guild Cinema, New York 1929. Figure VII. 12. In: Lesák/Trabitsch, *Frederick Kiesler*, 2012, p. 218. All translations are mine unless indicated otherwise. The original text in German: "Nach zweijährigen irrsinnigen Kämpfen aller Art aber unentwegter Arbeit, Ausarbeitung umfassender Projekte (ein Museum, Cinemabauten, Theater, Städtebau, eine neue Form Skyskraper) – habe ich den ersten grossen Auftrag bekommen: das ideale Cinema zu bauen."

Kiesler composed his initial text, *Building a Cinema Theater* on *Film Guild Cinema*, which was later included in an anthology entitled *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*. The article expressed Kiesler's narrative from various perspectives, including his observations and thoughts on the designing and building of the *Film Guild Cinema*. In this chapter, parallels will be drawn, first, between contemporary dimensions reflected within Kiesler's initial texts and the public response towards the *Film Guild Cinema* from that period (for example, media reviews, scholars' criticisms and comments). Secondly, criticisms following a longer time interval will be examined for further review and discourse, hence, helping to build a rational and comprehensive understanding within a historical context about this first-built project of Kiesler's.

2.2 Transmutation

As an innovative pioneer of modern European theater scenography who had already conducted various experimental visionary theater backdrop designs from the early 1920s on[28], Kiesler started by expounding his thinking and analysis of the differences in spatial organization between the Greek amphitheater, the 19th century European aristocratic theater and finally the modern motion picture theater, namely, the cinema. According to Kiesler, the Greek amphitheater, which lays at the origins of theater, represents a democratic phase of theater, "[…] with the action taking place in the middle and the great audience, which was composed of all kinds and classes of men, merely surrounding it."[29] However, with the passage of time, such a theatrical form passed gradually into the 19th century European aristocratic theater, which was designed to house only relatively limited audiences. As a matter of fact, this was not the first time Kiesler attacked such a theater form, as John Warren has noted: in 1922, in "*Débâcle des Theaters – Die Gesetze der G. - K. - Bühne*" (*Theatrical Debacle – the Rules of the Proscenium Stage*), Kiesler expressed his strong dissatisfaction towards the limitations and inadequacies of the proscenium stage, "The present form of theater is artificial, outdated and traditional ('Barockokotheater') […]. The relationship between art and nature must be rethought and traditional stage scenery replaced by the use of

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[28] This refers to F. Kiesler's European period when he was well known as a stage designer. Many of Kiesler's backdrop designs were created from the early to the middle 1920s, before he left for America in 1926. These include his involvement in the stage set for Karel Čapek's *R. U. R.* in 1923, the "*Space Stage*" at the *International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques* at the Vienna Konzerthaus in 1924; as well as his innovative application of film projection as a stage backdrop.
[29] F. Kiesler, "Building A Cinema Theater." [1929] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 16.

colour and film projections."[30] This statement might be seen as derivative of his earlier theater debate during his European period. In *Building a Cinema Theater*, Kiesler argues that the structural schema of the contemporary motion picture cinema was merely more than a simple adaptation of the conventional European aristocratic theater design, as that did not correspond with cinema's fundamental nature of being "international" and "the most ultra-dramatic of any art"[31]. In short, transmutation is urged, and is of great urgency, for the *Film Guild Cinema*.

2.3 Analysis of Architectural Transmutation of Film Guild Cinema

— *Architectural Aesthetics, Spatial Organization, Form Evaluation, Spatial Perception*

Behind the theater spatial organization and the formal evolution was a demonstration of ideology, a topic we will examine in depth later in this chapter. Nevertheless, to understand Kiesler's thinking and what he was reacting against a summary of the conventional movie theater of that epoch needs to be briefly introduced. In her essay *In the House, In the Picture: Distance and Proximity in the American Mid-Century Neutralized Theater*, Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece refer to the gradually disappearing movie palaces of the late 1920s and early 1930s; she gives clear description of the "dazzle and entice"[32] character of the mainstream movie theatres at that period, mainly from the perspective of architectural aesthetics:

> Fitted with thematic depictions of orientalism, fairy tales, or mythology, movie palaces boasted fantastical decorations such as colored lights, gilding, chandeliers, statues, lavish lounges, and murals, as well as seating for thousands; although exhibitors attempted to keep the lights relatively low in order to discourage socializing, the palaces frequently included a clear view of one's surroundings.[33]

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[30] Warren, "Friedrich Kiesler and Theatrical Modernism in Vienna", 1994, p. 86.

[31] F. Kiesler, "Building A Cinema Theater." [1929] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 16.

[32] McGuire, "A Movie House in Space and Time", 2007, p. 52.

[33] Szczepaniak-Gillece, "In the House", 2012, pp. 1-2. Originally from: Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992, p. 48.

Although in America the standards mainstream movie theater (Fig. 4. 5. 6.) was still at its infancy, the new movie palaces, strongly influenced by the Beaux-Arts style, appeared like an ingenuous child dressed up as a flamboyant dowager. Heavily made up with exotic, artificial decorations, the movie theaters were intended to stimulate the feeling of a delightful imaginary divorce from people's ordinary and monotonous daily life; in return, they encouraged a fictional adventurous experience for the moviegoers' trip to the movies. The movie theaters were the immediate recipients of the pre-industrial theatre's ornamental and sumptuous manner, as opposed to functional simplicity. "[…] proscenium arches, stages, curtains, and separated boxes and floor seating – movie palaces tended toward the spectacle of the theater […]",[34] rather than accommodating its spectators to the ideal optical conditions for film viewing. Just as Kiesler mercilessly criticized: "[…] the attempt to give an air of the aristocracy in the manner of decorations and furnishings is contrary to the basic purpose of the screen."[35]
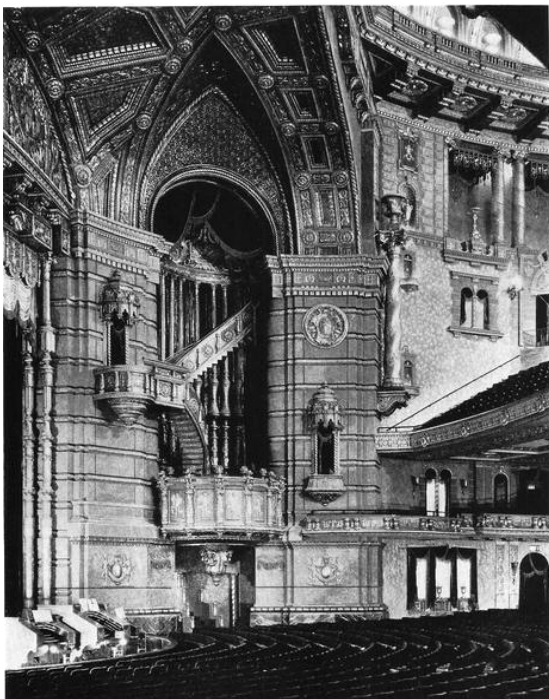
Figure 4 Auditorium of Roxy Theatre New York, 1927

Figure 5 Stage & Orchestra Pit of Roxy Theatre New York, 1927

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[34] Szczepaniak-Gillece, "In the House", 2012, p. 2.
[35] F. Kiesler, "Building A Cinema Theater." [1929] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 16.

Figure 6 Ticket Lobby of Roxy Theatre, New York, 1927

Considering the Beaux Arts-style influenced standards applied to mainstream movie theatres – "Barockokotheater" in Kiesler's term – the architectural aesthetics of *Film Guild Cinema* must have been awfully stunning for the late 1920s New York moviegoers. Going through contemporary media reviews, the reception was a total polarization, with lavish adjectives such as austere, bleak, coffin-like, desolate, forlorn, harsh and on to rigorous and stringent, a total range from A to Z were used by critics; yet, the others exclaim in admiration what a breadth of spirit. *Film Guild Cinema*'s interior, as Barbara Lesák summarized from a 1929 article: "[…] black and white tiles covered the walls, and the silver and black auditorium was bathed in pink and blue lights."[36] And the foyer (Fig. 7.), according to Laura M. McGuire's description, "[…] continued the black and white patterning, with white walls punctuated by asymmetrically placed rectangles of black Vitrolite glass."[37] Why proverbially black and

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[36] Lesák, "Visionary of the European Theater", 1989, p. 16. Summarized from: Douglas Fox, *The Film Guild Cinema: An Experiment in Theater Design*. Better Theater Section of *Exhibition Herald World,* March 16, 1929, pp. 15-19.
[37] McGuire, "A Movie House in Space and Time", 2007, p. 49.

white? It "typifies the black and white of the motion picture"[38], was Kiesler's answer to the *New York Time* columnist for the story *Picture Theater Made to Fit our Day*. Understanding that around the late 1920s the foundations of mass media had been laid, Kiesler clearly understood how to draw support from the media and thus to communicate, advocate and implement his ideology for transforming modern life. The controversy provoked by *Film Guild Cinema's* architectural aesthetics was certainly nothing less than the debates provoked by his theater backdrop and exposition designs in Europe back in the early 1920s.

Figure 7 Lobby of *Film Guild Cinema*, New York, 1929
© Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna / Photo: Luks

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[38] McGuire, "A Movie House in Space and Time", 2007, p. 49. McGuire cited from: Walter Rendell Story, "Picture Theater Made to Fit our Day," *New York Time*, June 09, 1929, SM8.

From a spatial organization point of view, Kiesler continued then with analysing the different spatial experiences between theater and cinema in his article *Building a Cinema Theater*. For him, if the theater disperses the spectators' interests into three-dimensional space, cinema rather attempts to hold the spectators' concentration on a single point of two dimensions. Thus, different spatial experience mirrors distinct forms of artistic composition in spatial organization.

Observing the fact that film requires neither the symphonic nor the stage-functional, the first radical step Kiesler intended to take for *Film Guild Cinema* was "to break clear all imitation of the theatre", because "Film has grown mature enough to create its own form of architecture"[39]. In order to create an ideal form for cinema as it gradually reached its maturity, measures Kiesler took included: abolishment of the non-functioning and passé proscenium (presumably due to the transition from silent film to the "talkies"); obscuring the orchestra and all other stage platforms that may have been reminiscent of the theatre; elimination of suffocating draperies, superfluous decorations, and any overwhelming ornaments, in a word, total dissociation from any vestiges of those Beaux-Arts influenced, standard movie theaters of the time. As a result, Kiesler filled-in his own vocabulary for a cinema with a contemporary sense of its interior, including spatial composition, colour-coding, lighting and projection. The theater "seated 485"[40], for that time a not particularly impressive number in terms of size perhaps, but what was special within *Film Guild Cinema* – thanks to Kiesler's various measures – was how the spectators found themselves totally immersed in a cinematic atmosphere. The main screen was unique because both its size and shape could be adjusted, depending on projection needs; in addition, according to Held, the screen "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."[41] In order to create his ideal cinematic realm, besides the main screen at the front, Kiesler intended to imply additional virtual projections with both still or motion pictures on the side walls and on the ceiling, all of which could function as extra projection screens if required by the program. According to McGuire, the lower wall of the cinema was coloured in dark blue, with black fabric above, the sloped ceiling was painted

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[39] F. Kiesler, "Building A Cinema Theater." [1929] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 17.

[40] Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 51. Held cited from: *The Brooklyn Examiner*, May 17, 1929, p. 20:1.

[41] Ibid. Held cited from: Douglas Fox, "The Film Guild Cinema," *Exhibitors Herald-World*, March 16, 1929, p. 15.

silver, "the entire composition was washed with dim, recessed lighting,"[42] as per a *New York Time* columnist, "fostering, a sense of quietude"[43]. Depending on the situation, the audience could find themselves suddenly surrounded by projected images: for instance, the auditorium could be virtually transformed into the interior of a medieval Gothic cathedral, or the site of massed crowds, or info screens for the upcoming experimental film projections, and so on.[44] In fact, due to the client's budget restrictions, Kiesler's visionary design for incessantly varying additional wall and ceiling projections was never fully realized. Nevertheless, the cinema remained the "House of Shadow Silence"[45], as illustrated on the front cover of the *Inaugural Program for the Film Arts Guild Cinema*; it would match "the optical flying machine of camera"[46], the film in Kiesler's term. On a black and white photograph taken in 1929, with Kiesler in front of *Film Guild Cinema's* opening poster, texts such as "Unique in Design", "Radical in Form" and "Original in Projection"[47] can be clearly read. Kiesler himself certainly referred to *Film Guild Cinema* as a new typology of movie cinema, which would match well to those theaters being categorized as so-called "Neutralized Theater"[48], a term Szczepaniak-Gillece argues in her essay, "imposed a new cinematic ideal on exhibition and, by extension, the form of film itself"[49], designed for total film projection environments.

In his article *Building a Cinema Theater*, Kiesler inquires into spatial perception and how it impacts moviegoers via the interplay among architectural aesthetics, spatial organization and the evaluation of forms. Spatial perception, in other words, how spectators became aware of the cinema through the senses of seeing, hearing, touching, feeling, were the essence of design. Since "The film cannot exist by itself"[50], it exists through its correlation with spectators and has more plasticity; therefore, the quality Kiesler intends to create for *Film*

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[42] McGuire, "A Movie House in Space and Time", 2007, p. 49. McGuire cited from: *Walter Rendell Story, Picture Theater Made to Fit our Day, New York Time*, June 09, 1929, SM8.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid. p. 50.

[45] "The House of Shadow Silence" appears at *Inaugural Program* for the *Film Arts Guild Cinema*, Front Cover. http://www.amazon.com/Frederick-Kiesler-Cinema-Inaugural-Brochure/dp/B0085EN8YS. (Accessed on: August 21, 2014)

[46] F. Kiesler, "Building A Cinema Theater." [1929] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 17.

[47] The quoted text can be found in "Frederick Kiesler vor dem Eröffnungsplakat, New York 1929." S/W-Fotografie, Silbergelatine auf Barytpapier, 16,7x16 cm. © Wien, Österreichische Friedrich und Lillian Kiesler-Privatstiftung. Katalog. "VII. Kinematographische Arbeiten Film Guild Cinema, New York 1929." Figure VII. 1. In: Lesák/Trabitsch, *Frederick Kiesler*, 2012, p. 60.

[48] Szczepaniak-Gillece, "In the House", 2012, p. 2.

[49] Ibid. Szczepaniak-Gillece cited from: Benjamin Schlanger, *Looking Towards a Better Theatre, Better Theatres section of Motion Picture Herald*, November 19, 1932, pp. 8-9.

[50] F. Kiesler, "Building A Cinema Theater." [1929] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 17.

Guild Cinema is to "suggest concentrated attention and at the same time to destroy the sensation of confinement that may occur easily when the spectator concentrates on the screen."[51] Kiesler states his design was an endeavour to break away from conventional theater features, by removing any nostalgic theatrical design elements that link it to the bygone and obsolete 'Barockokotheater', and replacing them with various new methods and inventions, among those, the most illustrious being the unique screen in the main auditorium, the "Screen-O-Scope"[52] (Fig. 8.) as Kiesler named his invention. According to McGuire: "Technicians could raise or lower, and broaden or narrow, the mechanical panels around the screen to adjust the size and shape of the projection surface or to shrink the viewing area to a small point." (Fig. 9.)[53] However, instead of McGuire's comparison of the Screen-O-Scope with a "cat's eye"[54], from a purely visual point of view, I would rather consider it to be much more reminiscent of a camera shutter or aperture; this also goes along with Phillips' argument that "[…] not only the floor but the ceiling as well were graded toward the screen, promoting some to compare it to being inside a camera."[55] (Robbers also refers to an "aperture-like mechanism."[56]) To a certain extent, the Screen-O-Scope was an innovative solution to dealing with spatial perception, and was Kielser's attempt at his so-called "Visual-Acoustics."[57] Such application certainly did not remain a simple functionalism, which was popular at the time; instead, it went far beyond it.

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[51] F. Kiesler, "Building A Cinema Theater." [1929] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 17.

[52] Ibid.

[53] McGuire, "A Movie House in Space and Time", 2007, p. 49.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Phillips, "Architect of Endless Innovation", 1989, p. 16.

[56] Robbers, *Modern Architecture*, 2012, p. 204.

[57] F. Kiesler, "Building A Cinema Theater." [1929] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 17.
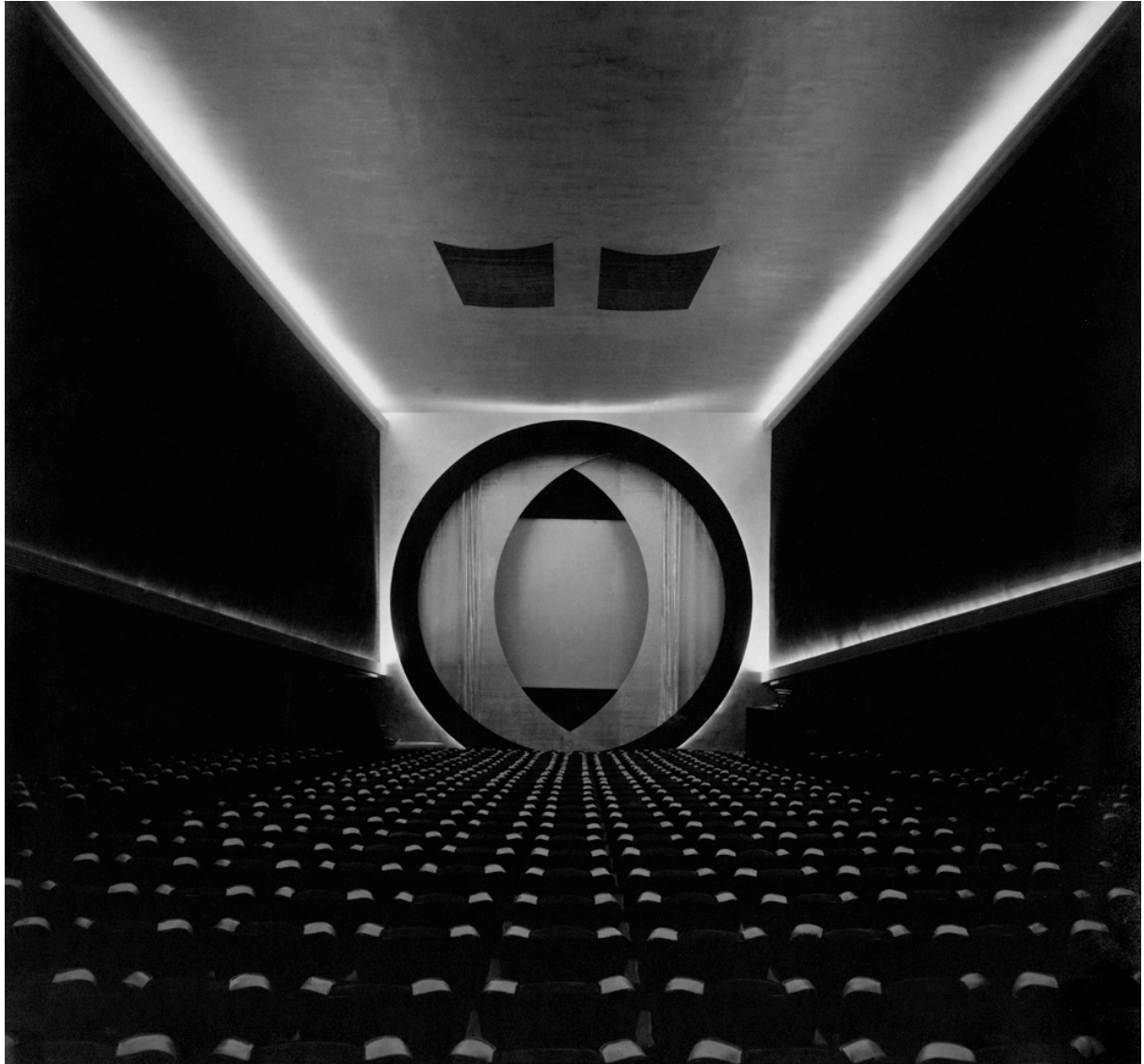
Figure 8 Auditorium with *Screen-O-Scope*, *Film Arts Guild Cinema*, New York, 1929
© Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna / Courtesy Ruth Bernhard
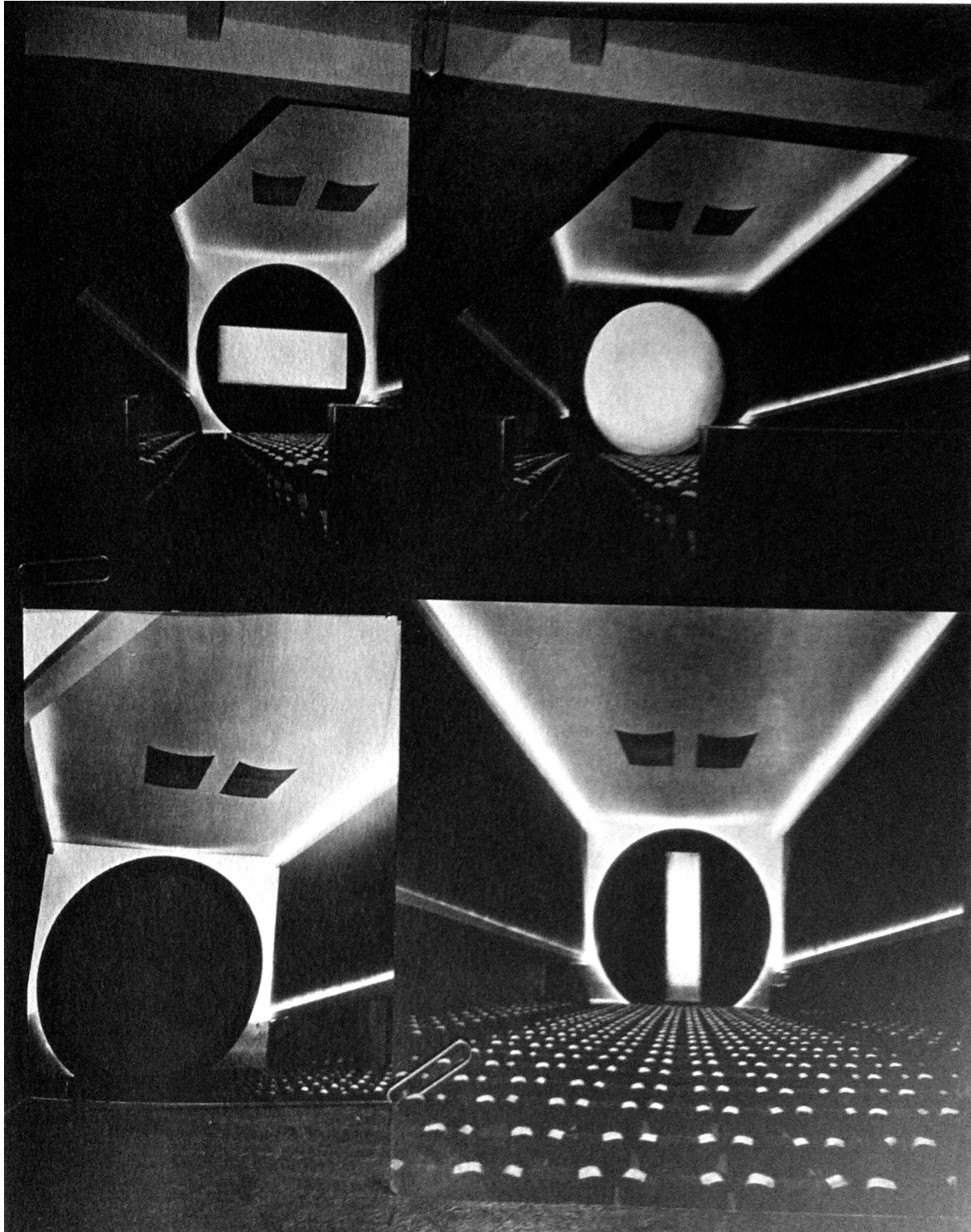
**Figure 9 Different Forms of *Screen-O-Scope*, *Film Arts Guild Cinema*, New York, 1929. Photo Collage
© Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna**

Certainly, the retractable screen in Kiesler's design did away with oppressive curtains, which were essential in conventional theaters; in addition, its "pictographic" symbol created a so-called "Visual-Acoustics" that provoked the spectators' spatial perception, imaging

themselves being inside or in front of a camera. Such an elastic design bestowed not only a new sense of the screen in cinema, but also offered spectators an atypical sense of ritual, with certain unpredictable psychological implications: it was, as if they were not passively seated in front of a movie screen, but rather, invited to look through the lens of a camera – looking in, looking out – and thus creating a roller coaster-like emotion. As all these emotional ups and downs are well hidden, without being perceptible within the milieu surrounded by the darkness, implied in a way, the feeling of being at a "peep-show." As a matter of fact, Kiesler had criticized the peep-show stage in another article; however, such an implication on the psychological level for film viewers was rather a different subject matter in comparison with "a box appended to an assembly room"[58] kind of peep-show. Attention should be drawn here to this "peep-show" motif, for this was not the only time that it was used in Kiesler's design career, as it was one of those various subjects Kiesler shared in common with Marcel Duchamp, a theme we will discuss later. Being aware of film's natural character of gathering the viewers' concentration on a single point of two dimensions, Kiesler's design intends to decrease the invisible gap between the spectators and the screen, and thus to let the spectator "be able to lose himself in an imaginary, endless space even though the screen implies the opposite."[59] In his paper *A Path to Elsewhere: The Transcenium Experience*, Amir H. Ameri has written the following, which provides an intriguing analysis between the real and the imaginary within cinema's physical space, and could contribute to our understanding of Kiesler's spatial organization and perception. One thing is certain: *Film Guild Cinema* was ahead of time.

> In as much as the movie theater insinuates itself, as it has from inception and per force, between the real world outside and the imaginary world unfolding on the screen inside, it inevitably locates and localizes the real and the imaginary at a pronounced physical distance. The modalities of this pronouncement define and articulate the perceived relationship between the real and the imaginary. All call for change in the modalities of this pronouncement may well stem from a perceived change in the established relationship between the real and the imaginary.[60]

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[58] F. Kiesler, "Notes on Improving Theater Design." [1929] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 30.

[59] F. Kiesler, "Building A Cinema Theater." [1929] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 17.

[60] Ameri, "A Path to Elsewhere", 2014, pp. 327-337.

The tedious ornate style of movie palaces of the time was Kiesler's departure point from which he decided that architectural changes shall begin. "First 100 per cent cinema in the world"[61] and "House of Shadow Silence"[62], were the phrases Kiesler's broadcast to the New York moviegoers about the *Film Guild Cinema*. By shifting towards a more reduced, minimized and neutralized architectural aesthetics; by paying attention to functional needs such as better sightlines, recessed color-code, appropriate lighting and innovative virtual screening; and by relying "[…] on an aesthetic of functionalism as stylistic erasure for the sake of a newly intimate relationship between viewer and screen"[63], Kiesler imperceptibly transformed architectural aesthetics, accomplished a new spatial organization, and countenanced the evaluation of form for the *Film Guild Cinema*'s design. Finally, through the interplay of architectural aesthetics, spatial organization and evaluation of form, the spatial perception *Film Guild Cinema* transmitted went far beyond functionalism, and achieved "*Correalism*", Kiesler would later call it.

Finally, at the end of his article, *Building a Cinema Theater*, Kiesler speaks of adding "constructive value to the progress of art"[64], saying that it is time to abandon the cinema's formal inheritance from the European aristocratic theater and create "a better machine, more perfect in operation and more effective in displaying the cinema art"[65]. Such statements were nothing less than the manifestation of an ideological position for turning cinema into a contemporary "Art-(dis)-Play-House". As this is a comprehensive topic linked often with Kiesler's involvement with multitudinous artistic activities and movements during his European period, we will examine and anlyze it separately in the next chapter.

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[61] Horak, *Lovers of Cinema*, 1998, p. 23. Horak cited from: Frederick Kiesler*, 100 Per Cent Cinema.* pp. 35-38; "Four Screen Theatre Being Build Here" In: *New York Time*, December 09, 1928. Sec. II.

[62] "The House of Shadow Silence" appears at *Inaugural Program* for the *Film Arts Guild Cinema*. Front Cover. http://www.amazon.com/Frederick-Kiesler-Cinema-Inaugural-Brochure/dp/B0085EN8YS. (Accessed on: August 26, 2014)

[63] Szczepaniak-Gillece, "In the House", 2012, p. 3.

[64] F. Kiesler, "Building A Cinema Theater." [1929] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, pp. 16-17.

[65] Ibid. p. 17.

III. Key Prequels, Precursors and Predecessors

Until now the focus has been on Kiesler's architectural vision as expressed in the Film Guild Cinema, and, to some extent, its broader context. Now it is time to look further in depth so as to trace its origins and look at certain indispensable precedents elements from Kiesler's European period.

Kiesler's 1920s was assuredly a time of transmutation, from Europe to America, where he settled at the age of thirty-six. As a recognized theater and exhibition designer, who was well connected with the European avant-garde art scene in Vienna, Berlin and Paris, Kiesler expected continued success for himself in America, the "promised land". If the "Roaring 20s" "heralded a dramatic break between America's past and future"[66], Kiesler instead completed a personal crossover by bridging various international avant-garde art movements between the two continents.

The years 1922, 1923 and 1924, according to Kiesler himself "were the most fruitful of his life"[67], and these shall be the years to look at in the "archeological" survey of this study simply because many ideas developed during this period that continued to closely involve him throughout his entire life. Even during the early years in America, between 1926 and 1934, namely, his so called "lost years"[68], Kiesler was able to continuously develop such ideas and thoughts into different projects, although few of those ambitious plans were realized; and he was able to maintain intimate relationships, continue to collaborate with many European artists of the international avant-garde. That being so, it becomes necessary to take a close look at the changes in Kiesler's life and work during his early American years themselves, but also the relevant contextual situation and relationship within which the changes took place. Analysis in this section should cover the discourses of both architecture and media, and range across topics from theater and cinema to mass media, as well as issues related to modernity and mass culture, topics Kiesler was deeply involved with, both before and during his commitment to *Film Guild Cinema's* design procedure.

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[66] Joshua Zeitz, "The Roaring Twenties." 2007. http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/progressive-era-new-era-1900-1929/roaring-twenties (Accessed on: September 10, 2014)
[67] Crighton, "Kiesler's Pursuit of an Idea", 1961, p. 110; Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 41.
[68] Newlin, "Part of the Cosmos", 1989, p. 86.

3.1 From Theater to Cinema

Around the early 1920s, while the great majority of the masses remained socially, culturally and even psychologically still deeply rooted in the nineteenth century, Kiesler found himself among those few progressive artists, architects and designers, who felt the stirring pressures of contemporary life and were keen for fundamental changes.

— *1922–1923: R. U. R. Backdrop*

Mentioned by most scholars, Kiesler's earliest recognized creative design works were in the field of theater stage design. Among these, what possibly remained less known was his innovative application of a cinematographically projected sequence within an electro-mechanized experimental stage set design for Czech playwright Karel Čapek's futuristic science fiction theater piece *R. U. R.* (Rossum's Universal Robots) at the Theater am Kurfürstendamm in Berlin. As a "theatrically effective, prototypal sci-fi"[69] drama, and which introduced for the first time in history the term robot – human-like machines – *R. U. R.* was a smash hit throughout Europe and America in the 1920s. After its premiere in Prague in 1921, the play was soon shown in New York, Berlin, London, Chicago and Los Angeles in succession.

In the Berlin version of *R. U. R.* backdrop, despite Čapek's technologically dystopian point of view of seeing technology as a potential threat, Kiesler contributed a synaesthetic stage set design that included a daring montage of cinematographical back projections, optical devices, neon lighting, mechanical movements, materials and images, as well as synchronized music – techniques that functioned with both accuracy and thoroughness. According to Barbara Lesák, the diverse apparatuses and machine parts compiled by Kiesler were a mixture of painted images together with real devices (Fig. 10. 11.), including "megaphone, seismograph, Tanagra device, iris diaphragm and light bulb. […] According to their functions, the devices could send light signals or sounds, as well as project films or perform optical illusions with mirrors"[70]. Instead of the conventional still-life kind of back stage, this design turned out to be vivid and dynamic, actively engaged into the play.

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[69] Burien, "Čapek, Karel", 2007, pp. 224-225.
[70] Lesák, "Visionary of the European Theater", 1989, p. 40.

Obviously, Kiesler's *R. U. R.* backdrop integrated many different techniques, among those, there were two kinds of film projection techniques: on the lower left section, an adjustable iris membrane was mounted, "through which the audience could see a cinematographically projected sequence showing a tracking shot into a factory space. It was filmed in such a way that the audience had the impression that the filmic space, as Kiesler writes, 'penetrated the auditorium.'"[71] The other projection device Kiesler used for displaying the animated images, was the *Tanagra Apparatus*, a technique that had originated in the puppet theater (it was patented in 1909, though not of Kiesler's invention), and had become widely known for being used in public visual entertainments.[72] Through the application of mirrors, the *Tanagra Apparatus* "created the illusion that the actors were performing offstage, while they appeared in miniature on a screen on the set, much like a closed-circuit television."[73] The *Tanagra* screen was mounted at the center of scaffold-like backdrop panels, which "did not show recorded images but [were] rather like 'television' screen showing images that were channelled through a system of concave mirrors. These animated images were live transmissions, reduced in scale, from a scene that happened in real-time yet in a space separate from the stage."[74] The application of both the *Tanagra apparatus* and cinematographic projections has the same purpose, that is, to borrow film's realism and hence to emphasize the sense of unreality within the theatrical context, as well as to present the impossible simultaneity of spatial absence, and distort those characters who appeared as miniature images off-stage both visually and acoustically in a mechanized fictional world. With just the push of a button, six such projected sequences occurred over forty-five minutes of the play,[75] Kiesler himself later described the *R. U. R.* backdrop design, that remarkable multimedia event as follows:

> The image's stillness has come alive. The backdrop is active, participates in the play. De la nature vivante [sic], means of reanimation are: The movement of lines, glaring colors. Transition of planes into relief forms to the round-sculpture MAN (actor). Dynamic play of colored lights and spotlights onto the backdrop. Rhythmically accentuated, coordinated with speech and

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[71] Robbers, *Modern Architecture*, 2012, p. 197. Robbers cited from: F. Kiesler, "Utilisation du cinéma en 1922, dans R.U.R., de Karel Capek," *Frederick Kiesler: Artiste-architecte*. Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1996, pp. 42-43.

[72] Ibid. Robbers cited from: Marianne Mildenberger, *Film und Projektion auf der Bühne*. Emsdetten: Lechte, 1961. pp. 26-31.

[73] McGuire, "A Movie House in Space and Time", 2007, p. 58.

[74] Robbers, *Modern Architecture*, 2012, p. 197. Robbers cited from: Marianne Mildenberger, *Film und Projektion auf der Bühne*. Emsdetten: Lechte, 1961, pp. 26-31.

[75] Warren, "Friedrich Kiesler and Theatrical Modernism in Vienna", 1994, p. 86.

movement of the actors. SPEED. On the left a large iris lens, 1.10 m in diameter. Material: nickel-plated. The lens opens slowly: The film projector clatters, a film is shown on the circular surface, cranked at light[n]ing speed; the iris closes. On the right, built into the props a Tanagra-apparatus. Flaps open, close. The director controls the waiting room in the mirror image of the apparatus. The keyboard on the desk organizes his orders. The seismograph (in the middle) moves forward intermittently. The turbine control (middle below) rotates incessantly.[76]

Resemblance can be found between *R. U. R.* backdrop's iris lens and *Film Guild Cinema's* "Screen-O-Scope", not only from the visual and mechanical movement aspects, but both projects too apply camera shutter or aperture-like adjustable and kinetic screens, namely; both projects' devices brought a "peep-show" kind of "Visual-Acoustics" into play, namely, to intentionally provoke the spectators' secret voyeuristic desire. Further similarity in both projects is the use of cinematographic projections, film and animated images to create a virtual reality, the desire to transfer "present" space into an ideal realm, for either theatrical or cinematic demands. That is, the iris membrane in *R. U. R.* allows spectators to watch a projected sequence; and in the *Film Guild Cinema* there is an un-utilized continuous projection, which can transform the cinema space into the interior of a medieval Gothic Cathedral or the scene of a crowd, all of it designed to create a total environment and to evoke the spirit of film.

