# *Frederick Kiesler and the Speculative Future of Avant-Garde TV*

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**Résumé/Abstract:** The career of architect/designer Frederick Kiesler constitutes one of the most robust and influential engagements with television prior to its commercial inception – and one of few sustained attempts to imagine a future in which art and broadcasting would advance as codependent harbingers of modernity. Though his ideas did not neatly forecast the development of the now-familiar broadcast entertainment industry, Kiesler's work explored an alternative path for TV's evolution that harnessed broadcasting's privatized domestic reception model to disseminate modernism's aesthetics and ideals. This essay resituates Kiesler's most enduring work, the design of the Art of This Century Gallery, in terms of the broad arc of his interests in media and technology. This space was not only an incubator for the development of 20th century fine art, but a laboratory for experiments about merging deep aesthetic contemplation and broadcasting. While his ideas remained largely unrealized, the circulation of speculative fictions like Kiesler's helped to define the potential uses of a new medium and incited conversation about the relationship between media and culture.

**Mots clé/Keywords:** television, architecture, avant-gardism, the art gallery

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The circle of avant-garde 1940s New York was an intimate one with a nexus at 28 West 57th Street -- Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery. The gallery space itself, with its curvilinear walls, biomorphic layout, and kinetic installations, has become an icon of mid-century modernist design. However, the theoretical contributions of the gallery's designer, Frederick Kiesler, have fallen into relative oblivion, paling alongside the maverick prestige of Guggenheim herself. I would like to move beyond considering Kiesler as merely "Peggy's picture hanger" to attend to how his installations at Art of This Century are a manifestation of a career-long attempt to imagine the integration of modern art and broadcasting, or the potential for an avant-garde television.

Exploring Kiesler's diverse applications of television in the context of avant-gardism allows us to probe one of the medium's many unactualized potentials. As a prominent player in international design movements like de Stijl and Bauhaus, Kiesler circulated amongst an elite group of artists and critics who were concerned with pushing the aesthetic, technical, and political bounds of the fine art tradition. After emigrating to the United States in the 1920s, Kiesler maintained his associations with the art world while simultaneously championing America's burgeoning mass culture. Significantly, Kiesler's conceptualization of TV's utopian potential to mingle with the fine arts was situated in the midst of heated debates about the relationship between avant-gardism and popular culture. His optimistic plans for the integration of art and media emerged in the same milieu that welcomed Walter Benjamin's influential 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" — in which he portends the collapse of fine art's "aura" at the hands of mass media technologies - and Clement Greenberg's inflammatory 1939 piece "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" — which positioned avant-gardism as the utter antithesis of mass culture (Benjamin, 1969; Greenberg, 1939). In a quite visionary sense, Kiesler did not draw such hard lines between so-called "high" and "low" cultures, but envisioned their mutual enhancement: "push button" technologies like the jukebox and the kinetoscope could be conceived as vehicles for the presentation of music and art, department store windows were ideal venues for gallery exhibition, and theatrical performances could be enhanced through the incorporation of moving images and recorded sound. Perhaps most presciently, Kiesler

advanced television - nearly a quarter century before its widespread installation in American homes - as a tool for delivering art to the masses.

Given a recent push to resuscitate Kiesler's centrality to the introduction and development of modernism, it is curious that his fascination with television has remained all but ignored. While his ideas do not always approximate the familiar apparatuses and systems that developed under the purveyance of the commercial entertainment industry, he offers an alternative path for TV's evolution that posits harnessing broadcasting's privatized domestic reception model to disseminate modernism's aesthetics and ideals. As a whole, his career constitutes one of the most robust and influential engagements with television prior to its commercial inception, and one of few sustained attempts to imagine this medium in the context of avant-gardism. Kiesler's speculative future for an avant-garde TV thus stands as an important point of entry into discussions about both television's imagined cultural functions in the early 20th century and the long, but often overlooked, historical relationship between art and broadcasting.

