

# George Kubler Shifting South: Architecture History Following Geopolitics<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This essay aims to present the shifting relations between North America and the South - South America and the South of Europe - through the work of the historian George Kubler. At the beginning of his career as a scholar, Kubler was invited by the Department of State to participate in a conference on inter-American relations. Later, with the positioning of the United States in World War II, the transatlantic relationship between the US and Europe became more prominent. Kubler's research interests followed this change: His research shift from South America to peripheral Southern Europe reflects an availability of funding given his country's geopolitical interests. So far, artists and other scholars have praised Kubler's vast work regarding the art and architecture of different 'Souths' mainly as a sign of 'nonalignment' and of his attention to the condition of peripheral countries.

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## Introduction

[1] George Kubler, the architectural historian, is known for his interest in art history's multiple patterns, both formal and conceptual. In *The Shape of Time* (1962), Kubler established a broad spectrum of a different kind of philosophy regarding art history, expanding its domain to every object ever made, not just masterpieces. From this perspective, other narratives can be joined to art historiography, such as politics, social issues, economics, and so forth. If we attempt this *Kublerian* exercise of looking at the historiography of art in relation to its political context we can find the traces of circumstantial influences within this scholarly field. In the case presented in this essay, the trajectory of Kubler's career and research interests offer a framework of the political, social and academic context in the US during the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of the century, US foreign policy tended to focus on South American countries, but after World War II it shifted toward Europe. Like Kubler's, the work of his

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a revised and extended version of the paper by the same title presented at the international conference *Southern Modernisms: Critical Stances Through Regional Appropriations*, ESAP, Oporto, 19-21 February 2015.

<sup>2</sup> See Robert Smith's publication bibliography in A. F. Pimentel et al., eds., *Robert C. Smith, 1912-1975: a investigação na história de arte*, Lisbon 2000.

friend and art historian Robert Chester Smith follows a similar pattern. Although he divided his studies between Portuguese and Brazilian art history, in the 1940s and 1950s he produced more books about Brazil, and after that, up until the 1970s, he became more concerned with Portuguese art and architecture.

[2] As Thomas Reese has already noted,<sup>3</sup> the Great Depression was an event that marked the beginning of Kubler's life as a college student - if not financially, at least contextually - and this event also changed the pursuits of art scholarship. In the oral history interview carried out by Reese and Richard Cândida Smith, Kubler mentioned that during the Great Depression the academic focus was on medieval studies in art history,<sup>4</sup> and that his interest in the notions of frugality and the peripheral might have its origin in this contextual circumstance.

[3] The idea of medievalism as an alterity of modernity and as a sign of resistance to industrial and capitalist developments was embedded in the history of art, a notion which is particularly clear in the genealogy traced by Nikolaus Pevsner when he linked William Morris's medievalism to Walter Gropius's modernism in *Pioneers of the Modern Movement: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (1936). This general connection between medievalism, folk art and the modernist myth of origin became frequent.<sup>5</sup>

[4] While studying at Yale, Kubler was greatly influenced by his supervisor, the medievalist Henri Focillon.<sup>6</sup> Focillon shared a fondness for Northern European popular and folk art with Jurgis Baltrusaitis - his former pupil, son in law, and colleague at Yale. In Kubler's notes about Focillon's text *Art Populaire* (1931), he points out that "Romanticism [worked] as [an] agent in the nineteenth century discovery of popular art by means of 'people' or 'folk' in opposition to élite, tending to display human *fond commun*, in a new historiography." He also notes the "Apparent contradiction: popular art as reinforcement of nationalism," and that the emergence of the appreciation of folk art appears as a "protest against machinism."<sup>7</sup> Focillon considers the interest in folk art to be a parallel phenomenon to romantic medievalism:

*This attempt of escape and rejuvenation takes a singular and even dramatic grandeur, when we see the principles of Mediterranean humanism, weakened by the battles of modern painting and the passionate anxiety of another humanity, of more distant secrets. When Gauguin was inspired by Breton calvaries and when he leaves to*

<sup>3</sup> See Thomas F. Reese, "Editor's Introduction", in: *Studies in Ancient American and European Art: The Collected Essays of George Kubler*, ed. Thomas F. Reese, New Haven 1985, xvii-xxxvi, here xvii; and Thomas Reese, "Systems of History: Reflections on Kubler's Legacy in Portugal", in: *Systems of History: George Kubler's Portuguese Plain Architecture*, ed. Eliana Sousa-Santos, Coimbra 2013, vol. 3, 79-99.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas F. Reese and Richard C. Smith, *George Kubler Interview* (1991), retrieved from <http://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/Browse.do?descCvPk=27697> (accessed 13 September 2014).