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[76] Robbers, *Modern Architecture*, 2012, p. 196. Robbers cited from: F. Kiesler, "De la nature morte vivante," *Internationale Ausstellung neuer Theatertechnik*, Wien: Würthle, 1924, p. 21. See also Kiesler's description of the "Tanagra Apparat" in F. Kiesler, "Interview with Friedrich Kiesler", *Progressive Architecture* 42, 1961, pp. 105-123.
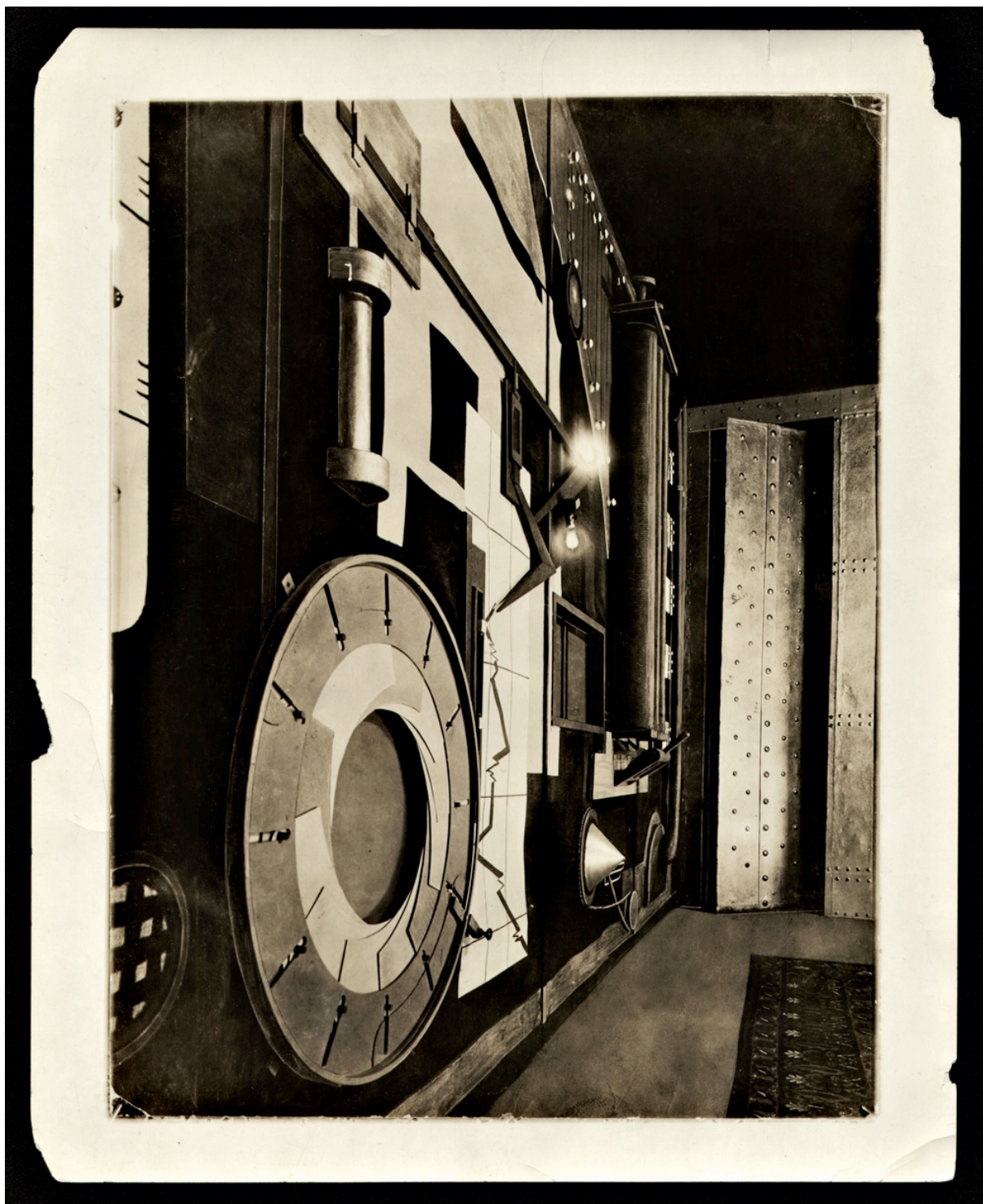
Figure 10 Set for Karel Čapek's _R. U. R._, Theater am Kurfürstendamm, Berlin 1922/1923
© Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna
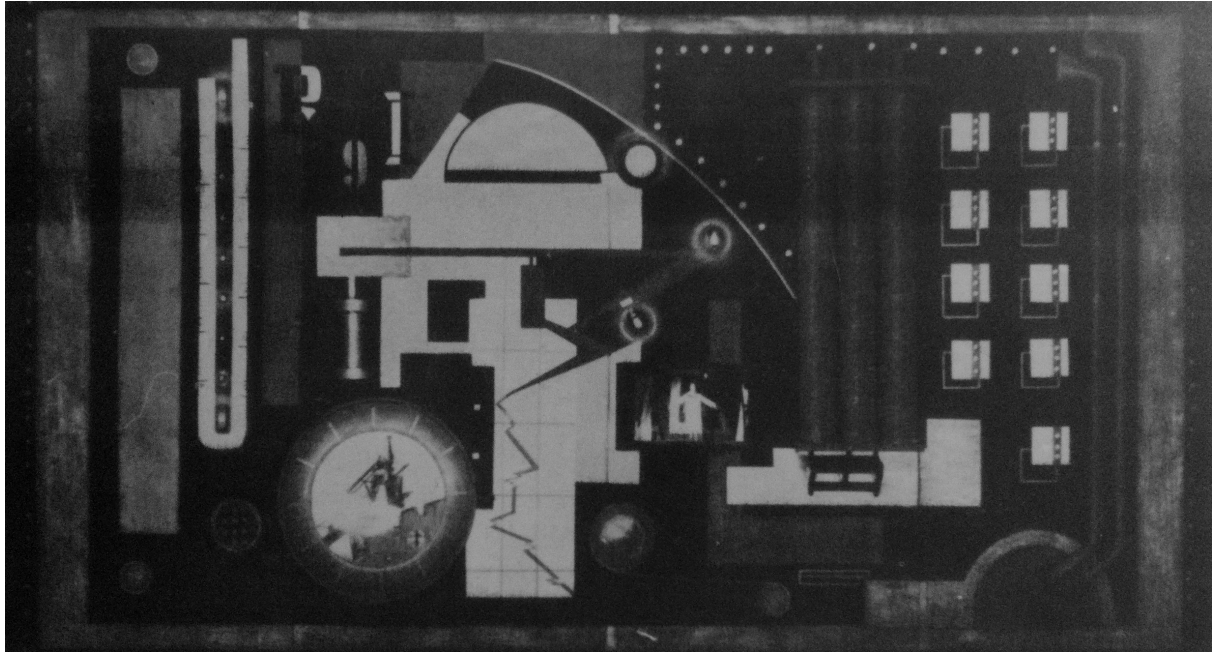
Figure 11 Set for Karel Čapek's *R. U. R.*, Theater am Kurfürstendamm, Berlin 1922/1923
© Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna

Consequence: Exposed to De Stijl and G–Material zur elementaren Gestaltung

Kiesler's innovative "electro-mechanical" backdrop design certainly attracted the attention of the avant-garde, it's photograph soon occupied various international avant-garde presses and journals such as Theo van Doesburg's *De Stijl, 6* (May-June 1923), *Das Querschnitt Buch 1923* (Frankfurt am Main, 1923) and Enrico Prampolini's magazine *Rivista d'Arte Futurista* (nos. 1-2, 1924)[77]. Such enormous publicity ensured Kiesler's passing through the threshold and standing at the frontiers of the international avant-garde. Soon he was associated with various art movements of the time, and among those, *De Stijl* and *G Group,* can be said to be the ones that had the most influence on his works of the next few years. The former group included members such as van Doesburg, Piet Mondrian and Jean Arp, and the latter one involved van Doesburg, Hans Richter and Mies van der Rohe, among many others. Art historian Dieter Bogner says that Kiesler's early New York projects "dealt with artistic and architectonic concepts that had been developed from the European language of form as spoken by the Constructivists and the *De Stijl* artists"[78]. From Bogner's perspective Kiesler herein functioned as an intermediary between European and American artists and architectonic movements. Lisa Phillips shares a similar view and comments below: "For aesthetic inspiration, American abstract artists looked specifically to Picasso, Léger, *Neoplasticism*, Russian and Bauhaus *Constructivism,* and the biomorphic *Surrealism* of Arp

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[77] Lesák, "Visionary of the European Theater", 1989, p. 42. Footnote 4. 5. 6.

[78] Bogner, "Kiesler and The European Avant-[G]arde", 1989, p. 46.

and Miró. Because of Kiesler's firsthand knowledge of these movements and his personal friendship with Léger, Arp and Mondrian, he was seen as a living exemplar of European high culture."[79] If the personal relationships with European avant-gardes were still just "teasers" for the Americans, Kiesler's writings provided then rather more comprehensive scholarship that the Americans needed. According to Phillips, Kiesler's 1929 publication *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display* "was the first encyclopedia of vanguard preoccupations in art, architecture, and design of the previous two decades. Kiesler had assembled all the visual motifs that had graced European avant-garde publications in the 1920s for the presentation to an American audience"[80], and within which, *De Stijl* and *Neoplasticism*, along with other European avant-garde movements such as Cubism, Futurism, Bauhaus, as well as the Machine Aesthetic were introduced one after another.

But to return to spring 1923, Theo van Doesburg, Hans Richter, El Lissitzky, László Moholy-Nagy, and Kurt Schwitters came to the second performance of *R. U. R.* in Berlin, and were truly impressed by Kiesler's film projections. Various studies attest that Dutch painter, architect, designer and writer van Doesburg was the one who met and spoke with Kiesler in person after seeing the play. At that time, van Doesburg was involved with both *De Stijl* and *G Group*. The periodical journal *De Stijl* van Doesburg published served to promote *De Stijl* itself and the group's theories. According to Laura M. McGuire, between 1925 and 1927, Kiesler successively published the following articles on architecture in *De Stijl*: "Ausstellungssystem Leger und Träger" (1925), "Manifest: Vitalbau-Raumstadt-Funktionelle-Architektur" (1925), "Erneuerung des Theaters" (1926/1927) and "L'Architecture Élémentarisée" (1927).[81] Kiesler shared *De Stijl* movement's motives and principles, and actively contributed to *De Stijl* not only while still in Europe but also after settling down in New York in 1926.

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[79] Phillips, "Architect of Endless Innovation", 1989, p. 21.
[80] Ibid. p. 19.
[81] McGuire, "A Movie House in Space and Time", 2007, p. 76. Footnote 3.

3.2 From Theatrical Modernism to Modernity

Along with many other international avant-garde pioneers, including *De Stijl* and *G Group,* Kiesler believed strongly that industrialization and modernization had social, cultural and artistic transformative powers.[82] A good example is the *Space Stage* (Fig. 12.) he showed at the 1924 *International Exhibition of New Theatre Techniques* in Vienna. Lesák argues that Kiesler had already taken his *Space Stage* as a critical structure aimed at "conventional, bourgeois theatre which offered its audiences poor, picture-like copies of experience borrowed from reality. Audiences which had come of age with film and photography no longer wanted to be tricked by the obsolete illusions of this type of theatre."[83] Likewise, commenting on Kiesler's visionary *Endless Theatre* plans shown at the New York *International Theatre Exposition* (1926), which possibly developed around 1925 when he was living in Paris, Lesák again writes, "Kiesler imagined that a kind of metropolis-symphony would be staged in the *Endless Theatre*: he did not want to produce a literary play, but rather to transport a slice of 'civilized' life, with all the dynamics of traffic, mass sport, crowds, noise and so on, into the theater."[84] If through *Space Stage* Kiesler had raised questions to challenge the bourgeois theatre, *Endless Theatre* was a further extension of this. Neither associated with Expressionism's excessive anxiety about the machine age, nor flaunting the glorified technology of the Futurists, Kiesler was rather seeking for an appropriate theater that would be in accord with contemporary time and for the future. To abandon the obsolete and embrace modernity, Kiesler believed strongly 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."[85] Based on his faith that the reality of the mechanical was the basis of civilization in the early twentieth century, Kiesler put his efforts into (re)-installing public spaces, where man and technology could be brought into a relationship that demonstrate a modern sense of theatre art and mirrored the truth of modern life and experience.

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[82] McGuire, "A Movie House in Space and Time", 2007, p. 58.

[83] Lesák, "In Quest of the Ideal Theater", 1989, p. 26.

[84] Ibid. p. 30. Lesák cited from "The Theater of the Future," *World*. February 28, 1928.

[85] Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 45.

Figure 12 *Space Stage* **in Middle Chamber (Today's Mozart-Saal) of Vienna Konzerthaus During Construction or Dismounting, 1924. © Vienna Austrian National Library**

— *1924: Space Stage*

The International Exhibition of New Theatre Techniques in Vienna was the next breath-taking event Kiesler organized after the success of the experimental electro-mechanized kinetic *R. U. R.* backdrop. The exhibition was one of the many events accompanying the *Second Festival of Music and Theatre,* held between 14 September and 19 October 1924. As John Warren describes it, despite the post-war situation, the city's socialist regime was eager to prove that Vienna could again organize a major culture and art festival, in order to declare that, "Austrian's inflation was over and the country was enjoying a brief period of political calm." The festival was organized by Dr. David Josef Bach, "with credits of 100,000 Schillings from the city's reorganized funds", and "its motivation was as much political as artistic".[86] Under such circumstances, Kiesler was put in charge of organizing one of those events — the *International Exhibition of New Theatre Techniques*. He mounted the exhibition, and designed, edited and contributed to the catalogue. This, the "'Katalog Programm Almanach' […] provided a series of key articles on modern theater as well as listing the ninety-five groups of work exhibited,"[87] within which, Fernand Léger's essay *Das Schauspiel: Licht/Farbe/Film* (*The Play: Light, Colour, Film*) was printed. The catalogue was obviously influenced by *De Stijl* graphic principals, with the articles laid out both

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[86] Warren, "Friedrich Kiesler and Theatrical Modernism in Vienna", 1994, p. 83.

[87] Ibid. pp. 84-85.

vertically and horizontally; however, it was claimed to be rather difficult to read. In addition, in the Vienna Konzerthaus, Kiesler also "designed and built a 'constructivist' stage […] where the modern Theatre Techniques and exhibitions of lighting were demonstrated and where readings and even a play were mounted."[88] The *Space Stage* or *Raumbühne* was a "theater-in-the round temporarily erected" in the middle of the venue, "the stage, devoid of scenery, comprised a series of ramps and platforms spiralling in a vertical construct on scaffold supports. It also introduced the concept of tension, which Kiesler relied on to provide a sense of space and motion."[89]

International contributors and exhibitors from Austria, Germany, France, Italy, Russia, Poland, Netherlands and Scandinavia, Japan, Java, New Caledonia, Ceylon and Brazil joined the exhibition with sketches, designs, figurines, manuscripts, models, photographs, dance costumes, masks, musical scores, instruments, etc. Warren listed an outline of the major exhibitions and exhibitors, which included Germany, with presentations by George Grosz, Oskar Schlemmer "designs and figurines for *Das Nusch-nuschi*, the *Triadische Ballett* and Kokoschka's *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen*", El Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, among others, and *Mechanisches Ballett* by Kurt Schmidt. Russia was strongly represented as it was such an inspiration for many theatrical modernists, and the Italians included its Futurist painter, sculptor and scenographer Enrico Prampolini among some twenty other exhibitors. Within the French exhibitons, the most notable works were from Léger, who contributed designs and figurines for *La Création du Monde* and *Skating Rink*; as well, his *Ballet Mécanique* was premiered and screened in Kiesler's *Space Stage*.[90] If we recall the 35mm nitrate print mentioned earlier – which contained hundreds of splices, and was found in Kiesler's Long Island New York "weekend" house, and determined to be an as original print by Jonas Mekas, then the puzzle is merely completed.

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[88] Warren, "Friedrich Kiesler and Theatrical Modernism in Vienna", 1994, p. 83.

[89] Newlin, "Part of the Cosmos", 1989, p. 87. Newlin cited from: Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 34.

[90] Warren, "Friedrich Kiesler and Theatrical Modernism in Vienna", 1994, p. 85.
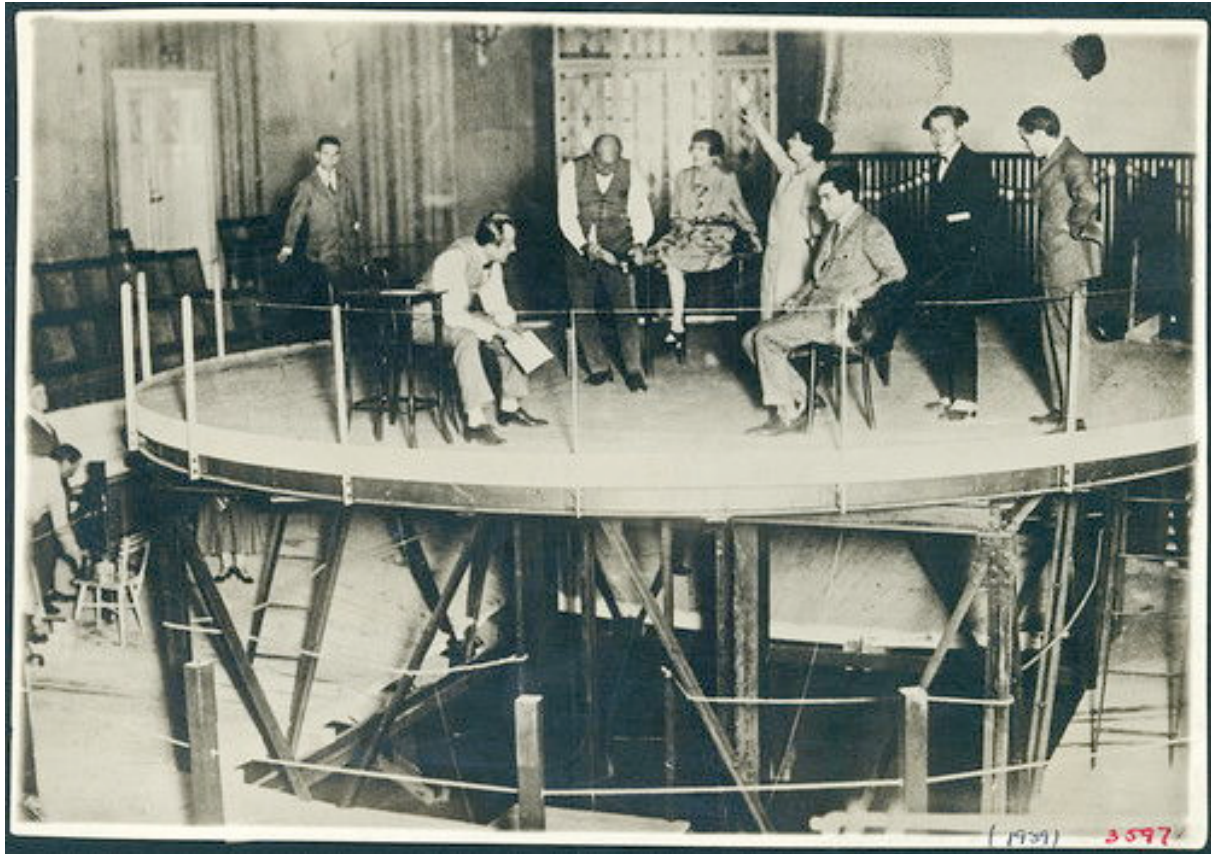
Figure 13 Kiesler and Friends during Rehearsal on the *Space Stage* (*Methusalem* from Iwan Goll),
"*International Exhibition of New Theatre Techniques*" Konzerthaus, Vienna, 1924
© Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna. Courtesy of La Casa Encendida

The *Space Stage* was constructed as a freestanding threelevel structure. According to Kiesler's recall and Lesák's description, there were three ways to reach the stage's upper platform, "the nucleus of actions" as Kiesler put it: 1) Take the ascending spiral ramps to reach the ring of the first level, then continue to climb up two steep iron ladders until reaching the trap-doors opened to the circular upper stage. Such a process is slow and deliberate, but could certainly provide more spatial possibilities for the actors and their performances; 2) a wooden staircase was built, and which gave direct access to the stage's upper level; and, 3) through a lift one could reach the stage's first level, then via the iron ladder, the second. This is the quickest and most direct way to approach the upper stage.[91] While in Kiesler's own version, there was a built-in open elevator running through the center of the *Space Stage*, with which even the stage's ground floor and top levels were connected.[92] The three-tiered experimental *Space Stage* or *Raumbühne* encouraged motion in all directions, including movements in vertical, horizontal, radial and centripetal directions. Several

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[91] Lesák, "In Quest of the Ideal Theater", 1989, p. 26.
[92] F. Kiesler, "Art and Architecture" [1946] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 49.

performance spaces stereoscopically staggered on top of each other, allowed simultaneous performances to occur on the same stage, side by side. "[…] particular tectonics demanded a so-called drama of movement, a new performance scenario for mechanical, abstract events of action"[93] were expected to match with the *Space Stage*. A dynamic program of movement was thus imposed on the dancers and actors through the tensions condensed within the *Space Stage*. This proved to be entirely favorable for the so-called "motion drama", a wordless theater of movement, considered the most progressive type of theater of the time.[94] The *Space Stage* was used, for example, for dramatic readings and performance of Paul Frischauer's *Im Dunkel*, among others.[95]

The other important feature of the *Space Stage* was that the stage itself actively participated in the play. The set-up brought the actors into the center of the stage, surrounded by the spectators, "drew observers into the action in order to connect them with the three-dimensional movement of the performance and allow the actor to develop a closer relationship with their audience"[96], rather than the conventional theatrical opposition between actor and spectator; thus, the once insurmountable distance was drawn closer here, or even practically dissolved. With this new posture, the *Space Stage* connected the spectators and the play more intimately, physically, emotionally, as well as psychologically; it included rather than excluded the spectators. The proscenium stage, which traditionally the actors' reserved and holy "private space" for their "public display" to the mass, now turned into a "public space" or "semi-public space" in Kiesler's *Space Stage*. Although minimum limitations were still set so as to distinguish the professional performers from the audience, in general, this shifting of boundaries encouraged more audience participation and socializing. This Greek amphitheatre-like spatial arrangement was non-hierarchical and unpredictable and this equilibrium, represented a neo-democratic notion of theatre. Through the *Space Stage*, Kiesler expressed his vision for the future stage, it "became a symbol for the revolutionary movement in Constructivist theater directed against the traditional proscenium stage."[97] This theater proposed a critical confrontation with the conventional, bourgeois way of thinking, and sought to overcome the barriers set by social, cultural traditions imposed by those

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[93] Lesák, "Visionary of the European Theater", 1989, p. 39.

[94] Lesák, "In Quest of the Ideal Theater", 1989, p. 26.

[95] Warren, "Friedrich Kiesler and Theatrical Modernism in Vienna", 1994, p. 89.

[96] McGuire, "A Movie House in Space and Time", 2007, p. 62; Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 29.

[97] Lesák, "Visionary of the European Theater", 1989, p. 39.

institutions. Such circumstances went far beyond the themes of theatre's formal transmutation, but rather, implanted modern motifs within contemporary circumstances. In this regard, doubtless Kiesler belongs to that generation of artists, who believed they were at the point of departure for an epoch of great transformation, and "his project is comparable to the baroque *theatrum mundi*, an extravagant vision of the seventeenth century which saw the world as theatre and the theatre as the world."[98] Again, if to reflect on *De Stijl's* motif as Van Doesburg wrote in its second volume: "Art and life are one, art and life are both expressions of truth"[99], shared motif once again appears.

Recalling an altercation with Alfred Kerr in 1922, Kiesler had already attacked the limitations and inadequacies of the proscenium stage (Guckkastenbühne) in his "*Débâcle des Theaters – Die Gesetze der G.-K.-Bühne*" (*Theatrical Debacle – the Rules of the Proscenium Stage*). The 1924 *Space Stage*, therefore can be seen as a further development into physical reality meant to demonstrate his strong dissatisfaction with the theatrical form of his time. In the same strain, Kiesler argued in *Building a Cinema Theatre* (1929), for the transformation of motion picture cinema so as to correspond with its fundamental nature of being "international" and "the most ultra-dramatic of any art"[100]. Kiesler was seeking a theatre, which he thought would be appropriate for the spirit of the twentieth century.[101] This attempt to transform modern life began with the backdrop of *R. U. R.*, continued with the *Space Stage*, and was to be reactivated in his *Film Guild Cinema*.

Unsurprisingly, an unprecedented debate already lay ahead for this avant-garde spiral stage construction upon its completion. Among the many critics, the most ruthless was Karl Kraus, the Austrian journalist, satirist, poet and playwright who stood for a "typical" point of view, accusing Kiesler of having excessively borrowed some typical forms of that time, for instance, from the boxing ring and modern road construction ("serpentine paths")[102]; also, Anton Kuh's more witty teasing compared the *Space Stage* with a roller coaster.[103] Along with other metaphors from the circus, critics evoked images of a pugilistic ambience, mingled

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[98] Lesák, "In Quest of the Ideal Theater", 1989, p. 30.

[99] Safran, "In the shadow of Bucephalus", 1989, p. 10.

[100] F. Kiesler, "Building a Cinema Theater." [1929] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 16.

[101] Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 45.

[102] Lesák, "Visionary of the European Theater", 1989, p. 39. Originally from: Karl Kraus, "Serpentinengedankengänge," Die Fackel, nos. 668-75, December 1924, p. 39.

[103] Ibid. Originally from: Anton Kuh, "Das Drama auf der Rutschbahn," *Prager Tagblatt*, October 05, 1925. p. 11.

with the clamour of road traffic, the noise of the amusement park. Through such vivid metaphors, both Kraus and Kuh presented a chaotic and messy imaginary of Kiesler's *Space Stage*. A caricature titled *Die Raumbühne oder: A so a Hetz war no net da*, illustrated in *Der Götz von Berlichingen* (Fig. 14.), might be the perfect visual aid to demonstrate Kraus and Kuh's dazzling analogies. Van Doesburg, however, contributed an article to the *Neues Wiener Journal* (31 October 1924), in which he celebrated the positive aspects of the exhibition, together with another article from *Neue Freie Presse* (24 September 1924)[104] backing Kiesler up in response to the satirical critics from the mainstream press. Most important of all, the Austrian architect and theorist Adolf Loos (1870-1933), who was also often controversial for both his radical writings and polemical buildings, rather appreciated the avant-garde spirit of *Space Stage*. Whether or not Loos might have recognized his own Raumplan concepts in the interlocking spatial levels of Kiesler's *Raumbühne* (*Space Stage*), he wrote for the New York *International Theatre Exposition's* catalogue (1926): "From the circus form F. Kiesler has created the '*Space Stage*,' which carries in itself the seeds of a revolution in staging methods."[105]

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[104] Warren, "Friedrich Kiesler and Theatrical Modernism in Vienna", 1994, p. 89.

[105] Lesák, "Visionary of the European Theater", 1989, p. 40. Originally from: Adolf Loos, "The Theater," in *International Theatre Exposition*, exhibition catalogue, New York: Steinway Hall, 1926, pp. 6-7.

Figure 14 Caricature *Die Raumbühne oder: A so a Hetz war no net da*
In: *Der Götz von Berlichingen, Eine lustige Streitschrift gegen Alle* [Wien]
Nr. 40, 3. 10. 1924 Wienbibliothek im Rathaus, Druckschriftensammlung
© Ladislaus Tuszynski

Consequences: Association with Modernity and Secession with Ornament

Kiesler and his avant-garde artist companions were seeking changes in the theatre, cinema, literature, art, architecture. The reality they perceived, the observation that mechanics and technology had become the basis of civilization in the early twentieth century, inspired them to reflect these new conditions and, consequently, to build a more "civilized" modern society. Although such an ideology was responded to only within the small art scene at first, Kiesler and his associates were always eager and tempted to incorporate the masses, as he had already tried in his experimental *Space Stage*.

An almost identical idea can be found in the design of *Film Guild Cinema* if we recall our earlier analysis in relation to the cinema's architectural design. Kiesler referred to *Film Guild Cinema* as a new typology of movie cinema, starting with stepping away from ornament as a fundamental measure. Such a notion can be found in G's *Elementare Gestaltung:* "no energy must be wasted on superfluous matter and all ornament must be eliminated".[106] Or the reference could be traced back even much earlier to Adolf Loos, around early 1910s. After a three-year stay in the United States (1893-1896), and influenced by early modernism, Loos brought back to Vienna with him a remark of Louis Sullivan's: "It could only benefit us if for a time we were to abandon ornament and concentrate entirely on the erection of buildings that were finely shaped and charming in their sobriety".[107] In his famous manifesto *Ornament and Crime* (1908), which marked his own "secession" from the Vienna Secession, Loos claimed: "The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament. […] In a highly productive nation ornament is no longer a natural product of its culture, and therefore represents backwardness or even a degenerative tendency." Loos also recognized that "as ornament is no longer organically related to our culture, it is also no longer the expression of our culture. The ornament that is produced today bears no relation to us, or to any other human or the world at large. It has no potential for development. […] Modern ornament has no parents and no progeny, no past and no future."[108] For Loos, ornament had become an encumbrance on cultural evolution, and did not match with modern times. It had become a

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[106] Trop, "The Vitality of Form", 2013, p. 34.

[107] Loos, "Ornament and Crime", 1908, p. 19-24. http://www2.gwu.edu/~art/Temporary_SL/177/pdfs/Loos.pdf (Accessed on: January 09, 2015)

[108] Loos, "Excerpts from Ornament and Crime", 1908, pp. 1-5. http://www.mariabuszek.com/kcai/Design%20History/Design_readings/LoosOrnamentCrime.pdf (Accessed on: January 09, 2015)

blind alley. And finally, wrote Loos, "Freedom from ornament is a sign of spiritual strength."[109]

Out of his radical aesthetic purism, Loos attacked *Art Nouveau,* the *German Werkbund* and *Vienna Secession*, and made himself the zealous foe of these architecture movements. But he was a friend, proponent and role model of Kiesler's. Similar to Loos, Kiesler felt the imperative of transmutation within contemporary life and modern society. According to Lisa Phillips, Kiesler claimed in several versions of his curriculum vitae that he had collaborated with Loos in 1920 on a slum-cleaning project in Vienna. Although no corroborating evidence has been found,[110] clearly Kiesler was well aware of the self-help initiative grassroots Settlement Movement, which led to the establishment in 1921 of a Municipal Settlement Office, to which Loos assumed office as it's architectural director.[111] Further connections and interactions between Kiesler and Loos could also be found. Warren noted that in the early 1920s, it was under Loos' encouragement that Kiesler made his "temporary emigration" to Berlin, one of the most noteworthy rendezvous for the international avant-garde, where the enormous publicity that resulted from his *R. U. R.* stage design ensured Kiesler's passing through the threshold and standing at the frontier of the international avant-garde. Association with *De Stijl* and *G Group* made him friends with many international avant-garde artists, architects, designers and experimental filmmakers such as Theo van Doesburg, Hans Richter, El Lissitzky, László Moholy Nagy, Mies van der Rohe and many others. For the 1925 Paris *L'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, according to a manuscript of Kiesler's, "Loos, brilliant pacemaker, came to my rescue in defending Josef Hoffmann, his life long adversary who, after commissioning me to demonstrate a *City-in-Space* as part of the official Austrian exhibition, was attacked by petit-bourgeois Austrian parliament members for having spent tax money on suspended houses";[112] Again, the article of support Loos wrote for the Vienna *International Exhibition of New Theatre Techniques,* championing the aesthetic of the circus and its elementary circular form led Kiesler to his next decisive event, the *International Theatre Exposition* in

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[109] Loos, "Ornament and Crime", 1908, p. 19-24. http://www2.gwu.edu/~art/Temporary_SL/177/pdfs/Loos.pdf (Accessed on: January 09, 2015)

[110] Phillips, "Architect of Endless Innovation", 1989, p. 14. According to footnote 5, Kiesler's curriculum vitae can be found at the Library of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C. pp. 13-14.

[111] http://www.werkbundsiedlung-wien.at/en/background/the-vienna-settlement-movement/ (Accessed on: January 10, 2015)

[112] Colomina, "Space House", 2000, p. 68. Endnote 26.

New York in 1926. According to Yehuda Safran, it was through Loos' client Tristan Tzara, the French avant-garde performance artist and key figure of early Dadaism, and who had commissioned Loos in 1925 for a house, that Kiesler was introduced in Paris to Jane Heap, editor of the progressive journal *Little Review*. Heap invited Kiesler to re-create his European visionary exhibitions in New York.[113] Kiesler was equipped with copies of experimental films by two pioneers of abstract film, Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling for the trip.[114] Together with Jane Heap and others, Kiesler was among the committee members of Film Guild's distribution organization *Film Associates, Inc.,* an advisory council to choose films to be presented first in New York and then to be distributed to other cities. Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* soon completed its New York premiere, quite possibly under Kiesler's promotion, a matter we will look into in the next chapter.

— *1925: City-in-Space*

Within the framework of the 1925 Paris *L'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, Kiesler created his *City-in-Space* (Fig. 15.), a project commissioned by Josef Hoffmann for the *Austrian Set and Theater Section*, this "walk through model of a utopian city, the climax of his European career, consisted of a suspended framework of intersecting panels"[115] above the ground, hanging from the ceiling on steel girders. This was the direct precursor to the trip he would recreate in America at the *International Theatre Exposition* in New York.

In Vienna in 1924 Kiesler translated *De Stijl's* artistic impulses, namely, two-dimensional arrangements into flexible spatial and suspension systems, meticulously planned spatial organization, specifically, the so-called *L+T* installation system (Leger und Träger Ausstellungssystem). Again with a similar principle as the *L+T* installation system, Kiesler conceived a spatial arrangement for "the two- and three-dimensional objects, 12 to 15 feet high and painted red, white, and black, [which] was the largest *De Stijl* environment of the twenties."[116] *City-in-Space* could be considered a further development of the *L+T* installation system, but even more comprehensive and sophisticated, larger in scale. Constructed with panels and beams, suspended in space with no additional support elements, it became a

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[113] Safran, "In the Shadow of Bucephalus", 1989, p. 14.

[114] Ibid. p. 6.

[115] Phillips, "Architect of Endless Innovation", 1989, p. 13.

[116] Bogner, "Kiesler and The European Avant-[G]arde", 1989, p. 50.

"system of tension in open space"[117]. Had observed *De Stijl*'s artistic principles of organizations, commented Van Doesburg, "[…] have realized that which we [*De Stijl*] dreamed could one day be accomplished."[118] Kiesler's visionary, architectonic concept, the blueprint for a utopian mega-city in *De Stijl's* artists view became then a *Neoplastic* spatial realization. According to Bogner, *City-in-Space,* approximately 22x10x8 meters in size, "designated the three-dimensional possibility of motion in the spherical space of the *Space Stage* as the most important criterion of a future theater."[119] Thus, Kiesler, who had always managed to transform the theoretical visionary utopian conceptions of the Constructivist avant-gardes (Russian *Constructivism,* Dutch *Neoplasticism* and *Elementarism,* and the German Bauhaus) into large construction works, from *Space Stage* to *City-in-Space,* naturally interconnected these within his own projects development.

The potential of offering spectators three-dimensional movement with flexible and infinite possibilities was one of the distinguishing features *City-in-Space* shared with the *Space Stage*, and which laid the foundation for Kiesler's later so-called *Time-Space-Architecture*; "[…] the visualization of a general principle that was not limited functionally to a specific purpose but open to the most manifold, diverse uses"[120]. This was also then an important feature that played a decisive role in the design of the "Screen-O-Scope" and the "Project-O-Scope" in his *Film Guild Cinema*.

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[117] Bogner, "Kiesler and The European Avant-[G]arde", 1989, p. 48.
[118] Ibid. p. 49.
[119] Ibid. p. 48.
[120] Ibid. p. 50.
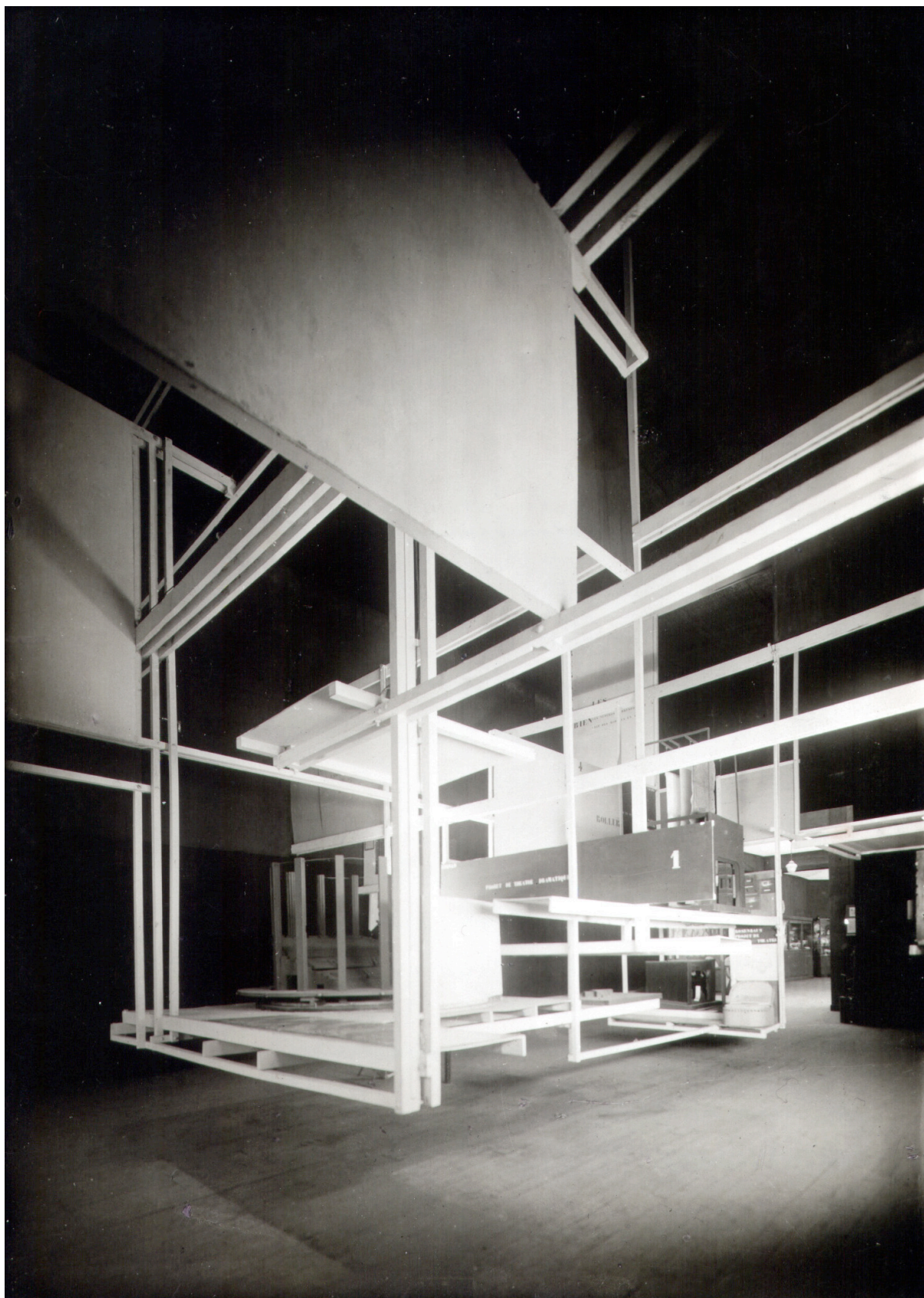
Figure 15 *City in Space* (*Raumstadt*)**, Grand Palais, Paris, 1925**
L'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes
© Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna

The impact of Kiesler's association with *De Stijl* can be distinctly noticed in *Film Guild Cinema*. Reviewing the lobby for instance, in McGuire's words, the "rectilinear patterns on the walls extended down to merge with the cement floor painted with red, gray, black and white rectangles […]".[121] From a visual perspective it links strongly to the Dutch artist Piet Mondrian's *Neoplasticism*, which virtually restricted itself to a grid of black vertical and horizontal lines, areas of the three primary colours, and the "noncolors" black, white and gray side by side on a white background; consequently, the black horizontal and vertical lines organize themselves into rather different, non-hierarchical, unpredictable and balanced relationships. The resemblance between *Film Guild Cinema* and the principles of *Neoplasticism,* both using composition to present a dynamic balance should be clear. It is as if the interior of *Film Guild Cinema* represents a Mondrian painting in three-dimensions, "in which the internal was externalized and the external internalized." [122] (Fig. 16. 17.)

Figure 16 Lobby Ceiling of *Film Guild Cinema*, New York, 1929 © Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna Photo: Luks

We should bear in mind that the years between 1917 and 1925 was the time that Mondrian was associated with the international *De Stijl* movement. It must have been an amazing encounter for Mondrian during his visit to the *L'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris in 1925 to find himself suddenly standing in front of a walk-in three-dimensional work that resembled
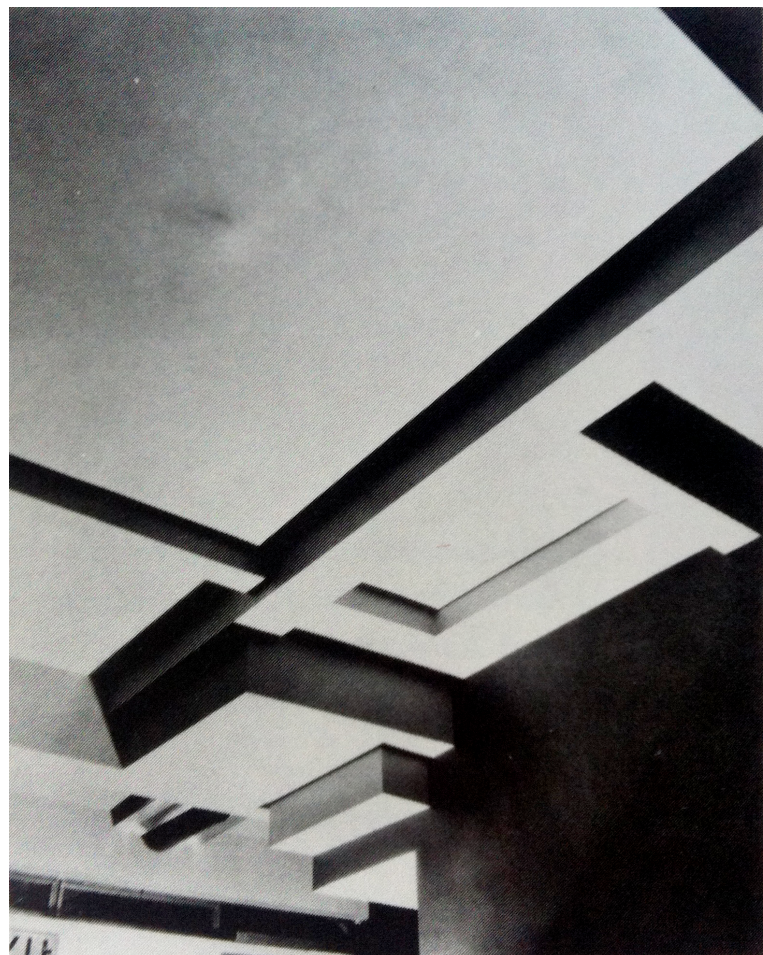
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[121] McGuire, "A Movie House in Space and Time", 2007, p. 49.

[122] The text is from MOMA's introduction to Piet Mondrian, quoted originally from Oxford University Press, 2009. http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist_id=4057#top (Accessed on: October 27, 2014)

one of his own paintings while visiting Kiesler's *City-in-Space*. Sharing both van Doesburg's *Elementarism* and Mondrian's *Neoplasticism*, Kiesler intended to create "architectonic axioms for the polydimensional possibilities of human movement in a flexible, infinite space"[123], which Alfred H. Barr, Jr. later described as "technically and imaginatively the boldest creation in the *De Stijl* tradition."[124]

Figure 17 Foyer of *Film Guild Cinema*, New York, 1929
© Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna
Photo: Worsinger

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[123] Bogner, "Kiesler and The European Avant-[G]arde", 1989, p. 48.
[124] Phillips, "Architect of Endless Innovation", 1989, p. 13. Phillips, cited form Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Cubism and Abstract Art*, Exhibition Catalogue. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1936, p. 144.

