

A TEI Project

Interview of George Kubler

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1. Transcript

1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE MARCH 27, 1991

SMITH

Okay, the traditional thing is a pretty straight-forward question, which is when and where you were born.

KUBLER

Los Angeles, July 26, 1912.

SMITH

Was your family originally from Los Angeles?

KUBLER

No, they were both non-Californians. My father [Frederick William Kubler] was born in Akron, Ohio. My mother [Ellen Orloff Kubler] was born in Russia and was known to my father in Spain and they were married. He was a paper manufacturer and settled in Los Angeles.

SMITH

Because of the investment opportunities there?

KUBLER

I think he was employed in the Los Angeles office of a paper mill in Northern California.

SMITH

I understand that your father had training as an art historian.

KUBLER

Yes, yes, that was his trade in Germany. His father [Edward G. Kubler]--my grandfather--had a business in Akron. He was an industrial chemist. He'd been trained as an industrial chemist and he had a factory making Japan paint,

which was important to carriage makers and to early automobile makers--black Japan paint. So he made quite a good thing of it and retired early. At the time his children were being educated, he thought U.S. education was not worth very much, and he took the whole family to Brussels first so that they would learn French. Not Paris, of which he disapproved. Then they settled in Europe, and the children grew up both with an American childhood and an adolescence and student life in Europe.

SMITH

Did your father have an American identity?

KUBLER

Very much so, yes.

SMITH

So he did not feel himself a German who happened to be living in the United States?

KUBLER

No. No. He was an American, an American abroad.

SMITH

Okay. How did he come to do university study in Germany? Where did he study?

KUBLER

He studied at the University of Würzburg and he studied art history. And he studied with other art historians in other universities, which is customary in the German curriculum. So he studied with several well-known teachers. His dissertation was on an iconographic topic, which was at that time unusual, about the Virgin Mary--an aspect of the iconography of the Virgin Mary. It was printed, as was the custom in Germany. In 1906, I think. There are copies in libraries around Europe and in this country--two copies in the Yale [University] library.

SMITH

Well, I guess the obvious question is why didn't he assume a career as an art historian or a museum director?

KUBLER

That's what I think he wanted. I know that he came to New Haven hoping that there was an opening in the Yale [University] Art Gallery, which had been in existence since the 1860s. There was nothing for him there. It was a premature time to come to art history in this country because there were very few museums and there were no university posts. So he fell in with the family habit and became a businessman. His elder brother [Conrad Kubler] did the same thing. He took university degrees but ended up as a paper manufacturer. The two brothers had that in common. Very interesting--papers and business.

SMITH

Could you tell me a little bit about your mother's family background and her education?

KUBLER

She was brought up in Russia in a country setting and traveled a lot, and during her travels she married. She had a first marriage with a German and lived in Hamburg, and that marriage collapsed and she met my father, who was then traveling from museum to museum. I think they met in Spain. They were married and settled in Los Angeles.

SMITH

How long did you live in Los Angeles?

KUBLER

Until my father's death in 1920.

SMITH

So you were eight years old when he died.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Before we go beyond that, let me ask you about the religious values that you and your family grew up with. Was it a religious household?

KUBLER

No, no. My grandfather's household may have been. He was Protestant, and he immigrated as a Protestant from a Catholic province of Germany. Probably there are many Kublers in Charleston, South Carolina, as early as the seventeenth century. Kubler is a name meaning "barrel maker," and it's a name common wherever there is wine--making barrels. There were Kublers in Charleston. And in Charleston he met my grandmother [Emile Duchard Kubler], who was a Huguenot Protestant. A Huguenot family, but she had been born in Illinois, in northern Illinois, around the Hennepin Canal. It was said in the family that she was the first white lady to be born in the Hennepin Canal area. [laughter] But the family had been in Charleston, and I think they met in Charleston.

SMITH

What about philosophical values? In terms of his training or just his general approach to life, was he influenced by philosophy?

KUBLER

In so much as an art historian generally is. He was an art historian carefully trained in Germany, and I think he was as philosophical as art historians were then in the early 1900s.

SMITH

But that is not something that you have memory of.

KUBLER

No. I remember him well and affectionately, and I remember him as being interested in Japanese painting. I have a memory of him on his knees in Japanese dress doing brushwork--calligraphy--and we had Japanese housemen around the house we lived in and he took an interest in them and tried to speak Japanese with them.

SMITH

What about the world of culture and your family? Was it something that you grew up with?

KUBLER

Well, they were cultivated people. They were people of culture. My grandfather was a man of culture; my grandmother was far from illiterate. My uncles were university trained. One uncle was trained both in chemistry and in forensic law, and another uncle [George A. Kubler] was also a university man but suffered bad health. And then an aunt [Hermine Kubler Hassencamp], who did not go to university.

SMITH

I'm thinking-- In particular, if you know the historian Henry May, who's written about changes in middle-class life and values at the turn of the century, one of the things he's talked about--in fact, it's probably one of the theses that he's best known for--is the changing role in culture, that at the turn of the century or the First World War period, art and music had a particular role in the way families passed on values.

KUBLER

Yes. Yes, that was certain. My grandfather liked very much to draw, draw with ink--pencil and ink--and the children were people with those interests also.

SMITH

So, in some sense, were you given an introduction to Western classics as a child?

KUBLER

I think so. Our house was full of books. My father was a disappointed professor. [laughter] He would have liked to be a professor.

SMITH

The other thing I wanted to touch on at this time was it seems that you had some sort of an introduction to Mexico while you were in California.

KUBLER

Oh, yes. That's true. Yes. My father took an interest in speculation in Mexican mines, gold and silver mines. I used to have a bundle of shares in a La Plata Gold and Silver Mining Company, of which he was the secretary. I don't know what became of that mine, but he would go down to inspect it and see to its running, and he'd come back with tales of his travels. I remember those interests. So Mexico was a topic of conversation in the house.

SMITH

Did your parents collect art?

KUBLER

Yes. Oh, yes. I had many, many very good Japanese prints, which I gave to my son [Edward Kubler], who is fascinated by them. So it goes on.

SMITH

So there was a very strong focus on Japanese culture?

KUBLER

Yes. Living in Los Angeles. My mother loved California--she enjoyed it greatly--but she didn't want to live there anymore after he died. She wanted to travel. So we went to Europe, and she traveled mainly in France. She was visiting places she had known as a child. One of them was Le Touquet-Paris-Plage, and she put me in school in Le Touquet-Paris-Plage. She wanted to live in Le Touquet again. So we spent the fall and winter in Le Touquet-Paris-Plage, and she put me in a school which I enjoyed greatly. It was a school run by a man with a big beard and about forty children in the school. It was a one-room school. It was a private school. I don't remember anything much about the children, but he taught everything. There was no other teacher. He taught everything, and the children who weren't being taught by him were doing the devoir. He managed to teach everybody, and there were no grades, excepting some tickets he had printed like the old-fashioned tickets for a movie house, red tickets on each of which was printed "un bon point." [laughter] Each week there would be a distribution of tickets. Those who'd failed received no ticket, and those who had done the work received tickets. That was the grading system.

SMITH

At home what language were you using? What did you speak as a child?

KUBLER

Well, my father and mother spoke French to keep me from knowing what they were saying. [laughter] They also spoke German and they also spoke Spanish. They used those languages intermittently. I remember landing in France at Cherbourg--the destruction after the war. We were on a launch from SS Majestic, and I asked my mother the meaning of the word cuisine--the label on the doorway of the landing vessel. That was my first word of French. [laughter] But I'd grown up with French. I'd grown up with French without understanding it.

SMITH

What did your mother consider to be her native language?

KUBLER

Her first language was Russian. She spoke German well.

SMITH

Would your father have considered English or German to be his first language?

KUBLER

English in Akron and then German at the university. First at Gymnasium and then at the university.

SMITH

Until you went to France, it doesn't sound like there was an attempt to teach you a foreign language.

KUBLER

No, no. I learned French immediately with great ease in the school. I remember reading with great pleasure Pierre Loti's-- What is it? Anyhow, it was a novel of Pierre Loti's.

SMITH

Did you have any brothers or sisters?

KUBLER

Only child.

SMITH

Only child, okay. So you arrived in France in 1920. How long did you stay in France?

KUBLER

We stayed four years. Traveling constantly but with long residences in places that she remembered and wanted to visit again. Quite a series.

SMITH

So your preadolescence was spent in France.

KUBLER

Yes. And then she died. She died in Paris. Actually she committed suicide. She could not bear returning to this country. Ugly. I was then taken by my grandmother, who was living in Switzerland.

SMITH

Your father's mother or your mother's--?

KUBLER

My father's mother was living in Switzerland. She had lost her husband--my grandfather--in 1906 and she lived in Lucerne in the summer and in Lugano in the winter. So I spent several of those seasons with her, and then I was sent back to the U.S. to the care of a guardian who had been a lawyer to the family in Akron.

SMITH

So not a relative.

KUBLER

Not a relative. A lawyer. I liked him very much. His family was not very agreeable to me, but I liked him, and I went to school at the Western Reserve Academy, which was a very good school and which I enjoyed greatly.

SMITH

It was a boarding school.

KUBLER

Boarding school, yes.

SMITH

Okay, do you remember the lawyer's name?

KUBLER

Yes. T. W. Kimber. He managed my affairs. I inherited from my grandmother a substantial income, and he managed my affairs for a long time, until he died.

SMITH

So you went to Western Reserve Academy until you were eighteen?

KUBLER

Yes. That's right. And that was founded by a lot of professors from Yale who came out to the Western Reserve--emptying the excess population from Connecticut to the Western Reserve, which meant quite far west. This academy was in Hudson, Ohio, south of Cleveland. It was built as a replica of the brick row. It still stands. The brick row is still standing there in Ohio.

[laughter]

SMITH

I was going to ask you where the connection to Yale was.

KUBLER

That's it. That's it.

SMITH

Because it didn't seem to be in your family.

KUBLER

No, it wasn't a family connection. It was the Western Reserve Academy. I liked that place, and I knew some people at Yale.

SMITH

Well, maybe we could talk just a little bit about the classes you took there and the interests you had at the academy, any particular teachers that were either role models for you or particularly important.

KUBLER

Harlan Wood was the Latin teacher. He was an elderly professor of Latin. Very mild and very effective. I liked him very much. There were a lot of other teachers. A man named Kitzmiller, who taught French, and his wife. They helped run the student newspaper. I worked on the student newspaper, and Kitzmiller was director. Things of that sort.

SMITH

So your interests were in the languages at that time.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Did you have any career interests?

KUBLER

Not yet. I was much interested in maps, and I wrote a paper for admission to Yale on cartography, which I'm told was liked. At Yale I had the good fortune to be a student of Henri Focillon.

SMITH

I think we'll get to Focillon in a little bit, but maybe if you don't mind staying back here at the academy, I have one more question about that. I was wondering if a school like that would encourage you to be thinking in terms of career.

KUBLER

Yes. Very much so. The headmaster was an admirable man named Boothby, Ralph Boothby. He took a serious interest in where his seniors were going to go to college and directed them very well, I think.

SMITH

So was it already in your mind that you might become a university professor?

KUBLER

No, no.

SMITH

No. Do you think a writer?

KUBLER

Yes, I liked writing. I liked writing and I tried writing a novel, which I destroyed.

SMITH

Oh, you destroyed it? Too bad. You sure you don't have the carbon copy?

KUBLER

No. I hope not.

REESE

At the academy?

KUBLER

No. This was at Yale.

REESE

What do you remember about the daily life at the academy?

KUBLER

It was very regular, very stable, very quiet. It was an extraordinarily good school. It was at that time second only to Phillips Andover in the size of its endowment. That endowment was from a man who had made a fortune and was a banker of the world's fair at Chicago.

SMITH

It was the guardian who had suggested that you--

KUBLER

The guardian suggested that I go to this school, knowing that it was a good school. It was at its peak then, and it continues to be one of the best schools in the Midwest.

SMITH

Did you still have family in the Akron region?

KUBLER

No. No family remained. Friends of my grandfather, yes, whom I didn't know very well.

SMITH

What about your reading interests in high school? Were there authors that you were particularly--?

KUBLER

The library was excellent, and the librarian was a dear lady who paid a lot of attention to me, sort of guided me in reading. Mary Blake Eilbeck, a Philadelphian lady. She used to have me to tea. So it was a school of manners.

SMITH

A school of manners. You've mentioned Pierre Loti, which I would think would be a little sophisticated for a child. I mean, at that time you were ten, eleven, twelve. What was your reading interest?

