Alien Doubles: Magic, Myth and Taboo in the Spatial Experiments of Frederick Kiesler

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Abstract

A number of obsessions dominate the later architectural projects of Frederick Kiesler and mark a radical departure from the prismatic functionalism that had associated his work with the avant-garde movements of Constructivism and then later De Stijl. It is primarily through the appropriation of magic and mythology that these are brought into existence and, through a certain critical repositioning, appear to work against the rubric of Kiesler’s own attitudes towards art and architecture. While the influence of magic and mysticism has been a major theme in discussions of the art of the period, particularly in regard to the work of Picasso, its influence over architecture has been less widely discussed or understood. This paper will look at the ‘Galaxy’ installation that Kiesler installed beside Philip Johnson’s Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut in 1953. The piece is pivotal for demonstrating the previously undervalued role that myth and magic played in the work of Frederick Kiesler, defining his architecture and, more directly, his architectural process. Kiesler’s association with surrealism during the period, as well as his awareness of the principles of psychoanalysis, were both major orienting themes in his work and reinforce the role and importance of magic and myth in his thinking. The paper will demonstrate how the surrealist search for ‘objects’ was assimilated into a model of ‘other’ architecture in a number of Kiesler’s proposals from the 40s and 50s. Drawing on recent critical interest in his work, the paper will show how Kiesler’s spatial interiors can be positioned within the broader intellectual culture of surrealism, and as strategies against the totalising forces of functional modernism.
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A stark black-and-white photo, taken in 1953, shows a large sculpture, crudely hewn from found pieces of timber that, through a selective foreshortening, towers over the black steel and glass of Philip Johnson’s Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut. The house had only been completed four years earlier and the sculpture, by Frederick Kiesler, had at the time of the photo been only recently installed. The installation itself is unusual. Spiky and emaciated, the bony frame has none of the smooth, earthy and sensual interiors of Kiesler’s Endless House, or the experiential labyrinths of his collaborative exhibition spaces. The space of the interior has been replaced by an architecture of the frame, where structure and symbolism have replaced substance and experience. Marking a period in Kiesler’s work where magic, primitivism and ritual were central to his creative output, the piece was given the title ‘Galaxy’ and, when set against the clean rationalism of the iconic Modernist house, seems to embrace a regressive and totemic mysticism. Upon its installation Johnson had sent a telegram to Kiesler that read: ‘Galaxy is a great success’.¹ Three years later, and perhaps fittingly, the piece was destroyed by lightning.

Although unique, ‘Galaxy’ was not an original piece. It had been distilled through a number of previous births into its current form before its untimely (and unfortunate) destruction. In his role as Director of Scenery at the Juilliard School of Music (a position he had held since 1933) Kiesler had originally designed a crude driftwood shelter for a production of Darius Milhaud’s Le Pauvre Matelot in 1948. The spiky post-and-beam structure functions, in the set design, as the home of the solitary wife in the play: a feminine, wall-less space where she waits for her husband to return from the sea. Crudely tied with rope and simple timber joints, the found pieces of driftwood metamorphose into the bony skeletal structure of fish and other creatures of the sea. Having seen the play, Nelson Rockefeller had purchased the piece and commissioned Kiesler to reconfigure it for his private residence in the Hudson Valley. Before the work was installed it appeared in the Fifteen Americans show² at the MoMA where Kiesler developed a new base, shaped in a cruciform configuration, which reinforced the skewed perspective of the original piece.³ It was while developing the piece for this show that Kiesler began work on the large timber structure for Philip Johnson.