**Early Experiments with the Television Apparatus**

Many scholars have traced Kiesler's interest in media technologies to the sets he designed for a 1922 production of Karel Čapek's science fiction drama *Rossum's Universal Robots. R.U.R.* featured a seismograph, megaphones, moving image and still projection, strobe lighting, and neon, which thrilled audiences and enriched the play's futuristic *mise en scène*[1]. However, Kiesler was particularly invested in simulating live broadcasting, which was, at the time, quite science fictional in and of itself. While incorporating a functional television set was still a technological impossibility, *R.U.R.*'s stage set was situated around an obsolete mirror technology called a Tanagra apparatus (Kiesler, 1924: 21). Like a closed circuit television, the Tanagra apparatus allowed off-stage actors to perform a scene that was transmitted live onto a screen before the audience via a complex system of concave mirrors[2]. As Kiesler recalled,

1 See Elcott, 2016; Salter, 2010; Dixon, 2007.

2 Indeed, years later, Kiesler altogether elided explaining the complexities of the Tanagra apparatus and instead referred to it simply as "a television," six feet by three feet, embedded in R.U.R.'s stage set. See Held, 1977: 17.

> it was my occasion to use for the first time [...] television in the sense that I had a big square panel window in the middle of the stage drop which could be opened by remote control. When the director [...] pushed a button at his desk, the panel opened and the audience saw two human beings...a foot and a half tall, casually moving and talking, heard through a hidden loud speaker. (qtd. in Creighton, 1961 : 109)

As if to underscore the marvel of the television technology, Kiesler took extra care to authenticate the liveness of the "broadcast" by ensuring that the off-stage actors re-appeared on stage immediately afterward: "It was quite an illusion, because a minute later you saw the same actors appear on stage full size. There was, inevitably, a burst of applause at this moment." (qtd. in Creighton, 1961 : 109)

The critical and technical success of the Tanagra apparatus was formative for Kiesler: *R.U.R.* established, for the first time, a basis for discussing televisual technology in the language of international modernism. Indeed, Kiesler recorded in his diary that, following *R.U.R.*'s second performance, his colleagues Kurt Schwitters, Hans Richter, László Moholy-Nagy, El Lissitzky, and Werner Graeff spent a "whole night" enthusiastically discussing his technological experiments (Creighton, 1961: 111). As is well-known, the European avant-garde's reconciliation of industrial technology with the fine art tradition deeply inflected the roots of American modernism. Kiesler contributed profoundly to the traffic of these ideas as he established himself as a fixture in New York's art community alongside up and coming artists like Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, and Robert Rauschenberg, whose 1966 artwork, *Homage to Frederick Kiesler*, pictures a saint-like Kiesler arrayed alongside an image of *R.U.R.*'s Tanagra apparatus.

Many of these artists were introduced to Kiesler's ideas through the publication of his influential 1930 book *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display*. Upon arriving in America, Kiesler eagerly accepted a number of commissions to design department store window displays, including a multi-year installation at Saks Fifth Avenue that was the subject of much acclaim and which incited demand for a written account of his novel ideas about design and technology (Haran, 2013). Andy Warhol and Jasper Johns (who began their careers as window dressers), among many others, used Kiesler's book as an indispensable reference. In it, he treats the store window as a "modern method of

communication" that will be "ripened" with the perfection of television: "What are we doing," Kiesler mused, "to probe the rich, untapped potentials of this medium?" (Kiesler, 1930: 74, 113). For Kiesler, store windows - an ideal site for merging commerce and culture - should be "kinetic," connected to the eye of the consumer like an "electrical circuit." (Kiesler, 1930: 111; 1941: 37) At their fullest potential, store windows would be nothing more than "shields" for massive TV sets that constituted a bulk of the store's facade and worked as a sort of customizable public architecture (Kiesler, 1941: 39). In addition to using television as a "broadcasted decoration" or "tele-decoration" on a store's facade, Kiesler proposed the establishment of retail "networks" that would produce content for this TV-assisted form of "window shopping."[3] Kiesler's imaginations for television were positioned on the final pages of his book as a gesture toward the future - an aspirational statement about where art and design might next flourish. Significantly, this mediated brand of modernism was directed at the masses, who, he hoped, might routinely and casually find the precepts of avant-gardism embedded in the structures and rituals of their everyday lives.

