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Fredeick John Kiesler And The Körperkultur Movement: Body, Nature, And Perception

Frederick John Kiesler ve Körperkultur Hareketi: Beden, Doğa Ve Algı İle Birlikte Form Anlayışı

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ABSTRACT

During the rise of industry, Gottfried Semper's understanding of tectonics and notions of body and dressing of building highly dominated architecture of Nineteenth Century Germany. Later in the twentieth century, being concerned with the human body and its health, the Körperkultur Movement emerged as an important social change and emphasized the negative consequences of industrialization. After the Korperkultur, the Austrian-born architect and artist Frederick John Kiesler also dealt with tectonics in architecture regarding the relationship between body and dressing of building. His interpretation of architectural form includes references to body, nature, and perception that are parallel to the doctrines of the Korperkultur and shows that how such a cultural movement had a significant impact on architecture. This study seeks to examine how Kiesler interpreted form in his architectural design in terms of the notion of body together with the aspects of nature and perception similar to the approach of the Körperkultur.

Key words: Tectonics, Body, Nature, Perception

ÖZET

Endüstrinin yükselişi boyunca, Gottfried Semper'in tektonik ile birlikte beden ve binanın giydirilmesi kavramlarını anlayış şekli 19. Yüzyıl Almanya'sının mimarlığını büyük oranda domine etmiştir. Daha sonra, 20. Yüzyılda, insan bedeni ve onun sağlığı ile ilgilenerek, Körperkultur hareketi önemli bir sosyal değişim olarak ortaya çıkmış ve endüstrileşmenin olumsuz etkilerine dikkat çekmiştir. Körperkultur sonrası, Avusturya doğumlu mimar ve sanatçı Frederick John Kiesler de beden ve bina giydirilmesi arasındaki ilişki bağlamında mimarlıkta tektonikle ilgilenmiştir. Kendisinin mimari formu yorumlaması bedene, doğaya, ve algıya Körperkultur öğretilerine benzer referanslar içermekte ve böyle bir kültürel hareketin mimarlık üzerinde nasıl bir önemli etki yaptığını göstermektedir. Bu çalışma, Kiesler'in kendi mimarı tasarımında formu beden kavramı ile birlikte doğa ve algı yönleriyle birlikte Körperkultur yaklaşımına yakın bir şekilde nasıl yorumladığını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tektonik, Beden, Doğa, Algı

1. INTRODUCTION

Along with industrialization, which had enormous social effects, tectonics became the leading concept of the German architectural discourse in the nineteenth century. In this period, Gottfried Semper stood out as a significant figure with his four elements theory that arose from his notion of tectonics. His theory indicated a tectonic clarity of the distinction between the body and the dressing of building. After Semper, Germany witnessed a social change in the twentieth century, and the Movement of *Körperkultur* appeared as an adverse reaction to the dominance of industrialization. Meaning ''body culture'' in English, it praised the human body and its healthy maintenance. After the *Körperkultur* Movement, the Austrian-born architect and artist Frederick John Kiesler attracted attention with his design approach in which tectonic clarity of the distinction between the body and the dressing of building was difficult to identify as they seemed to be integrated. This study seeks to examine how Kiesler interpreted form in his architectural design in terms of the notion of body together with the aspects of nature and perception in a way similar to the approach of the *Körperkultur* Movement.

2. THE *KÖRPERKULTUR* MOVEMENT AND ARCHITECTURE

After industrialization, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Life Reform Movement emerged in Germany. ''Back to nature'' was the main idea behind (Ekici, 2008). ''Zurück Zur Natur'' from 1896 listed the adverse effects of industrialization together with technology on urban areas, including automated capitalist labour, even though it praised them. The author wrote that ''everywhere people call for returning to natural, reasonable living conditions; the same call, which strongly motivated Rousseau. But we are no longer as dazzled and foolish as in his time. Rousseau desired to throw out the baby with the bath water and return to the paradisiacal, primitive state. However

we want to keep the blessings of civilization without taking its harmful sides. We want to live in nature, but equipped with all armamentaria that modern technology provided to us'' (''Zurück Zur Natur,'' 1896, p. 92).