Figure 18 Exterior of *Film Guild Cinema*, New York, 1929
© Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna
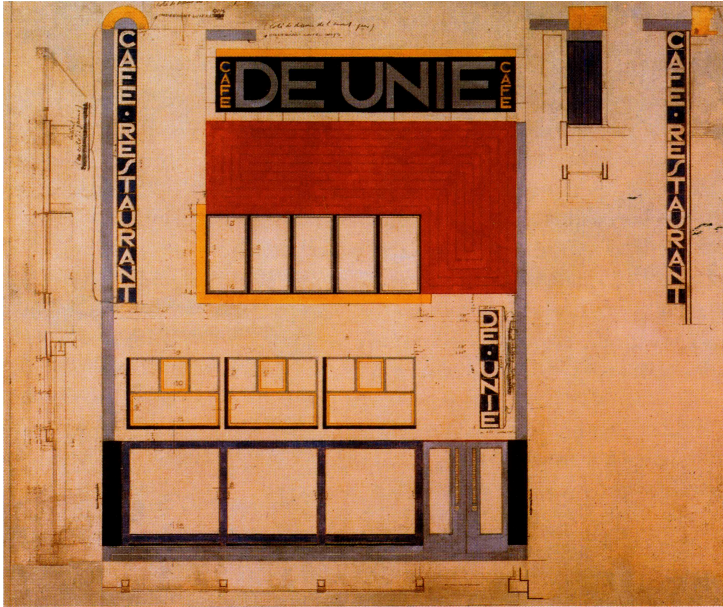
Figure 19 J. J. P. Oud (1890-1963), Gouache on Paper
Café De Unie, **Rotterdam, 1924-1925**

Figure 20 J. J. P. Oud (1890-1963), Photo
Café De Unie, **Rotterdam, 1924-1925**

Although the exterior of *Film Guild Cinema* was predominantly black (Fig. 18.), the composition of the façade was reminiscent rather of the *Café De Unie* in Rotterdam, designed by another prominent *De Stijl* member, Dutch architect Jacobus Johannes Pieter Oud (1890-1963). An architectural drawing of the elevation and a photograph (Fig. 19. 20.) show that *Café De Unie* was composed with a color organization of primarily red, blue, yellow and white; *De Stijl's* signature-like asymmetrical and orthogonal layouts, and straight vertical and horizontal lines. To make the comparison with *Film Guild Cinema's* exterior, McGuire cites Paul Overy: "The white lines superimposed over the black façade of the Guild, with windows of different dimensions, conform precisely to each of the *De Stijl* principles of organization; it is a composition of basic 'elements,' utilizing both asymmetry and orthogonals"[125]. Both façades were abstract, rational, effective and laconic. The only difference was that *Café De Unie* applied colors, while *Film Guild Cinema* remained in black and white tones. Does the black and white refer again to the cinema's motion picture-like interior design? Does the black and white echo for Kiesler a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk,* a fusion of architecture and film as one entity? This is certainly within the realms of possibility. As an active member of the international *De Stijl* movement, Kiesler was involved with and influenced by the Dutch Neoplasticists. In fact, he had certainly adopted features of *De Stijl's* style, and shared the artistic principles and design philosophy, at least for *Film Guild Cinema* project.

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[125] McGuire, "A Movie House in Space and Time", 2007, p. 65. Footnote 3. McGuire cited from Paul Overy, *De Stijl* 1969; London, 1991, p. 11. Overy posits these characteristics as those most commonly presented in *De Stijl* magazine, and in the works of its founders.

If Kiesler's involvement with *De Stijl* movement had an impact mainly on his architectural design, his encounter with *G Group*, which runs parallel with his involvement with *De Stijl* and its members, was more related to the avant-gardes that were fascinated by the new medium of cinema, and that considered film as derivative of existing art forms (the theater, for instance), yet hoped to take it further so as to discover and establish its uniqueness.

Berlin of the 1920s' was one of the most noteworthy places of rendezvous for the international avant-garde. Regardless of nation, language, culture or artistic discipline, artists collaborated in alliances or found themselves in mutual opposition, turn and turn about, often ephemeral, being frenemy. *G Group* was possibly among one of those most important outcomes of such fickle turbulence. The group produced a journal, *G–Material zur elementaren Gestaltung.* (Fig. 21.) Started as newspaper-like large folded sheet of just four pages, the Group produced only five issues between 1923 and 1926, rather non-periodical. From June 1924, the third issue of the journal turned into a more conventional magazine. It was primarily interested in modern constructive form, which included architecture, aeroplanes, cars and city planning; they subsequently also added film and photomontage. Later issues combined both trends, and served "as a platform for developing an alternative idea of cinema".[126] "In July 1923, the first issue offered programmatic statements by its key figures, Hans Richter, Theo van Doesburg, El Lissitzky, Raoul Hausmann, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Werner Gräff. […] The principles of this new design orientation are enunciated on the journal's first page: economy, order, regularity and especially total control of materials and process."[127] The *G Group* observed how modern technologies were permeating the world, and it was keen to develop a new meaningful language in response. Meanwhile, cinema, as a new technology, was found to be the perfect medium towards this new dimension, as many of the key G Group members agreed. Although the turbulent situation of collaboration and separation, alliance and opposition at the time made it fairly difficult to state with final clarity who actually belonged to the *G Group*, who actively took the lead, and who was just a passive associate, that Kiesler was among the contributors has been confirmed by both Doesburg and Gräff.

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[126] Robbers, *Modern Architecture*, 2012, p. 13.
[127] Mertins/Jennings, "Introduction", 2010, p. 4.
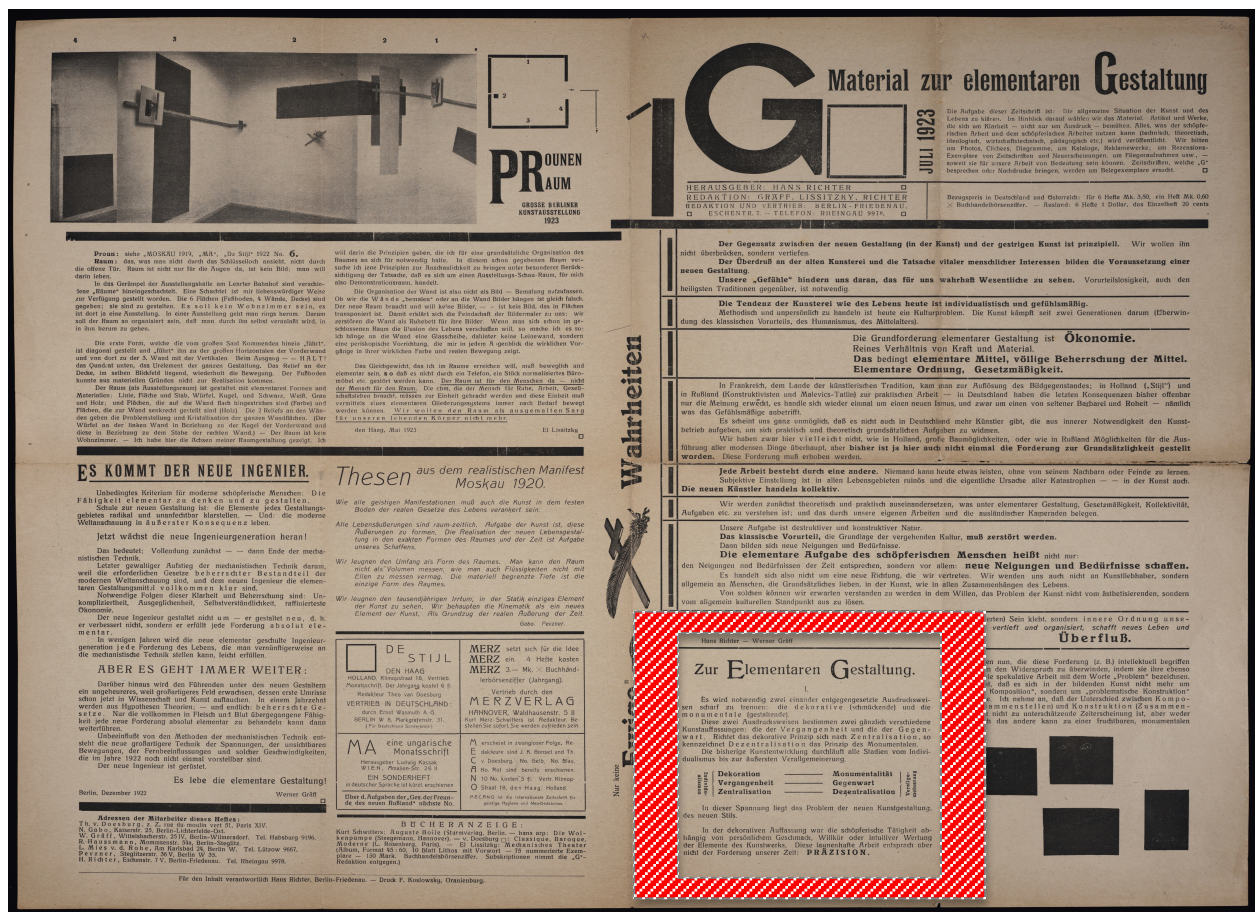
Figure 21 *G–Material zur Elementaren Gestaltung,* July 1923. Page 1.
© Monoskop.org

In the initial issue, central figures of the editorial board members made statements about *Elementare Gestaltung*. They distinguished between decoration and monumentality, past and present, centralization and decentralization.[128] They considered the new art form and the new styles as possessing the power of transmutation they were seeking, and which lay within the tensions between those contradictions. (Fig. 22.) Different statements were given for what the "G" in their name meant, but there seems to have been common agreement that it stood for *Gestaltung.* The word *Gestalt* in German means "form", "shape", "build", and *Gestalten* could be translated as "shaping", "forming" or "designing". According to Mies' own statement, it is rather "a different note from the constructivist belief in the importance of the 'designed' object – whether airplane or poem – as the organizing force of everyday life."[129] Such thinking can be found in Kiesler's writings from around this period as well, and this

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[128] "Zur Elementaren Gestaltung." In: *G–Material zur elementaren Gestaltung*, July 1923. p. 1. http://www.monoskop.org/File:G_Material_zur_elementaren_Gestaltung_1_Jul_1923.pdf (Accessed on: November 11, 2014)

[129] Rykwert, *The Dancing Column*, 1998, p. 518.

was, of course, not just by coincidence. As one of the direct results of his association with *G Group,* Kiesler would later arrive with copies of experimental films by Richter and Eggeling for the 1926 *International Theatre Exposition* in New York.

Zur Elementaren Gestaltung.

I.

Es wird notwendig zwei einander entgegengesetzte Ausdrucksweisen scharf zu trennen: die d e k o r a t i v e (schmückende) und die m o n u m e n t a l e (gestaltende).

Diese zwei Ausdrucksweisen bestimmen zwei gänzlich verschiedene Kunstauffassungen: die der V e r g a n g e n h e i t und die der G e g e n - w a r t . Richtet das dekorative Prinzip sich nach Z e n t r a l i s a t i o n , so kennzeichnet D e z e n t r a l i s a t i o n das Prinzip des Monumentalen.

Die bisherige Kunstentwicklung durchläuft alle Stadien vom Individualismus bis zur äußersten Verallgemeinerung.

Individu-alismus	Dekoration	——— Monumentalität	Verallge-meinerung
	Vergangenheit	——— Gegenwart	
	Zentralisation	——— Dezentralisation	

In dieser Spannung liegt das Problem der neuen Kunstgestaltung, des neuen Stils.

In der dekorativen Auffassung war die schöpferische Tätigkeit abhängig von persönlichem Geschmack, Willkür oder intuitiver Wertung der Elemente des Kunstwerks. Diese launenhafte Arbeit entsprach aber nicht der Forderung unserer Zeit: **P R Ä Z I S I O N .**

Figure 22 *G–Material zur Elementaren Gestaltung,* July 1923. Page 1. Enlarged Detail.
© Monoskop.org

3.3 From Contemporary Art to Mass Culture

— 1926 – 1928: Art Applied to Display

Arriving in New York on a cold January day in 1926, and greeted as an internationally acclaimed theater architect and designer, Kiesler recreated the *International Theatre Exposition* – one of the earliest introductions of radical stage ideas – to the Americans, including "Constructivist, Cubist, Futurist, and Bauhaus artist-designers such as [Pablo] Picasso, Oskar Schlemmer, Enrico Prampolini, El Lissitzky, and V. E. Meyerhold," as well as Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*, together with Kiesler's own design for "an egg-shaped *Endless Theater*"[130]. The Exposition was called by *the New Yorker* "a woeful hodge-podge, brain taxing scrambled mess..."[131]. In this manner Kiesler began his grandiose dreams of an American adventure. In letter to Herbert Ihering, Kiesler says that he had been struggling with all kinds of projects before he finally got the major contract to build *Film Guild Cinema* for Film Art Guild in 1928. How did Kiesler experience his early encounter with America? What did he actually do in those transitional years between 1926 and 1928?

Having come from Europe, which "had lost its leadership in practically everything except art" as a result of the World War I, Kiesler, observed that America rather "had gained leadership in everything except art".[132] For him, in Europe, people were concerned more with personal experiments in art, as it were, *l'art pour l'art* (art for art's sake), while in America, "*Contemporary art reaches the masses through the store.*"[133] He noticed that although the museums and galleries of various sizes had tried but failed to make contemporary art appreciated by the majority of the American public, powerless, it was still restricted to small circles of art lovers in America. However, Kiesler soon discovered that the department store functioned as a "true introducer of modernism to the public at large"[134], through commerce, in fashions, show windows, store decoration and expositions, and finally through interior decoration for the home – the strongest and weakest fortress of the American public. It "came

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[130] Phillips, "Architect of Endless Innovation", 1989, p. 14.

[131] Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 43. Held cited from: *"The Art Galleries", The New Yorker*. March 13, 1926.

[132] F. Kiesler, "America Adopts and Adapts the New Art in Industry." [1929] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 10.

[133] Ibid. Italics in original.

[134] Ibid.

into closest contact with the stream of the mass" [135], popularized modernism and contemporary art. From such a perspective, "the department store acted as the interpreter for the populace of a new spirit in art,"[136] and *the new art is for the masses*."[137] Thanks to the creative power of machine mass production instead of a sort of medieval handicraft system, Kiesler foresaw an adaptation and rebirth of art for the American mass, machine-made and functioning on a large scale.[138]

After the New York *International Theatre Exposition* Kiesler quickly gained several significant theater design projects; unfortunately, financial support for his major projects evaporated equally swiftly due to political and economic reasons. Among these projects, the most dramatic scenery for Kiesler to enrich his experience of the realities of American politics was the commission of a theater in Brooklyn Heights, from Ralph Jonas, president of the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce. The project had been a part of the campaign strategy to attract the Brooklyn voters for the Democratic Party's candidate Governor Alfred Emanuel "Al" Smith. Kiesler planned "for the first time in America, […] 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."[139] The project turned out to be meaningless when "Al" Smith failed to be elected President of the United States.[140] The stock market crash of 1929 eliminated another project's building funds overnight. This was the Universal Theatre at Woodstock, which Kiesler won in competition against Frank Lloyd Wright, the great American architect.[141] Lack of sufficient income during the first years after his arrival in the United States, caused Kiesler to seek employment in commercial art, including a few show windows; among these, the most fully known was his redesign of the windows of Saks Fifth Avenue. Instead of decorating the show windows in a conventional manner with expensive Tudorish wood panels, he invented an entirely new system of displaying merchandise and that resolved both practical and artistic considerations, by making the silent windows fulfil their duty,

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[135] F. Kiesler, "America Adopts and Adapts the New Art in Industry." [1929] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, p. 12.

[136] Ibid. p. 11.

[137] Ibid. p. 12.

[138] Ibid.

[139] No author noted, "Design's Bad Boy", 1947, p. 89; Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 49.

[140] Phillips, "Architect of Endless Innovation", 1989, p. 14. Certain detailed information also sourced from: Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 49.

[141] Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 50.

namely, "To talk. To demonstrate. To explain. In short: to sell."[142] In Saks' case, Kiesler "set the window-dressing world on its 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."[143] Although Saks originally planned to change the windows after two or three weeks, due to the flexibility provided by the permanent architectural background, the show windows remained in place for the next nine years.

In 1930, Kiesler brought out his first publication, *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display*. The book was considered to be the first encyclopedic collection aimed at Americans of European vanguard preoccupations in art, architecture, and design of the previous two decades. Worthy of our contemporary attention is the fact that "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,"[144] another symptom of Kiesler's awareness of applying mass media to display art and mass culture. Kiesler had long been engaged in efforts to popularize art by overcoming the estrangements set by social and cultural traditions and ideology imposed by the nineteenth-century institutions, and later the succeeding new museums and other institutions, by separating art and life. As Yehuda Safran has argued, ironically, though making royal and imperial collections available to the public, the separation between art and life only became more visible, and thus the new institutions made art even more remote and unreachable; "Kiesler came to embody more than any other architect of his generation" to realize that "it required much more than the sympathy of a few enlightened patrons; it required the conversion of public bodies to a vision of reality which could be expected only from someone driven by the singularity of purpose."[145]

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[142] F. Kiesler, "The Ideology of the Show Window." [Around 1928] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 13.

[143] No author noted, "Design's Bad Boy", 1947, p. 90.

[144] Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 52.

[145] Safran, "In the Shadow of Bucephalus", 1989, p. 14.

IV. Film as Content

Having reviewed Kiesler's European and early American activites in a variety of fields, it is time now to examine his direct involvement in the cinema. New technologies can provoke a mutual exchange of visions, talents and ideas, as well as artistic advances. If photography laid a great influence on Impressionist painting in the nineteenth century, cinematography rather caused enormous excitement for the European avant-gardes at turn of the twentieth century and especially its first two decades. If we look beyond their tangential similarities, for both procedures, the most significant parallels lie rather at the very fundamental level. "The nineteenth century saw the decline of a religious view of the world, with its basis in faith and underlying quietism, replaced by a scientific materialism, with its basis in observation, experiment and technological determination"[146], as British film maker Malcolm Le Grice states; while in the early twentieth century, following the further development of science and technology, such "observation, experiment and technological determination" transited rather towards a more radical and as well "relevant" view of the world. Within the European avant-garde art movements, as acknowledged by many artists themselves, following a line leading through the Post-Impressionists, there was a kind of awareness that "the 'appearance' of the world was something constructed from the activity of the observer"[147]. This lead to a conception of artistic endeavour that became more individualistic and subjective, a detachment from conventional "absolute" reality and that deformed or reorganized resulting in an overall "exterior" shape of the mechanical trace (*Futurism* or Analytical *Cubism*). Too, the complexity within the flux of time-space surfaced in new dynamic processes of experience. "Whereas work like that of Mondrian or Van Doesburg, which had developed from Cézanne and the Cubists, mostly interprets its dynamic in terms of a new 'architectural' analogy, work like that of Kandinsky or Malevich, deriving from Futurism and Expressionism, tends towards a kinetic interpretation."[148] Soon after this new perceptual conception transcribed itself into artistic work, it approached as well other relevant discourses, including architecture. According to Robbers, a number of "German theorists such as Adolf von Hildebrand, Heinrich Wölfflin and Aloïs Riegl shifted the question of the essence of architecture from questions of form − perceived from a stationary position − to images of the object perceived by an ambulatory observer." August Schmarsow brought such

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[146] Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 1977, p. 9.

[147] Ibid. p. 10.

[148] Ibid. p. 14.

ideas even further, by "suggesting that the perception of the architectural object was not merely dependent on a moving eye, but on bodily kinetics."[149] For Schmarsow, space is "an emanation of the human being present, a projection from within the subject, irrespective of whether we physically place ourselves inside the space or mentally project ourselves into it."[150] Such "projection" of space involved the spectators' active involvement, both physically and mentally. Perception of architecture, once thought to be rigid and constructed through structural elements, was now perceived as an art of motion, the continuous time-space experience of individuals. This was the historical context in which Kiesler found himself.

From the fundamental conceptual level, Kiesler's works from his most fruitful years perfectly fit his historical and artistic times contexts. In the backdrop for *R. U. R.*, aside from the forty-five minute film sequence along with both the iris diaphragm and Tanagra device, Kiesler added a kinetic interpretation to virtualize a mechanized fictional world while constantly switching on and off the cinematographic screening to simulate the simultaneity of a spatial absence. Such an unexpected theatrical viewing experience involved not only dynamic movement, but also touched upon spatial narratives from the backdrop design itself. Although it took place within a limited architectural space, it strongly triggered the spectators unlimited imagination, merely via the itinerary that the eyes had been lead through. Such a visual experience could be considered as touching the fringes of cinematography. In *Space Stage*, Kiesler emphasized spatial experience and encouraged interaction between the plays, the performers and the observers within the spherical space, by applying a vitality and dynamism in developing the traditional static, box-like proscenium into an organic, flexible "expandable space"[151], allow the spectators to go through a Time-Space experience in all possible dimensions. Thus, during the course of walking about and by constantly unfolding the *Space Stage*, instead of gazing at a single frame like a painted and static stage backdrop, spectators in motion could rather glance at the successive "frames" of the space, which thus drew certain analogies with film.[152] Spectators could find themselves perceiving a series of consecutive "picturesque shots"[153] through a "self-montage" while walking within the space.

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[149] Robbers, *Modern Architecture*, 2012, p. 58.

[150] Ibid. p. 59. Robbers cited from: August Schmarsow, "The Essence of Architectural Creation," *Empathy, Form and Space. Problems in German Aesthetics 1873-1893*, ed. Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonomou, Los Angeles: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994 [1893], p. 289.

[151] Warren, "Friedrich Kiesler and Theatrical Modernism in Vienna", 1994, p. 86.

[152] Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 2002, p. 57.

[153] Ibid. p. 58. Bruno cited from: Sergei M. Eisenstein, *Montage and Architecture*. p. 120.

By fusing such uninterrupted "picturesque shots" from a precipitate past, an instant present, and an immediate future to come, "time has become the criterion for spatial organization"[154]. In both *L+T* system and *City-in-Space*, Kiesler stimulated visitors' active reception and provoked their interactivity with the space "through physical activities and visual navigation"[155]. Such a mixture of physical and visual actions incorporated visitors' interaction and participation within the spaces, and also provided visual experiences of successive movement in time and with unexpected, changing views. As Giuliana Bruno argues "cinema also descends from view painting and from the construction of pictured space in architectural and scenic terms. […] The spatiality in which spectacle was displayed through motion by inciting the observer to wander through space."[156] If we view Bruno's argument from a reversed direction, such a spatial experience within *L+T* and *City-in-Space* once again simulated the cinematographic experience, namely, by inciting the spectator to wander through the space, the spectacle spatiality was then displayed in motion.

In parallel, kinetic and time factors for Kiesler had also become matters to be permanently concerned with as space was to be experienced through dynamic processes, and more importantly, the ration of time, whether elongated or compressed, was found to be no longer lying in the object, but within the subject, namely, the observer. The relationship between object and observer was triggered to become more active rather than passive, and the experience each observer perceived was extremely individual, private and personal on the one hand, collective, public and communal on the other, largely through the event's mass gathering. If film's spectators had gone through a virtual "imaginary path followed by the eye"[157] as Eisenstein put it, during this phase of sustained time-space experiments (1922-1925), Kiesler rather invited spectators of his projects to go through a physical three-dimensional path of space and time by "changing position of a body in space", therefore, through "a visual experience of successive movement in time"[158], thus creating a common ground for both architecture and cinema.[159] Most likely Kiesler didn't always consciously align motion pictures with his projects; in a lecture delivered to the Yale School of

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[154] F. Kiesler, "Manifest", 1925; F. Kiesler, "Die Stadt in der Luft", 1926, p. 12.

[155] McGuire, "A Movie House in Space and Time", 2007, p. 59.

[156] Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 2002, pp. 60-61.

[157] Ibid. p. 55. Bruno cited from: Sergei M. Eisenstein, Montage and Architecture. p. 116.

[158] Robbers, *Modern Architecture*, 2012, p. 60. Original from: Fritz Schumacher, "Das bauliche Gestalten," *Handbuch der Architektur*, Darmstadt, 1926.

[159] Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 2002, p. 56.

Architecture when he talked about the *R. U. R.* backdrop, he noted: "Yes, it was in that play, in the first act, that I employed motion picture instead of a painted backdrop – the time was 1922. It was not because I was very progressive, but I simply didn't do it otherwise."[160] It was just a very logical thing for him to do, and he believed that the attempt to apply film footage was "a logical thing, in the spirit of the play"[161]. However, if we are aware of the florescence of the film industry at that time, being an avant-garde artist with a cinematographic sensibility, we might recognize that Kiesler's applying film was not only "in the spirit of the play", but also in the spirit of the time, an artistic spirit that also attempted to "misuse" the language of the new medium, cinematography.

It is also worth noting additionally that in a much later two-part essay published in *Architectural Record* in 1937, named *Design-Correlation*, *Certain Data Pertaining to the Genesis of Design by Light (Photo-Graphy)*, Kiesler has indicated his particular interest in and vast knowledge of both photography and cinema. Cinema had cast its influence on Kiesler, just as for many of his avant-garde contemporaries; it was both a matter of artistic cross-influence and within the spirit of the times.

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[160] "Lecture by Friedrich Kiesler On His Use of Film In 1922 Production of *R. U. R.* by Karel Capek, delivered to Yale School of Architecture, 1947." In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 31.
[161] Ibid.

4.1 Florescence of the Industry and the "Misuse" of Cinematography

A quick look into the historical background: cinematography, the most advanced medium at that time, could be said to be a mechanical toy associated with a beam of light, a rectangular planar projection surface and mechanical devices, with features such as electric lights, mechanical images, kinetic dynamism (sound would also soon be fused), and above all, it is the representational medium of the time and its fantasy. "The commercial cinema maintained a steady and rapid growth from its inception in 1896 right up until 1914 when the war virtually stopped European film production".[162] By the eve of World War I, European commercial film production reached its peak before the sudden suspension caused by war. René Doumic, the prominent director of *Revue des Deux Mondes*, commented on its popularity: "The cinématography has taken its place in our culture. It is popularly called 'cinema' for short. One goes to the cinema, one even goes a lot, everybody goes. It's all over the place"[163] The cinema soon surpassed the theatre, and cinema-going became an international phenomenon. Even the most conservative estimates show an impressive amount of film theaters. To take some pre-war statistics from 1913, "in Germany, one source put the number at 1,529; another at 2,446. In Paris alone there were reportedly more than 200 cinema theaters, and for New York the incredible figure of 460 has been cited."[164] Another source showed that "on a Sunday in Paris in 1913 more than 10,000 people would visit the movie house"[165], with approximate population of 2,8 million in Paris at that time[166], such number of film attendance is of course considerably astonishing. Le Grice has this to say about the cultivated public's potential involvement with the new medium as seen from the artistc point of view, "It is difficult to imagine that most artists at that time didn't talk about the possibilities for film, and many must have contemplated using it."[167]

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[162] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 2.

[163] Ibid. p. 4. Lawder cited from: René Doumic, "L'âge du cinema," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 15 Aug. 1913, p. 920.

[164] Ibid. p. 4.

[165] Ibid.

[166] http://ssa.paris.online.fr/pages/History.htm (Accessed on: February 24, 2015)

[167] Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 1977, p. 20.

With the rapid growth of the industry, following the establishment of its commercial existence, film's influence as a cultural phenomenon soon came to the fore. Side-by-side of cinema's violent commercial development was the interest in developing cinema as an artistic medium. This had the potential of making "misuse" of it, in other words, turning it into something both non-commercial and non-narrational. The more radical ones, according to Robbers, such as *Filmfreunde* [Friends of Film] went as far as to "[declare] the fight against 'the fabrication of kitsch' and commercial film's 'abuse' of technical progress and instead [support] 'artistic, independent film as the expression of time' and 'the true Gestaltung of reality!'" in one of their undated pamphlets.[168]

Numerous international avant-garde artists allied their own art with the new medium of film, which is generally known as the avant-garde film movement. Lawder assigns objective credit to the film industry's flourishing commercial existence, which, from his perspective, certainly played a non-negligible role in the technical and artistic interchange: "the influence of film and filmic techniques on the more established arts could not have been felt until film itself had been established, […] Film as an art is closely keyed to its growth as an industry, and the former cannot be understood without some knowledge of the latter."[169]

Avant-garde artists' association with film may have made common sense, but it also contains a variety of "touches", either with actual hands-on "touches" of the medium itself; or simply "borrowing" the notion of film to explore its potential in various forms, the dimensions and dynamics of motion; and even to expressing the violent destruction of daily life; or, contrarily, as inspiration for fantasies and hallucinations. The Italian Futurists, who wanted to "FREE THE CINEMA AS AN EXPRESSIVE MEDIUM"[170], manifestoed a list of fourteen positive directions for the opening of a Futurist Cinema, "Painting + sculpture + plastic dynamic + Words-in-freedom + composed noises + architecture + synthetic theatre = Futurist cinema", a statement of their ambitious "poly-expressive-ness," covering a large range from fundamental philosophy to almost all existing art categories.[171] The Cubists were

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[168] Robbers, *Modern Architecture*, 2012, p. 4. Robbers noted the Pamphlet was entitled as *Filmfreunde*, archived in the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin. Mies, Walter Ruttmann, the pioneer of animation film Lotte Reiniger, documentary filmmaker Carl Junghans, actress Asta Nielson, Hans Richter and Werner Graeff, gallery owner Karl Nierendorf and composer Paul Hindemith were listed as memebrs of the central committee.

[169] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 2.

[170] Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 1977, p. 12.

[171] Ibid.

instead "essentially concerned with its exploration of the dynamic of perception"[172], namely, using film as a powerful mechanical device for image-creation, and tracing movement within an "actual passage through space and time"[173], and then envisioning it in motion. Lawder notes that Pablo Picasso, at that time, was an enthusiastic movie-goer who "had toyed with the idea of using film for the representation of movement"[174] around 1912, which was precisely within his Cubism period. Kandinsky who viewed film as fantasy, in the autumn of 1913, had the potential (unfortunately never come to realization) to collaborate with Arnold Schönberg upon his request through Universal Editions, a Vienna-based music publishing house, because the Austrian composer aspired to "the utmost unreality" for the visual design of a film project for his second operatic composition, *Die Glückliche Hand*.[175] From architectural aspect, cinema played an important role in some architects' theoretical and practical reflections at the time. In 1917, the Berlin-based German architect and urban planner Bruno Taut described "film as a possible agent to further 'the development of architecture' because it would permit the 'redemption' from the still image"[176] of traditional architecture; he even imagined that "the experience of watching a film as a surrogate for experiencing architecture 'the moving cinematographic recording almost replaces the guided tour around and through the building and allows it to be appraised as a whole as organism and as body.'"[177] Although no evidence has yet been found of any interaction between Kiesler and Taut, through association with *G Group* and the Bauhaus, as well as their socializing in the Berlin art scene around the early 1920s, most likely they were at least aware of each others; perhaps they met via Mies or Van Doesburg, who were both key members of the *G Group* with architectural background, and at the same time passionate movie-goers, just as Kiesler and Taut. Consider the fact that Taut integrated film into his architectural designs, and Kiesler merged motion pictures into his set design for *R. U. R.* From the very fundamental conceptual level, shared principles can be found between the two architects, namely, searching for solutions could go beyond those rigid, solid principles which embarrass the realization of the modern architecture.

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[172] Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 1977, p. 14.

[173] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 21.

[174] Ibid.

[175] Ibid. p. 27.

[176] Robbers, *Modern Architecture*, 2012, p. 9. Originally from: Bruno Taut, "Mitteilung," *Der Städtebau* 14, no. 2-3, 1917, pp. 32-33.

[177] Ibid. p. 10.

There is little information about Kiesler's artistic activities during the pre-war period. However, when talking about "The Endless Sculpture" in his later writings, there comes an unexpected semi-cinematic description involving space and time. Serving in the press corps in Vienna during World War I, Kiesler had convenient access to a variety of newspapers including the more neutral ones from Switzerland. This probably accounts for his knowing that the war was about to come to an end before the official signing of the Armistice. He then quit going to the office and re-started his artistic activities by building a large 'galaxy' of paintings out of cardboard "to portray personalities fixed in space and time", E. E. Cummings, Marcel Duchamp and Henri Laugier were all revived in his galaxy among other artists.[178] None were in isolation, as Kiesler recognized already at that time that "the intervals between the units became of major importance to the correlation of the total work"[179] and each single unit "will have a great impact on the composition of the galaxy per se and also on the observer who is drawn into this world of a man-made expanding universe"[180]. Without frames, and formed of about twenty units, Kiesler's galaxy attempted to expand endlessly within a three-dimensional frame, an infinite experience within the enclosure of a room, even "if they actually end (physically), their capacity to inspire continuity would be great, in that the observer could go on adding more and more units according to his own imagination."[181]

If the pre-war experiments were merely a hesitant overture, in the post-war period Kiesler initiated his personal involvement with various international artists groups. His association with the avant-garde film movement had even more consequences. Before further exploration, we'd like to quickly draw an outline of an overview: first of all, according to Yehuda Safran, Kiesler was equipped with copies of experimental films by Richter and Eggeling for his America trip. As already mentioned, there is a statement by Kiesler at the very beginning of Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale* (1924). Under what circumstances did the thirty-four year old young architect be able to make such a statement on one of the most important experimental pieces in film history? Although we might not be able to research and establish a strict historical sequence upon this question (it will very likely remain for further study), still, analysis can be made on the content of Kiesler's statement, and help us comprehend his understanding of this film or even to trace a potential inter-influence between

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[178] F. Kiesler, "Towards The Endless Sculpture." [1956] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 55.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid.

Kiesler and Eggeling. As for Richter, he too was associated with and influenced by Cubism, Constructivism, Expressionism, De Stijl, Dada and other movements. Both Kiesler and Richter were connected with *G Group* – "a laboratory and a publicity organ for the avant-garde project of acclimating the human senses to the demands of contemporary life".[182] Together with Gräff, Richter was in charge of outlining key attributions on the topic film medium for *G*. Jointly with Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale*, his film *Rhythmus 21* (1921) were considered to be important pieces of early abstract film. These will be paired with Kiesler's *City-in-Space* and *Film Guild Cinema* for methodical comparison, and to look for common motifs shared among avant-garde movements, such as *De Stijl* and *G Group*. We have already mentioned briefly Kiesler's efforts on both the world premiere and New York premiere of Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*, which we will also look into for more details not only to review the ins and outs of both events, but also to analyse the shared *Mechanism Aesthetics*[183] between the two architects / avant-garde artists. What has not yet been mentioned much but will be soon added in, is Kiesler's interest in the topic of the "spiral", an interest he shared with Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968); we will draw a parallel and compare the notion in Duchamp's Dadaist film *Anémic Cinéma* and Kiesler's *Space Stage*, looking at motion and rhythm into art, cinema and architecture respectively.

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[182] Dimendberg, "Toward an Elemental Cinema", 2010, p. 53.

[183] The common acknowledged term would be "*Machine Aesthetics*", which according to *Oxford Reference*, indicates that "something machine-made, acknowledging industrialization, mass-production, and engineering, or that used elements of metal structures" held its impact on art, design and architecture. However, here I prefer the term "*Mechanism Aesthetics*", which more focus on the Mechanism Aesthetic Experience as inspiration for art, design and architecture. Quoted contents about "*Machine Aesthetics*" are from *Oxford Reference*, see: http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198606789.001.0001/acref-9780198606789-e-2786 (Accessed on: October 08, 2015)

4.2 Kiesler and The Early Abstract Films of Richter, Eggeling and Ruttmann

Lawder relates that although Paris was the place where the avant-garde film movement found its most significant activity, the early stage of the movement was rather rooted in Berlin, and originated with the abstract animated films of Hans Richter (1888-1976) and Viking Eggeling (1880-1925) working closely together (1919-1921), and Walter Ruttmann (1887-1941)[184] working independently in Munich, but who later corresponded on a technical basis with Oskar Fischinger, another German filmmaker. The overtures from Richter, Eggeling and Ruttmann had literally outcomes and there were copies of the film footages survived through the time.[185] Coincidentally, all three avant-garde filmmakers had relationships with Kiesler, either on the personal or artistic levels, so an exchange of influence could have occurred and so we will first look at the correspondence in their work, both overt and hidden.

Of the three avant-garde German filmmakers, Richter had the most interaction with Kiesler. We know that besides his early acquaintance with Kiesler in Europe, he was later among the many European émigré guests at Kiesler's Greenwich Village penthouse apartment at 56 Seventh Avenue, often together with the other regulars such as Duchamp, Léger, Mies, Arp, Mondrian, Arnold Schönberg, Edgard Varèse, as well as museum curators, art critics, patrons and dealers, for instance, Alfred H. Barr and James Johnson Sweeney from MOMA, Sidney and Harriet Janis, or local architects and artists like Frank Lloyd Wright, Martha Graham, E. E.

Figure 23 Frame Enlargement with Duchamp from
8 x 8: A Chess Sonata in 8 Movements, **Hans Richter (1957)**

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[184] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 35.

[185] Le Grice argues Bruno Corra and Arnaldo Ginna's films were the first avant-garde works of cinema, however, none of their productions any more existed, hence will only be mentioned as historical background information. Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 1977, p. 17.

Cummings, and others.[186] Kiesler maintained a friendship with Richter, and being a passionate chess player (as was Duchamp), he would make a cameo appearance as the "Minotaur" in Richter's later film (in collaboration with Jean Cocteau), *8 x 8: A Chess Sonata in 8 Movements* (1957), (Fig. 23. 24.) a film drawing upon mythology and dealing with the "subconscious based on the game of chess." Participants included a host of *Dada* and *Surrealist* artists including Arp, Calder, Duchamp, Léger, Man Ray, Dorothea and Max Ernst, Julian Levy, Jaqueline Matisse, Yves Tanguy, Jose L. Sert, Paul Bowles and others. The film was called "a projection of the surrealist vision into cinema" and embodied a "comprehensive portrait of the Dada movement: a surreal world on a giant chessboard". Richter himself would describe this film as "part Freud, part Lewis Carroll", as he believed that he paid homage to both.[187] Although limited information is available, this cameo appearance in *8 x 8: A Chess Sonata in 8 Movements* marked Kiesler's personal milestone for his intimate connection with the realm of cinema, and at the same time, evidenced his active involvement with both *Dada* and *Surrealism* movements.

Figure 24 Film Still from Episode Checkmate in *8 x 8: A Chess Sonata in 8 Movements*,
With Kiesler as Taurus and Josep Lluís Sert as Torero, Hans Richter (1957)
© Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna

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[186] Phillips, "Architect of Endless Innovation", 1989, p. 27. Footnote 12.

[187] Ibid. Resources of the information are from both websites: http://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/156050 and http://worldscinema.org/2012/08/hans-richter-jean-cocteau-8-x-8-a-chess-sonata-in-8-movements-1957/ (Accessed on: February 28, 2015) Detailed list of cast for the filmmaking is from the previous website, and the quoted texts are from the later one.

Richter was a multi-faceted figure in the realms of both art and film, and there often appears to be a lack of any precise sequence in his works; this possibly has something to do with his "spontaneity", a quality he described when talking about past collaborations with Eggeling. Malcolm Turvey's says that "Richter's art is known for synthesizing different, seemingly mutually exclusive avant-garde ideas and movements, and there is an important reason for this synthetic approach that has to do with Richter's theory of modernity."[188] Rather typical for the twenties avant-garde film movement, Richter's artistic career began as a painter. He only came to filmmaking through his encounter with modern art. From 1912, his painting clearly acknowledges a debt to the Cubist vocabulary, (Fig. 25.); however, instead of the typical Cubist structural analysis, he borrowed their language to

Figure 25 Hans Richter, *Cello Player***, 1914**
Photo Copy © Standish D. Lawder
In: *The Cubist Cinema*

"rhythmically articulate the surface of the canvas"[189]. Later, associated with Dada, within his ephemeral "*Visionary Portrait*" series period, Richter started showing particular interest in "exploring a contrapuntal figure-ground relationship in which measured areas of contrasting black and white alternated in their pictorial function of defining form and space".[190] The film medium presumably became increasingly relevant when time as an important factor joined in to became another element in dealing with painting. During the process Richter went on further to explore "rhythmical movements of musicians, repetitive motions of workers, and the bodies of crowds gathered at demonstrations"[191], which paid homage to the scientific chronophotography of both Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey, an influence that most likely derived through the Futurists with whom he was also associated. Richter noted in his writing: "Problems in Modern art lead directly into the film. Organization and

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[188] Turvey, *The Filming of Modern Life*, 2011, p. 18.