<sup>5</sup> The idea that there is a modern essence in medieval or pre-modern art happens to be recurrent in art history. This idea has been developed recently by Alexander Nagel, *Medieval Modern: Art out of Time*, London 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Kubler translated Focillon's work *La Vie des Formes* (1934) into English and manifested his appreciation of the work by expanding its arguments in *The Shape of Time* (1962).

<sup>7</sup> George Kubler, *Notes about "Art Populaire"*, in: George Alexander Kubler Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, MS 843, Accession 1998-M-103, Box 1, Folder Proseminar HA103, n.d.

*discover a more noble sadness, he went into exile in Polynesia, it follows the same curve, it obeys a logical development. We can say that it pushes the romantic Pre-Raphaelite to its last stage.*<sup>8</sup>

[5] Following his supervisor's essential standpoint, Kubler decided to research the architecture of New Mexico in the sixteenth century.<sup>9</sup> When asked about his choice of subject matter, Kubler mentioned the essential character of the architecture: "Partly because of the wish to test art historical principles on an unlikely subject of a very plain, simple, rustic, provincial character. And Focillon approved enthusiastically."<sup>10</sup> He embarked on that endeavour because he considered that this architecture shared some essential characteristics with modern architecture. Kubler's journey to New Mexico was connected to the search for modernist traits in historical buildings.<sup>11</sup> In this way, Kubler looked at some of these objects not as artefacts belonging to a specific time, but rather as elements that belong to a certain family. He called them 'families of minds' and this was an idea that he borrowed from Focillon. This allowed Kubler to look at art history from a timeless perspective, as a network of extensive dynamics, rather than a stylistic sequence.<sup>12</sup>

[6] At the time of Kubler's study, New Mexico was already being explored by some modernist artists in the US. The photographers Paul Strand and Edward Weston, and the painter Georgia O'Keeffe,<sup>13</sup> to name a few, were part of a larger group of artists that chose to live and work in New Mexico, depicting its light, landscapes and architecture. Laura Gilpin, another photographer, had been in New Mexico since the 1920s; many of her photographs provide illustrations for Kubler's book.<sup>14</sup> In a sense,

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<sup>8</sup> Henri Focillon and Congrès international des arts populaires, eds., *Art populaire. Travaux artistiques et scientifiques du 1<sup>o</sup> Congrès international des arts populaires* [Prague 1928], Paris 1931.

<sup>9</sup> In the oral history interview Kubler explains that his subject matter appealed to Focillon as a 'medieval survival': "SMITH: Now, of course he's a medievalist. You're dealing with architecture that's considerably post-medieval. KUBLER: Post-medieval. But medieval in a sense. [laughter] SMITH: Spiritually medieval, whatever that means. KUBLER: Medieval survivals. SMITH: Okay. KUBLER: Which was a topic that interested Focillon, medieval survivals." in Reese and Smith, *George Kubler Interview* (1991), retrieved from <http://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/Browse.do?descCvPk=27697> (accessed 13 September 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Reese and Smith, *George Kubler Interview* (1991), retrieved from <http://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/Browse.do?descCvPk=27697> (accessed 13 September 2014).

<sup>11</sup> As Kubler later noted: "To undergraduates reading about the International Style in Europe, however, the immediate future seemed clear, bare simple shapes stripped down to functional nudity were the way, and for me, the way led to New Mexico." George Kubler, "Foreword", in: *Spirit and Vision: Images of Ranchos de Taos Church: Essays*, eds. S. D'Emilio, S. Campbell and J. L. Kessell, Santa Fe 1987, xi.