In general, Life reformers maintained the idea of going back to nature without completely ignoring the opportunities provided by industrialization and technology. They also wanted to bring concepts that were regarded as opposite together, such as primitive and modern, nature and technology, and country and city. For some, this refers to a reactionary, alternative, or another modernity (Ekici, 2008). As Sigfried Giedion wrote in Befreites Wohnen—Liberated Dwelling—with the typologies of the sanatorium and hospital, modern architecture itself was dealing with the issues of hygiene, light, and air as well (Giedion, 1929). The sanatorium became a representation of the concern of modern architecture with light and air considering its ventilated rooms, exposure to the south, and long balconies. In fact, this could be dated back to the concept of Licht-Luft hütte—the light-and-air hut— (Figure 1) (Ekici, 2008).

Figure 1. The Light-and-Air Hut by Adolf Just, 1880.
Source: Ekici, 2008.

The idea of Licht-Luft hütte—the light-and-air hut— seems to have been neglected in modern times probably due to its relation to the idea of primitive. However, the sanatorium became a legitimate model in modern times as a medical institution, and it was coherent with the scientific, technological, and rational views that were common in the 1920s. The light-and-air hut actually had appeared in the middle of the nineteenth century within the Naturopathy movement, which was a primary component of the Life Reform movement. Naturopathy involved natural methods to solve health issues that city life caused. In that period, cities were considered as the sources of all kinds of diseases, physiological problems, and immorality. As there was not enough fresh air and light in the cities, Naturopathy aimed to expose the human body to fresh air and light to treat related diseases and disorders. In this case, the most remarkable method became light-and-aid bathing that scientific medicine would later use. Light-and-air therapy was used to treat many different health issues, including physiological problems, cold, and syphilis (Ekici, 2008).

Light-and-air bathing was initiated in the middle of the nineteenth century by Arnold Rikli, a Swiss nature healer. By conducting his therapy, he wanted to stimulate the nerves and improve blood flow in order to provide more oxygen for the skin (Ekici, 2008). Rikli also integrated scientific methods to his treatment in terms of atmosphere and hygiene, naming his therapy as ''atmospheric cure'' (Rikli, 1895). Furthermore, with his focus on this therapy of light and air, he led nudist tradition (Frecot, Geist, and Kerbs, 1972). People who bathed in that way could be seen as impersonators of primitives as light-and-air bathing was considered to be a return to the primitive (Ekici, 2008). An essay from 1905 that explains the benefits of light-and-air therapy can be an example of this way of thinking as it includes photographs of bathers who wore skirts made of grass (Figure 2) and a scientific analysis of the issue (Jaerschky, 1905).

Figure 2. Light-and-Air Bathers
Source: Ekici, 2008.

The nature-cure resort established by Adolf Just in 1896 in the Harz mountains can be regarded as the first example of integrating primitive and science (Figure 3.) Just was using Rikli's methods; however, he believed that the light-and-air bath was a means for natural living in addition to the hygiene aspect (Just, 1905). He wrote that ''light and air are the true life-giving elements for humans, which are the highest light-and-air creatures. In light and air, man should exercise naked, in harmony with nature, day and night, winter and summer'' (Just, 1905, p. 52). Such nature-cure resorts became popular, especially among the middle-class people. Visitors stayed in the light-and-air huts or just in the open air. Furthermore, they exercised as groups every day naked and performed religious ceremonies (Figure 4). They also benefitted from natural spring water and mud baths and learnt about vegetarianism, clothing reform, and natural medicine (Anderson, 1984).

Figure 3. The Light-and-air Hut, Jungborn, 1900
Source: Ekici, 2008.

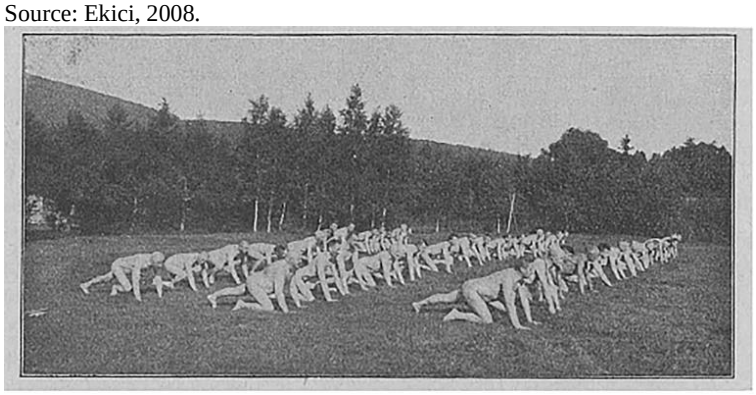

Figure 4. Physical Exercise, Jungborn
Source: Ekici, 2008.