KUBLER

I read constantly. I read all sorts. Jules Verne and--

SMITH

Let me rephrase the question a little bit, then. When did you start developing an interest in contemporary literature, modern literature?

KUBLER

At Yale.

SMITH

But experimental? At that time it was experimental?

KUBLER

Yes. And I wrote for the Yale Literary Magazine and took part in the Harkness Hoot, which was a journal of undergraduate protest against gothic Yale.
[laughter]

SMITH

Okay, well, let's go to Yale. You started Yale in what year?

KUBLER

'Twenty-nine. Arriving just in time for Bloody Monday on Wall Street. October 8, was it? The crash. The crash didn't affect my finances. My guardian, Kimber, promptly bought a farm for me. I had a farm, [laughter] a 168-acre farm, which later was sold.

SMITH

Were you a scholarship student?

KUBLER

No, I paid my way. Tuition was \$600.

SMITH

Yes. But that was quite a bit of money back then.

KUBLER

Yes. [laughter]

SMITH

It was a full year's wages for quite a few people.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Did you live in the residence halls on campus, then?

KUBLER

Yes, I was in the dormitories. This was before the college system. Then I went to Germany for a year to improve my German, because my German, which I'd learned in Switzerland, was Swiss German, peasant German, from the peasant children of the summer hotel. So I studied German and German literature.

SMITH

At Yale?

KUBLER

Yes. With [Carl] Schreiber.

SMITH

With Schreiber. Was that your initial major?

KUBLER

No. My major, fortunately, was something called History of the Arts and Letters.

SMITH

In 1929?

KUBLER

Yes. Yes, there was no art history department. I graduated with the class of '34, owing to my absence in Germany during the Hitler period. I was in Munich when Hitler became chancellor and stayed in Munich during those dreadful months--reading Greek. I was enrolled in the university, and I read Greek because I had been rather shaky in the Greek I studied at Yale and I needed to redeem myself by reading more easily. So I read church fathers, patristic texts, with a man named [Fritz Joachim] von Rintelen, who was a very instructive professor who probably oriented me towards medieval studies, which I picked up when I returned to Yale--on to graduate school.

SMITH

I do want to talk about Germany, but let's continue with the undergraduate life at Yale. What I would like to do is get a picture of Yale culture in the early thirties. From some of the things I read, it seems like the school was in a fair degree of turmoil, as many Ivy League schools were, as they were in transition

from gentlemen's schools to modern universities. Did you have any perception of the school being in conflict over what its role should be?

KUBLER

Very much so. Very much so. Which was crystallized in the appearance of the Harkness Hoot, which was a journal of protest, as I mentioned.

SMITH

Now, weren't you one of the organizers?

KUBLER

No, but I contributed to them. I remember redesigning the undergraduate curriculum in twelve pages. [laughter]

SMITH

Why did you want to redesign the curriculum? Let's start with that.

KUBLER

Because it was not adequate as it stood.

SMITH

What was the undergraduate curriculum?

KUBLER

Well, the undergraduate curriculum was reading and then repeating what one had read in recitations. The courses were run as recitations, so that one showed having read the text by being able to regurgitate.

SMITH

From memory?

KUBLER

From memory, yes.

SMITH

Verbally or on paper?

KUBLER

Verbally. Sometimes on paper. There were some brilliant lecturers. I remember Robert [Dudley] French on Chaucer. I remember many of the lecturers--excellent lecturers. I was more interested in the lecture courses than in the recitations. But recitations were much too important.

SMITH

But were they the equivalent of seminar classes, then?

KUBLER

No. The recitations were run by young instructors who did not lecture but would check up on the reading. The reading was tested. It seemed like a waste of time. [laughter]

SMITH

Were there students who you knew who liked the system? Who felt it was good for them?

KUBLER

A lot of them had no criticism of it.

REESE

What about your perceptions of the social makeup of the Yale student body when you first arrived?

KUBLER

Oh, I fell into it easily. I didn't have any trouble. I thought the entry system was very good. In the entry system, that is-- Stacked one on top of the other, with the staircase. You knew a lot of the entry and you made friends easily that way.

SMITH

I'm sorry, I guess I'm not picturing it.

KUBLER

Yes. Well, it's like an apartment house with many entries, and these apartments are connected by the staircase.

SMITH

Oh, I see. Okay.

REESE

It's still the basis of the Yale college system, staircases.

KUBLER

The Yale colleges are built on the entry system, and it still subsists with the women students. The women students have redesigned it very intelligently, and the administration has taken their advice, namely, men on the ground floor and men on the top floor, where there is circulation--basement and attics--protecting the women in between.

REESE

How did you feel at Yale after your training at the academy? Did you feel that your education was in many ways better and more disciplined than that of other people in the freshman class at Yale? What did you immediately feel?

KUBLER

No, I felt well prepared. I felt adequately prepared, and I found much that was of value in the courses I took at Yale, but I was critical of the system.

SMITH

What was the thrust of the changes that you wanted to see made?

KUBLER

Oh, I've forgotten. I've forgotten.

SMITH

Okay. [laughter] Well, what I'm wondering is, as you joined the faculty, if some of these changes manifested themselves in your own work as a teacher.

KUBLER

I think they had already come about. There was quite a change with the Depression. The whole system of instruction changed greatly. There were many more lecture courses and fewer recitations.

SMITH

Were there many students who were negatively affected by the Depression?
People you went to school with?

KUBLER

The Depression didn't affect us very much.

SMITH

What about suffering in New Haven and the Connecticut area? Connecticut was a very industrial state at that time.

KUBLER

At that time it was much more peaceful than it is now. It was still a small industrial town. The great change in population happened in the fifties, when over 50 percent became black families.

SMITH

Let's talk a little bit about the expectations for students. How many papers were you expected to write in a course and how frequently?

KUBLER

Well, there was a course called Daily Themes. One wrote a paper every day, a story.

SMITH

How long would the papers be?

KUBLER

They would be term papers. There were daily papers. There were weekly papers. There were monthly papers.

SMITH

So there was quite a bit of writing.

KUBLER

There was a lot of writing, yes.

SMITH

One thing I ran across-- It wasn't specifically about Yale. They were referring to Princeton [University] and Harvard [University] and Brown [University] and so on. A gentleman could go to school there and be exposed to many, many ideals but never encounter a single idea. I just wonder how you would view the accuracy of that. And, again, I'm not talking about an academically motivated student, but your average Yale product.

KUBLER

Well, I found much stimulus from the people teaching me. I remember a young man from the English department, whose name I've forgotten, who was constantly encouraging in the direction of the history of ideas. Then I remember a seminar in historiography with J. M. S. Allison. That seminar was elementary, but for beginners a great eye-opener.

SMITH

Do you recall who you might have read in that seminar? Who were the historians they might have referred to?

KUBLER

He was a medievalist, and we would read medieval historians. All my work was drifting toward the Middle Ages. Then when [Marcel] Aubert and Focillon were appointed, from France--they were both medievalists-- that clinched the medieval circuit. [laughter]

SMITH

You've mentioned French. He was the Chaucer scholar, and he was also your adviser, I understand.

KUBLER

Robert Dudley French, yes. He was the Chaucer specialist, and he became the first of the masters of the new college system in Jonathan Edwards [College]. I was one of the first students to live in that building, which opened in 1934. Robert French was its master.

SMITH

The English profession, as we now know, at that time was at war with itself between the philologists, on the one hand, and the critics, on the other hand.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Where did he fit in that?

KUBLER

I think he was a cultural historian. Robert Dudley French. His book on Chaucer [A Chaucer Handbook] is the proof.

**1.2. TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO
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SMITH

In terms of his approach, then, he was interested more in providing a cultural context than in, say, the recitations aspect?

KUBLER

Yes. He was a cultural historian. That would be the proper designation for him. He used Chaucer as his method. Chaucer studies.

SMITH

Is there any way that you would say that he's influenced you, either as a teacher or as a scholar?

KUBLER

Well, he was an admirable person, and he had a great deal to do with the implanting of the British Oxbridge college plan, which was picked up by both Yale and Harvard. He guided its implantation here with great skill.

SMITH

In your work there is a concern for scientific rigor. Would you have viewed his approach to his cultural materials as being sufficiently methodological?

KUBLER

No. He was more interested in interesting students, awakening an interest in the students. He was extremely good at that. His lectures were always aimed at evoking interest.

SMITH

Well, when you became a teacher--for instance, when you were lecturing--wouldn't you be interested in evoking interest? Let's say in an undergraduate lecture course.

KUBLER

Yes. Yes. Oh, yes.

SMITH

So there's always that. I mean, there's the question how the form affects the particular work that you're doing. What about his research methods?

KUBLER

Robert Dudley French?

SMITH

Yes.

KUBLER

Well, he wasn't highly regarded in the profession. He hadn't written enough.

SMITH

Okay. There's another person that I wanted to ask you about, which was Theodore Sizer.

KUBLER

Theodore Sizer was director of the [Yale University] Art Gallery. Of course, then the director of the art gallery was subordinate to the dean of the arts school, Everett Meeks. Everett Meeks presided over everything, including the drama school. Theodore Sizer was a very cultivated and interesting lecturer, but he didn't say very much. But he taught appreciation.

SMITH

Appreciation. Art appreciation?

KUBLER

Appreciation, yes.

SMITH

So it would be the history of Western art from--

KUBLER

Yes. And he knew a great deal about printmaking. I remember a seminar with him and a printmaker who was one of the college heads, whose name I've forgotten, and then the university printer, Carl Rollins. So we got the whole package of books and prints and--

SMITH

Medieval manuscripts?

KUBLER

Medieval manuscripts.

SMITH

This is another funny quote, but a student from Yale in the 1920s said that at that time the universe stopped for Yale on July 14, 1789. Nothing was recognized of substance that happened after that date. Again, an exaggeration, I'm sure, but the medievalism that you've talked about, is that entrenched in the institution or is that because of your personal interests?

KUBLER

Well, medieval studies became dominant in a way that is not present today. Medieval studies were new-- they were new, they were glittering new--and medieval studies were very attractive. I think many people were drawn to it at the time. But the current interest in medieval studies is very low. Before our time--my generation's time--I don't think medieval studies figured importantly at all. But there was a wave of interest in medieval studies.

REESE

I'm sure with the construction of the new college system it must have been important.

SMITH

What would you attribute that wave of interest to at that particular time? Was it an influence of personalities on the faculty?

KUBLER

Yes. And the general awakening of interest in the Middle Ages everywhere, in Europe as well as America.

SMITH

Because, actually, I think that really dates back to the 1880s, 1890s. We have even the formation of societies to resurrect jousting and that sort of thing. But also a lot of scholarship. Did it then hit Yale later than other institutions?

KUBLER

Yes. I think the concentration on medieval studies boiled up during the twenties and thirties. The Depression years were very favorable for medieval studies.

SMITH

Why is that? I mean, are you making a connection with the social aspects of the Depression?

KUBLER

Perhaps. There was a demand for medievalists.

REESE

That makes me think of religion at Yale. Was there any strong integration of religion--?

KUBLER

No. Not in my case.

SMITH

Another faculty person that I wanted to ask you about was Richard Swann Lull.

KUBLER

Oh, yes, the paleontologist. Yes. He was director of Peabody Museum [of Archaeology and Ethnology]. Much respected and a good lecturer.

SMITH

What courses would you take from him?

KUBLER

I didn't study with him.

SMITH

Oh, you didn't?

KUBLER

No.

SMITH

Okay. Your training in anthropology came when?

KUBLER

Well, I picked it up on the way. I don't think I ever took a course. I picked it up. I read anthropology and I had friends with whom I talked anthropology. But I never studied it separately.

SMITH

What about archaeology?

KUBLER

Well, when I was a graduate student I went to New York University to the Institute of Fine Arts, which was a European implantation, quite different from other places of study. There I studied with Karl Lehmann-Hartleben. My Greek was useful, and I studied Greek and Roman art with him and was very seriously interested in classical archaeology. When Lehmann-Hartleben began his excavations at Samothrace, he wanted me to come with him and join his large crew there. But at that time the war was already very much in the way, and I was looking for a way to do archaeology in this country. So I picked New

Mexico and began these studies of New Mexico, which were mainly architectural, but semi-archaeological.

SMITH

I was going to ask you, if you say archaeology, then why not have picked the Anasazi.

KUBLER

I wanted it closer to the present. It's such a living presence in New Mexico, the colonial architecture.

REESE

Richard raised earlier this question of the medieval versus the modern. Clearly, a lot of your close circle of friends were associated with the Yale Lit [Yale Literary Review] and the Harkness Hoot. Did you meet them right as you came to Yale as a freshman and sophomore?