It is not the confluence of these two influential architects that is peculiar about the ‘Galaxy’ installation. Johnson, as the cultural powerbroker for displaced Europeans in
America, knew of Kiesler since his arrival in New York in the 1920s. By the late 40s Kiesler had become a central figure in the creative circles of New York and his inner-city apartment had been host to extended stays by Willem de Kooning, Jean Arp, Andre Breton, Marcel Duchamp and Arshile Gorky as well as becoming the cultural epicentre for the numerous displaced surrealists living temporarily in America. Kiesler had earlier worked on some post-war housing projects with Adolf Loos in Vienna in 1920 (who remained an enthusiastic supporter) and, through his friends Theo van Doesburg and Kurt Schwitters, had been introduced to Mies van der Rohe in 1924. Given their strong links to the European avant-garde it is not surprising that the creative trajectories of Johnson and Kiesler would eventually cross, and surprising perhaps that they had not crossed sooner.

What is peculiar about the juxtaposition between the ‘Galaxy’ piece and the Glass House is the apparent contradictions that seem to be working between Kiesler’s archaic primitivism and conceptual witchcraft and Johnson’s austere modernism. The transparency and visual connectivity of Johnson’s house and its seamless integration of services would normally intersect harmoniously with Kiesler’s theory of ‘Correalism’ and the vast array of architectural projects that had preoccupied him up until that point. However not only does Kiesler’s installation refuse to engage the house, it appears to openly and brazenly critique it. It is a structure at war with its context.

A number of cathartic events can be tracked in Kiesler’s work of this period and manifest themselves in this seemingly radical departure from the language of modernity and his theories of interrelatedness. Kiesler’s introduction to the circle of Surrealism in this period, and his contemporaneous proximity to Andre Breton in particular, influenced, and possibly even necessitated this departure from a spatial model of ‘synthesis’ and ‘continuity’. His collaborative projects with David Hare in the same period, whose work is frequently associated with African tribalism, could also have been equally instrumental in restructuring his thinking. However it was Kiesler’s systematic immersion in mysticism, his fascination with primitivism and magic and his embrace of the darker aspects of spirituality that is characteristic of this dynamic and polemically destabilising current in his work. The nature and evolution of this obsession, and its implications for Kiesler’s architecture, will be the subject of this paper.
In order to make sense of the peculiar ‘doubling’ that takes place in the ‘Galaxy’ installation in Connecticut and to position a broader critique of the notions of homesickness that may underpin it, it is necessary to first look at some important preceding projects and, in particular, the way that they articulate a nostalgic and internalised attitude towards homesickness and the modern subject. Writing in the *New York Times* in 1960, critic Ada Louise Huxtable argued that Kiesler’s work ‘camouflages abstract sculpture as a kind of building. Sculpture becomes structure, by a slick, expertly rationalised, unpardonable reversal of architectural procedures.’ Huxtable had been critical of Kiesler’s erosion of the basic principles of architecture and saw his interiors as a kind of sculptural intrusion into architectural space, blurring the connection between the two. While this careful ‘camouflaging’ of the distinctions between structure, sculpture and space functions in a number of Kiesler’s projects, its structural collapse, and almost systematic destruction is witnessed in the ‘Galaxy’ piece in Connecticut. While there is little doubt that a number of Kiesler’s architectural proposals, and especially the Endless House, resemble sculpture both in form and representation, it is clear that Kiesler’s free-standing sculpture rarely, if at all, attempts to integrate the principles of architecture. This is demonstrated by the almost antithetical siting of the ‘Galaxy’ piece in relationship to Johnson’s iconic box.

The timber structure, as well as reinforcing ideas of animalism and totemic symbolism, demonstrates a sentimentality towards the ‘primitive’ and the historical origins of the primitive hut. It also reinforces the rituals of tribalism, providing a communal centre or hearth that is open to the sky, and a circular, semi-defined surrounding area which, in anthropological terms, is an ancient model for gathering and community. This spatial structure is significant in not only critiquing the ahistorical lines of Modernism, but also the compartmentalisation and centrality of services and rituals in Johnson’s now famous floor plan. In the sense through which Hal Foster would like to position an ‘armouring of the [masculine] ego’ in the post-war strategies of avant-garde art, the ‘Galaxy’ piece seems to suggest an almost pre-modern occupant, equipped with fire and basic tools rather than the advanced weaponry of the soldier or the highly cultivated sensualist of Johnson’s Glass House. In each case the installation creates an ‘alternative’ to modernity, which can only be read as regressive and primitive.