Even though the Life Reform movement referred to an anti-fashion trend, it led its own consumption culture. Simple clothing for health such as light clothes and footwear that allowed maximum light and air for the body became common. Similarly, such household items emerged, and they symbolized a new type of bourgeois aesthetics that referred to health. Furthermore, advertisements indicated a demand for healthy clothing not only in the nature-cure resorts but also in public. Therefore, mass production of such clothes began (Figure 5).


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DR. WALSER'S
Chinagrass Rippenkrepp Health Underwear

Mesh Garments with two Layers.

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CARL MEZ & SOHNE IN FREIBURG, BADEN, GERMANY.

Patented in Germany and America.

Several Medals awarded at Hygienic Expositions.

DR. WALSER'S RIPPENKREPP HEALTH UNDERWEAR

made of the best Maco with Chinagrass ribs is the cheapest and most practical for adherents of the Just, Kneipp and other Natural Healing Methods. The Rippenkrepp Health-Underwear holds a great deal of air, offers the best protection for colds, does not lose its porosity, does not shrink in the wash, only the linen-threads come in contact with the skin, at the same time being much more durable than the real linen.

Prices for Dr. Walser's Rippenkrepp Health Underwear.

Following prices are Gentlemen and Ladies (Sizes 32 to 40; 42 to 52 cost 50 cents extra each piece or $1.00 per suit):

Undershirts, unbleached, with Chinagrass ribs	$2.50
Undershirts, bleached, with Chinagrass ribs	2.75
Drawers, unbleached, with Chinagrass ribs	2.75
Drawers, bleached, with Chinagrass ribs	3.00
Shirts, with or without collar (can be worn without underwear)	3.25
Sporting and Night-shirts	3.50
Rippenkrepp-texture, bleached or unbleached, with Chinagrass ribs, width 22 inches, per yard	.65

Above prices for sizes 32 to 40, 41 to 52 50 cents extra each piece or $1.00 per suit.

Suits or Combination Suits to order $1.50 extra to above prices.

HOW TO SEND MEASURE FOR UNDERWEAR:

1) Total length; 2) Circumference of chest (give it as large as possible); 3) Length of the sleeves from the centre of the back to the wrist (bending your arm); For shirts the exact measure of the neck should also be indicated besides the above measures.

DRAWERS:

1) Circumference of the body; 2) Length of leg from crotch to ankle; 3) Total length of drawers.

General Depot for the United States:

Kneipp Health Store, 111 E. 59th St, N.Y.

WHOLESALE AND RETAIL.

A complete catalogue and samples will be furnished on application.

Figure 5. Advertisement for Health Underwear, 1900
Source: Ekici, 2008.

The *Körperkultur* movement later became an inspiration source for the German Socialist Worker's movement. A similar one emerged in Russia as well, with the name of *Fiskultura*, meaning ''physical culture'' in English. As the Soviet and East German focused on winning gold medals, this ''physical culture'' became associated with high-level sports in time (Brownwell, 1998). Sports became an essential issue for university education, as in the case of the university and city of Muenster. This also shows how *Körperkultur* developed and was modernized in time (Krüger, 2012) as the advocators of this movement sought to restore the coherence of body with mind and equalize them in the age of industrialization (Ekici, 2008). *Körperkultur* also meant the recognition of various configurations of the human body (Bale and Philo, 1998).

Regarding the *Körperkultur* Movement and architecture, the notion of body is central in both. The relationship between body and architecture, together with the concept of corporeality, has always played a leading role in European culture since the time of Vitruvius (Wesely, 2002). Vitruvius focused on the human body and its proportions in terms of achievement of proportional unity (van Eck, 1994) and for him, the compositions of architects should include ''an exact system of correspondence to the likeness of a well-formed human being'' (Mallgrave, 2010, p. 13) Together with Vitruvius, Leon Battista Alberti and Leonardo da Vinci also referred to the human body in their interpretations of architecture (Mallgrave, 2010).