KUBLER

Yes. They were all around, yes. They were both ahead of me and after me.

SMITH

Who were the people that you felt closest to?

KUBLER

People like Richard Bissell and a whole group of people at the Elizabethan Club. The Elizabethan Club was a center, with its very good library and daily tea and conversation and very good company. People like Walt [W.] Rostow, Eugene Rostow, Richard Bissell, Max Millikan--son of the physicist [Robert A. Millikan]--were in this dingy little house down on College Street. That was a very pleasant place where we educated each other.

SMITH

And you said earlier that you were rebels.

KUBLER

Yes. Trying to take part in revising the course of study with this journal called Harkness Hoot.

SMITH

The Harkness Hoot seems to have been interested in modern art, modern literature.

KUBLER

Very much so. Through the founders, William Hale Harkness and Selman Rodman. Selman Rodman is still around. He lives in Haiti and he is the grandfather of Haitian art.

SMITH

Modern art, modern literature is a big area. Were there particular aspects of it that you--individually and the group that you were a part of--were more inclined towards? I mean, for instance, would the surrealists have interested you?

KUBLER

Less. I think our taste as a group was not avant-garde. We followed it, we knew what was going on, and it seemed extravagant.

SMITH

Did you like Ezra Pound or T. S. Eliot?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

I mean, would that have been more--?

KUBLER

Oh, yes. We accepted them.

SMITH

So perhaps you were looking for a revived sense of cultural tradition, as opposed to a rupture?

KUBLER

Yes. And criticism such as the Harkness Hoot was part of a therapy.

SMITH

A therapy of what, though?

KUBLER

It was the therapy for malaise with the present world of that time.

REESE

And where did you think the malaise came from?

KUBLER

Politics.

SMITH

Politics. I know that in part these are unfair questions because we go past where we start from. So, I mean, for T. S. Eliot, of course, the malaise has to do with being divorced from the eternal and its reflections in natural life and social life. Was that religious sensibility prevalent in the Harkness group?

KUBLER

No. They were much more materialists.

REESE

What about their interest in different literatures--French, German, English, American? Was it evenly distributed or did it--?

KUBLER

I think so. I think so. We read everything that interested us and we read widely, in translation when necessary.

SMITH

So perhaps the answer to the malaise was a critical thought, the ability to look at things.

KUBLER

Well, that we had the Hoot for.

SMITH

I know it's somewhat ancillary, but I would like to talk about your brief career as a fiction writer. You published three stories, and they seem to be portraits of malaise. Were those personal, autobiographical?

KUBLER

No. Not really, no. They were stories that seemed pertinent and interesting, so I told them. But I desisted from storytelling.

SMITH

Perhaps, since you mentioned the novel, couldn't you at least tell us what it was about?

KUBLER

Oh, I've forgotten. I've forgotten. I've forgotten.

SMITH

What happened?

KUBLER

I took it with me to Germany and wrote quite a lot on it, and I threw it all away.

SMITH

Okay. All right. I'll respect the veil.

KUBLER

I really wiped it out.

SMITH

What about Egbert Miles? To get back to some of the faculty.

KUBLER

Egbert Miles. Oh, yes, he's a mathematician. Oh, yes. He was a man who spoke with great clarity about mathematics. I enjoyed his conversation very much. He was a fellow in Jonathan Edwards College, which is where I knew him.

SMITH

When you were a graduate student, then.

KUBLER

Yes, and later. How did you know of Egbert Miles?

SMITH

I've got tons of notes here.

KUBLER

Ah, yes. There were two Miles. Egbert was the mathematician.

SMITH

Typically at this time, students were required to take philosophy, a senior seminar from the president of the university or a senior person in philosophy. Was there a course like that at Yale that you took?

KUBLER

No. I don't remember one. I would have gotten the equivalent in history with Allison, the seminar in historiography.

SMITH

Then, of course, we need to talk about Meeks.

KUBLER

Everett Meeks. He was an egg-shaped man. [laughter] He was wider than tall--almost--and an architect. He was an architect and he was a great authority and he taught a general course on history of architecture that was followed by hundreds of students. He was very thorough. It was a drill. It was a drill in the whole history of architecture.

SMITH

Would it have had a beaux-arts--?

KUBLER

It had a beaux-arts background. His taste was beaux arts.

SMITH

So what he would have considered good contemporary architecture would have been neoclassical revival?

KUBLER

And we disagreed with him. Yes. We were looking at contemporary architecture.

SMITH

Were you familiar with what was happening in Germany and in France with Corbusier?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

You were following that?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

And you liked that? Did you like modern architecture?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Why?

KUBLER

It was a change. It was a change, and it looked promising. Then it grew tedious.

SMITH

For instance, would your taste have been more towards the Frank Lloyd Wright craftsman style or toward the German International, the Bauhaus?

KUBLER

I admired Wright. I admired Wright and made efforts to follow his work.

REESE

When do you remember first hearing Meeks's lecture? How early?

KUBLER

I think I followed his course as a sophomore. That would have been 1930 to '31.

REESE

Now, is that a class that one would have taken as part of the History of the Arts and Letters?

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

So it would have been in the general curriculum.

KUBLER

It was in the general curriculum. It was attended by very large audiences, and one was obliged to keep a notebook illustrated with clippings. So National Geographic and travel magazines were caught up and commented on. The lectures were very clear and sound, except for his beaux-arts limitations.

REESE

Did he use slide projection?

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

Single slides or--? Do you remember?

KUBLER

Single slides, yes.

REESE

And it had a very strong French component?

KUBLER

Yes. It was very, very French.

REESE

And the Middle Ages also?

KUBLER

And the Middle Ages, oh, yes. It was the whole history of architecture.

SMITH

For instance, the competencies at the end, would the test have been primarily concerned that you knew dates and buildings or would it have been analytic?

KUBLER

It was very factual--very factual. Recognition and memory.

SMITH

So, for instance, they might show you a building that you had not studied in class and then ask you to connect it to buildings that you had studied?

KUBLER

I don't think it was that imaginative.

REESE

Did you draw at all? Buildings or--

KUBLER

I remember sketching a lot during the lectures.

SMITH

The History of the Arts and Letters was a humanities program, but was it part of the College of Fine Arts?

KUBLER

No. It was in Yale College. It was in Yale College, and it was a possible major-- History of Arts and Letters. It continued until the Department [of Art History] was founded in 1940.

SMITH

I guess it's my understanding that art history was taught as an adjunct to the art practicum.

KUBLER

Yes. It was originally taught in the art courses, various art courses in painting and sculpture. The [Yale] Art School goes back to the Civil War.

SMITH

Did you take painting history or sculpture history?

KUBLER

No, no.

REESE

It's interesting that in the pieces that you did for the Harkness Hoot, the artist emerges as an important figure from very early. Did you clearly see yourself as wanting to follow the artist, either as a writer or as a painter or as an architect?

KUBLER

No. My thought was never to become one but to know more about them as historical personages. I'm trying to recover the temper of the time, of being an undergraduate. It's difficult.

SMITH

I have to ask you about Walt Rostow, just because he is such a notorious figure in the 1960s.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

If you could just talk a little about him as a fellow undergrad.

KUBLER

Well, the brothers were New Haven boys and named for Walt Whitman and Eugene Victor Debs by their parents. [laughter] There was another child in the family who was named for another poet I've forgotten. But the Rostows were brilliant--of extraordinary brilliance--both of them. They were about three years apart and they excelled in everything and they were part of this crowd.

SMITH

The image that the Elizabethan Club conjures up for me, the way you describe it--and it may be incorrect, which is why I want to pursue it a bit--is that it conjures up images that one sees in English movies of Oxbridge life in the 1930s or 1920s.

KUBLER

Well, that was very much the thought of the founder, who was a book collector and endowed the club with a very respectable collection of old books. The idea was simply conversation about books. The Elizabethan Club was about literature. The conversation was generally very good. One went for conversation.

SMITH

What about Freud? Was Freud a subject of conversation?

KUBLER

Yes, yes. Not center stage.

SMITH

Not center stage?

KUBLER

No.

SMITH

As he was other places.

KUBLER

T. S. Eliot was center stage. Ezra Pound was center stage.

REESE

Thomas Mann?

KUBLER

Thomas Mann, no. The Germans didn't figure very much.

SMITH

You know, there's a controversy in the study of modernism whether German modernism had any role to play in influencing Anglo-American modernism, whether it was not strictly from the French. I mean, were you reading Baudelaire and Lautréamont?

KUBLER

Yes. I think we were much more French oriented than German. German was not part of the studies of most of us. I'm speaking for the undergraduates. German studies were not very important, and they were taught by a very dull man, Carl Schreiber. They didn't have much drawing power. But French literature did.

SMITH

Who would be the French authors that would have been center stage?

KUBLER

Proust. My reading was more in older nineteenth century.

SMITH

Balzac? Stendhal?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Were you already introduced to Bergson before you met Focillon?

KUBLER

Yes, I had read Bergson, Henri Bergson.

SMITH

Did you find his thought sympathetic to your interests?

KUBLER

Yes, yes. I never had the direct experience of Bergson, as I had of Focillon.

SMITH

Right.

KUBLER

So Focillon outshone Bergson.

REESE

The Elizabethan Club was largely organized by you students, as opposed to a faculty mentor who would lead discussion?

KUBLER

No, there was no faculty supervision. Graduate students were important. Graduate students were more important than faculty. Faculty were less visible than graduate students. I remember listening to graduate students with more profit than listening to the undergraduates.

REESE

So it was really the locus of intellectual enlightening.

KUBLER

It was. It was. The best minds seemed to be there--from the graduate school and from the college.

REESE

Now, you also had in the Harkness Hoot several people like the Rostows with interest in politics and--?

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

This tended to separate itself from the literary group? Or did they in fact try to find--?

KUBLER

It melted. It melted together. Condensation was general.

SMITH

Were there Marxists involved in this circle?

KUBLER

Oh, yes.

SMITH

What variety, I guess I should ask.

KUBLER

I don't remember any activists, but people who'd read Das Kapital.

SMITH

Okay.

KUBLER

A literary acquaintance.

SMITH

Das Kapital can be read from a literary point of view, but yet it pretends to be a scientific work at the same time.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

I mean, I wonder if there is a tension within the intellectual formation of that generation between aesthetic interests and scientific pretensions.

KUBLER

Well, with respect to Marxism I don't remember a serious Marxist among them. The Rostows were not serious Marxists, but they knew the literature.

SMITH

Actually, I wanted to generalize a little bit more. If there was a desire to find a totalizing scientific approach to interpreting experience, which was really aesthetically derived but took the form of searching for schema that could appear scientific and in fact probably were scientific in some of their formal attributes--

KUBLER

Are you speaking of undergraduate aspirations?

SMITH

Yes, aspirations.

KUBLER

I think that's a fair estimate, and the amount of activism was nil. There wasn't enough of it to comment on.

REESE

Did poets like e. e. cummings come in to the campus and--?

KUBLER

Yes. Oh, yes.

REESE

Through the Elizabethan Club?

KUBLER

Very often.

SMITH

It does sound very similar to what other people I've talked to have said about their experiences at Oxford [University] in particular--the Auden circle.

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

Well, reading the Harkness Hoot, too, there's a great sense of experiment, anticipation of what will come next, announcements: "In the next issue this will appear." So you have the sense of constant movement.

KUBLER

And a lot of the pleasure of shocking without being radical. We shocked but we were not radical.

REESE

Was it considered, though, to be a critique of the Yale Lit or a splinter organization?

KUBLER

It was in opposition.

REESE

So that the Yale Lit would have been interpreted by members of the Harkness Hoot in what way? In terms of the values.

KUBLER

Well, the Hoot was doing what the Lit wouldn't: a certain amount of social criticism, a certain amount of criticism of the university, a certain amount of criticism of the norms of imaginative writing.

SMITH

Were there other universities that you would look to and say, "This is more how Yale should be structured"?

KUBLER

I think we looked in that way on the English universities--Oxford, Cambridge.

SMITH

So the development of the English system was very much something that you had been agitating for.

KUBLER

Yes. We were affected by that.

REESE

Yet, ironically, within a group with very strong French interest as well.

KUBLER

Yes. That's right, yes.

SMITH

I have here a list of courses that Tom has pulled out that were from the Yale catalog--

KUBLER

Oh, yes.

SMITH

I'm wondering if you took Sizer's class, Introduction to the Fine Arts?

KUBLER

I did.

SMITH

Yes. And we've talked about that.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

What about Taylor's class on pictorial art?

KUBLER

No.

