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Systems of History

George Kubler's Portuguese Plain Architecture

Eliana Sousa Santos, Editor

Nº 03

September 2013

Debates

www.ces.uc.pt/cescontexto



Propriedade e Edição /Property and Edition

Centro de Estudos Sociais/Centre for Social Studies

Laboratório Associado/Associate Laboratory

Universidade de Coimbra/University of Coimbra

www.ces.uc.pt

Colégio de S. Jerónimo, Apartado 3087

3000-995 Coimbra - Portugal

E-mail: cescontexto@ces.uc.pt

Tel: +351 239 855573 Fax: +351 239 855589

Comissão Editorial/Editorial Board

Coordenação Geral/General Coordination: Sílvia Portugal

Coordenação Debates/Debates Collection Coordination: Ana Raquel Matos

ISSN 2182-908X

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Acknowledgements

This symposium was organised at CES – Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra with the sponsorship of FCT – Foundation for Science and Technology, and FLAD – Luso American Foundation.

Acknowledgment is extended to all architects and historians who have kept this subject afloat, allowing its historical drift, to use Kubler's term, and especially to the person who was the catalyst to this project, Prof. Paulo Varela Gomes.

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Introduction

Eliana Sousa Santos,¹ Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra
e.sousasantos@gmail.com

Systems of History

The following essays are the proceedings of the symposium “Systems of History: George Kubler’s Portuguese Plain Architecture” held at Centro de Estudos Sociais September 7th 2012. This symposium was a celebration of many things: George Kubler’s 100th birthday; *The Shape of Time* 50th anniversary; and *Portuguese Plain Architecture* 40th anniversary. This was the year to celebrate Kubler, and we joined other celebratory conferences that happened throughout the year and to resonate a special note about his work in Portugal and the influence of his book: *Portuguese Plain Architecture: Between Spices and Diamonds, 1521-1706* (1972).

Kubler is well known to have given an extraordinary contribution to art history by writing *The Shape of Time* (1962), a book that established his position as a visionary historian since the 1960s, and contributed to open the field to include all human-made things, not only the finest works of art. The book was so successful that his writings actually became a kind of artifact, changing our assessment of all previous works in history of art and architecture and influencing some of its further developments.

Kubler’s interest about the patterns of change in art can be related to his inquisitiveness about disappearing cultures, remote places, places where the systems of making could become visible, since their shapes of time were less convoluted.

Kubler traveled to Portugal several times between 1950’s and 1960’s, when the country was still very affected by its geographic position and its political regime. In a sense, it was a Plain country, the one that he saw. As I said elsewhere Portugal, given its geographical and historical situation, was the kind of place that was very convenient to Kubler’s study. It is remote and yet connected, it was once very influent and yet lost most of its influence, it was part of Europe and yet it maintained the fundamental difference that its poverty and remoteness imposed.

Kubler’s text infuses Portuguese architecture with poetic qualities, achievable with immaterial qualities such as light and proportion, or strictly functional and thus not dependent of technological progress. *Plain Architecture* can be understood as the essential qualities of architecture itself. Somehow the fascination with ‘pure volumetric forms’ is even assigned by Kubler to be “recognizable as a distinct Portuguese trait as early as the sixteenth century.” And these qualities resonated with modernist qualities: the simplicity of forms, the boxlike spaces, and the taste for unornamented shapes.

The idea of Portuguese Plain Architecture, although emerging every once in a while and having a stable position within Portuguese Architecture historiography has yet to have that position mapped.

¹ Eliana Sousa Santos (PhD, London Consortium) is an architect, researcher and educator. She has worked at West 8 and at Sousa Santos Arquitectos. She is a postdoctoral researcher at CES, University of Coimbra with the project "George Kubler’s Shape of Time: The Historiographical effect of Portuguese Plain Architecture in Post-revolutionary Portugal." This research is funded by FCT - Foundation for Science and Technology.

The connection between the idea of Portuguese Plain Architecture and architectural practice started in 1979 when the architect Duarte Cabral de Mello compared Vítor Figueiredo's architecture to Portuguese Plain, it continued in several texts and lectures by Paulo Varela Gomes and reemerged in Manuel Graça Dias's edition of *Jornal dos Arquitectos* in 2001, essays by Alexandre Alves Costa, one of its last appearances was in a speech by Eduardo Souto de Moura where he equated his work to Portuguese Plain.

Portuguese Plain Architecture became some kind of a meme, or to use Kubler's expression a *sequence*, metamorphosing through time, expressing political positions in the 1970s, and serving an architectural establishment nowadays. It is this change of tone, which is most interesting. Not only shapes change through time, but also ideas, and the tracing of Portuguese Plain Architecture from conveys the relationship between history of architecture and its practice. By rearranging the perception of Portuguese architecture in Portugal, Kubler achieved what he defined to as historians' commitment, that is, to "... discover a patterned set of properties that will elicit the recognition all the while conveying a new perception of the subject."

The following papers were presented at the conference. Joana Cunha Leal (Universidade Nova de Lisboa) contextualizes Kubler's work about Portuguese architecture within the tradition opened by Julio de Castilho, who coined the term *plain style* (estilo chão) as a possible tradition to be adopted by contemporary architectural practices. Raquel Henriques da Silva (Universidade Nova de Lisboa) presents Kubler's work within the realm of the historiography of art, focusing on the reverberation of the ideas within *The Shape of Time* (1962) and their influence in history and theory of art. Reva Wolf (New Paltz, State University of New York) writes about Kubler's use of metaphor as an instrument to support his arguments, and shows its manifestations in *Portuguese Plain Architecture* (1972). Susanne Bauer (University of London) contextualizes the adoption of the color white as a meme by the Portuguese contemporary architect Álvaro Siza Vieira relating it to the idea of *Plain Style*. Patrícia Miguel (Universidade de Coimbra) maps the persistent role of the vernacular revival in the recent history of Portuguese architecture. Emanuel Sousa (Architectural Association School of Architecture) analyses Kubler's arguments in *The Shape of Time* (1962) relates it to Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1966), and makes a parallel between the recurrence of *Plain Architecture* through Foucault's concept of *heterotopia*.

This symposium was organized as part of my post-doctoral research project "George Kubler's Shape of Time: The Historiographical effect of *Portuguese Plain Architecture* in post-revolutionary Portugal", with the supervision of Paulo Varela Gomes.

Plain, Pombaline and (Post)modernism: On some pre and post-Kublerian narratives on Portuguese architecture

Joana Cunha Leal,¹ Universidade Nova de Lisboa
j.cunhaleal@fcs.unl.pt

Abstract: This paper begins by discussing Júlio de Castilho's work as pre-announcing an interest in "material culture" and vernacular architecture that would achieve its scholarly definition in Kubler's *Portuguese Plain Architecture*. As Kubler himself states the term "plain style" was picked from Castilho's *Lisboa Antiga: o Bairro Alto* (1972: 3). This much discussed notion, as well as its counterpart – plain architecture – was presented by Kubler as denoting an architecture "free from academic rules and Italianate forms", one that was "like a vernacular architecture, related to living dialect traditions more than to the great authors of Antiquity" (Kubler, 1972: 3). This definition can be very much associated with Castilho's own interest in the history of Lisbon and its building environment. The founder of the so-called *Olisipografia* (an historical discipline entirely devoted to Lisbon's study) was deeply committed with the preservation of Lisbon's historical neighborhoods when everybody else strived for the radical renovation of Alfama, Mouraria or Bairro Alto. Thus, Castilho was the first to address, in 1879, the very notion of urban heritage in Portugal while developing his thesis on Lisbon's distinctiveness as arising both from specific modes of urban everyday living (to which he devoted an ethnographic inquiry) and its current residential anonymous architecture. Following his interest in common architecture, Castilho would even be the first, and only author to point Pombaline architecture as the basis of any survey on the specificity of the "Portuguese house" which, he sought, had to be discussed on the grounds of urban typologies instead of rural ones. Accordingly, Castilho not only attributed historical value to this ultimate "plain style", that is Pombaline architecture, but also tried to define it as a heuristic starting point to contemporary architectural practices (that is if Lisbon's distinctiveness were to be preserved). It did so in a context of unanimous depreciation of Pombaline architecture as well. Indeed, those who commented the Reconstruction of Lisbon since late 18th century did not see it as a project endowed with artistic value, but as a work injured by aesthetic marginality. Monotony, pragmatism, parsimony, repetition, and lack of originality shape a group of powerful anathemas that cast a shadow over it. As is now well known (Leal: 2004) only in 1947-9 the modernist ideals guiding Pardal Monteiro's perception of Pombaline architecture would allow a renewal of interest in the undertaken of 18th century Portuguese military architects. And, of course, a thorough recognition of its urban plan had to wait until the study devoted by J.-A. França to the Reconstruction of Lisbon was finally published in 1965.

¹ Joana Cunha Leal (1969) was awarded her MSc (1997) and PhD (2006) from Universidade Nova de Lisboa (UNL). She is Assistant Professor at the Art History Department of Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas at the same University. She teaches courses at graduate and post-graduate levels on art theory, 19th century art and architecture, art history's theory and methodologies of and urban studies (also as an invited lecturer in the Universitat de Barcelona, Spain).

By analyzing the framework of these discourses, this paper also aims to establish a comparative study between the impact of Kubler’s historiographical account of the PPA and that of the genealogy of the appreciation of Pombaline architecture. This study will eventually open the debate on the connection between historical accounts and contemporaneous architectural practices, as it was only with the overturn of prevailing straightforward modernist conceptions and aspirations that both PPA and Pombaline architecture (not the plan!) would achieved their full acceptance.

Every important work of art can be regarded as a historical event and as a hard-won solution to some problem. It is irrelevant now whether the event was original or conventional, accidental or willed, awkward or skillful. The important clue is that any solution points to the existence of some problem to which there have been other solutions, and that other solutions to this same problem will most likely to be invented to follow the one now in view. As the solutions accumulate, the problem alters. The chain of solutions nevertheless discloses the problem. (Kubler 1962, 33)

George Kubler introduces the term plain (*chão*) to tackle a (historiographical) problem. The adjective names what he captured as a formal series in Portuguese architecture of the 16th and 17th centuries (Kubler, 1972). Such series had been, in its *serialityness*, ignored by previous art historical accounts. The point at issue was the mismatch between this body of work and ruling art historical taxonomy of styles (Renaissance, Mannerism and Baroque).² Envisaged through common stylistic bias this set of buildings failed full recognition for their “intrinsic character” was misread (Wohl, 1974: 609), and therefore remained invisible.³

Conversely, the “major change of Portuguese taste in the 1520’s” opened a field of study suited to the expanded idea of art history fostered by *The Shape of Time. Remarks on the History of Things* (1961). As is well known, Kubler’s essay championed the idea that “no style or class excludes simultaneous possible presence of many other prior classes”,⁴ while expanding art history as *history of things*⁵ and as *world art history*.

Kubler’s formalism recovered the anthropological focus of early historians such as Jacob Burkhardt, Aby Warburg and Alois Riegl,⁶ overthrowing strictly stylistic analysis forged under

² As Hellmut Wohl pointed out: “Professor Kubler is the first scholar who has approached Portuguese architecture between the reigns of Manuel I and John V in its own terms, elucidated its aesthetic principles and, through the typological and sequential grouping of buildings, charted the course of its development. In an earlier survey he had noted that the reason why Lusitanian architecture cannot be classified as Mannerist or Baroque is that ‘one cannot anatomize one national architecture in terms of another; one can define its specific nature only by examining its forms in context and in chronological sequence.’ In the present work he has consequently concentrated on detecting patterns of taste in the context of specifically Portuguese conditions, on questions of architectural meaning, on the selection and combination by architects of forms from a variety of present and past stylistic traditions, and on the identification of what in *The Shape of Time* (1962) he called form-classes – linked sequences of gradually altered repetitions of a solution to the same problem.” (Wohl, 1974: 609)

³ This difficult situation is somehow denounced in advance by Albrecht Haupt’s book on Portuguese renaissance architecture, namely in passages as the one he dedicates to the Tomar convent cloister. While attributing its authorship to Diogo Torralva, Haupt writes: “However, if this magnificent construction, more than all the others existing in Portugal, might be considered a renaissance piece showing all the means generally used in Italy, if in the type of portico used one can partially recall the wonderful Venice library, its architecture has, on the other hand, something completely anti-Italian in its surface, something that always brings me back to the Portuguese soil.” (translated from the Portuguese by the author) (Haupt, 1986: 188).

⁴ Kubler references his *The Shape of Time* as a “more recent view” (Kubler 1972, 4).

⁵ “Our choice of the ‘history of things’ is more than an euphemism to replace the bristling ugliness of ‘material culture.’ This term is used by anthropologists to distinguish ideas, or ‘mental culture’ from artifacts. But the ‘history of things’ is intended to reunite ideas and objects under the rubric of visual forms: the term includes both artifacts and works of art, both replicas and unique examples, both tools and expressions – in short all materials worked by human hands under the guidance of connected ideas developed in temporal sequence.” (Kubler, 1962: 9)

⁶ Four art historians are praised by G. Kubler on the account of their attempt to “discover valid ways to generalize upon the immense domain of experience of art”: besides Alois Riegl and the French art historian Henri Focillon known as major influences in his work, Kubler mentions F. Wickhoff and H. Wöllflin (Kubler, 1962: 31).

the aegis of core European centers. The typological series analyzed by Kubler overcame Eurocentric *high art* criteria by way of considering other geographies (*peripheral*) and aesthetics (both *high* and *low*). Moreover, as Withey Davis puts it, *The Shape of Time* “dealt with order – the *typological and seriatinal* order – that Kubler detected in the ‘history of things’, the human-made artifacts now typically called material and visual culture” (Davis, 2011: 495). So, the anthropological focus that Kubler set forth allowed him to grant artistic value (i.e. formal value equated as meaning, and as a sequence in time) to things coming from material and visual culture’s large domain.

The term *plain* arises in this context as a necessary and alternative designation to render visible an exceptional constellation of buildings from the 16th and 17th centuries. In this term we find the conceptual tool that allowed a loose set of *peripheral* architecture to become an autonomous series, recognized by its permanency, cohesion, and formal replication (all taken to be immanent qualities). Again, Kubler’s historiographical account gave artistic dignity to an “entirely different architectural geography, where clarity, order, proportion and simplicity mark the contours of another aesthetic” (Kubler, 1972: 5). Or, as he also puts it, to a sequence free “from academic rules and Italianate forms” that was “like a vernacular architecture, related to living dialect traditions more than to the great authors of the remote past” (Kubler, 1972: 3).

Kubler found the expression “plain style of architecture” in Julio de Castilho’s *Lisboa Antiga: o Bairro Alto* (1902-1904).⁷ Castilho used it to qualify the lack of sophistication he finds in Lisbon’s 16th century palaces, as he calls attention to the lively contrast they offered if compared to the trade of luxury goods arriving from India and China which, he says, flooded the city.⁸

As its title evidences, Castilho’s study is entirely devoted to Lisbon: to its history, its stories, its memory and its building environment.⁹ As I have shown elsewhere (Cunha Leal, 2006: 73-85), he was deeply committed to the preservation of Lisbon’s historical neighborhoods when everybody else strived for their demolition. As such, he was the first to address the very notion of *urban heritage* in Portugal. Accordingly, Castilho developed his thesis on Lisbon’s distinctiveness as arising both from specific modes of urban everyday living (to which he devoted an extensive ethnographic inquiry) and the visual panorama of its *plain* architecture (taking into consideration not only those undecorated palaces, but also current residential architecture, be it 18th century Pombaline buildings or random anonymous vernacular specimens).¹⁰

⁷ “Following Júlio de Castilho’s idea of *estilo chão* [BA, I, 144], I have called it ‘plain’ architecture” (Kubler, 1972: 3). Castilho’s study on Lisbon’s Bairro Alto had its origin in a single volume published in 1879 by Antonio Maria Pereira. Castilho’s series on *Old Lisbon* (*Lisboa Antiga*) would then begin with his 8 volumes on Lisbon’s Oriental Quarters (*Bairros Orientais*) published from 1884 on. The 2nd edition of his study on Bairro Alto – that would later become the first part of the Old Lisbon’s (*Lisboa Antiga*) series – would only appear 23 years after the 1879 volume. *Lisboa Antiga: o Bairro Alto* was re-edited between 1902 and 1904 as an extended 5 volume study. Its 3rd edition was published by Lisbon’s City Council from 1954 on, under the coordination of Gustavo Matos Sequeira (who worked on the 2nd edition of Castilho’s study). All subsequent quotations and references are taken from this 5 volume 3rd edition (1954-1966).

⁸ “In Portugal, the design of such buildings was not distinguishable by great beauties or luxuries; those were monopolised by churches and convents, where the power and opulence of the Royal savings appeared. Not even the Royal palaces were of significant architectural apparatus; as such, noble residences were necessarily more simply fashioned” (translated by the author).

“Em Portugal nunca o traçado de tais edificios se estremoou por grandes belezas nem riquezas; essas monopolizavam-nas as casas religiosas, onde se espanadia todo o poderio e luxo dos cofres Reais. Nem mesmo os Paços eram obras de grande aparato exterior; quanto mais as moradas singelas dos nobres!” (Castilho, 1954-1966: 144-145)

⁹ Castilho is considered the founder of the so called *Olisipografia* (an historical discipline entirely devoted to Lisbon’s study).

¹⁰ Castilho’s notion of urban heritage encompassed not only recognised national monuments, but also the vast panorama of urban common dwellings, namely plurifamilial rental buildings. It thus encompassed vernacular typologies, otherwise taken

While reading Castilho one clearly realizes that this panorama of residential architecture is praised on the basis of its heritage-value. Because his focus was Lisbon's distinctiveness, Castilho could even express his relative sorrow for the lack of a more expressive *high* artistic-value, since his aesthetic judgment did not endanger the major heritage-value attributed to those buildings (both 1500's palaces, and common urban dwellings). So, Castilho was far from being committed to any formal-value re-reading in Kublerian terms.

Yet, *Lisboa Antiga*'s argument did not limit itself to acknowledging the dependence of Lisbon's image upon its built environment. It also acknowledged its paramount heuristic potential, for his appeal to the preservation of Lisbon's urban heritage was also supported by the idea that *plain* architecture should be taken as a subject of systematic research on the basis of which prescriptive architectural criteria should be settled. Meaning, it should be taken as a basis of shared knowledge that would support and legitimize prescriptive criteria for future building projects destined to Lisbon.¹¹

Thus, the uniqueness of Castilho's studies in his heyday, comes not only from the fact that he established a new field of study – hybrid and interdisciplinary *olisipography* (gathering contributions from many disciplines: philology, ethnography, art history, archeology, genealogy, heraldic, etc) –, but also from the fact that his appreciation of Lisbon's urban heritage was, as stated above, completely against the grain. Castilho despised 19th and early 20th centuries *beaux-art* architectural trends, favoring instead standardized Pombaline buildings and vernacular architecture traditions, as he strived to preserve Lisbon's image authenticity (a parallel commitment can be found in Gustavo Giovannoni's defense for *minor architecture* and urban contextualism from 1910s onward) (Sabatino, 2010: 57-91). So, even if his paramount interest on Lisbon's vernacular traditions and popular culture can be equated to the work of contemporary art ethnographers¹², it is worth noticing that the focus of the latter was exclusively oriented towards the rural, pastoral worlds (Leal, 2000: 40, 130-139). Indeed, they completely ignored, if not abhorred, the city as a potential field of research.

A major example of this orientation in the scope of architectural culture would be the efforts put toward the identification of an original native style. Despite well-known differences of opinion, debates on such cause would win unrivaled preeminence in 20th century Portuguese architecture.¹³ As to what matters here, one should remind that the celebrated debate on the characteristics of a *truly Portuguese house*, and the vast movement in favor of a re-nationalization of Portuguese architecture associated to it, as well as much later progressive left-wing reactions against it (*Arquitetura Popular em Portugal*, 1961) also turn their attention to the rural world.¹⁴ In other words, the acknowledgement of anonymous residential buildings, or *minor architecture*, was pursued exclusively on the basis of non-erudite rural standards.

Conversely, Castilho's focus were urban dwellings (both vernacular and erudite). He would thus be the first and only author to point Lisbon's building environment, including 18th century Pombaline architecture – erudite, though standardized, undecorated, and under-appreciated –, as the basis of any survey on the putative specificity of the *Portuguese house* which, he sought, had to be discussed on the grounds of urban typologies instead of rural ones.

as irrelevant and even expendable by his contemporaries (as is clearly shown by coeval allegations for the eradication of Lisbon's historical quarters: Alfama, Mouraria, Madragoa or Bairro Alto); see (Cunha Leal, 2005: 4-21).

¹¹ The paralleling of Castilho's perspective and that of 20th century Venice School architectes has been debated in (Cunha Leal, 2005: 22-40).

¹² Such as Joaquim de Vasconcelos, João Barreira, and Virgílio Correia; see Leal (2000).

¹³ See (França, 1990: 153-159); see also Vieira de Almeida (1970).

¹⁴ For an overview of these debates see Vieira de Almeida *et al.* (1986); see also Tostões *et al.* (1997).

Accordingly, while recognizing heritage-value to this ultimate *plain architecture*¹⁵ – i.e. Pombaline architecture – Castilho defined it as the main heuristic basis to legitimately regulate contemporary building practices, if Lisbon’s distinctiveness was to be preserved.

Castilho praised Pombaline architecture in a context of its unanimous depreciation. Indeed, those who commented the Reconstruction of Lisbon after the Great Earthquake of 1755 did not see it as a worthy project, but as an undertaken injured by aesthetic marginality. Monotony, pragmatism, parsimony, repetition, and lack of originality shaped a group of powerful anathemas casting a dark shadow over it.¹⁶

Only the rationalist ideals guiding Pardal Monteiro’s perception of Pombaline architecture in the late 1940s would allow the recovery of Castilho’s insight (Pardal Monteiro, 1949, 1950).¹⁷ Pardal Monteiro found out, by means of a parallax effect that distances him from his colleague architects (Varela Gomes, 1988: 115-136), the modernity of Pombaline architecture and urbanism, re-opening the agenda of its artistic assessment (Pardal Monteiro, 1949: 21). He actually presents the undertaken as a lead for the Modern Movement on the basis of several criteria,¹⁸ including the rationality of the urban grid, and the simplicity and seriality of architectural types (supported by a pre-fabrication system). On these grounds, Monteiro overturns the stigmatizing burden of Pombaline architecture, and praises it as an aesthetic achievement. As he puts it, Pombaline reconstruction created

something so big, so perfect, so reasonable, so national and at the same time so international, that one can consider the total achievement, without doubt, as a major example of the Portuguese History of Architecture. (Pardal Monteiro, 1949: 16)

Pardal Monteiro’s approach to Pombaline architecture moves away from heritage-value concerns found in Castilho. It is entrenched in the aesthetical criteria supported by the rationalist principles of Modern architecture. As such, the *plainness* of Pombaline architecture is recognized as an *erudite artistic-architectural* achievement, for different reasons but in the same terms Kubler would years later attribute to 16th and 17th centuries Portuguese architecture.

Let us recall Kubler’s famous passage on *plain style* bringing about architecture that was “like a vernacular architecture, related to living dialect traditions more than to the great authors of the remote past” (Kubler, 1972: 3). Actually, to write that plain architecture is “like a vernacular architecture” implies both the recognition of fundamental similarities and fundamental differences. Thus, Portuguese plain architecture cannot be taken for a vernacular architecture in its overall sense. It is not vernacular architecture (though this distinction does not rely on a hierarchical logic as expected from someone who expanded art history as *history of things*). It is apparent that the comparison stressed the regional specificity of the phenomenon – that it is “related to living dialect traditions”, and thus belongs to an “entirely different

¹⁵ “We believe that not only the essential values of ‘plain style’ continued until the end of 17th century, but they also formed a stream that, on the account of utilitarian buildings and through the educational and administrative structures of military engineers, was able to survive under the most baroque phase of our history (D. João V), re-emerging in the rational pragmatism of Pombaline architecture” (translated by the author).

“E mais pensamos que não só os valores essenciais do ‘estilo chão’ se prolongaram até finais do século XVII como formaram uma corrente que, enquanto arquitectura utilitária e através das estruturas escolares e administrativas da engenharia militar, conseguiu sobreviver à fase mais barroca da nossa história (D. João V), constituindo o pressuposto do pragmatismo racionalista do pombalino.” (Horta Correia, 1991: 70)

¹⁶ See Cunha Leal (2008).

¹⁷ See also Cunha Leal (2008: 247-254).

¹⁸ The decision to rebuild the city disregarding its previous cast – an option connected to the principles of the so-called “Progressive” Urbanism, supported by the *Athens Charter* – and the submission of private to public benefit are some of evidences Monteiro points out; see Cunha Leal (2004: 6-17).

architectural geography” (Kubler, 1972: 3-5), - but it also concedes that despite its simplicity plain style did not leave the scope of erudite architectural design (*ibid.*: 3).

Furthermore, 16th century Portuguese architecture was read by Kubler as anticipating the transformations set in course in the 20th century, “when an ornate and eclectic taste surviving from the late 1800’s yielded to rationality and economic necessity in the abandonment of the heavily decorated surface” (*ibid.*: 3). Thus, Kubler’s appraisal of Portuguese plain architecture’s *typological and seriatinal* order finds some interesting parallels in Monteiro’s rationalist approach to Pombaline architecture, although the latter kept his distance from any thorough historiographical perspective.

Maybe that explains why the rupture set by Pardal Monteiro’s writings on Pombaline Lisbon did not have immediate repercussions. Bias of utilitarianism, repetition and monotony kept stigmatizing both its architecture, and its urban design, refusing its integration into Portuguese art history agenda (the only exception would be Praça do Comércio).

As is well known, thorough recognition of Lisbon’s post-earthquake urban plan had to wait until J. A. França’s study on the Reconstruction was published in 1965 (França, 1987). Yet, the plain qualities of Pombaline architecture did not achieve the same appraisal. The very preface of the book sign by the French art historian Pierre Francastel (Francastel, 1990: 7-34) (Francastel, 1974), would persevere in depreciating Pombaline reconstruction. Far from the anthropological openness of Kubler’s art history, Francastel’s assessment was based on the idea that artistic quality depends on two key values: monumentality, and originality.¹⁹ His conclusion would then be that, although the reconstruction of Lisbon might be praised for its technical expertise, it failed artistic and architectonic significance. It was the result of a pragmatic approach to the Enlightenment ideals.

França exceeds Francastel’s claims, yet maintains his *high* modernist criteria (i.e. criteria fed by an essentialist notion of a privileged autonomous aesthetic realm destined to innovate, and therefore hostile to tradition and conventions; in this sense, art history is the history of Eurocentric *high art* and its formal achievements). As such, there are no signs of the potential primary impact that Kubler’s *The Shape of Time* could have had in his account (actually, Kubler’s writings were only acknowledge as essential after the publication of *Portuguese Plain Architecture* in 1972. Its translation was made by Pais da Silva in the late 1970’s but would only be published in 1988. During this decade, Kubler’s studies arrived to FCSH’s art history curricula mainly via José Eduardo Horta Correia syllabus).

Disregarding the notion of art history as *history of things*, França’s modernist study attaches the reconstructed centre of Lisbon to the Enlightenment aesthetics on the basis of two exceptional elements: (1) Praça do Comércio’s monumentally; and (2) the thesis that the reconstruction of Lisbon was “essentially an urban planning phenomenon” (França, 1987: 173). It is as such that its artistic value is supported.²⁰ In opposition to the merely quantitative rhythm attributed to Pombaline architecture (França, 1987: 179), França praises the variation effect introduced into the urban grid of Baixa valley, an effect obtained by the contrast between the transversal and longitudinal alignment of the blocks and by the constant alteration of the street’s width in that area. It creates a “dynamic rhythm that energizes the urban grid, keeping it apart from the apparent monotony” (França, 1980: 46). He could then point out the total submission of architecture to urbanism, arguing that the dynamic orthogonal grid validated the plainness of housing buildings.

¹⁹ For Francastel an *artwork* could only be appreciated “by means of conducts able to create new schemes” (Francastel, 1987: 8-10).

²⁰ França writes: “the significant qualities of the work” are precisely “the immediate and aesthetic beauty of the plan, with its rational simplicity, economic and realistic sobriety, and programmatic beauty as a political ideal.” (França, 1994: 18)

Determined by these terms, França settles the aesthetic value of Pombaline Lisbon on the solid ground of originality and innovation championed by modernist theories. But, the undecorated, plain housing buildings could not achieve such excellence, and thus were not meant to be “aesthetically individualized, forgetting their determination” (França, 1987: 173). Indeed, França states that there are no isolated buildings, but only blocks, groups of building quarters (ibid. 174). The “main Pombaline building” could only be understood through the “unity of those groups” (ibid.). As a result he was forced to ignore significant parts of Pombaline city built outside the limits of Baixa valley, namely Chiado, which did not benefit from the dynamic orthogonal grid or its block sequences, although was part of the original plan and filled by the same housing typology as Baixa.

Finally, I would like to re-address the expanded (maybe post-modernist) idea of art history fostered by Kubler’s *The Shape of Time*, not only to highlight the connection between art historical accounts – meaning, narratives on the history of art – and contemporaneous artistic and architectural orientations and practices, but also to say that *plainness* was an artistic-architectural problem as much as it was a historiographical problem. In order to make sense out of a “completely different architectural geography”, in order to appreciate and legitimate such a deliberate option for the unexceptional, the yet unnoticed, or simple formal solutions, including vernacular ones, prevailing modernist framework of analysis had to be changed. In art history’s territory only few historians were, as Kubler was, committed to show the artistic relevance of unnoticed or depreciated elements (be it erudite or vernacular) – and therefore few were able to back the raise against modernist principles and bias set in motion by architects in the second half of the twentieth-century.

In Portugal, the expanded field of Modern architecture from 1950s onward was, as is well known, closely related to the survey on vernacular (rural) architecture set in course by the progressive Architects’ Union. Yet, as Eliana Sousa Santos as shown, it would also end up benefiting from Kubler’s historiographical recovery of plain architecture, as its simple, undecorated, and sober erudite forms “related to living dialect traditions” would buttress the legitimacy of Modern practices (Sousa Santos, 2012).

Surprisingly, *Kubler’s effect* took a long time to reach Lisbon’s plain architecture, including that of Pombaline reconstructed areas. Modernist bias implicitly prevailed over erudite plain Pombaline architecture, partly because it is an urban phenomenon (and not a rural one), and partly because until very recently all available accounts on the Reconstruction were either those of França or rightfully indebted to them. It seems that Pombaline architecture only achieved a new level of recognition as a result of the traumatic loss brought about by the 1988’s Chiado Fire and the recent application of Baixa-Chiado to Unesco’s world heritage (2004). Thus, once again, the very heritage-value acknowledged by Castilho a century ago opens the door for its thorough re-consideration in art history. The Kublerian re-reading it deserves will eventually arrive.

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George Kubler and the Historiography of Art

Raquel Henriques da Silva,¹ Universidade Nova de Lisboa

Raquelhs10@gmail.com

Abstract: *The shape of time* was published in 1962 and represents, to this author at least, a personal meditation on Kubler's own experience as a historian of art. His debt to Henri Focillon, his first master, is clear but, over time, Kubler improved on that model through diverse contributions. The most important of them, I believe, derived from the structuralism then under elaboration by linguistics and anthropology. The book also provided a challenge to the iconological systems ongoing ever since the 1939 Panofsky book, *Studies in Iconology*. Against the 'symbolic language' of iconological studies, Kubler, as early as the preamble, puts forward 'the art as form'. From his perspective, that was productive territory in keeping with how he had applied it to the cultural peripheries in Mexico, Spain and Portugal.

Fifty years on from its first publication, I would suggest it retains a very active assessment of thinking on both history and the theory of art. Hence, in my paper, I shall analyse the author's themes and concepts and reflect on their originality and productivity. I am especially interested in detecting how Kubler breaks up the occidental tradition linking history of art, philosophy, religion and literature, approaching anthropology, linguistics, the methodologies of scientific laboratory work as well as certain developments in the field of contemporary art. Finally, I will portray the major contributions of this book: the claim that art moves in an expanded geography, where the topography of centers and peripheries is always an open and ongoing process.

Following this reflection, it becomes clear that this book is testimonial in character: a man restrained in theory and of great passion for positive analysis throughout the diversity of artistic systems, Kubler's *Shape of Time* is a kind of mirror on his work as historian. One can say that its exact concepts and their prospective rhythmic composition, in apparent paradox, represent theory as method.

(...) Like crustaceans we depend for survival upon an outer skeleton, upon a shell of historic cities and houses filled with things belonging to definable portions of the past (...). G. Kubler, *The Shape of Time*, 1

¹ Associate Professor at Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Universidade Nova de Lisboa (FCSH-UNL), Department of Art History. Director of Instituto de História de Arte (since 2010). She coordinates the Master in Museology in FCSH and a Research Project about the History of Art Museums in Portugal (2010-2013) with a team of candidates to doctorate. Author of research and dissemination studies in the fields of urbanism and architecture (19th-20th century), visual arts and museology. Former director of Museu do Chiado- Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea (1994-97) and the Instituto Português de Museus (1997-2002). She was a former member of the board of directors of the Serralves Foundation, representing the Ministry of Culture (2000-06). She was scientific coordinator for the preparation of candidacy of Lisbon's historical centre for World Heritage, later participating in the Working Group, which outlined the Strategic Plan for Baixa-Chiado.

Preamble

In the *Dictionary of Art Historians* (Sorensen, 2012), George Kubler (1912-1996) is termed a ‘maverick’, with a primary meaning of an ‘unbranded calf’ and, by extension, ‘unorthodox person’ or ‘person who dissents from the ideas of an organized group’ (Hornby *et al.*, 1987: 525). This is a qualification particularly appropriate to encapsulating the particularity of the career of this historian of art and that he himself might appreciate. It is worthwhile fleshing out this dimension in order to better contextualize the reflection that follows.

Despite being the son of German immigrant parents and having studied in Munich and Berlin throughout two years (1931-33), his career would unfurl at Yale University but with a very specific European dimension: as a student of Henri Focillon, as this great historian of the Middle Ages was under contract to this university as from his arrival in the United States in 1938.