Every architectural piece described a reality and eventually turned into a semiotic transformation of it (Frascari, 1985). The most crucial feature of the role of the body regarding understanding reality is the relationship between the body and that which truly exists. Initially, Plato and Aristotle tried to understand corporeality. For Plato, the body was not something which was given, isolated, or defined; instead, it was part of a ''process of ordering within the domain of necessity,'' which is never complete and open to enhancement. Here the body becomes a ''relatively stable structure'' which is ordered in reality (cosmos.) The openness of the ordering process explains the contingency of the world and the contingent nature of body both. In this case, it is almost impossible to regard the human body, architectural components, and what they mean as separate from the world. Instead, the reality of the world is organized around embodiments that refer to a continuous relationship between the opposite entities such as human and divine. Aristotle argued that when body is integrated to its environment and it is similar to it, it becomes involved in it and a part of the whole. (Wesely, 2002).

Regarding the concept of body, the *Körperkultur* movement made an important impact on architecture in Germany. Before that, in the nineteenth century, the dressing—*Bekleidung*—notion of Semper spread with his theory of four elements. In his view, building consisted of four elements: the hearth, the roof, the mound, and the enclosure (Semper,

1989). His approach was clearly visible in his idea of the primitive hut, manifested in the model of the Caribbean hut that he encountered in the Great Exhibition of 1851 (Figure 6). Reducing these four elements into two, Kenneth Frampton claimed that for Semper, building consisted of the tectonics of the frame, which was light, and the stereotomics of the earthwork, which was heavy (Frampton, 1995). He also wrote that Semper regarded the joint as the fundamental tectonic element in building, believing that the transitions from stereotomic base to tectonic frame formed the essence of architecture (Frampton, 1996). Parallel to these ideas, Frascari argued that the joint was the place where the interpretation of construction and the realization of it encountered (Frascari, 1984).

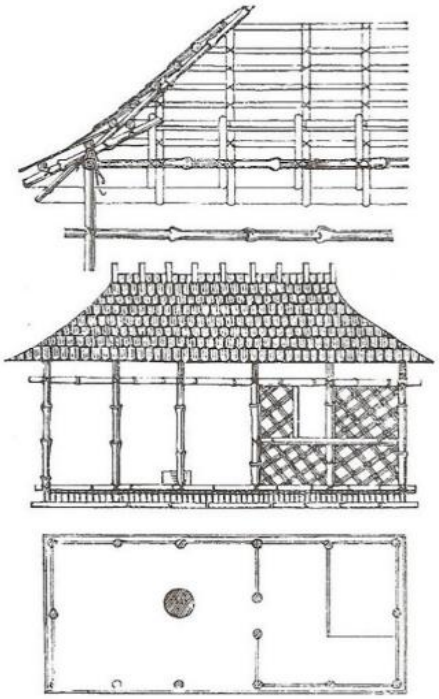

Figure 6. The Carribean Hut Model
Source: Semper, 2004.

In Semper's view, building itself was the body to be dressed by the enclosure. He named the enclosure as dressing as he declared with his conception of primitive hut. However, Körperkultur brought the idea of regarding the house itself as a dress focusing on dwelling referring to the basic needs of body. Later, the art historian August Schmarsow also developed a similar approach based on this dress analogy. For him, architecture could be described as a spatial and bodily creation. With the movement of Körperkultur, the dress metaphor in architecture changed and emphasized the new consciousness about body (Ekici, 2008).

3. FREDERICK JOHN KIESLER'S ARCHITECTURAL APPROACH AND THE *KÖRPERKULTUR* MOVEMENT

Kiesler was born in Vienna in 1896. He directed the Department of Scenic Design at the Juilliard School of Music in New York from 1934 to 1937; and from 1936 to 1942, the Laboratory for Design Correlation at Columbia University. He published his Inside the Endless House in 1964 and passed away in 1965 (Hendrix, 2003).

Kiesler was familiar with Semper's ideas and his principle of dressing—Bekleidung—as he studied in Vienna and had the chance to learn its different interpretations by Adolf Loos and Josef Hoffmann (Braham, 1998). Like Semper, he was also interested in space and dwelling. Although it was never built, the Endless House was one of his most important projects (Figure 7 and 8). It was especially significant in terms of tectonics. Matthew Krissel wrote that after Kiesler's death in 1965, his Endless Space and studies attracted attention in the contemporary architectural discourse again and new technologies of the time encouraged different views on the tectonics and material usage regarding the concept of The Endless house (''Endless House|Frederick Kiesler,'' 2009). Kiesler developed the idea of integrating all arts and disciplines to have an expression that went beyond existing boundaries and categories. He wanted to exceed the boundaries of the finite, show the infinite by using finite form and abandon the architectural frame, unlike Semper (Hendrix, 2003). In the Endless House, he seemed to integrate the body and the dressing of building, doing theoretical experiments with dynamic space (Day and Rex, 1984).