‘Galaxy’ was not only the title of the Johnson installation, but the name given to an entire genre of representation that Kiesler had pioneered. A ‘galaxy’ was a process of portraiture where conventional drawings of the various components of an individual’s
face were presented on independently framed sheets of paper. For Kiesler, this model was first developed in 1915 as a response to the fragmentation of the First World War but it was dramatically reinvigorated in the late 1940s. The process served to expand the conventional portrait into the entire art space, and, by implication, the universe. However it equally embodied a violent fragmentation of the body and a complex disfiguring of the individual face and the elements of recognition and proportion that structured it. While technically perfected in the paintings of Dali and Magritte, the ‘galaxy’ genre was central to the theorisation of architectural space in Kiesler’s work, and the fragmented and mutilated body that occupied it. The theorised body, exploded into space, suggests not only a connection between the body, space and representation which was central to Surrealism, but also a broader critique of the modern subject and the overly-simplistic Modernist machinations that had been configured to accommodate it. This understanding of a changing ‘modern’ subject is at the heart of Kiesler’s engagement with magic and mysticism.

In this sense, the ‘Galaxy’ piece works to articulate a schizophrenic modern subject; no longer unified but oscillating violently between the architectural forces of technological determinism and regressive primitivism. Rather than, in Huxtable’s words ‘sculpture becoming structure’, the ‘Galaxy’ installation reads as a structure metamorphosing into sculpture, and abruptly critiquing the cold steel skeleton of Johnson’s Cartesian box. Kiesler intended the piece to be read as a visible ‘aura’ that shaped the immediate environment and exaggerated the spiritual emptiness of its modernist neighbour. No longer a ‘reversal of architectural procedures’, the artefact is characterised by a pronounced absence of any architecture at all. The skeletal forms of ‘Galaxy’, literalising the animalistic skeletons of African art, project themselves into the infinite spaces of the house, mounting a critique of the sterile and industrialised lack of substance and organic matter that was, at the time, both revolutionary and deeply mistrusted amongst sections of the avant-garde. Where the glass box aspires to a position of neutral objectivity, the ‘Galaxy’ piece manifests a complicated subjectivity: specifically housing, through an appeal to myth and magic, the battered, fragmented and destabilised ‘subject’ of the post-war avant-garde.

The role of magic in framing ideas in twentieth-century art is now widely discussed, especially in relationship to cubism and abstraction. Picasso’s famous account of his visit to the Trocadero has recently been positioned as the primal scene of modern aesthetics, triggering the violent tribal rhythms of ‘Les Demoiselles d’Avignon’ (1907)
and establishing an aesthetic of ‘primitivism’ which became characteristic of Picasso’s work. Through these paintings Picasso evoked Africa, as Christopher Green has pointed out, not only as ‘other’ but equally as a ‘locus of danger’.11 The sculptures and paintings are heavily overladen with images of impending violence and evoking, as other scholars have demonstrated, the prevalent ‘modernist’ themes of castration anxiety, doubling and violent torture. Images in Picasso’s oeuvre such as ‘Nymph and Sculpture’ (from 1933) draw immediate and recognisable connections between the perceived normality of Eurocentric anthropomorphism and the violent and threatening fragmentation of African otherness.12 This was not only a model of aesthetic critique, but of psychological empowerment and, to use a term of Hal Foster, was a cultural symptom of ‘primitive envy’ where the elements of a fantasised ‘primitivism’ where projected as a viable alternative to the claustrophobia of modern life.