SMITH

Meeks's class, Introduction to Architecture?

KUBLER

Yes. With great profit.

SMITH

Great profit in what sense?

KUBLER

It was a drill, it was a memory drill.

SMITH

In your own career, have you taught architectural survey courses?

KUBLER

Yes. I didn't teach in that way.

SMITH

Maybe you could briefly compare your methodology with Meeks's methodology.

KUBLER

Oh, mine was very different.

SMITH

In what way?

KUBLER

It was more like Focillon. It was more French.

SMITH

And what do you mean by that?

KUBLER

It was not beaux-arts French. I mean, we will get more into Focillon-- It was Focillon French. [laughter] The humanist approach of Focillon was so different from Meeks's approach.

REESE

You would describe it as formalist?

KUBLER

No. Meeks had been at the [Ecole des] Beaux-Arts, and he transplanted that history of architecture to Yale. It was a drill and nothing more--a memory drill. But Focillon's was a history of ideas.

SMITH

As expressed through the architecture?

KUBLER

As expressed through the architecture, or of ideas emerging from architecture.

SMITH

Okay. What about Eberhardt's class, History of Sculpture?

KUBLER

No, I didn't.

SMITH

Sizer's class on graphic arts?

KUBLER

Yes. I did follow that. That was done with others, with assistants. One saw the techniques and one took part in the techniques to a certain measure.

SMITH

So, like, paper manufacturing or binding.

KUBLER

Yes. Yes. It was a very practical course designed for the Art School more than for the college.

SMITH

Baur's course on Greek architecture?

KUBLER

Yes, P. D. C. Baur. I did not follow that, no.

SMITH

Roman and Etruscan art?

KUBLER

Who taught that?

SMITH

Baur, again.

KUBLER

Baur, no, no. My study of ancient art was when I went to New York University to the Institute of Fine Arts.

SMITH

Stevens on medieval architecture?

KUBLER

I didn't follow that either.

SMITH

Thompson's course on medieval Italian art?

KUBLER

Dan Thompson?

SMITH

Yes.

KUBLER

No.

SMITH

Or Renaissance Italian art?

KUBLER

No. Whose was that?

SMITH

Dan Thompson.

KUBLER

Dan Thompson. No.

REESE

These were drawn from catalogs for the period in which you were there.

SMITH

[Chauncey] Tinker's course, Modern English Painting?

KUBLER

Yes, I did. I did follow that.

SMITH

Maybe we could discuss that class a little.

KUBLER

Yes. He was an extraordinarily dramatic lecturer. He was acting while lecturing. He lectured to move people, and he was moving. He was moving. People would weep and he would weep.

SMITH

So I presume the class would start somewhere in the beginning of the eighteenth century?

KUBLER

Yes, yes.

SMITH

When would it end? When's the end of modern British painting?

KUBLER

Modern British painting ended, oh, I think, with the romantics.

SMITH

Did he ever make it to the pre-Raphaelites?

KUBLER

No, I don't think so. [laughter] He was highly selective.

SMITH

Okay. And that, I take it, was not very much formal analysis.

KUBLER

No. It was more anecdotal. It was a bridge. There were many bridges into literary history.

SMITH

Is that what you would consider cultural history?

KUBLER

No.

SMITH

Let's see. Stevens's class on Renaissance architecture?

KUBLER

I didn't follow that.

SMITH

In Tinker's class on painting, ultimately at the end, your competency, was that like Meeks's class? You were shown the painting on a slide and you identified it, or were you expected to comment on some basis?

KUBLER

I think there was a test at the end, yes. A slide test. I've forgotten. I've forgotten.

SMITH

I mean, it sounds like you really had a schizophrenic approach to art education at the time. It was either extremely formalistic in the sense of memorize the buildings, or it was very emotional and anecdotal.

KUBLER

Yes. Right. Memorizing works a lot is a necessary drill, and probably not enough of it is done now.

REESE

Were these classes very popular?

KUBLER

Very popular, very popular.

SMITH

So this is not attendance required, but rather they naturally drew.

KUBLER

I think they drew, yes. Dean Meeks, of course, would draw two, three hundred people, and they would go through this drill.

SMITH

Well, for many people drill is much easier than having to think about the work.

KUBLER

Yes. And you're obliged to keep this notebook going.

SMITH

In your own courses--let's say in an introductory course to architecture--how many buildings would you reasonably expect a student to know at the end of the course? As opposed to how many buildings Meeks would expect a student to know.

KUBLER

Far fewer. But in much more detail.

SMITH

In much more detail. But let's give-- Forty buildings?

KUBLER

Well, for example, cathedrals, I would take one cathedral apart for an early example and another one for a late example.

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SMITH

In the course on the cathedral you would take an early example?

KUBLER

I would take an early cathedral and a late one and then analyze their structure and their ornament. And in the course of that refer to other buildings where the same process appears.

SMITH

We're talking about an undergraduate--?

KUBLER

Yes. This would be in an undergraduate lecture. Rather than spreading their time over too many buildings, spread their time on only a few buildings.

SMITH

What would be an example of the kind of pairings that you would make in the cathedral course? What would be the cathedrals that you might choose?

KUBLER

Well, it would depend upon what I wanted to say with them. I might build a course around that choice.

SMITH

Now, would that choice have to do with things that you were pursuing in your personal research at that time and questions that you needed to answer?

KUBLER

Yes. It might very well, yes. I remember giving a course on rib vaults. Rib vaults can take a whole year.

REESE

Richard had asked earlier if you had any real sense of what was going on, let's say at Harvard [University] or Princeton [University], in terms of art history and literary studies. Were those worlds very different from Yale [University]?

KUBLER

No. Not at all. Princeton was very close to us because they, too, were investing in the interest in the Middle Ages that seems to be such a strong feature of the Depression period. They, too, had undergraduate studies that were mostly medieval, as we did. I don't know about Harvard. Harvard also participated in it with [Kenneth J.] Conant and others. But that is a phenomenon in American universities--the interest in the Middle Ages during the Depression.

REESE

Did the phenomenon of students who had studied at Harvard or Princeton or faculty coming here to give lectures exist during this period?

KUBLER

Yes. There was a lot of exchange that way, and the enrollments in medieval studies were always big during the Depression. Not before the Depression and not since.

SMITH

So you would liken it to the Depression and not to who the faculty happened to be.

KUBLER

Well, it involved also a restudy of the Middle Ages from the ground up that was taking place. That's what was interesting. That was what was interesting--this capacity in the history of ideas that the Middle Ages offered.

SMITH

Could you elaborate on that a little bit more? I think I'm getting a glimpse of what you mean, but I think more because I'm connecting it with other things I know.

KUBLER

It was apparent that a lot could be said about the Middle Ages that hadn't been said--put it that way. That with respect to the capacity of a topic to entertain a large number of new ideas-- Now, that was possible in medieval studies. Now they're all taken for granted.

SMITH

Were you interested in new ideas about Scholastic philosophy?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Was it social history?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

So across the board?

KUBLER

Yes. Across the board. Anything that was useful.

SMITH

Okay. Let me-- I'm not a medievalist, but let me throw out a few names. The first one of which would be obvious, just to get a reaction. Henri Pirenne?

KUBLER

Henri Pirenne? Yes, he's a political historian and not an art historian.

SMITH

No, I know.

KUBLER

Pirenne is a handbook, an important--

SMITH

Though he also wrote a book on the medieval city [Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade].

KUBLER

Medieval city? Yes, that's right.

SMITH

Everybody had to read it when I was at [University of California] Berkeley.

KUBLER

Ah, yes.

SMITH

I am interested if there is a relationship between that history and art history. Perhaps this writing had been developed in political and social history and then art history begins to-- Perhaps "catch up" isn't the right word, but there is a new way of looking at medieval society, and then one has to look at the art.

KUBLER

That's part of this novelty, this novel world that remained to be examined and explored--a relationship between the society and the work.

SMITH

What about Etienne Gilson? Was his work influential? Were you introduced to him at this time?

KUBLER

I remember Gilson but not as of first importance to me.

SMITH

The next name I ask partly because Ernst Kantorowicz, who left Germany, came to Berkeley and had tremendous influence on the avant-garde poets of California.

KUBLER

Yes. Kantorowicz was known to me. Especially through [Erwin] Panofsky.

SMITH

So they would come later, then.

KUBLER

Yes. I studied with Panofsky at the Institute [of Fine Arts, New York University] studies on medieval art that are of major importance.

REESE

We left out another dimension of undergraduate education at Yale, which is the museum and the collection. What remembrances do you have of going to museums, either on your own or as a part of class work?

KUBLER

Less than there is today. There was less traveling around for academic purposes than there is now.

SMITH

[to Reese] You had a couple more questions about the Harkness Hoot and the Elizabethan Club?

REESE

As you were talking, too, about the Middle Ages, I was thinking about this search for something new and critical, thinking about the kind of English models, but then thinking too about the fact that these colleges are being built in a way which must have had not only the English models but other ideas deeply rooted in the Middle Ages about the productive thing, the Depression and the attempt of a country to rebuild itself in some way. That all of that was there.

KUBLER

The Hoot ridiculed the medieval colleges [laughter]--that was part of the Hoot's stock in trade--and suggested that the money would have been better invested on curriculum than on buildings. [laughter]

SMITH

As an undergrad were you beginning to develop professional interests? Had you made your "entrance," as it were, into art history?

KUBLER

When I went to the Institute of Fine Arts I made that.

SMITH

But that's as a graduate student.

KUBLER

That's as a graduate student. Yes, I went directly from Yale College to the Institute.

SMITH

This is shifting a little bit, but why did you go off as a sailor? You became a seaman at one point.

KUBLER

Oh, that's right. That's right.

SMITH

It doesn't sound like you needed the money, particularly.

KUBLER

I wanted to go to Latin America. I told my uncle [George A. Kubler] that I'd like to go to Latin America, and he arranged for me to go on a fruit ship as an able-bodied seaman. That took up a summer.

REESE

Did you go back to stay with the guardian [T. W. Kimber] during the summers or did you stay in New Haven?

KUBLER

Oh, I stopped going back to Akron when I graduated.

SMITH

When you graduated from Yale?

KUBLER

Yes. I was twenty-one. I was no longer a minor. [laughter]

REESE

Did you get off of this ship when it went to Latin America?

KUBLER

Oh, yes.

REESE

Do you remember the ports of call?

KUBLER

Oh, surely, surely, yeah. Colón [Panama] and the Colombian ports and the Venezuelan ports. It was a Caribbean circuit.

REESE

Did it take you to Yucatán at all?

KUBLER

No.

SMITH

Then your next lark--and I'll call it a lark--was to go to Germany?

KUBLER

I went when it would have been my senior year.

SMITH

So that was the summer of '32, then, that you went?

KUBLER

Summer of '32, yes. Summer of '32. And the end of '33, that year.

SMITH

You started out at Berlin.

KUBLER

No. I went to Berlin in the summer of '31. That was another trip at Carl Schreiber's suggestion. He didn't like my Swiss accent. He said I ought to learn German properly. So I attended the school for foreigners at the University of Berlin for the summer and read German and spoke German and corrected my German.

SMITH

What were your impressions of Germany at that time?

KUBLER

In '31?

SMITH

Yes, in '31.

KUBLER

Oh, it was a banquet, a banquet of things and ideas. And Berlin was fascinating--very different from Berlin in '33. It was the end of the Weimar Republic.

SMITH

Of course the Depression had already--

KUBLER

But what an interesting place it was.

SMITH

So it enticed you back the following year.

KUBLER

Yes. Yes, that's right.

SMITH

Now, when you decided to spend a year in Germany, was this part of rebelling against Yale? Were you quitting Yale, in a way?

KUBLER

I was wanting to read and write, and I enrolled in the university and took courses such as the one with [Fritz Joachim] von Rintelen on the church fathers. Reading church fathers in Greek was interesting. Von Rintelen was interesting. And then I was fudging around with a novel.

SMITH

Of course you were there during the political turmoil.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

What kind of things did you observe?

KUBLER

Well, there were the things everyone knows: the brown shirts and the brutalization of the public. I knew some Jewish people who were owners of a department store. They had a villa in Schwabing, and I was a guest there. After Hitler became chancellor, these good people were woken up in the night by brown shirts and stood up in their garden and lined up and then they were subjected to a mock execution with rifles--but no ammunition. Then they were told to go back to bed and the brown shirts left. Brutalization.