Kubler’s entire career as art historian of Pre-Columbian and Ibero-American Art² took place under the auspices of Yale University. However, he was never to give up on travelling. It should be remembered, for example, that according to his own comments in the Preamble to the *The Shape of Time*, this book was in large part written in Naples in early 1960 (Kubler 2007, x), and that he had already been in Lisbon in 1957 to prepare the ground for the book co-authored with Martín Soria and published in 1959, entitled *Art and Architecture in Spain and Portugal and Their American Dominions* (Kubler, 1972: 1). The themes that he chose to research were what made him a ‘maverick’. As we shall return to on several occasions, pre-Colombian art had, hitherto, fell within the scope of the field of anthropology, which served as the framework not only for the ongoing archaeology but also the history of art deployed to document the ‘essential cultural unity’³. As regards Iberian-American art, this was a domain also conceived from the perspective of the commissioning colonial power and not within the terms of the actual place of production.

Kubler introduced this displacement from the centre to the periphery given that both Spain and Portugal had been or were colonial powers whilst simultaneously peripheral to the European artistic scene. Moving the focus away from the most prestigious high points of European artistic production to confront the far distant times of the pre-Colombian arts, with their shortage of sources, especially in literary terms, this field of study proved the core of the revolution triggered by Kubler in the theoretical approach to European History of Art. As he himself stated with a particular sharpness of clarity:

The Shape of Time was written at the end of a twenty-year period when I had been teaching and writing about Spanish architecture (1957), Latin American art (1959), and pre-Columbian archaeology (1962). The three books occupied me since before 1950, and it seemed timely after the completion of the pre-Columbian manuscript in 1959 to bring together some of the theoretical points that had emerged from these overviews of the art of the New World, both in isolation and in relation to Spain and Portugal. This triad of studies seemed like a firm tripod in structure, likely to stand upright on uneven ground, and it supported my teaching during those years. (Kubler, 1975: 759)

² See the article by Thomas Reese, ‘George Alexander Kubler (1912-1996), People in the News: In Memoriam’, in particular: ‘(...) in 1929, Kubler entered Yale College, where he remained throughout his life. As Kubler later told me, his was a career that developed in a time when institutions nurtured, created, and sustained scholars, instead of employing them (...)’ (Reese, 2009).

³ Expression from Gordon Willey, quoted by Kubler: ‘He found the key difference to be in the anthropologist’s reliance on ‘essential cultural unity’ as contrasted with the art historian’s insistence on cultural pluralism in the same area’ (Kubler, 1975).

The Shape of Time: the components for a revolution

Ever since its publication, *The Shape of Time* has been translated into a range of language and has come in for a high level of quality criticism. The summary that follows does not include any new interpretations, nor even out of economy of text does it extend to any analysis of aspects that have in the meanwhile aged somewhat. I have drawn upon a specialist bibliography for this work whilst nevertheless also opting to remain loyal to the first reading that I made of his work in the 1980s. From my perspective, this book represented an epistemological ‘revolution’ that I shall contextualize at the end of this article.

The legacy of Henri Focillon

Despite important contributions made by other books and articles, it is in *The Shape of Time*, written in 1961 and published in 1962, where Kubler defines the core of his theory of art. What immediately leaps out at readers is the absence of any critical showboating in what the author refers to as ‘my little book’ in a 1975 article that I shall draw on below (Kubler, 1975: 757). The number of notes is fairly limited and both the structure and the style are highly literary, articulated with aesthetic effectiveness and making recourse to a fluid and metaphoric writing style.⁴

In my opinion - that does not find any echo in any of the critical articles I have thus far been able to consult - there is, in this first material characterizing works of art, the imprint of Henri Focillon, an intellectual who had a similar style of writing as if striving to be the means to capture plurality and, on occasion, the opacity of the complex levels of existence to artistic objects. We might also accept that even the very title of the work – in which neither the word Art nor the word History is present – might well be in homage to *Vie des Formes* by Focillon, published in Paris in 1934 and translated by Kubler in 1942 for Yale University Press and entitled *The Life of Forms in Art*.⁵

Kubler repeatedly recognized the importance of this book by the French historian on his own reflections. In 1975, he expressed his own surprise at how ‘little has been written about Focillon’s art theory’, highlighting the way in which ‘(he) urged his students in the 1930s to study technical phenomena for their objective nature and for information they provide about artistic experience’, before adding that: ‘For Focillon’s method, technique was a major topic of historical research, permitting a comprehension which recapitulates the process of creation, itself located in the relations among mind, technique, and matter’. It should be added that, according to Kubler, ‘Focillon disclaimed being author of a system’. Instead, he began by sketching out the various imaginary worlds which compose the history of art and by searching for the special logic presiding over their creation. He saw the ‘special logic’ of art as related to the life of history in distinctive ways which vary according to time and place, but always as different from the ways of history and not to be confused with it (...)’ (Kubler, 1975: 757-758).

Quoting another ‘penetrating essay’ by Focillon in 1937 entitled ‘Généologie de l’unique’, Kubler returns to emphasizing how ‘his insistence on the uniqueness of the work of art also

⁴ These material characteristics of works of art were highlighted in the wake of its publication. I would quote, for example, in the critical essay by Priscilla Colt, who stated as early as 1963: ‘To summarize Professor Kubler’s thesis is nearly impossible since the essay itself is more in the nature of a summary than an exhaustive exposition of a very complex set of propositions. Moreover a summary cannot possibly convey the elegance and subtlety of his aesthetically very satisfying presentation’ (Colt, 1963: 78).

⁵ See critical review of this edition by Emanuel Winternitz (1943).

places him in opposition to the social-scientific classing of art by statistical means and among the humanistic proponents of ‘sciences of qualities’ which he regarded as a task for the history and theory of art’ (*ibid.*).⁶

Finally, I would also stress the position taken by Kubler as regards the aspects of Focillon’s thinking that ‘affected his American students’, referring especially to: ‘his interest in social morphology, reflecting a lifelong concern with socialist thought and paralleling his studies in the morphology of religious arts. Another was the idea of ‘spiritual families’, allowing unexpected comparisons between artists of different cultures and eras, in a reclassification resembling ‘races unknown to anthropology’. What Focillon represented to Kubler was not merely some master of the History of Art field but rather, and far more so, an example for life, in accordance with the early 20th century concepts of humanism that both cherished so dearly. However, there were also productive influences across the ideological and political fields. We should remember that Focillon found himself in the United States as a refugee from the Second World War and sought to maintain, alongside other exiles, the intensity of French cultural life. Hence, the taste for sociology (a social morphology defined by Durkheim at the end of the 19th century), ‘the socialist thought’, the continued interest in religious art and the openness to ‘races unknown to anthropology’ explain, in Kubler’s own words, his decision to write the ‘History of Ancient American Art’, which appeared in 1962 (Kubler, 1975: 758).⁷

Art as a system of formal relations

Inspired on Focillon’s work, *La vie des Formes*, Kubler’s own book represents a methodological leap forwards in relation to the model existing, and a catalyst for leveraging the experience built up through working on pre-Colombian civilizations, portrayed through the archaeological remains found and changing the long term framework.

As from his Preamble, Kubler affirms his critical position in relation to the understanding of art ‘as symbolic language’ and countering this position with ‘another definition of art, as a system of formal relations’ given that ‘The forms of communication are easily separable from any meaningful transmission’ (Kubler, 2007: IX). Basing his position on the then most recent linguistics studies, he considered how ‘The structural forms can be sensed independently of meaning’, whilst accepting that the regularities observed in this field ‘probably govern the formal infrastructure of every art’ (*ibid.*: X) in temporal successions in series and sequences.

Alongside linguistics, with the heavy connotations of the Structuralism that Lévi-Strauss was also applying in a renewed Anthropology, Kubler openly assumes a special debt towards the archaeological works of A. L. Kroeber. The latter studied Peruvian ceramics through ‘statistical analysis based upon the assumption that undated items belonging to the same form-class can be arranged in correct chronological order by shape-design correlations (...)’. This methodology fed into a progressively advancing theoretical framework expressed in works able to generate great enthusiasm in Kubler, for example *Configurations of Culture Growth*, 1944, and *Style and Civilization*, 1956 (Kubler, 2007: 121).

Other references also proved fundamental to Kubler and also interweaving with the studies carried out by Kroeber. Distancing himself from the biological metaphors that were so dear to Focillon, he proposes that ‘Physical Metaphors’ would prove of greater effectiveness. His reflections on this issue are certainly worthwhile and including:

⁶ Focillon’s essay ‘Généologie de l’unique’ was published as ‘Fragment’ em *Actes du 2e Congrès International d’Esthétique et de Science de l’Art*. Paris, 1937, 2: 120-127.

⁷ On the cultural activities of Focillon in the United States in conjunction with other exiles, see (Kritzman, 2005: 733). On the concept of ‘social morphology’, see (Turner, 2005: 109).

‘Perhaps a system of metaphors drawn from physical science would have clothed the situation of art more adequately than the prevailing biological metaphors: especially if we are dealing in art with the transmission of some kind of energy, with impulses, generating centers, and relay points; with increments and losses in transit; with resistances and transformers in the circuit. In short, the language of electrodynamics might have suited us better than the language of botany; and Michael Faraday might have been a better mentor than Linnaeus for the study of material culture’ (*ibid.*: 8).

This quotation illustrates one of the most innovative aspects to the work of Kubler: his attention to the world of scientific research, mathematically based and, as was said at the time, with cybernetic ambitions. He became a genuine enthusiast but this procedure is, in itself, a metaphor: to displace art from its consecrated niches and chronologies, thereby opening up the non-art of indigenous Americans and the fusions taking place in colonial era arts, required the discovery of non-academic models of reflection.

In 1965, in one of the first critical receptions of *The Shape of Time*, Jan Bialostocki was already positing this fact in stating ‘Professor Kubler’s book is perhaps one of the first results of historical, systematic thinking that encompasses much more than our Mediterranean cultural tradition’ (Bialostocki, 1965).

Fundamental concepts and major questions

Kubler departs from a strong affirmation: artistic production, whilst distinct, belongs to the ‘whole range of man-made things, including all tools and written’ and ‘such things mark the passage of time with greater accuracy than we know, and they fill with shapes of a limited variety’ (Kubler, 2007: 1).

This position, that the number of forms is limited even when approaching ‘the least useful and most expressive products of human industry’ (*ibid.*: 2) proves of great interest. Kubler thus compares both the romantic means of conceiving art with the scope for unlimited invention, a fundamental component to the vanguard then prevailing in contemporary society, and an issue we shall return to later.

This statement is furthermore reinforced and with still greater emphasis: ‘Everything made now is either a replica or a variant of some thing made a little time ago and so on back without break to the first morning of human time’. Whilst this had previously provoked contemporary art, this now served in its legitimation through an attitude that owed much to scientific thinking and equally affirming an optimistic vision on the History of Humanity.

As an expression and consequence of this finitude in forms, Kubler claims there is ‘a continuous series run from (stone tools, the oldest surviving things made by men) to the things of today’ (*ibid.*: 2).

There thus emerges the two core concepts to his heuristic perspective – that of sequence and that of series – and the main hermeneutic problem – determining, throughout the long sequences, the respective ruptures and the continuities – and within their scope to defining them and thereby opening up a new question: that of style, an issue present throughout the book.

According to Kubler, the word style covered an excessive variety of issues and stating clearly: ‘Style describes a specific figure in space better than a type of existence in time (Kubler, 2007: 3)’, with this latter situation containing that which was of interest.

Whilst the concept of style did not serve his purposes, alternative concepts seemed equally limited. He successively criticized the limits of iconology, biography and, most particularly ‘the ‘biological metaphors’ used to describe the past’ and taking his inspiration to a greater or lesser extent from the history of science (*ibid.*: 3).

The organization of formal sequences and series, over the course of historical timeframes, nevertheless constantly re-verifies the convictions held at the outset: that the number of ‘prime

objects' is highly reduced and that they resemble the 'prime numbers of mathematics because no conclusive rule is known to govern the appearance of either' (*ibid.*: 35). However, around every 'important work of art', 'Prime objects and replications denote principal inventions, and the entire system of replicas, reproductions, copies, reductions, transfers, and derivations (...)' (*ibid.*: 35). For a historian of art, this thereby opens up an immense terrain for research within the scope of which there are considerable 'Diagnostic Difficulties' (*ibid.*: 36).

In the already quoted article, published in 1975, thirteen years on from *The Shape of Time*, Kubler recognizes that despite the criticisms that he made of iconology as a theory of art, he still learned a great deal from Panofsky, whose lectures he attended 'at the Institute of Fine Arts in New York from 1936 to 1938'. What most interested him were the studies on the 'Renaissances' of classical art throughout the Middle Ages and thereby enabling him to grasp that 'Continuous form does not predicate continuous meaning, nor does continuity of form or of meaning necessarily imply continuity of culture'.

For the study of the long durations of 'civilizations of ancient America', 'where literary sources are unavailable', these reflections were of particular importance enabling him to draft another fundamental concept: that of the 'disjunction of form and meaning'. Hence, he confronted the American ethnology then prevailing that perceived the long period of Meso-American cultures 'as a huge cultural system'.⁸

In my opinion, one of the most interesting aspects of Kubler's reflection is the hesitation with which he evaluates the production of replicas. In principle, these are monotonous copies of 'prime objects' although he also affirms that

The replica-mass resembles certain habits of popular speech, as when a phrase spoken upon the stage or in a film, and repeated in millions of utterances, becomes a part of the language of a generation and finally a dated cliché. (Kubler, 2007: 35)

This is clearly not about making any elegies but rather, and above all, in recognition that replicas have their own dynamic existence and a strong impact on cultural life.

However, of greatest immediate importance is another affirmation:

Our distinction between prime objects and replicas also illustrates a capital difference between European and non-European arts. With European objects we often can approach closer to the hot moment of invention than in non-European ones, where our knowledge is so often based only upon replicas of uniform or debased quality. (Kubler, 2007: 39)

This reflection shall prove, within the framework of Western art theory, one of the leading contributions towards decentralizing the Euro-centrism that had proved a characteristic ever since its first foundation in the eighteenth century in addition to all its antecedents throughout classical culture and stretching back to at least Imperial Rome.

Kubler revealed and would continue to reveal territories hitherto underestimated in the expansion of the Western artistic scene and as a highly important component to the colonization of the Americas. When deploying them as examples, he proves especially brilliant and concludes, as regards the complexity of Mexican art of the sixteenth century, that the concepts of primary objects and replicas lose all relevance as well as the notion of a Systematic Age, and justifiably stating:

⁸ In this excerpt, Kubler affirms that, while under formulation since the 1930s, 'Panofsky's conclusions did not become completely available until his lectures in Stockholm in 1960' referring to *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*. Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell [1960]. He also refers in the same note to the iconographic studies he undertook were 'much affected by Panofsky's magnum opus: *The Iconography of the Art of Teotihuacan*, 1967, and *Studies in Classic Maya Iconography*, 1969' (Kubler, 1975: 760-762).

Hence the terms «retarded» and «progressive» are descriptive: no judgment of quality is intended, for the terms only record the antithetic phases of any moment of change, by describing their anchorage in time as backward or forward looking. (Kubler, 2007: 53)

Art, a humanist field

Kubler makes yet another innovative contribution, taking into account the times in which he wrote: his already mentioned fascination with scientific language and his demand that art and science ‘both deal with needs satisfied by the mind and the hands in the manufacture of things’ and ‘tools and instruments, symbols and expressions all correspond to needs, and all must pass through design into matter (Kubler, 2007: 9).

However, he simultaneously points to the existence of a community of needs and knowledge, and that it would be peremptory to consider that ‘the differences between science and art are nevertheless irreducible, quite as much so as the differences between reason and feeling, between necessity and freedom’ (*ibid.*: 9). Expressed otherwise:

A tool is always intrinsically simple, however elaborate its mechanisms may be, but a work of art, which is a complex of many stages and levels of crisscrossed intentions is always intrinsically complicated, however simple its effect may seem. (Kubler, 2007: 60)

And still more categorically:

In rough terms, artistic invention is one among many ways of altering the set of the mind, while useful invention marks out the scope of the knowledge the instrument was previously designed to encompass. (Kubler, 2007: 60)

Within this context, the work of the historian of art is, by its inherent nature, especially complex. Considering how ‘the beauty of art is ordinarily incommunicable’ (Kubler, 2007: 10), the contribution of the historian ‘is the discovery of the manifolds of time’. He compares this to an artist who ‘transposes, reduces, composes and colors a facsimile (...)’ (*ibid.*: 11).

Kubler and contemporary art

In 2001, Pamela M. Lee published a very interesting article entitled ‘«Ultramoderne»: or, how George Kubler stole the Time in Sixties Art’ (Lee, 2001).⁹ Her objective was to explore the most profound reasons explaining the interest of contemporary artists in Kubler’s book, in the years immediately after their publication and as is the case with the analysis of the ‘remarkable essay, published by Robert Smithson, in 1966, in *Arts Magazine* entitled ‘Quasi-Infinity and the Waning of Space’ (*ibid.*). According to Lee, Smithson writes in a highly peculiar fashion and simultaneously ‘concrete poetry and hallucinatory rant’, mixing ‘the most disparate cultural phenomena: pyramids and ziggurats, modernist literary criticism, classical physics, science fiction’ (*ibid.*) in which illustration was a fundamental component: ‘the essay made graphic use of the space of the page, so that textual information and visual information were held in dynamic tension with another, its ground noisy with pictures and solicited citations’ (*ibid.*). These wordy descriptions included quotations from *The Shape of Time*, published four years earlier.

⁹ According to the author (2001: 73), this text represented one part of her next book: *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Lee, 2004).

Lacking the scope for any extended reflection on the work of Lee, I would nevertheless highlight two aspects. Firstly, the interest of Smithson and other artists contemporary to Kubler¹⁰ would foster and drive curiosity in his field of work dedicated to the the pre-Colombian arts, which renovated one of the most stable themes of the 20th century vanguards: the primitivisms, the questioning of classical and academic traditions and the successively renewed fountains of inspiration. Furthermore, the style of writing of Kubler – not particularly academic, without any major critical tone, very rich in metaphors, somewhat unexpected and provocative, and making recourse to suggestions from mathematics and cybernetics to conceive of history of art – could not but drive the enthusiasm of the young artists in the 1960s that introduced the first major ruptures in vanguardist history.

Lee places value on still other aspects, and to an extent reaching further than mutual influence, detects the common terrain to the works of Kubler and the research of Smithson. Quoting an extract from the former, identifying the difficulties in thinking historically about ‘our own time’, she considers the author approaches the question of ‘presentness,’¹¹ an unstable and shapeless time, assumedly veiled to history but, on the contrary, still open to all types of experimentations. It proves somewhat natural that artists appreciated this expectant attitude on behalf of what was scorned by many contemporary critics, defenders of what were the orthodoxies of the vanguards of the first half of the century.

Stemming from this lack of faith in the ability to think the present, there emerges another point of encounter between Smithson and Kubler that Lee establishes: their shared love of ‘futurity’, and especially ‘the problem of communication over time’ (*ibid*: 58). Both were enthusiasts of the mathematical work of Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics: or the Control and the Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, published in 1948. To a certain extent, it is this shared interest in the interconnections between art and science that provide the framework for the work of John Baldessari, *Painting for Kubler*, presented in the Jewish Museum in 1970 and entitled *Software: Information Technology* (*ibid*: 60-63). This is the text that substantiates the painting:

PAINTING FOR KUBLER

THIS PAINTING OWES ITS EXISTENCE TO
 PRIOR PAINTINGS, BY LIKING THIS SOLUTION
 YOU SHOULD NOT BE BLOCKED IN YOUR CONTIN-
 UED ACCEPTANCE OF PRIOR INVENTIONS. TO
 ATTAIN THIS POSITION, IDEAS OF FORMER
 PAINTING HAD TO BE RETHOUGHT IN ORDER TO TRAN-
 SCEND FORMER WORK. TO LIKE THIS PAINTING, YOU
 WILL HAVE TO UNDERSTAND PRIOR WORK. ULTIMATE-

¹⁰ Palmela Lee, in one of her footnotes, refers to how other artists quote Kubler, such as Robert Morris, Ad Reinhardt, among other artists and critics he received letters from Asger Jorn, Juan Downey and Brian O’Doherty, among others. See also *Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere* (Reynolds, 2003).

¹¹ I would quote the excerpt from Kubler referred to by Lee: “We cannot clearly decry the contours of the great currents of our time: we are too much inside the streams of contemporary happening to chart their flow and volume. We are confronted with inner and outer historical surfaces. Of these only the outer surfaces of the completed past are accessible to historical knowledge”. (Lee, 2001: 56)

LY THIS WORK WILL AMALGAMATE WITH THE EXISTING
BODY OF KNOWLEDGE.

As Palmela Lee makes due mention, this is a rare display of interest by one of the most vanguardist painters of the 1960s in being dedicated to a historian of art who neither patronized, studied or understood their works. However, that does not ignore one fundamental dimension: the shared demand that art is an essential component to life and that artists have always worked on the questions posed by the scientific establishment of the day. For example: productive uncertainty, the multiplicity in the angles of vision and analysis on the complexity of the world and especially according to Wiener, ‘the first principle of cybernetics’, ‘the property of being able to adjust future conduct by past performance’ (Lee 2001: 64). We should turn to Kubler to clarify the contemporary relevance of his own theory:

Our lines of communication with the past therefore originated as signals which become commotions emitting further signals in an unbroken alternating sequence of events, signal, recreated event, renewed signal, etc. Celebrated events have undergone the cycle millions of times each instant throughout their history. (Lee, 2001: 65).¹²

Lee continues her reflection in considering how the principle of entropy, as heralded by Wiener and appropriated by Smithson and applied by both to survey contemporary artistic production, is also to be found in Kubler and characterized by the same concern:

As it is, our perception of things is a circuit unable to admit a great variety of new sensations all at once. Human perception is best suited to slow modifications of routine behavior. Hence invention has always had to halt at the gate of perception where the narrowing of the way allows much less to pass than the importance of the messages or the need of the recipients would justify. (Lee, 2001: 68)

The points of confluence studied by Lee do not however allow us to overlook the fact that Kubler held major reservations in relation to contemporary art. And unflinching critic: ‘our conceptions of artistic genius underwent such fantastic transformations in the romantic agony of nineteenth century (...)’ (Kubler, 2007: 6). And he also reflects critically on ‘an ambivalence in everything touching upon change’, before stating: ‘we cultivate *avant gardisme* together with the conservative reactions that radical innovation generates’ (Kubler, 2007: 56-7). Seeking out examples from past eras, he defines ‘six types of careers: precursors, *hommes à tout faire*, obsessives, evangelists, ruminatives and rebels (...)’ (Kubler, 2007: 84), while accepting ‘For instance, progressive painting today mainly attracts rebels (...)’ (*ibid*: 64).

On the other hand, Kubler sought to feel out his own times: ‘A recent phenomenon in Europe and America, perhaps not antedating 1950, is the approaching exhaustion of the possibility of new discoveries of major types in the history of art’ (*ibid*: 9), which led him to propose the concept of ‘Aesthetic fatigue’, also detectable in ancient cultures (*ibid*: 73-75).

All these approximations to the present should not be perceived as any claim to understanding or indeed commitment to the art of his own time. I believe that *The Shape of Time* only very superficially influenced those American artists who did read the book in the

¹² See Kubler (2007: 18).

wake of its publication¹³ and that these artists and some critics held absolutely no influence over the historian.

However, half a century later, it is today clearer how some artists captured from Kubler one of the first formulations of Post-Modernism, proposing the end of closed models for the understanding of reality, and especially Modernist formulates. It is noticeable the way in which he turns to Walter Gropius as an example of Purism that rejected History:

They sought to invent everything they touched all over again in austere forms which seem to owe nothing to past traditions. (...) By rejecting history, the purist denies the fullness of things. While restricting the traffic at the gates of perceptions, he denies the reality of duration. (Kubler, 2007: 113).

Standing against the proponents of *Strukturforschung* – ‘they seem to think of a culture as if it were a circular lens, varying in thickness according to the antiquity of the pattern – Kubler imagines ‘the flow of time as assuming the shapes of fibrous bundles, with each fiber corresponding to a need upon a particular theater of action, and the lengths of the fibers varying as to the duration of each need and the solution to its problems. The cultural bundles therefore consist of variegated fibrous lengths of happening, mostly long, and many brief. They are juxtaposed largely by chance, and rarely by conscious forethought or rigorous planning’ (*ibid.*: 111).

Such affirmations are at the core of the cultural mutations of the second half of the 20th century and Kubler detected them through both the effectiveness of his scientific culture but also because of his gaze on the present incorporated the depth of the field of research generated by his objects of study: the most ancient of cultures, dead or transfigured by the harshness of colonial era confrontations.

The Shape of Time and Portuguese plain architecture...

In the biographies and bibliographies that I have thus far been able to consult on George Kubler, the work *Portuguese plain architecture. Between spices and diamonds*, published in 1972, never gets referenced.¹⁴ For a Portuguese historian of art, this is rather an unusual finding given that the work is an outstanding landmark for any student not only of Portuguese architecture between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries but for many other specialists on other periods.¹⁵

¹³ In his 1981 article, ‘Formes du temps réexaminé’ in which Kubler engages with the critical analysis and comment on *The Shape of Time* and refers to the contemporary artists who quote him and affirms: ‘Cette estime peut s’expliquer par le sentiment qu’ils avaient, comme artistes, d’être libérés de ce qu’on a appelé le «pigeonnier de l’histoire de l’art» pour désigner les hiérarchies rigides conservées dans ce sanctuaire, l’industrie des manuels’, before more specifically dwelling on Reinhardt, Robert Morris and Robert Smithson (Kubler, 1981: 13-14).

¹⁴ Nevertheless, the work has been subject to some critical analysis. See, for example, the review of ‘Portuguese Plain Architecture between spices and diamonds, 1521-1706’ (Smith, 1973: 472). In this text, Robert Smith, the great historian of Portuguese woodcarving, is fairly critical in relation to certain factual shortcomings in the Kubler work regarding advice given to A. Ayres de Carvalho. See also, for a far more positive but less analytically based work, ‘Portuguese Plain Architecture between spices and diamonds, 1521-1706’ (Hoag, 1974).

¹⁵ Whilst not the objective of this text to study the critical response in Portugal to ‘Portuguese Plain Architecture...’, I would consider that such stems from two levels of reasoning: the first derives from the fact that the theses of Kubler on the particular characteristics of Portuguese architecture served to strengthen, and with an external authority, the studies of Mário Tavares Chicó on Mendicant Gothic architecture and of J. H. Pais da Silva on Mannerist architecture. The second level results from the absolute adhesion of José Eduardo Horta Correia to the defining premises of ‘Portuguese Plan Architecture...’ that informed his own studies on Portuguese architecture and, in the 1980s, decisively influenced all his student advocates on the Master’s Degree in the History of Art at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences of Lisbon’s Nova University, and myself included. We should also mention that a Portuguese translation of the work entitled *A Arquitectura Portuguesa Chã. Entre as Especiarias e os Diamantes, 1521-1706* was only published in 1988 (Editorial Veja), following its translation by J. Henrique Pais da Silva and a preface by José Eduardo Horta Correia. I would like to quote the following excerpt from this preface: ‘throughout the

Personally, I first read *Portuguese plain architecture...* to prepare for a subject on a Master's Degree of Art program dedicated to Modern Architecture in Portugal in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and lectured by José Eduardo Horta Correia. Thereafter, I signed up to the large Kubler fan club and his concept of 'plain architecture' as best explaining the particularities of Portuguese architectonic Mannerism in relation to its contemporaries across the remainder of the European panorama and especially the prevailing Spanish and Italian contexts.

Only after reading, and again on the advice of Horta Correia, *The Shape of Time* and here I discovered the theory that enabled the author to grasp and so blatantly enhance the Portuguese architecture of the modern period. What struck me as of particular relevance were the concepts of 'prime objects' and 'replicas' and the underlying proposition that the former are always limited and how in each era the majority of artistic objects are doomed to the replica status. However, this fact was simultaneously stripped of any negative charge as in certain specific social, political and cultural contexts, replicas gained their own autonomy and were susceptible to posing new questions, not only due to their capacity to reorganize the 'primary objects' but also out of their ability to open up new and enriching interchanges. In the Portuguese case, Kubler, certainly highly influenced by Mário Tavares Chicó, considers that 'the Portuguese plain style is like a vernacular architecture, related to living dialect traditions more than to the Great authors of the remote past' (Kubler, 1972: 3).

Applying his position to the classical styles, his option to establish temporal sequences and expressive series, without undue concern for their biographic ordering, emphasizing formal analysis over iconology and erudite literature, Kubler thus discovered, and with an extraordinarily brilliant level of insight, that modern Portuguese architecture experienced its own autonomous period of expressive history. Its roots ran deep into the historical Italian legacy (and French, I would add) but its particularities arose out of the late-Medieval landmarks dotting the Alentejo, where the once predominant Mudejarism still influenced and out of the needs and motivations generated by the periods of maritime expansion. He thereby noted and valued the peripheral location of Portugal in terms of both the geographic and erudite European culture before suggesting that this physical location was central within the framework of the new world economy under formation.

I found these and other insights in *The Shape of Time*, read with all the subjectivity of a Portuguese student and specialist in the history of art, and a follower in the Horta Correia tradition. This short book remains still today my point of reference whenever necessary to counter the false hierarchies of the history of art *vulgate*.

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course of this work, George Kubler would seem to retain present the methodological considerations that he so enthusiastically defended some years earlier in *The Shape of Time* and that he himself quotes at the beginning of this current work in affirming that 'no style or category excludes the possible simultaneous convergence of many other earlier categories', denying 'any solitary convergence of period, location and style' (Horta Correia, 1988: VIII).

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Stars, Rainbows, and Living Dialects: George Kubler's Vision of History as Metaphor

Reva Wolf,¹ State University of New York at New Paltz
wolfr@newpaltz.edu

Abstract: In his introduction to *Portuguese Plain Architecture*, George Kubler uses a metaphor to characterize the architecture that is the focus of his study. “The Portuguese plain style,” he writes, “is like a vernacular architecture, related to living dialect traditions more than to the great authors of the remote past.” Kubler had a knack for the apt metaphor. This talent for making history come to life by creating seemingly tangible comparisons is no doubt rooted in Kubler’s background, for in college, initially he studied creative writing. This background served him well when he shifted gears and decided to become an art historian. But Kubler’s attraction to metaphor is more than a desire to create the felicitous turn of phrase. In this paper, I argue that the use of metaphor is not only a central feature of George Kubler’s writing, but also of his conceptualization of history. Offering examples from a range of his publications, I show that metaphor is fundamental to Kubler’s vision of how we understand the past. I propose that for Kubler, metaphor provided a unique way to address the limits of historical knowledge that we all must confront.

Introduction

In the introduction to his 1972 book, *Portuguese Plain Architecture*, George Kubler used a metaphor to characterize the architecture that is the focus of his study. “The Portuguese plain style,” he wrote, “is like a vernacular architecture, related to living dialect traditions more than to the great authors of the remote past” (Kubler, 1972: 3). Kubler had a knack for the apt metaphor. This talent for making history come to life by creating seemingly tangible comparisons is rooted in Kubler’s intellectual background and early proclivities. At Yale University, where he enrolled as an undergraduate in 1929, initially he studied literature, and he wrote fiction for a student publication.² This background served him well when he shifted gears and decided to become an art historian. But Kubler’s attraction to metaphor is more than a desire to create the felicitous turn of phrase. As Thomas Reese perceptively observed in his

¹ Reva Wolf teaches and writes about art of the eighteenth century to the present. She is the author of two books: *Goya and the Satirical Print in England and on the Continent, 1730 to 1850* and *Andy Warhol, Poetry, and Gossip in the 1960s*. Her recent work focuses on methodology, art and humor, the reception of art, and issues of appropriation and authenticity. In 2008, she organized a panel on George Kubler’s book, *The Shape of Time*, and in 2009 published an essay about this book in *Art Journal*. She has held fellowships at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harvard University, and the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton. She is Professor of Art History at the State University of New York at New Paltz and was a 2010-11 recipient of the State University of New York Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching. Wolf received her Ph.D. in 1987 from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.

² On Kubler’s undergraduate studies, see Thomas F. Reese, “Editor’s Introduction” (Reese, 1985: xvii). For the link of Kubler’s attraction to metaphor to his undergraduate literary pursuits, see “*The Shape of Time: Of Stars and Rainbows*” (Wolf, 2009: 70).

introduction to the 1985 book of Kubler's writings that Reese edited, metaphors were "important historical tools" in Kubler's publications (Reese, 1985: xxxv). Taking Reese's insight as a starting point, in this paper I show that the use of metaphor is a principal feature of George Kubler's writing, and that in addition to being a "tool," it is central to his very conceptualization of history. Offering examples from a wide range of his publications, I show that metaphor is fundamental to Kubler's vision of how we understand the past. I propose that for Kubler, metaphor provided a unique way to address the limits of historical knowledge that we all must confront.

Kubler used an array of metaphors for distinct purposes. I have detected four kinds of metaphor that feature in his publications:

- comparisons of one time and place to another;
- metaphors used to illustrate particular qualities of objects or persons;
- those used to explain a particular phenomenon or point; and
- those enlisted to characterize the methods of art history.

Of course, several of his metaphors fit into more than one of these four categories. As with any exercise in classification, mine involves some degree of simplification. Still, analyzing Kubler's writings by putting a magnifying glass up to each of these kinds of metaphor will help us to appreciate his unique contributions to art history, and to understand why his writings have been so influential – to artists and architects as much as to art critics and art historians.³

Comparison

Turning, then, to the first kind of metaphor, involving comparisons of distinct times and places, it soon becomes apparent that such comparisons serve Kubler's ongoing examination of time and place as the defining aspects of history. Kubler's earliest writings contain comparisons of distinct historical moments. With these comparisons, typically the subject is a culture unfamiliar to European and North American audiences, and the comparison is with the European mainstream of art history. The purpose of the comparison, then, is to make familiar to us a culture that may seem remote or ungraspable. Thus, in an essay of 1943, he compares the local roots of fifteenth-century Aztec sculpture to those of French Gothic sculpture, to which, he proposes, it is "perhaps analogous."⁴ One year later, in a study of the design for West African domestic architecture created in the late eighteenth century by the Swede Andrew Johansen, and published in London by the engineer Carl Bernhard Wadström, another Swede, Kubler proposes that this design "prefigures" the "rational" or "mechanized" modernist housing of the first decades of the twentieth century. He explains, "[t]he house on stilts evokes Le Corbusier's predilection for elevating the living space above ground level" (Kubler, 1985a: 31).⁵ Indeed, Kubler foregrounds the comparison by placing it front and center, in the title of his study: "The Machine for Living in 18th Century West Africa."