[189] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 37.

[190] Ibid.

[191] Dimendberg, "Toward an Elemental Cinema", 2010, p. 55.

orchestration of form, color, the dynamics of motion, simultaneity."[192] Finally, together with Eggeling, after a hands-on experiment on film with support from UFA (Universum-Film, A. G., the largest state-aided film-production company in Germany at that time), Richter was convinced that "the challenge of cinema involved the articulation of time"[193], and that within film making, the orchestration of time appears to be much more important than the arrangement of form.[194] Thus, his association with film was virtually an inevitable and logical step in his artistic approach. For him, film as a medium could actually extend his "dynamic potential into actual kinetic movement".[195] Although Richter and Eggeling's vision of establishing an alliance between art and industry through experimental film was not successful, it still attracted attention from unexpected corners. Taut, whom we have previously mentioned, wrote in a letter, which was reprinted in *Die Gläserne Kette, Visionäre Architekturen aus dem Kreis um Bruno Taut 1919-1920*, "reine künstlerische [W]irkung, wie sie die Maler Eggeling und Richter ausarbeiten",[196] indicated that Die *Gläserne Kette Group*, which had the clear intention of using filmed drama to express their architectural utopias, was evidently aware of Eggeling und Richter's experimental film at that time; meanwhile, a pivotal Berlin critic, Dr. Adolph Behne, supported Eggeling and Richter's endeavors in a newspaper article, just as he supported Taut's idea to link film with architectural utopias; and finally, Behne's article drew Theo van Doesburg's attention, which connected Eggeling and Richter's experimental film with *De Stijl*, the common platform Kiesler would soon find himself sharing together with many other avant-garde artists.

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[192] Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 1977, p. 20.

[193] Dimendberg, "Toward an Elemental Cinema", 2010, p. 57.

[194] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 47.

[195] Ibid. p. 46.

[196] Ibid. p. 47. Footnote 17. p. 194. According to Lawder's footnote, *Die Gläserne Kette, Visionäre Architekturen aus dem Kreis um Bruno Taut 1919-1920*. Exhibition Catalogue of the Leverküsen Museum Berlin, [1963], p. 64. *Die Gläserne Kette Group* included Hans Scharoun, Walter Gropius, Vassily and Hans Luckhardt, and Max Taut, all more or less under the leadership of Bruno Taut.

The Swedish painter Viking Eggeling first become acquainted with the Dada movement around 1917 in Zürich through Jean Arp, who introduced him to Tristan Tzara. At that time, according to Arp, Eggeling was occupying himself with a work named "Symphony" and "searching for the rules of a plastic counterpoint, composing and drawing its first elements", by setting down "a sort of hieratic writing with the help of figures of rare proportion and beauty" on great paper rolls. The impression Arp had of Eggeling's "Symphony" was that "these figures grew, subdivided, multiplied, moved, intertwined from one group to another, vanished and partly reappeared, organized themselves into an impressive construction with plantlike forms."[197] Eggeling and Richter paired up spontaneously for collaboration in early 1918 because they'd recognized similar artistic interests in each other. In the same year, thanks to Richter's introduction, Eggeling soon gained entrance into the many-faceted, Berlin art scene, that included a circle of radical artists and architects such as the German Dadaists and *Novembergruppe* and others.[198] Between 1919 and 1921, the two spent a great amount of time working intimately together near Berlin, where they started to experiment in the new medium of film. At that time, many considered Eggeling and Richter to be an inseparable pair of artists. Being an acquaintance of Richter and Tzara, and associated with Dada, *De Stijl* and *G Group*, it is quite likely that Kiesler got to know Eggeling and his work around the same period.

Richter had not yet committed himself to focus on unfolding his own individual works, as he was still passing through a long and spontaneous path, availing himself of the various movements he was associating with and searching for a method of "synthesizing different, seemingly mutually exclusive avant-garde ideas and movements"[199]; As per Lawder, Eggeling rather had gone through "a long, intensive and systematic research" phase, trying to settle himself within an abstract medium. He took the visual elements of line, curve, shape, elementary shade and colour as being free in themselves from any visually imitative effect, and so that they might serve the function of an intermediate universal language "between the natural world and his own intellect".[200] Coming from the perspective of a landscape painter, and from a considerable family musical milieu, he was possessed of an almost single-minded persistence, Eggeling took music as a logical basis for his visual composition, and his

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[197] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 39.

[198] O'Konor, *Viking Eggeling*, 1971, p. 45.

[199] Turvey, *The Filming of Modern Life*, 2011, p. 18.

[200] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, pp. 39-40.

approach was to use forms "simplified into the hard geometry of man-made architecture", creating his own expressive language, he "distilled a vocabulary of pictorial forms out of the chaos of nature." (Fig. 26.) His scrolls were rational and systematic, analytic, even in a way semi-scientific, "arranged on the sheet like a page from a dictionary of pictorial ideograms"[201]. Looking at Eggeling's scrolls, one can almost empathize with the way that he was keen to create a language system of his own individual kind, with vocabulary, grammar and syntax, as if the ancient Chinese or Egyptians were creating their earliest hieroglyphs; or, one can practically make a comparison between Eggeling's specific "language system" with the engineering drafting specifications of the architecture profession, for instance, engineering legends and diagrams. (Fig. 27.) Whether or not, coincidentally, the architects were among of the earliest groups recognized his works when they turned to be abstract film. Van Doesburg was one of the first who wrote about the artists Richter-Eggeling in May 1921, recognizing both their work's spiritual level and its formal aspects, and how it shared certain similarities with *De Stijl*; Ludwig Hilberseimer, the Bauhaus architect and urban planner, contributed an article on their experiments entitled *Bewegungskunst*, and published in the May 23rd issue of the journal *Sozialistische Monatshefte* in the same year;[202] and Taut, leader of the visionary architects *Gläserne Kette Group,* had an idea for "a filmed utopian drama [which] was then modified to a film" referred as well as in a letter to Eggeling and Richter "Künstlerische [W]irkung".[203] Hence we can affirm Kiesler's awareness of Eggeling's work.
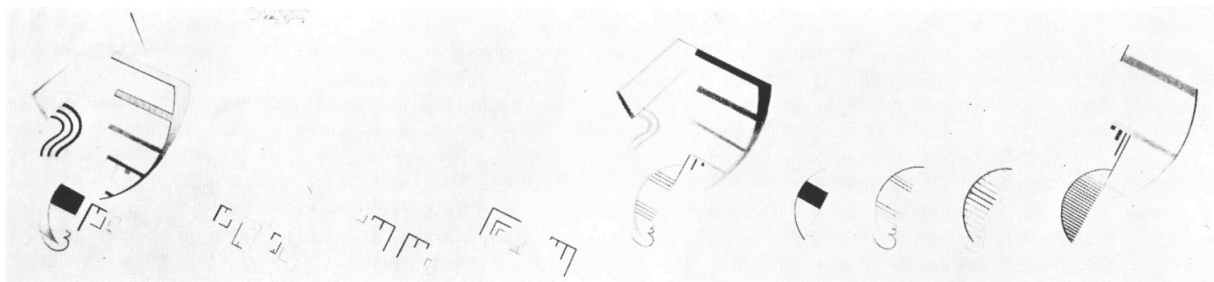
Figure 26 Viking Eggeling, *Symphonie Diagonale*, Detail
Scroll Drawing, Paper, With Water Marked "Progress" Along Top Edge
In: Louise O'Konor, *Viking Eggeling 1880-1925. Artist and Film-maker, Life and Work*
Photo Copy © Nationalmuseum, Stockholm

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[201] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, pp. 39-41.

[202] O'Konor, *Viking Eggeling*, 1971, p. 48.

[203] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 194. Endnote 17.
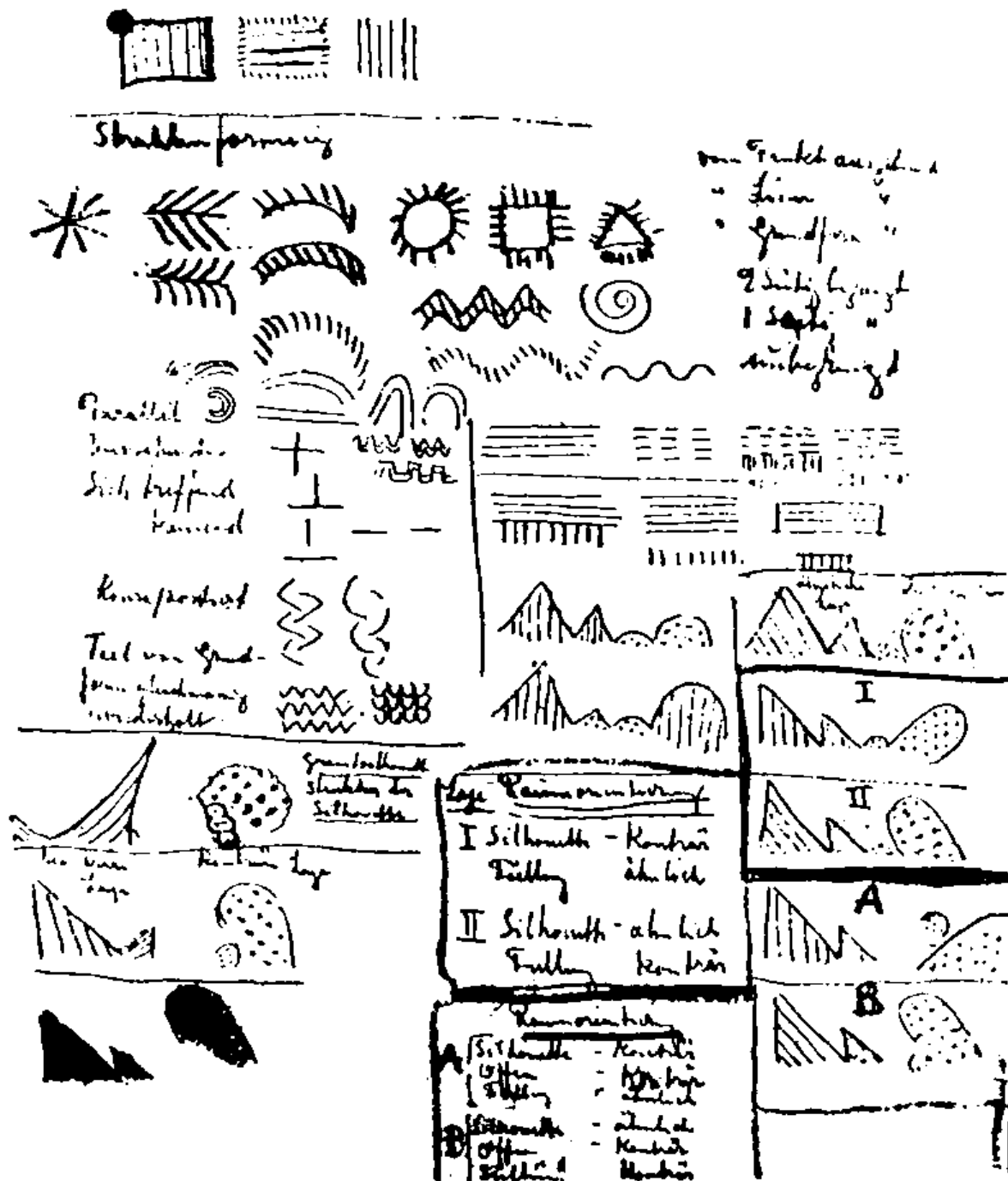
Figure 27 Viking Eggeling, Sheet of Studies of Abstract Forms from Nature, About 1916. Courtesy Yale University Art Gallery Photo Copy © Standish D. Lawder, In: *The Cubist Cinema*

Kiesler and Eggeling's association has not been much documented, but still traces appear from expected corners. In November 1975, when Lillian Kiesler wrote about the discovery of *Ballet Mécanique* in Kiesler's "weekend" house, she recalled "it was later I learned *Symphonie Diagonale* of Viking Eggeling and *Rhythmus* of Hans Richter had been in the closet, too."[204] Eventually, in a letter dated on April 21st 1937, Kiesler had offered those two films together with Ruttmann's early coloured advertising piece *Excelsior-Reifen* to the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) Film Library. The letter was addressed to Mr. John E. Abbott, and included Kiesler's conditions for the outright gift of the film to MOMA film library, "an approximate ten-line trailer to be permanently printed as an introduction to the film with an explanation which I got from Eggeling and a few historical data with it."[205] However, "The offer was considered, but not accepted." In the same year, Kiesler wrote on June 2 to the museum that he "withdrew his offer and disposed of the matter by sending Eggeling's film to his wife in Europe."[206] Considering both Kiesler and Eggeling's frequent association with international avant-garde movements, their common acquaintances and friendships, what Kiesler required (conditions for the outright gift) was very likely to be the tangible facts without too much exaggeration. Shortly after *Symphonie Diagonale*'s first public screening at a matinee performance on May 3 1925, arranged in collaboration by the *Novembergruppe* jointly with UFA at the UFA Palast on the Kurfürstendamm, Berlin, Eggeling passed away.[207] In early 1926, Kiesler took the copy of *Symphonie Diagonale*, headed for the New York exposition. It is quite possible that the well-preserved copy of Eggeling's film never returned to Europe and remained with Kiesler in America for many years. This remains till now only an assumption until concrete evidences is discovered to establish it as fact.

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[204] L. Kiesler, "November 1975, Films Salvaged: Lillian Kiesler Finds *Ballet Mécanique* by Léger and *Excelsior-Reifen* by Ruttmann Stored in Her Home." In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 22.

[205] Ibid. The letters are in the Kiesler Estate. Dated respectively on April 21 and June 07, 1937.

[206] Ibid. p. 23. Footnote 3.

[207] O'Konor, *Viking Eggeling*, 1971, p. 53.

Detailed research on Eggeling and his work from the University of Stockholm done by Louise O'Konor reveals Kiesler and Eggeling's association from the other side of the coin, as it were; unfortunately, there is little to answer the question why Kiesler's statement appears at the beginning of *Symphonie Diagonale*. According to this research, in the summer of 1925, Eggeling's widow Marion Eggeling had commissioned a copy to be made from the other major scroll drawings *Horizontal-Vertical Orchestra*, which was executed by Eggeling around the same time as *Symphonie Diagonale*. Indications show that Eggeling attempted to film the scroll *Horizontal-Vertical Orchestra*, but in fact, the only film known from him is *Symphonie Diagonale*. According to O'Konor, "This copy [*Horizontal-Vertical Orchestra*] was made quite openly and with no view to profit", because the "architect Friedrich Kiesler was preparing an exhibition in New York, The International theatre exposition which opened the following year, in 1926, and wanted a sample of Eggeling's work shown there."[208] The copy was returned after the exhibition and was included with the rest of Eggeling's work left in his studio. Thus, Kiesler's role in showing Eggeling's work in America is established. Apart from that, we should consider that instead of asking for Eggeling's only surviving film piece, *Symphonie Diagonale*, Kiesler rather asked for his *Horizontal-Vertical Orchestra*, thus showing that he was fairly familiar with Eggeling's works or even aware of his working method. Nevertheless, it also remains possible that he held a copy of *Symphonie Diagonale*. (This might also worth tracing in other contents perhaps, but not here in this thesis.)
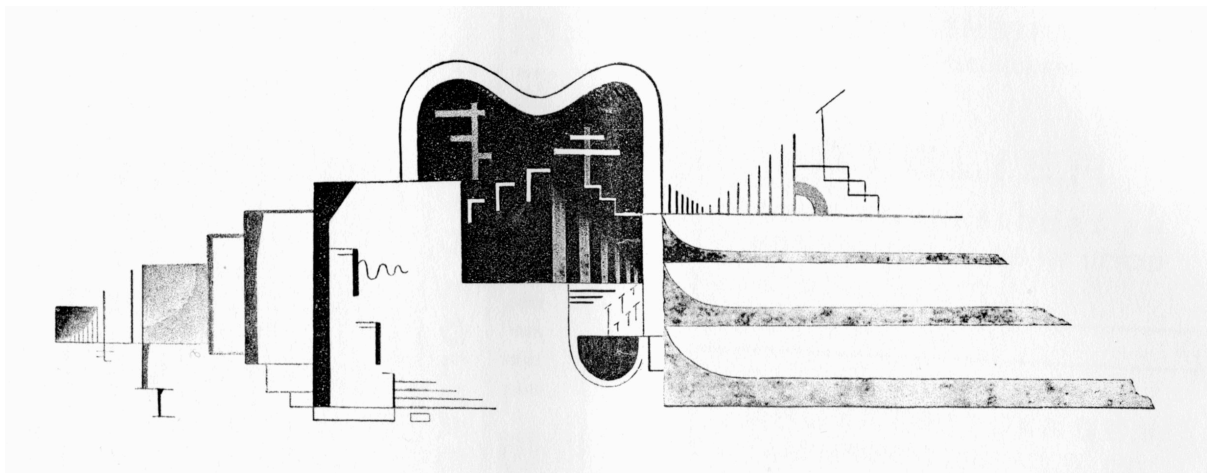
Figure 28 Viking Eggeling, *Horizontal-Vertical Mass*,
1919. Courtesy Hans Richter
Photo Copy © Standish D. Lawder, In: *The Cubist Cinema*

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[208] O'Konor, *Viking Eggeling*, 1971, p. 58.

Walter Ruttmann was a self-taught painter and accomplished violinist and cellist, who also studied architecture; such an interdisciplinary combination of three types of art within one single artist, according to Lawder, "were important sources for the series of short abstract films he produced in Germany during the years 1920 to 1925."[209] Noticing that painting as a static medium has its inevitable limitations gave Ruttmann strong dissatisfaction, and caused him to announce, "Painting must be set in motion."[210] Intended to "express visible motion through the suggestion of forms in movement", and consequently to, "extend these implied patterns of movement into actual kinetics"[211], Ruttmann turned to filmmaking. Although *Lichtspiel Opus I* is considered Ruttmann's first film, the earliest surviving film is *Opus II*. All his *Lichtspiel* series, namely, *Opus II, III and IV* (1921-1927) are colored.[212] Often considered as visual interpretations of music literally into visual art by some critics, his work is seen as applying twentieth-century technology, namely, film to fulfil the nineteenth-century urge for a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. An influential Berlin critic at that time, Dr. Adolph Behne, and who admired Richter-Eggeling's abstract film project with much more enthusiasm, ruthlessly stated that that "any musical interpretation would only be a debasement"[213]. Richter rather attacked Ruttmann's film at its artistic level: "There was nothing of an articulate language (which was for us… the one and only reason to use this suspicious medium, film). It seemed to us 'vieux Jeu', pure impressionism!"[214] Regardless, Ruttmann found sufficient supporters and admirers for his animated experimental films. German critic Bernhard Biebold reported on "Der gemalte Film" shortly before a private presentation in Frankfort on *Frankfurter Zeitung* on February 1, 1920, and after the public gathering at the Marmorhaus in Berlin, respectively, on *Lichtbildbühne*, XIV, No. 18, April 30, 1921 and "Berliner Filmneuheiten" in der *Kinematograph*, XV, no. 742, May 8, 1921; and Herbert Jhering, wrote a review in *Berliner Börsen-Courier* in May.[215]

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[209] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 57.

[210] Ibid.

[211] Ibid.

[212] Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 1977, p. 26.

[213] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 62.

[214] Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 1977, p. 27. Le Grice cited from an article in *Experiment in the Film*, ed. Roger Manvell, New York: Arno Press, 1970.

[215] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, pp. 60-61. / And p. 195, endnote 23.

Kiesler's connection with Ruttmann was as simple as the salvaging of his film *Excelsior-Reifen*, an advertising film made for the Excelsior Tire Company. Although due to the commercial character of the film, it hasn't attracted as much attention from film historians as the other films salvaged from Kiesler's closet. Still, credit was given by filmmaker and archivist Jonas Mekas of Anthology Film Archives, In his correspondence with Lillian Kiesler dated November 29, 1975, Mekas wrote a long paragraph about the footage of Ruttmann's *Excelsior-Reifen*:

> One can contains 35mm nitrate print – parts of it hand-tinted, and the whole print lab-tinted – of Ruttmann's film *Excelsior-Reifen*, an advertising film he made around 1923-24, approximately 3 minutes long. The color is very clear, very fine, in very good condition. The print itself seems to be handmade. It contains at least 30 splices – that is, very little piece is spliced in. It's either a print that Ruttmann made-up himself – there was no way of printing color at that time, one could only tint separate bits of film – or – there is a possibility – this print is the *original* from which Ruttmann made-up other prints. It also looks like it has been projected a good number of times – it shows on the splices, but there are no scratches in the film, or very few. Really, the print (original?) is in excellent shape. The only thing that is bad about it, is that time did a good job shrinking it. The sprockets are badly shrunk. […]

> […] I have been told there is no other color Ruttmann that has survived: this will be the first color Ruttmann in existence.[216]

Although nowadays Ruttmann's best-known films are his abstract *Opus* series and "his lyrical documentaries of city life, especially *Berlin, Symphonie einer Grossstadt* [1927], his first and best such film"[217], *Excelsior-Reifen*, as a commercial piece may not be worth much mentioning, still, from both the technical and historical perspectives, Kiesler's semi-professional preservation of that film's print were truly "invaluable, priceless" in Mekas' words,[218] and contributed physical evidence for Ruttmann's early coloured films.

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[216] Mekas, "Letter from Jonas Mekas. Anthology Film Archives, to Lillian Kiesler, November 29, 1975." In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 24.

[217] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 62.

[218] Mekas, "Letter from Jonas Mekas. Anthology Film Archives, to Lillian Kiesler, November 29, 1975." In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 24.

— *Common Ground shared between Rhythmus 21, Symphonie Diagonale, City-in-Space and Film Guild Cinema*

Kinetic Art and The Fourth Dimension – Time-Space

Rhythmus 21, was Richter's earliest undertaking in film, and from a technical perspective, although it was a crude experiment, it clearly demonstrated Richter's notion of rhythm and kinetic art, as Le Grice summarizes from Richter's description about his early films, "[…] they comprise mainly cut-out rectangles and squares of various sizes and tones. These are simply animated in a strong kinetic way, using movement in any direction, and particularly exploring a depth factor by having a square, for example, recede or rush outwards."[219] Thus, for Richter, the notion he held for *Rhythmus 21* was not that much different from what he had tried to articulate on canvas in his early Cubists-influenced paintings. Lawder also argues that *Rhythmus 21* "had obvious affinities with Richter's attempts at counterpointing positive and negative in the black and white areas"[220] of his earlier paintings, for instance, the *Dada-Köpfe*. Moreover, as a result of employing film, Richter was able to add element of time, so as to rhythmically corresponded with the spatial articulation of the two-dimensional film screen. To take the opening sequences from *Rhythmus 21* as example, two white rectangles slide in and out horizontally from both sides of the screen, anticipating the closing over and opening up the black screen behind; looking at it the other way around, then the black rectangle in the middle takes control, by dragging and pushing the two white rectangles aside. (Fig. 29. 30.) Similar motions soon appear again, but now from the top and bottom of the screen. In between the horizontal and vertical sequences, a white square appears in the center of the screen, diminishing in size dynamically, finally revealing the black background. Thus, the screen is divided into large dynamically interacting areas of black and white. This can be seen as an extension of Richter's particular interest in the articulation of surfaces and areas of a canvas, but now set in motion, with each part being in relation with the preceding and following movements, all of it together forming a continuity in time and a unity in space. When Richter spoke of *Rhythmus 21,* he also emphasized the movement and interrelationship of the parts:

> When I say there is no *Form* in *Rhythm 21*, I mean that by taking the whole movie screen, pressing it together and opening it up, top, bottom, sides, right, left, you don't perceive form anymore, you perceive movement. From such an elementary demonstration I went on to take

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[219] Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 1977, p. 26.
[220] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 42.

parts of the rectangular screen and move these *parts* together or against each other. These rectangles are not *forms*, they are parts of movement. The definition of form refers to one's perception of the formal quality of a single object, or several single objects; but, when you repeat this same form over and over again and in different positions, then the relationship between the positions becomes the thing to be perceived, not the single or individual form. One does not see the form or object anymore but rather the relationship. In this way you see a kind of rhythm.[221]
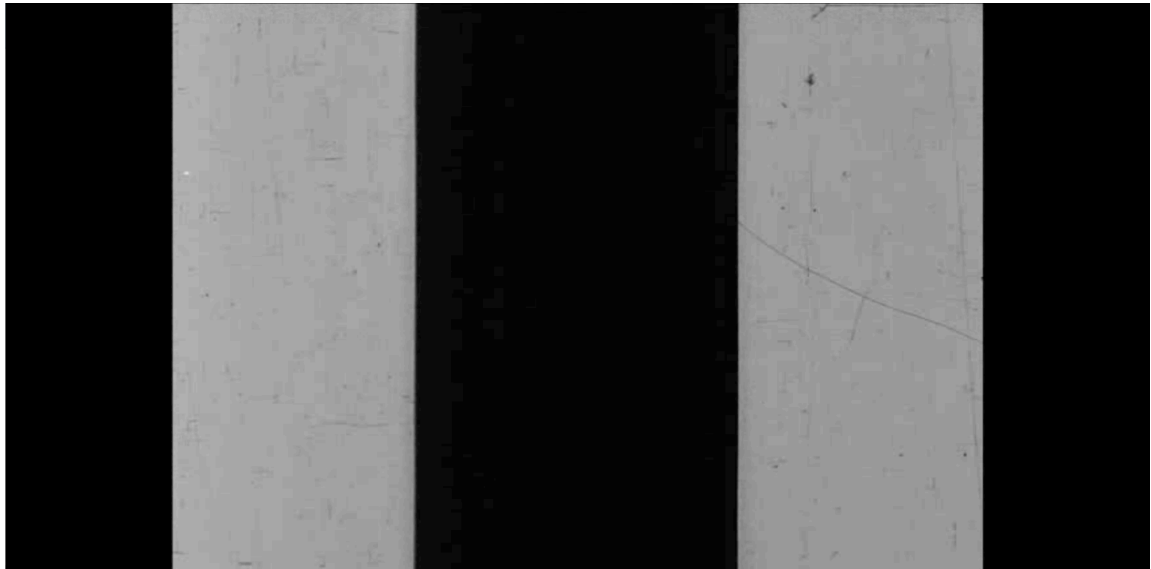
Figure 29 Film Still from experimental animation film *Rhythmus 21* (1921), Hans Richter.
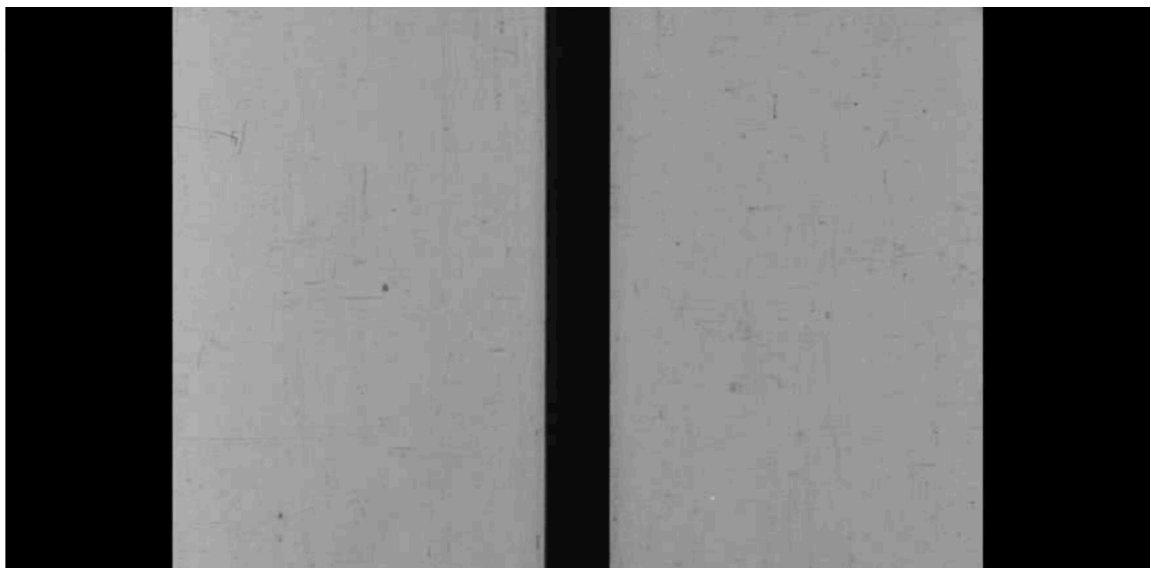
Figure 30 Film Still from experimental animation film *Rhythmus 21* (1921), Hans Richter.[222]

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[221] Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 1977, p. 26. Le Grice cited from: *Hans Richter*.

[222] http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/videos/249/1197 (Accessed on: March 02, 2015)

Through showing rhythm and constant movement within the film screen's two-dimensional rectangular space, Richter created "a work in which the content was essentially rhythm, the formal vocabulary was elemental geometry, the structural principle was the counterpoint of contrasting opposites, and in which space and time became interdependent."[223]

> He [Richter] has a bold awareness of the film's rectangle, sometimes changing the screen from white to black with broad diagonal sweeps. His "surrender" to the technical difficulties of the medium allows his films to express some of the fundamental dynamic qualities inherent in rapid changes of shape and the simultaneous presentation of elements moving at different speeds.[224]

During the procedure of making his *Rhythmus* films, it can be said that Richter had clearly went through the process of synthesizing different avant-garde ideas and movements, besides his own individual works, his "*Rhythmus* films conceived in collaboration with the Swedish painter Viking Eggeling, and, following the dissolution of Zurich Dada in 1919, Richter's involvement with de *Stijl*, international constructivism, and editing the journal G."[225] Richter saw, especially during the joint adventure of making the UFA film with Eggeling, that the weights between form and time in film is governed by laws that do not necessarily operate as in painting; instead, it appears that the orchestration of time may be more important than the arrangement of form. Thus, instead of stimulating the perception of seeing the movie screen as a kind of window of illusion (as in commercial films), *Rhythmus 21* rather "uses the movie screen as a direct substitute for the painter's canvas, as a framed rectangular surface on which a kinetic organization of purely plastic forms was composed"[226], to emphasize in filmic form the articulation of space simultaneously with articulation of time.

> Though his forms come directly from the constructivist or supremacist movements in painting, his filmic abstraction is not so dominated by abstract painting as that of Eggeling. It points the way to an abstraction more related to cinema, and derived from its technology. Its simplicity of form accentuates the rhythmic experience.[227] […]

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[223] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 52.

[224] Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 1977, p. 26.

[225] Turvey, *The Filming of Modern Life*, 2011, p. 22.

[226] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 49.

[227] Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 1977, p. 26.

Although often "paired up" as artists by the critics of the time, Richter and Eggeling, despite their common ground and close collaboration, also 'shared' some fundamental discrepancies. While Richter was more focused on the interplay of surfaces, Eggeling remained concentrated on his principle concern of linear notation. Nevertheless, both were keenly interested in working on the laws of counterpoint and analogy.[228] In a retrospective piece, Richter wrote, "[…] every action produces a corresponding reaction. This, in the contrapuntal fugue, we found the appropriate system, a dynamic and polar arrangement of opposing energies, and in this model we saw an image of life itself: one thing growing, another declining, in a creative marriage of contrast and analogy […] until eventually we came to look at them as living beings which grew, declined, changed, disappeared – and then were reborn."[229] Throughout their collaboration, Richter and Eggeling jointly formed a new artistic syntax leading to a cutting-edge understanding of elements of expression, "in which the eye travelled a prescribed route from beginning to end, and in which sequential reference forward and backward in space and time";[230] in addition, Eggeling also achieved the articulation of a complete syntax of formal relationships in his search for the potential of creating a "universal language". In a manifesto-like article Eggeling presents the theoretical basis of his work. It is titled *Theoretical Presentations of the Art of Movement*, and was published on August 1, 1921 in the Hungarian journal *MA* (Today).[231] He states, "Art is not the subjective explosion of the individual, but becomes the organic language of mankind, which must be basically free of misconceptions, clear-cut, so that it can become a vehicle for communication."[232] Likewise, he says that movement is the matter his drawings intend to represent and explore, and that this would find its realization within the process of film making itself. The "language" (formal language) to be "spoken" is based on an "alphabet", which arose from a fundamental principle of perception in the creative process: polarity. For Eggeling, polarity, as a general principle of life, is not different from the method of composition for any formal statement, such as proportion, rhythm, speed, intensity, location, tone, tempo, etcetera, and these corresponde with the potential of building a precise visual language from basic elements:

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[228] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, pp. 42-43.

[229] Ibid. p. 43. Lawder cited from: Hans Richter, "Dada and the Film", in Willy Verkauf [Ed], *Dada - Monograph of a Movement*, Teufen, Switzerland, 1957, p. 64.

[230] Ibid. p. 46.

[231] O'Konor, *Viking Eggeling*, 1971, p. 48.

[232] Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 1977, p. 21.

[…] Die abgebildeten Zeichnungen stellen Hauptmomente von Vorgängen dar, die in Bewegung gedacht sind. Die Arbeiten werden im Film ihre Verwirklichung finden. Der Vorgang selbst: gestaltende Evolutionen und Revolutionen in der Sphäre des rein künstlerischen (abstrakte Formen) analog etwa den unserem Ohr geläufigen Geschehnissen der Musik […]

Die „Sprache" (Form-Sprache), die da „gesprochen" wird, beruht auf einem „Alphabet", entstanden aus einem elementaren Prinzip der Anschauung: Polarität.

Polarität als generelles Lebensprinzip = Kompositionsmethode jeder formalen Äußerung. Proportion, Rhythmus, Zahl, Intensität, Lage, Klang, Zeitmaß […]"[233]

Further development of these ideas naturally lead to Eggeling encounter with movement and continuity, problems that could not be solved by conventional paintings. Consequently, the next inevitable step for him was to make use of the dynamic principles and techniques of film. According to O'Konor, Eggeling had already shown how to integrate movement in his drawings since around 1919. During the time when he was searching for a medium which would permit him to develop his ideas further, the question of film arose and became the "logical medium to extend this dynamic potential into actual kinetic movement."[234] In fact, "[i]n his drawings, his sketches, and his large scrolls Eggeling worked at a plastic treatment of the abstract elements, but the cinema, to which he now turned, was to provide him with a new dimension: time."[235] Employing the idea of using film for the representation of movement, however, he completely turned away from the naturalistic style of the film industry, which he considered to be rather lunatic and scandalous, as Swedish artist Axel Olson, who described Eggeling as a wholly modern visionary artist, wrote: "He works with conviction on his invention – a film renaissance is his dream – on a basis of purely abstract speculation he tries to evolve a musical-cubistic style of film."[236] The influential German critic Adolf Behne wrote enthusiastically in 1921 (in what is considered the earliest mention of Eggeling's film work in print), "Here is a pure lesson in film as an independent art. It is characteristic that the film, […] not only exists without musical accompaniment but quite rejects the need for one. A logical unfolding of abstract forms of geometric precision, […]"[237]

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[233] O'Konor, *Viking Eggeling*, 1971, p. 49. O'Konor noted that Eggeling's original manuscript has probably been lost; this part is quoted from the article published under Hans Richter's name in *De Stijl*; cf. n. 12. See Endnote 15 Chapter IV.

[234] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 46.

[235] O'Konor, *Viking Eggeling*, 1971, p. 46.

[236] Ibid. p. 50.

[237] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 55. Lawder cited from: "Der Film als Kunstwerk," *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 15 Dec. 1921. p. 1118.

Thus, for Behne, movements in Eggeling's film bear sober artistic clarity and tectonic strength. If Kiesler's statement at the beginning of *Symphonie Diagonale* is correct, and the film was only completed in 1924, then the film that Behne reviewed might be another early – and unknown – film of Eggeling's or of Eggeling and Richter's instead. Although, their experimental films at that time were merely the organization of rigorous abstract geometric forms and an "implied movement of graphic gestures", still, they brought to the fore their artistic need for a kinetic art. Shortly after a private screening of *Symphonie Diagonale*, a review by B. G. Kawan titled *Abstrakte Filmkunst* appeared in the Berlin journal *Film-Kurier*, on November 22, 1924, Kawan thought that Eggeling had applied kinetic art design with actual movement, and had dynamicized real (non-illusionistic) elements of the visual arts within the film.[238] Lawder says that in *Symphonie Diagonale* "the emphasis is on objectively analyzed movement rather than expressiveness, on the surface patterning of lines into clearly defined movements, controlled by a mechanical, almost metronomic tempo."[239]
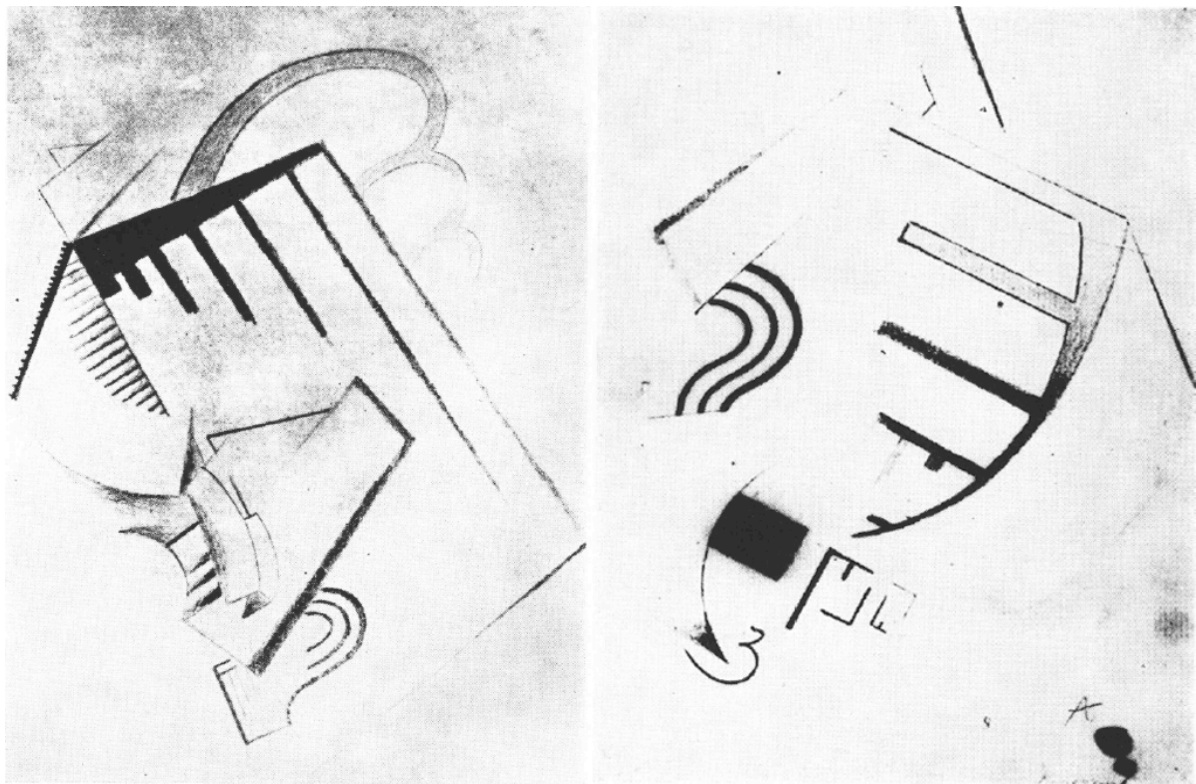
Figure 31 Viking Eggeling, Study for *Symphonie Diagonale* IV and First Stage
Photo Copy © Louise O'Konor, Viking Eggeling 1880-1925. Artist and Filmmaker, Life and Work

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[238] O'Konor, *Viking Eggeling*, 1971, p. 52.
[239] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 54.

Figure 32 Film Still from experimental animation film *Symphonie Diagonale* (1924), Viking Eggeling.

Figure 33 Film Still from experimental animation film *Symphonie Diagonale* (1924), Viking Eggeling.