<sup>12</sup> Kubler talked about the concept 'families of minds' in a lecture at Yale School of Architecture. See George Kubler, *Meso-American Spaces, and the Shape of Time*. School of Architecture, Yale University, Lectures and Presentations, (RU 880), Yale University Library, New Haven, 1974.

<sup>13</sup> These and other artists were interested in the landscapes of New Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s, around the same time George Kubler was doing his doctoral research. See Kubler, "Foreword", xi.

<sup>14</sup> George Kubler, *The Religious Architecture of New Mexico in the Colonial Period and since the American Occupation*, Colorado Springs 1940.

New Mexico was already depicted as a modern space when Kubler decided to study its colonial religious buildings.<sup>15</sup>

[7] Kubler found that the architecture of New Mexico bore a character that he would later find in other places, such as in the Portuguese architecture of the same period: "The striking quality of New Mexican folk art is its intense and austere religious expression, achieved with the minimum technical and formal means, within a rich and intricate system of traditional meanings."<sup>16</sup> If his interest in folk art took Kubler to New Mexico in the 1930s, the US government's international policies took him further, to South America.

### Visiting Peru as a 'good neighbor'

[8] In 1933, in his first inaugural address, president Franklin Delano Roosevelt [FDR] expressed his will to strengthen ties with South American nations as a strategic action of US development, or what was to be called the 'good neighbor policy'.

*In the field of world policy I would dedicate this Nation to the policy of the good neighbor - the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others - the neighbor who respects his obligations and respects the sanctity of his agreements in and with a world of neighbors.*<sup>17</sup>

[9] During this period, cultural exchanges between the US and South American countries grew and this was clearly visible in popular culture. Among the many signs of this cultural cooperation, one might recall Carmen Miranda in Hollywood,<sup>18</sup> the international career of the composer Heitor Villa-Lobos, the production of Orson Welles film *It's all true* (1946), set in Brazil, and even Disney's vision of Latin America in

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<sup>15</sup> This intricate connection between archaism and modernity is synthesized by Bruno Latour: "But are we as far removed from the past as we want to think we are? No, because modern temporality does not have much effect on the passage of time. The past remains, therefore, and even returns. Now this resurgence is incomprehensible to the moderns. Thus they treat it as the return of the repressed. They view it as an archaism. 'If we aren't careful', they think, 'we're going to return to the past; we're going to fall back into the Dark Ages'. Historical reconstitution and archaism are two symptoms of the moderns' incapacity to eliminate what they nevertheless have to eliminate in order to retain the impression that time passes." Bruno Latour, *We Have never Been Modern*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press 1994, p. 69.

<sup>16</sup> George Kubler, review of "Santos: The Religious Folk Art of New Mexico", in: *The Hispanic American Historical Review* (Nov. 1944), 756-758, here 758.

<sup>17</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, *First Inaugural Address* (1933), retrieved from <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres49.html> (accessed 19 January 2014).

<sup>18</sup> The idea of national identity and *Brazilian-ness* (Brasilidade) that was being explored in the country under the Getúlio Vargas regime became an exportable product. The construction of this national identity was sometimes made with anachronistic elements. Carmen Miranda, a Portuguese born in Marco de Canaveses, became the *Afro-Brazilian* representation of Bahia: "[...] in some public discourse *mestiçagem* was seen as a national strength, and Vargas himself made gestures on behalf of Afro-Brazilians. For example, he supported samba and admired Carmen Miranda, with her dress and idioms of Bahia, the north-eastern state sometimes called 'Africa of the Americas';" C. A. Hess, *Representing the 'Good Neighbor': Music, Difference and the Pan American Dream*, Oxford 2013, 97.

*Saludos Amigos* (1942).<sup>19</sup> Less prominent in popular culture, but still important, was the work of art historians such as Robert C. Smith and George Kubler, who also responded to a call from the Department of Intra-American Affairs to further their studies in South American regions.