While comparative metaphors of this sort are most typical of Kubler's early writing, examples appear throughout his career. In an essay of 1961 about the "camarin" – a chapel or

³ For Kubler's influence on artists and art historians, see "The Shape of Time: Of Stars and Rainbows" (Wolf, 2009) as well as the essays by Suzanne Anker, Ellen K. Levy, Mary Miller, and Shelley Rice in the Winter 2009 issue of *Art Journal*, a collection of essays devoted to the influence of Kubler's 1962 book *The Shape of Time*.

⁴ "The situation is perhaps analogous to that of the origins of Gothic sculpture in the Ile de France: new sculptural values were associated with the emergence of a new political entity, but the *main d'oeuvre* was drawn from the older late Romanesque traditions of Burgundy, Languedoc, Provence, and Lombardy" (Kubler, 1985: 220), originally published in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, s. 6, 23 (1943: 257-268).

⁵ Originally published in *Journal of the American Society of Architectural Historians* 4 (April 1944: 30-33).

shrine in some Spanish churches envisioned as the dressing room of the Virgin or as a treasure room – he likens these unusual spaces to safety-deposit vaults:

The closest analogy for the camarín in modern architecture is perhaps the safety deposit vault of a city bank. Visible to the profanum vulgum yet unapproachable without proper authority, it is a place which serves the humble needs of routine business, all the while safeguarding irreplaceable values. (Kubler 1985b, 139)⁶

Here, as in the West-African “Machine for Living,” the comparison is to a space known to Kubler’s twentieth-century audience. Inherent in such comparisons is a belief that the past becomes comprehensible by analogy to the present; that is, the strange becomes recognizable by association with the familiar.⁷ Kubler utilizes this approach in his book *Portuguese Plain Architecture* to bring to life the historical circumstances that contributed to a unique architectural mode. Discussing the Belgian work of the architect Wenceslas Cobergher, he likens the circumstance of needing to rebuild Belgium after the destruction of war in the Low Countries as being “comparable only to that of World War I” (Kubler, 1972: 100). Kubler draws a comparison between Cobergher and another, still more recent, phenomenon, too, remarking that “Cobergher’s career in archducal service [to Albert of Austria] anticipates the late twentieth-century conception of the architect as an environmental planner...” (Kubler, 1972: 100). From the start, Kubler was conscious of his use of comparison and even proposed that it was fundamental to the discipline of art history. In a 1944 essay about Latin American art, he described art history as being dependent on a “comparative method” (Kubler, 1944: 151).

Illustration

The second type of metaphor that Kubler often employed was for highlighting significant qualities, typically of things but sometimes of persons.⁸ In the survey book of 1959 on the art and architecture of the Spanish and Portuguese worlds that Kubler co-authored with Martin Soria, he described the Spanish plateresque (such as the famous example of the University of Salamanca) as being “adjectival” (Kubler and Soria, 1959: 2). The metaphor is minimalist, yet we can easily understand Kubler’s point – this is an ornate style in which the surface decoration of the façade modifies its structural surface, just as adjectives modify nouns. Kubler’s deployment of a metaphor allows him to state something quite specific and precise with only one word. Yet, on this occasion as on several others, his enthusiasm for metaphor takes over, and to further describe the nature of the plateresque, he turns to another, entirely distinct metaphor, now taken from the realm of music (and as if to make reference to synesthesia). “The ornament is never delicate,” he writes. “If it could be conveyed in sound, it would be loud, harsh, and intricate of rhythm” (Kubler and Soria, 1959: 2).

A surfeit of metaphors also erupts in the book on Portuguese architecture. In a lengthy discussion of the seventeenth-century convent church of S. Clara-a-Nova, in Coimbra, he describes the space of the “choir-loft balcony” as opening upon the nave like a “royal box at

⁶ Originally published in Spanish in *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos* 140-141 (1961: 1-7).

⁷ Such analogies were sometimes questioned. For example, in his review of Kubler’s edition of Felix da Costa’s *The Antiquity of the Art of Painting*, Jonathan Brown writes: “In the Preface, he [Kubler] suggests a comparison of the circumstances that precipitated Felix da Costa’s petition, written in 1696, to establish a Royal Portuguese Academy of Arts to the situation in our times, when ‘this country likewise must make decisions about government support of the arts.’ I doubt whether da Costa’s work, in spite of its many fascinating aspects, can bear such a weighty analogy.” (Brown, 1968: 237)

⁸ An example of Kubler’s use of metaphor to characterize a person is his likening of his teacher Henri Focillon’s manner of communicating his impressive range of knowledge “as from a horn of plenty” (Kubler, 1985c: 379), originally published in *Art Journal* 4, 2 (1945: 71-74).

the theater...” (Kubler, 1972: 152). He then introduces a new metaphor, now drawn from the physical sciences rather than from culture, for the purpose of capturing how the space functioned: “The nuns at one end and the sacrament at the altar were the poles of a circuit in which the people were the field. The nave was where these energies were put into motion” (Kubler, 1972: 152).⁹

In other instances, Kubler enlists such descriptive metaphors when he wants to bring to life the physical remnants of distant cultures. Thus, the urban design of Machu Picchu is “like a patterned blanket thrown over a great rock. The pattern falls in many folds...” (Kubler, 1960: 53).¹⁰ It is worth noting that the editors of the student-run architectural journal *Perspecta*, where Kubler’s study of Machu Picchu appeared in 1960, chose to highlight this metaphor by using it as a caption to a map of the ruins of this famous Andean site (Kubler, 1960: 54). The poetic aspect of Kubler’s metaphor is heightened by this clever recontextualization.

Explanation

More complex is the third type of metaphor favored by Kubler, called upon by him for the purpose of elucidating a point or an historical phenomenon that ordinarily involves duration in time. The increased complexity is due to the fact that the purpose of this type of metaphor is to explain concepts and developments rather than concrete physical entities. Kubler would seem to have turned to metaphor in these instances in order to make his concepts tangible – in a sense, visible – to his readers. A charmingly elaborate example of this type of metaphor in the 1959 survey book co-authored with Soria, in an analysis of Spanish architecture, concerns all manner of water. The metaphor is introduced in a discussion of Pedro de Ribera’s development, in which we are led to the ocean’s shore. Kubler writes:

Ribera was like the crest of a great wave of exuberant decoration that gathered way during the seventeenth century, to break in his lifetime. The end of his life, and the later work of his contemporaries, were like the foamy backwash upon the shore. (Kubler and Soria, 1959: 40)

As we move forward into the eighteenth century, we find that the stylistic development of the architect Ventura Rodríguez, on the other hand, in its lack of discrete stages, is “like a steep mountain stream tumbling through a variety of landscapes, carrying in its rush a burden of rocks and gravels swept from many other stretches of its banks” (Kubler and Soria, 1959: 50).¹¹ In both cases, the purpose of the metaphor is to capture art as it accumulates over time and transforms. This aim corresponds to Kubler’s definition of art itself as being in flux.

This is a good place to pause in order to make note of the main intellectual sources for this definition of art, which are in the philosopher Henri Bergson’s notion of reality as flux, articulated in his book *Creative Evolution* of 1907, and in Kubler’s mentor Henri Focillon’s

⁹ Kubler developed the idea of enlisting the physical sciences, and notably electrodynamics, to assist in explaining art history in his book, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (Kubler, 1962: 9). On this point, see also the final section of the present essay. Apparently, Kubler created the metaphor in *The Shape of Time* and then applied it in *Portuguese Plain Architecture*.

¹⁰ In this essay, Kubler lamented the effect of the “abysmal remoteness” of such ancient South American cultures (Kubler, 1960: 49).

¹¹ Not only architectural careers, but also buildings themselves, are woven into this elaborate metaphor. Renaissance architecture in Seville, we learn, has the quality of being reflected, “as upon a lazily rolling surface of water” (Kubler and Soria, 1959: 55).

adaptation of Bergson's idea to artistic form in Focillon's book *Life of Forms in Art* of 1934.¹² Kubler was familiar with both these works by the 1940s, as his career was taking off. An English translation of *Creative Evolution*, in the Random House Modern Library series and published in 1944, helped to popularize Bergson's theory in the English-speaking world. And Kubler was the co-translator of the 1942 English edition of Focillon's book, as well as of a revised edition of 1948 (Focillon was Kubler's most significant mentor and the influence of his work on Kubler is routinely pointed out).¹³ For our purposes here, it is important to note that beyond a vision of artistic form as a vital force, Kubler also would have encountered in Focillon's book an appreciation of this force as – in Focillon's words – a “metaphor” of “the entire universe” (Focillon, 1948: 2).¹⁴

Kubler again and again turns to metaphor as an aid in his ongoing endeavors to comprehend and to convey the layers of history of ancient America, and the existence of its art in time. An intricate metaphor – borrowing from the movements of the seas, as with the metaphors describing developments in Spanish architecture that I just mentioned – serves to portray the quick-changing nature of urban life in Central and South America. Since colonial times, Kubler observes, “the American scene...resembles a tidal beach marked by successive wave-patterns more than it resembles the deeply reworked loam of Old World history. In America... [h]istorical life loses difference with each great wave of revision, unlike Europe” (Kubler, 1985f: 90).¹⁵

Kubler seems especially attracted to detailed metaphors when discussing time and history. In one case, still drawing on the sea for his imagery, he offers an elaborate metaphor of a coral reef to characterize our understanding of human culture through time. “The present projection of all civilization,” Kubler proposes, is “like a coral reef” in its physical profusion (Kubler, 1965: 301). As if to relish the opportunity, he enlarges the metaphor: “We all are reef builders,

¹² Thomas Reese discusses these influences, and also considers how Kubler's ideas depart from those of Bergson and Focillon (Reese, 1985: xxvi).

¹³ Kubler refers to both Bergson and Focillon in his writings; see, for example, *The Shape of Time* (1962: 3, 16, 32, 48, 62, 67). He comments about Bergson's influence on Focillon in “History – or Anthropology – of Art?” (Kubler, 1985d: 406), originally published in *Critical Inquiry* 1, no. 1 (1975: 757-67). Furthermore, he acknowledges that he shares the “Bergsonian illusion (which is this writer's) that a vital impulse informs everything human” (Kubler, 1985e: 350), originally published as number 18 in *Studies in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Trustees for Harvard University, 1977).

¹⁴ The translation of the word “metaphor” was literal; here is the full passage in the French original: “La vie est forme, et la forme est le mode de la vie. Les rapports qui unissent les formes entre elles dans la nature ne sauraient être pure contingence, et ce que nous appelons la vie naturelle s'évalue comme un rapport nécessaire entre les formes sans lesquelles elle ne serait pas. De même pour l'art. Les relations formelles dans une oeuvre et entre les oeuvres constituent un ordre, une métaphore de l'univers.” (Focillon, 2002: 6)

¹⁵ Originally published in *Journal of World History* 9 (1966: 884-890). Several other examples exist of Kubler's use of metaphor to illustrate the layers of history evident in the artifacts of the Americas. In the already-mentioned study of Machu Picchu, he likens the remoteness of its strata of history to “the compacted planes of long distance photography on infra-red film with telescopic lenses. We know that the planes are far apart, but they are shown to us very close together” (Kubler, 1960: 49). (This particular metaphor is more arcane than most, and meaningful only to the reader who is well-versed in the processes of film photography!) Another metaphor meant to capture occurrences over time in a particular location is found in an essay from 1961 about the disappearance of native South American motifs during colonization. Kubler envisions four types of disappearance; one of these he calls “explant,” borrowing the term from science. Kubler explains that the “explanted” tissue of an embryo chicken heart has survived at the Rockefeller Institute since 1912. “The term can be borrowed,” he proposes, “to describe certain phenomena of native survival in colonial America, as when an isolated theme flourished for a period within the supporting medium of colonial institutional life.” He offers as an example “early colonial efforts to perpetuate the use of the Indian calendar” (Kubler, 1985g: 70); originally published in *Essays in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology*, ed. S. K. Lothrop and others (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961: 14-34, 450-452, and 485-486).

laying down an immense detritus like our relatives, the warm-water polyps of the oceans” (Kubler, 1965: 301-302).¹⁶

Kubler’s penchant for portraying time by way of metaphor is fundamental to his conception of history. Several instances are found in his influential book of 1962, *The Shape of Time*. Here I offer three striking examples. First, in a mixed metaphor that poses quite a challenge to the reader, “actuality” is conceptualized as the “eye of the storm: ... a diamond with an infinitesimal perforation through which the ingots and billets of present possibility are drawn into past events” (Kubler, 1962: 18). Second, knowing the past is likened to knowing the stars, for the historian and the astronomer both “collect ancient signals into compelling theories about distance and composition” (Kubler 1962, 20).¹⁷ Third, we envision the “flow of time” as “assuming the shapes of fibrous bundles...the lengths of the fibers varying as to the duration of each need and the solution to its problems... They are juxtaposed largely by chance, and rarely by conscious forethought or rigorous planning” (Kubler, 1962: 122).¹⁸

In his last writings, Kubler’s metaphorical conception of historical time is especially transparent. A notable example is in the book *Esthetic Recognition of Ancient Amerindian Art*, of 1991, in which he highlights this concept in the words of the subheading to one section: “Chronology: Measurement or Allegory?” (Kubler, 1991: 34).

Although Kubler routinely turns to metaphor to explain phenomena that concern change over time, he also often utilizes it to make other kinds of abstract or conceptual points. Sometimes its purpose is to make a distinction. In the *Shape of Time*, to help distinguish between what he terms “prime objects” and “ordinary objects,” he describes their difference as being like the difference between mutant genes and standard genes (Kubler, 1962: 40).¹⁹ In a 1964 study of Mesoamerican courtyards in which Kubler makes the case – as he often did – that pre-colonial South American peoples did not originate in Asia, he describes any parallels to Asian culture as being “convergence” as opposed to “diffusionist”; to clarify the point, he compares this distinction to the difference between “approximate resemblance” and a “close blood relationship” (Kubler, 1985i: 254).²⁰

Kubler’s book on Portuguese architecture contains several of this type of metaphor, including the one with which I opened this paper: “The Portuguese plain style is like a vernacular architecture, related to living dialect traditions more than to the great authors of the past” (Kubler, 1972: 3). Another example is Kubler’s comparison of tourists to pilgrims, in which he laments that tourists typically flock to the opulent Manueline architecture while visiting Portugal, and overlook the more severe edifices that are the subject of his book: “The tourist, like the pilgrim, wants to view famous relics...he is reluctant to leave the preordained

¹⁶ In another example of Kubler’s use of a metaphor taken from natural history to convey duration – now specifically the relative importance given to distinct historical periods – he turns to the realm of the dinosaurs: “In magnitude, it [the Renaissance] is like brontosaurus – by far the greatest example of its kind – but structurally it is similar to much smaller and more recent species.” (Kubler 1985h: 351); originally published in *Ornament, Via III: Journal of the Graduate School of Fine Arts, University of Pennsylvania*, ed. Stephen Kieran (Philadelphia, 1977: 31-41).

¹⁷ This elaborate metaphor continues: “The astronomer’s position is the historian’s date; his velocity is our sequence; orbits are like durations; perturbations are analogous to causality. The astronomer and the historian both deal with past events perceived in the present” (Kubler, 1962: 20).

¹⁸ Kubler developed this metaphor in proposing an alternative to *Strukturforschung*, which he also described in metaphorical terms, writing that proponents of this approach “seem to think of a culture as if it were a circular lens, varying in thickness according to the antiquity of the pattern” (Kubler, 1962: 121-122).

¹⁹ Kubler elaborates: “The mutant gene may be infinitesimally small but the behavioral differences which it occasions can be very great indeed” (Kubler, 1962: 40).

²⁰ Originally published in *XXXV Congreso Internacional de Americanistas, México, 1962, Actas y Memorias I* (Mexico, 1964), 345-357.

road or to expose himself to unscheduled wonders for which there is no ready-made explanation” (Kubler, 1972: 5). A third example from *Portuguese Plain Architecture* is in Kubler’s explanation of the introduction of the “classical model” that would contribute to the development of the “plain” style; this model initially appeared in the form of “architectural hors d’oeuvres,” the first instance being the Manga cloister fountain of 1533-34 in Coimbra. (Kubler, 1972: 8).²¹

Method

Early in his career, Kubler began to write about what it means to use comparison and metaphor in art history, and his comments about methodology multiplied and intensified as the years passed. This takes us to the fourth type of metaphor commonly employed by Kubler, whereby the discussion concerns the methods of art history. Some of Kubler’s first musings on art history are in the 1944 essay, “Remarks upon the History of Latin American Art.” It is in this essay that he characterizes art history as a “comparative method.” (Kubler, 1944: 151) At this early point in his career (he had received his Ph.D. in 1940), Kubler created the outlines of a picture – which he would fill in with vivid colors in the following decades – of art history (and of history more generally) as something we can approach and comprehend only by way of metaphor. Indeed, he concludes his 1944 essay by making the case for studying Latin American art, an area that had remained largely neglected by North American art historians, and the reason we should study this art, he proposes, is “suggested by a metaphor.” He writes:

...the dweller on the banks of a river needs knowledge of the greater system both above and below his particular meridian, but his knowledge of the greater system is vitiated if he be ignorant of the currents nourishing and eroding his own fields. (Kubler 1944, 152)

This is an early instance of Kubler’s use of a water metaphor, of which, as we have seen, there are many in his writing. Water provided an ideal metaphor for a writer who (taking his cue from Bergson and Focillon) believed in art and art history as phenomena in constant flux.

Kubler’s interest in what we might call a “methodology of metaphor” is apparent, then, at the outset of his career, in the mid 1940s. Stepping back to look at the intellectual context in the United States within which Kubler conceived of this approach to art history, it is interesting to discover that a related concept had been developed in the 1930s by the art collector and theorist Albert Barnes. Barnes had formulated, along with his close associates, the philosopher John Dewey and the art educator Violette de Mazia, an aesthetic theory that he called “transferred values.” As with Kubler’s metaphorical vision of art history, “transferred values” is fundamentally comparative, involving the association of one realm of experience with another. Barnes’s unique approach to arranging the galleries of his museum in Merion, Pennsylvania, in which decorative ironwork is exhibited alongside sculpture from Africa and modern European painting, for example, is based on his concept of “transferred values.”²² It is

²¹ In an additional example, Kubler proposes that the “vertical silhouette” of another monument in Coimbra, Sé Nova, recalls functional lift elements on the exterior of Dutch and Flemish houses, as if to create “an analogy between everyday life and spirituality, as in those kitchen scenes of Dutch and Flemish painting, where the humble work of the scullery is portrayed equivalently with that of the spirit, by comparing the labors of Martha and Mary.” (Kubler, 1972: 168-169)

²² On Barnes’s “transferred values,” see “John Dewey’s Socially Instrumental Practice at the Barnes Foundation and the Role of ‘Transferred Values’ in Aesthetic Experience” (Johnson, 2012). The link of this idea to the installation of the galleries at the Barnes Foundation was noted in Megan Bahr, *Transferring Values: Albert C. Barnes, Work, and the Work of Art* (Bahr, 2012), and is cited in Johnson (2012: 49). It is worth noting in this context that Kubler wrote a review of a book by an art educator

fascinating to find Kubler running on a parallel track to Barnes, Dewey, and de Mazia. It is striking, indeed, that some decades later, in the 1970s, Violette de Mazia wrote about “transferred values” as being like similes, figures of speech.²³ It is not a far stretch at all from “transferred values” to Kubler’s methodology of metaphor.

This methodology is present in Kubler’s writings from the outset, but it really comes into its own later, in the 1960s, and most notably with the publication of *The Shape of Time*. As is often noted, in this book, Kubler takes on the field of art history, questioning aspects of its traditional methods, and especially its foundation in a biological model. He proposes the physical sciences as a more suitable model – or rather, metaphor – than biology. He envisions, for instance, electrodynamics as more apt than plant or animal life for describing art as it exists in the world (Kubler, 1962: 9) (Kubler would later utilize the terms of electrodynamics in *Portuguese Plain Architecture* to characterize the functioning of space at S. Clara-a-Nova, as we have seen.). And in a well known instance, to explain why the study of “style” in art history is problematical and evasive, he writes:

Style is like a rainbow. It is a phenomenon of perception governed by the coincidence of certain physical conditions. We can see it only briefly while we pause between the sun and the rain, and it vanishes when we go to the place where we thought we saw it. (Kubler, 1962: 129)²⁴

In *The Shape of Time*, Kubler also uses a metaphor – and a markedly elaborate one at that – to characterize the development of art over time:

...the history of art is like a vast mining enterprise, with innumerable shafts, most of them closed down long ago. Each artist works on in the dark, guided only by the tunnels and shafts of earlier work...The scene also is heaped with the tailings of exhausted mines: other prospectors are sorting them to salvage the traces of rare elements once thrown away but valued today more than gold. (Kubler, 1962: 125)

The metaphor continues on further, but from the passage I just quoted we can see clearly the inventive way Kubler attempts to capture, by way of a metaphor, the complexity of the development of art over time. As in many of the instances we’ve already seen, the metaphor has a negative quality, too, as there is a vision of culture being built upon the ruins of the past.

While the artist is envisioned as laboring in the mines, the historian is viewed by turns as a painter (“[he] transposes, reduces, composes, and colors a facsimile”) (Kubler, 1965: 301), a policeman (“patrolling the beat against mythmakers”) (Kubler, 1965: 301), and even a snail (“...snails read space into succession...To spatialize time is a faculty shared by snails and by historians”) (Kubler, 1985j: 386).²⁵ As you will have guessed, this last comparison was *not* intended to flatter. Kubler was launching here one of his many attacks against a reliance on the concept of “style.” Metaphor served him well as an alternative to the terminology of style.

I would propose that, in addition, Kubler’s habit of relying upon metaphor is his way of grappling with the plain fact that any thoughtful historian would arrive at, that we are limited

with whom Barnes had been associated: *Evolution in the Arts and Other Theories of Culture History*, by Thomas Munro (Kubler, 1963: 92). For Barnes’s association with Munro, who had been a student of Dewey, see Johnson (2012: 43-44).

²³ For de Mazia’s uses of these terms, see Johnson (2012: 53).

²⁴ His aversion to art-historical terms pertaining to style is important to Kubler’s conception of “plain” Portuguese architecture as an alternative to the style-term “baroque.” See Kubler (1972: xv).

²⁵ “Style and the Representation of Historical Time,” originally published in *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 138 (1967: 849-855). Kubler notes in this essay that the scientific term for the snail’s perception of space is “transduction.” As if to wish to further clarify the likening of history writing to transduction, he returns to this comparison, proposing that “transduction includes the impulse to periodize,” in “Period, Style, and Meaning in Ancient American Art” (Kubler, 1985k: 395).

in our ability to know the past. He is especially keen to note this limitation when the subject is Central and South American art and architecture. Kubler puts the problem this way in a 1966 essay: “Our knowledge of the past runs to stereotypes” (Kubler, 1985l: 75).²⁶ To get our interpretations right, he notes elsewhere, requires being able to make the proper distinctions. Again, a metaphor is enlisted to convey the thought: “It is a matter of combining the desired viewing glasses at the desired distance” (Kubler, 1985f: 88).²⁷ In a 1968 study of Latin American architecture, he laments that our current knowledge of regional practices is “as arbitrary and as hazy” as maps drawn around 1500: “The main masses and the features separating them are still only dimly perceived and badly recorded” (Kubler 1985m: 86).²⁸ As a matter of fact, another publication of the same year is about one such map (the 1581 map of Cholula, Mexico)! (Kubler, 1985n: 92-101).²⁹

A 1977 discussion of Mayan vessels leads Kubler again to muse on the limits of knowledge in his field. Our inability to know is like traveling in a desert: “Mesoamerican studies often impress readers as a Sahara of guesses, where travelers crazed with a thirst for certainty suffer various mirages” (Kubler, 1985e: 349).³⁰ Seeing the mirage *as* a mirage (if that is possible) is paramount to Kubler. He more than once complained that anthropologists (who often were colleagues in his field of ancient American art) do not sufficiently appreciate the limitations of our knowledge of history. He denounced in particular what is known as “ethnological analogy,” whereby the practices of present-day groups of people are the means for understanding earlier cultures of the same geographical region (for example, using the practices of contemporary Andean groups to shed light on Incan civilization) (Kubler, 1985k: 403).³¹ Ethnological analogy is, like metaphor, a comparative enterprise, and what we discover in Kubler’s criticism of it is that he had a strong view that not all metaphors and comparisons are created equal. Metaphors can be misleading and unconvincing if not judiciously applied. It should be noted that Kubler’s comparisons of objects and phenomena from distinct times and places lack the causal link suggested by ethnological analogy. In any event, Kubler repeats his words of caution about the application of metaphor while at the same time arguing that metaphor is necessary to our ability to understand art, in a 1980 review of Ernst Gombrich’s book on decorative art, *The Sense of Order*. Kubler’s terminology here is stunningly succinct. “An epilogue on musical analogies,” Kubler observes regarding Gombrich’s book, “correlates music and dance with visual ornament...but warn[s] against abuse of the metaphors without which aesthetic experience is incommunicable” (Kubler, 1980: 175). For Kubler, metaphor rendered the

²⁶ Originally published in Spanish in *Boletín del Centro de Investigaciones Históricas y Estéticas, Caracas* 4 (1966: 51-61).

²⁷ The point of the metaphor in this study was to make the case that we “do not here want to return to seeing every city as completely different from all other cities, nor do we wish here to wipe out all differences among them” (Kubler, 1985f: 88).

²⁸ Originally published in Spanish in *Boletín del Centro de Investigaciones Históricas y Estéticas, Caracas* 9 (1968: 104-116). Kubler here bemoans the lack of precision in Diego Angulo’s *Historia del arte hispanoamericano*, using yet another metaphor to make the point: “the *Historia* has many geographical and chronological drawers containing the scrambled pieces of many puzzles. It is left to the reader to rearrange the pieces according to the designs to which he thinks they belong” (Kubler, 1985m: 85).

²⁹ Originally published in Spanish in *Estudios de historia novahispana* 2 (1968: 11-27).

³⁰ Later in this study Kubler uses a further metaphor, now to characterize what happens if we make a mistake, misguided by the mirages, in our writing of history: historical error is like a “shipwreck” and the “charting of these submerged reefs and wrecks is an unavoidable necessity because the history of error may be the history of much that we now accept as true” (Kubler, 1985e: 350).

³¹ “Today Precolumbian Mexican studies still are dominated by ethnological analogizing. Few people resist its invitation to explain the remote past by the tribal present.” Kubler repeats this point in his later essay, “History – or Anthropology – of Art?” (Kubler, 1985d: 409). He here proposes that a “recognition of uncertainty... will humanize anthropology” (Kubler, 1985d: 411). For an extensive response to Kubler’s criticism of ethnological analogy, see “The Interpretation of Ancient Symbols” (Grieder, 1975).

incommunicable visible. It was for him a potent and even necessary means by which to communicate with precision the vagueness and complexity of history.³²

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³² In an interview of 1973, Kubler acknowledged that his impulse was to communicate by “aphorism” or “epigram” (Kubler, 1985o: 414); originally published in *Artforum* 12, 2 (1973: 32-35).

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“Are we still modern?”

The dilemma of contemporary architecture

Susanne Bauer,¹ University of London

susanne.bauer@aaschool.ac.uk

Abstract: In recent architectural history the colour white is mostly connected with a modern design. The tumultuous times of the beginning of the 20th century created an environment that sought after simplicity, clarity and a hygienic world. Together with the newfound industrialisation and machine products the ideal world could be created through standardised commodities. The apparent whiteness that was soon linked to these products and buildings has since been linked to a ‘modern world’. And whiteness as a symbol of Modernism became symbolic to a perfect world and the ideal home.

Around the mid 20th century, Post-modernism was the term created for a new style period in architecture that took over from Modernism. Although calmer and more peaceful in political terms, the beginning of the digital age suddenly created immensity in possibilities and complexities that were likewise used to create a new architectural environment. The newly created architecture was often visually exposed through a variety of colours.

Yet a simplistic and often white design has made a return to architecture in the past two decades and the possibilities that have since stemmed from a digitally crafted design have shaped a new architectural language that is still - or again - regarded as ‘modern’. The terminology of ‘Modernism’ is thereby still linked to buildings that appear simple, clean, minimalistic or orderly regardless of the elaborate technologies used to create the sometimes complex forms and the times it was created in.

Even in the Mediterranean region, the traditionally white architecture was since reinvented to create a modern look. The Portuguese architect Alvaro Siza, whose career started around the end of the 1950s has since been an influence on contemporary architectural practitioners in Portugal and beyond and the modern look has been copied to create a new idealised world.

I want to show that the fascination with modern architecture to this date might subconsciously be linked with the ‘ideal world’ but the terminology of everything ‘modern’ is since falsely applied to a ‘modern’ or ‘white’ architecture created after the middle of the 20th century. We might therefore have to find a different terminology for the loosely applied word of ‘modern’ and might have to find answers to the question in which style period we are currently living in.

¹ Susanne Bauer is a German architect and has been living, studying and working in London for the last 10 years. She received her diploma in architecture from the University of Applied Sciences Augsburg, Germany in 2002 and her MA in Histories and Theories of Architecture from the Architectural Association in 2003. From 2004 – 2009, she worked as an architect at Foster and Partners in London. Since then she has been pursuing her PhD studies in Humanities and Cultural Studies at The London Consortium full-time. The London Consortium was a collaboration between the Birkbeck College, the Architectural Association, the TATE, the ICA and the Science Museum. Her thesis deals with the ‘Myth of the Modern’ and the continuous fascination of whiteness in architecture after Modernism.

“The perpetual problem confronting the historian has always been to find the beginning and the end of the threads of happening.”George Kubler (Kubler 1962, 79)

Architecture shapes our lives as much as fashion, product design and commerce influence our everyday life. The buildings that we live to see shape our lives as much as advertisement and the media direct us what we regard as beautiful today and desire tomorrow. Architecture can therefore shape, emphasize and manipulate opinions and is immediately connected to the life societies have sought after for generations. To look at this single aspect of culture in a specific timeframe one can draw conclusions about the customs of certain cultures and times and their state of mind; the way of life of a people or a single person independently is immediately shaped by ones surroundings and ones care for its habitat.

In my PhD thesis which I am currently completing at The London Consortium in London, I am exploring the consistencies and contradictions in architectural movements within the twentieth century. I am researching this by means of the colour white and how the perception and use of whiteness in architecture changed during the last century.

In Portuguese architecture white was used frequently by the famous national architect, Alvaro Siza, to create and continue the modern symbol of functional and simple architecture. I want to show that the fascination of whiteness within today’s architecture might subconsciously be linked to an idealised modern image but that the terminology of everything ‘modern’ is since falsely applied to a ‘contemporary’ architecture created after the middle of the twentieth century.

George Kubler’s research into the *Shape of Time*, its various fashions, style classifications and distinctions provides validation for my argument that there has not been only one style, namely Modernism, in the last century in architecture but that styles change rather quickly and regionally and are always preceding our perception of such transformation.

“Is there repetition or is there insistence.

I am inclined to believe there is no such thing as repetition.

And really how can there be.²”

Gertrude Stein

The tumultuous times of the beginning of the 20th century created an environment that sought after simplicity, clarity and hygiene. Together with the newfound industrialisation and machine products the new modern world was created through standardised commodities. The newly established “machine aesthetic” was a means of expressing the good life. Industrialization, standardisation and functionalism were the main concerns. And the design was rather based on the pure function of things; simplicity instead of symbolism, ornamentation as crime, colour only applied in pale shades to not distract from the overall machine-like aesthetic. The architectural image was created through the omission of all ornamentation, plain surfaces, flat roofs and an overall standardised appearance. It was proclaimed by many leading architects such as Adolf Loss and Le Corbusier and picked up by numerous other architects throughout the world. This style was soon identified as The International Style due to its widespread use and acceptance. And whiteness determined The International Style. The

² Gertrude Stein, cit. in Schwarz (1996: 259).

architectural affinities towards a pale design emerged out of this modernist spirit. The whole era was literally whitewashed.

This focus on the genuine was hence seen as progress rather than the absence, emptiness or nakedness of things. It was the ability of seeing things again in their essential, fundamental and basic nature that created this ‘new’ freedom of reality and honesty.

The “whitewash” is also a synonym for rehabilitation, apology or relief, an accurate phrase when talking about Modernism: breaking with the past and beginning something new, adjusting to the recently introduced circumstances of machinery, new products, new constructions and inventions by creating an honest design ruled by the mere expression of form and structure and focusing as much at functionalism as possible. White was the perfect colour to express that.

In “White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture”, Mark Wigley states that the white that “was successfully disseminated to an international audience” (Wigley, 1995: xiv) was only the surface of the architecture itself. “The identity of that architecture had finally been located in its white surfaces, surfaces that assumed an unparalleled force, so much so that they continue to define modern architecture long after architects started to remove the layer of paint in favour of the look of exposed concrete or metal. While the number of white surfaces may have been dramatically reduced, their definite role remains” (Wigley, 1995: xiv). That surface becomes the all defining element of modern architecture and has to be first of all cleaned off of all excessive elements hindering it to be seen as the pure surface itself. This cleansing process is closely linked to the removal of all decoration, which started in the mid nineteenth century by such advocates as Loos. “The look of modernity is that of utility perfected, function without excess, the smooth object cleansed of all representational texture” (Wigley, 1995: 3).

George Kubler already stated in his *Remarks on the History of Things*:

“Even in industrial societies which depend upon constant renewal by novelty, the very act of invention is distasteful to the majority. The rarity of invention in modern life corresponds to fear of change. The spread of literacy today is manifested not by a happy attention to new actions and new thoughts, but by stereotypes drawn from political propaganda or from commercial advertisements.” (Kubler, 1962: 68)

Such stereotypes are now connotations such as *The Weissenhofsiedlung*, Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier’s machine-like aesthetic, “Form follows Function”, Industrialization and standardized products or *The International Style*, which we now associate with this early modern movement.

The symbolic whiteness and its attributes in Modernism were soon overruled by a wide spectrum of colours in the post-war period. In the 1970s and 1980s the latest, the white modernist period ended and was surpassed by the extreme appearance of a colourful design and fashion. This was again an expression of a whole life-style and attitude rather than just a phase in design. Complexity and contradiction were suddenly issues opposing simplicity and purity of Modernism. A new attitude arose similarly in all subjects and activities due to various reasons. The outdated-ness of modern thought was the leading force. The new promising future and the superiority of the machine were seen in different ways after the post-war period. Technology and new information resources were now the key to a forthcoming world. Everything that was considered new, just a few decades prior, was soon overtaken by computers and information providers serving as high-speed plurality suppliers. Cultural boundaries as well as traditional viewpoints interfered with innovative inventions and new found future directions. Innumerable new creations and rapidly improving technologies led to a fast life concerned with unexplainable possibilities. Globalisation and the apparent close connection of all nations were the leading forces of a change of identity.