The mutual interchange of visions, ideas and talents, provokes artistic development. Although coming from totally different artistic backgrounds, in the spirit of the times a confluence among the international avant-garde artists could be observed. While searching for solutions for further artistic development, Richter and Eggeling "misused" the medium of film in their experimental films as they explored themes such as movement, dynamics, kinetic art, and time and space. Kiesler, as we have seen, was also fairly well aware of these technological matters, dealing with similar themes and seeking Time-Space spatial experiences in his projects *R. U. R.* backdrop, *Space Stage*, *City-in-Space*, and later further developed in *Film Guild Cinema*. Within this context, especially in *R. U. R.* and *Film Guild Cinema*, there was an undoubted feeling that film was a powerful, expressive element and so, he insisted upon the inclusion of film in his theater or architecture designs. Therefore, Kiesler could be considered to be "among those artists who wished to solve the topical problems of visual art by taking advantage of the great strides in film technique and thus to effect an aesthetic union between the dynamic and the static."[240]

Although the media Kiesler and Eggeling-Richter worked in were different, so were the approaches they undertook, of course; however, at the very fundamental level, similarities can still be observed, namely, in their attempts to integrate motion into their works. By making use of the dynamic principles of film technique, so as overcome the static character of painted backdrops can be clearly read, both in Kiesler's 1924 Manifesto *Die Kulisse explodiert* and in the practice of the *R. U. R.* backdrop and the other works previously discussed. *Space Stage,* functioned as an organic, flexibly "expandable space", brought vitality and dynamism into the stage design and replaced the traditional static, box-like proscenium scenery; *City-in-Space*, the walking-through model of a utopian mega-city, provoked spectators' interactivity and incorporated their vigorous participation, and provided a poly-dimensional visual experience with successive movements in time and space; in *Film Guild Cinema*, Kiesler applied his so-called *Time-Space-Architecture*, a concept he claimed he had already developed during the making of *City-in-Space* in 1924 in Paris. Through flexible image size and motion, the environment and space of *Film Guild Cinema* were expanded into a constantly changing visual setting. The films that were projected thus went far beyond the common understanding of film's limitations, becoming instead "a further

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[240] O'Konor, *Viking Eggeling*, 1971, p. 48.

embodiment of an idea which was a basic building block in Kiesler's theory."[241] We shall bear in mind that the design of *Film Guild Cinema* was very much based on the foundations laid down from his previous European theories and practices. In the following analysis comparison will be first made between *City-in-Space* and *Rhythmus 21*, then try to be as well applied for *Film Guild Cinema*.

To take Richter and Kiesler's early 1920s works for comparison, for instance, *Rhythmus 21* and *City-in-Space*, between both works similarities are evident. Within both works, as most historians agree, *De Stijl*-like principles of organizations can be clearly observed. It was not just happenstance that Van Doesburg, an active member of *De Stijl* saw that Richter's *Rhythmus 21* bore not only the *De Stijl* forms, but also the essential spirit of *De Stijl* movement. The kinetic organization of pure Neoplastic forms in the film, jointly with dynamic movements of elemental geometry, expressed a semi-"mathematical precision and maximum graphic clarity"[242], and was a perfect example of *Neoplasticism* in motion, namely; it also added the time element as a dimension on top of *De Stijl* artistic principles, creating a cutting-edge aesthetic alliance between the static Neoplastic painting and film's dynamic motion. Around the same time, Van Doesburg, considered that with *City-in-Space* Kiesler "realized that which we dreamed could one day be accomplished"[243]. Kiesler's visionary, architectonic spatial design for a utopian mega-city which shared both Van Doesburg's *Elementarism* and Mondrian's *Neoplasticism*, had extended two-dimensional Neoplastic painting on to the surface of a large construction work in space and had thus completed a three-dimensional Neoplastic spatial realization.

In the same strain, the resemblance between *Film Guild Cinema* and *City-in-Space* marked Kiesler's adoption of *De Stijl*'s artistic principles, and also indicated that during this period his works shared the same essentials as did with Richter's film *Rhythmus 21*.

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[241] Excerpts from Dissertation by Roger L. Held, *Endless Innovations: Frederick Kiesler's Theory and Scenic Design.* Kiesler's Use of Film on Stage (During *R. U. R.*), pp. 47-48. In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 29.
[242] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 51.
[243] Bogner, "Kiesler and The European Avant-[G]arde", 1989, p. 49.
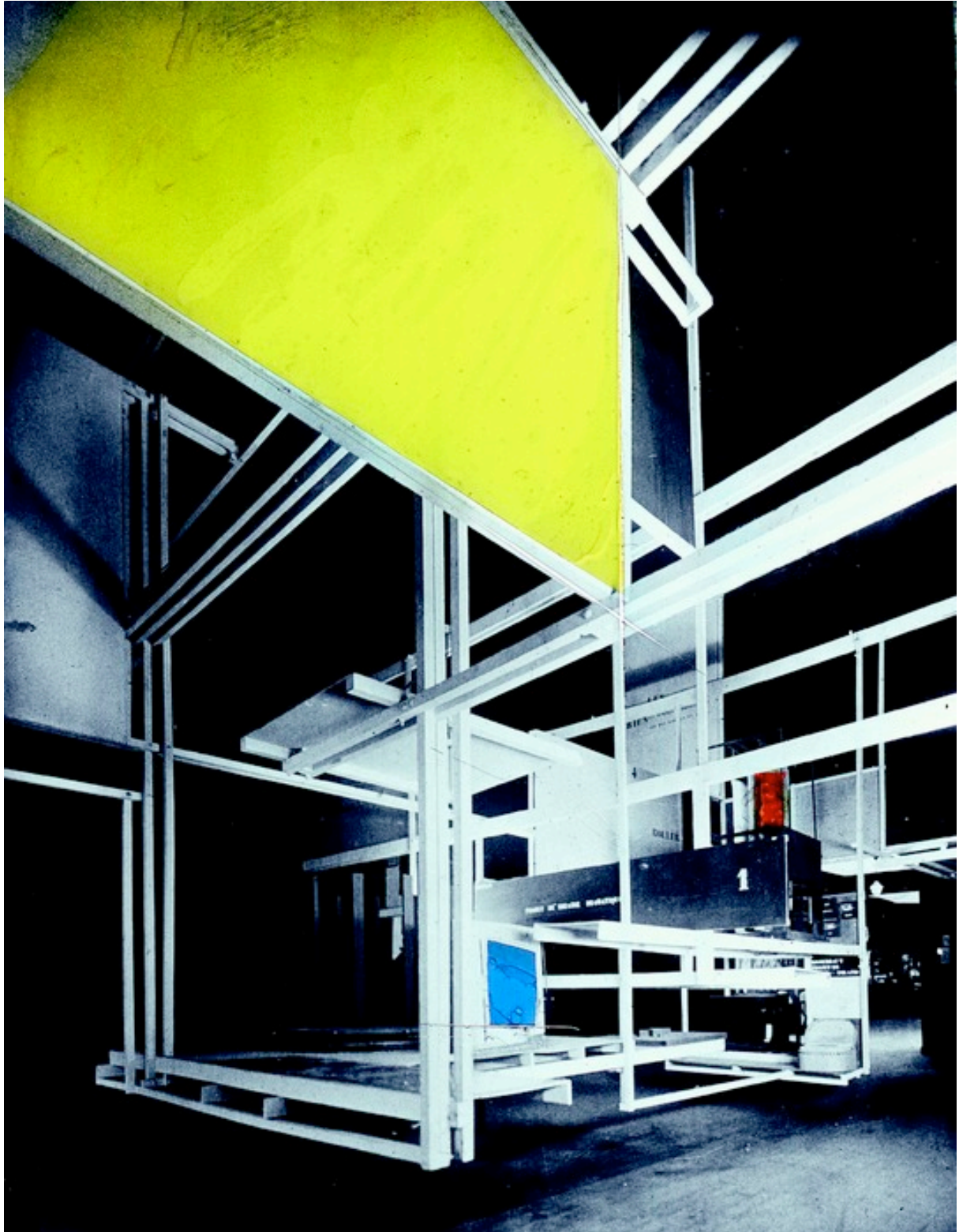
Figure 34 *City in Space* (*Raumstadt*)**, Grand Palais, Paris, 1925**
L'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes
© Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna

Comparison between *Rhythmus 21* and *City-in-Space* can be viewed from the level of perception, as Giuliana Bruno argues, "the changing position of a body in space creates both architectural and cinematic grounds".[244] Citing architect Bernard Tschumi's theoretical project *The Manhattan Transcripts*, Bruno writes, "he [Tschumi] suggests that the reading of a dynamic architectural space 'does not depend merely on a single frame (such as a facade), but on a succession of frames or spaces'", thus, analogies between film and architecture could be herein described. Similar to Tschumi's drawing of parallels between the "cinematic promenade" and the "architectural path" in his design,[245] if we review again Kiesler's projects, we could argue that such a "cinematic promenade" actually exists, especially in *Space Stage* and *City-in-Space*. If we take the common grounds between cinema (*Rhythmus 21*) and architecture (*City-in-Space*) for further comparison, in the case of *Rhythmus 21*, during the process of viewing those dynamically moving surfaces or geometries, although seemingly remaining physically static, the (im)mobile viewers followed the journey of their eyes and went through an imaginary virtual path in front of a static two-dimensional film screen; while for *City-in-Space*, mobile spectators, by changing bodily positions within space by actual movement, went through a three-dimensional path of space and time, here perceived as a visual experience of successive movement in time by making an actual journey in a constructed space – the *Time-Space-Architecture* created by Kiesler. Kiesler and Richter had included Kinetic Art and Time-Space themes to seek for "transformed experience of space and time and the relations among the objects"[246]; this should not be separated from the historic horizon of expectations at the turn of the twentieth century, which was associated with a thoroughly new understanding of motion, as was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Before Kiesler and Richter became acquainted at the beginning of the 1920s, they had both associated with various international avant-garde groups, respectively, and thus they shared similar frames of reference, including contemporary scientific and philosophical discourses.

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[244] Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 2002, p. 56.
[245] Ibid. p. 57.
[246] Mertins/Jennings, "Introduction", 2010, p. 53.

In 1905, Albert Einstein's (1879-1955) four important papers in the *Annalen der Physik* scientific journal, plus his dissertation – the later so-called *Annus Mirabilis* papers[247] – contributed not only to the foundation of modern physics but also to popular views of space, time, and matter. Einstein's *Theory of Relativity* especially proposed new concepts of space and time, yet, when it reached the ordinary cultivated public through the mass media, understanding of the physics formula vanished, and what remained was little more than an idea of a single continuum known as Space-Time. According to McGuire, Linda Henderson's study of the fourth dimension in modern art has shown that avant-garde artists in Europe and America were heavily influenced by Einstein's theory of relativity. As matter of fact, evidence of such influence can be found as well for both Eggeling-Richter and Kiesler's works. Eventually, when Eggeling and Richter campaigned to convince UFA to support their experimental films, they provided a short pamphlet called *Universelle Sprache*, within which they outlined "an elemental pictorial language of abstract form and its articulation through counterpoint of contrast and analogy". The pamphlet was sent to various influential individuals including Albert Einstein for testimonials to persuade UFA to support experimental film making.[248] On Kiesler's side, Held notes that he used the term "fourth dimension" to describe the theatrical effect in 1926, explaining his concept that the stage shall not any more remain a painted picture, but rather a constructed space to "meet the demands of the action".[249] Nevertheless, his idea was far ahead of its time, and even the most thoughtful critics couldn't entirely follow him, although a few tried to discuss his so called "fourth dimensional theatre as the element of time"[250]. Actually the term "fourth dimension" Kiesler was talking about stood for something else, namely, his modification of the Italian Futurist's *Scene-Synthesis*. From Held's perspective, such interrelation evidenced Kiesler's knowledge of a 1923 article Prampolini published in *L'atmosfera scenica futurista*. Sharing Prampolini's idea of continuous motion in scenery, Kiesler edited and reprinted the article in the catalogue of the Vienna exhibition in 1924, moreover, he extended the idea by including the actors.[251] Regardless of whether how it was understood, during the New York exposition, Kiesler's use of the term "fourth dimension" caught the attention of the New York press. The *Tribune* wrote: "The fourth dimension, according to [...] the inventor of the

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[247] http://www.loc.gov/rr/scitech/SciRefGuides/einstein.html (Accessed on: February 28, 2015)

[248] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 46.

[249] Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 46. Held cited from: *The Evening Post* (New York), March 13, 1926.

[250] Ibid. Held cited from: *The World* (New York), March 16, 1926.

[251] Ibid. pp. 46-47.

'*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.'"[252]; McGuire also considered Kiesler's "scientific interest in nature, kinesis, flux, and light at the guild borrowed from Albert Einstein's recently published theories concerning light as composed of both particles and waves and from contemporary discussions of the fourth dimension in art."[253] Although Kiesler never specifically stated that *Film Guild Cinema* was a fourth-dimension experiment, such an argument may still stand. Why? As further development of those ideas from his European era, especially directly following the 1925 *City-in-Space*, Kiesler had announced at the opening of the 1926 New York *International Theatre Exposition* that it was his intention to develop a "fourth-dimension" theater and "he would work to foster the creative powers of the both actors and audience so that they would function in concert with the theater and stage architecture in order to create a fourth-dimension experience."[254] The theme of a fourth dimension then had always been a central issue for Kiesler, and had been integrated in his R. U. R., *Space Stage*, *City-in-Space* and later in *Film Guild Cinema*. Thus, *Rhythmus 21*, *City-in-Space*, and later *Film Guild Cinema* could be categorized among those avant-garde works influenced by Einstein's theory of relativity.

From the philosophical point of view, French philosopher Henri-Louis Bergson's theories of duration and simultaneity were widespread in the early decades of the twentieth century. They certainly "left their mark on Cubism",[255] and on the *Futurists*, among many others avant-garde movements that both Kiesler and Eggeling-Richter were intimately associated with. As Tom Gunning remarks, "those formative years of cinema that were contemporary with Bergson's thought" shall certainly also not be ignored, because "the origins and archaeology of the concept of an 'art of motion' lie very much in the turn of the last century [19th] and reveal the ways cinema could appear as a resolution of tensions within the other arts and even become a central philosophical issue."[256] Bergson's ideas contained strong visual force and his theories provided an alternative explanation of space, time, and matter. Bergson's publications had gained extraordinary popularity and his work must have cast a powerful impact on those international avant-garde artists who were familiar with his ideas.

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[252] Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 47. Held cited from: *The Tribune* (New York), March 15, 1926.
[253] McGuire, "A Movie House in Space and Time", 2007, p. 69.
[254] Ibid. McGuire cited from: "Plans Laboratory of Modern Stage," *New York Times*. March 15, 1926. p. 19.
[255] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 20.
[256] Gunning, "Loïe Fuller and the Art of Motion", 2003, p. 76.

Soon after, his notion was further "extended" in *Creative Evolution,* "in the continuity of sensible qualities we mark off the boundaries of bodies. Each of these bodies really changes at every moment. In the first place, it resolves itself into a group of qualities, and every quality, as we said, consists of a succession of elementary movements. […] But in reality the body is changing form at every moment; or rather there is no form, since form is immobile and the reality is movement. What is real is the continual change of form: form is only a snapshot view of a transition."[257] Bergson argued that "metaphysics was led to seek the reality of things above time, beyond what moves and what changes, and consequently outside what our senses and consciousness perceive,"[258] and that this had shaped artificial and static constructs. Almost naturally, Bergson virtually "found in film a working model for his construct of fluid time and the perception of form".[259]

Around the 1910s, very likely Eggeling had paid homage to Bergson's philosophy, "Bergson's philosophy is marked by its dualism between spirit and matter. Space stands for matter. Time stands for life or spirit. His doctrine is also in many respects founded on biology,"[260] in a way, "emphasizing the organic wholeness of [v]ivid experience and the centrality of the body." Moreover, Bergson referenced more contemporary response "to the threat of ever accelerating processes of modernization and the intrusion of technology and industry into all spheres of life"[261].

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[257] Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 2012, p. 302.

[258] Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 2012, p. 7.

[259] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 20.

[260] O'Konor, *Viking Eggeling*, 1971, p. 79.

[261] Robbers, *Modern Architecture*, 2012, p. 334.

Bergson's philosophical influence can be found in Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale*, with its themes of Time and Space, and its metaphorical biological meanings and analogies to "living beings which grew, declined, changed, disappeared – and then were reborn"[262], as Richter wrote. O'Konor's research found that within the posthumous manuscripts Eggeling left behind, extracts and quotations from Bergson's most famous publication *L'évolution créatrice* (published in 1907, translated in German in 1912) formed an entire chapter under the heading of *Film*.[263] Parallel, "running commentary to his work, marginal notes and tentative ideas, clues to his philosophy"[264] can as well be found. Thus one might conclude that Bergson's ideas may have been significant for Eggeling's film experiments and influenced his conception of *Symphonie Diagonale*:

> We may say that the film *Diagonal Symphony* is enacted entirely in time, and from the extensive quotations in Eggeling's notes it is evident that Bergson's ideas (perhaps just because Bergson is a metaphysician) have played a role for the conception of this film. Eggeling uses "*la méthode cinématographique*" […]. In his film the forms are generated by the past and the present pervading each other; this is what produces continuity. This is the current flow, "*la durée*" in Bergson's philosophy.[265]

In an unpublished paper (date unclear) Kiesler wrote about early experimental film makers, and his admiration for Eggeling and the film *Symphonie Diagonale* can be clearly read in between the lines. Starting with introducing a Swedish scientific discovery of retranslating the invisible vibrations of sound for the human ear, which was not yet accessible to the average human conscious, Kiesler writes, "[…] but to a creative mind like Viking Eggeling […]". Kiesler continues by proposing what Eggeling had fulfilled: "Similarly, do not the vibrations of the cinema have speech thought, will? Scientific investigators may track down the evidences of this life; Egyptian hieroglyphists may interpret its system of logic; but is not the imagination to be permitted its faith in an arrangement of living lines which, going beyond pretext and scenery, play the leading role?"[266] Considering both *Rhythmus 21* and *Symphonie Diagonale* as being of "great significance in the development of optic-film conceptions" for the early 1920s, Kiesler affirmed their enormous impact on "those circles

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[262] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, pp. 42-43. Lawder cited from: H. Richter, "Dada and the Film", in Willy Verkauf [Ed], *Dada - Mono-graph of a Movement*, Teufen, Switzerland, 1957, p. 64.
[263] O'Konor, *Viking Eggeling*, 1971, p. 52.
[264] Ibid. p. 78.
[265] Ibid. p. 80.
[266] F. Kiesler, "Early Film-Makers: *Symphonie Diagonale*, by Viking Eggeling; *Rhythmus*, by Hans Richter." In: *A Tribute*, 1977, pp. 31-32.

that constituted creative forces of the European motion-picture avant-garde", and that *Symphonie Diagonale* was "the best abstract film yet conceived" because from a motion picture quality point of view, *Symphonie Diagonale* had marked a significant difference between Eggeling's "definite artistic results" and the so-called trick films of that time.[267] Whether or not was his own observation, or perhaps though reading relevant critics, writings, Kiesler noticed the essential matter of film actually lying at the time, "here was a creative mind trying to establish basic facts for film configuration and the most important problem to him was the time-element resulting through the succession of pictures within a certain time span, which we call: FILM."[268] The purpose of film was not the picture itself, rather the interval, the span, the continuity and the new life within those instantaneous pictures set in motion.

Although still unclear under what circumstances Kiesler's statement came to appear at the opening of *Symphonie Diagonale*, through this unpublished piece, we see that Kiesler is fairly familiar with not only the film itself, but also Eggeling's working method, process and working conditions in detail, as we can read from what he introduced in his paper:

> Eggeling installed a motion picture camera suspended from the ceiling in his little studio on the top floor of a house […]. Underneath the suspended camera he laid his designs on a table. There between two glasses of plates, a paper roll twenty feet long and three feet wide bearing the theme-designs of the *Symphonie Diagonale* in the form of a musical fugue, was passed in front of the camera. Again and again he partially covered up the designs with lead stencils. Light came from underneath and shot right up around his dark designs into the camera which absorbed them from above. He had to organize his workshop himself with very little means and in his own way to suit his purpose.
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> […]

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[267] F. Kiesler, "Early Film-Makers: *Symphonie Diagonale*, by Viking Eggeling; *Rhythmus*, by Hans Richter." In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 32.
[268] Ibid.

Eggeling recognized that proper organization of time within its limit set by the length of the film-reel was of prime necessity, no one had attacked that problem before. Designers, actors, production men, camera-mechanics were chiefly interested in reproduction of stories, pictures, melodies. Was the film to be an accumulation of photographs, of paintings come alive, like the tableaus in wandering circuses that suddenly start to move and return to their frozen apotheosis, or was the film a mechanized theatre show, or was it a conglomeration of all of them or was it the beginning of something that will develop into artistic self-sufficiency with its very own means?[269]

Kiesler went on to answer the questions he had proposed. For him, Eggeling, being a visionary avant-garde artist, and twelve years before Kiesler wrote this article, had already made an attempt in *Symphonie Diagonale* to prove that film could have its own goal and language, if not yet for the greater masses, then at least to the "avant-garde circles that constituted creative forces of the European motion-picture." [270] Eggeling's filmmaking was first of all minimized to "a point in motion developing to a line and a line in motion developing into a plane"; then, "reduction of designs to basic forms"; and finally, "Elimination of light and shadow, color and space. Elimination of illusions of space necessitates an abstraction of it as optical language"[271], giving film three or even more dimensions, instead of obeying the routinism of the two-dimensional limitation.

Figure 35 Film Still from experimental film
***Symphonie Diagonale* (1924), Viking Eggeling**

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[269] F. Kiesler, "Early Film-Makers: *Symphonie Diagonale*, by Viking Eggeling; *Rhythmus*, by Hans Richter." In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 32.
[270] Ibid.
[271] Ibid.

Composed of various combinations of architecture, diagrams, elements and figures, and performing through slow motion a kind of "topological transformation"[272], *Symphonie Diagonale* was purely "an expression of austere beauty that is only inherent to work of nature or art embodying entity of all parts held tenaciously together by its very own power of motion, that makes it expand and contract, endless in its breath and most concrete in its structure."[273] Instead of "surrendering" to the film medium, animation techniques or mechanics of any kind, Eggeling's approach was to utilize the medium analytically, rather than being dominated by the medium. The language and movement "being slow enough to be appreciated by the intellect as a series of transformations" in *Symphonie Diagonale* was organic.[274]

Richter considered that he had "profited enormously" from Eggeling, who was far ahead of him at the time when they met,[275] whether or not it was the same for Kiesler, remains unknown. It is clear that during life-long artistic practice, Kiesler slowly transformed his art from the *De Stijl* influenced *City-in-Space* or *Film Guild Cinema*, to his later so-called *Design Correalism* and finally, the search for endless an "organic result" in his architectural design, through a Time-Space-Concept of architecture that included a continuous tension within spaces.[276] We are by no means suggesting that Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale* had any direct impact on Kiesler's later works, however, the fact remains that there were numerous interrelationships between scientific, philosophical and artistic ideas and practices during this fertile period of creativity. Where "Continuity" and "Correlation" meet, bold and unrestrained transmutation would take place, as we have seen between the films and architectural projects of this chapter, namely *Rhythmus 21*, *Symphonie Diagonale*, City-in-Space and *Film Guild Cinema*.

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[272] Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 1977, p. 24.

[273] F. Kiesler, "Early Film-Makers: *Symphonie Diagonale*, by Viking Eggeling; *Rhythmus*, by Hans Richter." In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 33.

[274] Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 1977, p. 24.

[275] Ibid. p. 21.

[276] F. Kiesler, "Notes on Architecture." [1929] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 23.

4.3 Kiesler and Ballet Mécanique

— Salvaging Film: Ballet Mécanique

In previous chapters, we have mentioned the mysterious discovery of an original 35mm print of Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*, which was found in Kiesler's weekend house. Examination of Kiesler and his relationship with this film will be covered in this chapter. In November 1975, when Lillian Kiesler recalled the salvaged films, the listed films sound like a gathering of all the major early experimental films. Together with a "rosy, linen covered copy of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, a copy of Gordon Craig's *Florentine Journals*", a print of Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* was considered by Kiesler as "three of the greatest influences of his life".[277] On November 29, Jonas Mekas, who was handling all salvaged films around later 1975, wrote to Lillian Kiesler about the footage of *Ballet Mécanique*:

> The second and third cans contained a most beautiful print of Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*, in two rolls. […] I immediately ran to Anthology, picked up our print of *Ballet Mécanique* and began comparing the two prints. Our print, by the way, is the same as the Museum's (MOMA). Same as described by Lawder in his book. I discovered that Kiesler's print was, again, like that of Ruttmann's, made up of many, many little pieces – the print contains practically hundreds of splices. It's a handmade print. […] but these first two minutes or so revealed an immense difference between the MOMA print and Kiesler's print of Léger's film. Kiesler's print contains much more material, in most case. In a couple of cases I found the opposite: it was MOMA's print that contained more material (more frames of the hat, for instance). I have no theories about this, we still have to see the entire film, after we make a protection master of it (and, of course, it's a nitrate print). It's very possible that this is the same print which Léger gave to Kiesler for the premiere of *Ballet* in Vienna in 1924. It must be the same print, since it was part of the same Exhibition that he brought to New York, to Steinway Hall. That would mean that this is Léger's personal, and probably early version of the film. Later he may have polished and finalized a slight different version. This whole question needs a lot of historical detective work and mousing around. In any case, Kiesler's print is invaluable, priceless![278]

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[277] L. Kiesler, "November 1975, Films Salvaged: Lillian Kiesler Finds *Ballet Mécanique* by Léger and *Excelsior-Reifen* by Ruttmann Stored in Her Home." In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 22.

[278] Mekas, "Letter from Jonas Mekas. Anthology Film Archives, to Lillian Kiesler, November 29, 1975." In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 24.

— *Kiesler's Involvement with Ballet Mécanique's Publicity*

Why did Kiesler have a copy of *Ballet Mécanique*? As Mekas speculated, it could be traced back to the early 1920s, when the film was screened in Vienna at the 1924 *International Exhibition of New Theatre Techniques*. In early 1926, Kiesler brought a copy of the film to America for the New York *International Theatre Exposition*. (The programs of the two expositions were partly identical.) According to R. L. Held, *Ballet Mécanique* was just "one of several abstract films to be showed during the festival", the other three films were: "*The Stolen Necklace*, a French film featuring dancing geometrical shapes; an American film, *The Two Men of the World*; and the Karl Brune film, *Arabella*, the novel of a horse." [279] It wasn't simply by chance that Kiesler added films to the exhibition. Looking into Kiesler's "insistence"[280] on including film during the Vienna *International Exhibition of New Theatre Techniques*, Held gave the following analysis:

> He [Kiesler] no doubt felt that film was an element that could be of expressive power in the theatre as demonstrated by its use in *R. U. R*. The manner in which abstract films made the environment, the space of a visual setting, constantly change was similar to Kiesler's designs for the *Emperor Jones*. The films, therefore, were a further embodiment of an idea which was a basic building block in Kiesler's theory. Finally, it is when watching a film such as Leger's *Ballet Mécanique* that the spaces between the changing shapes appear as factors which define the relationship of the shapes.[281]

Kiesler and Léger's personal association, as we know, could be traced back to 1924 in Vienna during the festival, if not earlier. Susan Delson mentioned that according to the Viennese newspaper *Neues 8 Uhr-Blatt*, Léger gave a lecture and *Ballet Mécanique* was shown as part of the opening night event.[282] Although no detailed written archives are available to document Kiesler and Léger's personal encounter, however, a photograph shows the two standing in front of the controversial *Space Stage* (Fig. 36.); hence, an assumption can be made that as the key organizer, Kiesler and Léger did in fact meet during the occasion of the Vienna event, and the two remained in contact thereafter.

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[279] Excerpts from Dissertation by Roger L. Held, *Endless Innovations: Frederick Kiesler's Theory and Scenic Design*. "Kiesler's Use of Film on Stadge (During *R. U. R*.)" p. 30. In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 29.

[280] Ibid. p. 29. Held cited from *Arbeiterzeitung* (Vienna), July 13, 1924.

[281] Ibid. p. 29.

[282] Delson, *Murphy,* 2006, p. 59.
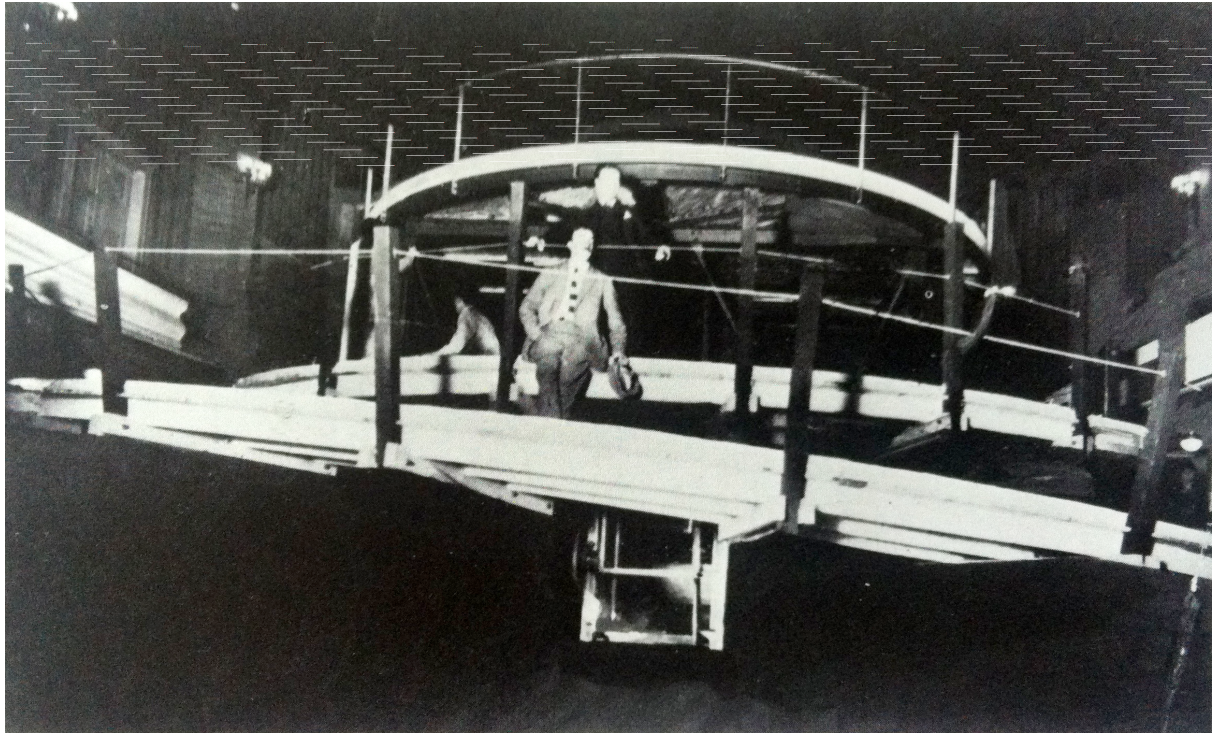
Figure 36 Kiesler and Léger in Front of *Space Stage*, Vienna, 1924
© Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna

Not only did Kiesler maintain a friendship with Léger, his relationship with *Ballet Mécanique* also now began. According to Lawder, *Ballet Mécanique* "received further attention from the Berlin Art circles when his essay on the film, first published by Kiesler, appeared in a special film issue of Hans Richter's 'G', this time in German translation."[283] That is to say, Kiesler was pushing to make *Ballet Mécanique* known to the German-speaking art scene.

There is still yet more to be discovered about Kiesler's involvement with *Ballet Mécanique*'s publicity after it reached the United States. Kiesler had been long experimenting with the potential to incorporate multimedia within theater backdrops and exhibition design. However, after arriving in the United States, he found out that although the movies had certainly taken their place as part of commercial entertainment culture in America, experimentation in bringing cinema and art or design into alliance, still remained scarce. Held, for instance, considered Kiesler's inclusion of film screenings in New York's *International Theatre Exposition* as an important contribution to both the conception and execution of the American exhibit,[284] and mentioned two films that had been screened: "The films were coordinated with the Franco-American Society by Count de Beaumont. Two of the films were: *The Street*,

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[283] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 184.
[284] Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 43.

dealing with the sordid aspects of Berlin life, and *Le Voyage Imaginaire* by René Clair, a surreal fantasy."[285] The films were not presented at the Steinway Building due to lack of space, but at other locations. Screening of those two films were merely tiny drops in the bucket, though there do exist hints of many other early avant-garde films that could be found during the *International Theatre Exposition*, including Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*.

Among many other exhibits, Kiesler once again presented Léger, including his designs and figurines for the two Ballets Suédois productions, *La Création du Monde* and *Skating Rink,* which were the same projects that Léger had exhibited in the *International Exhibition of New Theatre Techniques* in Vienna. In addition, according to Susan Delson, "the *Film Associates* announced a screening of Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Inhumaine*, under the film's American title, *The New Enchantment*."[286] On Sunday, March 14, at the Klaw Theatre on West Forty-fifth Street, the program also included "an abstract film as an indication of the new experimental films […]" That abstract film was *Ballet Mécanique*.[287] Likewise, according to Lawder, both films, *L'Inhumaine* and *Ballet Mécanique*, were already "heavily documented at the 'Exposition de l'art dans le Cinéma Français' held at the Musée Galliera in 1924. The event, like the representation of the art of the film which Ricciotto Canudo installed at the Salon d'Automne in 1922, stands as a clear indication that film was increasingly regarded as a twentieth–century art form."[288] Thus, New York was then approximately synchronous with Paris in alliance in awakening interest in the avant-garde film art. If the sci-fi/melodrama *L'Inhumaine* had received lengthy reviews from media, *Ballet Mécanique* rather "generated scant notice, much of it dismissive or bewildered"; but there was enough to give it an air of a curiosity, foreshadowing the film's future publicity in the United States. As the *New York Times* reported, "An even stranger production was put forth in which there was everything from pats [*sic*] and pans to a swinging girl, a glimpse of an amusement park and red circles — a film which would make the most confused effort of a futurist or cubistic artist seem as plain as a pikestaff."[289] On Thursday, March 18, *Ballet Mécanique* "received an encore

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[285] Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 43. Held cited from: *Moving Picture World* (New York), February 27, 1926.

[286] Delson, *Murphy,* 2006, p. 60. See: Program booklet, *International Theatre Exposition*, 34, Kiesler Collection, Harvard Theatre Collection, Nathan Marsh Pusey Library, Harvard University.

[287] Ibid. Delson cited from: "Projection Jottings," *New York Times*, March 14, 1926, Sec. 8, 5.

[288] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 99.

[289] Delson, *Murphy,* 2006, p. 60. Original from: Mordaunt Hall, "The Screen," *New York Times*, March 15, 1926, 18.

screening before a packed house of homegrown cinéastes"[290], together with "Charlie Chaplin's *The Pilgrim* (1923) and *Color Dynamics*, a prismatic abstract short produced by the Eastman Kodak Laboratories, and *The Three Wax Works* (1924), an expressionist feature by German director Paul Leni".[291] This time the screening was at the Cameo Theatre, as part of the opening event of the International Film Arts Guild's subscription series. After that screening, "earnest individuals who believe in using the words 'art' and 'cinema' in the same breath"[292] as the *New York Evening Post* commented, dropped in the event. And, however trenchant the tone, there were indeed "earnest individuals" involved, for instance, Kiesler and his associates, who thought of turning cinema into "Art-(dis)-Play-House".

Lawder's research shows that it was Dudley Murphy, who joined Léger for the production of *Ballet Mécanique*, who was responsible for the film's New York premiere. In fact, according to Lawder, on the same day, March 14, 1926, there was a double premiere of the film in both New York and London, and both likely linked with Murphy's efforts. In the London case, the assumption has been made (however not yet confirmed), that Murphy deposited a print at the London *Film Society* after the film's completion; while in the New York case, the premiere was due to Murphy's association with Symon Gould, who undertook the direction role of Film Guild at that time. Lawder argues that Murphy's involvement with the scheduling of films at the *International Film Arts Guild* for the Cameo Theatre in Spring 1926 gave him the possibility of regularly promoting *Ballet Mécanique* within the Theatre's programs.[293] However, what may cause doubt about this point is that later in Murphy's memoir he describes a detailed scene at the Cameo Theatre on March 18, but never mentions anything about the *International Theatre Exposition* or the presentation at the Klaw Theatre on Sunday, March 14[294] (according to Delson, who has carried out detailed research on Murphy). Considering that Kiesler was already at that time among the committee members of the Film Guild's Advisory Council, Film Associates, Inc., that choose the films to be presented, and that he had kept the original print of *Ballet Mécanique* from the film's world premiere in Vienna (or, the print that Léger gave him for the New York *International Theatre Exposition*), jointly with the fact that the screening date (Sunday March 14, 1926) was within the

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[290] Delson, *Murphy,* 2006, p. 60.
[291] Ibid.
[292] Ibid. Delson cited from: "Sub-titles," *New York Evening Post*, March 18, 1926, 12.
[293] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 185.
[294] Delson, *Murphy,* 2006, p. 60.

Exposition's time frame, bold speculation could be made that the print Kiesler had was quite possibly the one used for the Klaw Theatre screening, *Ballet Mécanique's* New York premiere. If such an assumption can be proven, then Kiesler's role as an important promoter of *Ballet Mécanique* can not then be ignored or underrated.

— *Shared Mechanism Aesthetics*

Léger was actively involved with the influential progressive journal *The Little Review*, the magazine that had invited Kiesler to recreate the European exhibitions at the *International Theatre Exposition* in New York. *The Little Review* was one of the few magazines at the time that was thoroughly dedicated to the "new" in ideas and the arts; it had committed itself to a range of artistic, social, and philosophical movements, and the inter-relations and inter-influences among these merged together and generated a dynamic *Mechanism Aesthetics*.

The Autumn 1924 issue of *The Little Review* had an especially strong visual and verbal dynamic impact, and included Léger's "statement and score" for *Ballet Mécanique*, George Antheil's article on his "machine-influenced music," and the Italian Futurist painter Enrico Prampolini's "powerful statement on the 'Esthetic of the Machine and Mechanical Introspection in Art'"[295]. Previously, Léger's 1923 essay "The Esthetic of the Machine" had also appeared in *The Little Review*, and this piece was the starting point for the journal's editor Jane Heap's fascination and celebration of the joined force between art and engineering according to Susan Nayes Platt.[296]

Begun during World War I and following the post-war era, "many of the artists who contributed to *The Little Review* were particularly concerned with the relationship of art and the machine. As mechanization increasingly entered daily life, the efficiency, simplicity, and functionalism of the machine influenced aesthetics. […]"[297]. Further, many avant-garde artists also "experimented in their art with machines as images, as objects, and as processes,"[298] which often directly reflected their admiration and fascination with the machine, machine technology, and machine-related aesthetics, all of which corresponded with their specific era; while others constructed their futurist visions of how the human

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[295] Platt, "Mysticism In the Machine Age", 1989, p. 31.
[296] Ibid. p. 38.
[297] Ibid. p. 21.
[298] Ibid.

society was being transformed by machines and by mechanized aesthetics. As Heap had declared, "The men who hold first rank in the plastic arts today are the men who are organizing and transforming the realities of our age into dynamic beauty. They recognize [the machine] as one of the realities."[299]

In Kiesler's case, we know that he had already positioned himself in relation to *Mechanism Aesthetics* in the early 1920s, by utilizing technology to radically reshape and mechanize the stage and thus too the human actions in his *R. U. R.* backdrop design, with which he had called for "the vitality of life itself, a vitality which has the force and the tempo of the age."[300] While for the 1926 New York *International Theatre Exposition*, he completely abandoned the traditional theatrical experience, and rather provided *The Little Review* and the New York spectators theatrically unorthodox experiences with "a tangible example for the use of machines as a means of transformation of spiritual as well as material life"[301], a description that corresponded well to *The Little Review's* press release for the New York exposition: "The automotive mechanical, electrical, chemical, and civil engineers have replaced the Seven Wonders of the World with their Wonders. In the machine we have replaced a new plastic-mystery which is influencing and energizing all the arts."[302]

Léger and Kiesler had both trained as architects, and also shared an enthusiasism for the modernity reflected in the city and architecture, as one can read from a letter Léger wrote to the French architect Le Corbusier and that reflects his impression about New York city and its architecture: "[…] I'm still constantly astonished by the vertical urge of these people drunk with architecture… This city is infernal. A mixture of elegance and toughness."[303] According to Carolyn Lanchner, in early fall 1931, during Léger's first trip in the United States, Kiesler, who had already immigrated to America, guided Léger around in New York. Léger's correspondence reveals that he was very excited about a meeting Kiesler had arranged for him with an architect who was involved in designing Rockefeller Center.[304] The fascination reflected in Léger's letter to Le Corbusier in a way recalls his post war manifesto on painting, *The City* (1919), in which he utilized a "Cubist visual vocabulary", and created

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[299] Platt, "Mysticism In the Machine Age", 1989, p. 34.
[300] Ibid.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid. p. 36.
[303] Affron/Lanchner, *Fernand Leger*, 2002, p. 36.
[304] Ibid.