Indeed, Kiesler's ambitions involved the total integration of televised art as an element of the modern landscape of daily life. This ultimately meant the installation of television sets in the home and the broadcasting of art works for private domestic reception. Accordingly, *Contemporary Art Applied* to the Store and Its Display closes with a move from the department store to the living room, suggesting that television might also work in the private sphere to turn the home "into a theater, a stadium; into Paris or Peking:"

> Just as operas are now transmitted over the air, so picture galleries will be. From the Louvre to you, from the Prado to you, from everywhere to you. You will enjoy the prerogative of selecting pictures that are compatible with your mood or that meet the demands of any special occasion. Through the dials of

3 While it can be established that Kiesler had correspondence with a number of department store executives, it is unclear whether contemporaneous experimentation with TV in these stores was a direct result of his influence. Nevertheless, it is significant that, in the years following the publication of Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display, large chains like Gimbels and Bloomingdales were collaborating with companies like RCA Victor to inaugurate "instrastore TV networks." See "Gimbel Style Show Going on Television", 1945: 32; "Store's Television Network to Provide Easy Shopping", 1945: 2.

> your Teleset you will share in the ownership of the world's greatest art treasures. (Kiesler, 1930: 121)

While other architects, notably those of the Levitt and Sons firm in the late 1940s, would go on to build television sets into the very walls of suburban homes, Kiesler's conception of the screen as an embedded architectural element was a manifestation of a protracted concern with making automatic access to art a regular feature of modern life.

In fact, two years prior to the publication of his plans for this "telemuseum," Kiesler had already designed a model domestic interior for Katherine Dreier's historic International Exposition of Modern Art at the Brooklyn Museum. The goals of the exhibition included demonstrating "how modern art would look in a home environment," and habituating the public toward living with art "on a daily basis." (Bohan, 1982: 59) Three of the four model rooms displayed at the exhibition approached this goal conservatively, hanging modern canvases amongst traditional furnishings purchased from a local department store. However, Kiesler's room was more ambitious, incorporating automated advertising equipment that was used, as he explained it, to realize "an old idea of mine to show how I envision the future way of getting in contact with one's pictures in one's home." (Kiesler to Dreier, November 2, 1926, qtd. in Bohan, 1982: 61) Dreier described Kiesler's installation as a "small dark room" equipped with a Teleset: "in turning a button, the Mona Lisa from the Louvre would appear, or if I pressed again, Velasquez's [sic] Venus from London, or a Rembrandt from the Rijks Museum would be lighted." (Dreier, 1950: xvii) Visitors were "enchanted playing with this expression of the future," and "someday," Dreier predicted, "all the important museums will have their real television rooms." (Dreier, 1950: xvii)

The 1926 "television room," and its later iteration as the 1930 "telemuseum," preceded a number of other domestic art-viewing machines that Kiesler proposed throughout his career. In 1932, for instance, he pitched designs for a prefabricated home to Sears[4], Roebuck, & Co. — a distributor of the "kit homes" that were available during this period as solutions to the American housing crisis. Significantly, Kiesler's house plans specifically

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4 Kiesler's ideas should be understood alongside his peer László Moholy-Nagy's so-called "domestic pinacoteca," a futuristic "radio picture service" for the home consumption of fine art that was first outlined in his 1925 book Painting Photography Film (1969).

accommodated “the inevitable television scenes [...] of the future” with designated space for a television set. The home was not picked up by Sears, but in 1939 Kiesler did manufacture (in limited quantities) his Mobile-Home-Library, a large curvilinear bookshelf and storage wall that could be installed in any home and used as a “biotechnical tool” for increasing domestic access to information and entertainment. The unit was highly adaptable with various removable parts that allowed for the realization that books would imminently be “replaced by newer ‘tools of communication’ - microfilm, television, reading by optophonetics, etc.” (“Everyman’s House”, 1932: E1; Kiesler, 1939: 71)