SMITH

In the interview I did with Wolfgang Herrmann, one of the conclusions that he drew was that the German university and the German academic tradition had a fundamental responsibility for what happened. And he mentioned that Rudolf Wittkower had drawn the same conclusions. I'm not saying whether that's right or wrong; it's their personal truth. I'm wondering if other people that you knew in German academia had some sense that the idealist tradition

within scholarship had some connection or responsibility for the triumph of the Nazis. People that you knew, people that you talked to.

KUBLER

No, I don't. I don't remember any. I don't remember any discussion of that kind. On the contrary, in among the friends I had, the feeling was that universities were being destroyed by radical movement from inside. Then with replacements, the process was moving faster and faster and destruction from the inside.

SMITH

I have a note that you took lectures from Wilhelm Pinder. Is that correct?

KUBLER

Yes. I heard lectures by Pinder.

SMITH

Was that in Munich or did you go to Leipzig?

KUBLER

That was in Munich. He was in Munich at that time.

SMITH

Okay, he had moved then. He, of course, became notorious as a Nazi.

KUBLER

Yes, that's right.

SMITH

Do you recall anything in particular about his lectures?

KUBLER

No. They were medieval lectures. I don't remember that they had any political content.

SMITH

Now, I noticed from some of the background that we've been doing that some of your thinking gets connected with Generationfolge theory. Is that fortuitous, or is there a connection?

KUBLER

I don't see how one can dispense with the idea of generational sequence, but I would leave it there.

SMITH

Okay.

KUBLER

Generationfolge, what did Pinder make of it?

SMITH

Well, that was his major contribution to German art history, the sense that each generation had its own Schicksal. You could not look at a particular time frame as a whole. You had to look at generations within that time frame, because they each had their own fate, their own historical question that had been given to them by the World Spirit. I'm not saying that this is part of your idea, but this is what is part of what he made out of the Generationfolge.

KUBLER

Mine would be much more relaxed. With him it was a political opportunity.

SMITH

You spent a year in Germany, so maybe you could compare German university life with Yale and make some value judgments.

KUBLER

Well, when I came back to Yale and after finishing the undergraduate work, I went to the New York University Institute of Fine Arts, and that was a taste of Germany. That was filled with Germans, with German refugees. That was a heavenly, heavenly spread of extraordinary people.

SMITH

I know it's hard, but let's--assuming that we can abstract the personalities out of the situations--just look at the systems and what they are intended to achieve, the kinds of educational opportunities and challenges.

KUBLER

Well, I like the German system in principle-- focusing on the seminar. The seminar is the instrument, even though the seminar might have five hundred people in it--but that was the deteriorated form. The German system seemed to be very commendable, and work at the Institute in New York University was very much of that style.

REESE

Was the literary society as big a feature of the German educational system as it was of Yale? Things equivalent to the Elizabethan Club?

KUBLER

Oh, no, no. I suppose the Burschenschaften, but I didn't have any part of that.

SMITH

My reading of this is that in the post-Civil War period in the United States, it was actually conceived that the literary clubs were the main place where your education took place.

KUBLER

Oh, yes.

SMITH

And you went to your classes in order to get things to talk about.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

And facts. But the actual formation, educational formation, would be--

KUBLER

Well, I guess that's the way they worked, yes. That's the way the Lizzie Club worked.

SMITH

So it really was a continuation of--

KUBLER

Yes. It was a continuation of the work you were doing in classrooms.

REESE

Could you describe a little bit, both in Berlin and then in Munich, your daily routines--where you lived, friendships, attendance in classes, attendance in museums, exhibitions. A sense of what that experience did for you in those years.

KUBLER

Well, it was much less close-knit than at Yale. At Yale we'd known each other for two, three, four years. But as a foreign visitor to Berlin or Munich, I was a stranger, I was an outsider. I had no social life whatever, excepting for acquaintances and friends that I picked up, but they weren't really university people.

REESE

Did you live in the campus environment?

KUBLER

No. I had an apartment in Munich. It was a pleasant apartment. I could entertain there, and I had friends who were not university people to whom I'd been sent by my relatives. So I didn't take part in German university life either in Berlin or in Munich.

REESE

But your relatives, then, still had many friends in Munich and Berlin?

KUBLER

Yes. My aunt [Hermine Kubler Hassencamp] lived in Rastatt, where her husband [Herbert Hassencamp] was a government official, and she introduced

me to a number of her friends in Munich. They were the people I saw. But they had nothing to do with the university.

REESE

Was the art experience very strong for you then? You were reading Greek in Munich, but were you going to exhibitions and museums regularly?

KUBLER

Yes. Oh, yes.

REESE

Contemporary art exhibitions?

KUBLER

Yes, whatever was showing. Theater, lots of theater. Theater was very lively, opera, lots to do. There was lots to do.

SMITH

Were you going to the expressionists?

KUBLER

Yes. Everything as it came along.

SMITH

I have two things. One is very practical. I'd like, just for the record, to pin down your languages and where you learned each of them. And we could start with English.

KUBLER

English, well, I learned English in Los Angeles. [laughter] When I was with my mother [Ellen Orloff Kubler] in France, I spoke no English at all and I spoke French all the time. I learned French very rapidly. So that's that. German I learned painfully. I learned it first in Switzerland with my grandmother [Emile Duchard Kubler] in a summer hotel at Selisberg overlooking Lake Lucerne. It was harvest time--hay time, haymaking time. I took part as a guest in the hotel. I took part in hay mowing with boys who were employed to work the farm. So I learned German, really, from them.

SMITH

That's Alamannic, that's the Swiss--

KUBLER

But that was my Swiss German, you see. So when I came to Yale and studied with Carl Schreiber, he said he found my accent scheusslich. [laughter] And he said I should go to Berlin and straighten it out--which I did.

REESE

Did you speak German or French with your grandmother?

KUBLER

We spoke English.

REESE

English?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

So you learned German in Berlin and Munich, really.

KUBLER

Yes. In Berlin and Munich.

SMITH

Hochdeutsch you learned--

KUBLER

Yes. Hochdeutsch in Berlin--especially in Berlin.

SMITH

And then what other languages do you know?

KUBLER

Spanish. Portuguese, less well. And that's it.

SMITH

Do you know Italian?

KUBLER

I read Italian easily, especially art historical Italian, but colloquial Italian is beyond me.

SMITH

What about Native American languages?

KUBLER

I read Náhuatl with a dictionary.

SMITH

And Maya?

KUBLER

I can work with Maya glyphs, but I've not kept that interest up since 1980.

SMITH

And Quechua? Did you learn any Quechua?

KUBLER

Quechua? Oh, yes, yes. At one point I worked with [Floyd G.] Lounsbury on the relationship with the Quechua and the Aymara.

SMITH

So you could engage in a Quechua conversation?

KUBLER

No, but I could read a text with a dictionary.

SMITH

A transcribed text.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

And what about a Nahua conversation?

KUBLER

Same thing. I couldn't maintain a conversation, but I could read a text.

SMITH

Okay. I just wanted to get that established for the record.

KUBLER

Surely, yes.

SMITH

Really the last question, but it's a big question, is the decision to pursue graduate studies in art history after returning from Germany. You still had a year of undergrad work. This is the time when you met [Henri] Focillon?

KUBLER

Yes. He'd just been appointed. And Aubert, Marcel Aubert. They were both medievalists.

SMITH

Was it Focillon who opened the door for you to make you decide, "Yes, I want a Ph.D. in art history"?

KUBLER

Yes, I think it was Focillon. It was Focillon. Marcel Aubert was around less often. Focillon, I saw much more of Focillon.

REESE

I think that might really be the next opening point.

SMITH

So then it's that final year of undergraduate work where things begin to jell for you.

KUBLER

And that made me want to go to graduate school, and I had the good luck to go to the Institute, which was never better than it was then. [tape recorder off]

SMITH

Okay, we're back for the second session this afternoon. I noticed that in your writing the word "entrance" takes on a special significance. You talk about the entrance into something affecting the way it plays itself out.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

I wonder if you could talk about that a little bit, particularly in relationship to your entrance into art history as a profession.

KUBLER

I think I first used the word in that sense in *The Shape of Time: [Remarks on the History of Things]*, which I was writing in 1959 and 1960. The expression means the conditions surrounding the beginning may be favorable, unfavorable. That's all. It's a term that I think is used more in English than in French.

SMITH

Well, it naturally made me think of the scenographic aspect.

KUBLER

In that sense it's scenographic. It's a theater term.

SMITH

Well, what about your entrance? Was it a favorable entrance or an unfavorable entrance?

KUBLER

Which entrance?

SMITH

Yours into art history. I mean, in terms of the setting?

KUBLER

It was extraordinarily favorable. I was a second-year graduate student at the Institute, and I was told that Yale wanted me to come back as an instructor. So I got in touch with Everett Meeks, who was then dean, still. Everett Meeks encouraged me to come. So that was the beginning, and I thought that was an extremely favorable entrance.

SMITH

It reads as if a major transformation, a revolution, is taking place at Yale, basically, with the formation of the history of art focus and then the department. What were the factors that were behind Meeks and others in the Yale administration wanting to separate art history from the art practicum?

KUBLER

Well, we're talking about 1938 when Meeks made this offer. There was no history of art department yet. There wouldn't be a history of art department until Henri Focillon was asked by President [Charles] Seymour [Sr.] to draft a project for a department of the history of art, and that was in 1940.

SMITH

Now, Focillon came to Yale in-- Nineteen thirty-four was his first year?

KUBLER

Yes. He began coming every year. He began alternating with Aubert, and then Aubert stopped coming and Focillon came every year. Prior to that Focillon would come every other year and Aubert, likewise, every other year. They were never here together. But after Aubert stopped coming, Focillon was the only one to come, and he came every year until his death. And it was he who really planned and laid out the itinerary for the administration with respect to a department of the history of art. Before that, it was History of the Arts and Letters.

SMITH

With an art focus as part of a broader focus.

KUBLER

Yes, with an art focus, yes. So my degree was really given in History of the Arts and Letters--my doctorate. The department was in preparation to replace the History of the Arts and Letters.

SMITH

It seems as though Focillon wanted a cadre, or an *équipe*, of students that were specially trained to implement his idea of art history.

KUBLER

That is right. That is right.

SMITH

Maybe we could go over some of these people. Had you known these people in your undergraduate years?

KUBLER

Oh, yes. Sumner Crosby, Charles Seymour [Jr.], and I were undergraduates together in different classes. Sumner was a little older than I and Charles Seymour a little younger, but we three, together with George [Heard] Hamilton and Carroll Meeks, were the core of the department, as I recall it.

SMITH

Had Seymour or Crosby or any of the others been in the Elizabethan Club?

KUBLER

I think so. Seymour certainly. Crosby certainly. Although I may be wrong. I don't know if Carroll Meeks had been a member of the Elizabethan Club. I may be overplaying the importance of the Elizabethan Club, but I don't think it was important to the department. It never became as important to members of the department as it had been to us as undergraduates.

SMITH

I'm trying to get the chronology of this. You came back from Germany in 1933. You spend '33, '34 completing your senior year.

KUBLER

Right.

SMITH

Was that the year that you had your first courses from Focillon?

KUBLER

I'd been having them before that, before I went to Germany.

SMITH

Oh, so you had course work with Focillon before?

KUBLER

I had a course with Focillon before.

SMITH

Well, let's stop there and trace the classes that you took with Focillon and the development of your personal relationship with him.

KUBLER

Well, I remember that they were in a room that is now my office. It was a rather large classroom. I'm afraid I'm a little vague on the calendar here.

SMITH

Well, that's okay.

KUBLER

I think Focillon began coming before '34. You said '34.

SMITH

Actually, I had noted somewhere that he had started coming in '29, but it seemed like you had a relationship with him starting in '34.

KUBLER

Yes. Aubert was the dominant figure to begin with, alternating with Focillon. It was during those alternating years that I first knew Focillon. When Focillon was coming regularly, I was away at New York University. But he still was coming regularly every year until his death in '43?

SMITH

'Forty-three. Well, after the fall of France he was permanently at Yale.

KUBLER

Yes, yes.

SMITH

Okay, so you had courses from Focillon as an undergraduate?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Even before you went to Germany. Do you recall the courses that you took with him?

KUBLER

Yes. They were on medieval architecture. He would also lecture on medieval painting. He was a medievalist, which is a surprise to people who are medievalists, who never thought of him as a medievalist. But this was after he had written a book of a general scope called L'An mil--The Year One Thousand. This book was a very valuable handbook to that period and to the group of efforts that mark the early Middle Ages, and after that book he was known as a medievalist. But it was a surprise to people that he would teach the Middle Ages, as he did.

SMITH

Well, how did he teach these classes? How would you characterize the approach?