Colours expressed the limitless of the new found spirit, the variety and complexity in every aspect of life that now seemed possible and ever present. The exaggeration of colour,

ornamentation and symbolism also led to the new presence of wit, humour, metaphor and copy. Besides all these features this post-modern architecture was accompanied by rapidly improving technology, new definitions of space, urban context, and the importance of past cultures – the new architecture was rich in variety and thus in absolute contrast to the simplistic modern attributes. A reaction to Modernism was created putting forth the continuity of history as something that could be learned from.

Robert Venturi proclaimed in 1966 the “Complexity and Contradiction of Architecture” (Venturi, 1966) and spoke for “double-functioning elements” and “the difficult unity of inclusion” (Nesbitt, 1966: 27). “Inclusiveness, he argues, produces positive artistic tension and leads to a rich condition of multiple interpretation” (*ibid.*: 27). The new design was therefore not only contradictory to the modern design but also contradictory in itself. Nothing was excluded from the arts or architecture.

After such a complex and multifaceted time, the counter reaction again, had to be one of simplicity. George Kubler’s remarks can be taken to explain the modern style-mutations which occurred after the post-war period, as Kubler explains:

“The artist itself is most exposed to tedium, overcoming it by the invention of new formal combinations and by more daring advances in previously established directions. These advances obey a rule of gradual differentiation because they must remain as recognizable variations upon the dominant memory image. The differentiations are bolder among young designers, and their tempo becomes more rapid as a style approaches its end. If a style is interrupted early for any reason, its unused resources become available for adaptation by participants in other styles.” (Kubler, 1962: 82)

It was in fact as if Kubler’s interruption of style was used up again by another style. And clearly enough, the new Minimalism as the name implies pursues to create simplicity, which in return, is sought by many minimalist artists and architects as the pure form of luxury and purity, as a way of life, to look at simplicity as a means for bringing in order and defining the everyday rituals and necessities of existence and thus by remembering a modern style (Pawson, 1996: 7).

Although whiteness is a means of expressing minimal architecture it is not a necessity. Minimal architecture can exist without the colour white. In fact, it prefers to exist without any colour at all. The honest expression of the material is the focus of minimal architecture. Unnecessary ornamentation or claddings are mostly banished by architects who prefer a minimal design, yet whiteness is exactly used in that sense. Seeking a minimalist or a timeless architecture, white always represents a classical and unchanging simplicity. White architecture therefore has to be questioned for its contradiction of complex spaces, forms and materials and its aim for a minimal and timeless appearance but it is precisely used for this effect, to abstain all fashions of the modern world and to hold on to the familiar and the idealised image or as George Kubler put it in *The Shape of Time*:

“Human desires in every present instant are torn between the replica and the invention, between the desire to return to the known pattern, and the desire to escape it by a new variation. Generally the wish to repeat the past has prevailed over the impulses to depart from it. No act ever is completely novel, and no act can ever be quite accomplished without variation. In every act, fidelity to the model and departure from it are inextricably mingled, in proportions that ensure recognizable repetition, together with such minor variations as the moment and the circumstances allow. Indeed, when variation from the model exceeds the amount of faithful copying, then we have an invention.” (Kubler, 1962: 72)

Yet a simplistic and often white design has made a return to architecture in the past decades and the possibilities that have since stemmed from a digitally crafted design have shaped a new architectural language that is still – or again – regarded as ‘modern’. The terminology of ‘Modernism’ is thereby still linked to buildings that appear simple, clean, minimalistic or

orderly regardless of the elaborate technologies used to create the sometimes complex forms and the times it was created in.

Throughout all these different fashions, the use of whiteness in architecture never vanished which can ultimately be seen in the architecture of Portuguese architect Alvaro Siza. Although also influenced by the Mediterranean and Portuguese surroundings, his architecture is primarily seen as a model of consistency in modern architecture. He adopted the characteristics of the specific style of the Mediterranean, which fit right into an idealised image of the white modern architecture.

In his career, which started around the 1950s, he uses whiteness almost exclusively for his buildings, and in doing so he has been an influence on contemporary architectural practitioners in Portugal and beyond. Although going through the different fashion periods after the early modern movement, his architecture always expresses a consistency due to the white aesthetic that he uses in his design images.

In his early projects, like the Boa Nova Restaurant or the Swimming Pool in Leça da Palmeira, both built in 1958, he started out with massive concrete surfaces built into the cliffs of Palmeira, only some of these concrete walls were painted white, his main goal during his early career was, as he stated in an interview in 2007 “the dream of building in concrete and making houses with roof terraces. That was very difficult because it was not accepted, it was considered too modern.”³ But his dream of building in a typically modern style would soon become his trademark as well. He uses the connection to a Mediterranean culture that the whiteness brings with it for his style of design.

Probably one of his most famous projects, the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Porto was built in 1986 and consists of different volumes of square, simple, white buildings sitting on a hilltop overlooking the Douro River. The white-painted concrete buildings with flat roofs were by then considered as the ultimate modern style, but built a few decades after the birth of the modern symbol. The long plains of white walls attaching the volumes together into one compound is one of his attempts of controlling the now more and more prevalent technique of building in fragments, as he tries to explain exactly such fragments in a speech given at the University in Santander in 1995:

After years of passionate invention, of separation from History, of glory and of failure, after the Modernist movement, a reading, albeit transitory, of the huge amount that we received from the previous generation seems fairly clear to me. In spite of new materials and new techniques, of the growth and the death of cities, of the breaking down of frontiers, of solidarity and of extinction of euphoria and of frustration, of the conquest of space and of the death of the forests, the essence of Architecture has not changed. No tree uprooted for building and no stone taken from the mountain is restored to us. No yellowed photograph brings back the Beauty that is gone. It remains to us to attempt – to continue – the construction of Beauty. (Siza, 1997:32)

The fragmented, complex and complicated new architectural style which had begun a few decades earlier, left its mark on so many architects who had just tried to adopt a modern design into their own architectural style and were then overrun by new technologies and a rapid development of new mixes of architectural styles or as Siza is quoted in *Architecture Writing*:

The breadth and variety of the knowledge which the practice of designing involves today, its rapid development and increasing complexity, does not make sufficient knowledge and control at all possible. Bringing into relation... a place of commitment which does not mean conformity, of navigation through a sea of contradictions, the weight of the past and the weight of doubts and future alternatives – aspects which explain why there is no contemporary Treatise on Architecture. (Siza, 1997: 28)

³ Álvaro Siza (cit. in Shuppan, 2007).

Yet, even acknowledging the lack of a contemporary treatise in architecture, the dream of preserving a modern architecture with simple structures, concrete surfaces and flat roofs continued on, as Siza's architecture is the perfect example for such an insistence of a supposedly 'modern' design and the white colour was the perfect means to achieve such consistency.

The symbolic white image of an apparent modern architecture can thus be easily created to regard something as 'modern' or as George Kubler put it in his *Remarks on the History of Things*:

A symbol exists by virtue of repetitions. Its identity among its users depends upon their shared ability to attach the same meaning to a given form. The person using a symbol does so in the expectation that others will enlarge the association as he does, and that the resemblances between people's interpretations of symbols will outweigh the differences. Indeed it is unlikely that any copy ever passes as such without a great deal of assistance from symbolic associations. (Kubler, 1962: 74)

But the question remains if it isn't indeed Modernism in which we are building today, a style which is identified so closely with the industrial revolution and the pure machine aesthetic. George Kubler argues:

Since no two things or events can occupy the same coordinates of space and time, every act differs from its predecessors and its successors. No two things or acts can be accepted as identical. Every act is an invention. Yet the entire organization of thought and language denies this simple affirmation of non-identity. We can grasp the universe only by simplifying it with ideas of identity by classes, types, and categories and by rearranging the infinite continuation of non-identical events into a finite system of similitudes. It is in the nature of being that no event ever repeats, but it is in the nature of thought that we understand events only by the identities we imagine among them. (Kubler 1962: 67)

The constant white architectural image therefore hinders us to accept that a new, a contemporary style in architecture has already emerged.

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The Corporema of the Portuguese House: On the potential and on the warnings at the time a problem is considered

Patrícia Miguel¹

patriciamiguel.dc@gmail.com

Abstract: In 1993, *The Problem of the Portuguese House* (1947), reproduced in a book with a retrospective of the work of Fernando Távora, would reassume a decisive role as a theoretical support for Architecture students and architects. In this publishing, the 1992 essay by Alexandre Alves Costa evoked the possibility of its contemporaneous rereading: ‘its continuity and its coherence and, above all, its permanent contemporaneity’ (1993: 17). In 1996, José António Bandeirinha called it the *edifying manifesto* and would devote an exhaustive chapter to it in *Quinas Vivas* in order to rigorously associate it with the premises to the *edifying application* of the post-modern thinking of Boaventura Sousa e Santos and to confront it with the referentials of Le Corbusier and the Modern Movement (1996: 76-118).

The Corporema of the Portuguese House aims to reflect on *The Problem of the Portuguese House* taking into consideration that between 2002 and 2003 the cycle of exhibitions *Influx*, *Recent Portuguese Architecture* defined some watchwords for the confrontation of the theoretical capacity of Távora’s text with contemporaneity; and that, once transformed in *Metaflux*, showed *Two generations in Portuguese architecture* in the 9th Architecture Biennial of Venice in 2004, looking to claim that “national identities” should be replaced by some kind of supra “European urban identity”. On this regard, Pedro Gadanho and Luís Tavares Pereira, curators of both exhibitions, questioned in *Influx*, regarding its program: ‘Is this choice of interest to new audiences or to those ideologists who spread the strict reading of the resistance Portuguese architecture (2003: 10)?’ In “Scarcity & Dislocation”, Gadanho referred to *Scarcity* as the ‘comfortable excuse for facilitation and for repetition’ associated to *those ideologists*; and *Dislocation*, associated to the *new audiences*, as a metaphor for the ‘erratic, nomadic and eventual’, which implies the ‘effective and natural overcoming of the vernacular ghost’ (2003: 148-155, 151-152, 155).

Also in 2003, during a meeting at the XM bookstore in Coimbra, architects as young as myself showed automobile silos and claimed for a new architecture that would contradict tradition and the idea of ‘Portuguese identity’: ‘an architecture for example with qualities of transparency, antipodal to Kubler’. In a final comment, Paulo Varela Gomes would say that these youngsters were the contemporary avant-garde, the “neo-avant-garde”. This confirmation of a separation between the idea of avant-garde and tradition seemed to point to the obsolescence of Fernando Távora’s opuscle.

However, the 2002 *Secil Architecture Prize*, which awarded in 2003 the *Pacheco de Melo House* by Pedro Maurício Borges, seemed to corroborate the still pertinent *Problem of The*

¹ Graduated by the Department of Architecture of the Faculty of Science and Technology, University of Coimbra (2001). Obtained Master in Architecture (2010) and approval in Advanced Studies in Architecture, Planning and Memory (2004) by the same Department. Is currently researching under a PhD scholarship of the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology and teaching in the areas of Design and Theory at the Department of Architecture and Landscape Parq. From 1999 to 2002 collaborated in the studio of João Mendes Ribeiro. From 2001 to 2009 was co-coordinator of PMKJ_architects; co-authored projects, layouts and productions for exhibitions in Lisbon, Porto, London, Calgary and Zaragoza.

Portuguese House. In fact, a Secil's "concrete prize" given to a white and plain house, with a tiled roof, seemed to ironically suggest the *scarcity* and the non-ornamentation which evoked the resistance to the "decorative whim" of the "Portuguese House" movement, enunciated by Távora (1947: 8).

The "neo-avant-garde" insistences in the need to overcome the vernacular ghost and the *Scarcity* raised some questions. Was the *Pacheco de Melo House*, the *Secil Award* which seemed to confirm the still pertinence of Távora's text, occupied, after all, by that "vernacular ghost"? Is there any relationship between the concepts of vernacular and normative *scarcity*? Is there any relationship between normative and *scarcity*? How do these observations interfere with the *Problem of the Portuguese House*'s power of persuasion?

The Corporema would be a set of signs that, emancipating itself from the reservoir of the never-ending sense that the body represents, would attain its own autonomy, nonetheless maintaining a formal and conceptual affinity connection [...] with the mother body.
Paulo Cunha e Silva (1999: 55)

Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
— Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,
Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies
Charles Baudelaire (1993: 58)

In October 2003, when Mário Krüger, in a *Theory in Architecture*² class, showed the *Vient de paraître* poster, I thought about replacing the image on the cover of Le Corbusier's book with that of Fernando Távora's *The Problem of the Portuguese House* (1947[1945]).³ Távora's opusculé, being thinner than *Vers une Architecture*, would be even better inserted in Le Corbusier's advertising strategy of thickness faking.⁴ Along with this, there was the dedication Fernando Távora had written in 1997 on my 1947 copy of *The Problem of the Portuguese House*: 'with kindness and congratulating you for the acquisition of this little "*Lusíadas*". The expression little "*Lusíadas*" connected the text to an effective thickening strategy intentionally operated by Távora himself.

In fact, *The Problem of the Portuguese House*, reproduced in a 1993 book with a retrospective of Fernando Távora's work, reassumed a decisive role as a theoretical support for architecture students and architects. In this publishing, the 1992 essay by Alexandre Alves Costa evoked the possibility of its contemporaneous rereading: 'its continuity and its coherence and, above all, its permanent contemporaneity' (1993: 17). In 1996, José António Bandeirinha called it an *edifying manifesto* and devoted an exhaustive chapter to it in *Quinas Vivas* in order to rigorously associate it with the premises of the *edifying application* of the post-modern thinking of Boaventura de Sousa Santos and to confront it with the referentials Le Corbusier and Modernist Movement (76-118).

² Under the Advanced Studies Program in Architecture, Territory and Memory, dARQ – Department of Architecture of the Faculty of Sciences and Technology of the University of Coimbra, 2002–2004 (ASPATM).

³ [*O Problema da Casa Portuguesa*], my translation. Essay first published on the weekly publication *Aléo* on November 10th, 1945; in 1947, a recast version, abridged by the author was published (the one which i refer now).

⁴ *Vient de Paraître*, advertising poster for *Vers une Architecture* from 1923 (?), see Colomina (1998:118–128, 122). All the translations from the Portuguese are mine.

“The *Corporema* of the Portuguese House” (2012), first written between 2003 and 2004, aimed to reflect on *The Problem of the Portuguese House*⁵ taking into consideration that, between 2002 and 2003, the cycle of exhibitions *Influx, Recent Portuguese Architecture* defined some watchwords for the confrontation of the theoretical capacity of Távora’s text with contemporaneity; and that, once *Influx* was transformed into *Metaflux*, it showed *Two generations in Portuguese Architecture* in the *9th Architecture Biennial of Venice* in 2004, looking to claim that ‘each situation and local tradition’ should be replaced by some kind of supra ‘european urban identity’ (Gadanhó, 2004: 47).⁶ On this regard, Pedro Gadanhó and Luís Tavares Pereira, curators of both exhibitions, questioned in *Influx*, regarding its program: ‘Is this choice of interest to new audiences or to those ideologists who spread the strict reading of the resistance of Portuguese architecture (2003: 10)?’ Gadanhó and Tavares Pereira added, stressing the polarity: ‘Before this generation, one witnessed the consolidation of portuguese architecture’s identity as a consequence of some of its protagonists’ genius’ (2003: 11). On the one hand, it seemed to be the most recent generation of architects, ‘blissfully indifferent to values that were previously seen as crucial or essential’, and on the other, a ‘heavy, autonomous and academicised tradition of portuguese architecture’ (Gadanhó, 2004: 41, 39). In “Scarcity & Dislocation”, Gadanhó referred to *Scarcity* as the ‘comfortable excuse for facilitation and for repetition’ associated to *those ideologists*; and *Dislocation*, associated to the *new audiences*, as a metaphor for the ‘erratic, nomadic and eventual’, which implies the ‘effective and natural overcoming of the vernacular ghost’ (2003: 151-152, 155).

Also in *Influx*, Ricardo Carvalho pointed his finger at ‘an endemic absence of theory’ in Portuguese architecture. He evoked a ‘wearing out of the “reality principle”’, and clearly mentioned Fernando Távora: ‘the confrontation between the modern and the vernacular tradition was central to the most peripheral and experimental architecture since the fifties, where one can highlight Fernando Távora’s oeuvre. But it was overcoming this confrontation [...] that lead contemporary architects to settle new scores’ (2003: 168, 165, 167).

In the year following the publication of the *Influx* catalogue, on a meeting at the XM bookstore in Coimbra, a few of these *contemporaneous architects* represented in the exhibition showed automobile silos and claimed for a new architecture that would contradict tradition and the idea of *Portuguese identity*: ‘an architecture for example with qualities of transparency, antipodal to Kubler’.⁷ In a final comment, Paulo Varela Gomes would say that these youngsters were ‘the contemporary avant-garde, the neo-avant-garde’. In 2001, in an article on the *Jornal Arquitectos*, Varela Gomes had already said farewell to Kubler: ‘All right, Doctor Kubler, bye, thanks for everything’ (2007a: 283).⁸

⁵ For my first text “The Corporema of the Portuguese House” [“O Corporema da Casa Portuguesa”], published in 2012, I used the version of *The Problem of the Portuguese House*, recasted and abridged by the author, published in 1947, the most widespread one. For this article I will also use the 1945 version.

⁶ *Influx* occurred during the ongoing programming of the Serralves Foundation for the Norte Shopping Silo between March 2002 and September 2003; *Metaflux* was the Portuguese official representation at the *9th Venice Biennial* from September 12th to November 7th, 2004, organized by the Portuguese Institute of Arts; both of them were curated by Pedro Gadanhó and Luís Tavares Pereira.

⁷ Conferences organized in November, 2004, on the occasion of the national tour of the traveling exhibit *Voyager 03!*, produced for 2003’s *Experimenta Design*.

⁸ The *Jornal Arquitectos* is a regular publication of the Portuguese Architects’ Association. I’ll use the posterior 2007 publication of the mentioned text. Paulo Varela Gomes, in “Non-aligned Architecture” [“Arquitetura Não-alinhada”], (2007a [2001], my translation), substantiates the farewell questioning, with several historiographical examples, George Kubler’s assertions in 1972’s *Portuguese Plain Architecture Between Spices and Diamonds, 1521–1706*. Paulo Varela Gomes refers to the book as an ‘(...) invention of an Object: the portuguese architecture of the period between D. Manuel’s death and the arrival of the Brazilian diamonds with D. João V, understood as a coherent stylistic period’ (2007a:280).

We did not quite need these remarks to relate the issues of *scarcity* and of *repetition* with an implicit Kubler in the critics of *Influx* and *Metaflux*. However, these remarks pointed to how much George Kubler could effectively be related to the *old ideologies* and with the *old ideologists* that some wished to overcome. On this subject, it would not be irrelevant to mention the *permanences on the Portuguese architecture* held by Alexandre Alves Costa in his various interventions and history classes, taught to several generations of architects, which stressed and prolonged in time the *series* of the *Plain Portuguese Architecture*, transforming it into a chance for an endless *sequence* that Kubler also admitted could exist in *The Shape of Time*.⁹

The separation between the ideas of avant-garde and tradition, or the *neo-avant-gardist* reiterations of the need for overcoming the *vernacular ghost* and the *scarcity*, which seemed to reinforce the definitive obsolescence of Távora and Kubler, cast, nonetheless, some doubts. Was there any relation between *scarcity* and the academicisms that some wished to overcome? Was there any relation between the concepts of vernacular and the ideology of *scarcity*? Was there any relation between ideology and *scarcity*? How would these remarks interfere with the power of persuasion of Fernando Távora's *edifying manifesto*? What was the clash between Távora's text and the apparently-new conscience of a need for internationalization, of a will for a "European identity"? What confrontation could, after all, be established between the europeanised/internationalised criticism of Portuguese contemporaneous architecture and the idea of identity inherent to Távora's text?

These questions led me, namely, to try to understand if there was any connection between Távora's opuscle and some type of prescriptive *construction* of *scarcity*. I considered the possibility of the existence of that link through, for example, the Modern Movement, mainly through the influence of Le Corbusier. In fact, the cover of Távora's text montaged on *Vient de paraître* ironically already suggested that possibility. Beatriz Colomina's, and, mostly, Mark Wigley's reflections, were thus called into discussion as a warning against the possibility of a control discourse linked to *scarcity*.¹⁰

I concluded, however, that if, on the one hand, the *scarcity*, originating from economy and the elimination of every excess, can be effectively linked to a normative discourse of control, on the other hand, what seemed to be a Portuguese atavism, extended to other domains, not exclusively Portuguese. This conclusion brought down the claims that a bigger internationalization or supra-europeanization would be, by itself, a warranty of autonomy

⁹ The *permanences on the Portuguese architecture* refer to "Permanent Values of the Portuguese Architecture" ["Valores Permanentes da Arquitectura Portuguesa"] (a 1987 communication by Alves Costa, published on the 1989 *Vértice* magazine, no.19, my translation). As for the theme, it is Alves Costa himself who states: 'It has been quoted by me in many speeches and lectures, and it become the structure of the Class integrated in the Aggregation Exams "Introduction to the Study of the History of Portuguese Architecture" ["Introdução ao Estudo da História da Arquitectura Portuguesa"], published by FAUP in 1995 (2007a: 27; 2007b, my translation)'. This approach, the one of Alves Costa, will relate itself with what Varela Gomes calls the 'left canton' or 'post-Kublerian historiography of portuguese architecture' (2009: 31, 2007a: 281). By *Portuguese Plain Architecture* I refer to Kubler's book *Portuguese Plain Architecture Between Spices and Diamonds, 1521–1706* (1972). On the notions of *open sequences* and *closed series*, see Kubler (1962:45).

¹⁰ Wigley, in "Untitled: The Housing of Gender" (text made available, meaningfully, by Paulo Varela Gomes on the classes of the ASPATM) based on Alberti's *De Re Aedificatoria*, relates the invention of privacy to a new attitude regarding the body: architecture, more than defending the body, would begin to defend itself from the body and the impurities it produces. Wigley refers to *scarcity*, made from economy and the elimination of all excesses (in its turn, associated to sensual pleasure), as a way of regulating and restraining architecture. He, then, links this idea of "cleanliness" to male control over the feminine body, and relates it to the white surface theme — repeating the expression *white surface*, or synonyms of it, about fifty times until the end of the article (1992: 345, 344-346). It is with subversive notion of detachment that Mark Wigley (2001) sees 'in Le Corbusier's totalitarian appeal to the whitening of architecture, a paradoxical programme of ornamentation' (Barata, 1997: 37).

regarding control discourses, or the ideological defence of *scarcity*. *To be European* or of *the world* did not solve, by itself, the problem of ideological *scarcity*.

On the other hand, still, I noticed that if the *Influx* proposal, exhibited in Porto's Norte Shopping silo, seemed to be on the brink of abandoning *scarcity*, *Metaflux*, on the Venice Biennale, redirected *scarcity* (on its apparently mere-remainders) to a place of condition, assembling and disassembling the ideological and academic discourse of *scarcity*-prescription.¹¹ *Scarcity*, being ideological and conditional, in Portugal, seemed to validate all discourses, hence invalidating them.¹²

And Távora, even though being moved by a similar judgement force to that of Le Corbusier's "Esprit de Vérité", he would never link, in *The Problem of the Portuguese House*, the spirit of truth to the smoothness, the white, or the lime of "Le Lait de Chaux; La Loi du Ripolin" (1996 [1925]: 165-184; 185-195).¹³ Architecture is described by Távora as a simple thing, done by every person, revealing his or her qualities and flaws.¹⁴

I concluded that Távora, who seemed to be on the antipodes of contemporaneity (and who allegedly was being forgotten by *newer generations*), was also entering in some kind of accordance. *The Problem of the Portuguese House*, after all, expressed a disgust for the *traditional* as a *form of academicism*, similar to that of Pedro Gadanho when he talked about 'heavy, autonomous and academicised tradition of portuguese architecture' (1947: 7; 2004: 39).¹⁵

The still-curiosities (now) become licit: What relationship actually exists between Távora and Kubler? In what way are they part of the same whole of ideologies that some wish to overcome?

¹¹ In *Influx*, it had been assumed that, despite all that, *scarcity* would not cease to be present in the proposals of the youngest generations; that *scarcity* was linked to remainders of ways of 'ideological policing of the borders of a given tradition' (Gadanho, 2003: 155). But when *Influx* became *Metaflux*, bringing to Italy ten of the fifteen architects who had been exhibited in Portugal (and adding only one other), *scarcity* starts to be seen in a different way: '*Metaflux* is a specific response to the theme *Metamorphs*. Based on the Portuguese context, however, it would be unwise to attempt to respond to the theme that Kurt Forster selected for the biennial with a technological and formal approach. Fundamentally, that discourse is not to be found in the Portuguese reality. The scarcity of means and the poetic and reductive response of the portuguese architects to historically adapt to their peripheral status does not allow for any elaborations where metamorphosis clearly assumes a central role' (Gadanho and Pereira, 2004: 19-23).

¹² For instance, if in other countries the usage of lime or white painted plaster may signify a (more or less formal) agreement with the Modernist Movement, in Portugal they intertwine, indeed, with the simple usage of a material with a constructive sense of reality and efficiency, and which converges (sometimes in an erroneous way) in language and in tradition.

¹³ Távora uses terms like *false*, *superficial*, *nonsense*, *illogical*, *wrong*, *serious disease*, *even more serious disease*, *beginning of chaos*, *very hard to ban...* (1947). Le Corbusier, in "Esprit de Vérité", says he feels he is driven by a judgment force, a truth spirit linked to active beings (1996 [1925]: 165-184, 182). In "Le Lait de Chaux; La Loi du Ripolin", Corbusier links the white of lime to the suppression of the mistake, the reinforced attention to the pure, perfect and complete object. Corbusier makes the exaltation of the good judge individual, that who knows what is superfluous and what is artificial, and who relates the white with clarity in order to be able to see himself and decide: 'lime's white is extremely moral'. The perfect object would be a living organism, because the spirit of truth would encourage it; and the smoothness and the lime would be the characteristics of that real object (1996[1925]: 185-195, 193).

¹⁴ Távora writes, in his opuscul: 'An Architecture has something of everyone because it represents all, and precisely it will be grand, strong, it lives in so far as each one can see him or herself in it as a reflection in a telling mirror that reveals its qualities and flaws. The collaboration will be of the majority so that all can be satisfied; a serious, concise, well oriented and realistic work is needed, (...)': 'When studying the portuguese context, we should meet the two fundamental elements, Man and Earth, in its present and in its historical development, influencing each other mutually (...)'. (1947: 10). In 1963, on the descriptive document of *Escola Primária do Cedro*, Távora reaffirms the impossibility to attain the pure and clean object, exalted in *Le Lait de Chaux; La Loi du Ripolin*: '(...) Architecture seems to me now as a great force, a force born from Earth and from Man, attached by a thousand threads to reality's nuances, (...). It is not, actually, about an untouchable and eternal virgin but about a small and simple work made by men to men' (Trigueiros, 1993: 86).

¹⁵ On this, Távora writes: 'Through bizarre reasonings it has been established (it is the time) that our "traditional" architecture be characterized by a certain number of decorative motifs which usage would be enough to produce portuguese houses. Form here, a new form of academism has came up, and such attitude was understood as that to which Art may encode itself into eternal shapes, according to fixed and unchanging rules'. (1947: 7)

1. Repetition and difference

‘Any way, is the debate on “being Portuguese” productive in the context of architecture?’ This was one of the questions Jorge Figueira asked to Paulo Varela Gomes in an interview published in a 2009 edition of *Jornal Arquitectos* entitled *Ser Português*. Varela Gomes answered the question: ‘Not as long as it is obligatorily linked to a set of forms. Or, to put it in a better way, to a style – to use the old word. On the contrary, it is a tragedy’ (2009: 32).

If a common ground exists between Gadanho, Varela, Kubler, and Távora, it is this negation of the concept of *style*. (Although in Gadanho it is translated into expressions like *scarcity*, *academicised tradition*, or *comfortable excuse for repetition* (2003; 2004). In this regard, it might be interesting to suggest the reading of Kubler in addition to *Plain Portuguese Architecture*, and a reading of Távora (related to Kubler) in addition to the *synthesis between the vernacular and the modern*. All this because both *Plain Portuguese Architecture* and the *synthesis between the vernacular and the modern* may overly link Távora and Kubler to a type of visuality that may be harmful to other readings.

The problematic link between the idea of identity and of *style* can be seen in Kubler’s remarks on *The Shape of Time*. The book is from 1962, and Kubler also published *Art and Architecture in Ancient America* in the same year. Kubler himself stressed, in *The Shape of Time, Reconsidered*, published in 1982, the influence that the writing process of one of the books may have had over the other. Kubler observed that ‘*Art and Architecture in Ancient America* became an art historical critique of anthropology’ and that ‘*The Shape of Time*, on the other hand, was a critique of the history of art from a point of view shaped in part by anthropological methods’ (118). In *The Shape of Time*, Kubler referred to that influence as follows: ‘Our distinction between prime objects and replicas also illustrates a capital difference between European and non-European arts. With European objects we often can approach closer to the hot moment of invention than in non-European ones, [...]’ (1962: 44).

Hence, Kubler, in his *remarks on the history of things*, and from the pre-Colombian motivations of his study, reflects on the way *history of art* interferes and is interfered with by the history of artefacts, replicas, tools, expressions, in short, all materials worked by human hands’ (1962: 9).

From all these things a shape emerges. A visible portrait of the collective identity, whether tribe, class, or nation, comes into being. This self-image reflected in things is a guide and a point of reference to the group for the future, and eventually becomes the portrait given to posterity. (Kubler, 1962: 9)

Repetition emerges as the founder of the idea of identity. And, consequently, the historian could now be portrayed as an identity detector; the historian would be responsible for the identification of identities: ‘The shapes of time are the prey we want to capture’; ‘The historian composes a meaning from a tradition, (...)’ (1962: 32, 13). *The Shape of Time*, however, breathes, shall we say, from that/the *fundamental contradiction* between repetition and identity:‘

In other words, every durable and successful form saturates the region of its origin, making it impossible for newer linked forms to occupy the same positions. Around every successful form furthermore, there arises a protective system of sorts for its maintenance and perpetuation, [...].’ (116/117, underlined by me)

No two things or acts can be accepted as identical. Every act is an invention. Yet the entire organization of thought and language denies this simple affirmation of non-identity. [...] It is in the nature of being that no event ever repeats, but it is in the nature of thought that we understand events only by the identities we imagine among them.’; ‘[...] all the classes of form are still open sequences, and it is only by an artificial convention that we may call any class a historical closed series. (67, 45, underlined by me)

Kubler seems to be describing the *tragedy* referred to by Varela Gomes. On the one hand, in these other perspectives, Kubler warns for the dangers of ideologizing identity – as the perpetuation of repetition by a minor quality *protective system*; on the other hand, he warns for the possibility that the concept of repetition might be, in itself, viewed as an always-*construction* of thought, as an *artificial convention*. These warnings by Kubler were already implicit in his rejection of the idea of *style*. The *fundamental contradiction* is, after all, between the positive vision of repetition (identity) and the negative vision of repetition (*style*): between repeating something and being the only one to do it; between the *realism* of repetition and the *invention* of repetition, the production of *alignment*.

In this *confrontation*,¹⁶ Kubler both devalues the ideas of artistic genius, talent, predispositions, or vocations, and accuses the copyist, the person who does not shift the course of tradition (1962: 7, 6), and stresses the stature of artists like Goya or Rembrandt (1962: 123). He both brings into art history reflections about tribal life, useful tools, or handicraft, as well as he values the artist and the original object. I observed, in the book, more than twenty interconnected polarities capable of generating antinomies: between *major artist* and *artisan artist* (123, 10); rupture and continuity (27); event and interval (13); life in the province and in the city (94, 77); new ones replacing old ones and old ones who do not let themselves be replaced by the new (17,117); *anatomy of routine* and the violation of the *sanctity of routine* (72,68); references to boredom, to *aesthetic fatigue*, or to the qualitative deterioration, and exultation of monotony (80, 77); or the meaning of *traditional craft education* and of the *work of artistic invention*.¹⁷

[...] a Great difference separates traditional craft education from the work of artistic invention. The former requires only repetitious actions, but the latter depends upon departures from all routine. Craft education is the activity of groups of learners performing identical actions, but artistic invention requires the solitary efforts of individual persons. (1962: 15)

An occasional person, born by chance into a favoring time, may contribute beyond the usual measure of a single life-span, but he cannot alone simulate in his life the corporate activity of a whole artistic tradition. (Kubler, 1962: 34)

Although one may discuss his method (Lapa, 2006: 94),¹⁸ Kubler, through the confrontation between traditional *art history* paradigms and those he recognizes in his *remarks on the history of [all] things*, ultimately challenges the orthodox historiographical procedures, seeking, in some way, their overcoming: ‘in his opinion, historiographical science should absolve itself of its traditional vocation to, in an absolute way, compartmentalise humanity’s productive past. [...] presenting the idea of the inevitability of border relativisation regarding perspectives as plural as instructive’ (Lapa, 2003: 6).

However, it was all about searching for a methodology for the organization of historical events, without, nonetheless, resorting to ‘[...] the organization of works by a hierarchy of

¹⁶ Kubler defines *confrontation* as follows: ‘The confrontation is between the new, untried coordinates and the whole experience: between untested guide-lines and the evidence of the senses: between the unknown and the familiar, the assumed and the given. It is the method of radical invention which differs from the other method of discovery by confrontation [...]’ (1962: 69).

¹⁷ These antinomies are after all intrinsic to the *confrontation*, proposed by Kubler, between the valuation of originals and replica-mass (39), European and non-European art (44), meaning and existence (25), retard and progress (59), permanence and change (71), discard and retention (77), etc.