The complexities of the term ‘primitive’ and its uneasy associations with psychoanalysis has been developed in the essay by Foster entitled ‘Primitive Scenes’.13 Foster argues that primitivism, in the European context of psychoanalysis, has an association with pre-genital drives and an immediate connotation of otherness and regression: to quote from Freud himself ‘the savage is a well-preserved picture of an early stage of our own development.’14 The fascination with African art can be closely aligned with this regressive tendency, particularly within the culture of surrealism, where regression manifested itself as a critique of modernism, at least in its architectural contexts.

Working through his analysis of ‘Nymph and Sculpture’, David Lomas explores the role of ‘introjection’ and ‘projection’ which, however fleetingly, have found their way into the cycle of Kiesler scholarship.15 Reinforcing the psychoanalytical reading of the work of ‘Nymph and Sculpture’, and weaving themes from Freud, Kristeva and Lomas, Green writes: ‘Menacing objects of fear have been introjected very early in ego-formation in the Freudian scenario … and then are expelled from the ego by projection, becoming thus alien objects assembled to form an alien double, a monster.’16 This model of ‘doubling’ which functions very directly in the aesthetic logic of twentieth-century art, was introduced as a deliberate architectural strategy by Kiesler, and as an explicit experiment in the ‘Galaxy’ installation in Connecticut. Mapping these readings of aesthetics against the work of Kiesler, this paper will argue that this inverse doubling was not a process of camouflage and synthesis, as Huxtable suggests, but a deeper response to the mechanistic forces of cultural and political upheaval which the
displaced European avant-garde found themselves subject to in their new lives in America. This collective ‘homesickness’, lamenting the collapse of familiarity and the maternal sites of architectural shelter, was articulated in a fetishistic and primeval way and simplistic cultural exchanges between America and Europe became problematic and, to some extent, traumatic.

Kiesler’s fascination with ‘magic’ in the 1940s is verified by his preparation of the unpublished manuscript, ‘Magic and Architecture’, which laid down the theoretical framework for a new model of architectural space. Clearly referencing the Modernist manifestoes of Corbusier in both style and content, the section ‘Towards Magic Architecture’ in the manuscript, clearly delineates the ground rules for this new architectural approach. Kiesler describes ‘magic architecture’ as:

… the expression of the creativeness of man. It is an architecture of contact, not of separation and resignation. Its emphasis is on participation, not on isolation…. Magic architecture is not dream-architecture, like that of temples and castles; it is the architecture of everyday, every-night reality.17

Illustrated widely with images of African architecture and ethnographic photos which were, at the time, widely circulating in avant-garde publications such as Minotaur, the treatise argues not only for a restructuring of Kiesler’s ideas relating to correalism but, more importantly, a social and cultural change in the structure of communities and the relationship they maintain towards architecture. Connecting ‘Magic Architecture’ with a broader social impulse towards primitivism, and echoing the contemporaneous writing of Georges Bataille, Kiesler writes:

Magic Architecture is, of course, unthinkable without its sociological roots in a society of free will and sacrifice. Its magic cannot be performed like the tricks of a prestidigitator. Its power to stimulate the evolution of unheard of capacities in man, can be part only of the structure of a society devoted to such ideals.18

Kiesler’s writing from this period directly engages the writing and thinking of Georges Bataille and his colleagues and friends in the dissident surrealist circle around Documents and the College of Sociology. Bataille had argued against the romantic idealism of Breton and saw transgression as a darker and inherently destructive
aspect of desire and, in this sense, embraced all its hedonistic implications. Architecture was central to this and, as Denis Hollier has demonstrated, functions in a continually negative way throughout Bataille’s thinking, conceptualised as the physical manifestation of control and inflexibility that the ‘formless’ systems of transgression set out to undermine and dismantle.\(^\text{19}\) The relationship with ‘magic’, as in the aesthetic ‘doubling’ of Picasso for instance,\(^\text{20}\) casts an ‘other’ to the organising and overladen structures of ‘architecture’ which, in the case of the ‘Galaxy’ installation are set in clear distinction and even opposition. The importance of Bataille and his influence over surrealist practice has been central to recent important reinterpretations of surrealist practice by Rosalind Krauss,\(^\text{21}\) Hal Foster\(^\text{22}\) and Briony Fer,\(^\text{23}\) among others.