"a simultaneous image of the many characteristic faces of the city"[305]. *The City* marked Léger's separation "completely and decisively" from his pre-war period, and represented the initiation of his so-called "mechanical period", and within it, "[…] flashes of advertising and traffic signs, glimpses of anonymous pedestrians, the hard-edged presence of urban architecture, all of this permeated with the sounds and incessant activity of city life. Throughout this restless composition are a series of interlocked and linked discs recalling the wheels of traffic which keep the city alive."[306] Thus, fine art and architecture merged into one single painting of Léger's, where *Mechanism Aesthetics* can be clearly observed, and which acted as a prelude for the making of *Ballet Mécanique*.

— *Mechanism Aesthetics in Ballet Mécanique*

If *The City* represents the beginning of Léger's response to the rhythms of modern urban life with its dehumanized residents, machinic features, disjointed spatial fragments, sense of confusion, and vision of motions; then *Ballet Mécanique* functions as a conclusion to his "mechanical period," 1919 to 1924. Léger commented on cinema and theater: for him, cinema represented the age of the machine, while the theater was the age of the horse, "Le Cinéma, c'est l'âge de la machine. Le Théâtre, c'est l'âge du cheval."[307] Léger undisguisedly revealed his fascination with the movement of machine-made objects and the cinematographic beauty of *Mechanism Aesthetics*. Simultaneously from three different but interrelated paths, namely, Cubist painting from a painter's view, the sensations of urban space and life from an architect's perspective, and finally "awareness of film at the time of his creative involvement with the medium"[308], Léger soon had his *Ballet Mécanique* ready for its world premiere in Vienna, before it was screened in Paris. During the *International Exhibition of New Theatre Techniques* in Vienna, *Ballet Mécanique* shared Kiesler's experimental *Space Stage*, and the two artists shared their admiration for technology and mechanical movements; their's was a positive view, rather than the dystopian view which was rather much more common at the time.

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[305] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 72.
[306] Ibid. pp. 70-72.
[307] Ibid. p. 65.
[308] Ibid. p. 66.

As for Kiesler, it was clear that *Mechanism Aesthetics had* already appeared in his *R. U. R.* backdrop. Despite Karel Čapek's dystopian view of seeing technology as a potential threat, Kiesler rather expressed curiosity, triumph, and admiration in his synaesthetic stage set design. He freed the traditional realistic illusion of a theatrical set by representing technology with both accuracy and thoroughness. Kiesler managed to design a space with a visual setting which constantly switched "from moment to moment"[309] by means of the expressive power of film projection, and that presented "a machine of the future"[310]. As Held argues, Kiesler's utilization of film in *R. U. R.* was "a further embodiment of an idea which was a basic building block […]"[311]. For Léger, his fascination for *Mechanism Aesthetics* surfaced when he wrote an admiring essay devoted to Abel Gance's *La Roue* [*The Wheel*] (1922), (which was also Léger's first hands-on participation in film-making), especially to the portion of the film where the "machine becomes the leading character, the leading actor"[312]. He considered that the plastic values that mechanical elements demonstrated in certain montage sequences "have long been the domain of the modern arts", and will as well "be laden with implications in itself and for the future":

> This new element is presented to us through an infinite variety of methods, from every aspect: close-ups, fixed or moving mechanical fragments, projected at a heightened speed that approaches the state of simultaneity and that crushes and eliminates the human object, reduces its interest, pulverizes it… The plastic event is no less there because of it, it's nowhere else; it is planned, fitted in with care, appropriate, and seems to me to be laden with implications in itself and for the future.

> The advent of this film is additionally interesting in that it is going to determine a place in the plastic order for an art that has until now remained almost completely descriptive, sentimental, and documentary. The fragmentation of the object, the intrinsic plastic value of the object, its pictorial equivalence, have long been the domain of the modern arts.[313]

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[309] "A Radio Broadcast Interview with Mrs. Kiesler: Friedrich Kiesler's Involvement with Films – Leger, Ruttmann, Warhol". In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 27.

[310] Excerpts from Dissertation by Roger L. Held, *Endless Innovations: Frederick Kiesler's Theory and Scenic Design.* Kiesler's Use of Film on Stadge (During *R. U. R.*), p. 30. In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 28.

[311] Ibid. p. 29.

[312] Freeman, "Bridging Purism and Surrealism", 1996, p. 29.

[313] Ibid. Originally from: Fernand Léger's, "A Critical Essay on the Plastic Quality of Abel Gance's Film The Wheel," *Comoedia* (1922), translated in Fernand Léger, *Functions of Painting*, translated by Alexandra Anderson, edited by Edward F. Fry, New York: Viking Press, 1965. pp. 20-21.

In addition, according to Judi Freeman, Léger even asked Gance to describe his visionary use of mechanical elements as cinematic plastic elements in the biographical note to be attached to Léger's own promotional article on the film, which appeared in *Comoedia*, therefore demonstrating his prescient appreciation of *mechanism aesthetics*:

> Fernand Léger is the modern French painter that first considered the *mechanical element* as a possible plastic element; he has incorporated the concept of equivalence into numerous pictures. Abel Gance has asked him to offer his view of the plastic value of his film *La Roue*.[314]

Through hands-on participation in the making of *La Roue* Léger discovered "the filmic rhythms of cutting and the expressive power of the close up"[315] and the futuristic plastic value of moving mechanical fragments; Léger's involvement with Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Inhumaine* [*The New Enchantment*] as one of the set designers (Fig. 37.), prepared the "second vital ingredient" for, *Ballet Mécanique*, namely, "Cubist imagery, pre-stylized for recording on film"[316]. The production of *L'Inhumaine* started in September 1923 and the film was released in the Spring of 1924, which was essentially also the period when *Ballet Mécanique* was created.[317]

Jacque Catelain, who played the leading male role in *L'Inhumaine*, described that started with bringing in six painted watercolours with "representations of a single surface of a whole forest of mechanisms: streets like trees, cones like trunks, levers like branches. No floors, walls, or ceilings",[318] Léger showed only abstract volumes without any construction details to L'Herbier, who had entrusted Léger to design two sets of laboratories for the film. Even more surprisingly, the next morning, "a man dressed like a mechanic brought strange pieces of wood, meticulously cut, to the studio; it was Fernand Léger". The architect and painter "constructed his own vision of a laboratory with a saw, some nails, and his heart."[319] "[…] from beginning to end, the film was infused with a spirit of deliberate modernism. It's themes centred around internationalism in the arts and fascination with modern technology."[320] Catelain writes that those abnormal laboratory sets designed by Léger (who was by then

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[314] Freeman, "Bridging Purism and Surrealism", 1996, p. 29. Originally from: Letter from Fernand Léger to Abel Gance, November 11, 1922 (Abel Gance papers, Cinematheque Francaise, Paris).
[315] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 99.
[316] Ibid.
[317] Ibid. p. 101.
[318] Ibid.
[319] Ibid.
[320] Ibid. pp. 101-102.

going through his so-called "machine" period), couldn't fit better into the film's theme as a "fairy story of modern decorative art"[321].
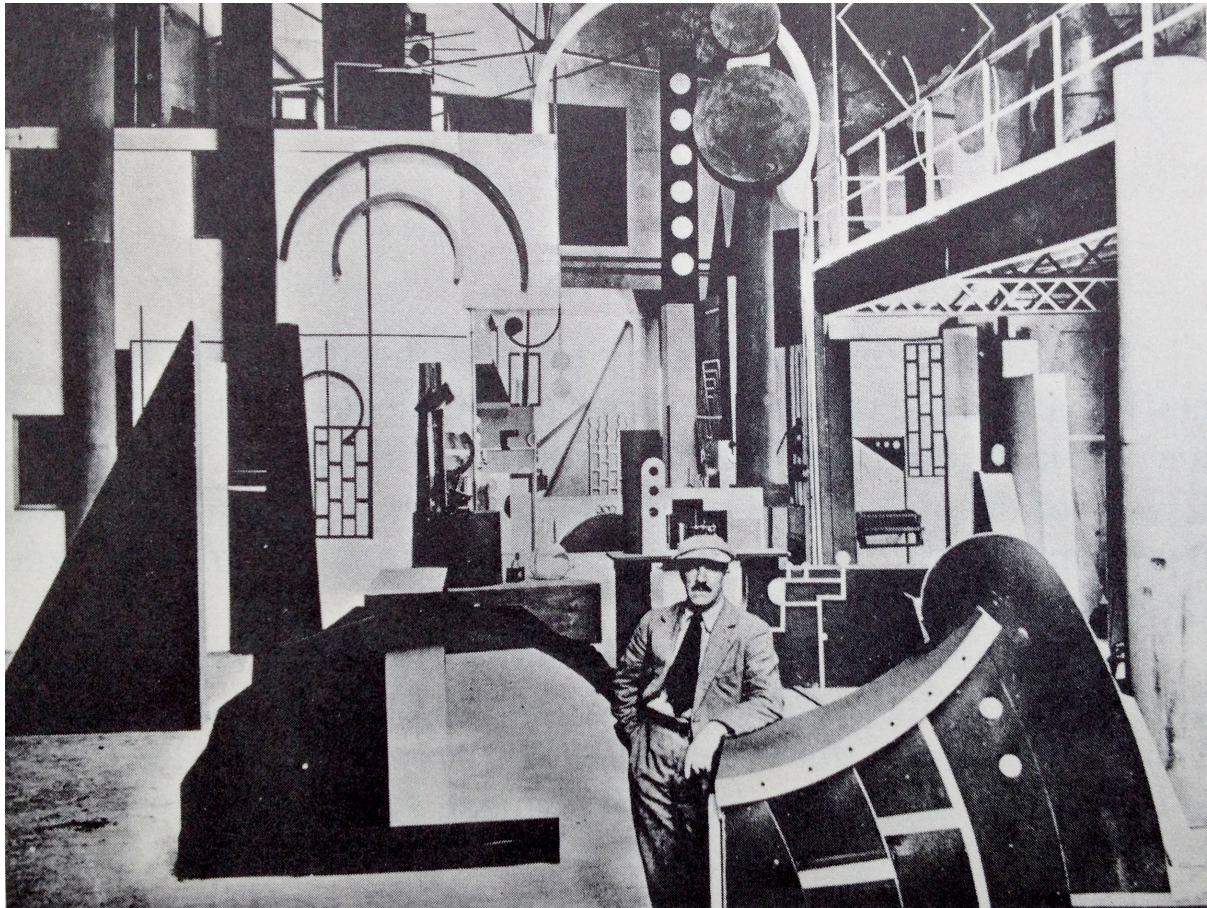
Figure 37 Fernand Léger standing in his set design for the laboratories in Marcel L'Herbier's film
***L'Inhumaine*, 1923. In: R. Mallet-Stevens, Le Décor au Cinéma, Paris 1928**
Photo Copy © Standish D. Lawder In: *The Cubist Cinema*

After World War I, the idea of film was very much in the air, whether it be Paris, Berlin or Vienna. Both of these incidents – Kiesler's Berlin version backdrop of *R. U. R.* and Léger's early hands-on participation in filmmaking – took place in the early 1920s, shortly before their encounter during the Vienna *International Exhibition of New Theatre Techniques*. And although both probably worked independently of each other, Kiesler and Léger shared an obsession and admiration for the new techniques and mechanical elements which represented modernity at their time. Both had trained as architects, Léger's approach to expressing his passion for mechanical elements was through the new medium of film; while Kiesler took theater stage design as his point of departure. But let us not to forget that *Tanagra Apparatus* and cinematographic projections had already been applied in Kiesler's stage design, and

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[321] "...cette histoire féerique de l'Art décoratif modern". Marcel L'Herbier, *La Tête qui tourne*, Paris, 1979. Belfond. p. 102. http://books.openedition.org/pupo/2458 (Accessed on: April 21, 2015)

similar concepts of borrowing cinematographic virtual projections had been applied in the design concept for *Film Guild Cinema* in 1929. As enthusiasts of modern culture, both Kiesler and Léger were greatly attracted to cinema, the most ultra-dramatic media of all the arts.

— *Inter-relation and Inter-influence between Kiesler and Léger*

Further inter-relations and inter-influences between Kiesler and Léger were investigated by Lawder. In *The Cubist Cinema*, he makes a bold assumption and connects Kiesler's backdrop for *R. U. R.*, *with* Léger's set design for *L'Inhumaine* and with Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927). He writes, "Kiesler's represents a probable influence on Léger's design for *L'Inhumaine* and Lang's film seems to have been influenced, in return, by Léger."[322] Presumably based on the fact that Léger and Kiesler were both familiar with the German speaking art world, Lawder argues that "Léger most certainly would have known" Kiesler's designs for *R. U. R.*, either through their friendship and common association with the international avant-garde art scene, or, another possibility was Léger might have seen the photograph of Kiesler's *R. U. R.* set design, published on *Querschnitt* in the summer of 1923, shortly before he started to work on *L'Inhumaine*'s set design.[323] Kiesler's description of his *R. U. R.* backdrop design in operation "corresponds closely to the intense electrical and mechanical activity that pulsates from the screen during the final scene of *L'Inhumaine*." Although due to its being a film, *L'Inhumaine* seems to be much more vigorous in its dynamics of camera vision and montage, "through cutting and close-ups, but nonetheless, the images and rhythms must have been essentially the same."[324]

Similar to Kiesler's *R. U. R.* backdrop, the film set Léger designed for *L'Inhumaine* (Fig. 38.) was as well electro-mechanical, and actively engaged with the film's plot, especially with the vivid pulsations during the dramatic final sequences when Einar Norsen (lead male role) tries to bring Claire Nescot (lead female role) back to life. Multifarious technologies and practices were applied in Léger's set design in order to create the laboratory's mysterious atmosphere, and at the same time make it ultra-modern, therefore to demonstrating the science-fiction side of the film's plot. The lab features strong geometric lines and forms, its interior space was

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[322] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 108.
[323] Ibid. 108-109.
[324] Ibid. p. 110.

composed with light bulbs of various shapes, simple geometric volumes for the furniture, cambered interior ornamental elements, an array of mechanical apparatuses and indicator dials, a swinging pendulum and rotating machineries. From the lighting perspective, spectators would see lights with various colors interweaving going on and off, spotlights and EDM (Electrical Discharge Machining) illuminating and dimming the space, all of this utterly rendering the film plot's thrilling atmosphere. What might be of interest to film scholars is that through the editing and close-ups, the mechanical movements in *L'Inhumaine* seems quite analogous to those of *Ballet Mécanique*. Such a homology might not be totally unexpected, since the production period of *L'Inhumaine* was also the time when *Ballet Mécanique* was created. The fact that such dynamic beauty can be essentially found in all three pieces, *R. U. R.*, *L'Inhumaine*, and *Ballet Mécanique*, once again raises the question of whether such shared *Mechanism Aesthetics* was the in "spirit of the play" or "spirit of the time"; in addition, this reflects the theme of the inter-relation and inter-influence of architecture, engineering, the industrial arts, the avant-garde and the relatively new medium of film.

Figure 38 Film Stills from *L'Inhumaine* (1924), Marcel L'Herbier.
With Léger's set design for the laboratories as background

If to zoom into more details for further comparison, the two "image-forming devices"[325] Kiesler used for the film projection in *R. U. R.*, namely, the "Tanagra Apparatus" and the "Iris Diaphragm" are both referenced by Léger for his *L'Inhumaine* laboratory's set design. Lawder considers that both of Kiesler's devices were typically "symptomatic of an early twentieth-century desire to submit nature to an electronically manipulated, finger-tip control, to extract, as it were, a pictorial image from the natural world and to frame it in a master control panel". [326] He observes that a similar notion exists in Léger's set design for *L'Inhumaine*, specifically in Norsen's invention of a video-scope machine or television, which could "instantly produce an image of any scene on the globe at the flick of a switch."[327] For instance, during the scene when Norsen invites Claire to sing in front of a microphone, through the "T. S. F. radiofonera," Claire's voice can be transmitted everywhere, and in return, through the same waves but via different a process, images of her audiences can be as well sent back and appear on Norsen's screen in his laboratory as televised images. Recalling the *Tanagra Apparatus* Kiesler's applied for *R. U. R.* set design, which sent an illusion of the offstage actors' performance and appeared in miniature on a screen, much like a closed-circuit television, the similarity between Kiesler's *Tanagra Apparatus* and Norsen's, or precisely Léger's screen can not be ignored. "[…] there miraculously appear on a screen, in televised image, the rapturous faces of primitive Africans, the Indians, as they are seen listening to Claire's voice."[328] (Fig. 39. 40.) Lawder further comments on Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. From his point of view, first of all, "the larger complex of futuristic technological fantasies were quite possibly modeled after Lége's set in *L'Inhumaine*"[329]; by then too, when Lang's city of the future was featured, "the television apparatus had become a standard piece of science-fiction equipment"[330]. Such movie props were of course linked with the invention of television around the early 1920s and by mid-decade television was already "firmly fixed in the public mind as a promise of things to come."[331] Thus, the set design in Lang's *Metropolis* in comparison with Léger or Kiesler's experiments, may be indeed "colossal" in scale according to a French critic, but definitely not any earlier in terms of time. Finally, Lawder assumes a potential connection between Lang's Herzmaschine and Kiesler's *R. U. R.*

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[325] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 113.

[326] Ibid.

[327] Ibid.

[328] Ibid. p. 105.

[329] Ibid. p. 113.

[330] Ibid.

[331] Ibid.

set design, "the giant control panel that regulated the electronic pulse of a totally automated underground city inhabited, as in [R]. U. R., by subhuman creatures who in the end revolt in an orgy of destruction."[332] The characteristics Lawder sees shared among the three play and films were not "based on formal, static, or design, but rather on similar patterns of movement and light."[333]

Figure 39 Film Stills from *L'Inhumaine* (1924), Marcel L'Herbier.
Left: The screen at Norsen's laboratory entrance attracted Claire
Right: Norsen showed Claire the televised images of her audiences

Figure 40 Film Stills from *L'Inhumaine* (1924), Marcel L'Herbier.
Left: Televised images show mass Audience attracted by Claire's voice on the street
Right: Televised images show a primitive African girl attracted by Claire's voice

Lawder's assumption of the potential inter-relation and inter-influence between Kiesler and Léger, and their hidden links with Lang's *Metropolis*, drew attention from a certain number of scholars, artists and designers, including Anthology Film Archives' Jonas Mekas, and Japanese designer and writer Katsuhiro Yamaguchi. Lawder's proposal remained only an assumption, with no further attempt at trying to bring it to a strong conclusion backed by solid evidence. Yamaguchi showed enormous interest in Lawder's idea and was working on a series of fifteen articles under the title "*Towards an Understanding of Frederick Kiesler?*" for the *Tokyo Art Journal*, *Bijutsu-Techo*. These articles later turned into a publication

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[332] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 113.

[333] Ibid.

Enviromental Artist Frederick Kiesler;[334] however, I have not succeeded in tracing that piece, and have had access only to the limited information found in MOMA's brochure "A Tribute To Anthology Film Archives' Avantgarde Film Preservation Program — An Evening Dedicated to Frederick Kiesler." According to Lillian Kiesler's article in the brochure, following Lawder's assumption, Yamaguchi went on and argued that Kiesler may have even influenced the direction of avant-garde film; but concrete evidence is still missing to support that point. Yet Yamaguchi was succeeding in finding other evidence that Kiesler did use film to create extensions of environmental. According to Yamaguchi's findings, in 1929, Kiesler wrote the following text:

> I had discussed with J. P. McEvoy the staging of his play *God Loves Us*. I composed a series of sketches of a setting with rooms on three levels, all the walls of the room on three levels, all the rooms made of transparent materials, on which black and white slides or color, as well as films, could be thrown to permit instantaneous changes of the milieu of twenty-eight scenes. This conversation took place in Paris, in 1926, before I came to America.[335]

From Anthology Film Archives' side, it seemed to be more active and ambitious for a time. On May 6 and 13 1976, Lillian Kiesler was interviewed by Jonas Mekas and Judith Vassallo in Philadelphia, on the topic *Frederick Kiesler's Involvement with Films — Léger, Ruttmann, Warhol*.[336] The interview touched on such topics as "Kiesler's interest in cinema and various forms of it, his interest in images, light and movement date to the early twenties"; before ending the interview, Vassallo summed up Mekas possibly "devoting a future issue of *Film Culture* to Frederick Kiesler and film", while Mekas himself hoped that Lillian Kiesler could "collect all the relative… related materials to cover this part of Kiesler's interest and work so that it could be then brought to the attention of those who work in that area […]"[337]. Unfortunately, almost forty years passed, and by the time I visited the Frederick Kiesler Foundation in Vienna, the topic "Frederick Kiesler's Involvement with Films" still remained relatively a vacuum. Possibly either little interest was there or limited information could be found from the past. Within the zone where architecture and film encounter each other, there might be such possibilities of merging architecture research and film studies together, and

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[334] L. Kiesler, "November 1975, Films Salvaged: Lillian Kiesler Finds *Ballet Mécanique* by Léger and *Excelsior-Reifen* by Ruttmann Stored in Her Home." In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 22.

[335] Ibid. pp. 22-23. Footnote 1.

[336] "A Radio Broadcast Interview with Mrs. Kiesler: *Friedrich Kiesler's Involvement with Films – Leger, Ruttmann, Warhol*". In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 25.

[337] Ibid. pp. 26-27.

thus find the consistency between Kiesler's principles of "*Continuity*" and *"Correlation"*, his crossover among various artistic mediums, and above all, his bold and unrestrained transmutation of boundaries within rigid disciplines. During the interview, Mekas opened another future topic regarding "Frederick Kiesler's Involvement with Films", and this was essentially the other reason he was especially interested in Kiesler's work. According to him, at the beginning of the Sixties, in 1965 when the first New York Expanded Cinema Festival was organized, "[…] as the programs proceeded and we began talking and searching for who did that before — of course many artists are working in the expanded cinema area today, but who are their predecessors, who are the forerunners?" Out of the discussion, they "discovered that Kiesler was not only already interested, but he was designing spaces for presentation of expanded cinema, and equipment, etc., etc., and that was in the early twenties."[338]

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[338] "A Radio Broadcast Interview with Mrs. Kiesler: *Friedrich Kiesler's Involvement with Films – Leger, Ruttmann, Warhol*". In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 27.

4.4 Anémic Cinéma

Anémic Cinéma (1924-1926), an approximately seven-minute film by Marcel Duchamp, "combines graphics, kinetics and Dada"[339], and some analogies can be drawn between *Anémic Cinéma* and Kiesler's works. There are several reasons for such a comparison: first of all, during the post-war era, many experimental films were made as a result of avant-garde artists' "toying" with the idea of exploring film for artistic expression, and *Anémic Cinéma* would fit perfectly into such a "toyed film" category; second, the period when Duchamp was experimenting with the film medium corresponds with the years that Kiesler was actively engaged with applying film to his theatrical set and exhibition designs. In both the *Space Stage* and the *Endless Theatre* (unrealized concept) he was dealing with the topic of the spiral, precisely the same theme Duchamp was working on in *Anémic Cinéma*; and third, it is due to Duchamp and Kiesler's intimate friendship and their frequent collaborations, which started in the mid-1920s in Paris and ended around the early 1950s for reasons still unknown. Throughout a quarter of a century, Kiesler and Duchamp intersected with various international artists groups, such as the Dadaist and the Surrealist, among many others, shared common acquaintances from the Berlin and Paris art scenes, and later the two frequented the same intellectual circle in New York, including Fernand Léger, Hans Richter, André Breton, Max Ernst and Peggy Guggenheim, among others.

Kiesler and Duchamp possibly first met in Paris in 1925, during the occasion of the *L'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*. In 1926, when he immigrated to the United States, Kiesler was befriended by one of Duchamp's patrons Katherine S. Dreier (1877-1952), whom he would appreciate as one of those few who unfailingly "stood courageously and amicably" by his side during his "trying first ten years in America."[340] One assignment Dreier recruited Kiesler for was "to design futuristic rooms for the Société Anonyme's 1926 exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art."[341] Founded by Dreier, jointly with Duchamp and Man Ray in 1920, the Société Anonyme, as later stated by the Solomon R. Guggenheim foundation, "[a]lthough it never had a permanent exhibition space, the Société Anonyme was the first collection in the United States to be called a

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[339] Jutz, "Sticking to the 'Factual'", 2014, p. 318.
[340] Phillips, "Architect of Endless Innovation", 1989, p. 16.
[341] Witham, *Picasso*, 2013, p. 191.

'Museum of Modern Art'".[342] In 1937, under the title *Design – Correlation Marcel Duchamp's "Big-Glass"*, Kiesler published an essay on Duchamp's *The Large Glass* (1915-1923), which gave an intellectual analysis of the piece from the perspectives of both an architect and an artist. Kiesler defined *The Large Glass* as an invention for a "structural way of painting", the way Duchamp dealt with painting for him was very similar to "anybody who designs space (forms)". In explanatory notes, he noted: "It surpasses in creative ingenuity any painting since the work of the great illusionbuilder Seurat, anticipating as well as continuing the line of development Picasso—Miró—Dalí, X., Y., Z. It will fit any description such as: abstract, constructivistic, real, super-and-surrealist without being affected. […] It is architecture, sculpture and painting in one."[343] Early 1942, Peggy Guggenheim asked Kiesler to advise her on "remodelling two tailor shops at 50 West 57th Street into an art gallery"[344]; these became the Art of This Century Gallery, within which Kiesler installed a "Vision Machine" to view a series of reproductions from Duchamp's *Bôite en Valise*. During the 1940s Kiesler and Duchamp collaborated on a number of projects, including the cover of *VVV Almanac* (1943)[345] and the exhibition *Imagery of Chess* (1944) at the Julien Levy Gallery in New York. During the opening of *Imagery of Chess*, Duchamp featured a chess game, "in which an acknowledged master, George Koltanowski, played blindfolded against seven artists concurrently, beating all of them except the visionary architect Frederick Kiesler, who fought the maestro to a draw."[346] In 1947, jointly with Roberto Matta, David Hare, Joan Miró, Max Ernst and Yves Tanguy, the two collaborated in Paris in "constructing a temporary double parabolic room made out of paper and canvas", and designed the *Salle des Superstitions*, where the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* was presented.[347]

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[342] http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/about-the-collection/new-york/katherine-s-dreier-bequest/1651 (Accessed on: May 11, 2015)

[343] F. Kiesler, "Design – Correlation Marcel Duchamp's *'Big-Glass'*." [1937] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, pp. 38-41.

[344] Phillips, "Architect of Endless Innovation", 1989, p. 29.

[345] Kraus/Sonzogni. "Wanted: Original Manuscript on Marcel Duchamp", 2003. http://www.toutfait.com/issues/volume2/issue_5/collections/kiesler/kiesler.html (Accessed on: May 12, 2015)

[346] Robert Hughes, "Art of the Game." In: The *New York Times*. October 09, 2005. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/09/style/tmagazine/chess.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (Accessed on: May 12, 2015)

[347] Phillips, "Architect of Endless Innovation", 1989, p. 30.

— *The Spiral Theme*

The previous paragraph gives only a brief, yet incomplete epitome of the interrelations between Kiesler and Duchamp, and offers a glimpse of their potential in establishing and shaping the tastes of the avant-garde art in American at the time, even though their purposes and approaches may not have always been the same. They both occupied themselves with predominant themes such as perception, mechanisms of vision, kinetics, the fourth dimension and so on. As frequent collaborators they obviously shared certain interests, but when we compare *Anémic Cinéma* with Kiesler's works, we will mainly focus on their joint interest in the theme of the spiral.

Drawing support from Man Ray and the cinematographer Marc Allégret, Duchamp realized another way to "amuse" himself, this time, through an optical experiment — toying with the medium of film. Despite his celebrated frivolity and derisive attitude towards art, according to Katrina Martin, this seven-minute film, is "a serious and coherent development of the same set of concerns found in his other major works."[348] This seriousness can be traced back to an unsuccessful experiment with a motorized machine, namely, *Rotary Glass Plates* (Precision Optics, 1920), an experiment Duchamp first played with in 1920; subsequently in 1923, he used a record playing turntable, with a series of "Disks Bearing Spirals" mounted on cardboard. The spiral theme, anticipated in the 1923 experiment, would then again appear in *Rotary Demisphere* (Precision Optics, 1925) and again in *Anémic Cinéma*.[349]

As preliminary physical study device, these optical discs, based on the *Disks Bearing Spirals*, Duchamp's so-called "rotoreliefs" (Fig. 41.), later developed into a total of ten black and white flat optical discs in the film *Anémic Cinéma* (Fig. 42.). With off-concentric circles drawn on them, and revolving mostly clockwise (with just a few exceptions), they created a virtual three-dimensional effect in depth, an "illusion of spiral motion"[350]. Those spirals, in Duchamp's own words, were "not in the geometric sense [spirals], rather in the visual effect."[351] In between, and alternating with the "rotoreliefs", another nine discs with bearing linguistic puns were rotating in the opposite direction, counter-clockwise, acting as pauses

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[348] Martin, "Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*", 1975, pp. 53-54.

[349] http://www.dada-companion.com/duchamp/films.php (Accessed on: May 14, 2015)

[350] Jutz, "Sticking to the 'Factual'", 2014, p. 318.

[351] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 1987, p. 72.

and counterbalances. The nine linguistic configurations were atypical sentences, arranged in a specific order, and without any attempt at making any kind of definitive statement; rather they "cast ironic doubt on the ability of any written sentence to make ultimate and absolutely conclusive sense. Aphorism is rendered invalid, or at the very least always open to questions."[352] Those puns, almost Duchamp's trademark, revolving with a speed that seems to be proper for reading, suggest a set of erotic scenarios, as many scholars agree.

According to Toby Mussman, who interviewed Duchamp in December 1965, Duchamp "stated emphatically that thirty seconds is the optimum amount of time to look at the discs."[353] Due to the limited viewing time of each disc, the spectators' eyes failed to gain "sufficient opportunity to categorize the optical play", nor does the spectator have enough time to adjust himself "physically to the ambivalence his eye is experiencing." Thus, no two spectators would be "subject to the same simultaneous perceptual experience"[354]; instead, the imaginary path spectators followed with their eyes would remain individual and subjective. By putting the discs in motion, and "strictly limiting their exposure time added a new kind of complexity and indeterminacy", Duchamp hoped, that "would leave his viewer unsettled and comfortably on edge."[355]

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[352] Mussman, "Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*", 1967, p. 151.
[353] Ibid.
[354] Ibid. pp. 150-151.
[355] Ibid. p. 151.
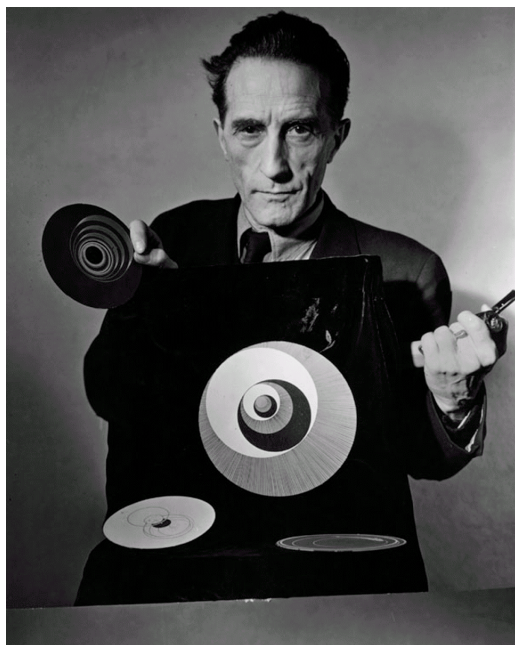
Figure 41 Duchamp with rotoreliefs
Film Still from Hans Richter's film
Dreams That Money Can Buy **(1947)**
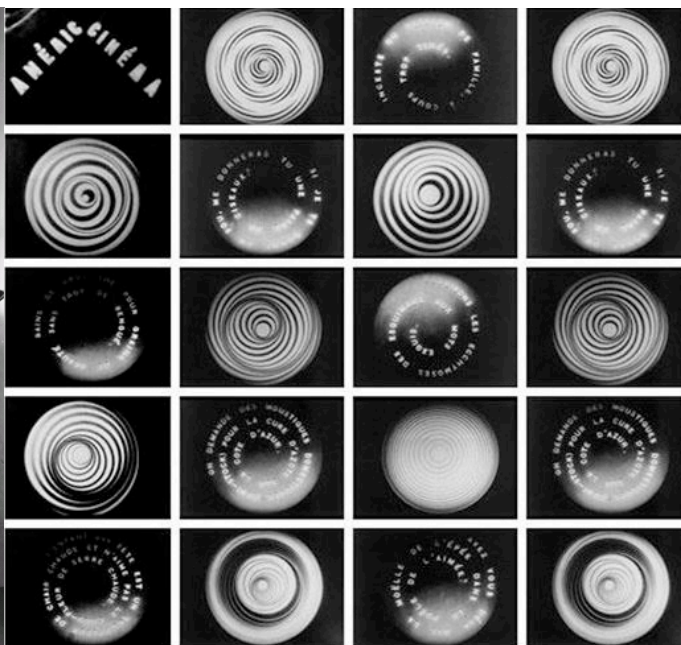
Figure 42 Film Stills *Anémic Cinéma*
Marcel Duchamp (1924-1926)
© Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia

Dealing with *Anémic Cinéma*, one can almost not avoid looking into its linguistic aspect, especially those puns. Katrina Martin has done a detailed study of them and provided a platform for non-French speaking viewers. It would take some time to go through all the puns, so we will just extract a few, mainly in relation to the theme of the spiral. According to Martin, the film's title *Anémic Cinéma* essentially originated from Duchamp's fascination with language, and was part of his plan for the realization of creating an entirely new language based on consonance. This statement is not unsimilar to Duchamp's explanation to Mussman, namely, *Anémic Cinéma* "came out of investigations which he said had begun to take on obsessive proportions, something of an *idée fixe*"[356]. Following Martin, we may try to analyse how Duchamp actually attempted to speak an "opaque language [which] ingeniously exploits traditional definition"[357] on various levels.

Martin points out that the word *anémic* does not exist in French, and so could be rather considered an anagram of the word c*inéma*. In fact it is closer to being a palindrome, a word, phrase, or sequence that reads the same backward as forward. At the beginning of the film, one sees "two graphic words incline towards each other around a vertical axis, mirroring each

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[356] Mussman, "Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*", 1967, p. 149.
[357] Martin, "Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*", 1975, p. 54.

other back and forth like the motions in the spiral."[358] Despite the literal visual illusion of the revolving spirals one perceives from the film screening, here we encounter already the very earliest "hidden" spiral theme, both in and out of the context of "anything but retinal". Why a spiral? Though perhaps inconclusive, Martin provides the interesting, supplemental information that Duchamp would describe himself as a "breather"; the French word for "breather" is *respirer*, which implies also *aspirer*, meaning "to aspire" and *en spirale* means "in a spiral".[359] Thereby, another "hidden" spiral is then unmasked.

In Pierre Cabanne's *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, Duchamp says that between 1921 and 1925 he was keeping himself busy with optical attractions from corkscrew to spiral effects from of turning objects, and that later he found a way of setting objects in relief through "offhand perspective", so as to get an impression of the third dimension. Amused, Duchamp continued off and on with such spiral "retinal" experiments until around 1934.[360] As for Kiesler, his *Space Stage* and his concept of *Endless Theatre* both involved spirals. The *Space Stage*, again, was a freestanding theater-in-the-round, with three levels of circular platforms and a series of ascending ramps spiralling around a vertical structure supported by scaffolds. From the presentational aspect, so-called "motion dramas" were presented on *Space Stage*, with a sense of space and motion on the stage; from the perceptual aspect, spectators' attention was drawn into the expandable space, following serpentine paths, and going through a Time-Space experience that revolved with floating spirals. Analogies can be already observed between Duchamp and Kiesler's spirals. To a certain extent, their spirals can almost be considered as contrary versions of each other. Duchamp's spirals in *Anémic Cinéma* were in fact illusory spirals, "constructed" visually with revolving off-concentric circles set in motion, therefore, the three-dimensional "geometries" or "volumes" existed only in virtual reality and through mirage; Kiesler's spirals, turned the other way around, were physically constructed three-dimensional geometries or volumes, however, through the spectators' consecutively "picturesque shots" and "self-montage" while passing through actually achieved a certain analogously cinematic experience. Taking a bird's-eye view of *Space Stage* or review the floor plan of *Endless / Universal Theatre* (Fig. 43.) and comparing them with *Anémic Cinéma's* film stills, the shared similarity between Kiesler and Duchamp's spiral theme then becomes apparent.

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[358] Martin, "Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*", 1975, p. 54.
[359] Ibid.
[360] Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 1987, p. 73.
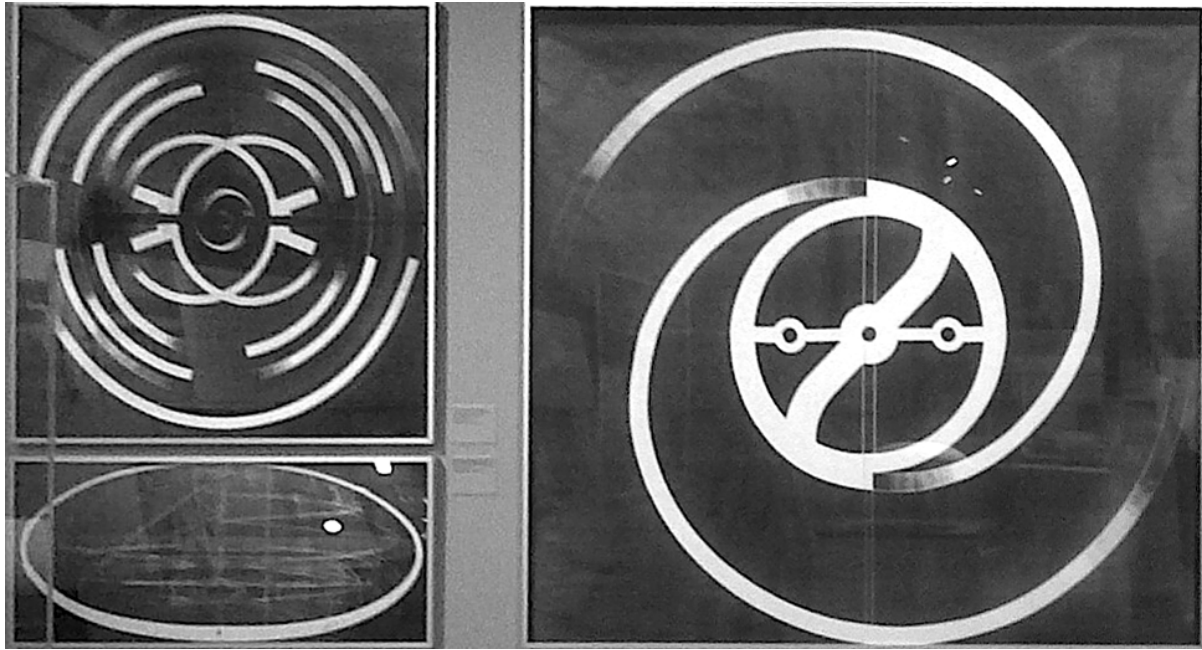
Figure 43 Floor Plan (Left Top), Elevation (Left Down) and Spiral form Ground Plan of a Stage (Right)
Endless Theater Variant (1924-1925)
© Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna

Though Kiesler's fascination with spirals started more or less around the same period as Duchamp's, it was much more long lasting. In 1946, he wrote a retrospective article, under the title *Art and Architecture Notes on the Spiral-Theme in Recent Architecture*, within which he said that "the creative mind finding its sources in the certitudes of memory rediscovers the spiral", covering topics from the law of spiral-structure "Logarithmic" to "Lituus-Spiral" to "Cochleoid (Snail) Spiral", and finally linked these to the latest member to this typology of structural projects, namely, the Museum of Non-Objective Art of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation (1943-1959), designed by American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. (Fig. 44.) Within this essay, Kiesler stated the spiral has a meaning of "perpetual renascence", which "continuous rebirth on new planes without losing contact with former ones." For him, the spiral is "an expansion of steps without halt" and "continuous motion from within its own force. Power of birth and re-birth."[361]

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[361] F. Kiesler, "Art and Architecture" [1946] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 47.