[10] In 1939 both Smith and Kubler were invited by the United States Department of State to participate in the conference *Inter-American Relations on the Field of Art*.<sup>20</sup> This conference resulted from the work of the Department of State's division of Cultural Relations, created in 1938 to

*encourage and strengthen cultural relations and intellectual cooperation between the United States and other countries. Although the work of the Division embraces all nations with which the United States maintains relations, the principal activities during the initial period are concerned with the other American republics.*<sup>21</sup>

[11] The conference sessions covered several topics which included resources for Inter-American exchange in the field of art; possible exhibitions held in the US about South American nations; opportunities for student and professor exchanges between countries and the role of motion pictures as a medium of art exchange. Participants in the conference, besides Kubler and many others, were: René d'Harnoncourt, director of the Museum of Modern Art; Walter S. Cook, Director of the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University (who suggested Kubler's participation); Everett Meeks, Dean of the School of Fine Arts at Yale University; and Robert C. Smith, who at the time was part of the Hispanic Foundation of the Library of Congress. Both Kubler and Cook were assigned to attend and participate in the session regarding student and professor exchanges between Pan-American countries.

[12] Kubler's participation in the conference was fruitful, since in 1948 he was stationed by the Smithsonian Institute to conduct research in Lima, Peru. The result of his research is the short report *Cuzco: Reconstruction of the Town and Restoration of its Monuments* (1952). We must point out that most of Kubler's work concerning pre-Columbian art developed from this early experience. Moreover, Kubler's idea of historical time, later developed in his best known book *The Shape of Time* (1962), might have originated after certain observations he made in Peru. In a letter to Carroll Meeks, professor of art history at Yale, Kubler mentions the relativity of geography and historical time:

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<sup>19</sup> "In 1941, with the world at war, the U. S. government sent Walt Disney and his team of researcher-animators to Latin America to find material for the cartoon feature *Saludos Amigos!* As one official reasoned, because of Disney's worldwide popularity, it would follow that Latin Americans would favor his 'message of Americanism' over Nazi rhetoric, then making inroads in the hemisphere. Some were surprised by Disney's new status as war-time diplomat. Even his characters seemed to be on the same footing as Nazi cultural officials, as the film critic Theodore Strauss joked in the *New York Times*: "Who would have thought in the dim primordial past of five years ago that Donald Duck would be giving the retort perfect to Herr Doktor Goebbels?" Quoted according to Hess, *Representing the 'Good Neighbor'*, 111.

<sup>20</sup> The conference was held on October 11-12, 1939 in the Department of State in Washington D.C.

<sup>21</sup> Department-of-State, *Division of Cultural Relations of the Department of State: Statement* (1939), George Alexander Kubler Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, MS 843, 1999-M-032, Box 3, Folder Conference Inter-American Relations on the Field of Art.

*We worked with a crew of ethnologists in one place, where the life of the villagers is the perfect facsimile of what we have always supposed medieval rural life would be like. We made a photograph of one man and gave him a print; it was the first photograph he had seen. (...) But none of this life is inaccessible - on the contrary, it's a day's easy run by automobile from here, and illustrates rather how tradition and economics may isolate people far more effectively than geography.*<sup>22</sup>

[13] Kubler was, up to a point, following the steps of another Yale scholar turned anthropologist, Hiram Bingham, who was for some time credited with the discovery of Machu-Picchu in 1911, during a previous wave of pan-Americanism.<sup>23</sup> Kubler was hired as an anthropologist, although his education and previous work were centered in art history.<sup>24</sup> Later he admitted that he did not have any kind of formal training in anthropology. In an oral history interview, when asked about his anthropology training, he replied: "Well, I picked it [anthropology] up on the way. I don't think I ever took a course. I picked it up. I read anthropology and I had friends with whom I talked anthropology. But I never studied it separately."<sup>25</sup>

[14] At the time of his brief period as an anthropologist, Kubler exchanged correspondence with Erwin Panofsky regarding his change of course. Panofsky jokingly noted that he "hope[d] that your anthropological affiliation will not entirely deprave your good art historical heart,"<sup>26</sup> to which Kubler replied: "The anthropological connection is one that still surprises me when I come to think of it, but it is only natural in America, where archaeology (and therefore the history of art) have long been the handmaidens of 'social Science' more than of philology."<sup>27</sup> In the essay "History: or Anthropology: of Art?" Kubler considers his work *The Shape of Time* to be on the threshold of art history and anthropology, and highlights the exchanges between the history of art and anthropology, which were, according to this text, relatively new endeavours in American academia.<sup>28</sup> In fact, at the beginning of his career, Kubler worked between the two fields.