As Lynn Spigel has explained in *TV By Design*, a cultural history of the many vital intersections between fine art and commercial television, the widespread commercial inception of TV in the 1950s ultimately did allow for the establishment of “a new visual environment - a virtual gallery - for painting in the postwar period.” Television, “as a living room fixture,” “offered audiences a way to feel ‘at home’ with modernism and to experience art as a form of home entertainment.” (Spigel, 2008: 22) Indeed, despite his alignment with the paragons of international art culture and his collaborations with major museums and galleries, Kiesler ultimately preferred everyday art-viewing contexts (and, above all, the private domestic interior) as superior exhibition venues. Museums, for Kiesler, had become “oxygen tents of art” that perpetuated an elitist and “artificial” relationship between “art and public.” Viewing art at home, casually and at leisure, was a “better, more honest” experience:

> we cannot live all the time in oxygen tents. It would be better, more honest, if [we could…] go and visit the paintings and sculptures of the memorable past and of our time in private homes, gardens, courtyards, rooftops and basements. (Kiesler, 1996: 69)

**Television and the Art of This Century Gallery**

Impressed by his reputation for innovation, and invested in non-traditional forms of gallery exhibition herself, art collector Peggy Guggenheim commissioned Kiesler to design her now-iconic Art of This Century gallery in 1942. With Guggenheim’s financial and creative support, Kiesler set out to implement his plans for a multi-sensory, mediated art

viewing experience. Rather than hanging artworks on the walls, Kiesler removed the frames from the canvases and arranged the works dynamically in space, using mechanical and audiovisual tactics to establish a flow of images that unfolded as patrons moved around and past the artworks. Pieces by Miró, Kandinsky, and Braque, among others, were variously hung from suspension systems, attached to adjustable vectors, propped against easels, and, significantly, ensconced inside a "profusion of devices for peeping, peering, concealing, and then revealing." (Quaintance, 2004: 227)

While Art of This Century has been lauded by critics and historians for the way it disrupted existing modes of art exhibition (at this time usually rather limited to velvet draped walls lined with wainscoting and neat rows of framed pictures), it is important to acknowledge that, at least within Kiesler's oeuvre, these designs were not entirely unprecedented.[5] As Mary Anne Staniszewski has shown in her study of exhibition practice, avant-garde artists, exhibition designers, and art patrons during this period were preoccupied with "viewer-activated gadgetry for installations" - a phenomena that she links to the parallel growth of media industries (Staniszewski, 1998: 22). Art of This Century's own exhibition strategies participated in referencing and refining cultural imaginations about both television technology and television reception that were circulating widely in the 1930s and 1940s.

Art of This Century retained the blueprint of the townhouse from which it was converted, with its four galleries unfolding into one another like the interior of a small home. While Kiesler's earliest plans for Art of This Century had included a large screening room that resembled a cinema, this was quickly superseded by televisual "viewing boxes" that better complemented the intimate environment established by the townhouse-turned-gallery's layout. Kiesler borrowed ideas for the gallery's floor coverings (linoleum) and wall treatments (fabric cycloramas) from his earlier designs for single-family houses, and furnished the space with seating arrangements composed of custom chairs he had designed for use in private homes. Given the clear resonances between Kiesler's domestic projects and the gallery's design, we might consider how Art of This Century extended Kiesler's decades-long investment in using broadcasting to bring modernism into the home.

5 See Kachur, 2001; Macdonald and Basu, 2008; Reiss, 2001.

Art of This Century's Abstract Gallery had a turquoise floor, an undulating ultramarine cyclorama curtain wall, and stark fluorescent lighting, bathing paintings in an electric blue glow (Quaintance, 2004: 217). Works were suspended by thin cords, looming and recessing into and out of view. The Surrealist Gallery was flanked with curved gumwood walls from which unframed paintings protruded on arm-like appendages. Pulsating lights strobed at prearranged intervals in conjunction with a train whistle sound effect, leading visitors to describe the space as a "decorated subway," ("Inheritors of Chaos", *Time*, 1942: 47) a "staggering of traffic lights," (Coates, 1942: 52) or a "whirring and blinking nickelodeon." The flickering lights directed and ordered the gaze, creating an architectural form of montage in space. The more modest Daylight Gallery allowed seated viewers to flip through stacks of small works on easels for private, slower-paced, examination. All three of these galleries cast individual works in spatial and sequential relationship with others through the workings of light, sound, movement, sequence, and duration.