¹⁸ Lapa refers, in Kubler, the legitimate search for ‘an order based on the “artistic substance”’ but he questions the method: ‘(...) the method the author suggests for the analysis of this substance is nevertheless debatable, because, as we have seen, this idea of *purposeful solution* that sustains is extremely questionable’. On this argumentation, see Lapa (2006: 94).

criteria on the basis of which authorship is embodied, and in which the Cartesian dimensions of both space and time are represented'.¹⁹ (Since these criteria would not suit, for example, historiography of pre-Columbian art.)

A net of another mesh is required, different from any now in use. The notion of style has no more mesh than wrapping paper or storage boxes. Biography cuts and shreds a frozen historic substance. Conventional histories of architecture, sculpture, painting, and the cognate crafts miss both the minute and the main details of artistic activity. The monograph upon a single work of art is like a shaped stone ready for position in a masonry wall, but that wall itself is built without purpose or plan. (Kubler, 1962: 32-33)

2. The Consideration of a Problem

Kubler would substantiate the overcoming of a historiography of the art traditionally built on the spatial-temporal Cartesian dimensions, on the local-style categories, on biographic entries, on the model of the biological vital cycle, or on the biased nature of iconological and morphological historiographies (separately), through the *consideration of a problem*: 'the principal aim of history' would then be that of '[...] identify and reconstruct the particular problem to which any action or thing must correspond as a solution' (1962: 8).²⁰

The problem disclosed by any sequence of artifacts may be regarded as its mental form, and the linked solutions as its class of being. The entity composed by the problem and its solutions constitutes a form-class. Historically only those solutions related to one another by the bonds of tradition and influence are linked as a sequence. (Kubler, 1962: 33)

The simultaneous *consideration of the problem* and of *the repetition* would put aside (not without a few more antinomies): the *consideration of style* and morphology (repetition without problem); the biographic entry and iconology (problem without repetition); or the inevitability of the vital cycle, since the *consideration of both the problem* and *the repetition* could become a latent ever-there: 'No formal sequence is ever really closed out by the exhaustion of all its possibilities in a connected series of solutions. The revalidation of old problems in new circumstances is always possible [...]' (1962: 44).

On this regard, and returning precisely to the possibility of the *reappearance of old problems*, it would be interesting to return to Fernando Távora, and to propose 1945's "The Problem of the Portuguese House"²¹ as an anticipation, in a way, of the critique of the paradigms of the traditional historiography of Kubler's *The Shape of Time*. We can observe this approaching in, for example, the cornerstone themes of the overcoming of *style*, of authorship, of the cut between morphology and iconology, or of the historiographical appropriation of the biological metaphor of the vital cycle. [I call them cornerstone themes taking also into account that Kubler himself labels them in this way in *The Shape of Time, Reconsidered*, appropriating Priscilla Colt's 1963 critical synthesis (1982: 112, 113).]²²

¹⁹ 'As the author himself comments (in other words), the "orthodox" historiographical method systematically funnels the perspective under which the creative reality of the successive ages is observed taking into account the abstract, absolute and "ecumenical" figure of corresponding successive styles' (Lapa, 2004: 4).

²⁰ '[...] we always may be sure that every man-made thing arises from a problem as a purposeful solution' Kubler (1962: 8).

²¹ Taking into account that I propose an *anticipation* of Távora, I will give priority to 1945's version, although at times, when trying to further stress or clarify an idea, I will resort to 1947's version.

²² Kubler quotes Priscilla Colt's critical review to mention the five main perspectives of his book ('which are at variance with entrenched practice in art history'): '1. The need to bring together the history of science and the history of art; 2. The irrelevance,

From the outset, for both Távora, the architect, and for Kubler, the historian, the fundamental presence of the *problem* replaces the resort to *styles* from the past. Távora replaces the *Portuguese house* by *The Problem of the Portuguese House*. Being that this *problem-that-substitutes* may be understood in a double sense: the *problem* that Távora considers to exist in *the Problem of the False Architecture*, which is that of the *style* of the *Portuguese house* — where problematizing replaces the *false* solution; and the problem that rests unsolved in concrete terms, which is that of the solution *For an Integral Architecture*.²³

‘It was found that portuguese architecture was losing what we today label as character. [...] the problem was considered to be solved through a very shallow study of our ancient architecture and, in practice, by the nonsense usage of some forms of that very same architecture.’ (Távora, 1945)

The great problems, certainly more due to the time than to the men, were not studied and, unsurprisingly, no satisfying solutions arose; instead, if there was a beginning for the chaos, it was tragically enhanced, with one more “style” [...].’ (Távora, 1947: 7)

The first problem would then be that of the existence of *one more “style”*, which resulted in the *nonsense usage of forms from the past* (repetition-just-for-sake-the-repetition); and the second, relating with the said *great problems which were left unstudied*, would be, according to Távora, the problem of ‘fulfilling that wish of houses for everyone’, the *root-problem*:

The social and economic conditions of the Portuguese Man, and the conditions and possibilities of the Portuguese Land (climate, luminosity, materials, etc.), should be studied, in what they may directly interest to architecture. This is the main work to do in order to solve the root-problem: Portuguese houses for all the portuguese. (Távora, 1945: 24)

Távora replaces the *style* by some kind of problem-problem, a problem in which it would make sense (social or national) to make the effort to solve it.²⁴ And that effort, Távora does not see it being made by a single man-author, for a *brief period*;²⁵ he imagines it to be long-lasting, crossing *future generations*:

It would be frivolous to think — and that was one of the mistakes of the creators of the “portuguese house” — that the new houses will be built in a few years and that every problem will be solved soon. It is impossible — and therefore difficult — for today’s men to still be able to see the result of their work; however, the great works and the great realities belong not to isolated individuals but to a community composed by everyone, past, present, and future, and under that spirit we would be happy knowing that future generations will attain the solutions we dreamt and in which we collaborated, without, nonetheless, having the prize of their full concretization. (Távora, 1945)

Hence, Távora projects himself in a *sequence* and redirects us towards Kubler: ‘The *continuum* of connected effort makes the single work more pleasurable and more intelligible

to the purposeful nature of artistic invention, of metaphors of biology and cyclical happening; 3. The inadequacy of biographical and narrative approaches to the linkages among works of art; 4. The unnecessary severing of meaning from form in the conflict between iconologists and formalists; and 5. The static nature of the concept of style as means of classification’ (Kubler, 1982: 112, 113).

²³ Távora uses subtitle “False Architecture” [“Falsa Arquitectura”] (in both the 1945 and 1947 versions) to refer to the *architectonic lie*, which characterizes the “Portuguese houses” (keeping with the previously mentioned judgment spirit). The subtitle “For a Whole Architecture” [“Para uma Arquitectura Integral”] belongs to the 1945 version, being then replaced in 1947 by: “For a Today’s Portuguese Architecture” [“Para uma Arquitectura Portuguesa de hoje”] (9, my translation).

²⁴ ‘It is, in fact, our purpose to simply raise, clearly and without bias, an urgent concern, of which everyone is talking about, a concern not only of aesthetical character but mostly of *social character*’ (Távora, 1945).

²⁵ I refer to the notions of *duration* observed by Kubler (1962: 83–86).

than in isolation’²⁶ (1962: 45). At the same time, and still corroborating this author’s self-dilution in a mass of time, solutions and men, Távora values the sole *style* possibility he accepts: ‘A style is born from the people and the land with the naturalness of a flower, and the people and the land are present in the style they have created for many generations’ (1945). To which he added, in the 1947 version: ‘[...] People and Land are present in the style they created with that naivety and that unconsciousness that characterized every really felt act, being it of a man or of a community, of a life or of many generations’ (7).²⁷

This calling to the *popular ingenuity of a style* (as opposed to what Távora would call the Romantic perception of *style*), on these terms, is close to another of Kubler’s *fundamental antinomy*. The antinomy between the consciousnesses and the unconsciousnesses of the creative act, or, to return to the previously mentioned dilemmas, to the antinomy of individual authorship and anonymous repetitions, or of *repetition* and *identity*.

On the one hand, Távora is aware of the *problem of the Portuguese house* – he, therefore, introduces a *mutant intention* and becomes the man who proposes a crossword grid for others to (also) solve [using Kubler’s metaphor (1962: 45)].²⁸ On the other hand, he self-proposes the fading of his own conscience (and of his relevance) on those others; he values the spontaneity of a flower; and he deviates the existence of the *problem of the Portuguese identity* towards the existence of *problems of the Portuguese condition*. Hence, in *The Problem of the Portuguese House*, there is the proposal of a *becoming* for architecture that would develop between the intentionality (conscience of the *Portuguese* needs that are to be overcome) and the conviction of the self-life that identity possesses, and that ‘does not just vanish like smoke’ (1947: 12). Which is to say: the *problem* must exist, but it must be other than *identity* in itself (since *identity*, in Távora’s view, similar to what Kubler said (1962: 9), could never be produced through one individual author’s intentionality, only through a *reflected self-image of a collective entity*).

It is as if Távora, in his certainty about the existence of self-life for identity, however not disregarding the study of the Portuguese condition, wanted to recover some kind of *pre-modern feeling*, on the terms developed, for example, by Paulo Varela Gomes: ‘That feeling, because it was not modern, did not correspond to an architectonic shape or “style”’; ‘Nobody felt the need to search or describe a shape for the architectonic portuguesism because the portuguesism was transcendently based [...]’ (2007b: 328).²⁹

²⁶ Távora questions himself about the point of creating a *style* in a single generation (1945). Interestingly, on the “speed” pretension, both Kubler and Távora reject the *romantic spirits*; Távora sees them as ‘armed with a false interpretation of the past’ (1947: 5); Kubler refers: ‘we are only slowly emerging from the Great romantic deformation of experience, when all the different skills and callings were costumed in fairy-tale parts, such as seven-league boots that allowed some to leap faster and farther than their plainshod contemporaries’ (1962: 63).

²⁷ On a 1953 interview, Távora, quoted by Tostões (1997: 46), mentioned, confirming: ‘Those who preconize the return of styles that have already passed or that by the lines “of fashion” wish to create in Portugal a modern architecture and urban design are taking the wrong path; each of these attitudes reveals a plastic dilettantism as dangerous as useless (...). “Style” does not count; what counts is the relationship between work and life’.

²⁸ Kubler remarks: ‘Still another example of the difference between prime objects and replica-masses is the daily crossword puzzle. The manuscript draft by the puzzle-maker is a prime object [...]; all the solutions in subways and on the desks of people who “kill time” compose the replica-mass’ (1962: 42).

²⁹ The link between the transcendence and the conscience/construction of identity is addressed by Varela Gomes in an article beginning with the quotation of the praise, in Filipe I of Portugal’s letters, to Sintra’s Town Palace: ‘it has very nice things and that I think I have never seen anywhere’ (2007b: 311). Varela notes: ‘(...) it is clear that the idea of a Portuguese architecture could not have, at the beginning of the 16th century, the same cultural outline which it came to have in the 17th century, and less yet in the 19th and 20th centuries. But there were, in the historical period on which I presented here a few testimonials, a particular feeling of the Portuguese architecture, a pre-modern feeling [...]. That feeling, because it was not modern, did not correspond to an architectonic shape or “style”’; ‘Nobody felt the need to search or describe a shape for the architectonic portuguesism because the portuguesism was transcendently based, being anterior to architecture, to art, to literature, to every

It is with the same certainty that Távora calls, *without fear*, for the study of (also) foreign architecture: ‘It is neither fair nor logical that we close ourselves, in a sought ignorance, to the works by the great foreign architects’, ‘by the great masters of today’ (1945, 1947: 12). Távora, being convinced of the impossibility of *identity* to be built by a single man during his lifetime, and warning about the need for a study of the actual situation, considers that there was no risk in studying the architecture produced outside of Portugal: he would not lose his identity, taking into account that identity, in a way, surpassed him;³⁰ nor would he repeat the foreign models just for the sake of repetition, since his *problem* would always be his situation (repetition-just-for-the-sake-of-repetition, what Kubler calls *exact repetition* (1962: 63), was, after all, what was to be avoided, regarding identity issues or any other type of issue).

However, in this interest for the architecture produced outside of Portugal, Távora adds, to the calling for the study of the ‘popular [anonymous] house’, the calling for the study of the ‘great [foreigner] masters of today’³¹; as if, like in Kubler, the confrontation and overlaying between the traditional historiography paradigms and those produced by the history of every-object was at stake. [Furthermore, Távora calls for both the study of Portuguese popular architecture, and the study of Portuguese erudite architecture, whose knowledge he accuses of being (also) shallow at the time when he wrote the text (1945).³²]

It is a matter of the ambivalence lived by the author, whose existence is forcibly inserted in the tradition of the history of bibliographical entries, but that, at the same time, values the collective production and wants to return to that kind of pre-modern feeling, where every identity would be unconscious, and where his own identity would lose itself. As if a will for recovery of a transcendent feeling of identity would correspond to a post-conscience conscience of authorship and identity building. In this context, however, it will always be a game between consciousness and the building of unconsciousness, between author and the fading of the author. (Távora’s own mythification in the context of 20th century historiography of Portuguese architecture refers to this fundamental contradiction).³³

In *The Shape of Time*, that ambivalence is intrinsic to the method proposed by Kubler for historiography. According to Kubler, the historian would have to discover (*consciously*) the *problem* that would be behind the (*unconscious*) building of a collective identity. However, because that *problem* assumes a need, intention, and purpose, it converges anew, not only in the *conscience* (building) of the historian, but also in the *conscience* of the solution creators – Lapa (89-94, 159, 161) criticizes precisely the way Kubler chases the notion of *purposeful solution*, inside that ambivalence.³⁴ (The paradox is built right from the start because the demand for the existence of a purpose is inherent to the rejection of *style*, to the rejection of repeating-for-the-sake-of-repetition):

empirical proof. It was only necessary to invent a shape for Portuguese architecture when, at the beginning of the 19th century, the debate stepped into the empirical arena of History’ (2007b: 328).

³⁰ Távora says: ‘If today we have individuality, no harm will come to us if we study foreign architecture; if we do not have it, it will be therefore useless to have the pretension to talk about Portuguese Architecture’ (1945).

³¹ Here I perform a simultaneous appropriation of the previously mentioned expressions used in 1945 and 1947.

³² ‘The study of the Portuguese house (erudite and popular), or, rather, of the construction of Portugal, is not done’ (Távora, 1945).

³³ I referred this mythification, for example, in the introduction to this text. (But it is, in some way, implicit in the fact that I am proposing to, once again, reflect on *The Problem of the Portuguese House*. Kubler’s warning on this relates to the risk of trying to ‘display the entire historical situation’ starting only from ‘an individual’s development’.) [On this relationship between *biography* and *historical situation*, see Kubler (1962: 36)].

³⁴ However, in Kubler, the notion of *purposeful solution* is much more ambiguous than that which we can see in Lapa’s argumentation.

‘[...] the historian communicates a pattern which was invisible to his subjects when they lived it, and unknown to His contemporaries before he detected it.’ (Kubler, 1962:13)

‘There are no linked solutions without there having been a corresponding problem. There is no problem where there is no awareness. [...] Each class of forms consists of a real difficulty and of real solutions.’ (Kubler, 1962: 38)35

In this context, the vernacular, or the popular architecture, would provide a model of *identity* without *conscience* and of *repetition* with a *real problem* and with *real purposes* (without *style*). It should also be mentioned that the publication of the *Inquiry to the Portuguese Popular Architecture* in 1961, the need of which is precursory suggested by Távora in 1945 in *The Problem of the Portuguese House*,³⁶ is contemporaneous to the writing of Kubler’s *The Shape of Time*. This coincidence enhances the perception of a continuity between Távora’s proposal and Kubler’s intentions: one way of reading it could be as a post-modern attempt to open history and the creative act to the possibility of an architecture without architects, of an art without artists; another possible reading could be as a search for functional and rational principles underlying popular architecture, in an effort to justify the principles of the Modernist Movement. That ambivalence is of a similar nature to the one underlying Kubler’s historiographical method: between the search for unconsciousness and the search for the purpose.

In fact, that ‘modernist reading of popular architecture’ (Leal, 2009: 48),³⁷ it underlies, at least partially, the *Inquiry*. This link may constitute the basis of what can explain the association of Távora and Kubler with the ideologies that Pedro Gadanho meant to overcome: the ghosts of *scarcity* and of the *synthesis between vernacular architecture and the modern*, which I have mentioned at the beginning of this text. It may also constitute the basis for the association of Kubler’s *Plain Portuguese Architecture* to ‘some kind of Giedionization or Pevsnerization of our ancient architecture’s history,’ which, according to Paulo Varela Gomes, may have served ‘perfectly the anti-cosmopolitan patriotism in place in the 70s’ in Portugal (2007a:283).³⁸ And it will, ultimately, lead, extrapolating, to the said tragedy of *style*, to a *stereotypical image* of ‘being portuguese’: ‘[...] it is a corset, it doesn’t mean anything; it has stopped wanting to say

³⁵ Kubler’s, but also Lapa’s, contradiction (between consciousness and unconsciousness of the problem) is understood in the following statements: ‘(...) for him [Kubler], the art historian’s work is not only about identifying a history narrative of the contents or a formal sequence on the evolution of the containers, but chiefly about the “report” or “revelation” of overlaying and evolving unconscious senses in the history of the shape of objects’. (Lapa, 2003: 6, underlined by me); ‘On the traditional notion of style, which logic required a perspective with a stable tendency over the objectual production of the past (from which static classes of objects resulted — the styles), Kubler, hence, adds the possibility of openness of alternative perspectives (although in a limited amount), based on the differentiation between multiple intentions presiding the creative activity’. (Lapa, 2003: 12, underlined by me); another observation by Kubler denouncing his contradiction is the way he criticizes the functionalism, for having been the ‘only one brief moment when a people have consciously sought total Independence from past formulas of expression’ (1962: 109).

³⁶ It is on an approach to the necessity of understanding the principles of traditional architecture, which degree of anticipation is shared by the architect Keil do Amaral (although two years later), that *The Problem of the Portuguese House* becomes a precursor of the conduction of the *Inquiry to the Portuguese Popular Architecture* [*Inquérito à Arquitectura Popular Portuguesa*]. Initiated in 1956, it had Keil as coordinator, Távora as the team coordinator for Minho region, and it would be published in 1961 in the volumes *Popular Architecture in Portugal* ([*Arquitectura Popular em Portugal*], Lisbon: Portuguese Architects’ Association); on the roles assigned to Távora and Keil do Amaral, anticipating the need for the study of popular architecture, see Keil do Amaral; ‘Uma Iniciativa Necessária’ in *Arquitectura*, no.14, Lisbon, April, 1947, quoted by Tostões (1997: 49–50).

³⁷ João Leal supports the *modernist* Reading of the *Inquiry* in depositions from Távora of 1996 (2009: 41).

³⁸ Gomes advocates that ‘“poverty” (constructive, of materials, decorative, of composition, of drawing, of façades), that seemed to deface as a stigma so many portuguese convents and churches, suddenly would show up redeemed (as simultaneously un-Europeanized) in a decade, that of 1970, on which Portugal sought a political and ideological autonomy with clear contours, we might say, “peripheral”’ (2007a: 280–281).

anything; it has turned into a recipe for making designs and photographs and isn't going anywhere', appropriating Varela Gomes, in Jorge Figueira's 2009 interview (2009: 32).³⁹

The risk is that of the resurgence of a catalogue of shapes, presumably emptied of an effective real sense, but justified in reality (in the place, the economy, the functionality, etc.). Deep down, it is all about a reading chance linking plain architecture, not to the condition in which it apparently roots itself, but to an ideological formula for the artificial *construction* of a Portuguese identity (contemporaneous or of every age). (The realization of this hypothesis eventually becomes more tragic if rethought also according to the controlling speeches of the modern movement, not exclusively Portuguese, founded upon the elimination of every excess, and visible already in a post-Wigleyan or post-Colominian consciousness, etc.).⁴⁰

Putting aside the fair amount of quarrels towards which these observations lead us to, I would, nonetheless, stress, in this context, the paradoxical fact that Gomes, Gadanho, Távora, and Kubler are all, in a single-voiced rejection of *construction* or of *style*, moved by the same principle of reality (ironically, all of them are post-Tavorean, or post-modern, in a certain way). The issue, in this case (and using the correlation between negative-presence-of-*style* and absence-of-*problem* recognized by Távora or by Kubler, as previously mentioned), would be the tragic existence of solutions that do not assume a real problem (a principle of reality), but a formal assumption where the problem is replaced by the imposition of an already-answer.

3. Warnings to the consideration of a problem

Hence, the danger of simulating a problem with an already-answer (a pseudo-problem) would be one of the warnings to the consideration of a problem (a warning that may be addressed to both architecture and historiography).

For example, Lapa, on the '*rising* process of the functionalist ambition', refers the contrast between its easy integration 'into the known conditionalities on the time it occurred' (the problem-problem) and 'the discrete arrogance *contaminating* the anti-ornamental speeches of an assumed disregard for a contemporaneous use of the ancestral "decorative art"' (an already-answer in itself) (2006: 87).⁴¹ Lapa also summarizes the historiographical implications of this last operational positioning (*ibid.*: 92). Imagining an order of events 'in a *sequence* where every work with a trait of will for the elimination of the superfluous would be grouped,' Lapa notices that all these events 'would answer the *evident* problem of elimination of the superfluous', however, not only 'does the problem includes in itself a substantial part of the answer: the notion of the superfluous [...]'; like the problem is in itself an answer: the elimination of the superfluous.

Under this argument, the issue would be: whether Távora and Kubler would look for unornamented and austere architectures, or whether they would look for an architecture based on a real problem, rooted in a real condition (of economy and of *scarcity*); whether the interest for the vernacular comes from an adhesion to Architecture's full-body, or whether it is all about a *discrete arrogance* driven by the ascetic detachment; if Portuguese plain architecture is an

³⁹ Figueira addresses Varela Gomes: 'At a certain point in time, this "being portuguese" in portuguese architecture turned into a stereotypical image with which we distinguish ourselves outside the country. A poetic, delicate architecture in synch with the place, acting with decorum. There comes a time when this being Portuguese can be a corset...' (2009: 32).

⁴⁰ This observation is related to my considerations at the introduction of this text.

⁴¹ Lapa refers, in a footnote, and regarding the 'arrogance that contaminates the anti-ornamental discourses', to the examples of Loos and Le Corbusier.

invention, or if it is an interpretation of a concrete reality.⁴² But, also, if Gadanho's anti-scarcity appeal arises from a real problem, if it is a problem-problem, or just an answer: the elimination of *scarcity*.

Neither repeat-for-the-sake-of-repeating (through uncritical repetition or through ideological repetition), nor being-different-for-the-sake-of-being-different, have on their root, inside the *style* detractors' principles, a problem-problem. [Lapa partially justifies this type of repetition or difference (without a problem) as a behaviour enhanced by the search for prestige among peers, therefore considered 'as a characteristic worthy of veneration' (2006: 174). Extrapolating: it is as if repetition and difference would be used as alignments with certain groups, that either resort or anti-resort to certain shapes, building a prescription of recurrent or anti-recurrent attitudes (but without a real problem)].⁴³ As if the issue would be the warning for the need of a permanent settlement of scores with reality.

The fact that Kubler establishes an interdependence between problem and formal repetition, for historiographical alignment purposes, and, as we saw, for the purpose of overcoming traditional historiography, directs us towards other remarks regarding the warnings when (generically) considering a problem (confirming the remark that a formal repetition is not necessarily driven by a problem, not even by a common problem): will it make sense to think that by solving a problem (in time), a formal sequence of 'closely related designs' would necessarily arise (Kubler, 1962: 37)? Formally distinct objects cannot answer to a same problem? A formal solution for a problem, in a given series, cannot be the solution for a problem of another series? Etc.

These issues are related to the Kublerian antinomies: on the one hand, the consideration that 'the field of history contains many circuits which never close' (1962: 36) [that 'historical time is intermittent and variable', that 'the end of an action and its beginning are indeterminate' (1962:13)]; on the other hand, the conception attempt (for reasons regarding the historiographical operability) of an early and a late, of a formal commensurability, for the incommensurability of a problem's life (see, for example, 1962: 56).⁴⁴

If, in Kubler, there is an explicit attempt for the organization of events through the association of 'closely related objects', which redirects to the problem of ideologising and

⁴² The answer to these questions would probably result in too long a reflection, I shall, for now, limit myself to record the ambivalence. Varela Gomes, quoting expressions from Kubler in *Portuguese Plain Architecture*, lists some principles that would underline the search for the "modernist" type: '(...) restrained principles; austere architectonic shapes, coldly rational exteriors; tasteful proportions; clarity; order; simplicity; severely deep and heavy architectonic qualities; blunt and simple architectonic expression in a poor country; purist profiles; sober exteriors with buttress-pilasters and curtain-walls; an architecture less academic and vernacular than the "unornamented" Spanish, etc.'; Gomes advocates that such an organization of events would be an invention: '(...) *Portuguese Plain Architecture* seeks an internal coherence and, by doing so, invents an Object: [...]' (2007a: 280) The other reading will be the one linking Kubler's (or Távora's) search, to the way they transport into history and into architecture their observations on objects that are usually discriminated (for example, without author). Lapa observes, on Kubler's *Portuguese Plain Architecture*: 'Before a group of apparently neglected or misunderstood objects in all the depth of their value, Kubler sought to, through appropriate comparisons, find logical relationships between their traits. Departing from the identification of those traits and the comparison between objects (some of the traits were constant) he could establish formal invariables, exclusively determinant of the Portuguese architecture of that time' (2004: 4).

⁴³ Kubler also addresses this warning to the consideration of a problem, when he mentions, quoting Rebecca West and the example of literature, that a 'continuum of connected effort' may largely represent a just-will of stimulus production in the critics (1962: 45)

⁴⁴ Kubler describes a series of antinomies related to the end and the expansion of a *problem* (1962:35): he both sees history as a process with no ends (quoting T.S. Eliot), where he assumes that 'any past problem is capable of reactivation under new conditions' (35); and also establishes, in a much more linear way, the final and initial stages of a series (38, 56). The association between problem and formal repetition is, all in all, related to this need for "finitude" (a condition of historiography) (36). Kubler defines form-class: 'the entity composed by the problem and its solutions constitutes a form-class' (33); and questions himself, in this context: '[...] are formal sequences not indefinitely numerous? No, because each corresponds to a conscious problem requiring the serious attention of many persons for its successful resolution' (38).

building a concept of identity, and, ironically, to the *style* that Kubler himself rejected; in Távora, the interest for the formal repetition will only be implicit in the attention devoted to popular architecture.⁴⁵ These approaches are, actually, not all that different. In both, repetition is accepted in the ambiguous terms of *unconsciousness* in the creation of a *style*, and in the terms of the existence of a *problem-problem*. In fact, both Kubler and Távora would use the word *style* when talking about their favourite sets: the ‘plain style’ and the ‘style that is born from the people with the naturalness of a flower’, respectively (1972, 1945).

4. The *Corporema* of the Portuguese House: repetition as possibility, or not

On a reading, the survey of antinomies and warnings, resulting from the reflections on 1962’s *The Shape of Time* and 1945’s “The Problem of the Portuguese House,” might seem to serve as the basis for the definite decrepitude of both texts. On another reading, however, the way they actually come closer regarding, for example, the consideration of the advantages of posing a *problem* (which, as we saw, also makes them come partly closer to Paulo Varela Gomes’s assertions or to the commissaries of *Influx* and *Metaflux* themselves) seems to point to other possibilities.

On one side, considering the possibility of replication [to use Kubler’s term (1962: 71)], which implies a chain of efforts in time (to use a conception belonging to both Kubler and Távora), also implies repetition as an in-itself possibility (that the interlocking of both texts is, in itself, an example, in the terms of the said *consideration of a problem*). Both efforts, Kubler’s and Távora’s, address a rejection of repetition-for-the-sake-of-repetition (*style*) without putting aside the possibility of *repetition*, and without putting aside nor overestimating the possibility for *difference* [since that, in one way or another, and not without ambiguity, acknowledge that ‘societies behave differently from each other in their relationship with originality’ Lapa (2003: 13)].⁴⁶

On the other hand, those ambivalences, Kubler’s or Távora’s, while increasing the body-of-possibilities, also question the readings that strictly relate them to the formal paradigms of the Modernist Movement. A particular conception of time may be at stake: the rejection of repetition-for-the-repetition, or the rejection of difference-for-the-difference, makes historiography and architecture come closer in a possibility of *becoming* for the artistic creation.⁴⁷ In fact, questioning the organization of events according to a *style* has a simultaneous historiographical and project design impact that the approach between Távora and Kubler (beyond any visuality) makes recognizable (at least, in a contemporary, post-Deleuzian, context).

But the *fundamental ambivalence* (the most shared one) is that which suggests that a not-aligned architecture may always lead to new realignments.

⁴⁵ Regardless of all the sharing we have determined, Távora, probably due to his being an architect, never refers to formal alignment, repetition, in an explicit way (this question, by itself, would give way to a specific chapter regarding the crossing of historiography with architecture).

⁴⁶ Lapa refers that ‘if artisticity is, as in politics, an inevitable reality of societies, and if societies behave differently from one another in their relationship with originality in the production of objects, then this cannot, by definition, be considered the quintessence of art’ (2003: 13).

⁴⁷ On the relationship between *becoming*, repetition, and difference, I wrote “A Repescagem” (Miguel, 2010).

The body, instead of taking a traditionally unicentral position, will unfold itself into several multiple centralities, each one of the new occupied positions being a corporema.
Silva (1999:55)

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Heterotopology: Portuguese Plain Architectural histories, c1960-present

Emanuel de Sousa¹

sousa_em@aschool.ac.uk

Abstract: George Kubler's 'history of things' (The Shape of Time, 1962) and Michel Foucault's 'order of things' (Les mots et les choses, 1966) and their respective emphasis on time and space frames the cross-reference analysis of the invention, variation, replication, mutation and exaptation (i.e. co-optation in function) processes and products within formal sequences, presenting a new way of opening up the simultaneous historical-social-spatial palimpsest. The notion of heterotopia becomes here the point of departure from which to unpack overlapping lines of enquiry which reinforces the instrumental role of the notion in the reframing of spatial practices and boundaries, since the ninety-sixties, namely in cultural theory, cultural geography and architecture – in order to establish a critical cross-section of this spatio-temporal framework and the shaping of physical and conceptual space.

The paper specifically (re)examines the disruption of 'orthotopographic' thought (i.e. in the right place) and the reverberation of 'heterotopology' (i.e. science of other places), from 1960s onwards, (re)assessing the normative in architecture and city formations. By examining histories of architectural knowledge in this period and specific urban design strategies, it is suggested the process by which the utopian project was transformed into a diversity of 'other' – heterotopia – practices, emphasizing the relevance of 'type' and typological series variation. In challenging the process of resemblance usually ascribed to heterotopia, the paper reinstates a latent process of similitude. If resemblance presupposes a primary reference that prescribes copies on the basis of the rigor of the mimetic relation to itself; in similitude, the primary reference is dislocated, things and images are side by side, 'without any of them being able to claim the status of 'model' for the rest' shifting from a hierarchical relation to a series of simultaneously exclusive lateral relations in complex network of interactions. Thus, heterotopia not as a question on the 'other' (deferring a peripheral position) but a (re)questioning on the 'same' (reinstating a central position) in the account of the relationship between space, object and democracy. In particular, the paper excises the ordering process of typological resemblance from heterotopia, in favor of an understanding of 'type' as process – namely within the Portuguese architectural realm following the publication of Kubler's Portuguese Plain

¹ Emanuel de Sousa is an architect graduated from Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto (FAUP), Portugal, further academic education at Technische Universiteit Delft and Berlage Institute Rotterdam, The Netherlands. He is a registered architect who has previously worked at Steven Ehrlich Architects in Los Angeles, at Peter Eisenman Architects in New York, and at José Manuel Carvalho Araújo, Portugal. He has taught Urban Planning at FAUP and History and Theory Studies at AA. He is the recipient of Jovens Criadores Award (2000), Ricardo G. Spratley Award (2004) and Eng. Antonio de Almeida Foundation Scholarship (2005), European 09 Award (2008) AA/CCA Centre Canadien D'Architecture Research Grant (2010) and is presently pursuing his PhD at Architectural Association, supported by FCT – Foundation for Science and Technology, Portugal – entitled Heterotopia: Reframing Spatial Practices and Boundaries, 1960 – present. He is co-editor of Propositions: Ideology in Transparency (AA, 2010).

Architecture in 1972 – not as schema formulated a priori but deduced from a series of instances (i.e. variants of the series). The process of reducing formal variants to a common root, which is itself subordinate to variants of the series, implies a suspension of historical judgment, inherently and intentionally negative, in relation to law and precedence. Therefore, the suspension of historical judgment enables the (re)assessment of the normative in architecture and urbanism, directed towards a (re)evaluation of city and territorial formations.

I would like to start with a quote by the 2011 Pritzker laureate, Eduardo Souto de Moura:²

There's a book by George Kubler, *A Arquitectura Chã*, that describes Portuguese architecture as connected to the earth, the ground, creating empathies in the ground. The Portuguese are a few people and have discovered too many things in this world, so to control and occupy them they had to come up with very pragmatic systems. So Portuguese architecture is very pragmatic and effective in the way that it doesn't alter landscape. It takes shapes that empathize with topography, and that influences Portuguese architecture a lot. Everybody knows that the Romans changed topographies in order to build their cities. The Portuguese, along the coast of Africa [in the 14th century] would occupy small territories, placing some families there. And those families would contact the natives and occupy the territory as it was. And there arises this effective pragmatism that allowed for Portugal to become the colonial empire it once was. Evidently this creates an architectural identity – and I don't know if architecture has one identity – but it has variants, and one of them is this plain architecture. Portuguese architecture is low, small, embedded in the terrain. I will give you an example. In the 18th century, the world's richest king – because Portugal was the US of that time – built a ridiculous palace. Ridiculous. The Queluz Palace is a small pavilion for European royal family standards, and it was built by the richest king in the world. This means we are down to earth – small. And we build according to that. Whenever we wanted to build big, opulent things like the Mafra Convent, we'd call in Italian architects who built differently (Souto de Moura, 2011).

² Portuguese architect born in 1952, in Porto, where he lives and works. Following his studies at the School of Fine Arts in Porto, Souto de Moura began his career collaborating in Álvaro Siza Vieira's office, architect with whom he would later co-author a number of projects, such as the Portuguese Pavilion at the Expo 2000, in Hannover, or the Pavilion of the Serpentine Gallery, in London (2005). His work has been awarded since 1980, when he started his own office. Guest speaker at renowned European universities, his work has been shown in several exhibitions. Souto de Moura's recent Braga Municipal Stadium is one of his most famous buildings. Pritzker Prize 2011.