Bataille’s circle, and particularly his colleagues and friends Michael Leiris and Roger Callois, had focused in a very explicit way on ethnography in their studies of sociology and throughout the 1940s Bataille concerned himself with tracing an esoteric and influential history of primitive art and its centrality to the evolution of western culture.\(^\text{24}\) In ‘Magic and Architecture’ Kiesler clearly links the process of making architecture with ‘primitivism’ and, to an even greater extent, with animalism. The mimetic concerns of Callois, which structure a large part of Mark Linder’s analysis of Kiesler’s work, can be read in a different way in the literal figurative qualities of Kiesler’s sculpture and the connections that Kiesler draws with animal processes of nesting. In the section ‘The Nest, First Artificial Shelter’ Kiesler documents the building methods of ‘primates’ and ‘anthropoid apes’ to demonstrate the ancestry of human techniques of construction. Kiesler’s analysis – which covers every aspect of an ‘orang-utan’ making a nest from selecting a site and preparing the ground to eventual inhabitation – explicitly refers to the role of large-structural timber, portal frame structures and simple rope connections in the creation of the structure. This allows Kiesler to conclude that ‘there is no difference between his shelter and ours: the frame-house of our time is erected in the same way as the orang utan erects his.’\(^\text{25}\)

The specific focus on ‘nesting’ and its centrality to Kiesler’s text regarding ‘Magic and Architecture’ is evidence of the importance of sentimental attitudes towards domesticity and the home in the period and their role in framing the art practices of a number of the displaced Europeans who had fled to America during the war. It was a constant theme, as demonstrated by Demos,\(^\text{26}\) in the art of Kiesler’s personal friend Marcel Duchamp and was an overwriting theme in the First Papers of Surrealism exhibition which Kiesler helped curate.\(^\text{27}\) The home, and its role in nurturing the body,
was a central theme in Kiesler's work of this period and has, problematically in some contexts, been central to his induction as the ‘solitary’ architect of surrealism.\textsuperscript{28}

That Kiesler's involvement with Surrealism would eventually steer his work away from the machine aesthetics of International Modernism (and his earlier associations with De Stijl and Constructivism) was inevitable. The collision between the fantasies of the Surrealist movement and the hygienic machinations of Modernism could not have been more dramatic, operating on vastly different trajectories across the landscape of Paris in the 1920s and 30s. The Surrealist fascination with magic and myth is already well documented. Breton's house, since the early 20s had been lavishly decorated with artefacts from Africa.\textsuperscript{29} Magic and mysticism were a current in the work of a number of seminal artists, especially Max Ernst and his partner of the 1920s Leonora Carrington, who had a deep fascination with mysticism and, in particular, alchemy.\textsuperscript{30} Kiesler came to know Ernst through his association with Ernst's wife, Peggy Guggenheim on the \textit{Art of this Century} exhibition space.\textsuperscript{31} Equally the ‘Large Glass’ of Duchamp, which Kiesler had originally reviewed for \textit{Architectural Record}, has been frequently and systematically positioned within a context of magic and alchemy. While these themes from Surrealism seem explicit in Kiesler's work there has been a critical resistance to reading specific connections between Surrealist ideas and architectural design. The two major injections into the scholarship of architecture and Surrealism – Dalibor Veseley's special issue of \textit{Architectural Design} dedicated to the subject ‘Surrealism and Architecture’, published at the end of 1978 and Thomas Mical's \textit{Surrealism and Architecture} published in 2005 – have both stressed the inability of Surrealism to assimilate ideas relating to architecture into their work and a broader indifference to architectural space that characterised the movement.\textsuperscript{32}