Visitors to Art of This Century were not free to peruse the space of their own volition as in a conventional art gallery, but were subjected to a cyclical and programmatic structure that revised traditions of art viewership by referencing broadcasting's reception models. Contemporaneous accounts reflect on the effectiveness of this strategy. Henry McBride, of the *New York Sun*, noted how the pictures "loomed into view" and "passed before him" to constitute a predetermined visual route that, as he put it, "is not [his] idea of aesthetic liberty:" "It compels you to have the correct thought at the correct time. [...] It might be alright if you timed your entrance and went about like a puppet. But who wants to be a puppet?" (McBride, 1942) Guggenheim herself recorded instances of spectators "complaining" that "if they were looking at one painting on their own side of the room, they would suddenly have to stop and look at a different one in another part of the room." (Guggenheim, 1946: 274) Emily Genauer of the *New York World Telegram* characterized the exhibition as "intruding on one's consciousness" and even the renowned art critic Clement Greenberg remarked that, due to the unusual arrangement of the pictures, his eyes were "unable to isolate them easily." (Genauer, 1942; Greenberg, 1943: 177)

6 "Fabulous Fancies," November 14, 1942, reproduced in Sonzogni, 2004: 276.

This idea of a prearranged flow of images was literalized in Art of This Century's most daring room, the Kinetic Gallery - a small, dimly lit space equipped with three interactive art exhibition machines. The largest of these was a seven-foot diameter spoked wheel that could be spun to reveal a cyclical parade of fourteen images from Marcel Duchamp's Boîte-en-valise collection. The images rotated on a disc implanted in the wall and were made visible through a four-inch elliptical peephole. On the opposite wall, a paternoster housed a series of small works by Paul Klee, which were mounted on a conveyor belt. Each painting floated before a spotlight for ten seconds before disappearing, although viewers were provided the option of prolonging their gaze by pressing a stall button. Lastly, a device resembling a coin-operated peep show concealed a single Klee painting and was operated by a lever that expanded a diaphragmatic shutter and triggered an incandescent interior light. Simply, but tellingly, the New York Times described the installation in quite televisual terms as "a series of pictures arranged in viewing boxes." ("Modern Art in a Modern Setting", 1942: 16-17).

In a history of technology, Kiesler's architectural and mechanical approximations of television's electronic future might not have a place -- his wheels and mirrors do not anticipate the broadcast technologies that developed under the purview of commercial and industrial interests. However, the circulation of speculative fictions like Kiesler's helped to make television a culturally viable phenomenon, outlining the potential uses of the medium and inciting broader conversations about the relationship between media and culture. During the period when Kiesler was envisioning television, the notion of "seeing at a distance" was the stuff of science fiction - as was exemplified by his own incorporation of television in the landmark sci-fi drama R.U.R. But it was also a fiction that had verged on actualization for more than half a century, with high profile demonstrations of experimental broadcast apparatuses fueling anticipation for the medium long before its widespread installation in American homes during the post-World War II years. That Kiesler, himself something of a futurist, would have joined the chorus of voices speculating about a distinctly televisual modernity is hardly surprising.

Indeed, throughout his career, Kiesler tended to be more invested in imagining the future than in building it; Philip Johnson famously called him "the greatest non-building architect of his time." (Johnson, 1960: 70) Hundreds of sketches, most of them

self-consciously theoretical or even whimsical, were generated in preparation for the Art of This Century installation, and collectively they convey something of Kiesler's more holistic vision for how his televisual machines were intended to function. In one of his most arresting sketches, Kiesler depicts a person shackled to a wall with his head ensconced by a blinder that directs his line of sight toward an illuminated panel. One outstretched arm controls the device with a push-button (Kiesler [c. 1942], 2004: 45). Related attempts to regulate and mediate art viewing include strategically placed spot - or back-lighting, rotating platforms, motorized scrolls, and telescope-like enclosures that mandate viewing in sequence, in private, and, oftentimes through a window, lens, or screen. The most ambitious sketches represent tangles of "electric spark-units," "turntables" with encased "sound records," and other amalgams of media and communication technologies that sync audio and visual components for the purpose of making a "show" of art and art history, of "Rafael, Cezanne, you and me" [sic] (Kiesler [c. 1938] 1997).