[15] In a curious clipping from a Peruvian newspaper (Fig. 1), Kubler is described as an archaeologist.<sup>29</sup> In fact, Kubler considered that he had some training in archaeology,

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<sup>22</sup> George Kubler, *Letter to Carroll Meeks* (1949), George Alexander Kubler Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, MS 843, 2000-M-056, Box 1, Kubler Archive - CR.

<sup>23</sup> Hiram Bingham, *Lost City of the Incas*, London 2003.

<sup>24</sup> George Kubler, *Application for federal employment* (1948), George Alexander Kubler Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, MS 843, Accession 2000-M-056, Box 1, Correspondence.

<sup>25</sup> Reese and Smith, *George Kubler Interview* (1991), retrieved from <http://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/Browse.do?descCvPk=27697> (accessed 13 September 2014).

<sup>26</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Letter to George Kubler* (1949), George Alexander Kubler Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, MS 843, 2000-M-056, Box 1, Kubler Archive - CR.

<sup>27</sup> George Kubler, *Letter to Erwin Panofsky* (1949a), George Alexander Kubler Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, MS 843, 2000-M-056, Box 1, Kubler Archive - CR.

<sup>28</sup> George Kubler, *History: Or Anthropology: of Art?* (1975), retrieved 27/02/2010, from Jstor <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1342847>, p. 766.

<sup>29</sup> See Clipping "Reconstrucción del Cuzco", in: George Alexander Kubler Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, MS 843, Accession 98-M-82, Box 5, Folder Cuzco 1956. Kubler exchanged correspondence with archeologists and anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, André

and that may be the reason he used the term interchangeably, even though his job description was anthropologist.<sup>30</sup>



1 Newspaper clipping, George Alexander Kubler Papers, Folder Cuzco 1956. Yale University Library, New Haven, Manuscripts and archives, George Alexander Kubler Papers, MS 843, 98-M-82, Box 5.

[16] Although Kubler's research interests expanded to include Portugal and Spain, he never ceased to publish articles and books as well as to teach courses regarding issues that originated in this phase of his career.<sup>31</sup> Later in his life, when asked about the repercussions of the *Good Neighbor Policy* in scholarship, Kubler admitted that the program was part of a plan to work with Latin American countries and turn them into useful allies, and that the work of scholars was viewed as fundamental to shape government policies regarding international relations.<sup>32</sup>

Leroi-Gourhan, and Robert Heizer.

<sup>30</sup> In the interview Kubler mentions his initial work as an archeologist: "When Lehmann-Hartleben began his excavations at Samothrace, he wanted me to come with him and join his large crew there. But at that time the war was already very much in the way, and I was looking for a way to do archaeology in this country. So I picked New Mexico and began these studies of New Mexico, which were mainly architectural, but semi-archaeological." Cited according to Reese and Smith, *George Kubler Interview* (1991), retrieved from <http://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/Browse.do?descCvPk=27697>.

<sup>31</sup> This is particularly clear in the listing of his published work between 1938 and 1982. See "A Bibliography of Works by George Kubler (to 1982)", in: *Studies in Ancient American and European Art: The Collected Essays of George Kubler*, ed. Thomas F. Reese, New Haven 1985, 431-438.