KUBLER

Well, he was verbally perfect. He had defective vision that made it difficult for him to consult notes, and, as a matter of fact, he had difficulty seeing the slides. He remembered the slides more than he could see them. And reading for him was difficult. He had to bring the paper very close to his eyes and he needed a strong light. So he tended to memorize what he was going to say

and to dispense with reading and talk about the slides from memory. This was all a stunning feat of recall. They were brilliant lectures. Always. Every one of them was brilliant and full of the richest allusions and cross-references. It was verbal instruction at its highest. I've never met anything like it again or heard anything like it again.

SMITH

We talked a little bit about how you organized your classes and a little bit about how that compared to Meeks's class in architecture. How did Focillon organize his lecture courses?

KUBLER

I have very detailed notes on them. They're highly organized, but there are few topics. The topics are entered more deeply than usual, but that's because there are few topics. [laughter] And they are selective of what to him--in the program he set forth--were essential pillars of the edifice he was building. Each lecture was self-contained, but it connected with the other ones.

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KUBLER

The lectures were related in the sense that the members of a building are. You could see the building taking shape, and the building was the whole of medieval architecture.

SMITH

But the whole is a big, big topic. So, I mean, was it French medieval architecture or a particular--?

KUBLER

It was French medieval architecture, but then it was also German events or Italian events or Low Countries events or even Spanish events that were relevant to the growth of the building he was erecting. So it was full of reference to things outside of French architecture. Although he was often criticized for being Francophile.

SMITH

So I would take it that, as in your classes, he would really choose one or two or three buildings, and the whole course would be based on--

KUBLER

Yes. It was not a lavish run-through of everything that is in the manuals of medieval architecture. It was highly selective.

SMITH

Would he integrate things like the Utrecht psalter or the tapestry of Bayeux?

KUBLER

Yes. He would make cross-references to other arts and point out identities, relationships that one wouldn't find in the literature.

SMITH

So you began taking these undergraduate lecture courses with him. When did you begin to have a personal relationship with him, would you say?

KUBLER

Well, almost from the beginning, because he and his wife [Marguerite Focillon] were very hospitable. They had an apartment in the Hotel Taft, and they entertained the members of the course and one got to see him informally. And he was jovial and welcoming--extraordinarily warm personality.

SMITH

This is a tough question, but what about the papers you wrote for him? Do you remember what one of them or two of them might have been about and the kinds of comments that he gave back to you?

KUBLER

Yes. One was the cimborio vault in Spanish architecture. It's an open vault with a rather odd history, and I wrote a paper for him on that and discussed it with him. And he added to it and helped with it. He would read very carefully. He

would supply ample comments and further readings and-- He seemed inexhaustible.

SMITH

In terms of the descriptive detail in these papers-- You would take the vault, and I would presume that you would have to identify the morphology of the vault in some kind of quantifiable form?

KUBLER

Well, he would encourage one to frame it as a problem: What is the problem here? Mere description is not enough. What is the problem? He always came back to the problem, and if one didn't have a problem, one had to find it. [laughter] So progress with him was from problem to problem, and one had to discover the problems.

REESE

Did he speak English fluently or were the lectures in French?

KUBLER

He always spoke in French. He understood English, but he wouldn't speak it.

REESE

And how did that affect the undergraduate reception of his lectures?

KUBLER

Well, many of them learned French in order to listen to them. [laughter]

SMITH

How many students were in these lecture courses?

KUBLER

Oh, up to fifty. And then he would give public lectures which would be attended by three or four hundred, but always in French.

REESE

Was this very unusual at Yale, in terms of the kind of curriculum, to have--?

KUBLER

No, I don't think so. At that time there were many foreigners coming, and they often lectured in their languages and sometimes with translators. But French was well enough known so he never needed a translator. He could always have an audience and not need a translator.

SMITH

Let's talk about some of the fellow students that you had with Focillon.

KUBLER

Sumner Crosby and Charles Seymour, George Hamilton, Carroll Meeks, who had been assistant to Dean Meeks but no relationship. But Carroll Meeks did all the dreary work. Dean Meeks, being the dean of everything, including the drama school, didn't read papers. Carroll Meeks read the papers.

SMITH

How many of these people became medievalists?

KUBLER

Well, Crosby and Seymour wrote dissertations on medieval topics. Carroll Meeks eventually wrote a book on railroad stations. I've forgotten what his dissertation was, but he may have had a medieval topic. Anyone writing a dissertation or a thesis with Focillon was likely to write it on a medieval topic.

SMITH

Except for you.

KUBLER

Yes, yes.

REESE

Could you say something about what brought Focillon to Yale? Do you know the prehistory of the president's invitation to him to come up--?

KUBLER

I think it was Dean Meeks's close association with academy life and with the architectural profession in France. It was Dean Meeks's knowledge of the academic situation in Paris that brought him together with Focillon and Aubert. Meeks, I think, was the driving agent. Everett Meeks was the driving agent interesting the president in opening medieval studies in the history of art and eventually opening a department of the history of art. I may be wrong about this, but I think Meeks and his relations with Charles Seymour, Sr., the president was one of the instruments bringing it about. And at this time Focillon was already influential with President Charles Seymour, whose son was Charles Seymour [Jr.].

SMITH

Perhaps could you compare a course of Focillon's to a course of Aubert's?

KUBLER

They were both very polished performances. Aubert was far dryer, far dryer--describing details in an excessively dry way. With Focillon everything was illuminated from several sides, placed in connection with other things, so that you never had the sense of isolated evidence. Everything was connected in the Focillon presentation. Whereas Aubert's was items of building, but there was never a building there.

SMITH

But if one were to take Focillon, Aubert, and Dean Meeks, how would you compare what the purpose of art history was for each? Why would one take an art history class? Why would one spend time? What would be, to use an American term, the payoff for this effort?

KUBLER

Why did Dean Meeks think it would be important?

SMITH

Yes.

KUBLER

He was a Francophile, and he knew of Aubert and Focillon through their work in Paris. And at this time Aubert was better known than Focillon. But he knew

Focillon, partly through his writings, had a wider audience, much wider than Aubert. The large intellectual public of France knew of Focillon but did not know of Aubert. Aubert was too closely concerned with technical problems. Whereas Focillon was always grappling with cultural problems, problems of cultural direction and cultural composition. So that he was far more interesting to follow than Aubert.

SMITH

For a general person.

KUBLER

Yes. And it was he who had the idea of the department of history of art that would include the whole history of art instead of just a part of it, and all aspects of the history of art. It was a generic conception of the history of art that he presented to the president and which the president endorsed.

REESE

In many ways it sounds as though Meeks was preparing architects to know their prototypes and to know the parts of the plans and Aubert was much more the scientific, archaeological--

KUBLER

Yes. Archaeology, he was the archaeologist.

REESE

Focillon seemed to have almost provided the spiritual thing that you were searching for in certain ways, a critical access on--

SMITH

That brings us to the next kind of scandalous aspect of it, which is his connection to Bergson and the whole mysticism that has surrounded the name of Bergson and the people who were influenced by--

KUBLER

In the circle.

SMITH

In the circle, right. Well, let's discuss that. The degree to which Bergson was a guardian figure for Focillon and Focillon's thought, the degree to which vitalism was functioning within it.

KUBLER

I never had that impression. I knew that Focillon was aware of Bergson, but not influenced--not a disciple and not a follower. He was part of the scene for Focillon, but I don't think Focillon would have acknowledged any debt to Bergson.

SMITH

In his lectures or in his private discussion, did he bring in Saussure and the developments within French linguistics?

KUBLER

He knew of Saussure and he cited him. He probably knew his work well, but I've never discussed Saussure with him.

SMITH

Okay, so you would not see a--

KUBLER

I don't see a link there. I would doubt that Focillon would have known Saussure. Saussure would have been much older.

SMITH

Yes, he would have been, but I don't think-- The Cours général was not published until after the war, as I recall. It was well known but not available.

KUBLER

But Focillon's thinking was not unlike Saussure's.

SMITH

In what sense?

KUBLER

Well, linguistic. The linguistic system of Saussure is a powerful system, and the system Focillon had devised for instruction in medieval art was like the system of Saussure, being inclusive and fragmentary.

SMITH

Okay, but would you see a parallel between the langue parole distinction in the way he approached architectural art?

KUBLER

I haven't thought of it. No.

SMITH

No? Okay. Or the signified/signifier?

KUBLER

No, I don't think so either, no. I don't remember his talking about signified/significance.

REESE

Well, one of the subjects that interests I think everyone about the episode of the Institute of Fine Arts is foreign scholars teaching in America. What do you know about the conditions of Focillon and Aubert's absence from France? First in the early thirties, but then as the thirties progressed, the war came on. Was it a normal continuation of their French art history? Or did their being here in America substantially cause a new kind of art historical thought to be developed?

KUBLER

I think the latter. As to the conditions of their coming, I think they were encouraged by the government, by the French government. The French government actually subsidized some of these visiting professorships through their various overseas agencies. It was a high honor for both Aubert and Focillon to be in this position at a major university in the USA. So it was an honor for them, and the French probably paid for some of their salaries.

REESE

You'd imagine that the teaching that they did in France and what they did at Yale was very similar.

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

So it carried directly.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

What about the relationships with the students? One often hears that the relations that American students and the professors have is of a very different quality than European students and professors. Do you think there was an adjustment there?

KUBLER

Well, Aubert was never enthusiastically received. Focillon--everybody loved Focillon. That was the difference. How else to put it I don't know.

SMITH

In terms of his discussions, lectures, did the work of [Marc] Bloch or [Lucien] Febvre come up? The Annales people--the people who later became the symbols of Annales.

KUBLER

I knew of them. I knew of the Annales much later, and I think all of that came into focus later than this period of Focillon's, which was a terminal period in Focillon's activities, because he died in New Haven without going back to France.

SMITH

Right. In terms of Focillon's approach to teaching, was there a balance between practical and theoretical training? What was the proportion, shall we say?

KUBLER

He was not at all interested in forming architects. He rather despised architects and preferred students who were not architectural students. I think he probably sensed that the architects didn't know what he was talking about--student architects.

SMITH

So you become a graduate student in '34. At the time you decided to become a graduate student, did you know you were going to pursue art history?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

At that time did art history have already a distinctive identity from history per se?

KUBLER

It did in the minds of many people outside this country, but in this country art history was still a sort of mystery or an unexplained newcomer.

SMITH

So in the History of the Arts and Letters, was the art history component one of several components?

KUBLER

No. History of the Arts and Letters, it was the sort of thing that we were talking about in the morning that [Theodore]Sizer was doing. Sizer was teaching art appreciation.

SMITH

Okay, but you guys wanted to move from art appreciation to actual--

KUBLER

To art history. That was a totally different career and preparation and activity.

REESE

Did Focillon, in fact, impress upon you as students that there was this difference? Did he himself criticize the way it was taught?

KUBLER

Yes, yes. Remember, it was taught in France, too, as appreciation, as gourmandise--gormandizing. He used to use that expression.

SMITH

Was he your graduate adviser?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

It's '34 now. You entered graduate school at Yale. What kind of decisions are you having to make about what you are going to do? Presumably you know you want to get your Ph.D. in art history, so how were you advised as to what the steps should be?

KUBLER

Well, I chose to write about New Mexico. I suggested this to Focillon and told him enough about it, and he approved enthusiastically. He told me, "Proceed."

SMITH

When did you decide on New Mexico? Was this before or after your studies in New York?

KUBLER

It was before.

SMITH

So '34. Now, why did you choose New Mexico?

KUBLER

Partly because of the wish to test art historical principles on an unlikely subject of a very plain, simple, rustic, provincial character. And Focillon approved enthusiastically.

REESE

When did you first discover New Mexico?

KUBLER

Traveling there. Going out there. I made a trip to see the scene in '34 and came back realizing that there was a lot to do worth doing.

SMITH

You went to the penitente country then?

KUBLER

Yes. I went up and down the river to a number of pueblos. I went with a classmate [Edmond G. Thomas], who became a medical man, and I was convinced that I could make a presentable master's thesis out of this.

SMITH

Your initial goal was simply to do a master's thesis?

KUBLER

Then I rewrote it and submitted it as a doctorate. I always had Focillon's approval.

SMITH

Now, of course he's a medievalist. You're dealing with architecture that's considerably post-medieval.

KUBLER

Post-medieval. But medieval in a sense. [laughter]

SMITH

Spiritually medieval, whatever that means.

KUBLER

Medieval survivals.

SMITH

Okay.

KUBLER

Which was a topic that interested Focillon, medieval survivals.