After Art of This Century's success, Kiesler only became more ambitious with his plans for television. As late as 1957, he was installing "viewing boxes" in Herbert Mayer's World House galleries, recessing artworks behind panes of glass with artificial illumination for observation by "window-loiterers." ("Stairs Float and Walls Flow", 1957: 30) Not incidentally, Mayer was a television visionary himself who had established an early TV demonstration theater in the 1940s and founded the Empire Coil Co. - which manufactured parts for TV sets, and presided over TV stations in Kansas City, Cleveland, and Portland. Many of Kiesler's late-career projects related to his conception of a vast media gesamtkunstwerk and production center that he called the Universal Theater, which included TV and radio studios, auditoriums for theatrical and operatic performances, and sound stages intermingled within a "flexible" gourd-shaped skyscraper.[7]

## Kiesler on Television

7 The Universal Theater concept may have been precipitated by a 1934 contest sponsored by WGN to design a "beautiful and distinctive," "ideal as well as practical" broadcasting studio adjacent to New York's Tribune Tower. Kiesler submitted an entry (which did not win) and seems to have remained preoccupied with the challenge for more than three decades. ("The WGN Broadcasting Auditorium Competition,", 1934: 12)

By the late 1940s, when television had become a societal reality, Kiesler was already bemoaning the medium's commercial trajectory and, in typical visionary form, even beginning to turn his sights toward computers as the next revolutionary venue for culture and communication. Kiesler's diaries record key moments when he watched television (oftentimes while experiencing sadness, malaise, or insomnia) and he was at least casually critical of televised arts programming. On one occasion, he begrudged an invitation to travel to the home of a friend with a "large new TV set" to watch a special art-themed episode of *The $64,000 Question* featuring celebrity art collectors Vincent Price and Edward G. Robinson (Kiesler, 1966: 71). And in 1959, like many Americans, he lamented the notorious quiz show scandals by peevishly writing:

> A whole country has been lured into the race for glory and money, a dead-end trap-squeeze. The TV Quiz. A man of fine ancestry, teacher of a university, fell for it, too -- that is, for rigged answers to gain the nation's admiration and win the show's highest prizes. Charles van Doren, the man who rose from middle-class honesty to the photo-finish of fake stardom and was finally doomed to dishonor. (Kiesler, 1966: 223)

Despite his dissatisfaction with these "TV hypnotics," or perhaps because of it, Kiesler accepted an invitation to meet with producer John McGiffert at the CBS Studios in 1960 (Kiesler, 1966: 377). Kiesler's ideas about domestic architecture were in demand during this period when efficient housing solutions were of paramount importance to a nation that was grappling with a massive post-war population boom. A number of prominent architects, like Buckminster Fuller, Richard Neutra, and Mies van der Rohe, were using the mass media to promote their utopian, technologically-enhanced housing solutions and CBS proposed to feature Kiesler's own *Endless House* - a biomorphic single-family dwelling - on its pioneering and prestigious cultural arts program *Camera Three*.

While architecture was considered to be "almost quintessentially telegenic" given that it was such a "preeminently visual subject," TV critics were nevertheless perplexed about why it consistently failed to take hold on screen: "It's hard to understand why architecture has been a dud on television, but it is a subject consistently marked by heavy-handed good

intentions and ponderous superficiality." (Huxtable, 1964: 59) Frank Lloyd Wright, for instance, had interviewed with Mike Wallace, but although "his wonderfully truculent face hugged the side of the 21'' tube perfectly," the program "never explicated the art of architecture to any appreciable extent." ("The Shape of Things", *The English Journal*, 1962: 660). A special profile of architect Philip Johnson was "so busy" that it failed to adequately showcase his work: "One merely wished that the camera had illustrated Mr. Johnson's architecture more fully." (Gould, 1965: 71) And a primetime NBC spectacular entitled *The Shape of Things* transported viewers from Egypt and Rome to the contemporary urban metropolis in a frenetic barrage of rapid-fire stylistic editing that left critics desirous of more focus and less flash. *The Shape of Things* received tepid reviews and drew a disappointing 9.2 Nielsen rating alongside *The Lawrence Welk Show*'s 16.2 and *Have Gun*, *Will Travel'*s 25.1.