Souto de Moura was actually being asked about his hometown, Porto, and the influence that, in the words of the interviewer Vera Sacchetti, 'this historical city, filled with regional, vernacular architecture' have had upon him (Souto de Moura, 2011). The book he refers to is *Plain Architecture* published in 1972, where Kubler compared the style to a 'vernacular architecture, related to living dialect traditions more than to the great authors of the remote past,' or to 'an entirely different architectural geography, where clarity, order, proportion, and simplicity mark the contours of another aesthetic.' (Hoag, 1974) Not only does the author expand the limits of architectural history to consider the effects of economic and dynastic events but he applies to this study the belief that 'no style or class [be it Mannerism or Baroque] excludes the simultaneous possible presence of many other prior classes' (Hoag 1974). Without the over simplification that 'the assumption that period, place, and style are interchangeable' (*ibid.*) is likely to produce, the book tends to seem confusing and difficult to grasp, treating at some length some forty buildings presented in chronological order that does not always allow to understand completely their interrelations. In a typical attitude in Portuguese architecture, born of the attempt to preserve the national identity at a time of political, economic and social crisis, the resulting volumetric cobbled rectangles, extremely compact and orthogonal, where the decoration was avoided whenever possible, remained a very practical kind of building, allowing it to be built throughout the empire with small adjustments, and ready to be decorated when one thought it was appropriate or economic resources were available.

It allowed later applied decoration or simply building the same type of building decoration adapting to the taste of the time and place and thus it became an elegant typology that could be co-adapted in the entire empire from Portugal to India passing through Brazil, allowing the fragile balance between the Portuguese identity and the 'out there' local specificities. Economic and easily executable, to understand it in its entirety it is essential to bear in mind the inherent character and the functional space of the empire. Misunderstood by art history, which had only in mind the Italian or French models, only in the 80s of the twentieth century, it began to be understood by its wit and intelligence.

Since the publication of *Portuguese Plain Architecture*, Portuguese architectural practices have been nudged by its impact, as the brief for this conference rightly put it. The connection of *Portuguese Plain Architecture* with the ideological attributes of early modernism and the political context of the time, the country was on the verge of the 1974 revolution, catalysed the re-emergence of a new order of Portuguese Plain that evoked early modernism and was correlated to the ideology of aesthetics of scarcity and to progressive liberal thought. Plain Architecture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries shared some qualities with the architecture in post-revolutionary Portugal, most importantly the effect that could be achieved with low budget buildings that were responding to new a situation of crisis. If Kubler was displaying a type of architecture previously undefined by architectural historians, he was as well unveiling a new tradition to be adopted in a post-revolutionary situation. Nevertheless, instead of repeating the formulae used by Kubler in carefully sample a collection of parallel instances within a series, clearly framing the development of post-1974 Portuguese architecture, I would like to illustrate this re-emergence in a single ephemeral contemporary example within an exhibition-like setting, which encapsulates more than typologies to be recognised and clearly identified, the process by which Portuguese Architecture seems to rule itself.

In Venice, a mirrored plane, supported by beams that crossed the windows of the Fondaco Marcello, on the Canal Grande, was the central object of the Portuguese representation at the

11^a Venice Biennale 2008, curated by José Gil³ and Joaquim Moreno.⁴ In an immediate reading, this element completed the front of a single storey warehouse and established a continuity of alignment with the adjacent buildings while the use of a mirrored surface added a certain amount of provocation, taking into account the recurrent conservatism of Venice, after all, the glass and neutral surfaces are the ultimate symbol of the dreaded ‘modern city’.

There is another way of seeing the intervention that directly puts it into the overall theme of the Biennale: *Out there: Architecture Beyond Building* – as the ruin of a curtain wall, the ‘found’ fragment of something greater, a mysterious object, enigmatic, ‘out there’.

José Gil and Joaquim Moreno chose to translate literally ‘Out There’ – ‘Lá Fora’, in Portuguese –, to which they countered ‘Out Here: Desquieted Architecture’ – ‘Cá Fora: Arquitectura Desassossegada’. But ‘Out There’ has a multiple meaning of something that ‘goes around’, mysteriously, or even something beyond the norm, fantastic – in colloquial terms – ‘out’ or ‘past’. The curatorial premises of Aaron Betsky, the commissioner of the exhibition, and the set of visionary or ‘strange’ objects exposed at the Arsenale – and, in particular, the ‘houses’ of Asymptote Architecture – pointed in that direction. Betsky proposed architecture as an ‘alternative world’, the ‘continuing revelation of where we are and perhaps of who we are,’ or even, in this context, a ‘spectacular architecture’ outside the mainstream. The approach by Betsky in the Biennale referred to an ‘architecture that is strange, useless, unusual, gorgeously absurd’ (Betsky, 2008). The mirror on Canal Grande seemed to belong to this dimension “Out there”, even if their references are closer to *Roma Interrotta*⁵ – the 1978 exhibition at the Arsenale reinstalled (with Rossi and Venturi, among others) – than to *Uneternal City*⁶, foreshadowing the future Rome. If we take the mirrored surface as a recovered fragment, perhaps of a late-modern building demolished in Mestre or Lido, we are ‘beyond the building’, in a spectral architecture, ‘Out there’. Or ‘disquieted’, in terms of the curators.

‘Out There: Architecture Beyond Building’ can imply a dimension of the outside so active and closely integrated to an inside to induce an unlimited exterior in the interior. The ever expanding ‘Out There’ would then ensure the enlargement of architecture. This interpretation implies that the problem at stake is no longer the quest for a home, for a dwelling capable of sheltering us in an ever-changing world – a quest eager to recover some neo-archaisms not beyond, but before contemporaneity. Nor would it be the definition of a dissemination, of a

³ Portuguese philosopher born in 1939, in Maputo, Mozambique, José Gil lives and works in Lisbon. After studying Mathematics, he graduated in Philosophy by the University of Sorbonne and started his teaching activity in 1965. Professor of Aesthetics and Contemporary Philosophy, he starts to publish regularly from 1980’s onward, becoming «one of the 25 great world thinkers» as quoted by *Le Nouvel Observateur*. Among his most recent books, one can highlight *Portugal, Hoje. O Medo de Existir* and *O Imperceptível Devir da Imanência – Sobre a Filosofia de Deleuze*.

⁴ Portuguese architect born in 1973, in Luanda, Angola, Joaquim Moreno lives and works in New York. He graduated from the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto and has a Master from the Barcelona Technical School of Architecture. He works at the Media and Modernity Program of the Architecture Department at Princeton and is an assistant professor at Columbia University.

⁵ In 1978, twelve internationally renowned architects gathered around the project *Roma Interrotta*: based on the map of Rome drawn in 1784 by Gian Battista Nolli, the last architectural planning for the Eternal City, the architects reinterpreted the city with a critical view towards what had been built and destroyed throughout the centuries. The projects were exhibited in Rome in 1978. It included projects by Piero Sartogo, Costantino Dardi, Antoine Grumbach, James Stirling, Paolo Portoghesi, Romaldo Giurgola, Robert Venturi, Colin Rowe, Michael Graves, Leon Krier, Aldo Ross and Robert Krier.

⁶ The projects drafted in 1978 in conjunction with the ‘Rome Interrupted’ exhibition concentrated on the design of the historic city, by proposing utopian and elitist urban visions based on the form of the 18th-century city. ‘Uneternal City’, on the other hand, while starting from the same assumptions, proposes an altogether different interpretation – no longer associated with the fixity of the built city, but deeply interested in the transformation of the contemporary city and in its relation to history and memory. It included Projects BIG – Bjarke Ingels Group, Centola&Associati, Clark Stevens - New West Land, Delogu Associati, Giammetta&Giammetta, Koning Eizenberg Architecture, Labics, MAD, n!studio, Nemesi and t-studio. ‘Uneternal City: Urbanism Beyond Rome’, Section of the 11. Mostra Internazionale Di Architettura, la Biennale Di Venezia, 2008.

nomadism, of the building process; a dissemination that would bring it to the public and artistic space of contemporary life. In this case, the multiplication of heterogeneous, chaotic, and discontinuous elements would lack the necessary consistency of an architecture for a time gone ‘out of joint’ (Gil *et al.*, 2008). From this reflection emerged the idea of a permanent disquiet, of an outside more exterior than every other outside because it is lodged in the inside, beyond every distinguishable point. Hence: ‘Out Here: Disquieted Architecture’.

This disquiet, this movement between inside and outside, converging lines originating from the interval, or the intensity, of the disquiet is a productive creative movement that reinforced the consistency of the outside in ‘here’, beyond every ‘there’ (*ibid.*).⁷ This movement opened an ever-expanding field of experimentation: the invention of spaces in differential intervals (an outside expanding in an inside perpetually mobilised through this paradoxical expansion), experimentation, co-existence, or combination of heterogeneous elements.

Since the early works, Souto de Moura rehearses the switch from the neo-plastic system towards the ruin system: each plane once clear, pre-fabricated or serial now tends to be archaic (of stone), fragmented, dislocated. Of the modern totality there is some leftover fragments. The anxiety about the ‘miesian’ fullness and silence lead to the fragmentation of the ruin. It is this circuit that Souto de Moura works since the 80s, and this is where its architecture gains contemporary expression. The line that separates the domestic ‘normality’ of the ‘minimal’ houses and the strangeness of an architecture brought to the bone is thin and, sometimes, is overcome, as is the case.

In the words of José Gil what Souto de Moura and Ângelo de Sousa⁸ proposed was ‘to construct how a plane of immanence is constructed’ (Gil, 2008)⁹ – a ‘plane of creation’ – ‘a real virtual space, that enables the project but that it is not the project’ (*ibid.*)¹⁰ – further explaining that ‘it is a space in which one does not rests, even in rest, so that it is in me that which constantly differentiates me from myself’ (*ibid.*).¹¹

This mirrored facade supported by counterweights that filled the anti-chamber which gave entrance to a room where images are constructed and deconstructed through an infinite game of mirrors ever changed with the movement of the visitors produced an infinite palace. As Gil put it, ‘the plane of creation shows the unfolding of the plane of immanence, through the absorption of a series of outer elements, which enter in chaos in the anti-chamber and which revert themselves with the entrance of visitors’ (Gil, 2008).¹² This conception recalls, in the words of the philosopher, to an idea of territory, not as isolated place but that enables

⁷ As the curators put it: ‘The interest in the formulation of a contradictory Out Here is the continuity of expansive movement. Such formulation is better substantiated in an architectonic experiment, in the mobilisation of the Portuguese Pavilion as a laboratory set-up, than in the documentation of earlier events. To promote transformation, to enquire into the future – more than access the present or the recent past – is a program better served with architectonic experiments than with clearly framed retrospections, and this is the general purpose of the Portuguese representation, to temporarily materialize the heteronymous disquiet in a contradictory Out Here.’

⁸ Portuguese visual artist born in Maputo, Mozambique, in 1938, Ângelo de Sousa lives and works in Porto. He graduated from the School of Fine Arts in Porto, today the Fine Arts School of the University of Porto, where he would teach from 1962 to 2000, when he was emerited. Drawer, sculptor, painter, and filmmaker, Ângelo de Sousa exhibits regularly since 1959. Serralves Museum presented two anthological exhibitions of his work in 1993 and in 2001, and Gulbenkian Foundation’s Modern Art Centre held two big retrospectives in 2003 and 2005. In 2007 he received the Gulbenkian Award for Art.

⁹ ‘O que fizeram foi construir como se constrói um plano de imanência’ (Gil, 2008).

¹⁰ ‘Um espaço virtual real, que permite o projecto mas que não é o projecto’ (Gil, 2008).

¹¹ ‘É um espaço no qual não se descansa, mesmo em repouso, para que seja em mim aquilo que me diferencia constantemente de mim’ (Gil, 2008).

¹² ‘O plano de criação mostra o desenrolar do plano de imanência, através da absorção de uma série de elementos do exterior, que entram em caos na antecâmara, e se vão reverter à medida que entram os visitantes’ (Gil, 2008).

ramifications with the land and escape lines to an outer space. A space which we can inhabit in permanent transformation.

‘To inhabit is to create conditions to in a given place I could circulate and invent a maximum of possible exits’, this is, ‘where one encounter what Souto Moura denominates of comfort, not a small pleasure but of constant transformation.’ (Gil, 2008)¹³

Usually evoking Venturi and Aldo Rossi, Souto de Moura speaks of architects who are on the threshold of what happens today. Even if already lost, Venturi, in favour of ‘common sense’, and Rossi, on ‘exalted reason,’ they still had a script. On the Canal Grande, the hypothetical billboard suspended in front of Fondaco Marcello was a bow to this latter rationality.

The authors of the intervention, Eduardo Souto de Moura and Ângelo de Sousa, assumed also the reference to the famous drawing by Robert Venturi which included an ordinary volume with a billboard proclaiming: ‘I Am a Monument’ (at the time, a ‘counter-project’ for the Boston City Hall).

In Venice, the mirrored billboard introduced, in effect, a public dimension onto a modest warehouse, mimetising the theory of the ‘decorated shed’, a theme also found in *Learning From Las Vegas* (Venturi *et al.*, 1977), but here they did not overlay the mirrored plane with graphic or scenic elements ‘a Las Vegas’, but fixed a curtain wall, precisely the image-type of modern architecture countered by Venturi.

In the process, they even contemplated the possibility of using the famous phrase, and registered it in the plan, or an alternative: ‘Io Sono un Specchio’ (perhaps an unusual intersection of Venturi with Magritte of *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*). An apparent redundancy that in fact becomes paradoxical as the mirror of 20 x 18 m is not a mirror but an acrylic mirrored film, only noticeable upon touch, which in fact, floats over the water plane.¹⁴ The process of installing this billboard was also rather difficult as the structure could not be welded to the original building as the original structure is ‘intouchable’, requiring an additional counterweight structure that filled the anti-chamber, with concrete blocks, counterbalancing the wind pressure on the enormous mirrored plane. In terms of authorisations and licenses, the installation was even more complex, as contrary to the original impression that billboards are normally accepted in Venice – as there is always a palace being restored – the same was not true when proposing to install the mirrored plane, which in the end was taken off two days before the end of the *bienale* by a judicial order.

The idea of producing a montage with mirrors raises some questions on the final product, something in between the work of art and the horror show in temporary fun fairs. But the intervention does not resume itself to the exterior mirrored plane, reflecting the opposite facades, which in the words of Souto Moura becomes ‘an intervention of virtual architecture that in principle pretends that it does not exist’ (Souto de Moura, 2008).¹⁵

The trapezoidal plan of the interior of the warehouse with nine pillars was transformed by the introduction of a second plane that parallels the alignment of the Canal Grande and the facade which was finished with mirrors. In the middle of the pillars, nine pillars were positioned on ‘I’ profiles 3 meters high illuminated by suspended lights. This paraphrases an installation by Ângelo de Sousa originally set in Serralves, Porto, with the title – ‘Nós vemos como os

¹³ ‘Habitar é criar condições para que num certo lugar eu possa circular e inventar um máximo de saídas possíveis’, ou seja, ‘onde se encontra aquilo que Souto Moura chama de conforto, não de um pequeno prazer mas de constante transformação’ (Gil, 2008).

¹⁴ Souto de Moura recalled the difficulty of the production of the installation, which started with real mirrors, which were refused by the authorities due to the risk of breaking with the wind pressure, to polished inox plates, which at the time there was not in stock to the final acrylic mirrored film, which ended up reflecting more than they thought in the first place.

¹⁵ ‘[...] é uma intervenção de arquitectura virtual, que em princípio finge que não existe’ (Souto de Moura, 2008).

outros nos vêem a nós’ – ‘We see how the others see us’. The installation is based on the positioning of two mirrors at 90° which enables one to see himself as others normally see them, and not in symmetry as when one looks at the mirror. Which interestingly resumes the theme of the bienale in two opposite way: inside one sees as other see us and outside how one sees the others, reinterpreting the overall theme ‘Out here’.

This game of mirrors and words on the implications of an outside and an inside leads us back to the citation by Michel Foucault in which he addresses the paradigmatic example of the Mirror as heterotopia.

In the mirror, I see myself over there in the unreal space. A sort of shadow gives me the visibility to see myself, to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, exerting a sort of counteraction to the position I actually occupy. From the mirror, I find the absence of where I am because I see myself over there. Place is displaced, and I is transferred to the other on the other side of the mirror.

Starting from the gaze directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space in the mirror, I come back toward myself, beginning again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself where I am, through the other.

The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolute real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolute unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. (Foucault, 1966: 24)

With the paradigmatic example of the mirror, heterotopia is presented in all its complexity, not only a question of space, but a question of the subject and the relation to the other, unfolds in the reflection of a simple surface.

Animals divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies. (Borges, 1981: 141)

Referring to a passage by the Argentinean author Jorge Luis Borges quoting a ‘certain Chinese Encyclopaedia’ in the preface of *Les Mots et les choses* (1966), Michel Foucault contrasted utopias to heterotopias and presented the notion of heterotopia as destroying syntax – ‘secretly undermining language’ –, unsettling the flow of discourse. Redirecting the notion towards architecture and spatial configurations in ‘des espaces autres’ – a paper presented at the Centre d’Études Architecturales Paris in March 1967 –, Foucault would point to a series of social institutions and ‘places’ that disrupt the assumed continuity/normality of ordinary everyday space – an injection of alterity into sameness – offering multiple possibilities within a spatialised ‘otherness’ could flourish.

Foucault coined these ‘places’ hetero-topical – ‘other places’ – meaning a ‘place’ out of the ordinary: the peripheral and the displaced – the extra-ordinary. Reassessing the examples given then – the mirror, the boarding school, the military service, the ‘honeymoon trip’, the rest home/asylum, the psychiatric hospital, the prison, the cemetery, the theatre stage, the cinema screen, the garden, the museum and the library, the fair and the carnival, the holidays resort, the *hammans* of the Moslems, the Scandinavian sauna, the American motel, the brothel, the Jesuit colony, the ship – these ‘heterotopical’ sites set an important shift towards an external space, beyond both the internal phenomenological perspective and an abstract space. Heterotopias point towards the set of relations delineating sites on a heterogeneous space – spaces of crisis, deviance, exclusion and illusion — in a way transgressing from an abstract level of discussion, to a more real and physical, therefore located – and source of many of

misappropriations in multiple branches of knowledge – ‘typologies’ or real places that could be referenced as heterotopias. From these initial examples, Foucault set to enunciate the principles of what he would later label a new science: heterotopology.

Foucault’s reference to concrete ‘typologies’ opens up another set of issues instrumental in the discipline of architecture, namely the notion of type and typology. Likewise, any attempt to confine the study of Type to a historical moment or even restrict the study of Type to architecture, becomes in principle a misleading distortion of the essential meaning of Type which should be taken as a ‘conceptual model’ or paradigm that permeates every intellectual creation.

In order to fully understand the scope of both notions and to derive the fundamental meanings of the concept of type and heterotopia from the body of architectural tradition, it would be necessary to proceed, simultaneously, in time and space, along two distinct lines of enquiry: one diachronic, the other synchronic, meaning one to trace the evolution of the theories of type from one author to another and the other to ‘disclose’ the common ideas that lie behind theories formulated at different times.

For example, heterotopia (i.e. the displacement of organic tissue to an unusual place) (re)presents, in medical terms, a distinct kind of ‘variation’ beyond the traditional categories of normal and pathological. Among evolutionary mechanisms, adaptation has been defined by historical genesis (i.e. features built by natural selection for their present role) and current utility (i.e. features now enhancing fitness besides their origin), a bifurcation that tended to be dismissed by the dominance of natural selection, which turned historical processes and current utility in one simple adaptation. Nonetheless, many features of organisms are non-adapted, but available for co-optation in descendants, meaning that an important concept had no place in evolutionary lexicon. Features that now enhanced fitness but were not built by natural selection for their current role, would then be called exaptations, restricting adaptation, as Darwin suggested, to features built by selection for their current role. Thus exaptations can be of two kinds: features that evolved through natural selection for one function being co-opted to another function; and features that arose through adaptative processes and have been co-opted for a biological function, named organism’s architectural spandrels (i.e. the concept initially extracted from architecture referring to spaces left over in-between distinct structural systems superimposed in a building or structure).¹⁶

From evolutionary mechanisms to disciplinary knowledge – namely architectural and taking as a basic feature in this specific research the operative role of heterotopia and type –, an investigation through the lens of exaptation, would represent another way of opening up the simultaneous historical-social-spatial palimpsest.

From an unusual distribution of discrete elements of corporal space in medical terms – through histological processes in the isolation of a functional, two-dimensional section of tissue – to the reorganisation of space in cultural and architectural terms – through a perception of the relativity of differences and its local status in the organisms architecture – heterotopia assumes

¹⁶ In many of his essays, Steven J. Gould has suggested complications or revisions to any simple version of the Neo-Darwinian synthesis. He has also proposed a number of alternative concepts to simple adaptation. In ‘The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm’ (*Proceedings of the Royal Society of London*, 205, 281-288) Gould and Lewontin warned against “naive adaptationism” in the explanation of features that had emerged for other reasons. Using the dome and spandrels of the basilica of San Marco as an illustration, Gould and Lewontin showed the triangular spaces of the spandrels at San Marco are simple solutions to the problem of filling in the spaces left by placing a dome on four arches. In themselves, they should not be called adaptations, as they did not arise as a adaptation through natural selection but rather as effects of the adaptative processes (i.e. adjoining distinct structural systems) and that have been co-opted for a biological function (i.e. being used to an additional distribution of the dome weight, directing it to the pillars). In another paper, ‘Exaptation - a missing term in the Science of Form’ (*Paleobiology*, 8, 4-15), Gould and Vrba use the term Exaptation to describe the new use of parts that were originally adapted to some other function.

an exaptive role in the reframing of spatial practices. The identification of exaptations, like the one just pointed out with the notion of heterotopia, especially within architectural discursive and case studies, allows a productive reassessment of its disciplinary knowledge at a period when architecture saw its materials change more than its systematic form: from hand drawing to computer assisted drawing, from physical reality to virtual reality, from utopia to heterotopia.

To fully understand the implications of this reordering of space, it is necessary to trace heterotopia back to its medical and biological origins.

Heterotopia. s.f. [heterotopia, heteros de autre, topos lieu]. S'est dit pour erreur de lieu. Nom donné autrefois à la formation de masse morbides d'une structure déterminée hors du lieu où siègent les tissus normaux correspondants, consécutivement à une lésion plus ou moins ancienne de ces tissus normaux. Ainsi, pendant le développement d'une tumeur épithéliale de l'utérus, du rectum, de la langue, de la mamelle, etc., on voit parfois se produire des tumeurs d'une texture semblable dans les couches musculaires ou lamineuses, dans les nerfs, les muscles, les ganglions lymphatiques, ou autres organes plus ou moins éloignés du tissu primitivement altéré et sans continuité avec lui; c'est la généralisation du cancer. (Littré, 1908)

The word heterotopia consists of two parts derived from the Greek *heteros* (another) and *topos* (place). In biology and medicine, heterotopia indicates a phenomenon occurring in an unusual place. Thus 'heterotopic' stands for a deviation from the natural position, a description of spatial displacement of normal tissue, becoming antonym to 'orthotopic' – from the Greek *orthos* (right/correct). Ernst Haeckel's theory on ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny – 'die Ontogenie ist eine Rekapitulation der Phylogenie' – specified that, in their development, animals repeat the adult stages of their ancestors (Haeckel, 1866, 300)¹⁷, proposing as exceptions to the generic rule of recapitulation – the so-called biogenetic law later subsequently proven false – the 'alterations or distortions of the original palingenetic course of development' in which ontogeny does not parallel phylogeny. A displacement (i.e. 'caenogenesis' according to Haeckel) which takes place either by locality – *heterotopism*¹⁸ – or by time – *heterochronism* – specifically in the accelerations or delays in the 'rise of an organ' generating changes in the phenotype.

12 The kenogenetic vitiations of the original palingenetic incidents of evolution depend in great measure on a gradually occurring displacement of the phenomena by adaptation to the changed conditions of embryonic existence. This displacement may affect either the place or the time of the phenomena. If former, it is called Heterotopy; if the latter, Heterochrony.

Ibid. 13 Displacement of position, or heterotopy, especially affects the cells or elementary parts which compose the organs; but it also affects the organs themselves. (Haeckel, 1866: 300)

Dominating evolutionary developmental biology in the late nineteenth century, heterochrony was used to describe the condition when the ancestral ontogenetic sequence of events failed to recapitulate the sequence of events in phylogeny; while, heterotopy sunk into obscurity.¹⁹ Not used until the ninety-twenties, when it becomes regularly referenced in medical

¹⁷ Haeckel's original formulation, which lacked any suggestion that adult stages were recapitulated – reflected a recapitulation that most would be comfortable with, this being that 'Ontogeny is a brief and rapid recapitulation of Phylogeny, dependent on the physiological functions of Heredity (reproduction) and Adaptation (nutrition)'.

¹⁸ One of Haeckel's primary examples of heterotopy was the origin of germ cells from endoderm or from mesoderm in different animal groups, presenting itself as another evolutionary developmental mechanism – alteration in spatial location of one or more developmental processes.

¹⁹ The concept of heterochrony also fell in disuse for various reasons until it was rehabilitated in Gould who, in late nineteenth-seventies, interpreted heterochrony as the phenomenon that produces parallels between ontogeny and phylogeny, with 'acceleration' producing recapitulatory patterns, while 'retardation' leading to paedomorphosis – 'ontogeny of the most

literature, particularly in pathology and histology, heterotopia here stands for a phenomenon initially completely harmless, the organic tissue is not diseased, simply dislocated, not being in itself a pathology *a priori* but rather a ‘variety’ of what is normal.

The other normal state that heterotopia subliminally presented must have had a disturbing effect, because it denoted the end of orthotopographic thought, whose mappings assign each functional part of the healthy body to its correct place. Analogically, considering that heterotopias are not just other spaces to be added to the geographical imagination, they could be seen as another way of thinking spatially. When Foucault contrasts heterotopias to utopias, heterotopias are rendered not as a non-place in language but as the possibility of a new spatial order in which to distribute these counter-sites. The regrouping of utopian discourse on the everyday motivated by an increasing discontent both with the alienation and dispersion of contemporary neo-avant-garde architecture as well as with the consumer culture could be understood as countering Foucault’s emphasis on the extra-ordinary. But this extra-ordinary was in fact given by the reassessment of the ordinary, through the critique of the alienation of the everyday. Ernst Bloch’s utopian doubling conception of ‘abstract utopia’ presenting the perfect overall plan, a spatiality sealed from historical processes, and ‘concrete utopia’ as an open spatiality, entailing historical transformation, informs the reworking of the concept between the subjective utopian desire and the criticality of utopian space (Bloch, 1986). To reconsider utopian spatiality apart from anarchist conceptions – a critical spatiality – offers insight into the nature of power, subjectivity and transformation of social space.

Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down’; on the other hand, heterotopias are formed in the very founding of society, therefore ‘real places’, some kind of ‘counter-sites’, a kind of ‘effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. (Foucault, 1966: 24)

Thus, to what extent heterotopia, analogically to its biological and medical background, has shaken or disrupted architectural ‘orthotopographic’ (i.e. in the normal place) thought and how this is still reverberating in architectural contemporary practices?

In *The Transparent Society*, Gianni Vattimo referred that ‘the most radical transformation in the relation between art and everyday life to have occurred since the sixties may be described as a transition from utopia to heterotopia.’ (Vattimo, 1992: 63) Agitation is due not only to Foucault’s lecture and its inconclusiveness, but also the subsequent appropriations of the key concept – heterotopia – which have produced a broad spectrum of interpretations. From the original transcript of the lecture only circulated among members of CEA²⁰, the text would be

remote ancestor goes through the same stages as a phylogeny of adult stages read in reverse order’ – in this way reversing the biogenetic law advanced by Haeckel. Albeit the morphological context of Gould’s definition, heterochrony is often defined simply as ‘evolutionary changes in developmental rate or timing’ which implies that dissociated heterochronic process can influence the evolution of novelties. Nevertheless, if in terms of heterochrony, definitions abound as a result of disparate interpretations of the time axis, the same happens as a result of interpretations of the spatial field, in the case of heterotopy, meaning: ‘spatial patterning’ as a result of localized growth rate changes (ontogenetic trajectories) producing novel shape changes or novelties; displacement in the location at which an organ or tissue arose during development; ‘spatial repatterning’ as a result of localized growth rate changes (ontogenetic trajectories) producing changes in phenotype geometry. See *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (Gould, 1977) and *Beyond Heterochrony* (Zelditch, 2001)

²⁰ Heterotopia would reappear in 1977, in a theoretical analysis of questions of the mechanisms of power and their spatializations in the anthology *Il dispositivo Foucault* presenting a comprehensive problem of space and deriving an epistemology for architecture by Georges Teyssot. ‘Of Other Spaces’ would be published in full for the first time in 1984, along an account of ‘the historical and topo-graphical variety in the reconstruction and renewal of Berlin’ by Josef Paul Kleihues, as part of the exhibition *Idea, Process, Result* on IBA at the Berlin Martin-Groupiu Bau. Theoretically enriched and

reprinted in 1986 in *Diacritics*, where the term seemed then to serve the cause of the minority demands to preserve their identity²¹. This shift towards the subject moved the focus from the concrete typologies (i.e. hospital, prison, motel) that Foucault enunciated to the more fundamental analysis of space and time.

Taking again Foucault's account of heterotopia, we have two undeveloped takes on the concept as 'sites' – textual and geographical –, bringing together heterogeneous collections of unusual things/places without allowing them a unity/order established through resemblance. The ordering presented by Foucault derived from a process of similitude, an unusual/abnormal combination/arrangement that unsettles the flow of discourse. Heterotopia only exists in relation – the difference is in a relationship between sites rather than otherness/difference of the site itself –, which entails an outer positioning – (an)other perspective. The problem lies on the impossibility of heterotopia being locatable – or 'representable' as a site. To identify sites as heterotopia is self-refuting because the concept depends on maintaining its unsettling character.²²

Any located site, removes its alterity.

The 'systematic description', which Foucault named heterotopology, presenting a new way of envisioning space nowadays spreads exponentially from the intimate realm to the public realm, from the micro scale of the house to the macro scale of territory boundaries, in which telecommunications and computer networks reconfigured institutions and destabilized spatial configurations. Within a citizenship where the individual is substituted by the corporate identity in the privatization of public space, heterotopia became a strategy to reclaim places of otherness from within an economized 'public' life and homogenised space – a moment of 'catharsis' in relation to the '*nomos*' of normality. Symptomatic of the renewed interest on heterotopia are discourses that lament the simulated 'public' space or, conversely, advocate new forms of public space located in private sites as shopping malls and theme parks or alternative spaces found in marginal spaces as vacant lots, *terrain vagues*. Rather than interrupting normality, heterotopias now seem to realize or simulate common experience of place within a tension between topicality and a-topicality, place and non-place.

Nevertheless, the critical reassessment of the notion heterotopia as 'the other side of the same' – 'a process of sudden purloining' – unashamedly proclaiming what is already there and what our thought disavows in its principles of scarcity aims towards the rediscovery of the interstitial space where the laws are apart, a marginality in which one would be able to reorder the physical and conceptual space in 'other' patterns.

Returning to the initial interview that opened up the question on the Portuguese Plain Architecture Histories, Eduardo frames Portugal as a 'very delayed, slow country, where inertia is largely felt', saying:

sometimes, because the cutting edge is cyclical and sometimes antagonistic, sometimes Portugal meets the cutting edge out of chance. For example, when I started practicing as an architect the vanguard was post-modernism, as resistance to modernism. And Portugal had just left its fascist period, and we built in

reflect of Foucault's concept of heterotopia, the focus in an all-embracing urbanism with the city as a holistic structure, uses specific 'urban architectures' for the analysis of the urban development of Berlin. The text would be reprinted in 1986, in *Lotus International*, where Pierluigi Nicolin speaking of a city divided into 'anonymous fabric and architectural monuments', referred to exceptional cases of the fabric – the architectural monument – as heterotopia.

²¹ This shift towards the subject, based on a changed concept of identity as suggested by the American cultural critic Craig Owens, is an interpretation that according to Daniel Defert can only be understood when referring to the simultaneous translation of volume II and III of the *History of Sexuality*.

²² Reading Foucault's heterotopia through Derrida's concept of *différence* (1976), Genocchio suggests that what is wrong with the use of the term as a geographical concept is that it uses the language of 'resemblance' rather than similitude, an incommensurable and continually challenging relationship which cannot be fixed but whose attributes creates novel or abnormal resonances with what surrounds them. See Genocchio, Benjamin (op. cit, 1995: 35-46).

neoclassical style. So in 1975 we were coinciding with the avant-garde, with our columns and tympanums, which post-modernism also had. When we finally decided to do modernism in the late 1980s – which was new for us because it had been forbidden for 50 years – there was a revival of modernism in the avant-garde, and so we coincided again. So there is a type of inertia that leads us to cross paths with the avant-garde. (Souto de Moura, 2011)

With this, we can return to *The Shape of Time*, published in 1962, where Kubler's philosophy of art history implied that 'closed sequences' could be opened by several reasons, and in this case Kubler's Portuguese Plain Architecture, by 1974 already established in Portuguese architectural vocabulary, catalysed the re-emergence of some of the 'form classes' to reappear in Portuguese architecture. *The Shape of Time* presented a radical new approach to the study of art history, defending of the view that the history of art can be the study of formal relationships, as against the view that it should concentrate on ideas of symbols or biography, replacing the notion of style as the basis for histories of art with the concept of historical sequence and continuous change across time based on morphology and iconography analysis. Kubler studied 'individual forms' and 'arrested moments,' even risking his own portrayal of sequence and motion. As he put it in 'The Shape of Time Reconsidered':

Once the problem is identified, the various solutions-which compose a class of forms-reveal themselves as related to one another in a temporal sequence-which is the formal sequence. Change occurs in linked sequences or series, depending on whether viewed from within or without, respectively. Change seems to obey a rule of series, although interferences from images and meanings may distort the process. Within each sequence, prime objects and vast masses of replicas are to be discovered. Prime objects, described as inventions possessing prime traits, remotely comparable to mutant genes, are capable of generating change. They result in copies and variants, which also generate change through minute variants. The propagation of things is carried on through invention and replication in time. Duration has different rates. It cuts into different lengths, and it displays different kinds of shapes. Durations follow several different shapes. The morphology of duration includes continuous classes, arrested classes, extended series, wandering series, as well as guided and self-determining sequences. (Kubler, 1982: 113)

George Kubler's 'history of things' (*The Shape of Time*, 1962) and Michel Foucault's 'order of things' (*Les mots et les choses*, 1966) and their respective emphasis on time and space frames the cross-reference analysis of the invention, variation, replication, mutation and exaptation (i.e. co-optation in function) processes and products within formal sequences, presenting a new way of opening up the simultaneous historical-social-spatial palimpsest.