REESE

Do you have specific recollections of New Mexico from that period, of the artistic environment?

KUBLER

Yes. The coherence of it and--

REESE

What kind of things would one have read about New Mexican architecture or New Mexico at that point in time that would have helped you?

KUBLER

Well, there were the documents. It's very well documented. There are a lot of documents you can read, yards of documents.

REESE

I'm actually thinking before the first trip that would, you know, animate you to take this trip to New Mexico.

KUBLER

I remember being much moved by Archibald MacLeish's poem "Newfound Land." Archibald MacLeish decided with the Great Depression that he had better come home from his vagabondage in Paris. And coming home he wrote "Newfound Land," the joys and merits of returning to one's land. At the same time it was becoming difficult to go to Europe.

SMITH

From a financial point of view? I mean, in '34 we're still several years away from the war.

KUBLER

Still open, yes. But 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. So that's what drove me to New Mexico.

SMITH

Of course, how did Focillon feel about that? I mean, New Mexico aside, but just the idea of doing work in this country.

KUBLER

He approved it.

SMITH

Do you think this was something he encouraged amongst the other students as well? They should look where they were?

KUBLER

I don't know of anyone who was so undisciplined as I--leaving Romanesque and Gothic, where there is so much to do. [laughter] But Focillon encouraged me. He saw the value of it instantly.

REESE

But it is very interesting this thread, which I had not heard before really. The cimborio, working on this Spanish material with Focillon, later the Escorial with Panofsky, the trip to the Caribbean. I mean, some of that you felt is a very early--

KUBLER

Yes. I liked the Latino atmosphere--the Spanish-speaking atmosphere.

SMITH

Okay, you went to NYU [New York University] in '36. Is that correct?

KUBLER

'Thirty-six? Yes.

SMITH

So you had two years of graduate studies at Yale.

KUBLER

No, no.

SMITH

No?

KUBLER

'Thirty-four. I took my bachelor's degree in '34 and went to NYU. Or did I do two years of graduate school here? Perhaps I did, in order to benefit from Focillon. Yes, until '36. In '36 I went to New York and stayed there until I was called back to New Haven as instructor. See, I was two years in New York.

SMITH

Okay, so the first two years of graduate work are basically here at Yale under Focillon's direction?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

He was not here all the time. Were there other professors that you were working with?

KUBLER

Yes. I'm trying to remember who they were. I was more or less on my own.

SMITH

Who was on your committee, and how did they get there?

KUBLER

For the master's degree I don't think there was a committee. No, I stayed to get the master's degree. I stayed in New Haven, and I'm a little vague about what I did. I worked a lot with Focillon.

SMITH

You worked a lot with Focillon. And whoever else you worked with, the fact that they fade into insignificance is pretty important.

KUBLER

Yes. I really don't remember whom else I worked with.

REESE

Was Lane Faison a colleague or--?

KUBLER

Lane Faison was. He came here from Williams [College]. He was assistant to Focillon and a very good assistant and a very kindly one. I was on good terms with Lane Faison.

REESE

Was he senior to you?

KUBLER

Yes. Older and already established. His field was more in France than in anything else.

REESE

Did either Sumner Crosby or George Hamilton, who were both one or two years ahead of you, give classes while you were in this master's program?

KUBLER

No. I don't think so. They joined the department after its foundation.

SMITH

Well, on the subject of fellow students, George Heard Hamilton--

KUBLER

George Hamilton, yes.

SMITH

Was he already interested in Marcel Duchamp at this time?

KUBLER

I think so. I think so.

SMITH

Was this something that Focillon encouraged?

KUBLER

Oh, most certainly.

SMITH

So as a medievalist, his perspective was quite wide.

KUBLER

Oh, yes. He was open to the whole domain.

SMITH

Were you interested in Duchamp yourself?

KUBLER

No.

SMITH

I'm just curious how you might have interpreted Hamilton's enthusiasm for Duchamp.

KUBLER

I didn't criticize it. But I wouldn't have gone to the twentieth century.

REESE

As a group, was there a sense at all of a kind of competition for the master's affection? Because all of you were working very closely together right where the medieval field would be like the first.

KUBLER

Yes. That was the first area in view. That was the prime area where we were trained.

REESE

But I was thinking as graduate students together. You all were very close friends and--

KUBLER

Yes, yes. We saw each other regularly and got along well--no rivalries.

REESE

Did the kind of institution you had with the people from the Harkness Hoot continue at all in the seminar or with Focillon?

KUBLER

No, no. Oh, no. Not at all. Not at all. There was nothing like it in graduate school. Graduate school is very lonely.

SMITH

Were there women in the graduate program?

KUBLER

Yes. Women in the department of painting since the Civil War.

SMITH

But what about in the History of the Arts and Letters program.

KUBLER

Yes. We had women in the graduate school. History of the Arts and Letters was in the graduate school.

SMITH

Were these women who went on to make a career for themselves?

KUBLER

They were very able women students, yes.

SMITH

What about nonwhites in the school at this time?

KUBLER

Let me see. I don't remember blacks. I don't remember an Asiatic. They were rarities.

SMITH

The question of anti-Semitism is something that's brought up all the time. Were you aware of there being an anti-Semitic tradition at Yale?

KUBLER

I was not. I was not and I never encountered it. Excepting when I learned, as a freshman, that Mory's, an eating club, was inviting freshmen to become members but they were not inviting Jewish freshmen. So I refused Mory's and never joined. I can't go to Mory's unless I'm invited. [laughter] Which is all right with me, because one doesn't eat very well at Mory's. I was not aware of anti-Semitism at Yale. I was aware of many Jews and I liked many of them, and if they were discriminated against, I couldn't bear it.

SMITH

Getting back to your dissertation-- You said, of course, Focillon insisted on the problem. How did you pose the problem to begin with?

KUBLER

The dissertation?

SMITH

Yes, the dissertation--or the master's thesis, preferably.

KUBLER

Yes. Well, it's the same piece of work, really. The thesis and the dissertation are separated by more fieldwork.

SMITH

Did you change the way you posed the problem from your initial encounter with the subject as you developed it? And if so, how?

KUBLER

As a master's thesis and as a dissertation the organization is the same.

SMITH

The plan for the organization, or the structural plan, how much of that came from you and how much from Focillon? Not the conclusions, but just the method.

KUBLER

Focillon didn't work very much on it. He didn't want to work on it. He just encouraged me to finish it. What differentiates the thesis from the dissertation is a lot more documentation. I got more documents. And it is a rich documentation.

SMITH

Perhaps we could spend just a little bit defining the research methodology for the dissertation.

KUBLER

Well, for one thing there is the problem of dating. There are the documents, but there are also the timbers. At this time there was this new technology, dendrochronology, dating from tree rings, which was new. So I took borings. For the dissertation, I took borings from the timbers. I had the help of an assistant who was a dendrologist. We made quite a collection of tree-ring borings and got some dates that are in some cases substantiated by documents and in other cases take the place of documents. So that I was able to date more buildings in the first place with dendrochronology.

SMITH

So the first problem was, then, to know where all the buildings fit on a chronological scale.

KUBLER

Yes. Getting them lined up in time and then analyzing the design problems that the churches contained, establishing the problems and deciding the ways in which they were solved. That's part of the originality of the style. And the rather ingenious and original way of fenestrating--putting the windows in--is peculiar to New Mexico. Transverse clerestories all the way across the upper part of the nave. These transverse clerestories are peculiar to New Mexico--

you find them nowhere else really. It's, as it were, a transformation from a domed construction to a band of windows. Very simple, very effective.

REESE

Did you find that you had plenty of people here among your colleagues to talk to about your work? Or was it a very lonely--?

KUBLER

Oh, no. I talked with people. I talked with Carroll Meeks, who was an architect. I could talk to Crosby, who is an archaeologist. Charles Seymour was helpful. Lane Faison was a good adviser, especially about writing.

**1.5. TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE
MARCH 27, 1991**

SMITH

Let's shift subjects a little bit to the studies with the Institute of Fine Arts [New York University]. Let's start at the beginning, the decision to go there. You had been studying with [Henri] Focillon. Why did you feel you needed to go study with other people?

KUBLER

I wanted to have more experience in the history of art. And the Institute of Fine Arts was where the up-to-date history of art was being received in the persons of refugees. That was the place to go, and they were marvelous instructors. The whole operation was under the direction of Walter Cook, who was a Hispanist. Walter Cook encouraged me to come to New York because of my interest in Spain and New Mexico. It was Walter Cook who was the drillmaster for the refugees and made them write out their lecture notes and get them mimeographed and have them be available as texts. Walter Cook was, in those days, a very driving and powerful personality as director.

REESE

Where did you first meet him?

KUBLER

Oh, dear. Hard to say. I met him--went down and had an interview with him. I'd known his work. I'd read his work.

SMITH

Let's talk about some of the professors whose courses were of particular importance to you. I guess Walter Cook is a good place to start, but in his capacity as a teacher. He was a Hispanist, so that would--

KUBLER

He was a Hispanist. He was a dry sort, very exact, very detailed and noninspiring.

SMITH

You took courses in Spanish architecture from him?

KUBLER

Yes, I followed one of his courses in Spanish art.

SMITH

Art?

KUBLER

Including architecture. [Erwin] Panofsky was the man I worked with with most enthusiasm. And I wrote a paper for him on the Escorial, translated it and wrote it into a book [Building the Escorial (1982)]. Working with Panofsky was a joy. Very small seminar, everyone doing his own piece, and Panofsky reading his current paper and saying, "Here's the way I do it. Maybe you could learn something from this." Then he would listen to us, our trial papers. Then he would give a trial paper and improve the paper and then improve it again and then submit it finally. So that was the seminar.

SMITH

Was this the special methods class?

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

Did he speak English from the beginning?

KUBLER

Yes. His English was very good. Very good.

SMITH

So you developed your paper on the Escorial. Was that the only thing you worked on for him?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Why the Escorial and what was the problem for you? And how did it relate to your dissertation?

KUBLER

Well, I was interested in Hispanic matters. The Escorial is one of those world-class buildings, and I wanted to work on a world-class building. I needed it. There are extraordinary aspects to it that I opened up a little bit, which you can see in the book.

SMITH

I don't think we need to spend too much time on the content of a particular work. Those are there to be read.

KUBLER

But it was, in a way, trying to get to the other side and the other extreme of the Hispanic world by going to the center and finding some of the same qualities that I'd been working with in New Mexico.

SMITH

You also did some studies on Cuzco [Peru] at the same time.

KUBLER

That was for UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization].

SMITH

I thought while you were at NYU [New York University], I noted that you had written a paper on colonial Cuzco.

KUBLER

Perhaps I did. Perhaps I did. But later on in the fifties there was a great earthquake in Cuzco, and UNESCO asked me to go and assess the damages and to supervise, if I could, the clearing of the churches. Then I wrote a report for UNESCO on Cuzco [Cuzco: Reconstruction of the Town and Restoration of Its Monuments (1952)], which I think was 1950 or '51. The earthquake was in '50. That was in '51. Then I went again in '53.

SMITH

Now, on Panofsky, I think we should spend a little more time on how he presented the iconographical method to his students, the kinds of criticisms that he might have given you as a student as you were working through your paper. I think you've written that Panofsky was not as single-minded in iconology as his followers sometimes have made him out to be.

KUBLER

Oh, it was in growth. It was a matter that was growing in his mind, a subject that was growing in his mind constantly. He didn't talk much about his work. He would criticize your reports and make suggestions for improving the research or the writing, but he wouldn't talk much about anything else. It was rather more supervisory of assigned tasks. At that time the Institute was very poorly housed in a building belonging to the Lehman family. The library was in a hotel, which is now quite a good hotel again, but it was rather run-down then-- end of the Depression. Panofsky would meet the seminar in a bar--in the bar of this hotel--for drinks after the session in a seminar room.

SMITH

Now, the relationship with the Metropolitan [Museum of Art] was already in place, wasn't it?

KUBLER

Yes, that was already in place, but the Metropolitan received only the big audiences for the main lectures, the main lectures and lecturers. There were no offices. All the offices had to be in this residence on Fifty-fourth Street, I think. I forget the name of the house. Then in the hotel down on Madison Avenue, where the Institute had the mezzanine area for classrooms and slides, a slide room-- Slides and classrooms were there, so the classes met in the hotel.

REESE

Did you notice any qualitative differences between the kind of students you met at the Institute classes and those you had known at Yale [University]?

KUBLER

They were the same sort of people, yes. They knew they wanted to be art historians and they were very able--very, very well chosen. Phyllis [Williams] Lehmann, who married [Karl] Lehmann-Hartleben, with whom I studied for a while, was one of them. She's still an active classical scholar.