Figure 44 *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum* Interior (1943-1959) Frank Lloyd Wright
© Aura Arquitetura

Without forgetting to mention his own practices on the spiral themes in the essay, Kiesler noted that the concept of the *Space Stage* was developed in 1923 and constructed in 1924. "The ramps […] had a long straight start in the *lituus* manner."[362] In 1924, in an idea of a wholly spheroid building for "theatrical, cinema and sport activities", the concept of *Space Stage* was expanded, to "form all floors of the vast structure up to its very heights in intertwining ramps", and which constituted "a building wholly composed of ramps, accessible on all levels by foot and cars." What's even more exciting for film studies is the description of "[t]he inside of the paraboloïd shell of the 'Endless' was smoothed for projection."[363] According to Kiesler's notes, relevant information about the *Endless Theatre* can be found in the Catalogue of the 1924 Vienna Festival (1924). In 1925, while living in Paris, Kiesler frequented intellectual circles including many free-minded artists and architects, and according to him, everyone was concerned with reconstruction, "particularly with ideas of resurrecting the spirit massacred", and the architects were not very much into "constructing 'minimal-homes for everyman' as building *nucleï* where people might meet and engage in the game of sharpened ideas". Inspired by the "never-ending revolt of the

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[362] F. Kiesler, "Art and Architecture" [1946] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 49.
[363] Ibid.

contemporary spirit", Kiesler intended to turn the space of Place de la Concorde into a large-scale "spiral-in-space", acting as a grandiose generator that could transform the whole city into one "continuous", organic "endless structure" with an "action-area and an integration of 'building and inhabitants'", where the "endless structure" would wind its way in spiral ramps, and "in its power of suction and ejection becomes the very expression of a living organism" rather than just a massive volume of architecture with rigidity and static.[364] This concept was then later called *Universal Theater*, another spiral project of Kiesler's. (Fig. 45. 46.)
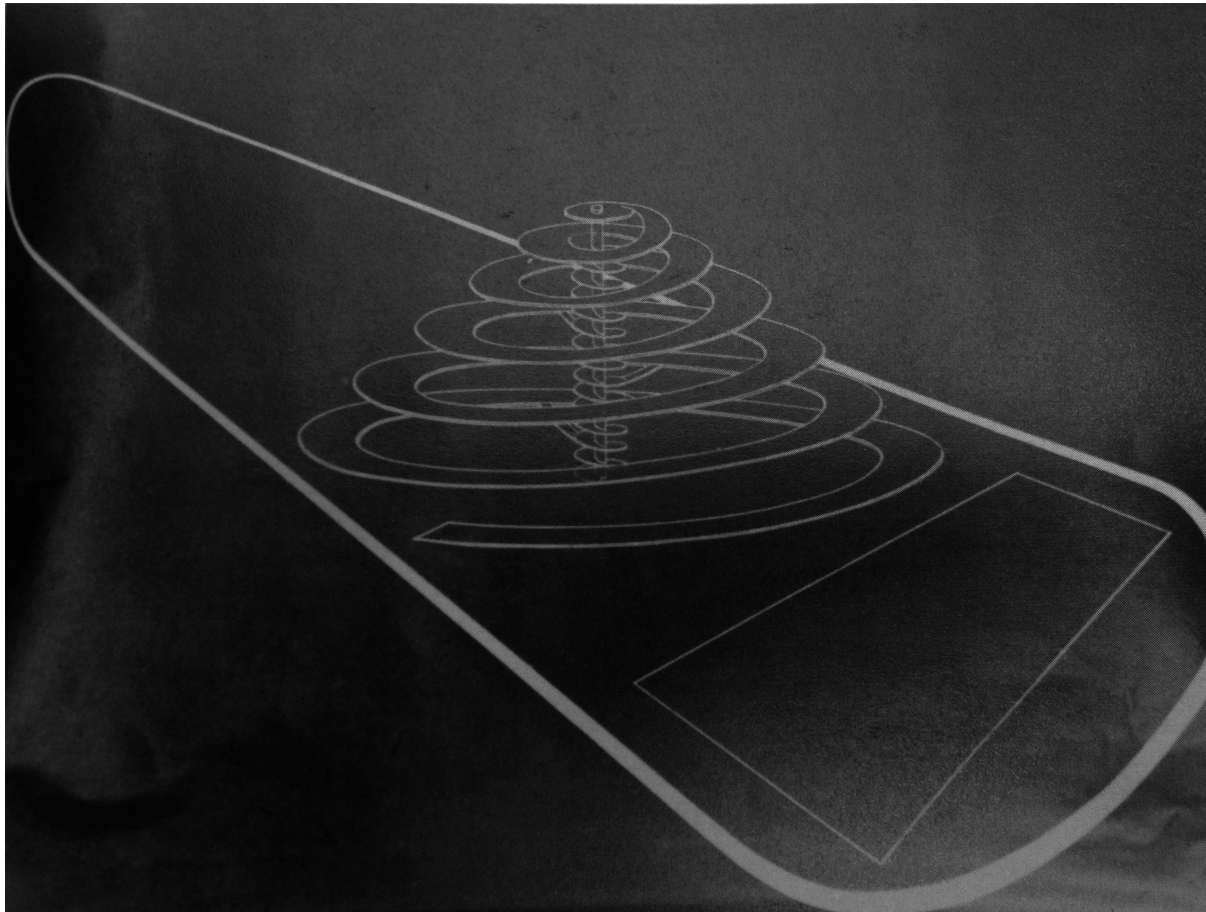
Figure 45 Spiral Plan Perspective / *Universal Theater* Variant (1925)
© Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna

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[364] F. Kiesler, "Art and Architecture" [1946] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, pp. 49-51.

Figure 46 Spiral Plan Section / *Universal Theater* **Variant (1925)**
© Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna

One extremely obvious resemblance Kiesler's *Space Stage* shared was the Russian Constructivist architect Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* (1919-1920), though this is rarely mentioned, except by Dieter Bogner a few times and by McGuire in her essay. Here then they are illustrated together so as to make it more visible. (Fig. 47. 48.) Kiesler, mentioned Tatlin's project in his essay, wrote: "Model of Tatlin's monument, planned 1920, to commemorate the Russian Revolution. A hollow twin – spiral, free-standing steel-frame, pointing up its pole, bearing inside the Administration Building. It was the sculptor gone architecture and the architect gone constructivist. A superb attempt at Architecture per se."[365]
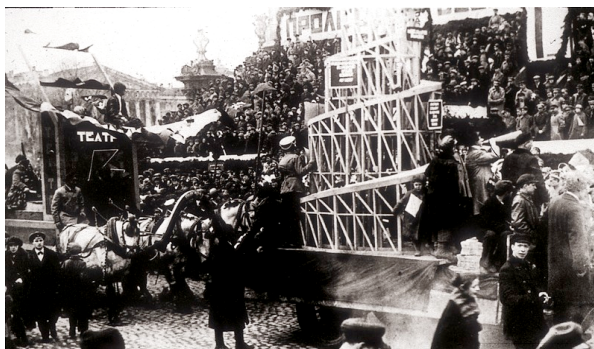
Figure 47 Archival Newsreel Footage of a Soviet Parade, with wooden model of Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* **(1919-20) carried through the streets.**

Figure 48 *Space Stage* **in Middle Chamber (Today's Mozart-Saal) of Vienna Konzerthaus During Construction or Dismounting, 1924**
© Vienna Austrian National Library

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[365] F. Kiesler, "Art and Architecture" [1946] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 49.

— "To aspire" "in a Spiral"

Kiesler considered that the spiral has "a two-fold origin: *the to and from*. [Gravitation] (attraction) and radiation."[366] This statement leads to a "sub-theme" related with the spiral. Apparently, "*the to and from*" cannot be settled with rigidity, on the contrary, it signifies transition, demands motion, movement and mobility. Within the following paragraphs, we will first return to a few critics on *Anémic Cinéma* in relation with this point, and then make some comparison among Kiesler's works.

Anémic Cinéma's title and the film's core substance are both tangled up with the spiral theme. Just as the fact that Duchamp's works never lend themselves to simple interpretations, such information may lead in many intricate directions. American avant-garde cinema historian, P. Adams Sitney, who served on the selection committee of the Anthology Film Archives' *Essential Cinema*, would describe the spiral's function in *Anémic Cinéma* jointly with the spectator's perception, both optical and verbal. His description may help to give a certain overview on the film, its reception as well as other aspects:

> At first sight *Anémic Cinéma* would seem to underline the difference between optical and verbal images. The two modes of representation are held together by the figure of the spiral. Yet we automatically apprehend them differently. The eye grasps the eccentric circles as if they were geometrical wholes. […] While the view sees one set of disks as creating depth, he "reads" the other set as flat because of his reflex to the familiar orthography of the Latin alphabet. Thus, the viewer is the victim of an automatic response at odds with the ontological "sameness" of the shots.[367]

Keeping Sitney's analysis in mind, now let's return to the linguistic aspect to dissect some more details of the films. Besides the literal perspective of the spiralling image; the hidden anagrams and puns obliquely at "aspiring" "in a spiral"; the film's title is also consistent with this "ambivalent motion",[368] thus, it puts the viewer already on the edge of feeling both "unsettled and comfortable" at the very beginning of watching the film, just as Duchamp wished. Martin conjectures that, there are other words that could be associated with *Anémic*. For example, *Anémique*, contain the meaning of "anaemic or unhealthy"; and *Animé*, another

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[366] F. Kiesler, "Art and Architecture" [1946] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 48.
[367] Sitney, *Modernist Montage*, 1990, pp. 24-25.
[368] Martin, "Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*", 1975, p. 54.

potential pun, means, "animated".[369] This "animated" pun actually makes even more sense if to be put it in company with Kiesler's argument for the spiral-theme's two-fold origin: "*the to and from*". Consistent with the artistic development of early twenties century, Duchamp sensed that static pictures had became a kind of end-game for artists, and that "ambiguity and motion"[370] would be claimed to be the "new" in artistic expression. Thus, we may conjecture that the genuine meaning of Duchamp's "animated" "illusion of spiral motion" stands for the rejection of static images, and their replacement with images in motion (the cinema). However, one major difference between Duchamp's idea of cinema and that of the other avant-garde filmmakers (like Léger, Richter, Eggeling, and Ruttmann's) was in his idea of film's dimensionality. Eggeling articulated a complete syntax of formal relationships in *Diagonal Symphonie*, and sought to create a "universal language"; Richter and Ruttmann's films achieved a rhythm of abstract forms and movements; and Léger linked figurative images together with abstract patterns, creating a cinematographic kaleidoscope in *Ballet Mécanique*. Duchamp, instead, tried to expand into further dimensions by creating illusionary geometries, and "squeez[ing] the viewer into a three-dimensional space of infinite depth"[371]. With this drifting in between the two and three-dimensional, Duchamp gave his film an essential sense of space and motion. We may draw then a parallel between Kiesler's physical spirals and Duchamp's illusiory spiral in *Anémic Cinéma*: both spirals, physical or virtual, became actually one shared form applied to different mediums, and through which architecture and cinema discovered an intersections.

Kiesler's essay *Art and Architecture Notes on the Spiral-Theme in Recent Architecture*, inspired especially such interdisciplinary kind of thinking among art, architecture and cinema. If *The Large Glass* was in Kiesler's opinion a "structural way of painting", to employ the same logic, *Anémic Cinéma* may be then seen as a "structural way of filming". With the application of a kinetic device, the rotation of the discs produced a kind of "illusion of volume".[372] The way Duchamp envisaged *Anémic Cinéma* might be not much different from the designing of a space, such as Kiesler did. Within the "structural way" of painting (or filming), as Kiesler argued for Duchamp, if such notion of "resistance-rigidity of plant-

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[369] Martin, "Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*", 1975, p. 54.

[370] Ibid.

[371] Jutz, "Sticking to the 'Factual'", 2014, p. 319.

[372] http://mediation.centrepompidou.fr/education/ressources/ENS-Duchamp_en/ENS-duchamp_en.html (Accessed on: May 15, 2015)

structures"[373] can be observed, is it any different from Kiesler's projects? For instance, recall *Space Stage*, *City-in-Space*, or *Film Guild Cinema*, and how they constantly changed their interior spaces by means of film projection or the "Screen-O-Scope" or the "Project-O-Scope" for a "Visual-Acoustics" purpose. According to Helmut Klassen, among many of the cinema's innovative design features, "the flexible screen of projection was conceived as an eye/camera projecting the space of the film back onto the audience."[374] Coincidentally, Kiesler had observed almost the same feature in Duchamp's *The Large Glass* and wrote, "to create such an X-ray painting of space, material and psychic, one needs as a lens (a) oneself, well focused and dusted off, (b) the subconscious as camera obscura, (c) a super-consciousness as sensitizer, and (d) the clash of this trinity to illuminate the scene."[375] The text Kiesler wrote about *The Large Glass* is insightful and touches the essentials of the piece; however, if we take the text out of the context of Duchamp's work, could it as well be a profound analysis of his own "Screen-O-Scope"?

As we have already landed in front of the *Film Guild Cinema's* "Screen-O-Scope", let's try to "project" Duchamp's film into Kiesler's space. But before we begin, let us state clearly: no records have actually yet been found to prove that *Anémic Cinéma* was ever screened at the *Film Guild Cinema*.

From both Mussman and Calvin Tomkins' descriptions, we may put together information about *Anémic Cinéma's* production and premiere: the film was created between 1924-25 and assembled in 1926, had its premiere at a private screening room in Paris in August 1926. Duchamp even "constructed specially for the first showing of the film a projection screen of translucent glass, like that used in bathroom windows, with a reflective mirror-silver backing."[376]. Information as how the film was later presented in New York, is currently lacking. However, Mussman's description gives the impression that the projection screen was actually a crucial parameter that Duchamp paid attention to. Let's begin with the most obvious aspect, the visual, or in Duchamp's preferred terminology, the "retinal". Both the "Screen-O-Scope" in *Film Guild Cinema* and its anterior "iris diaphragm" in the *R. U. R.*

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[373] F. Kiesler, "Design – Correlation Marcel Duchamp's *'Big-Glass'*." [1937] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 41.

[374] Klassen, "The Figure of the Spiral", 2006, p. 16.

[375] F. Kiesler, "Design – Correlation Marcel Duchamp's *'Big-Glass'*." [1937] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 38.

[376] Mussman, "Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*", 1967, p. 153.

backdrop were screens that couldn't be any better fitting for the projection of *Anémic Cinéma*. (Fig. 49. Left & Right) Moreover, when thinking of the seemingly (spatially) flat puns as elements in the film meant to "provide a curious complement to the experience of following the spirals of the optical discs around and into depth at the center" and whose purpose was "only to have the eye thrown back out to a peripheral circle or to realize that the center is also the foremost tip of a cone projecting outward"[377], we once again realize that the film never just exclusively deals with the two-dimensional surface, but has always sought further dimensions — both the "physical" dimension of illusiory geometries and the temporal dimension of passing through experience, namely, "*the to and from*". The circular forms of both screens in Kiesler's projects ("Iris Diaphragm" and "Screen-O-Scope") could be appreciable aids for deducting a film's flatness, and insinuating the three-dimensional effect in depth, especially in the case of *Anémic Cinéma*. Thus, a hypothesis can be made — any area which is not within the motion spirals' realm, can almost be dismissed without causing damage, neither to the film's projection nor for the spectators' perception. In addition, Kiesler's illustrations for the "Screen-O-Scope" (Fig. 49. middle) shows "a conceptual and physical space in which one can imagine Duchamp's indeterminate illusion of space in *Anémic Cinéma* capable of being actualized".[378] A perfect match between Duchamp's film (Anémic Cinéma) and Kiesler's screens ("Iris Diaphragm" and "Screen-O-Scope") thus appears.
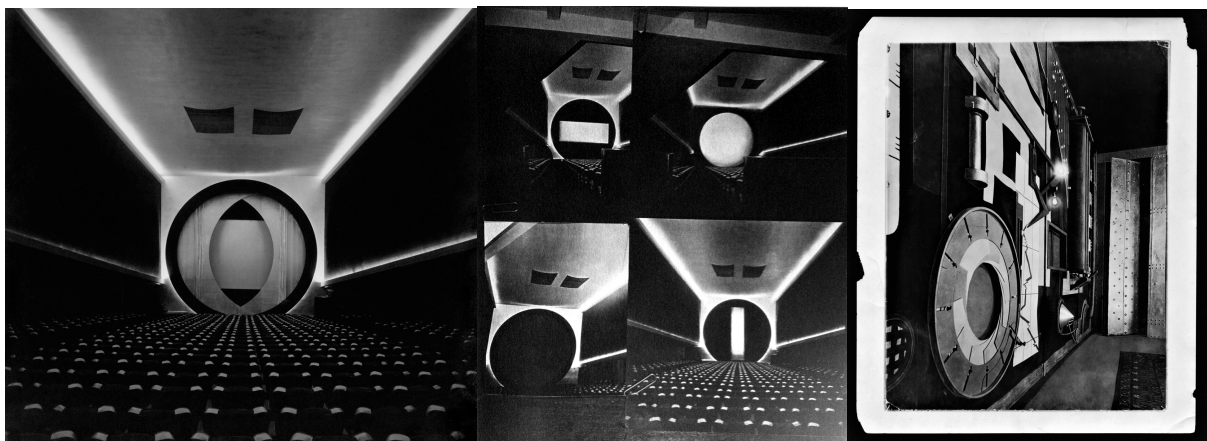
Figure 49 Left: Auditorium with *Screen-O-Scope*, *Film Arts Guild Cinema*, New York, 1929
Middle: Variations of *Screen-O-Scope*, *Film Arts Guild Cinema*, New York, Photo Collage 1929
Right: Set for Karel Čapek's *R. U. R.*, Theater am Kurfürstendamm, Berlin 1922/1923
© Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna

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[377] Mussman, "Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*", 1967, p. 151.
[378] Klassen, "The Figure of the Spiral", 2006, p. 16.

— *Cinematic Blossoming*

As with other avant-garde filmmakers, Duchamp's "touching" of the medium film was not totally coincidental. If we review his earlier paintings, there is a prefiguration of images in motion, for instance, in the Cubist inspired *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912), or in a relatively later one, (shortly before the making of *Anémic Cinéma*) *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even* (1915-1923). If the "animated" cinematic "illusion of spiral motion" is literally tangible in the practice of making *Anémic Cinéma*, the motif with the same strain could rather already be sensed in Duchamp's thinking and writing for the creation of *The Large Glass*. Such a motif of "animated" motion would be then the "prequel" for Duchamp's "touching" of cinema:

> The bride basically is a motor. […] The whole graphic significance is for this cinematic blossoming. This cinematic blossoming is controlled by the electrical stripping (see the passage of the bach. machine to the bride) […] but the *cinematic effects of the electrical stripping*, *transmitted* to the motor with quite feeble cylinders, leave (plastic necessity) the arbor-type at rest – […] and do not touch. […] This cinematic blossoming is the most important part of the painting.[379]

Duchamp identifies the "cinematic blossoming" as the most important part of his painting *The Large Glass*, which is represented by cinematic effects, through the transmission of "electrical stripping". Topics such as Mechanism Aesthetics, kinetic art and the fourth dimension, are looming between the lines in Duchamp's writing. With or without reading Duchamp, Kiesler perceived such motifs, and saw painting, sculpture and architecture joined as one in Duchamp's work. For him, Duchamp's work is "in a state of eternal readiness for action, motion and radiation", creating a "spatial balance" between "stability and mobility", just as his own aspires for an architecture that is not "rigid[ly], inflexible[y], lifeless[ly]", Kiesler's ideal space shall be "elastic and interdependent".[380] In the "new joint-design" like Duchamp's, as Kiesler stated, how techniques works, is not as important as "is its spirit, guiding lost sheep and the collective herd back to juicy roots embedded in nature's creative subconscious instead of encouraging them to take refuge in research and statistitching."[381] We don't know if Duchamp shared Kiesler's kind of spirit of seeking modernity or aspiring

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[379] Duchamp *The Essential Writings*, 1975, p. 42.

[380] F. Kiesler, "Design – Correlation Marcel Duchamp's *'Big-Glass'*." [1937] In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 40.

[381] Ibid. pp. 40-41.

to "transport" civilized life, very likely not at all, since Duchamp is known for being unengaged throughout his life. However, what is known is Duchamp's objection to "retinal art", as he wrote: "Painting should not be exclusively visual or retinal. It must interest the gray matter; our appetite for intellectualization."[382]

If Kiesler's goal was to search for the spirit of modernity and achieve some sort of "civilized" life by involving the spectators intellect, Duchamp's interest, on the other hand, was presumably not at all in the spirit of educating, but in amusing his viewer (though too, stimulating his or her intellect). Martin's argument that the "spiraling images alternating between graphic and verbal is itself a pun on the alternating images and titles of silent film"[383] offered one sort of understanding of the film; Bart Testa considers that Duchamp's film "lives up to its name: it minimizes the element of silent films: words, then images. Duchamp sharply bifurcates the film viewing activity into two: reading words on a screen and viewing images, moving spirals, whose motion produces the play of depth and flatness that is a given of cinematic illusion."[384] One of the fundamental optical components of *Anémic Cinéma* is the "illusion of spiral motion", which is poles apart from the physical elements, the "rotoreliefs"; the illusion, instead, functions as an expression of time and space through the abstract representation. The other important optical component, the readable, but not totally understandable linguistic configurations engage the spectators' struggle to interpret, to intellectualize; and if we consider the fact that due to the constant revolving of the spiralling puns, the process of reading may even demand the spectators' simultaneous bodily movement, then corporealization is as well included. As Bart Testa has summarized up from his so-called Phenomenological level:

> […] the combined reading and viewing of silent films conventionally give rise to a third activity: our imaginative conjuration of a domain with all the space and furniture of a world. It is what film semioticians term diegesis. *Anémic Cinéma* exposes, by its reduction, this third and paradoxically maximizing activity: our imaginary production of diegesis, which can still happen in *Anémic Cinéma*. And the film does this, amazingly enough, by dismissing mimesis.[385]

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[382] Michael Betancourt, "*Anémic Cinéma* By Marcel Duchamp." April 03, 2011 on Cinegraphic.net. Originally from: Cleve Gray, "The Great Spectator" interview, *Art in America*, July-August, 1969, vol. 57, no. 4, p. 21. http://www.cinegraphic.net/article.php?story=20110326140929316&mode=print (Accessed on: May 15, 2015)
[383] Martin, "Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*", 1975, p. 54.
[384] Bart Testa, *Screen Words: Early Film and Avant-Garde Film in the House of the Word*, 2002. http://www.dada-companion.com/duchamp/films.php (Accessed on: May 12, 2015)
[385] Ibid.

The illusory spirals in *Anémic Cinéma* held Duchamp's two modes of representation, both optical and verbal images, to construct a system revolving with spectators, visually, physically and intellectually. To compare Duchamp and Kiesler's spirals, we found that one attempted to unfold the "illusionary motion spiral" on the screen and to squeeze the spectators into an imaginary space of infinite depth, while the other applied physical spirals in *Space Stage* in the tangible real world, inviting spectators to go through a physical three-dimensional path of space. The similarity is then self-evident in this fundamental parallelism between film and the architecture, between the imaginary and the real.

V.   Intermediary as Context

— *Little Cinema Movement*

As a further result of his restaging of the European Theatre Expositions for the American public, Kiesler became associated with the Film Guild. This association led to him being named the architect of the *Film Guild Cinema*. According to Held, the Film Guild "organized a distribution company called Film Associates, Inc." around February 1926, and this "company would screen a film once in New York and then make it available to other theatres." Together with Kenneth MacGowan, Gilbert Seldes, Lawrence Langner, Jane Heap, Christian Brinton, and Sheldon Cheney,[386] Kiesler was part of an advisory council to choose the films to be presented. Under what circumstances, as a newly immigrated, young European architect, did Kiesler become a committee member of the Film Guild's advisory council? When trying to answer this question, we might have to follow at least two parallel lines simultaneously, while also at times crossing them together. One of the clues is the avant-garde art movement, which Kiesler had been actively involved in since the early 1920s; the other important clue would be the *Little Cinema Movement*. The first point has already been widely discussed, therefore, it will be only briefly reviewed in correspondence with the other circumstances; the second point, the Little Cinema Movement, will be then the key issue reviewed here.

Kiesler's client for the *Film Guild Cinema* was the International Film Arts Guild, a small film society founded in October 1925, with a special focus on importing and screening "significant foreign films as well as the revival of earlier film milestones".[387] At that time, while the majority of the American movie companies and film producers were devoted to "increasing attention to the new and mass market 'talking' motion pictures", the Film Guild rather attempted to reach an audience that was open to "the experimental, the eclectic, and the unusual" films.[388] Symon Gould, who undertook the directorship of Film Guild, was one of the crucial figures among those sympathizers for the Little Cinema Movement in the United States. In 1925, when the Screen Guild was established, it already had its Sunday film screenings at the Central Theater and the George M. Cohan Theater in New York City, both

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[386] Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 51.
[387] McGuire, "A Movie House in Space and Time", 2007, p. 54.
[388] https://thelittle.org/history (Accessed on: May 21, 2015)

organized by Gould.[389] According to Scott MacDonald, the author of *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society*, besides being engaged with organizing screenings for the newly founded Screen Guild, with sponsorship from the International Film Arts Guild, Gould also started America's first regular and continuous art film programming at the Cameo Theater in New York city in March 1926,[390] one of the key screening venues before the *Film Guild Cinema* was designed and constructed. We may remember that both Standish D. Lawder and Susan Delson have noted that *Ballet Mécanique* was screened at the Cameo Theatre (Thursday March 18, 1926), and was part of the opening event of the International Film Arts Guild's subscription series. It is worth recalling that Kiesler arrived in New York in January 1926 to re-create the *International Theatre Exposition*, and had essentially equipped himself with copies of experimental films from European avant-garde filmmakers such as Léger, Richter, Eggeling and Ruttmann. It would be near preposterous not to see these events as being linked – namely, the screening of Ballet Mechanique, and Kiesler's cache of films, together with Kiesler's association with the Film Guild and his later designing of the *Film Guild Cinema.* Of course, those European films constituted only part of the Film Arts Guild's screening program. Consistent with the Little Cinema Movement's dedication to showing "art films that appeal to the intelligent and sophisticated", the Film Arts Guild also shared hopes that "appeal to devotees of silent films, foreign films and films based on the classics".[391]

The Little Cinema Movement itself represented a position of resistance to the incursion of the "mass merchandising trends in the entertainment industry that [were] gathering momentum in the 1920s with the ascension of mass circulation magazines and the radio."[392] At that time, the division between the film professionals and the amateur filmmakers was clear: the former were the employees in the industry, "producing for hire a profit benefiting the corporate hierarchy", and the latter were "more concerned with the cause of film art",[393] the so-called Cinéma pur[394] filmmakers. The Little Cinema Movement emerged under such circumstances,

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[389] Horak, *Lovers of Cinema*, 1998, p. 20.
[390] MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 2006, p. 3.
[391] https://thelittle.org/history (Accessed on: May 22, 2015)
[392] Ibid.
[393] Horak, *Lovers of Cinema*, 1998, p. 15.
[394] Horak, "Discovering Pure Cinema", 1980, p. 1. https://www.academia.edu/1572733/Discovering_Pure_Cinema_Avant-Garde_Film_in_the_1920s (Accessed on: May 22, 2015)

with its advocates hoping to achieve "beauty at a low cost"[395] and antagonistic toward the vulgar aesthetic tastes. Declaring itself to be an alternative to the commercially-orienting movie houses, the short-lived Little Cinema Movement, however implausibly, even had some success at the beginning. So much so that the International Film Arts Guild, besides sponsoring film screenings, was still fortunate enough to support the design and construction of its own cinema, the *Film Guild Cinema* — the "first 100 per cent Cinema in the world" as Kiesler called it. According to Raymond J. Haberski, Gould once confirmed that his programs of "independent and foreign films had drawn consistently large audiences at Manhattan's Cameo Theatre", and he believed that the "'film art movement', would continue to grow because 'its propelling principles are evolutionary and not revolutionary.'"[396] The later part of Gould's statement may refer to the programs of the Film Arts Guild, which mostly focused on significant artistic, experimental European or classic American features, but also included political films rejected by the mainstream commercial distributors or censors. McGuire reveals that a survey of the display ads showed that "during the first year of its opening indicates that European and Soviet films were the primary fare, although it frequently re-screened popular works: Charlie Chaplin films appear to have been a favourite",[397] as Chaplin's films were "stamped indelibly with the personality of the maker"[398]. The movement even gained credit from film industry insiders and the professionals, for instance, film producer, screenwriter and drama critic Ralph Block observed that "the small movie companies, independent of the industry and of the general public, could 'find at once a potential audience which the professional movie produce and distributor has never touched.'"[399] The Little Cinema Movement entirely relied on an independent spirit, namely, independent producers, theatres and correspondingly an independent audience, "serving as sources for exceptional photoplays as well as a reflection of the movie industry's failings."[400]

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[395] Haberski, *It's Only a Movie!* , 2001, p. 52. Haberski cited from: Block, "Movies versus Motion Pictures," p. 892.

[396] Ibid. p. 53. Haberski cited from: Could, "Little Theatre Movement in the Cinema", p. 4.

[397] McGuire, "A Movie House in Space and Time", 2007, p. 54.

[398] Haberski, *It's Only a Movie!* , 2001, p. 52. Haberski cited from: Frances Taylor Patterson, "Signs and the Portents", p. 4.

[399] Ibid. Haberski cited from: Block, "Movies versus Motion Pictures," p. 892.

[400] Ibid. Haberski cited from: Kuttner, "A Place for the Photoplay", p. 3; idem., "Exceptional Photoplay", p. 3; and idem., "Needed — One Free Screen on Broadway", p. 3.

Parallel with the Little Cinema Movement's emergence in the United States, there were other film societies or movements throughout Europe, a half-decade ahead of America. The European film societies or movements shared certain similarities in general, but also had their own characteristics. The pivotal activities of the movements would find themselves in France, Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands, Belgium and Britain among other countries. We will mainly look into the ciné-club movement in France, the decisive Film Matinée *Der absolute Film* in Germany, as well as the London Film Society established in the United Kingdom. The looming traces among the European movements' interrelations, their potential influence on the Little Cinema Movement in the United States, as well as Kiesler's possible involvement will be reviewed in succession.

The ciné-club movement in France of the early 1920s was among the earliest film societies. Within the movement, the French ciné-club C. A. S. A. (Club des amis du septième art) was originally founded as a discussion group, but soon turned to organize private screenings for its members. The club was frequented by members of the avant-garde such as "Germaine Dulac, Marcel L'Herbier, Alberto Cavalcanti, Jean Epstein, Léon Moussinac, Blaise Cendrars, Jean Cocteau, Robert Mallet-Stevens, Fernand Léger […]"[401]. These names indicate that the Club's members were mostly the artists and intellectuals, rather an elitist group. The goal of the other film society, Club Français du cinema, established around late 1922/early 1923, was "to defend filmmakers as artists […] and to attack the restrictions of the commercial industry".[402] Sharing such an enthusiasm, the two clubs soon amalgamated into a more influential one and arranged "an extensive schedule of monthly public screenings of revivals of impressive but underappreciated earlier films and premieres of new films", including some avant-garde films, such as *Ballet Mécanique*. "Political films rejected by commercial distributors or the censors" were as well included, for example, Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925).[403] And though the film societies' activities spread throughout France, the audiences at their screenings still remained limited to "an elitist audience", as Richard Abel describes it, a synthesis "of artists, intellectuals, cinéphiles and (to use an unflattering label from the period) 'boisterous snobs'."[404] Kiesler was as well an enthusiastic moviegoer; he would fit perfectly into the Parisian ciné-club's sphere. Even if not directly involved, he was

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[401] Hagener, *Avant-[G]arde Culture and Media Strategies*, 2005, p. 80.
[402] MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 2006, p. 2.
[403] Ibid.
[404] Ibid.

at least very well aware of the French ciné-club movement. His time of living in Paris would have granted him the most updated knowledge about avant-garde films and the ciné-club movement.

In Germany, instead of the French ciné-clubs' "elitist culture", the film societies started more like audience organizations, which rather shared "the heavily politicised sphere of the Weimar Republic", and to some extent were more grassroots-orientated. For instance, founded in 1921, *Münzenberg's Internationale Arbeiterhilfe* (IAH) was actively involved with organizing a "worldwide" aid program for famine affected regions in both Soviet Union and Münzenberg. [405] The Social Democratic Party, Unionist organizations, and the Communist Party all arranged cinema events throughout the 1920s, which were all well received by the working-class. In this case, the function of film screening was more about "a means of propaganda and persuasion". [406] In 1922, with support of the trade union, *Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* (ADGB) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) founded the *Volksfilmbühne* and *Film und Lichtspieldienst* for its own production and distribution. Seemingly far away from artistic avant-garde films, still, the German context slowly found its way to emerge as a force field of an alternative cinema culture. The decisive event would be the Film Matinée *Der absolute Film* dated 3 and 10 May 1925. Presented by the *Novembergruppe*, in cooperation with the film production company UFA, the event took place at the UFA Theater am Kurfürstendamm in Berlin. The collaboration was an abnormal association with distinct interests. The *Novembergruppe*, founded by the Berlin Expressionists to demonstrate their response to the World War I, "the Treaty of Versailles and the October Revolutions in Russia" and their utopian purpose to "unite all revolutionaries of the spirit — Expressionists, Cubists, and Futurists"[407]; while the UFA represented the German film industry, Universum-Film, A.G. the largest state-aided film-production company in Germany at the time. UFA's Culture Film Department was where Eggeling and Richter had gained support for their earliest hands-on film experiments. According to Malte Hagener, it could be considered as a Research & Development Department, that "innovated trick effects, camera equipment, shooting techniques and technical inventions". [408] Identifying itself neither with propaganda nor the film industry, the program of the Matinée was "an

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[405] Hagener, *Avant-[G]arde Culture and Media Strategies*, 2005, pp. 85-86.
[406] Ibid. p. 86.
[407] Elder, *Harmony and Dissent*, 2008, p. 163.
[408] Hagener, *Avant-[G]arde Culture and Media Strategies*, 2005, pp. 87-88.

aesthetically minded association of artists with avant-garde leanings"[409]. By checking the program archive in Frankfurter Filmmuseum, Holger Wilmesmeier's research confirmed that a total of six films were presented, including *Dreiteilige Farbensonatine – Reflektorischen Farblichtspiele (Three-Part Colour Sonatine), Film ist Rhythmus (Film is Rhythm)*, *Symphonie Diagonale, Opus 2, 3 und 4, Images Mobiles* and *Entr'Acte*,[410] among them, four were considered as coming from the German avant-garde filmmakers (although Eggeling was not German) and two contributions from the French avant-garde (Fernand Léger jointly with Dudley Murphy, Francis Picabia and René Clair). The program had to be repeated because of the heavy interest shown during the first session, which is both normal and abnormal at the same time, because avant-garde films rarely achieved mass distribution, rather remaining within the film societies or art house, but in this case, both the reception and the screening space were unexpected. Besides the program, the location of the Matinée was also quite unusual — neither in the aristocratic old section of Berlin, nor in a working-class neighbourhood where the propaganda films were shown, but rather in the UFA Theater am Kurfürstendamm, in Berlin's bourgeois and commercial center of the new West. "This occasion emphasizes the links between artistic innovations and the industry and the proximity of the avant-garde to the emerging documentary film"[411], making this decisive film event a remarkable icebreaker therefore for an alternative cinema culture in the post-war Germany.

R. U. R., for which Kiesler had created the backdrop design, had played at the Theater am Kurfürstendamm in Berlin around the end 1922 and early 1923. The enormous publicity Kiesler gained from this innovative "electro-mechanical" design ensured his passing through the threshold, and standing right at the frontier of the international avant-garde. Not to mince matters, Kiesler's left-leaning progressive political affiliation at the time matched perfectly with the *Novembergruppe's* utopian political tendency, and the aesthetically minded association he shared with avant-garde artists were both faultlessly in line with the German avant-garde film societies. In addition, many years later, the undisguised admiration Kiesler expressed in an unpublished paper, showed that he was still convinced that his experimental filmmakers friends and their films had an enormous impact on "those circles that constituted

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[409] Hagener, *Avant-[G]arde Culture and Media Strategies*, 2005, p. 87.

[410] Wilmesmeier, *Deutsche Avantgarde und Film*, 1994, p. 7.

[411] Hagener, *Avant-[G]arde Culture and Media Strategies*, 2005, p. 87.

creative forces of the European motion-picture avant-garde".[412] Finally, once again, we have to point out that those copies of experimental films found at Kiesler's "weekend" house, including films from Richter, Eggeling, Ruttmann and Léger, could almost constitute another Film Matinée of *Der absolute Film*. He may have arranged screenings – if not publicly in cinemas or museums, maybe French style private screenings – for an elitist group of artists, intellectuals, museum curators, art critics, patrons and dealers, or simply for those cinéphiles who were up to the non-narrative films from those "amateurs-turned-professionals"[413]. Thus, if Kiesler's involvement with the French ciné-club movement was a kind of undercurrent passion, his involvement with the German film culture is rather unmistakable.

In the United Kingdom, the London Film Society was founded in 1925, following "principles of selection and serious study from the widest possible range of film material".[414] The society consistently offered its members programs of "remarkable breadth, combining avant-garde films, scientific films and other types of documentaries, classic shorts and features, and commercial films of distinction from around the world."[415] The programs of the London Film Society remained influential and later expanded beyond the United Kingdom, when one of its major figures, Iris Barry, was named the first film curator of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York in 1935. At that time, the museum's director Alfred H. Barr was trying to set up a film library for the museum, "with a mandate to preserve and exhibit (and subsequently distribute) a broader range of films than was commercially viable in the United States".[416] Barr was "by chance" among the guests at Kiesler's Greenwich Village penthouse apartment at the 56 Seventh Avenue, where Kiesler hosted his European émigré artists friends, along with others, including such as museum curators, art critics, patrons and dealers. A letter dated on April 21st 1937 connects Kiesler with MOMA's endeavors. As mentoned, in that letter Kiesler offered an outright gift of two avant-garde films *Rhythmus* and *Symphonie Diagonale*, together with Ruttmann's early coloured piece *Excelsior-Reifen* to MOMA's Film Library, and his "offer was considered, but not accepted" for reasons unknown.[417]

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[412] F. Kiesler, "Early Film-Makers: *Symphonie Diagonale*, by Viking Eggeling; *Rhythmus*, by Hans Richter." In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 32.

[413] Horak, *Lovers of Cinema*, 1998, p. 17.

[414] MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 2006, p. 2.

[415] Ibid.

[416] Ibid. p. 3.

[417] L. Kiesler, "November 1975, Films Salvaged: Lillian Kiesler Finds *Ballet Mécanique* by Léger and *Excelsior-Reifen* by Ruttmann Stored in Her Home." In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 22.

If involvement with French and German film culture was what Kiesler inherited from the past, his attempt to contribute to America film culture was then a gift for the future, for instance, being a committee member of the Film Guild's advisory council, his involvement with the publicity for the early experimental films, offering the outright gift of those films to MOMA, and especially and much later, those copies of films he had kept are "invaluable, priceless" (for the historical detective studies of the early avant-garde films).