<sup>32</sup> However, Kubler thought his role in this shaping was minimal, as he noted in an interview: "SMITH: What were your perceptions of the Good Neighbor policy, which is, I think, the overall

## From South America to the South of Europe

[17] Even before Kubler went to Peru,<sup>33</sup> US foreign policy was changing. In 1947 the Marshall Plan was put into practice.<sup>34</sup> By 1949 president Harry S. Truman gave his Inaugural Address expanding the policies set by FDR for South America to the rest of the world, stating that:

*We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas. For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and skill to relieve the suffering of these people.*<sup>35</sup>

[18] The anthropologist George M. Foster exchanged opinions about this with Kubler, reflecting upcoming opportunities to carry out research funded by the US government:

*There is great activity in the Interdepartmental Committee because of President Truman's Point 4 in his Inaugural Message. Everybody is trying to figure out ways of thinking up projects to save the world. We are not submitting a program, though we have suggested that anthropologists attached to agricultural missions and such things would undoubtedly be very worthwhile.*<sup>36</sup>

[19] In the previous year, economic cooperation between the United States and Europe through the Marshall Plan had already begun, and Kubler had been invited by Nikolaus Pevsner to participate in the publication of the *Pelican History of Art*. At first, Pevsner asked Kubler to choose between one of two subjects: "Once again let me have your decision soon. So much hinges on it. As you realise, it goes between two things: the pre-Columbian high cultures and Architecture of the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in Spain, Portugal and their dominions. [...] For each of them I can give you five years. I expect

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umbrella that allowed all of this activity to develop? KUBLER: Well, we always unbelt towards Latin America when we're in trouble, when we need Latin America, and that's unfortunately not the regular case. We don't take Latin America seriously. SMITH: The change in government policy and national interest allowed these activities to take place. Did you feel that scholars' recommendations were beginning to shape government policy or foundation policy towards Latin America? KUBLER: It seemed during the events that that was the case. My own participation was nil, excepting for this case, which is marginal, peripheral." Quoted according to Reese and Smith, *George Kubler Interview, (1991)*, retrieved from <http://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/Browse.do?descCvPk=27697> (accessed 13 September 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Kubler visited Peru in 1948 and 1949. During his stay he kept a very thorough diary, see George Kubler, *Diary* (1948), George Alexander Kubler Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, MS 843, 1998-M-082, Box 2, Folder Cusco Diary.

<sup>34</sup> About the deployment of the Marshall Plan in postwar Europe see T. Judt: *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*, London: The Penguin Press 2005, p. 90-95.

<sup>35</sup> Harry S. Truman, Inaugural Address (1949), retrieved from [http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/50yr\\_archive/inagural20jan1949.htm](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/50yr_archive/inagural20jan1949.htm) (accessed 19 January 2014).

<sup>36</sup> George M. Foster, *Letter to George Kubler* (1949), George Alexander Kubler Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, MS 843, 2000-M-056, Box 1, Kubler Archive - CR.



you will not accept both [...]."<sup>37</sup> However, Kubler did accept both, recommending Martin Soria to collaborate with him in the volume dedicated to Spain and Portugal.



2 George Alexander Kubler: Album Page from Portuguese Album 1953. Yale University Library, New Haven, Manuscripts and archives, George Alexander Kubler Papers, MS 843, 97-M-22, Box 20.

[20] Kubler's research for each volume spanned more than a decade, despite several letters from Pevsner trying unsuccessfully to rush their completion. During this time, Kubler travelled extensively to Portugal and started other projects that would last even longer. Following *Art and Architecture in Spain and Portugal and their American Dominion: 1500-1800* (1959), Kubler published two other books directly related to Portugal: the facsimile and English translation of Felix da Costa's *The Antiquity of the Art of Painting* (1967) and *Portuguese Plain Architecture: Between Spices and Diamonds, 1521-1706* (1972). These undertakings came to be long term projects which allowed Kubler to spend long periods of time and travel considerably throughout Portugal and other European countries from the mid-1950s onwards.<sup>38</sup> When asked if it was difficult to fund research in Iberian studies, Kubler admits that at the time it was relatively easy to access funding: "I never had trouble getting funding for those outings. Guggenheim I think I had three times. Then there's another one, the American

<sup>37</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *Letter to George Kubler, March 31 1947*, George Alexander Kubler Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, MS 843, 1998-M-103, Box 2, Folder Correspondence with Penguin Books 1948-1970.