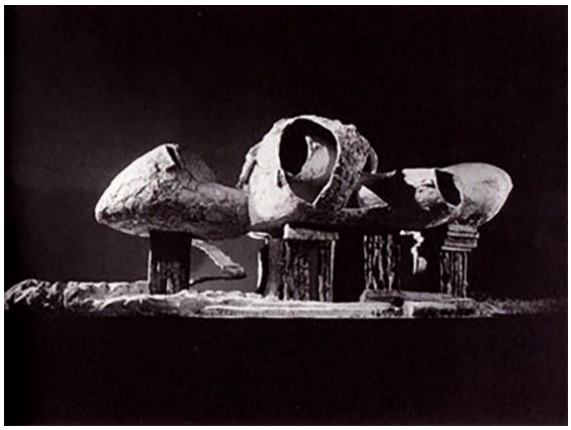

Figure 7. Model of the Endless House
Source: Kiesler, 1950.

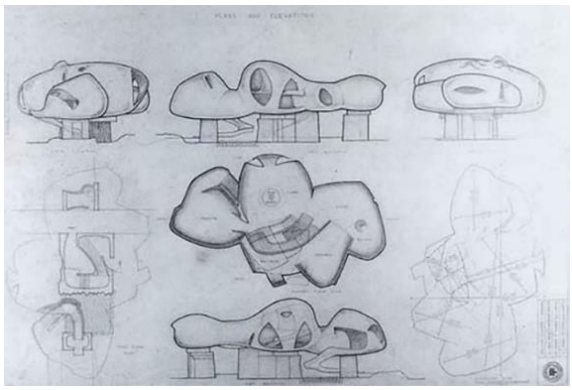

Figure 8. Plans and Elevations of the Endless House
Source: Kiesler, 1950.

Kiesler noted that ‘‘The ‘‘Endless House’’ was called the ‘‘Endless’’ because all ends meet and meet continuously.’’ (Kiesler, 1966, p. 566). He declared several demands that explained his design approach: ‘‘We will have no more walls, armories for body and soul, nor armorized civilization; with or without ornament. We want: 1. Transformation of the surrounding area of space into cities. 2. Liberation from the ground, abolition of the static axis. 3. No walls, no foundations. 4. A system of spans in free space. 5. Creation of new kinds of living, and, through them, the demands which will remould society’’ (Kiesler, 1926, p. 141ff).

There are parallels between how Kiesler interpreted form in his architectural design and the approach of the Körperkultur movement. In both, the notion of body is essential. Furthermore, their interpretations of nature and perception can be regarded as similar. In terms of form, for Kiesler, art forms should be extended in space beyond their limits, referring to transgression and dissolution together with process (Hendrix, 2003). He also explained that the artwork was not separate from its environment anymore and should be evaluated depending on the context of changes in time and space, including its physical movements and visual appearance in all dimensions (Kiesler, 1966). For instance, for the renovation work of the Hugo Gallery in New York in 1947, he aimed to abandon the traditional distinction between the space components, which were floor, walls, and ceiling by using color in a structural way that represented a spatial continuum (Bogner, 2001). In this way, Kiesler had a different tectonic approach to the building, in which the tectonic clarity between the body and the dressing of building was almost impossible to identify. Furthermore, with this approach, he attempted to go beyond the boundaries to reach an art that indicated such a continuity among human beings, the earth, and the universe. He sought for material embodiments of awareness of the human psyche, the surface of the earth, together with cosmic constellations (Hendrix, 2003). He wrote that ‘‘we become aware that our independence is only a state of mind and that this state of mind, if it is not to die or to be driven into a psychotic realm, must draw its life forces from the energies of the universe… always relying on its continuity’’ (Kiesler, 1966, p. 153). Furthermore, opposing the idea that ‘‘form follows function,’’ Kiesler claimed that function changed as man interacted with the environment. In this case, the concept of ‘‘functional design’’ was deficient. Instead, he defined another kind of design approach, which was ‘‘biotechnical.’’ As he explained, biotechnics was a term that could be used only for nature’s method of building, it did not refer to building methods of human beings. These two were entirely different. Nature built by diving cells aiming for continuity, whereas man could only build by linking parts to each other without continuity. However, these man-made joints were actually under the control of nature, and they could be easily broken apart. Kiesler argued that architects should avoid using