Along with the flourishing evolution of the Little Cinema Movement in the United States, the avant-garde film's exhibition and reception appeared to be on the agenda. In March 1922, *Exceptional Photoplays*, from the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, was apparently the first magazine to suggest the establishment of art cinemas.[418] These were to be "a special theatre or series of theatres" whose purpose was to "build[ing] up of an audience, [and that] would naturally be followed by the actual making of experimental pictures"; and beyond that, "directors and actors, stimulated by what they had seen in this theatre and encouraged by the reception of new work, would feel impelled to try their hand."[419] After a Sunday film screening of art films at the Central Theater and the George M. Cohan in 1925, Gould later engaged the Cameo Theater for a continuous art film program in March 1926, and which Gould himself confirmed, "had drawn consistently large audiences." However, Horak says that the over-scheduled European and American features for the 540 seats Cameo Theatre "had been failures in their first run" because they were just not 'popular' enough.[420] Regardless, during the inaugural screenings of the *Film Guild Cinema* in February 1929, two avant-garde shorts by Americans, *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928, James Sibley Watson and Melville Webber) and *Hands* (1928, Stella Simon), along with a Soviet feature, *Two Days* (1927, I. E. Samchylovski) were included in the inaugural program, and "[t]he premiere led the National Board of Review to name *The Fall of the House of Usher* in its 'a Calendar of Progress,' noting that: 'Amateur experimentation reaches a sudden peak in this abstract film."[421]

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[418] Horak, *Lovers of Cinema*, 1998, p. 20. Horak cited from: O. Spearing, "A Vakuable Service," *Exceptional Photoplays 2* (March 1922); John Hutchins, "L'Enfant Terrible: The Little Cinema Movement," *Theatre Arts Monthly 13*, No. 9 (September 1929): p. 696.

[419] Ibid. Horak cited from: John Hutchins, "L'Enfant Terrible: The Little Cinema Movement," *Theatre Arts Monthly 13*, No. 9 (September 1929): p. 697.

[420] Ibid.

[421] Ibid. p. 23. Horak cited from: "The Motion Picture: A Calendar of Progress," *Theater Arts Monthly* 13, No. 9 (September 1929): p. 644.

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE FILM GUILD

The Film Arts Guild founded the little cinema movement in America on Sunday, November 22nd, 1925, with a revival showing of "Deception," with Emil Jannings as King Henry VIII and Henny Porten as Anne Boleyn.

During its four years of existence the Film Arts Guild, under the direction of Symon Gould, has provided the nucleus for the propagation of a little cinema movement in the United States, has served in its own way the cause which has for its aim an appreciation on the part of the public for the better grade of films and has culminated its activities in this field by erecting what is called the first 100 per cent cinema house in the world.

A detailed resume of the important film-product shown under the guild aegis would read like a symposium of practically all the great American films and a goodly portion of the Continental films.

It is not without a tinge of nostalgia that one recalls that happy period in American film production when Hollywood was turning out utterly charming, witty, civilized motion pictures—such things as the Cruze and Lubitsch satires, the Raymond Griffith and Mal St. Clair satires, things like "A Woman of Paris," "The Pilgrim," "The Merry Widow," "Beggar on Horseback," "The Marriage Circle," "Kiss Me Again," "Paths to Paradise," "Hands Up," "The Grand Duchess and the Waiter," "Lady Windermere's Fan," etc.

All these and many more the Film Arts Guild revived—first sporadically in various theatres on New York's Rialto—later at the Cameo Theatre, where these cinematic gems were ensconced in a quiet, unobtrusive atmosphere for a long and memorable sojourn.

The Sultan of Satire, the esteemed Herr Lubitsch, unconsciously assumed the role of envy extraordinary in this heroic crusade for the whole-hearted acceptance of the artistic film. One after another his cinema chef d'oeuvres were presented—"The Marriage Circle," "Rosita," "Kiss Me Again," "Forbidden Paradise," "Lady Windermere's Fan," "One Arabian Night," "Danton," "Passion," "Peter the Great."

Indeed, it was a Lubitsch film which opened the crusade—"Deception," with Emil Jannings as the ribald and not too particular Henry VIII of England. And, as the only American film to receive the honor of an American premiere for the "good of the cause," the lot fell once again to a Lubitsch truffle—"So This Is Paris." A five-week run to record-breaking attendance was the answer to the sceptics.

Nor did the guild neglect the foreign film. On the contrary, it presented at a brilliant series of subscription performances at the Cameo three American premieres of such exotic imported products as "The Waxworks," "Shattered," "The Treasure," "Backstairs," "Faces of Children," "Feu Mathias Pascal," "Paris Endormis," "Ballet Mecanique," and numerous others.

It made "The Last Laugh," that finest flower of the Teutonic cinema craft, a commercial success, for the first miracle, and subsequently included in its revival programs such historically

2

COMING

"NOSFERATU THE VAMPIRE"

Directed by Murnau

Inspired by motives from "Dracula."

. . . a symphony in gray . . . moods macabre and mordant . . . a powerful psychopathic study of bloodlust . . .

INAUGURAL PROGRAM

BEGINNING FRIDAY, FEBRUARY, 1st, 1929

1. LIFE AND LOVE: A Ballet of Hands
(AMERICAN PREMIERE)

Produced by Mrs. Stella Simon, a German-American, at the Rex Studios, Berlin. Directed by Miklos Bandy, a Hungarian. Photography by Leopold Kutzlub. Abstract movements by Hans Richter.

CAST

Love	Herbert Volck	Passion	Takka-Takka
Life	Hertha Feist	Truth	Berthold Schmidt

Fritz Lang, the director of "Metropolis," "Siegfried," "Kriemhild's Revenge," etc., says of "Hands": "I have found this film extraordinarily interesting and also confirmed my conviction that the rhythmic play of hands is ever so much more expressive than the mimicry of the human face. There are several sequences which have moved me deeply."

2. THE FROG PRINCESS
(AMERICAN PREMIERE)

An animated color picturization of an old Russian folk tale, conceived, designed, and executed by Paul Peroff, assisted by Nicholas Ciskovsky. The material used for the plot is taken from several old Russian fairy tales and poems by Alexander Pushkin. The principal characters are a jolly old King, his brave son, an evil magician, and the beautiful princess. The costumes and settings were drawn after well-known Russian paintings by K. Makovsky, V. Basnetzoff, and the famous illustrator of Russian folk tales, Ivan Biliban. A special technique was developed and employed to give depth and transparency to these backgrounds.

3

COMING

"TOLSTOI INTIME"

A record of his daily life made in 1908 when Tolstoy was eighty years old . . . in which we see the great writer in intimate moments on his estate at Yasnaia Poliana . . .

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important films as "Cabiria," "Dr. Caligari," "The Golem," "Quo Vadis," "Moana," "Cyrano de Bergerac," "Crainquebille," "Gypsy Blood," "The Loves of Pharaoh," etc. Weeks were devoted to the work of D. W. Griffith—"Intolerance," "The Birth of a Nation," "Broken Blossoms," etc. And to the early John Barrymore films—"The Lotus Eater," "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," and "Beau Brummel."

The Film Guild fought an unceasing battle with the censors on "Potemkin" and collaborated with the Amkino in the successful presentation of this momentous screen - masterpiece, which demonstrated the technical superiorities of the Soviet studios and became the forerunner of other major motion pictures from Moscow. Its next premiere presentation of importance was "Czar Ivan the Terrible."

The Film Guild in its past career has been largely hampered in the full expression of its ideas because it did not control the theatres presenting its programs, but with the advent of the Film Guild Cinema an uncompromising policy of film-art may be expected and no cinema, no matter how radical its experimental quality, will be refused a hearing—or rather a viewing.

A PROPHECY FULFILLED
(Reprinted from The Evening Telegram, June 8, 1926)

THE FILM ARTS THEATRE

Who will be the patron of the motion picture art and donate a theatre? All we ask is a little place on a side street. Part of it for a museum where the best films, selected by a special jury, can be stored for posterity. Here we will show in repertoire the best films of the past. This will be a film orphanage where the good, un-box-office films can come and find a haven. Perhaps, after being fed and clothed awhile with our publicity, fare forth again into the world to conquer the public. An asylum for superb foreign films which we are so eager to deport the moment they arrive. Without a hearing. Here will be the archives of the films. Who will write his name in the heavens of cinema immortality by donating the Film Arts Theatre?

4

who is symon gould—anyway?
by charles yale harrison

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3. THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER
(AMERICAN PREMIERE)

Produced and directed by J. S. Watson, Jr., and Melville Webber, of Rochester, both amateur cinematographers - representing in the opinion of the major screen authorities the triumph of the amateur over the professional film-creators . . . representing not only a new cinema technique, but also unique because it does not attempt to tell Poe's story in detail, rather to invoke in its audiences the esthetic impressions and moods which the tale creates in its readers . . . an unusual and revolutionary approach to the screen embodying a tremendous psychological significance.

Mr. Wilton Barrett, Secretary of the National Board of Review, states: " 'The Fall of the House of Usher' represents the greatest advance made in the progress of the motion picture as an independent art since that optical film, "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari," barring no other photoplay produced by American and European professionals. Our Board has awarded it major mention as an exceptional photoplay, an honor granted only the world's finest cinematic achievements."

This film was conceived by J. S. Watson, Jr., who did the photography, and by Melville Webber, who wrote the scenario, designed the sets, and played one of the three sets as well. The other two were acted by Herbert Stern and Hildegarde Watson.

4. 1 A.M.

Charlie Chaplin's soliloquy to the comic muse. Based on his famous "music" hall sketch with which he toured in American vaudeville and which first brought his pantomimic gift to the attention of the early film magnates. A recreation of the same material and a tremendous test of Chaplin's solo - abilities, which he meets with varying effectiveness.

"I feel that the screen should express things trivial and prodigious, beautiful and sordid, hateable, adorable."

5

COMING

"AELITA"

"The Revolt of the Robots"

. . . the Russian "R. U. R." . . . Caligari in settings . . . satiric in conception . . . stylized in direction and acting . . . a Sovkino production . . . produced by the Moscow Chamber Studio . . .

Figure 50 *Film Guild Cinema* **Inaugural Program Page 2. 3. 4. 5.**
© **Film Guild (Director, Symon Gould), New York; 1st Edition (1929)**

tracings of the architect

1910—research on the ideal theatre and the ideal cinema.

1922—i begin to realize my conception for the screen-o-scope in the kurfurst-endamm theatre in berlin.

1923—first steps towards creating the funnel-shaped auditorium on the occasion of my staging o'neill's "emperor jones" for its european premiere . . . these theories being subsequently published.

1924—transformable walls through light and mechanics achieved for the music festival of vienna.

1925—building of black auditorium with screen in grand palais of the expo-

sition des arts decoratifs et industrielles modernes in paris . . . completed plans for conic-shaped and ray-shaped auditorium.

1926—february—exposition of all my plans in new york city at steinway hall and publication of theories expounding the various ideal types of theatre and cinema . . .

1926—may—adaptation of ideal theatre and cinema plans to the american building code: the twin theatre; the ray; the megaphone theatre.

1928—designed and executed the saks fifth avenue windows.

1929—erection of the film guild cinema.

three functional parts of this cinema . . .

a. projectoscope
   a gallery of light-stations encircling the auditorium sending rays in all directions . . .

b. screenoscope
   a device for the main screen with three auxiliary screens spanning the auditorium . . .

c. seating plan . . .

the realization of any architectural ideal means combat; the realization of an ideal cinema means war;—war against space and time; war against owner and builder; war against an army of sales-people and experts.

the function of a building determines its form, color and material. architecture is function materialized in space. the time dictates the style. the talent of an architect is in ratio to his respect for materials and the limits of utility. a semi-solution of this principle makes for decoration. the perfect solution of function and material becomes beauty.

frederick kiesler.

8

COMMENTS ON FILM ARTS GUILD

words, Russia refuses to adapt stage technique for its cinema but is trying to develop a new technique which is "cinema" as opposed to "theatre." And the Film Arts Guild as I see it, has been quick and first to recognize the superiority of this method as opposed to the American money method. It has not only sponsored Russian Films in America, but better, has constantly emphasized such aspects of the film art as are inherently opposed to merely meretricious and ignorant entertainment—the guide and light of the Hollywood lords.

I extend my compliments to this movement as represented by the Film Arts Guild and all others. I wish them well. Indeed, my sincere hope is that their influence may be felt increasingly throughout America.

—THEODORE DREISER.

The Film Arts Guild has done more for the introduction of European Films to America than any other single organization. It has become a prominent factor in the international relations regarding motion pictures and a means for mutual understanding between the different nations.

—CONRAD VEIDT.

I wish to extend my congratulations on the success of the Film Arts Guild and its first truly representative theatre.

—FRED NIBLO.

The Film Arts Guild has entered upon a most ambitious program both of exhibition and analysis of outstanding production. If the work of the Guild proceeds impersonally and without prejudice for or against any production group, it seems to me that it can be of great value in determining the lines along which the industry should proceed.

CECIL B. DE MILLE.

I hope and wish sincerely that the Film Arts Guild will continue as a permanent institution, for I believe that the Film Arts Guild has done a tremendous deed towards popularizing the art of motion pictures. I am convinced that everybody sincerely interested in the art of motion pictures will feel the same way regarding the Guild as I do.

—ERNEST LUBITSCH.

My best wishes for the success of the Film Arts Guild.

—CHARLES CHAPLIN.

Heartiest best wishes and thanks for your attention to my work.

—EISENSTEIN.

The Film Arts Guild released my film "The Three Waxworks" in New York. This pioneer work has smoothed my work in America, and what the Film Guild has done for me it has done for the entire German film industry. As the Film Guild will always be assured of my gratitude, it should also receive the gratitude of the German film studios.

—PAUL LENI.

9

P ROJECTION

IS THE

LIFE

OF THE

TRUE

CINEMA

Installers of all projection equipment for the Film Guild Cinema

We furnish everything for a motion picture theatre—except the audience

NATIONAL THEATRE SUPPLY COMPANY
OFFICES IN ALL PRINCIPAL CITIES

1560 BROADWAY   NEW YORK CITY

All decorations for this theatre executed by

The Brounet Studios, Inc.

1133 Broadway

New York

Watkins 8832

12

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the ability to handle a unique problem in lighting, such as this theatre presents, is the special characteristic of this organization

the metal craftsmen co., 27 e. 22nd st., n. y. tel. algonquin 3872. designers and manufacturers of fine period lighting fixtures

Best wishes

for the success

of the

Film Guild Cinema

Josef von Sternberg

"SALVATION HUNTERS"

"UNDERWORLD"

"THE LAST COMMAND"

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Figure 51 *Film Guild Cinema* **Inaugural Program Page 8. 9. 12. 13.**
© Film Guild (Director, Symon Gould), New York; 1st Edition (1929)

— *Film Guild Cinema's Inaugural Program and Its Reception*

After being thinly spread across the country during the late 1920s, the art theatre movement[422] seems to have petered out during the 1930s. The *Film Guild Cinema* also shared this misfortune. However, at its highest point during the time of its inaugural screening, no one would have expected that such an ill fate would soon arrive. Certainly, with an estimation of about "thirty thousand amateur filmmakers in the United States alone" in 1926, and that "more than a hundred amateur cinema clubs existed" in America and abroad in 1928, and the "Amateur Cinema League had more than twenty-three hundred members, all of whom were producing amateur films"[423] in the same year, the grandiose inaugural of *Film Guild Cinema* in early 1929 could not have been anything else than a logical event to expect.

In the Inaugural Program for the *Film Guild Cinema*, Theodore Dreiser commented, "the little cinema theatres, which should, and I hope will, act as heavens for artistic American as well as European productions and such experimental efforts of 'amateurs' here as many have the real interest of the screen as art truly at heart."[424] Dreiser's comments well described the cinema's screening programs, namely, American avant-garde films were often paired with those from Europe, especially those experimental features from Germany and Russia. Among those, highly promoted as the "German-American Film," the female filmmaker Stella F. Simon's *Life and Love: A Ballet of Hands* (1927-28, Miklos Bandy & Stella Simon) was listed as the first film to be presented for the inaugural screening,[425] which also gave the program a certain feminist aspect – from today's perspective. To make the film more attractive, a quote from Fritz Lang was included in the inaugural program: "I have found this film extraordinarily interesting and also confirmed my conviction that the rhythmic play of hands is ever so much more expressive than the mimicry of the human face. There are several sequences which have moved me deeply."[426] The Russian feature entitled *The Frog Princess* (1928, Paul Peroff) was an animated color "picturization" executed by Paul Peroff, and

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[422] The term "Little Theatre Movement" was used in regard to independent stage productions, and was also used for movies until critics began calling it the "Little Cinema Movement".

[423] Horak, *Lovers of Cinema*, 1998, p. 19. Horak cited from: "Cranking Your Own," *National Board of Review Magazine* 2. No. 6 (June 1927): 3. Also see the letter from Arthur Gale (Amateur Cinema League consultant) to Marion Gleason, November 21, 1928, Gleason file, George Eastman House (GEH), Rochester, N. Y.

[424] Ibid. p. 24. Horak cited from: Theodore Dreiser, Comments on Film Arts Guild. In: *Inaugural Program* of the Eighth Street *Film Guild Cinema*, February 01, 1929, p. 4.

[425] In: *Inaugural Program* of the Eighth Street *Film Guild Cinema*, February 01, 1929, p. 3. https://wfpp.cdrs.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-stella-f-simon/ (Accessed on: May 23, 2015)

[426] Ibid.

whose plot was rooted in Russian fairy tales and poems. Combining "European influence with something home crafted"[427], *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928, James Sibley Watson and Melville Webber), was called "the most renowned and technically accomplished film" conceived by two amateur cinematographers, and it too was American premiered in the inaugural program:

> […] representing in the opinion of the major screen authorities the triumph of the amateur over the professional film-creators… representing not only a new cinema technique, but also unique because it does not attempt to tell Poe's story in detail, rather to invoke in its audiences the esthetic impressions and moods which the tale creates in its readers… an unusual and revolutionary approach to the screen embodying a tremendous psychological significance.[428]

The program included also more established works such as *1 A. M.*, a Charlie Chaplin soliloquy, was recreated, "based on his famous music hall sketch with which he toured in American vaudeville and which first brought his pantomimic gift to the early film magnates. […] a tremendous text of Chaplin's solo abilities."[429] Chaplin, of course, was universally known for his indelibly individuality trademark strongly printed into his movies, and so it came as no suspense that his movies would be frequently screened at the *Film Guild Cinema*. The other two films shown were *Preude* by the Film Guild Ensemble and another Russian film *Two Days* from I. E. Samchylovski.[430] Besides these, there were a few films not included in the Inaugural Program, but announced as coming soon, for instance, *Tolstoi Intime* (1908), was a record of Tolstoi's daily life with "intimate moments on his estate at Yasnaia Poliana" when the great writer was eighty years old.[431] It could be considered as one of the earliest Russian documentaries or home movies, if we may arrange it in such categories. *Aelita* (1924), a silent film directed by the Soviet filmmaker Yakov Protazanov, was considered as Russia's first big-budget science fiction spectacular, with Martian scenes accompanied by Constructivist sets.[432] The film was called as "the Revolt of the Robots" and appraised as the Russian version of "R. U. R." in *Film Guild Cinema's* Inaugural Program.[433] "A powerful

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[427] http://www.filmpreservation.org/dvds-and-books/clips/the-fall-of-the-house-of-usher-1928 (Accessed on: May 24, 2015)

[428] In: *Inaugural Program* of the Eighth Street *Film Guild Cinema*, February 01, 1929. p. 5.

[429] Ibid.

[430] Information from Amazon.com page, on Frederick Kiesler - Film Guild Cinema - 1929, Inaugural Brochure. http://www.amazon.com/Frederick-Kiesler-Cinema-Inaugural-Brochure/dp/B0085EN8YS (Accessed on: August 08, 2014)

[431] In: *Inaugural Program* of the Eighth Street *Film Guild Cinema*, February 01, 1929. p. 3.

[432] http://www.ce-review.org/00/1/kinoeye1_horton.html (Accessed on: May 24, 2015)

[433] In: *Inaugural Program* of the Eighth Street *Film Guild Cinema*, February 01, 1929. p. 5.

psychopathic study", F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu The Vampire* (1922)[434] and Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), were both later premiered in New York at the Guild[435]. On the top of all these films, the Inaugural Program informed the *Film Guild Cinema's* cinéphiles that the Film Guild also "fought an unceasing battle with the censors on 'Potemkin' and collaborated with the Amkino in the successful presentation of this momentous screen – masterpiece."[436] With such information, Film Guild had clearly stated its position, namely, "it did not control the theatres presenting its programs, but with the advent of the *Film Guild Cinema* an uncompromising policy of film-art may be expected and no cinema, no matter how radical its experimental quality, will be refused a hearing – or rather a viewing."[437]

Following its distinguished inauguration, however, the climax of the cinema didn't last long. Only after somewhat less than a year and half's operation as an arts film cinema, in 1930, the *Film Guild Cinema* was remodelled and "leased to another exhibitor and renamed the Eighth Street Playhouse."[438] Rather the opposite of Theodore Dreiser had wished for (Fig. 50. 51.) "[…] that their influence may be felt increasingly throughout America".[439] The decline of the *Film Guild Cinema* also gives evidence to Horak's argument that the arts film theatres of this kind "had been failures in their first run" because they were just not that "popular". The Cinema remained open until 1992, however, one of its most important innovative features, Kiesler's cat's-eye shaped *Screen-O-Scope*, was ruthlessly removed. According to McGuire, the building now functions as a DVD rental store at 52-54 West Eighth Street in Greenwich Village.

"The fall of the house of art" had various reasons. From the architectural perspective, although it was reputed to be the world's first cinema "designed solely for the projection of the cinema",[440] according to Held, due to lack of funds Kiesler's concept was never fully constructed, and those special projectors for the ceiling and the walls were never fabricated,

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[434] In: *Inaugural Program* of the Eighth Street *Film Guild Cinema*, February 01, 1929. p. 2.

[435] McGuire, "A Movie House in Space and Time", 2007, p. 55.

[436] In: *Inaugural Program* of the Eighth Street *Film Guild Cinema*, February 01, 1929. p. 4.

[437] Ibid.

[438] McGuire, "A Movie House in Space and Time", 2007, p. 55. McGuire cited from: "Lease Allows Television, M. C. Ansorge Gets Control of Eighth Street Playhouse", *New York Times*, May 25, 1930, p. 50.

[439] Theodore Dreiser, Comments on Film Arts Guild. In: *Inaugural Program* of the Eighth Street *Film Guild Cinema*, February 01, 1929. p. 9.

[440] Held, *Endless Innovations*, 1982, p. 43. Held cited from: *The Brooklyn Examiner*, May 17, 1929. p. 20:1.

only the structure and fine acoustics remained as Kiesler had planned them. Regardless, from a contemporary and more objective or "pragmatic" view, the defects may also be due to the limitations of the construction and projection technology of the time.

From the point of view of its film programs, as McGuire has pointed out, the cinema was a "progressive" movie house "where the good, un-box-office films can come and find a heaven".[441] Having said that, to disregard the box-office and overlook other issues might also have caused problems. An article from John Hutchins in *Theatre Art Monthly* already reflected the possible decline of the movement; in September 1929, not too long after *Film Guild Cinema's* opening, Hutchins wrote:

> That their bright day is done and they are for the dark, within only four years of their inception, is the unhappy comment on an art movement that from the first was characterized not so much by art as by a truly astonishing lack of foresight, and later by merely bad business methods.[442]

Allies of the American film industry had a consistent criticism on the European "art" films, namely, "static and inferior". According to Horak, Hutchins found many foreign movies even "distasteful", and he "argues that the Little Cinemas had 'little or nothing to offer,' and accuses Gould's Film Guild, for example, of showing too many Russian films."[443] Perhaps the Russian films should not be categorized as the "inferior foreign films", but we should look rather to "a worsening economic climate"[444], or even a worsening political climate. Needless to say, as Horak sees it, such criticisms from the allies of the American film industry would eventually also contribute to the demise of many Little Cinemas.

Different viewpoints lead to different arguments. American novelist and journalist Theodore Dreiser would see it differently from the American film industry people like Hutchins; in his eyes, the Little Cinemas rather had much to offer instead of little, for instance, he commented in the Inaugural Program, "Russia refuses to adapt stage technique for its cinema but is trying to develop a new technique which is 'cinema' as opposed to 'theatre'. […] Film Arts Guild […] has been quick and first to recognize the superiority of this method as opposed to the

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[441] A Prophecy Fulfilled - The Film Arts Theatre, Reprinted from The Evening Telegram, June 08, 1926. In: *Inaugural Program* of the Eighth Street *Film Guild Cinema*, February 01, 1929. p. 4.
[442] Horak, *Lovers of Cinema*, 1998, p. 24. Horak cited from: John Hutchins, "L'Enfant Terrible: The Little Cinema Movement," *Theatre Arts Monthly 13*, No. 9 (September 1929): p. 694.
[443] Ibid. p. 25.
[444] Ibid.

American money method."[445] As for taste, Dreiser thought that "the guide and light of the Hollywood lords" was "meretricious and ignorant" and he hoped that the Little Cinemas would be a force opposed to it by sponsoring the screening of foreign films, and "constantly emphasize[ing] such aspects of the film art".[446] Dreiser's opinion was representative of the Little Cinema Movement, as Col. Roy W. Winton, who was the managing director of the Amateur Cinema League, noted in 1927, "We are concerned about where this Eighth Art is going and we are concerned about it aesthetically as well as socially and ethically."[447] German UFA star actor Conrad Veidt agreed with the Little Cinema Movement's ideology, but was more focussed on the constructive aspect than provoking trepidation from the other interest Groups. For him, the Film Arts Guild has become a "prominent factor in the international relations regarding motion pictures and means for mutual understanding between the different nations."[448] Even Cecil B. DeMille, already foresaw the potential dilemma of the Guild's "uncompromising policy" and pointed this out quite diplomatically in his comments written for *Film Guild Cinema's* inaugural program. Acknowledging that the Film Arts Guild had entered upon a tremendous ambitious program of "exhibition and analysis of outstanding production" towards popularizing motion picture arts, he also advised that "if the work of the Guild proceeds impersonally and without prejudice for or against any production group, it seems to me that it can be of great value in determining the lines along which the industry should proceed."[449]

From the management and operation levels, Hutchins' criticism about "truly astonishing lack of foresight, and later by merely bad business methods" might be not far from the facts. Apparently Gould had set up certain distribution networks for renting films to both the art cinemas and the mainstream commercial theatres. "However, any profits realized never made their way back to the filmmakers."[450] For instance, Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's copy of *Manhatta* (1921) disappeared following a Cameo Theatre screening in 1926; Robert Florey

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[445] Theodore Dreiser, Comments on Film Arts Guild. In: *Inaugural Program* of the Eighth Street *Film Guild Cinema*, February 01, 1929. p. 9.
[446] Ibid.
[447] Horak, *Lovers of Cinema*, 1998, p. 17. Horak cited from: Roy W. Winton, "For the Love of It," *National Board of Review Magazine 3*, no. 7 (July 1927): 4.
[448] Conrad Veidt, Comments on Film Arts Guild. In: *Inaugural Program* of the Eighth Street *Film Guild Cinema*, February 01, 1929. p. 9.
[449] Cecil B. DeMille, Comments on Film Arts Guild. In: *Inaugural Program* of the Eighth Street *Film Guild Cinema*, February 01, 1929, p. 9.
[450] Horak, *Lovers of Cinema*, 1998, p. 27.

complained that he had received neither the rentals/sales for his experimental shorts, nor had he gotten his prints and negatives back; more over, he had never heard from Gould again.[451] Lacking sufficient information, we cannot make any assertion on how far Kiesler, as a committee member of the advisory council, was involved with the *Film Guild Cinema's* screening activities, but recall that he was also in possession of copies of many of those early avant-garde films. However, there are a few vague and intricate trails we may think of but that still demand more research before any conclusions can be made. For instance, in *Film Guild Cinema's* Inaugural Program, Richter was listed as part of Simon's film-making team on *Life and Love: A Ballet of Hands*, for abstract movements;[452] according to Barr's "Russian Diary", when he traveled to Moscow around 1927–1928, he had a print of Simon's film with him.[453] Both Richter and Barr were well connected with Kiesler. E. E. Cummings, who was jointly listed as director and photographer for as *The Fall of the House of Usher*,[454] was part of the Surrealist group, which Kiesler also belonged to. Regardless, what we do know is that when MOMA's film library was founded with an "essentially Eurocentric"[455] outlook and with a special focus on the avant-garde films of the 1920s and 1930s, Kiesler offered outright gift of his copies, and had them well preserved when the issue remained unsettled. Judging by this, he was a faithful artist who respected and understood film art, just as he understood the other arts, and so perhaps we can read between the lines: "[I]n the film, as in every other art, everything depends on how its mediums (means) are utilized and not on what is employed."[456]

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[451] Horak, *Lovers of Cinema*, 1998, p. 27. Horak cited from: Letter, Robert Florey to Frank Stauffacher, February 27, 1047, "Art in Cinema" files, PFA.

[452] In: *Inaugural Program* of the Eighth Street *Film Guild Cinema*, February 01, 1929. p. 3.

[453] https://wfpp.cdrs.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-stella-f-simon/#ccp (Accessed on: May 28, 2015)

[454] http://www.filmpreservation.org/dvds-and-books/clips/the-fall-of-the-house-of-usher-1928 (Accessed on: May 28, 2015)

[455] Horak, *Lovers of Cinema*, 1998, p. 29.

[456] Ibid. p. 20. Horak cited from: Amateur Movie Makers 3, no. February 02, 1928, p. 100.

Summary and Conclusion

When I cautiously chose the topic *Frederick J. Kiesler's Involvement with Film Culture*, my expectations were not very high. Although Kiesler has been regarded as a visionary architect, scenic designer, environmental artist, sculptor, painter, writer, poet and philosopher, and research has been conducted correspondingly, his involvement with film culture has never been seriously undertaken as an academic research topic. After an initial of information gathering, the primary literature-based research showed that Kiesler had been working inter-disciplinarily, and his crossing among various media often dissolved rigid disciplinary boundaries. He challenged conventional ways of thinking and practicing within distinct art fields, and he designed, constructed the *Film Guild Cinema*, but, that's where the trail went off.

The "ice-breaker" came when a MOMA brochure of about 50 pages appeared, and within which, there is a transcribed text from a 1976 radio interview from WUHY-FM in Philadelphia, among Judith Vassallo, Jonas Mekas and Lillian Kiesler, under the title *Friedrich Kiesler's Involvement with Films – Leger, Ruttmann, Warhol*.[457] The interview touched topics upon such as "Kiesler's interest in cinema and various forms of it, his interest in images, light and movement date to the early twenties"; before the end of the interview, Judith Vassallo, who hosted the program, mentioned the possibility of Mekas "devoting a future issue of *Film Culture* to Frederick Kiesler and film"; Mekas also hoped that Lillian Kiesler would "collect all the relative… related materials to cover this part of Kiesler's interest and work so that it could be then brought to the attention of those who work in that area […]"[458] The interview also pays homage to American film historian Standish D. Lawder's publication *The Cubist Cinema* (1976), within which Lawder made the bold assumption of connecting Kiesler's backdrop for *R. U. R,* to Léger's set design for *L'Inhumaine* and Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927). Originally, Lawder had written, "Kiesler's represents a probable influence on Léger's design for *L'Inhumaine* and Lang's film seems to have been influenced, in return, by Léger."[459] This breakthrough gave me more confidence to conduct further research and eventually lead to the finalization of this thesis.

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[457] "A Radio Broadcast Interview with Mrs. Kiesler: *Friedrich Kiesler's Involvement with Films – Leger, Ruttmann, Warhol*". In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 25.
[458] Ibid. p. 27.
[459] Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, 1975, p. 108.

Based on primary literature-based research, I have zoomed in very closely on a wide range of artistic activities Kiesler pursued throughout his life, and espacially conducted an "archaeological" survey of the *Film Guild Cinema* (1929) and his other projects that have a more obvious relation to film studies, such as the *R. U. R.* backstage production design (1922-1923). Even for those projects that seem to have almost nothing to do with film studies at first glance, such as *Space Stage* (1924), *City-in-Space* (1925), analysis has been carried out in depth, retrospectively, and comprehensively, in order to see them within a larger historical context. The aspiration has not been to "rediscover" a master lost in history, but rather to exam certain key works from Kiesler's early European period (1922 -1929), and to look for the potential impact they might have cast on *Kiesler's involvement with film culture*. Such an investigation sought out an unexpected or hidden cinematographic vision of Kiesler's. Unlike film, that leads its spectators through a virtual "imaginary path followed by the eye"[460], Kiesler's projects had always invited their spectators to go through a physical three-dimensional path of space and time, by having them change their own bodily positions within space. Under such time-based circumstances, through the visual experience of successive movements in relation with time, a common ground for both architectural and cinematic originated. A quasi-film-experience of this kind, which exists within architectural spaces through the visitors' interaction and participation, was faultlessly in line with the European avant-garde art movements' awareness that, "the 'appearance' of the world was something constructed from the activity of the observer".[461] Thus, conceptions of art were widely opened up, in such a way that more individual and subjective experience divorced from a conventional idea of an "absolute" reality – was experienced by spectators in the new dynamic works that Kiesler created.

To understand Kiesler's "cinematographic effects" further, studies were made of his works in relation to the early abstract films of Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling, Walter Ruttmann, Fernand Léger and Marcel Duchamp in succession. These artists (many of them painters) stepped into film-making through their encounter with avant-garde art, which was what they shared with Kiesler in common. They each also had a relationship with Kiesler, either on the personal or artistic level.

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[460] Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 2002, p. 55. Bruno cited from: Sergei M. Eisenstein, *Montage and Architecture*. p. 116.
[461] Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond*, 1977, p. 10.

Hans Richter's *Rhythmus 21* (1921), Viking Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale* (1924), Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* (1924) as well as Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma* (1924-1926) were reviewed in succession in comparison with Kiesler's artistic projects or essays, in order to seek a potential "inter-relation" or "inter-influence" between Kiesler and his contemporaries during their collaborations and correspondence. Selected issues on science, technology and philosophy from the era were also briefly reviewed in order to trace the potential impact these other fields may have had on the individual artists' artistic approaches, and to observe the interests they might have shared in common, for instance, scientific and philosophical interests in nature, kinesis, and mechanism aesthetics. One of the surprising discoveries made during the research was an unpublished paper Kiesler wrote on the early experimental filmmakers, and within which one reads not only the detailed knowledge of Eggeling's film making processes and methods, but also Kiesler's insightful understanding of the medium itself. Finally, when trying to "project" Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma* into Kiesler's *Film Guild Cinema*, I returned to the departure point of this thesis, and realized that "cinematic blossoming" finds intersections when similar themes are applied in different media. In this case, a potential of mutual enlightenment between cinema and architecture can be observed. At the same time, divergence can be seen, in that Duchamp attempted to involve the spectators' intellectualization in his work, while Kiesler was rather seeking a spirit of modernity by transporting the aspiration for a "civilized" life.

Being part of the *Little Cinema Movement*, the *Film Guild Cinema* was actively involved in importing and screening "significant foreign films as well as the revival of earlier film milestones"[462] with the goal of reaching an audience that was open to "the experimental, the eclectic, and the unusual" films.[463] With international ciné-club movements as its context, a review of the *Film Guild Cinema*'s inaugural program and its reception was conducted in detail, and which again reflected Kiesler's active involvement with film culture.

There is still much more research on Kiesler's involvement with film culture to be investigated and discovered, not only in regards to its historical context, and its relation to contemporary art, but even its future. For instance, in an essay *"On the Origins of the Virtual Museums"* contributed to 2002 Nobel Symposium *"Virtual Museums and Public*

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[462] McGuire, "A Movie House in Space and Time", 2007, p. 54.
[463] https://thelittle.org/history (Accessed on: June 01, 2015)

Understanding of Science and Culture", media historian and pioneering media archaeologist from UCLA, Erkki Huhtamo, opens his essay with a quotation from Kiesler's 1929 essay, *The Telemuseum*: "Through the dials of your Teleset you will share in the ownership of the world's great art treasures."[464] While discussing the notion of the virtual museum, Huhtamo introduces László Moholy-Nagy, El Lissitzky, Herbert Bayer, Marcel Duchamp and Frederick Kiesler's application of experimental photography, film, sound recording, as well as exhibition design itself as new medium. What is especially attractive is his observation and analysis of Duchamp and Kiesler's paying attention to "[…] bringing the 'lost' dimension of tactility and with it a sense of 'life' back to art."[465] In the essay, Huhtamo also mentions that some reviewers of the Art of This Century Gallery "spoke about 'a kind of artistic Coney Island' or 'a penny-arcade peep show without the pennies.'"[466], and he assumes that "quite clearly Kiesler was inspired by the well-known hand-cranked peep show movie machines (like the Mutoscope) and other popular entertainment devices, just like Duchamp's 'Roto-reliefs' had a relationship to 19th century optical toys, like the phenakistiscope and the stereoscope."[467] Thus, Kiesler's involvement with film culture can remain not just for historical research on the cultural values of the past, but could also be linked to a contemporary topic still yet to be developed, namely, the cyber-cultural discourse of the "Virtual Museum".

According to Lillian Kiesler, several months before Kiesler passed away, in the class he was teaching, Modern Seminar, at the New York University, he predicted a "total environment projected with film, a changing 'spa[t]ial continuity' on the clouds." Kiesler was even already doodling a "weekend house for outer space where one could have a cloud-side view of the projection", and hoped that soon "we would not be able to distinguish between reality and film", and be "delighted at the forthcoming prospect."[468]

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[464] F. Kiesler, "The Broadcasted Decoration – The Telemuseum." [1929]. In: *Frederick J. Kiesler Selected Writings*, 1996, p. 19.

[465] Huhtamo, "On the Origins of the Virtual Museums", 2002, p. 1.

[466] Ibid. p. 8. Huhtamo cited from: Dieter Daniels, "Points d'interférence entre Frederick Kiesler et Marcel Duchamp", in Frederick Kiesler. Artiste-architecte, edited by Chantal Béret, Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 1996, pp. 125-126.

[467] Ibid. p. 8.

[468] L. Kiesler, "November 1975, Films Salvaged: Lillian Kiesler Finds *Ballet Mécanique* by Léger and *Excelsior-Reifen* by Ruttmann Stored in Her Home." In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 22.

The last two discoveries – the Virtual Museum and a Total Environment of Film which fuses the dream and reality – remain undeveloped, I hope that they will function here as "teasers" that might stir the curiosity of readers; and therefore, instead of concluding this thesis with a closing end-point, I would prefer to depart at a point that will open up further studies. As said previously, the purpose of this thesis is neither to rediscover a master lost in history, nor is it to gain certificate of "genius" for Kiesler the artist who also happened to be intimately involved with film culture. Rather it has intended pay closer attention to the "inter-relations" and "inter-influences" among various disciplines. However, the thesis does pay homage to Kiesler for his intersecting between and among different media, for his dissolving of the rigid boundaries between disciplines, and his endless challenging of conventional ways of thinking and practicing within distinct art fields. In the end, I hope that through this thesis, we can reactive the "future issue" Mekas dreamed of 40 years ago, the topic that Standish D. Lawder, Jonas Mekas, Lillian Kiesler and Judith Vassallo and Katsuhiro Yamaguchi had already begun, and finally develop it into the topic "*Frederick Kiesler's involvement with Film Culture*", and offer it to the attention of those who are interested and who work in this area.

I want to end with a short quotation from the Kieslers, and which Lillian Kiesler recalled from the last lecture Kiesler ever gave at the New York University:

> 'The time will soon come that when we move, that film will be projected of course on the clouds.' And that moving from film to reality, reality to film we will not know the difference, it's inexerable, it's inevitable that we will be surrounded with it.[469]
>
> — *Frederick and* Lillian *Kiesler*

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[469] "A Radio Broadcast Interview with Mrs. Kiesler: *Friedrich Kiesler's Involvement with Films – Leger, Ruttmann, Warhol*". In: *A Tribute*, 1977, p. 27.

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38. Figure 38, Film Stills from *L'Inhumaine* (1924), Marcel L'Herbier. With Léger's set design for the laboratories as background.

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02. 2007   "KITABESI dot" / Canan Dagdelen
                "KITABESI dot" / An Exhibition from Canan Dagdelen
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04. 2013   "Architecture Sequins Fashion Show Era"
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09. 2007   *2007 (DIAF) / Game Process*
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12. 2006   *The Next Vienna* / New Crowned Hope, Mozart Jahr 2006

12. 2002   "Lonely Courtyard, Quiet Altars –
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