<sup>38</sup> Throughout his career, Kubler never ceased to publish work about American and South American art, and the courses that he taught at Yale were mostly on those subjects. However, his research trips to Portugal were manifold and long running, beginning in 1953 up to the mid-1960s. George Alexander Kubler Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, MS 843, Accession 97-M-22, Box 18-20.

Council of Learned Societies. Between those I had financial help on most of my research trips."<sup>39</sup>

[21] In the 1970s, the focus of interest moved from continental Portugal to its former and soon to be independent colonies. In 1971, Kubler was part of the team included in Yale University's request to the Gulbenkian foundation to sponsor an academic program on "Expanded Studies on Portuguese Literature and Civilization". The main objective of the program was not centered on the study of Portuguese culture per se, since this was already part of the Portuguese studies curriculum, but on Portuguese relations to other areas:

*What is interesting for present purposes is that the third-world areas chosen for curricular development – the Far East, South East Asia, Africa, Latin America and more recently, India – are precisely the regions of Portuguese colonisation, whose proper study requires extensive knowledge of Portuguese languages [sic], culture and institutions.*<sup>40</sup>

[22] In this case, interest in Portuguese culture ran parallel to the international outlook toward former colonies as well as the political interest in the provinces of Angola and Mozambique that had been at war with the metropole in their struggle for independence since 1961. These areas in Africa were at the time a proxy for the Cold War, with opposed factions being financed either by the United States or the USSR. The territories that still remained under Portuguese rule were players in the global conflict as potential areas of interest.<sup>41</sup> Once more, interest in Portuguese culture in the realm of academics followed the interests of US foreign policy.

### Coda: The unaligned South

[23] The political context in the US during the twentieth century, and its policies regarding international affairs, were pervasive in academic and even in popular culture; in part, this influenced Kubler's career path and its expansion from South America to peripheral Southern Europe: the Iberian Peninsula.

[24] Nevertheless, the marginal character of the cultures in question – South America in relation to North America, the Iberian Peninsula in relation to Northern Europe – pointed the historian's attention toward the peripheral, the minor and the incidental. Just as medieval studies were focused on lesser subjects at the time of the Great Depression, Kubler also found the same essence in other cultures – in the walls of Cusco, Peru as in those of the Jerónimos Monastery, Portugal. Although Kubler's research was partially guided by US international policies and funding, his interest in

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<sup>39</sup> Reese and Smith, *George Kubler Interview* (1991), retrieved from <http://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/Browse.do?descCvPk=27697> (accessed 13 September 2014).

<sup>40</sup> Letter to the Gulbenkian Foundation, Draft of Proposal by Yale University to the Gulbenkian Foundation for Support for Expanded Studies in Portuguese Literature and Civilization. George Alexander Kubler Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, MS 843, Accession 97-M-22, Box 18.

<sup>41</sup> See John A. Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution I: The Anatomy of an Explosion (1950-1962)*, Cambridge 1969, and *The Angolan Revolution: Exile Politics and Guerrilla Warfare (1962-1976)*, Cambridge 1978.

the particular, the small and the peripheral came to be perceived by other historians and artists alike as an ideological inclination to radical positions.

[25] The artist Juan Downey (1940-1993), who produced video essays about relevant historical and political moments, was inspired to create a film manifesting the nature of Kubler's *Portuguese Plain Architecture* (1972).<sup>42</sup> In Downey's film plan, *Plain Architecture* was to be presented as an "Architecture of Crisis" that traversed several moments of history.<sup>43</sup>

[26] In post-revolutionary Portugal,<sup>44</sup> several architects embraced the notion of Portuguese Plain as a rediscovery of a new tradition, still untainted by the previous political regime. Duarte Cabral de Mello, when referring to the social housing projects of Vítor Figueiredo, made the first comparison of *Plain Architecture* with contemporary practice. In a special issue of *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (1976), a group of Portuguese architects presented their work as a manifestation of a revolutionary environment, even though many of the projects shown were in fact designed and built before the revolution.<sup>45</sup> Other international publications, such as *Lotus International*, published many housing projects by the architect Álvaro Siza Vieira, focusing on the connection between social housing design, building with scarce resources and the notion of revolution. The revolutionary process was presented as embedded in the aesthetic and practice of architecture.<sup>46</sup>

[27] In the 1990s, the debate about the importance of Portuguese Plain reemerged following the publication of the Portuguese translation of Kubler's *Portuguese Plain Architecture* in 1988,<sup>47</sup> and in the wake of the Portuguese entry to the European Union.