Despite this, Kiesler's work has recently been positioned quite forcefully within the canon of Surrealism and this has been problematic in a number of contexts. Kiesler's connection with the movement was primarily through association and implication. He wasn’t a signatory to either of the Surrealist Manifestoes and it was largely through his friendship with Marcel Duchamp (himself marginal to Surrealism) that he was later introduced to the circle.\textsuperscript{33} More importantly, it was not until the exile of a number of the Surrealists to New York in the latter years of the Second World War (including Breton himself) that this relationship was concretised. Despite this somewhat tenuous relationship, Kiesler has been frequently lauded as the stylistic model for an architectural surrealism: the pure and unadulterated model of an intrauterine space.
The Endless House in particular, modelled over more than a decade, seems to capture the grotto-like spatial qualities eulogised in Freudian psychoanalysis: making concrete the verbal manifestos of Breton, Tzara, Dali and Matta amongst others who had argued for the womb as the primal scene of architectural habitation.\(^{34}\)

This hermetic architectural programme of a primal interior finds its model in the grotto which, as well as running through a number of surrealist experiments with technique (and at the heart of Marcel Duchamp’s spatial intervention at *Exposition International du Surréalisme* in Paris in 1938), is most heavily centred around the work of Kiesler, and is suggested, if not enforced, in the architectural enclosure of ‘Galaxy’. The grotto became a concern, to the point of obsession, for Kiesler and while it ties heavily to the intrauterine fantasies that are familiar to discussions about surrealism and architecture, it ties equally strongly to a fascination with African vernacular architecture and the earthy, grounded enclosures of the African hut and yurt. Kiesler explored the idea of a grotto directly in his (unbuilt) ‘Grotto for Meditation’ (1963), dating to a few years after ‘Galaxy’ but embodying a number of ideas relating to magic and myth. It is also overlaid with animalist imagery, in this case the shapes of a dolphin and a shell.\(^{35}\) Similar ideas were evoked in the domed interior of the ‘Shrine of the Book’ in Jerusalem: his last, and most significant, built work. All of these projects hinge on a sentimental view of space as primal shelter, nurturing the body and protecting it from external threats. This privileging of interior space over exterior form or architectural volume has remained one of the primary criticisms of the surrealist experiments with architecture and Kiesler’s work in general.

Kiesler’s most eccentric embrace of magic as a motivating theme for architectural space was in the exhibition space curated at the Galerie Maeght in Paris, at the invitation of Breton, for the 1947 *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*. The emphasis on magic and mysticism was specific in Breton’s brief: ‘a primordial concern to retrace the successive stages of an initiation’.\(^{36}\) The opening space, conceived as a ‘waterfall of superstitions’, contained Kiesler’s ‘Totem for all Religions’ hewn, like ‘Galaxy’, from driftwood and rope and, as Cynthia Goodman writes, ‘strangely reminiscent of both a crucifix and a gallows’.\(^{37}\) Upstairs was Kiesler’s equally enigmatic ‘Anti-Taboo Figure’ which, as an upraised hand with one pointed finger, was installed to, in Goodman’s words, ‘ward off evil’.\(^{38}\) A curved thread, labyrinthine in nature, ran through all of the spaces and, referencing the earlier Surrealist exhibition spaces,
established an ancestry with the ‘idealised interior’ lacking any external expression or architectural presence.

These esoteric spatial interiors can be contextualised within his broader interest at the time in free-standing sculpture; an interest that had not been developed in any of Kiesler’s earlier projects and, again, can possibly be traced to the influence of Hare on his work. In the period from 1947 until 1963 Kiesler completed a number of sculptures that experimented, in form and title, with ideas and attitudes related to mysticism. Works such as ‘The Earth’s Finger’ (1963) and ‘The Marriage of Heaven and Earth’ (1964) not only reinforced the traditional status of the sculptural object in an exhibition space, but traced the symbolic reduction of sculpture through a kind of miniaturisation or modelling of the universe. This ethos, like that of the surrealist object in general, attempted to position the art object with a universal significance that operated outwards from the object and was encoded within a system of representation and interpretation. In psychoanalytical terms, this constitutes a kind of cathexis, where the art object comes to represent the totality (and the part becomes the whole, at least in a ritualistic sense). Freud saw it as a major function of the African artefact and, in the context of turn-of-the-century Vienna, was part of the revitalisation of myth that ran beneath the modernisation of Europe.