Kiesler's modest Camera Three episode aired one week after *The Shape of Things* and was produced with "about one-twentieth of the money" - just $3,600 dollars ("The Shape of Things": 661). The episode aired on a Sunday morning, sandwiched between the religious program *Mass for Shut-Ins* and 90 minutes of "Oswald the Lucky Rabbit" cartoons. An archival copy of the little-known episode shows Kiesler with his head resting in his hands, swiveling slightly in his chair, and evading direct eye contact with the camera. A montage of abstracted fragments fade into one another as Kiesler speaks in voiceover, his accent heavy. This opening sequence, and much of the episode, is characterized by long periods of silence and emphasizes duration and composition in ways that defy commercial television's usual pacing and clarity of form. As he continues to expound upon his ideas, still images of modern paintings linger on screen and the camera explores plays of light and volumetric form as it slowly tracks over, around, and through three-dimensional models of his architectural designs. At one point, a camera arcs over Kiesler's shoulder to capture a large sketchpad upon which he carefully draws an infinity sign with a thick black crayon. In one of the most interesting sequences in the episode, Kiesler moves behind an opaque sheet of plastic which he draws on like a transparent blackboard. He is clearly more comfortable communicating with his pen than with his voice, and his ideas come through quite lucidly as he draws out a history of global domestic architecture. Although it is impossible to

determine with certainty, the fact that these strategies do not appear on other episodes of Camera Three suggests something of Kiesler's involvement in their implementation.

"Simply prepared" gestures like these were appreciated by critics, who found that the program's calm and spare design "respected the curiosity" of viewers. Though the Camera Three episode was not extravagantly produced, its "fresh" and "imaginative" approach demonstrated "infinitely more love" for the arts than other programs had with their over-produced, lavish conceptions ("The Shape of Things": 661). While critic Ada Louise Huxtable conceded that viewers were "still waiting for 'big' program" that would "reveal the full beauty, drama and importance of the art of architecture," the Kiesler spot was a "sincere, straightforward, competently conceived" and otherwise "stimulating" attempt at bringing architecture to television. Kiesler appeared composed and lucid despite the "unorthodox" and "esoteric" content of his ideas (Huxtable, 1960: 13). One reviewer even concluded his remarks by expressing an interest in "trying to get producer McGiffert to rerun the program." ("The Shape of Things": 661). Considered as a capstone to a career devoted, in large part, to television, the Camera Three episode is both a triumph and a defeat - art and artists, including Kiesler himself, were being broadcast into private homes, but their efforts were oftentimes anathema to TV's commercial underpinnings. Despite the relative success of his appearance on television, Kiesler nevertheless responded privately in his diary by asking: "Is that making the grade or the degrade?" (Kiesler, 1966: 242).

If Frederick Kiesler has so far remained an "unacknowledged innovator, out of his zeitgeist," it should be clear that his historical obscurity is, in large part, an effect of his own prescience (Haines-Cook, 2009: 180). As Erkki Huhtamo has pointed out, Kiesler's work was so "remarkably forward looking" that it may be most accessible in retrospect, from the vantage of the media future that he envisioned nearly a century ago (Huhtamo, 2010: 121-135). Kiesler's visionary plans for an avant-garde television found no long-term application, but even foreclosed futures shape cultural trajectories. His contributions to the climate of utopian speculation that arose in the decades prior to the television industry's consolidation were unique in their aspiration to merge traditions of deep aesthetic contemplation and broadcasting. And his most enduring work, the Art of This Century gallery, should be re-situated in terms of the broad arc of its designer's interests in media

and technology. This now-iconic space was not only an incubator for the development of 20th century fine art, but a laboratory for early experiments with television reception. Most importantly, then, it was a theorem about a future in which art and broadcasting would advance together as codependent harbingers of modernity. As Kiesler wrote in his diary on March 16, 1957, while listening to Beethoven's "Fidelio" on the Hi-Fi in Spiro's air-conditioned 12th Street Diner: "How old-fashioned can you be! […] This is the age of Enlightenment, art education by mechanical injection. The wheels of industry turning out high-speed culture. […] Just push a button. Don't be a sap." (Kiesler, 1966: 87).

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