[28] In an essay presenting the history of Portuguese architecture, as part of the Europalia Festival dedicated to Portugal in 1991, the architecture historian Paulo Varela Gomes defines a genealogy of a national Portuguese architecture that borrows its

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<sup>42</sup> Downey was inspired by three historical periods in which "the economic situation and the activities of a people seem to interlock closely": fifteenth century Florence - inspired by Robert Lopez' essay "Hard Times and the Investment in Culture" (1953); sixteenth century-Portugal - inspired by Kubler's *Portuguese Plain Architecture* (1972); and fin-de-siècle-Vienna - inspired by Carl Schorske's book *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (1980). And all these case studies would be preludes to the main subject - 1970s New York, where, parallel to the apparent decline of the city's economy, an ebullient art scene developed of which Downey was part of. See Eliana Sousa-Santos, "Plain Arts: Portugal and Beyond", in: *Portuguese Studies Review* 22 (2014), 195-203.

<sup>43</sup> L. Krueger, Notes on New York, March 7, 1987, Meeting "Hard Times and Culture": 16th century Portugal (1987), in George Alexander Kubler Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, MS 843, Accession 1997-M-022, Box 2.

<sup>44</sup> In 1974 a military coup overthrew the already feeble dictatorship, Estado Novo, that had been in place for over forty years.

<sup>45</sup> See Duarte C. de Mello, "Vitor Figueiredo: La misère du superflu", in: *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 185 (1976), 30-31.

<sup>46</sup> See Álvaro Siza, "The proletarian 'island' as a basic element of the urban tissue", in: *Lotus International* 13 (1976), 80-93; and "Préexistence et désir collectif de transformation", in: *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 191 (1977), 121.

<sup>47</sup> Georges Kubler, *Arquitetura Portuguesa Chã: entre as especiarias e os diamantes: 1521-1706* (J. H. Pais-da-Silva, Trans.), Lisbon 1988.

argument from Kubler's *Portuguese Plain Architecture*.<sup>48</sup> Later, Varela Gomes defined Kubler's book as a symptom of the country's non-aligned position, placing Kubler's research interests within the sphere of the nations that stood against the globalizing policies of the US. Varela Gomes points out that in the 1980s the prominence of Kubler's book in the history of art showed that Portugal stood against the grain of European historiography and that it had a singular position: within art historiography Portugal was *non-aligned* with Europe. This was part of an "ideological desideratum" that allowed "a positive appreciation of buildings, or groups of buildings that didn't fit into the standard categories of European historiography such as Renaissance, Mannerism or Baroque".<sup>49</sup> This enabled the interest regarding the marginal - Portuguese architecture - to regain a central position within its own historiography - *Plain Architecture*.

[29] Thus, Kubler's *Portuguese Plain Architecture* (1972) created a framework that enabled considering Portugal as having a specific architectural culture, given its peripheral nature. Kubler's attention toward the 'other' might have been prompted by a genuine interest in the peripheral, and it was also encouraged by US government foreign policy.

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<sup>48</sup> Defining the general character of 'Portuguese architecture', Varela Gomes cites ideas developed in Kubler's *Portuguese Plain Architecture*: "We can talk in a way characteristic of Portuguese pre-modern and modern times, to understand the architecture gradually studied by the historical and architectural research in motion since the 1940s. It dons the following characteristics: (...) Proximity between erudite and popular architecture, both formally and culturally." Paulo Varela-Gomes, "Quatre batailles en faveur d'une architecture Portugaise", in: *Europalia 91. Points de Repère: Architectures du Portugal*, exh. cat., ed. Frank Vanhaecke, Brussels 1991, 21-62, here 21.

<sup>49</sup> Paulo Varela-Gomes, "Arquitectura não-alinhada", in: *JA: Jornal Arquitectos* 200 (2001), 5-9, here 6.

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