All of Kiesler’s experiments with interior exhibition design can be read within this context of cathexis: a process of setting up highly controlled internalised experiences which, in their nature and materiality connect the viewer with a deeper, contemplative relationship to the work of art, or the commercial shopfront, as the case may be. The blending or ‘camouflage’ of architecture is replaced by its internalisation; deferred to experience and to the literal accommodation of the body. The art object, in Kiesler’s case, became a literalisation of the body and a return, however idealistically to the body. Rather than an outwardly radiating ‘correlation’ with the natural world and biology, his built work shows a gradual retreat, becoming more internalised and nurturing as it evolved throughout the 40s.

What is apparent in the ‘Galaxy’ installation at the Johnson Glass House is a magnification of these themes, to the point of crisis where the object, rather than projecting a visual or spatial continuity towards the house, begins to suggest a mythical overshadowing of the object, replacing connection with presence and content with aura. It is not without irony that the ‘Galaxy’ piece was destroyed by lightning.
Kiesler’s appeal to a universal spiritualism in the piece, and its clearly antithetical role in integrating with the environment of the Glass House, seemed to invite a catastrophic response: as though the aura associated with the birth of the piece was equally the key to its destruction. The piece, like all of Kiesler’s architecture works, was ephemeral, reinforcing the very subjectivity and contextualism that Kiesler had orchestrated as a crisis.

However the piece, in its short life, crystallised a number of themes in the complex oeuvre of Kiesler and the avant-garde currents working against the totalising forces of Modernism. In particular the piece positioned, and even grounded, an attitude of homesickness: a spatial mourning for more familial environments and more connected communities. Nostalgia and sentimentality, configured through ethnological strands of African tribalism and the well-trodden methodological toolkit of psychoanalysis, became central to Kiesler’s work in this period, triggering an immediate unravelling of the principles that had structured his creative life up until that point. Witnessing the power and dissemination of African art during his time in Europe, the events were reassembled in a cathartic way in Connecticut where, having embraced the circle of displaced Europeans, Kiesler saw himself as a serial outsider, and agent of critique.

That the ‘Galaxy’ piece functions as an ‘alien double’ in its relationship to the Glass House hinges on a tenuous demarcation where modernism is associated with normality and ethnology with difference. The introduction of a mainstream modernism, and its underhanded abduction in America (most successfully in the Glass House) was countered, by sections of the European avant-garde in particular, with a yearning for comfort, familiarity and the kind of cultural complexities which were circulating in Europe before Kiesler’s departure in 1926. On Kiesler’s arrival in America, he had predicted, perhaps presciently that the art of America could only be communicated through the commercial shop window: in a Capitalist society it was through the abstract spaces of consumerism that ideas of aesthetics must be implemented. It was also the forum where radical change was possible. Twenty-five years later, Kiesler’s ‘Galaxy’ installation asks questions about spatial and cultural identity and the continual juxtaposition of incompatible elements in space. It no longer enforces the inevitable progression of ideas through commerce, but the initiation of debate through difference. Rather than a process of camouflage, as Huxtable defined the installations of Kiesler, the spatial collage at Connecticut initiates a cycle of opposition and critique,
mounting a tacit resistance to the modern and its dictatorial role in organising the aesthetic environment and, by implication, the cultural and economic one as well.