By examining histories of architectural knowledge and specific design strategies, it is suggested the process by which the utopian project was transformed into a diversity of 'other' – heterotopia and heterochrony – practices, emphasizing the relevance of 'type' and typological series variation.

In challenging the process of resemblance usually ascribed to heterotopia, it is reinstated a latent process of similitude. If resemblance presupposes a primary reference that prescribes copies on the basis of the rigor of the mimetic relation to itself; in similitude, the primary reference is dislocated, things and images are side by side, 'without any of them being able to claim the status of 'model' for the rest' shifting from a hierarchical relation to a series of simultaneously exclusive lateral relations in complex network of interactions.

Thus, heterotopology not as a question on the 'other' (deferring a peripheral position) but a (re)questioning on the 'same' (reinstating a central position) in the account of the relationship between space, object and democracy.

In particular, the paper excises the ordering process of typological resemblance from heterotopia, in favor of an understanding of 'type' as process not as schema formulated a priori but deduced from a series of instances (i.e. variants of the series). Thus, heterotopology could stand for this uniqueness within a continuum, as 'the other' in 'the same'. The process of

reducing formal variants to a common root, which is itself subordinate to variants of the series, implies a suspension of historical judgment, inherently and intentionally negative, in relation to law and precedence. Therefore, the suspension of historical judgment enables the (re)assessment of the normative in architecture and urbanism, directed towards a (re)evaluation of city and territorial formations.

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Systems of History: Reflections on Kubler's Legacy in Portugal

Thomas Reese¹

treese@tulane.edu

This conference announced four thematic categories: (1) the work of George Kubler, (2) the “aesthetics born of poverty and scarcity.” (3) the Portuguese reception of Kubler’s work, and (4) the relationship between the writing of architectural history and the architectural practice, particularly on a ‘new tradition’ of Portuguese architecture that emerged following the April 1974 revolution. I will try to touch on all.

The elaboration of George Kubler’s “systems of history” began in Kubler’s senior year at Yale, when his literary aspirations were redirected towards *l’art medieval*. Henri Focillon’s lectures provided the impetus. In 1981, Kubler recalled Focillon’s reflections on style,

Tradition, influence, and experiment are the critical phases of the history of style. Various styles may coexist at the same place and in the same moment. Various ‘states’ of styles (experimental, classic, refinement, academic, baroque) are not necessarily sequential, but may coexist. (Kubler, 1981)

New Mexico provided his entrance to a career dedicated to the history of art. Kubler made his first trip to New Mexico in his senior year in 1934 with a Yale classmate and proposed the subject of New Mexico’s mendicant churches to Focillon as a topic for a Yale thesis, [which he wrote between 1935 and 1938]. In an interview in 1991, I asked, “Why did you choose New Mexico?” Kubler answered, “Partly because of the wish to test art historical principles on an unlikely subject of a very plain, simple, rustic, provincial character.” While his U.S. colleagues chose European subjects, Kubler, who had spent time as a child in France and Switzerland and as a Yale student in Berlin and Munich, turned to the Americas: “I had the feeling that I didn’t want to spend my scholarly labors away from this country. I wanted a topic in this country.”² Next, in 1936, Kubler made his first trip to Mexico and on his return received a Yale scholarship to study at the newly formed Institute of Fine Arts in New York,

¹ Thomas Reese has been with the Stone Center for Latin American Studies at Tulane since 1999 as Executive Director. His scholarship and publications include studies of eighteenth-century Spanish art and politics, culture contact in sixteenth-century Mexico, devotional space in Colonial Andean society, and contemporary architectural practice in Europe and America. His most recent research focuses on images and identity in turn of the century Argentina and Mexico. Previous to coming to Tulane, he served as Deputy Director of the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles and taught at the University of Texas at Austin. As Executive Director, he is responsible for overseeing all academic and administrative functions of the Stone Center for Latin American Studies. In addition, he also teaches courses in art history in the Art Department.

² J. Paul Getty Trust, “George and Elizabeth Kubler, Interview conducted by Richard Cándida Smith and Thomas F. Reese in New Haven on March 27-30 and November 18-21, 1991,” in *Interviews with art historians, 1991-2002* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute (199: 82-83): “Traveling there. Going out there. I made a trip to see the scene in ’34... I remember being much moved by Archibald MacLeish’s poem “New Found Land [1930].” Archibald MacLeish decided with the Great Depression that he had better come home from his vagabondage in Paris. And coming home he wrote “New Found Land,” the joys and merits of returning to one’s land...”

... where the up-to-date history of art was being received in the persons of refugees. ... Panofsky was the man I worked with most enthusiasm. And I wrote a paper for him on the Escorial...³

Kubler received his doctoral degree from Yale in 1940. His health prohibited him from wartime service and he began work on *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century*, together with new ethno-historical projects on acculturation processes in Mexico and South America. The two-volume Mexican monograph, which was published in 1948, was not only a study of architecture, but also an intellectual history of the Mendicant's methods and an economic history of building and labor in sixteenth-century Mexico.

Kubler's methods in his first two monographs on New Mexico and Mexico owed much to French archaeological method, which employed a particulate or composite treatment of architectural form that stressed the importance of sequence and seriation. The subdivisions of Part 2 of the *Religious Architecture of New Mexico* are (1) emplacement, (2) materials, (3) plan, (4) structure, (5) mass, and (6) optical effects and the treatment of light.⁴ Kubler found that the absence of artist's names, precise dates, and extrinsic supporting evidence in his studies of New Mexican and Mexican architecture made an "analytical" and "scientific" approach preferable to a narrative of outstanding events.

Those first two books also focused on architecture born of the confrontation between Native Americans and European friars. Kubler studied those interactions by positioning himself in the spaces where the distinct cultural traditions interpenetrated: preliterate and literate, folk art and fine art, Precolumbian and European, Medieval and Renaissance, to name but a few. It was a favorite vantage point that he would rarely abandon in his work, as we will see in his Portuguese studies (Testa, 1984: 136).

Both of Kubler's monographs investigated architecture, like that of the Depression, built in an age of poverty under minimal economic conditions, and an architecture, like that of the thirties, which was stripped, frugal, and efficient – Kubler had been in Germany in the summer

³ Kubler introduced a similar course at Yale, History of Art 100A. "SMITH: You've mentioned a historical methods course, and then there would be specific topics that you would develop. KUBLER: Yes. Especially topics on how early art historians conducted their work, going back to the Renaissance. This was a training course. They wrote papers. ... I gave the course repeatedly, many years in a row, and in each year I blocked out different parts of the history of the methods that were being used. Different periods, different groups, different clusters of writers about what identifies method." (Reese et al., 1991: 92-96)

⁴ Kubler himself clearly explained the organization of the book and his methods in the introduction: "The method of presentation is an old-fashioned one for this class of studies. The treatment of the elements of the style is distinct from the historical documentation of individual buildings. Thus the descriptive section lacks the detail of archaeological description ... Essentially, it is the older French archaeological method of appending a statistique monumental to the descriptive work. Although this method leads to confusion in the study of swiftly changing styles, I hope that clarity and ease of consultation will result from its use with this material, where the movements of style are imperceptibly slow over long reaches of time." (Kubler, 1940: vii) (Kubler, 1973).

Focillon's *L'art d'occident* (Paris, 1938), which was translated to Portuguese in 1978, employed similar organizational constructs. He succinctly described them and their rationale as follows: "We should bear in mind the basic factors of the art of building. A building is composed of plan, structure, composition of masses, and distribution of effects.... We already have some idea of the interdependence of plan and structure, plan and masses, masses and equilibrium, and masses and effects.... The architect is simultaneously and to a greater or lesser degree, geometer, engineer, sculptor, and painter-- geometer in the interpretation of spatial area through the plan, engineer in the solution of the problem of stability, sculptor in the treatment of volumes, and painter in the handling of materials and light." (Focillon et al., 1963: 66)

of 1931 and in 1933-34 where he became interested in *Neue Sachlichkeit*.⁵ So Kubler's interests in an "aesthetics born of poverty and scarcity" began in the 1930s.⁶

Kubler had not yet worked in the Iberian Peninsula, where his parents first met, when in 1947, Nikolaus Pevsner approached him about writing a volume on Spain and Portugal for his new Pelican series.⁷ Kubler convinced Pevsner to expand the commission to include Latin America and contracts followed for two volumes – *The Art and Architecture of Ancient America* and *Art and Architecture of Spain and Portugal and their American Dominions, 1500-1800*.⁸ Kubler received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1952-53 to work on the Pelican volume, and while in Spain, José Gudiol, the editor of the series *Ars Hispaniae*, convinced him to write *Arquitectura de los siglos XVII y XVIII*.⁹ Kubler received a third Guggenheim in 1956-57 to complete the *Ars Hispaniae* manuscript, which was submitted in 1956, and to advance work on Pevsner's Pelican manuscript, which was submitted in 1957.¹⁰

The chronological range, the density of artistic events, and the complex and interlocking regional Spanish traditions that Kubler sought to represent in the *Ars Hispaniae* volume posed very different problems of portrayal from the "scientific" approach he employed in his first monographs. He had to come to grips with the question of biography and the role of individual artists and architects.¹¹

Research materials drawn from Kubler's archive illustrate his working methods in the 1950s. He took notes on three-by-five index cards, which he filed under three rubrics: (1) monuments, (2) architects, which included biographical facts as well as "diagnostic traits," and (3) ideas with period and style denotations, observations on artistic geography, significant quotes by others, and information on unique Spanish "form-classes," building typologies, decorative motifs, proportional relationships, and the like.

Next, he charted temporal data on graph paper. Architects were listed alphabetically – a note to the right indicated a geographic focus or a "school." Kubler could then scan the biographical strands on the charts to see meaningful groupings. Simultaneously, he listed buildings by lustrum (five year periods), noting city, dates, and architect. He could scan the charts visually to gauge in each period key architects, the primary monuments, first appearances, new creative directions, shifts in generating centers, typological changes, and the intensity of building activity – techniques also employed in charting *Portuguese Plain Architecture*.¹²

⁵ Kubler later commented that these works wedded two intellectual traditions—first, lessons learned from what he described as the "hard school" at the Institute, referring specially to Panofsky's interest in the critique of art historical writings, and, second, Focillon's poetics and artful command of compositional structure that gave his work broad appeal. Both were qualities essential to the success of *The Shape of Time* in 1962.

⁶ Indeed, the New Deal example of the Works Project Administration (1935-43) also influenced his thinking about the role of massive building programs in moments of economic crisis.

⁷ Summerson, Blunt, and Wittkower signed the first three contracts in March 1946.

⁸ The first deadlines fell in 1951. Kubler prepared a first draft of *Ancient America* in 1951-1952, which he later restructured and submitted in May 1959.

⁹ The latter was formally commissioned in 1953.

¹⁰ The sections on painting and sculpture were written by the German-born, Spanish- and Swiss-educated Martin Sebastian Soria, whose Harvard dissertation on Zurbaran was completed in 1949 and published in 1953. Soria had a Guggenheim Fellowship in Spain in 1950-51, but at present it is unclear when Kubler invited him to participate in the Pelican volume. Kubler described a meeting they had in Sevilla in 1956-57 to plan the volume, but Soria surely began work on it earlier. These three manuscripts were completed in 1956, 1957, and 1959 respectively.

¹¹ In 1991, Kubler described the new problem, "Oh, that was a change with each building that I took up. It was building oriented or city oriented. It was designed more as groups of architectural monuments, and the personalities are really secondary.... The grouping was by style and similarities connecting the personalities, rather than by the personalities.... And, actually, Spanish architectural personalities are not very concrete. They are not very definitive. They're mostly "maestros", which is perhaps a medieval survival."

¹² The table of economic rhythms was not included in the published volume, but was indicated as Table 1 in the English manuscript for Kubler, *Arquitectura de los siglos XVII y XVIII* in "George Alexander Kubler Papers, 1872-2000."

From these graphic representations, Kubler constructed his book so that he would not straightjacket the text with an overly rigorous hierarchical structure. Instead, he adopted flexible and shifting focuses for the subsections of each chapter, which allowed different structures to coexist and which gave the reader simultaneous views of different ways of ordering the material, each taking its cue from the nature of the dominant problems at a given moment in time. Kubler's goals are best demonstrated by citing his own proscriptions in the third large survey, *Ancient America*,

One cannot anatomize one national architecture in terms of another; one can define its specific nature only by examining its form in context and in chronological sequence... Furthermore, one should not lessen the differences between regional styles... to increase the impression of unity and equivalence among the arts of unconnected regions (Kubler, 1962a: 2).

For today, I will forgo the analysis of the composition and structure of *Ancient America*, but it is clear that the challenges of historical representation in writing these five monographs and surveys provided the stimulus for Kubler's propositions about classing, propagation, and duration in *The Shape of Time*, which was, in principle, a book about the historian's task in portraying "the shapes of time." It was written as he was recuperating from a recurrence of tuberculosis in 1960. Nothing might better represent one of the central metaphors of *The Shape of Time*, which described fibrous bundles of "form-classes" – which Kubler defined as an "entity composed of the problem and its solutions" – better than Kubler's chronological tables for *Ancient America*.

A new phase of Kubler's career (1961-79) unfolded following the completion of *The Shape of Time*. The grand works of synthesis were behind him, and his new investigations focused on more microscopic analyses of works of art which were selected because of their locations at critical junctures in time and space. He moved from the periphery to more saturated mainstream areas (such as textual and iconographical analysis, Italian architecture, Spanish painting, and Maya epigraphy) and he increasingly studied "individual forms" and "arrested moments," even at the risk of shifting the focus of attention away from his portrayal of sequence and motion. The changes to highly focused frames and extremely fast shutter speeds were influenced by iconography, quantum physics, and later chaos theory.¹³ I am sorry that I do not have time to explain further.

Kubler's reengagement with European subjects were stimulated by his recuperation in Naples in 1960, where he prepared the manuscript for *The Shape of Time*, and subsequent European sojourns – either summers or semesters – in 1962, 1963, 1964, 1967, and 1969. The range of Kubler's scholarly production during these years was staggering, but the European work centered largely around research on three interconnected books: a facsimile edition and

¹³ After 1960, antithesis (complementary paired concepts like form-meaning, style-duration, fine-plain, art-science, renaissance-disjunction, technique-format, signage-modus, period-sequence), discontinuities ("Renaissance and Disjunction"), boundaries ("Period, Style, and Meaning"), arrested synchronic moments of creation ("A Reductive Theory of Visual Style"), and individuality and the microscopic examination of single works of art ("tissues and cells" in *The Escorial*; "bricolage" in da Costa's treatise; "disjunctions at transfer points" in Maya sculpture and ceramics) moved to the foreground in his scholarship. Kubler synthesized many of the insights he gained in the sixties and seventies in "Towards a Reductive Theory of Visual Style," published in 1979, which represented a gateway to his work following 1980 – a project that was incomplete at the time of his death in 1996. In that last period, Kubler advanced his thinking about several historical puzzles that he had long contemplated. They included (1) the role of aesthetic choice (from the linguist Stephen Ullmann), (2) the relationship of evolution and the history of art in relatively short durations (from the cognitive psychologist Colin Martindale), and (3) mathematical accounts about what happens in situations of change (from the evolving work in chaos theory as described by the journalist James Gleick). Unfortunately, there is no time to discuss them today; my principal goal here is to indicate trends in Kubler's development towards questions of aesthetic "choice" in relatively short durations.

translation of Felix da Costa's *Antiquity of the Art of Painting, Portuguese Plain Architecture, and Building the Escorial*.¹⁴

These works represented new directions, but not new interests. Kubler had first written about the Monastery of San Lorenzo in the Escorial at the Institute of Fine Arts in a seminar led by Erwin Panofsky in 1937-38, and his research on Portuguese architecture began in 1952-53, when George, his wife Betty, and their youngest daughter Elena first travelled to Portugal, while Elena recuperated from a bout with TB. They returned on a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1957 as Kubler prepared his sixteen-page section on Portuguese and Brazilian architecture for the Pelican volume; and again in 1964, 1967 and 1969.¹⁵ The family always stayed in York House, a converted seventeenth-century convent, in the Rua das Janelas Verdes, where they learned and practiced their Portuguese and where they were hosted by the French hotelier Andrée Goldstein, to whom Kubler dedicated *Portuguese Plain Architecture*.¹⁶ In addition, he expressed his gratitude to Carlos de Azevedo (1918-1995), a musician, musicologist, art historian, and student of Mário Tavares Chicó, who, he said, "had always been my passport in Portugal."¹⁷ They frequently travelled together to visit and photograph churches. Thanks too went to Carlos Cudell Goetz, an art collector in the aviation industry, and Rogério Mendes de Moura (1925-2008), the founder in 1953 of *Editora Livros Horizonte*. (Blogtailors, 2004) I would ask any who know more about these connections to let me know!

Kubler's primary scholarly contact was Mário Tavares Chicó (1905-1966) – seven years his senior – who had studied in the 1930s with Élie Lambert and Henri Focillon in Paris.¹⁸ They took excursions together and exchanged ideas, but Chicó's untimely death in 1966 prevented

¹⁴ The first represented an unfulfilled obligation to publish a manuscript given to Yale University by a student of the class of 1951- Robert J. Schoelkopf, Jr., a New York art dealer, who in 1956 gave Yale his copy of Felix da Costa's important unpublished seventeenth century treatise entitled *Antiguidade da Arte da Pintura* (1685-1696). The second was inspired by Mário Tavares Chicó's request for Kubler to prepare a study of the impoverished interval between the opulent Portuguese reigns of Manuel I and John V, the latter fulfilled only posthumously. The third was stimulated, no doubt, by the many scholarly colloquia and publications surrounding the centennial celebrations of the monument in 1963.

Most of Kubler's articles on European subjects during these years grew directly or indirectly from research on these books: "Francesco Paciotto, Architect" (1964), "Palladio e l'Escuriale" (1963), "Palladio e Juan de Villanueva" (1963), "Galeazzo Alessi e l'Escuriale" (1974), "Villalpando's Translation of Serlio" (1977), and "El San Felipe de Heraclea de Murillo" (1970) from *Building the Escorial*; "Cellular Compositions in Portuguese 'Plain' Architecture" (1971) and the "The Claustral 'Fons Vitae' in Spain and Portugal" (1973) from *Portuguese Plain Architecture*; and "Vicente Carducho's Allegories of Painting" (1965) and "Three Remarks on the *Meninas*" (1966) from *The Antiquity of the Art of Painting*. The latter also sparked Kubler's interest in Spanish Golden Age painting and probably encouraged him to accept several requests from friends and colleagues to address problems of attribution, although Kubler transformed what many would have dealt with as problems of connoisseurship into unique historical and iconographical studies. "The Portrait of Hernando Cortés at Yale" (1975) and "El retrato de fray Juan de San Bernardo atribuido a Valdés Leal" (1966) were written about paintings at Yale; "El 'San Felipe de Heraclea' de Murillo" (1970) was written about painting in the nearby Clark Institute, directed by former Yale colleague George Hamilton.

¹⁵ The short chapter included sections on Manueline and Purist Styles (1500-80), Italian and Netherlandish Contributions (1580-1640; Spanish annexation), Unified Naves and Cellular Envelopes (1640-1720), Eighteenth Century Portugal (1693, discovery of gold in Brazil), and Eighteenth Century Brazil. Robert Smith in *The Art of Portugal: 1500-1800* (1968, prepared 1964-66) periodization of the period 1500-1800 was: the first third of the sixteenth century (late Gothic; Manuel I, 1495-1521; 10.5 pp.), the second third of the sixteenth to the early years of the eighteenth centuries (sequences of delayed aspects of the Renaissance; 8.5 pp.), and 1710-1800 (baroque, rococo, and classical revival; João V, 1706-1750; 10 pp.).

¹⁶ The Goldsteins purchased York House in 1931. Kubler "had his desk in the old refectory of the building and wrote on the old refectory table. I [Elena] remember hearing him say that the table held stories!" Elena brought Betty back to York House after his death. (York House, 2013)

¹⁷ Carlos Mascarenhas Martins de Azevedo was the Portuguese secretary for the Fulbright program, which sponsored his research in 1963-64 (Falcão, 2004).

¹⁸ Mário Chicó, "A arquitectura em Portugal na época de D. Manuel e nos principios do reinado de D. João III: o gótico final português, o estilo manuelino e a introdução de arte do renascimento," *História da Arte em Portugal*, II, Chapter V (Porto, 1948).

him for seeing the completed book.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Chicó's student, Jorge Henrique Pais da Silva (1929-1977), began work on translating Kubler's manuscript to Portuguese before 1972, although it remained unpublished until 1988 (Pais da Silva, 1983; Kubler, 1988).

It is significant, I believe, that the generating concept of Kubler's study, notably the concept of "estilo chão," drew on the nineteenth century journalist, poet, writer, and politician, Júlio de Castilho (1840-1919), who used the term in 1879 (Castilho 1879). Kubler was not generally inclined to join scholarly networks. I would imagine that with the exception of social occasions and excursions to monuments with friends and family, Kubler was probably a rather solitary researcher in Portugal, which probably explains how he came to write the history that had not been written. Although he would deny it, Kubler had a penchant to write "against the grain." In 1968, Kubler reviewed *The Art of Portugal* by his contemporary Robert C. Smith (1912-75), whose strong predilection for ornament and the decorative arts, I am convinced, probably also prompted Kubler to write its counter-history! (Kubler, 1968: 45-48)

When asked what it was about the "estilo chão" that intrigued him, his answer was hardly surprising: "... it was related to my interest in New Mexico and the plainness, the simplicity, the elegance of working in adobe. I found a recurrence of that aesthetic in Portugal, which was partly owing to financial crises, but those financial crises allowed this expression." But it was probably also the many centennial colloquia planned for 1963 to celebrate the Monastery of San Lorenzo, which Philip II conceived at El Escorial to serve as a burial place for him and his parents – a project Philip moved definitively forward in 1563.

Portuguese Plain Architecture and Felix da Costa's *Antiguidade* were integrally related to the problem of the Escorial. Kubler described the resemblance between the severe style of Juan Bautista de Toledo and the still-to-be-named "plain style" of Portugal in 1959 and Fernando Chueca noted the importance of Portuguese antecedents for the *estilo desornamentado* in 1963, while Felix da Costa, whose unpublished treatise was in the Yale library, was the principal theorist of the "plain style."²⁰ The text of Da Costa was completed in December 1964, *Portuguese Plain Architecture* in 1969, and *Building the Escorial* in 1979. Kubler also wrote in 1973 a new preface to a revised edition of *Religious Architecture of New Mexico* in which he summed up the major issues which had concerned him in his dissertation and in his current work,

... the interaction of local and alien traditions in building activity under minimal economic conditions, the relation of frugality to expression, the pluralism of 'style' at any time and place, the permanence of efficient forms, and their relation to art's perfection...

Although frugality and expression were shared concerns across time, Kubler's methodological interests changed noticeably following 1960, when his research and theoretical writings turned increasingly to problems of the nature of the bonds between form and meaning. The critical figure was again Panofsky, whose *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* appeared in 1960. Kubler's 1961 review in *Art News*, was dramatically entitled "Disjunction and Mutational Energy," which focused on Panofsky's "principle of disjunction." (Kubler, 1961: 34, 55) Felix da Costa's *Antiguidade da arte da pintura* (1685-1696) provided Kubler an opportunity to look at "disjunctions" in the textual field.²¹ Unfortunately, there is no time to

¹⁹ Kubler dedicated *Antiguidade* to his memory in 1967 (Dias, 1970).

²⁰ Kubler had committed himself to prepare an edition of da Costa as early as 1962.

²¹ The problem of presenting da Costa's little-known manuscript, *Antiguidade da arte da pintura* (1685-1696) resulted in the publication of a facsimile edition with an annotated English translation and a searching introduction that presents new archival data on da Costa's life, writing, pictures, and criticism and clear analyses of the manuscripts, purpose, content, and method of

discuss the work in detail today, but da Costa's methods, like those of Levi-Strauss' *bricoleur*, were similar to practices that produced "disjunction" in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. As Panofsky noted in *Renaissance and Renascences*:

Medieval art made classical antiquity assimilable by way of decomposition...It looked upon it as a storehouse of ideas and forms, appropriating therefore such items as seemed to fit in with the thought and actions of the immediate present. (Panofsky, 1972)

Da Costa's *Antiguidade* was likewise disjunctive. Kubler traced each idea, each passage, and the organizational structure of the manuscript, documenting not only da Costa's sources, but also the nature of his transformation of sources through processes such as unintentional mistakes, purposeful misreadings, misguided translations, selective or partial extractions, leveling through extreme condensation, sharpening through the magnification of details, changes of tone, free variations, etc., etc. The chain involves such eminent texts as Cicero, Pliny, the Bible, Aristotle, Vasari, and others. [Federico Zuccaro, Ludovico Dolce, Romano Alberti, Vicente Carducho, and Gaspar Gutierrez de los Rios]

As noted, the Escorial was the generating core of the three books written in the 1960s. Geographically, it was the center of a stylistic universe that absorbed or directed influences toward Mexico, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Flanders, and temporally, it was the pivot point between Renaissance and Post-Renaissance architectural styles in Europe.

Kubler was especially attracted to the complexity of these intersections at "transfer points," which might be best described as "relays"- passages in the history of art when old configurations suffer fatigue and appetites for novelty lead to change and new directions."²² Beginnings and ends, the new and the old, are complementary and inextricably interrelated.

the *Antiguidade*. The latter Kubler researched in Lisbon archives in the summer of 1962. Kubler clearly demonstrated the manuscript's local significance to Lusitanian specialists as a document of taste – da Costa admired those "who strive for the essential and abhor the unnecessary" – but also its significance as a European theoretical text that could elucidate the very nature of da Costa's research, attitudes towards sources, rhetorical devices, and organizational strategy, and of content, which has important bearing upon "sociological, legal, political and theoretical aspects of the golden age of European painting." Garnishing the tools of a philologist, Kubler proceeded to "establish the text," reconstructing with genealogical precision the primary sources of all passages and ideas and demonstrating the numerous secondary and tertiary routes, often via translations, which da Costa followed to reach them.

Interestingly, Kubler undertook the analysis of a document whose form and content belonged more to the replica mass than to the status of primes. Indeed, it was perhaps the particulate and derivative nature of da Costa's manuscript that appealed to Kubler. It was "a mosaic of borrowed pieces. The materials are a patchwork, and his writing reads in places like an anthology or a chap book." In order to help us see the phenomenon in a more neutral light, Kubler borrows from Levi-Strauss the metaphor of the *bricoleur*, one who puts structures together from whatever is handy without looking for congruity of materials. As Kubler notes, "the bricoleur utilizes ready-made objects and fragments to make compositions of his own. Levi-Strauss compares bricolage to the work of myth-makers, junk sculptors, 'pop' artists, and makers of collages, of whom all are concerned with decomposing and recomposing extant assemblages into new structural arrangements, rather than working directly from raw materials like earlier artists."

²² They represent ends and beginnings, which reminds me of what was for me one of Kubler's most challenging propositions and conundrums – that art historians premiate inventions and beginnings at the expense of questions about the processes that influence ends of explorations. He had written, albeit indirectly, about these dilemmas in some of the most poetic passages of *The Shape of Time* about the nature of "actuality." "Our signals from the past are very weak. Weakest and least clear of all are those signals coming from the initial and terminal moments of any sequence in happening.. The beginnings are much hazier than the endings, where at least the catastrophic action of external events can be determined. ... Now and in the past, most of the time the majority of people live by borrowed ideas and upon traditional accumulations, yet at every moment the fabric is being undone and a new one is woven to replace the old, while from time to time the whole pattern shakes and quivers, settling into new shapes and figures..." (Kubler, 1962: 17-18)

Kubler wrote many articles about the problem of the Escorial.²³ “Francesco Paciotto, Architect” (1964) probably recorded Kubler’s central interests with greatest clarity.²⁴ His article, which I will not analyze here, documented a major bifurcation in the history of Western architectural style, one that would determine the ornate character of the Italian baroque, and the rule of rectilinear planes in Spain. In order to understand the mechanisms which aided and/or determined this major bifurcation, Kubler brought into play theoretical issues that had long fascinated him: Kroeber’s concept of pattern growth, saturation and exhaustion, Panofsky’s concerns with continuities, exchanges and disjunctions at “transfer points,” Goller’s concept of *Formermüdung*, and Kubler’s own ideas about “systematic age” and “extended and wandering classes” as presented in *The Shape of Time*. All helped to explain that curious and sudden exchange circa 1560:

Spain, emerging from the ornate extreme of Plateresque decoration, was prepared for severe fashions by 1560. Italy, with the tranquil order of the High Renaissance already far behind, was prepared for more elaborate and ornate experiments. Hence, the Spanish and the Italian systems, as early as the 1560’s, differ as to forms, as to expression, and as to formal age... Defeated in Italy by contrary taste, the *estilo desornamentado* flourished under royal patronage on Spanish soil. (Kubler, 1985: 147)

Fascinatingly, Kubler directed from Spain and Portugal an inquiry that led to a fundamental re-evaluation of rhythms of style and taste in Italy in the mid-sixteenth century.²⁵

²³ He located the monument within the Spanish tradition, following the example of his own *Ars Hispaniae* volume, but he wished to avoid pitfalls like those he expressed in his 1961 criticism of Earl Rosenthal’s *The Cathedral of Granada, A Study of the Spanish Renaissance*: “The impression left by the book is as if Siloe had little connection with Spain; as if Granada cathedral were only incidentally related to other Spanish edifices, having its true relation more with Roman imperial and Italian buildings than with anything in Spain; and as if Siloe’s other works were of little or no interest, other than to furnish an occasional support to the thesis in progress.” (Kubler, 1961a: 146-47)

Kubler’s study of El Escorial represented, I believe, a basic change in Kubler’s attitude to individual works of art and towards the role he chooses to play as a historian. Instead, of the comprehensive coverage and the intricate and tightly interwoven structure, in which works of art and the numerous bundles of problems of form and meaning which compose them flow and dissolve into one another, the structure of this book is much more particulate and varied. Once the major themes of each chapter are determined, the relevant monuments are inventoried and then arranged roughly in chronological order. There is no attempt to force them into tight linear sequences; instead, each is described with the fullness and richness that savors rather than diminishes its unique form and meaning. The descriptions of individual monuments, which are the building blocks out of which the whole is formed, contain some of Kubler’s finest, most disciplined, and most sensitive descriptive prose. Kubler’s descriptions perhaps reveal what for him was the essential appeal of this architecture: the infinite complexity that so often resides beneath external simplicity.

²⁴ The article opens and closes with statements that make clear the attraction that the monument and the patron had for him. “The Escorial was an enormous bundle of problems, with traditional and anonymous solutions as well as original and personal ones.” He closes with a description of the spiritual affinities between Paciotto, Bosello, and Philip II, all of whom favored sober commodity over exterior richness and pomp. Aware of Paciotto’s role in the planning of the Escorial, Kubler went in search of his career and fame in Italy. That process led him to controversies over the design of the Cittadella of Piacenza between 1558 and 1661 that revealed one of those small ironies of historical fame: Paciotto at 40 was more famous than Vignola at 54. Furthermore, a defense of Paciotto’s designs by Giovanni Bosello gave evidence of a major fracture in Italian taste and practice: one between a sure taste for simplicity and clarity and another for Mannerist ornamental enrichments. As Kubler noted, “Bosello wrote as a purist and as a proponent of the *estilo desornamentado*, which the Escorial would eventually make real in Spain.”

²⁵ Nevertheless, Kubler was writing not only of Italy, but of Spain and Portugal. His masterful analysis of Paciotto’s unpublished criticism of Juan Bautista de Toledo’s designs for the Escorial basilica reveals subtle, but fundamental differences between Spanish and Italian taste and practice, as well as allowing Kubler to define “trace elements” of Paciotto’s designs incorporated and transformed in the final projects.

Kubler’s subsequent articles on the Escorial follow suit, but each opens not only anew chapter in the Italian contributions to the Escorial, but also new methodological concerns. “Palladio e l’Escoriale” (1963) and “Palladio e Juan de Villanueva” (1963) discuss sacral-secular transfers and disjunctions in form and meaning as specific architectural forms migrate through time (from antiquity to the Renaissance) and Space (From Italy to Spain) and adopts metaphors and methodological models from chemistry (“trace elements”), biology (“type-specimens”), and philology (“establishing the text”) to reconstruct a lost prototype, in this case Palladio’s plans for the Escorial basilica. “Galeazzo Alessi e l’Escoriale” (1975) uses similar technique to reconstruct the

Now, at long last, after defining the larger context in which it took shape, let me turn to *Portuguese Plain Architecture*. Kubler described the focus of the book in his own preface and conclusion:

This is... a collection of studies seeking to determine the nature of Portuguese building during an age when resources were scarce... Today... we need to study the continuously changing architectural situation, and to trace the shifting pattern of taste, with more concern for the nature of architectural meaning than the slogans and pigeonholes of encyclopedic art historical classification will allow. (Kubler, 1972: xv)

It is the study of a “different architectural geography, where clarity, order, proportion, and simplicity mark the contours of another aesthetic.” It is a “vernacular architecture, related to living dialect traditions more than to the great authors of the remote past.” It was born from economic necessity in a period when economic resources were scarce, and has too often been “lost to view between the ostentatious ornament of reigns swollen with the wealth of either India or Brazil.”

If these statements describe the organization, subject matter and intellectual and aesthetic appeal of the work for Kubler, they do not address the specifics of his methodological focus. The latter included not only defining national events in this period within the artistic geography of a region that included much of Europe, but also with the transformational qualities – the “mutational energy” of “disjunction.” I should say before reading several long quotes from Kubler that the impact of his hypotheses about national expression were drawn from these case studies,

The designer at any place and moment is engaged in choosing his materials from the past, combining and adjusting them according to his own needs and preferences. These, in turn, are continually transformed by his exposure to the unused possibilities of the past. In Portugal during the era under discussion, architects were confronted with choices and decisions that were not limited to the diffusion of Italian examples. North European and Spanish possibilities as well as indigenous and colonial ones were present. The resulting architecture does not easily allow a classification by mere ‘influence’ or by architectural biography alone. (Kubler, 1972: 4)

Portuguese architecture corresponds to an experimental attitude among designers who were nourished on Renaissance theory and yet were able to disregard its prescriptions in the quest for useful and inexpensive building. ... Local needs and regional expressions slowly invaded the fabric of central authority ... Rationality and austerity were the guidelines... (Kubler, 1972: 165)

This passage captures the essence not only of this book, but also of Kubler’s sense of the nature of the history of art.