joints in building design as much as possible to eliminate this problem. In this regard, he came up with the idea of ‘‘continuous construction,’’ based on the aim of creating more resistant forms with more rigidity that would be easier to maintain at lower prices (Kiesler, 2007). He also preferred to name his works as ‘‘galaxy.’’ His metaphor referred to the composition and the endlessness. For him, galaxies were made of various components, similar to his designs. Including the Endless House, in most of Kiesler’s work, the Galaxies had organic forms (Phillips, 2001). He was interested in using the perfect geometrical form of the spheroid, which always referred to a self-supporting shell, as a biomorphic form (Bogner, 2001). This conception of form for Kiesler can be seen as parallel to the Körperkultur movement regarding biological references.

Kiesler also tried to raise a body experience in the experience of architecture which put thought as a material presence in the realm of the body (Hendrix, 2003). About children, he wrote that they tended to ‘‘speak through their bodies and to receive messages through their bodies. This delight in feeling themselves and communicating physically is… one of the oldest methods of expressing man’s feelings. Later it grew into rituals…’’ (Kiesler, 1966, p. 386). With all these ideas, he put the body in the center of architectural experience like the Körperkultur movement.

The concepts of nature, reality, and environment were also important in Kiesler’s approach to architecture. In his view, natural or artificial forms were meeting points of integrating and disintegrating forces that changed slowly. Reality was composed of these two types of forces that continuously interacted with each other. Kiesler named this interaction of forces as correality and the science of its relationships as correalism, which referred to the continuous interaction among man and his natural and technological environments. He argued that the technological environment was a product of man and architects worked in this technological environment. For Kiesler, the most critical factor in determining the validity of this new environment was health (Kiesler, 2007). Kiesler believed that the technological environment had not always been good for man; however, it should provide the maintenance of health. For him, health should be the criterion of building design (Kiesler, 2007). With his focus on nature, including the environment and human health, his architectural approach is close to the principles of the Körperkultur movement.

In Kiesler’s architectural approach, perception, together with senses, also played a significant role (Kiesler, 2007). About senses, Juhani Pallasmaa argued that architecture was experienced together with its material, embodied, and spiritual essence, identifying shapes and surfaces for the eye, as well as the other senses. An architect also works both with his or her body and sense of self. Architecture inevitably becomes a projection of the human body and its movement through space. Furthermore, the genuineness of architectural experience derives from the tectonic language of building and how the senses understand the act of construction. For Pallasmaa, the creation of embodied and lived existential metaphors which make our beings in the world tangible is the eternal task of architecture (Pallasmaa, 2005). Kiesler’s The Endless House can be seen as an architecture of heterogeneous, transgression, and ecstasy rather than homogenous, orthographic, and signifying. Here life is found in the incompletion of being and the struggle with the structure. The architecture exists in the catastrophe, chaos, and heterogeneous space. Also, spatial perception derives from the obscure realm of unconscious determinations of the user (Hendrix, 2003). In these ways, it is possible to claim that together with body, Kiesler put perception and senses in an important place of his architectural approach. Considering the user aspect in architecture, this refers to the Körperkultur movement, which put the human being in its core.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is important to consider how Kiesler interpreted form in his architectural design in terms of body together with the aspects of nature and perception and the approach of the Körperkultur movement as close to each other. As it was evident in his Endless House, Kiesler saw form as something organic and related his ideas to the notion of body. Nature and its representations in architecture were also important to him, together with the consideration of health in architectural design. Furthermore, he was interested in how perception worked in space and affected architectural experience. Conceptions of body, nature, and perception are also important in the approach of the Körperkultur movement, which focused on the human body and its healthy maintenance in nature. Regarding all these aspects, it is possible to claim that Kiesler’s architectural approach and the approach of the Körperkultur movement share similar featues, and this is noteworthy as it shows how architecture can be related to a social movement like the Korperkultur.

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