Endnotes

2 Featuring works by Abstract Expressionist mavericks such as Jackson Pollock, Clyfford Still and Mark Rothko, the catalogue for the Fifteen Americans exhibition contained an essay by Kiesler expounding his theory of ‘correalism’ and arguing for the interrelatedness of elements within space and the general continuity or ‘endlessness’ that characterised spaces, objects and their contexts.
4 See: Kiesler, Frederick Kiesler, up.
6 Kiesler first formally expounded his theory of ‘Correalism’ in the early 1930s, but the most widely-read account of it was: Frederick Kiesler, ‘On Correalism and Biotechnique: a definition and the new approach to building design,’ Architectural Record (September 1939), 61.
9 See: Kiesler, Frederick Kiesler, up.
10 See: Foster, Prosthetic Gods, 1-52.
16 Green, Picasso, 228.
This distinction between ‘architecture’ and ‘transgression’, distilled through Bataille, functions as a central theme in Christopher Green’s analysis of Picasso’s work. See Green, *Picasso*, 1-11.


Duchamp’s ‘16 Miles of String’ installation remains one of the most well-known and often cited architectural spaces of Surrealism. For analysis of the work, see T. J. Demos, ‘Duchamp’s Labyrinth: First Papers of Surrealism, 1942’, *October*, 97 (2001), 91-119.

Dalibor Veselý, for instance wrote that ‘the only surrealist architect, whose formal legitimacy cannot be questioned, was Frederick Kiesler.’ The positioning of Kiesler as the sole ‘architectural’ voice of surrealism neglects that both Man Ray and Matta, key members of the movement, had studied architecture and, in their respective works, had demonstrated a distinctly surrealist technique for articulating it. Matta had worked in the studio of Le Corbusier before turning to painting and his ‘Architecture and the Mathematics of Time’ is, despite being short, one of the most important texts linking architecture with the surrealism. While Kiesler may have been the sole ‘functioning’ architect of surrealism, his association with the movement and any of its members came relatively late in both his, and the surrealist movement’s, creative life. See: Dalibor Veselý, ‘Surrealism, Myth and Modernity’ in Veselý (ed.), *Surrealism and Architecture*, 93.


The full account is documented in: Susan Davidson and Philip Rylans (eds.), *Peggy Guggenheim and Frederick Kiesler: The Story of Art of this Century* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2004).

Veselý had maintained that ‘the Surrealists were not particularly interested in architecture, except occasionally and then only in a very personal and rather indirect way.’ Dalibor Veselý, ‘Salvador Dalí: On Architecture’ in Veselý (ed.), *Surrealism and Architecture*, 138. In the same volume, Frampton had conceded ‘it may be argued that the surreal in architecture does not exist, or at least does not present itself in the same way as the manifestations of the movement.’ Kenneth Frampton, ‘Has the Proletariat No Use for a Glider’, in Veselý (ed.), *Surrealism and Architecture*, 138. Similarly, more than 25 years later, Thomas Micai referred to architecture as a ‘blind spot’ in surrealist theory and argued that ‘architecture … remains the unfulfilled promise of surrealist thought.’ Thomas Micai, ‘Introduction’, in Micai (ed.), *Surrealism and Architecture*, 2.

In his role as critic for the mainstream American magazine *Architectural Record*, Kiesler had written an article about Duchamp’s *Large Glass* referring to it as the first ever ‘x-ray’ of architectural space. In the article Kiesler had used the Large Glass as an exemplary example of a new paradigm in interior organisation, where the art object, rather than sitting passively within a space, has an active role in creating and redefining it. Duchamp found the article worthwhile enough to send a thank-you note to Kiesler and, while they had met before, became friends through the correspondence. When Duchamp moved to New York he stayed in Kiesler’s apartment for an extended period of time and they worked on a number of projects together up until Duchamp’s death. Of most significance were the two Surrealist exhibitions opening within


38 Goodman, ‘The Art of Revolutionary Display Techniques,’ 73.

39 For accounts of the role of *cathexis* in the art process see: Fer, ‘Fault Lines,’ 158-160; Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*.

40 This dimension of Kiesler’s work is central to the argument mounted by Mark Linder, where he sees the techniques of display as central to Kiesler’s relevance to an emerging neo-avant-garde in America. Linder, ‘Wild Kingdom,’ 122-53.