Kubler explained too how the historian’s task was complicated by the prevailing currents of architectural history,

Today, still another kind of confusion, this time between historical dogma and the reality of architectural history, has prevented people from seeing the evidence of the existence of a Portuguese national expression. This cannot be automatically classed as the ‘Portuguese mode’ of Mannerist or Baroque architecture. The prevailing historical dogma of the century has been that these secular styles – Mannerist and Baroque – are ecumenical. Beyond their orthodoxy, radiating along lines of ‘influence’ (like the isotherms of physical geography) from Florence in the sixteenth century and Rome in the seventeenth, the dogma urges us to

complex sequence of events that determined the influence, both indirect and direct, of Galeazzo Alessi on the Escorial basilica. For European architectural historians, it reconstructed the history of the famous twenty-two lost Italian projects for the Escorial basilica, a major event in sixteenth century European architecture, which alas still remain un-recovered. It is both figurative and the real center of the article.

believe that there remain only awkward heresies or deserts of provincialism and folk art. [Isotherms are a type of contour line that connects points of equal temperature at a given date or time on a geographic map.] (Kubler, 1972: 171)

The study of these spatial and temporal transmissions in the Europe of the Hapsburgs allowed Kubler to come to a fuller understanding not only of Portuguese architecture, but of Italian, Spanish, Flemish and French architecture as well.²⁶

There was no pretense in *Portuguese Plain Architecture* to be encyclopedic; Kubler focused instead on selected problems that could be studied in greater depth. Thus, the nine chapters unfold roughly in a historical sequence, often based not on the first and final occurrence of the forms described but on their rough systematic age within the local horizon. Each chapter selected a specific problem or theme to represent a stage in the web of Portuguese style and taste. I will not read my synopsis, as I know most of you are familiar with the content.²⁷

²⁶ In speaking of the church facades of Wenceslas Cobergher, an architect who had worked in Antwerp, Paris, and Rome and who was called to the service of Albert of Austria, Kubler gives some sense of the scope of his tapestry, “These facades antedate similar expressions in Portugal first, and later in Spain. They compose a northern and Peninsular architectural expression of the Counter-Reformation, which coexists with the Baroque architecture of Italy. Both these regional languages – Baroque in Italy, and ‘planar’ elsewhere in the seventeenth century – of course share many forms, but their configurations are as different as Italian and Dutch languages. On the Iberian Peninsula the history of north European architectural forms paralleled the Reconquest, when German, French, English and Netherlandish artists worked in Spain and Portugal continuously throughout the Middle Ages. After 1500 the appearance of Italian craftsmen and a new taste only briefly deflected the long tradition of northern architectural diction in the Peninsula. Soon after 1600 the old alignment was reasserted in designs owing more to northern sources than to Italian ones. To retrace such continuities and deflections is one of the main purposes of this book. Their outlines have long been apparent, but many links in the pattern of communication were lost”

“REESE: But in the analysis of the architecture itself, did you find that there were very different, kinds of qualities and rhythms and problematic concerns? KUBLER: Very different, and as in the language, the art has different sources. The Portuguese are more Germanic and they’re more Northern Europe in the original reconquest from the Moors. Whereas Spain was reconquered with a French stamp, and that French stamp is part of the lightness of the Spanish expression. The Portuguese are more like Burgundians, rather heavy and rather Germanic, and the language is also heavy and not graceful. KUBLER: Well, in the Portuguese case, it was apparent to me that only the highly ornate side of Portuguese expression had been discussed or had achieved expression for people wanting to know more about the Portuguese art. So I decided to write on the plain style, which is a translation from the “estilo chão” I worked for some years on that book and selected the examples. The book finally came out, and it now exists in Portuguese, too. The only serious criticism of it that I remember is that some of the examples are not plain style. They’re not “estilo chão.” REESE: To what extent was the plain-style book charted in advance as to the kind of problems that you would deal with, as opposed to growing in the more organic way out of the research you were doing? KUBLER: Well, it grew out of the material, out of the buildings that I knew of and which I had visited and seen. I included perhaps too many ornate buildings for a rigidly selected group of plain monuments, of plain-style monuments. The book was criticized for that, that there were – It overflowed from plainness into the abandoned ornateness.” (Reese and Smith, 1991)

²⁷ The first two chapters (“Cellular Compositions” and “Hall Churches”), like chapter 8 (“New Directions before 1640: Narthex Facades and Doorway Facades”) reflect Kubler’s long-term interests in formal and functional typologies and serializations. In them he treats such fundamental architectural issues as plans, walls, facades, sections, massing, and proportion. The next three chapters (“Some Palladian Reductions and Derivations,” “‘Plain’ Style and Flemish Ornament,” and “Portuguese Taste and Italian Suggestions”) explore some of the more subtle permutations of Portuguese architecture between 1550-1600 as it absorbed, transformed, and was transformed by different foreign vogues. Methodologically, the chapters stand close to Kubler’s studies in the 1960s of trace-elements of Italian idioms in the Escorial.

The next two chapters (“Albert of Austria in Lisbon and Brussels” and “The Joyeuse Entree at Lisbon in 1619”) are among the most historical and innovative. The first views Peninsular presence and achievements in Belgium; the second Belgian institutions adopted in the Peninsula. The former, which studies the role of Albert of Austria and his architects in the reconstruction and development of Belgium following years of civil war and foreign occupation, like other references throughout the book to the role of monastic reform in architectural development, is a close study of patronage, economic institutions and architecture, reminiscent in many ways of Kubler’s early study of the mendicants in Mexico. The latter, which studies the northern sources, iconographical program, patronage, economics, function and meaning of the *Joyeuse Entree* for Philip III in 1619, perhaps oddly enough closest to Kubler’s studies after 1967 of the iconography and function of Maya art and ritual at transfer points in history. Both chapters reflect not only Kubler’s term as a Fulbright Fellow in Belgium in Fall 1969, but also the new interest in festival architecture in the late fifties and early sixties spurred by the enormous editorial efforts of scholars like Jacquot. The last two chapters (“New Directions before 1640” and “After the Restoration”) documents new trends at a moment, especially following 1620, when new building activity will practically come to a halt. The first is retrospective, focusing on innovations passed over due to the high focus of the chapters on Albert and the *Joyeuse Entree*. The

[I should note, though, that Kubler joked in 1991 that,

“The only serious criticism of it that I remember is that some of the examples are not plain style... I included perhaps too many ornate buildings for a rigidly selected group of plain monuments, of plain-style monuments. The book was criticized for that, that ... it overflowed from plainness into the abandoned ornateness.” (Reese and Smith, 1991)

Horta Correia’s preface to the Portuguese edition in 1988 avoided criticism, (Horta-Correia 1988) but Varela Gomes affirmed in 2001 that the proportion of *não chão* monuments presented interpretive challenges. (Varela-Gomes 2001)]

At this point, though, I would like to address the question of the potential appeal and “operative” utility of *Portuguese Plain Architecture* to practicing architects in Portugal – a subject for which I am very grateful for the insights of Alexandre Alves Costa, Paulo Varela Gomes, Ana Vaz Milheiro, and Eliana Sousa Santos. I am a newcomer here and beg forbearance if my observations seem obvious to cognoscenti. Although I have not been able to document many direct contacts between Kubler and contemporary architects during his visits to Portugal, Alvaro Siza confirmed that Fernando Távora (1923-2005) had met Kubler.²⁸

I read George Kubler’s *Portuguese Plain Architecture*, following the advice of Távora. Távora met him, I am not sure if in Portugal. He admired him very much. The book influenced his ideas about architecture and then him as professor and the school of architecture of Porto. Then it also influenced me.

Távora had participated in the *Inquérito à Arquitectura Popular em Portugal*,²⁹ so if they met in the 1950s or 1960s, it is surprising that Kubler did not mention these works in his

last notes the occasional deflection of Portuguese architectural traditions under the aegis of Spanish or Italian Baroque forms, and the more frequent practice of softening the severe older surfaces by the accretion of decorative forms.

²⁸ “Dear Tom, Interesting topic! I certainly consulted Kubler’s book when I was writing my thesis *The Architecture of Álvaro Siza* in the HTC program at MIT in 1984. At the time (and subsequently) I spoke with Siza about Kubler’s research in Portugal and Spain and he was certainly familiar with his work and the book. Fernando Távora, Siza’s mentor and Director of the Architecture School in Porto had met with Kubler during his time in Portugal. There is no question that Kubler’s book was influential in the circle around Távora. On another note my thesis committee (Stanford Anderson and Kurt Forster) had George Kubler read my thesis on Siza and comment on it. He was an enthusiastic reader! It was a real honor and fascinating to have this exchange. I hope this is of some assistance. Warm regards, Peter.” Personal Communication, August 15, 2012.

²⁹ Távora was a friend of Reynaldo dos Santos (1880-1970) and Mário Tavares Chicó, Fernando Távora (1923-2005) took part in the late 50’s “Survey on Portuguese Architecture” and was the author of several essays, namely “O Problema da Casa Portuguesa” (Lisbon, 1947) and “Da Organização do Espaço” (Porto, 1962 and 1982). Távora was a teacher and lifelong mentor to Álvaro Siza Vieira and Eduardo Souto de Moura. From convents to markets to residential projects, all in Portugal, he sought to integrate local and traditional values within a modern vocabulary. Those who advocate a return to styles of the past or favor a modern architecture and urbanism for Portugal are on a bad path... “style” is not of importance; what counts is the relation between the work and life, style is only the consequence of it. [Fernando Távora (1962) [Paulo Varela Gomes, “Quatre Batailles en Faveur d’une Architecture Portugaise” *Europalia 91: Portugal Points de Repere: Architecture du Portugal* (Brussels: Fondation pour l’Architecture, 1991: 41-42)]. The *Inquérito à Arquitectura Popular em Portugal*, begun in 1949, and led initially by José Figueira Huertas Lobo (1914-87) and Francisco Keil do Amaral, (1910-1975).

bibliography – albeit one might argue that vernacular architecture *per se* was not Kubler’s subject.³⁰ They might well have met after the book was published in 1972.³¹

In mid-twentieth century Portugal, principled modernists were wary of doctrinaire architectural idioms favored in the state-sponsored building campaigns of the *Estado Novo*, which had embraced at different moments modern, classical, and traditional sources. Távora and others believed it fundamental to resist essentialism and such categories as “style,” “constants,” “type,” “language” or any set of pre-established rules that would lead to codifications of expression,³² and that profound skepticism persisted, especially in the Oporto School when the April Revolution of 1974, injected new social and democratic commitments into the discourse and debate.

If Kubler did not know the architects personally, many knew *Portuguese Plain Architecture*.³³ As we have seen, Távora’s courses in Porto were critical for Siza and Souto de

³⁰ If there is one major omission in my narrative, it is the chasm left in the history of Kubler’s achievements by my focus on European art and my decision for the sake of time and elegance not to discuss the constant interplay between Kubler’s work on Early Modern European subjects and studies of Precolumbian America. It is significant that Kubler wrote “Fine and Plain Arts: Sociological, Economic, and Art Historical Perspectives on Latin American Arts from Precolumbian Times to the Nineteenth Century” (paper first delivered on March 28, 1975; represented in November 1977 at the Winterthur Museum)³⁰ in which he reflected upon the complex that might be defined as plain, popular, or folk art. In typical fashion, he offered no operative definition, but explored historical variables – many antithetical – that might help establish diagnostics of fine and popular/plain arts: meaning (recondite and reserved vs. everyday things in everyday ways), taste (the elite likes vs. the people like), class (art of the elite vs. art of the people), function (sacred vs. profane), status or media (noble arts vs. crafts), nature of rulership (theocratic, aristocratic, military vs. democratic), power and control (bondage and exploitation vs. freedom and leisure), production and marketing (standard and concentrated vs. varied and dispersed), spatial and geographic (metropolitan and central vs. rural and peripheral), and the economic condition of the artist (art for gain vs. art for pleasure). One might conclude after a broad historiographic review of these categories across Precolumbian societies, the European Middle Ages, and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that varied significantly across historical periods and cultural areas, he experimented with the fact that this matrix might provide an opportunity to develop postulates about the presence or absence of fine or plain art in a given society.

³¹ In retrospect it is disappointing that Kubler was not more interested in linking his research to issues that engaged contemporary architects for he was in Spain and Portugal in 1952-53 and 1956-57 during a time when many architects felt impelled to critically assess their relationships to the nationalist projects of authoritarian states. The *Inquérito* was ideologically linked to the nationalist rhetoric of Salazar’s *Estado Novo* that promoted tradition and historic patrimony and the search for constants in Portuguese architecture and values. Salazar and Franco faced the same question – in which style do we build? I am a newcomer to contemporary Portuguese practice, but know Spain, where academic modernists like Luis Moya Blanco (1904-90) and Fernando Chueca Goitia (1911-2004) revived the severe classicism of Juan de Herrera and the Escorial *estilo desornamentado* as an exemplary national model, while many Spanish architects in charge of the Dirección General de Regiones Devastadas (1939-57) embraced principles drawn from vernacular regional architectures. Such reflections often led to the search for invariant forms of nationalist expression as in Fernando Chueca’s *Invariantes castizos de la arquitectura española*, published in 1947. Kubler repeatedly criticized such propositions, especially in a period when discontinuities and disjunctions were a passionate concern.

³² “They eventually produced a thick survey called *Arquitectura Popular em Portugal*, in which they documented, region by region, the varieties of vernacular architecture in Portugal. What they sought in the vernacular was a form of building without resort to “style,” or what they called “constants,” by which we can understand formal norms. Although they chart typologies within the body of the book, in the introduction they deny the importance of type. They are afraid that from types a “Portuguese architecture” might be sought and reified into a code, just as the state had done with its models. They flee from the stifling and betraying codifications that are language. They do say that the buildings reflect, although not in types or specific architectural elements, “something of the character of our people” in terms of a tendency to domesticate and turn “humble” certain traits of the baroque. Exactly what that is, which must be some formal characteristic – simplification of contour, for instance – is purposely left unsaid. Instead they point out the “strict correlation” in those buildings “with geographical factors, as well as economic and social conditions.” They are “simply direct expressions, without intrusions nor preoccupations with style to perturb the clear and direct consciousness of these relations.” [quotes from *Arquitectura Popular em Portugal* (Lisbon: Sindicato Nacional dos Arquitectos, 1961).] (Levit, 2006)

³³ Peter Testa remembers conversations with Alvaro Siza about the book in the early 1980s, and Malcolm Quantrill described his conversations with Siza about it in preparing his *Plain Modern: The Architecture of Brian MacKay-Lyons*, published in 2005. In a trip to Porto and a conversation with Siza, Malcolm Quantrill struck up a conversation: “I recalled one of my favorite books on architecture, George Kubler’s *Portuguese Plain Architecture, 1521-1706*, and its examination of a very restrained type of work by Portuguese architects characterized by clarity, order, proportion, and simplicity. In the early minutes of my meeting with Siza, I dared to suggest that through the example of his own contemporary work we were witnessing a rebirth of

Moura, who, when Vera Sacchetti inquired in an interview in 2011 about how the historical city of Porto influenced him, opened citing some of Kubler's observations about Portuguese architecture.³⁴

But I have asked myself many times what the appeal to architects would have been of a scholarly book that Pál Keleman reviewed in this way,

The scholarly apparatus will overwhelm, even frustrate readers. To 97 pages of text, 432 footnotes of source works are appended. The bibliography contains 332 more entries, many of peripheral interest... Here the writing is dense, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, French, and German technical terms abound and quotes are without translation. (Kelemen, 1973)

I would argue that its appeal depended on the book's analytic intelligence, its richly complex descriptions, and its capacity to engage Portuguese architects to compare their own situations to those of another historical moment in their country.

What is still unclear to me is whether the architects discovered *Portuguese Plain Architecture* or whether they were led to it, or absorbed it second hand, thorough the writings of historians, theorists, and critics. Paulo Varela Gomes wrote on the subject in 1991 (Varela-Gomes, 1991: 23) and it was given broad professional exposure in 2001, when Manuel de Graça Dias created space for the debate in a themed issue of *JA: Jornal Arquitectos*, to which Varela Gomes and Alexandre Alves Costa contributed essays. (Graça-Dias and Alves Costa, 2001)

At this point, I would like to propose three late-twentieth century architectural "conditions" in Portugal that not only influenced the reception of the book, but also became strategies for the appropriation and extension of Kubler's concepts. These discourses often flow one into the other, but I hope to separate them and to draw some distinctions among them. Let's take each in turn, but since I began this paper by describing the methodological production of Kubler's histories, I feel an obligation to point to, where they occur, certain "poetic misprisions" – to use the words of Harold Bloom – that sometimes drew upon Kubler's generalizations for ends distinct from his own.³⁵ Position Number One linked scarcity and plainness as an "aesthetic category;" Number Two involved the polemics around the "problematic of a national style;"

Portuguese plain architecture. Appreciative of the comparison, Siza and I spent most our time together discussing the importance of plainness, rather than decoration, in the history of architectural culture. I well remember Siza's concluding comments: "Plainness is no accident in good architecture. You have only to think of Karnak, the Parthenon, and those marvelous Romanesque abbeys in France. Portuguese plain is part of a great tradition, part of a recurring theme, which is simply a cultural resistance to unnecessary elaboration and embellishment." (Quantrill, 2005)

³⁴ "The Architect's Newspaper: "I'd like to start with Porto. How does this historical city, filled with regional, vernacular architecture influence you?" Eduardo Souto de Moura: "There's a book by George Kubler, *A Arquitectura Chã* ("Plain Architecture") that describes Portuguese architecture as connected to the earth, the ground, creating empathies in the ground. The Portuguese are a few people and have discovered too many things in this world [notably in the 14th and 15th century discoveries], so to control and occupy them they had to come up with very pragmatic systems. So Portuguese architecture is very pragmatic and effective in the way that it doesn't alter landscape. It takes shapes that empathize with topography, and that influences Portuguese architecture a lot. Everybody knows that the Romans changed topographies in order to build their cities. The Portuguese, along the coast of Africa [in the 14th century] would occupy small territories, placing some families there. And those families would contact the natives and occupy the territory as it was. And there arises this effective pragmatism that allowed for Portugal to become the colonial empire it once was. Evidently this creates an architectural identity – and I don't know if architecture has one identity – but it has variants, and one of them is this plain architecture. Portuguese architecture is low, small, embedded in the terrain. I will give you an example. In the 18th century, the world's richest king – because Portugal was the US of that time – built a ridiculous palace. Ridiculous. The Queluz Palace is a small pavilion for European royal family standards, and it was built by the richest king in the world. This means we are down to earth – small. And we build according to that. Whenever we wanted to build big, opulent things like the Mafra Convent, we'd call in Italian architects who built differently." (Sacchetti 2011)

³⁵ On "poetic misprisions", see Bloom (1973).

and Number Three looked metaphorically and existentially to the past to comprehend “the isolated position and condition of the Portuguese architect.”

Position Number One. The architect Duarte Cabral de Mello (1941-2013), as Eliana Sousa Santos pointed out, first drew analogies between Kubler’s “plain architecture” and the work of Vítor Figueiredo (1929-2004) in 1979.³⁶ Cabral de Mello admired Kubler’s evocative generalizations about the aesthetic dimensions of Portuguese building that were linked to scarcity. They represented for him an experiential resource that Portuguese builders such as Figueiredo could access in moments of economic necessity – “interiors ...enriched only by proportional refinement” or “cooly rational exteriors... without further ornament” (Cabral-de-Mello, 1979: 25). Kubler’s study, and, in particular, its title, served to condense his arguments for many readers into a general thesis that this architecture could be explained in part by peripheral isolation, strong vernacular traditions, and a regime of economic scarcity and that these conditions had the capacity to generate in Portugal aesthetic effects and become identified as a “style” – for example, the importance of materials of construction, elementary geometries, unified interior spaces, indifference to erudite models,... are a few cited by Varela Gomes (Varela-Gomes 1991: 23; 2001: 5-9).

Kubler, however, was more careful in his language, describing not a “style,” but “a different artistic geography, where clarity, order, proportion, and simplicity mark the contours of another aesthetic,” (Kubler, 1972: 5) Of course, in that particular optic, there are clearly visible “aesthetic” affinities among the *pueblos* of New Mexico, the “*estilo chão*,” and the work of, let us say, Távora, Siza, and Souto de Moura. [But I am somehow skeptical that architects in Porto were studying Kubler’s illustrations for aesthetic inspiration – although I must say that I was ready to doubt myself when I read Siza’s affirmation that “A type of building that has always impressed me is the convent!” (Zaera-Polo, 1994: 14)] In conclusion, however, the works might have shared qualities, but it is difficult to demonstrate that they constitute what Kubler described as “linked” or “wandering series.”³⁷

I would propose, however, that there are cases in which Kubler’s analysis of innovative formal solutions in *Portuguese Plain Architecture* did inspire new critical explorations. I will mention only one – notably Kubler’s analysis of the “spatial possibilities of the wall itself, as membrane, as vessel or passage, as barrier, as screen, and in general as an obstacle or limit to be transformed” (Kubler, 1972: 7). This problem could constitute a formal sequence that Kubler defined as “form classes” or an “entity composed of the problem and its solutions,” which by its very nature constituted an “open-ended series” awaiting further elaboration or transformation (Kubler, 1962: 33). I am curious to learn from Joana Cunha Leal whether the focus on the “poetics of thick walls” and “transition-space” in Pedro Vieira de Almeida’s (1933-2011) *Dois Parâmetros de Arquitectura Postos em Surdina*, which resemble “form-classes,” took cues from Kubler’s work.³⁸

³⁶ Eliana Sousa Santos’s paper, “Portuguese Plain Architecture: History Opening a Closed Sequence,” for an excellent historiographical review, in which she also pointed out to me that it was the architect Duarte Cabral de Mello (b. 1941) who in 1979 admired Kubler’s evocative generalizations about the aesthetic dimensions of Portuguese building that were linked to scarcity (Cabral-de-Mello, 1979: 25-26, cit. in Santos, 2012).

³⁷ Kubler’s observations about “the typology of artists’ lives” in *The Shape of Time* include “precursors,” who “usually appears on the periphery of a provincial civilization, where people have long been the recipients rather than the originators of new behaviors” (Kubler, 1962: 86-96).

³⁸ Alexandra Cardoso, Joana Cunha Leal, Maria Helena Maia, and Pedro Vieira de Almeida, *Document Zero*, in which Pedro Vieira de Almeida authored *Dois Parâmetros de Arquitectura Postos em Surdina. O propósito de uma investigação* (Porto: CEAA, 2010).

Position Number Two. What role did *Portuguese Plain Style* play in discourses of architects engaged in discussing the question of “invariant forms,” “constants,” and “national style” in Portugal? Varela Gomes’ “Quatre batailles en faveur d’une architecture Portugaise” (1991) provides a unique and thought-provoking critical periodization and evaluation of Portuguese debates around national styles and/or architectures that I need not repeat here. I want to insist, however, that *The Shape of Time* was a treatise dedicated to propose a system of analysis to remedy the inadequacies of style – “we cannot fix anywhere upon an invariant quality such as the idea of style supposes” – and Kubler was vigorously antagonistic to concepts of national styles.³⁹ Nevertheless, Kubler wrote in his conclusion that he hoped to redress

... confusion [that] has prevented people from seeing the evidence of the existence of a Portuguese national expression. ... The preceding studies turn around the idea of such an emergent national architecture outside the ... isotherms ... (Kubler, 1972: 171)

Kubler spoke though, not of “national style,” but of “national expression” and “national architecture,” which were subjects that provoked much discussion in Portugal in the 1950s. For example, in 1994, Alvaro Siza remembered specifically the moment around 1958 when

... architecture magazines focused on the debate between the recovery of local and national architecture, and the incorporation to international tendencies, to a more abstract and functionally determined architecture... After a few years... my interests began to move away from traditional Portuguese architecture. [This is the moment of the *Beiras House* and the *Magalhaes House*, in concrete, and without tiles...] I wanted to avoid an introversion in a language or an attitude which was, in fact, related to a very specific moment in Portuguese architectural culture... (Zaera-Polo, 1994: 20)

Let me conclude my discussion of Position Two by insisting again that an interest in studying Portugal’s architectural past is not equal to embracing a position that sought to create a national style especially in the wake of the António de Oliveira Salazar’s and Francisco Franco’s many attempts to do so.

Position Number Three. Varela Gomes’ 2001 essay on “Arquitetura não-alinhada” described what I would call an “existential position,” which frankly – like Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction*⁴⁰ – had/has the capacity to serve as a platform to develop an aesthetic position and design strategy.

Kubler’s book fulfilled an ideological desire that allowed us to have a positive appreciation – in a strong, full, autonomous, coherent, and closed way – of the buildings or urban clusters that would not usually fit in the main categories of European historiography such as Renaissance, Mannerism, or Baroque.

The ‘paucity’ (of materials, of decoration, of design and of facades), that seemed to blemish like a stigma many Portuguese convents and churches, was suddenly absolved (and simultaneously to gain a character that was not entirely European) in a decade, the 1970s, in which Portugal was searching for political and ideological autonomy with peripheral outlines. (Varela-Gomes, 2001)⁴¹

Sousa Santos identified this dimension of critical reflection, when she described how Alves Costa’ (b.1939), a disciple of Távora, “synthesized in a poetic way the instrumentalisation of Kubler’s “plain architecture” by his generation.” As Alves Costa wrote,

³⁹ (Kubler, 1962: 129) Kubler’s critiques of “style” continued into the 1970s.

⁴⁰ First published in 1966 and translated to Portuguese in 1995. See Venturi (1995).

⁴¹ Reprinted in *Ensaios de História e Arquitectura* (Edições Almedina, 2007).

Kubler gave us courage, Távora inspired us, taught us, and so, between conversations and travels ... there is a Portuguese architecture. (Alves-Costa, 2001: 35)⁴²

Kubler gave us interesting clues towards finding a unique way, beyond styles ... he brought forth forgotten, even dismissed, examples, and looked at other examples with different eyes. And we did too. (Alves-Costa, 2001: 35)

By 2003, Ana Vaz Milheiro in “Baixa corrente (O Efeito Kubler)” also saw promise in utilizing Kubler’s inferences as a critical prospecting tool for undervalued contributions to Portuguese architecture. (Milheiro, 2004: 58) Alves Costa, Vaz Milheiro, and Sousa Santos all make it clear that *Portuguese Plain Architecture’s* depiction of the conditions of practice in Portugal over the *longue durée* had particular resonance among architects who had practiced in countries where architects had felt isolated and limited by working outside the isotherms, especially where they had worked under authoritarian regimes that had promoted nationalist programs (Testa, 1984: 136).⁴³

In sum, Kubler’s analysis sought to define architectural events in Portugal not in terms of “constants” or “styles,” but rather in a universe characterized by the open flow of ideas, architects, and clients across Europe under the aegis of shifting regimes of power, wealth, and taste. As we said, Kubler’s analysis of works placed selected Portuguese monuments in groups, but avoided sequences implying progressive movement to some purposeful action or goal. Instead, each took form in a complex matrix of forces – style, aesthetics, and/or budget – that deformed and transformed the work [– for example, the external articulation might be Italian, the proportions Spanish, the treatment of the interior walls Portuguese, and the decorative motifs Flemish.] Kubler’s text repeatedly relied on words such as complexity, ambiguity, antithesis, tension, multiple readings, and simultaneous possibilities of interpretation to describe conditions and appearances. Such a perception of positionality was similar to those described by Alves Costa, Varela Gomes, and Siza Vieira.

This is perhaps by now unnecessary, but I will take a selection from *Portuguese Plain Architecture* and make some word substitutions to suggest how and why the historical situation might have had resonance in Portugal in the 1970s,

The preceding studies turn around the idea of such an emergent national architecture outside the... isotherms ... This architectural language was conditioned by old native preferences and regional traditions rather than by the imitation of the latest International Style [~~Florentine or Roman~~] fashions. Portugal was, of course, constantly exposed to European modernist [~~Italian~~] taste and to American [~~northern~~] taste as well; but the Portuguese resistance to imitation depended on the possession of aims peculiar to Portugal... (Kubler 1972, 171)

Kubler’s position, I believe, can be productively compared to Alvaro Siza’s descriptions of “magical cities,” which functioned as ciphers for analogous qualities he sought to achieve in his architecture,

My sense of universality has more to do with the vocation of the cities, arising from centuries of intervention, of crossbreeding, of superimposition and mixing the most opposed influences, creating however an unmistakable identity... The cities... have been built upon international relationships, through a balance between what is local, traditions, idiosyncrasy, and what is foreign, innovation, grafting... What most

⁴² Cited by Eliana Sousa Santos in "Portuguese Plain Architecture: History Opening a Closed Sequence" (2012).

⁴³ Testa’s point of departure was “to establish a basic distinction between an approach to architecture which is derived from indigenous sources and one which is oriented by universal sources inflected by local circumstances,” contesting to Frampton’s classification of Siza as a “critical regionalist.”

impresses us in magical cities is this crusade of transplanted roots and the influences it sets in motion... (Zaera-Polo, 1994: 6-8)

[Or, as Alves Costa wrote in “We are from Póvoa do Varzim” in the themes issue of *JA on Ser Português*,

What is interesting is that this apparent break introduced by the most recent critique replaces the idea of complex multiplicity proposed by Távora or that of a desire for unity understood as the polemical expression of the complexity, in our own words, that seems to overcome in contemporaneity the dichotomies: unity/diversity; old/new; generation “y”/generation “x”; scarcity/displacement; modern/vernacular; Portugal/foreign – dichotomies that are typical of a type of fatal attraction for Judeo-Christian Manichaeism.] (Alves-Costa, 2010)

Did these affirmations and explanations owe something to Kubler’s representation of the conditions of architectural practice in *Portuguese Plain Architecture* or, on a broader canvas, were they inspired by Kubler’s *The Shape of Time* or its predecessor Focillon’s *La vie des formes*?

Portuguese Plain Architecture was, I argue, an empirical case study to test and expand ideas essayed in 1962 in *The Shape of Time* – whose Portuguese translation went through four editions before 2004.⁴⁴ Art historians have studied its reception among American artists in the US, but not its reception by architects.⁴⁵ I am often struck by a number of Alvaro Siza’s statements that parallel ideas in *The Shape of Time*. For example,

My architecture does not have a pre-established language and does not establish a language. It is a response to a concrete problem, a situation in transformation to which I participate. [We have passed the stage in architecture where we thought that unity in a language resolved everything.] A pre-established language, pure, beautiful, etc. does not interest me. (Zaera-Polo, 1994: 20)

Or,

Architects invent nothing. They work continuously with models which they transform in response to the problems they encounter. (Testa, 1984: 20)

The last resembles a metaphor that Kubler used in 1965 in an article in *Perspecta* specifically addressed to architects, cited by Sousa Santos.

Actually, every building is a collective enterprise. Multiple authorship is the rule; single authorship is the rare exception. The metaphor of the coral reef is worth recalling here; the individual artist stands upon an immense secretion or platform of prior achievements. We tend to overestimate the potential of individual achievement. (Kubler, 1965: 302)⁴⁶

But, then, in their turn, Kubler’s propositions in *The Shape of Time* belong to a chain of poetic speculations about art making that were the legacy of Henri Focillon, whose *La vie des formes*, written in 1933, Kubler translated to English in 1942. In its turn, a Portuguese translation of *La vie* appeared in Porto in 1962.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *A forma do tempo: observações sobre a história dos objectos*, tradutor, José Vieira de Lima (Lisbon: Vega, 1990, 1998, 2004)

⁴⁵ Pamela M. Lee, “Untramoderne: Or, How George Kubler Stole Time in Sixties Art,” *Chronophobia, On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004: 218-257). See also, works by Reva Wolf, Shelley Rice, Ellen K. Levy, and Suzanne Anker in “*The Shape of Time*, Then and Now,” *Art Journal*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (2009: 62-105).

⁴⁶ Cited by Eliana Sousa Santos, “Portuguese Plain Architecture: History Opening a Closed Sequence,” in *Revista de História da Arte* (2012).

⁴⁷ Focillon (1962, 1983 and 1988).

A work of art is an attempt to express something that is unique ... But it is likewise an integral part of a system of highly complex relationships... flowing together within it the energies of many civilizations may be plainly discerned. (Focillon, 1948: 6)

Each order of action obeys its own impulse – one that is determined by internal exigencies, and retarded or accelerated by external contacts... The history of art displays, juxtaposed within the very same moment, survivals and anticipations, and slow, outmoded forms that are the contemporaries of bold and rapid forms. (Focillon, 1948: 55)

In certain realms of art... individual effort yields more readily to tradition and to the collective spirit. (Focillon, 1948: 57)

I am not sure whether we should speak of “influence” or of “family or spiritual resemblances,” but many of Alvaro Siza’s positions in writings and interviews that first began to appear in 1976 resembled Focillon’s and/or Kubler’s propositions,

Tradition is a challenge to innovation... I move among conflicts, compromises, hybrids, and transformations. (Siza, 1986: 8)

Order is the bringing together of opposites. (Siza, 1986: 8)

Form and function have a complex and relative relationship, like that we analyzed between local and universal. They cannot be analyzed in a linear or inevitable relationship... (Zaera-Polo, 1994: 15)

The human mind does not function in a linear manner, but in a much more syncretic way, in curves or zig zags... and that non-linearity of thought is what allows for the production of information which did not exist a priori, because it was open to possible accidents... (Zaera-Polo, 1994: 11)

But sorting out the literary and theoretical predilections among representatives of the Porto School represents a subject for future investigation.

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Colégio de S. Jerónimo
Apartado 3087
3001-401 Coimbra, Portugal
T. +351 239 855 570
F. +351 239 855 589
www.ces.uc.pt
ces@ces.uc.pt

CES - Lisboa

Picoas Plaza
Rua do Viriato, 13
Lj 117/118
1050-227 Lisboa, Portugal
T. +351 216 012 848
F. +351 216 012 847
www.ces.uc.pt/ces-lisboa
ceslx@ces.uc.pt

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