SMITH

What kind of professional ambitions did you personally and did the other students have? Did you assume that you would become professors at universities around the country?

KUBLER

I think so. I think so. Professors or museum people. I never really wanted to be a museum person. I've always wanted to teach rather than be in a museum.

SMITH

And you believed that was realistic at the time?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Was it because of expansion that you could see taking place?

KUBLER

Yes. The scene was opening. Actually, I was offered a post at Yale in '38.

SMITH

Right.

KUBLER

After two years at NYU.

SMITH

That we'll get into next time, I think.

REESE

What was the attitude at NYU, let's say Panofsky in particular, towards the training you had received at Yale from Focillon?

KUBLER

Well, they were never contemptuous of it, but they didn't think that highly of Focillon.

SMITH

Why is that?

KUBLER

Because he was perhaps too much of a litterateur for them, having had such a variegated career in all fields of literature and coming to rest in the history of art only fairly late. I think they regarded him as a maverick.

SMITH

But what about *La Vie des formes*? Did you discuss that at all?

KUBLER

I don't think the hard school of historians of art care for it. It's too literary.

SMITH

You had Walter Cook, who gave you some grounding in Hispanic architecture and art history. What about Herbert Spinden and archaeology? How did he influence your later work?

KUBLER

Well, he was a lecturer at the Institute, coming over from Brooklyn Museum, and he would lecture in one of the lecture halls of the Metropolitan. The lecture series of the Institute was open to the adult public. Middle-aged and retired citizens of New York could pay a fee and come and listen to the lectures. And Spinden would have one hundred people come to his lectures on Mesoamerican archaeology, which he took very seriously and in which he presented his own researches. At that time he still was very much in his head. Later on he fell apart quite a lot, but at that time he was very much worth listening to.

SMITH

Were you interested in Mesoamerican cultural artifacts at that point? Did you know that you were going to do work in that?

KUBLER

Yes. I wanted to know more, and Spinden was at hand and I started with him.

SMITH

Did you feel that it was necessary that in order to do your dissertation you had to have a sense of the Native American background?

KUBLER

No. I didn't do it for that purpose. But I did want to bring this archaeology into the scope of the history of art, and as firmly as classical archaeology is placed in the history of art. I wanted to do that with American antiquity, which covers the same time spans, more or less.

REESE

Did Spinden give seminars as well?

KUBLER

No, he didn't give a seminar. He only did these public lectures.

REESE

Did you write papers for him?

KUBLER

I wrote a paper for him, yes.

SMITH

On what? What was the topic?

KUBLER

Mexican calendar. A topic in Mexican calendar-- a problem.

SMITH

A problem. Does that then later lead to your work on the Tovar Calendar? Is there a relation, a connection in there?

KUBLER

Yes, they're related.

SMITH

But I take it not directly.

KUBLER

No, but knowledge of the calendar is based on documents like the Tovar Calendar.

REESE

What did the Europeans of the Institute think about Spinden, and perhaps Cook, as scholars? Was there any tension of the Germans versus the Americans?

KUBLER

Yes. They thought Cook was a well-intentioned but ignorant American, and I think they would have had the same opinion of Spinden. But Walter Cook's serious articles are still credible, dealing with the manuscripts and matters of dating. He did good work.

SMITH

Let's pursue that a little bit more, because it seems there might be something to their critique that goes beyond methodology. That there might be a philosophical underpinning, or an epistemological underpinning, that maybe would come out in the kinds of things that they might say to you in terms of your papers. I mean, they were critical of Focillon, they were critical of Cook, they were critical of Spinden.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

What is it that's lacking? These people are not precise enough?

KUBLER

Well, at that time Hispanic studies were not really part of the history of art yet. They were outside, and Walter Cook did a great deal to bring them in. American archaeology was outside the art historical fold. Spinden did not succeed very well with bringing American archaeology into the history of art. That is still incomplete. It's still something that is outside the inner circle.

REESE

Although interestingly, you know, Diana Faine's work on-- Spinden at the Brooklyn Museum was doing this in the field of museum education in a very active way.

KUBLER

Oh, I haven't seen this.

REESE

Not the university.

KUBLER

I know Diana Faine, and her book is out.

REESE

No, it was actually the exhibition about Spinden's collections at the Brooklyn Museum, which were dismantled. So he was working in academic art history, but also within this very popular museum education, actually, which was aimed at a different kind of audience.

SMITH

Your explanation is that they simply didn't know enough to be able to judge--

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

They couldn't judge Cook's work and they couldn't judge Spinden's work because they didn't know the fields.

KUBLER

No, no, no. It was outside the known world.

SMITH

I guess what I am interested in is, say, German idealistic or Neoplatonist philosophy--say Panofsky's interest in [Ernst] Cassirer and symbolic form--to what degree that acted as a screen that caused them to dismiss these other people's work and to define the art historical discipline in a very particular kind of way.

KUBLER

Well, in this country, the closely guarded boundary of the history of art was the work of the departments in the universities. What they could teach-- what they were trained to teach--and that was it. They were unwilling to break it open so that there would be more and more competition in the departments among fields. And that's still true. It's difficult to shoehorn pre-Columbian studies into a curriculum that is already full. Bringing in a stranger to a family, to a family who are at home with each other.

SMITH

It seems to me you just hire a pre-Columbianist.

REESE

How would you describe what it meant to make a transition from Focillon's lectures to the seminars of Panofsky and Karl Lehmann? Did you feel you improved significantly methodologically into something either very different in kind or more or less sophisticated or a different emphasis?

KUBLER

Well, Panofsky's lecturing style was confusing. It's a question of lecturing style, really.

REESE

Of laying out something very clearly versus peeling the complexity--

KUBLER

Yes. Lehmann-Hartleben was very clear--very clear and a very good lecturer. He lectured about classical archaeology with great skill. And Panofsky never riveted an audience to his words as Edgar Wind did. Edgar Wind was a much better speaker, but Edgar Wind would turn the lights off and there would be no lights. [laughter] And he would not read his lecture. He would speak it.

SMITH

This suggests there's a whole other aspect of the art historian, which is the art historian as performer.

KUBLER

Yes, exactly. That's important.

SMITH

Not only for the students, but for the upper-middle-class audiences that might come to a museum lecture.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

That one's reputation, to some degree, also can depend on your performance skills, your ability to put slides together in a fascinating way and then say something that might be scintillating. Brilliant but not necessarily too profound.

KUBLER

Oh, it exists very much in every department. There's always a star. There's always a star who lectures a lot. Then there are the drones who don't lecture a lot. [laughter]

REESE

There has been some discussion about Panofsky's statement in *The Meaning of the Visual Arts* about the movement to America representing a new beginning for him where he could learn to lecture to students and deal with administration as something that was useful knowledge. Some people have said that they feel that that comment represents really almost an ironic statement about the passing of the privileged position he had in Germany. And others say, no, they felt he really did embrace the changes that teaching within an American university brought forward. Do you have any--?

KUBLER

Well, I've read Panofsky's works before he came to America. They are very dense and recondite, very dense and very recondite. But his American lectures are infinitely better as lectures. He learned how to reach a public. In Germany he was all tied up with rivals and colleagues and had no public. He wasn't speaking to any public.

SMITH

Now, when we talk about reaching a public, it makes me think about Donald Preziosi's line of reasoning that one of the functions of the art historian is to construct a tradition, an understanding of Western civilization or whatever national tradition that you're dealing with, and sell it to a public. That you basically are establishing a normative ideological perspective. How do you feel about that? That the art historian is participating in the construction of a normative ideology.

KUBLER

Oh, I don't think it should have any part in it, no. [laughter] I think he should communicate discovery and share discovery.

SMITH

Expansion, then.

KUBLER

Yes. Expansion. Expansion of the field rather than overcultivating it. [laughter]

SMITH

Given the particular things that you've worked on, that certainly fits--to bring New Mexico and Mexican and Spanish art into the mainstream.

KUBLER

The Escorial. The Escorial was much neglected.

REESE

Did you sense, though, in Panofsky something you might call elitist in his very early seminars at the Institute? His relationship with students and with their knowledge, that they were in some way less than the German students he had taught?

KUBLER

No. I thought in the seminar I had with him that he was very much trying to treat us as colleagues and to show us how to work through showing us how he worked. That was his manner. And I found it very satisfying.

SMITH

Was there therefore, then, say, a lot of discussion of Cassirer and that intellectual background?

KUBLER

No. The discussions were of the papers being presented.

SMITH

So he would not fall back upon a more fundamental philosophical position?

KUBLER

No, he wasn't talking about that at all. He wasn't in that mode--the Hamburg mode--at all. But it was his teaching mode. And his teaching mode was to teach by telling how he had done it.

REESE

What was the political edge to discussions at the Institute in light of events in Europe and in light of the fact that they were émigrés? Was that acknowledged and discussed ever?

KUBLER

It was never mentioned--it never came up. No one talked about it. It was just not an interesting topic.

SMITH

When did you decide that there was going to be a war with Germany? When did you feel that it had become part of your future?

KUBLER

Well, I probably was as sure of it as I ever had been when I was in Munich in January of '33.

SMITH

Really? That early?

KUBLER

I knew then that this had to end.

SMITH

And it would end with another world war.

KUBLER

And there would probably be a war. He was leading his people to war.

REESE

You had once mentioned to me staying in Berlin in a house which was filled with German veterans.

KUBLER

Oh, yes, officers, German officers. It was a pension, yes. And they were talking, yes. That was '31, summer of '31. That was two years before Hitler, before Hitler's chancellorhood. But they were talking Junker. It was Junker talk. It wasn't social democratic.

SMITH

We sometimes forget that before Hitler we had the Julius Streicher dictatorship. The democracy had faded away over several years before Hitler.

KUBLER

Yes. No, these were speculations about who was going to take over when [Paul von] Hindenburg left and so on.

SMITH

Something that struck me is that your work and the work of your generation has a strong empiricist foundation, that you want to collect your data before you begin to make conclusions. And yet your teachers--and perhaps this is just the spin that's been put on them by the current generation--are people who work from a priori theoretical constructs. I mean, certainly that's how Panofsky is discussed nowadays and Focillon. How do you account for that apparent disjunction between the theoretical construct and attention to empirical detail? Is it a disjunction?

KUBLER

Well, I think it's a necessary cooperation of both an empirical foundation and its opposite. But without verification, why open your mouth.

SMITH

Well, I mean, the famous thing that [Georg] Lukacs said--some facts were raised to counter an argument that he had been making--was, "The facts be damned. What I'm saying has to be true because it's logically necessary."

KUBLER

Yes. Logic and fact are different.

SMITH

And certainly that's a strong aspect of--

KUBLER

It's a restatement that facts and logic must be brought together.

SMITH

Right. But to get back to Panofsky, if one reads about Panofsky nowadays, it really does stress his indebtedness to Cassirer and a working out of a philosophical program in which the facts seem somewhat incidental. Is that how it manifested itself in the classroom?

KUBLER

No. In the classroom he was always highly factual and he lost all the speculative concern that marks the Hamburg papers.

SMITH

What about Focillon? In some ways you have a similar disjunction in Focillon between a broader philosophical outlook and attention to detail.

KUBLER

Well, in Focillon there is something which one might call journalistic. He is very much concerned for effect and for reaching the public, and his rhetoric betrays it. His rhetoric, his very superior rhetoric, brings him very close to his public. But what he has to say is substantial and solid, and that he has not maintained a large following is perhaps the loss of the people who might have benefited by knowing him. I think his work is less and less read. Am I wrong?

REESE

La Vie des formes has just gone into a new edition, as you know, with Zone Books. Did they not republish your translation just recently?

KUBLER

No, I haven't seen it.

REESE

Of La Vie des formes?

KUBLER

No. Is there any commentary?

REESE

No, no. Straight reprint.

KUBLER

Just a reprint, yes. Then the book is still in demand.

REESE

I think what's interesting to me, though, is that we have been talking about rhetorical forms--the lecture, the seminar, and in fact among lectures, public lectures, university lectures. And we no longer have anything remaining but the written text, scholarly work, right?

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

But you're recalling the kind of lost pieces that were so important in building the discipline. And therefore we don't know what a Panofsky lecture was, because it's not recorded.

KUBLER

A Panofsky lecture was in no measure as gripping as a lecture by Wind. Panofsky admired Wind in Hamburg, but in America I think he came to despise him for that dramatic capture of the public that Wind cultivated in America but apparently he didn't have it in Hamburg.

REESE

And of course that brings [Aby] Warburg to mind.

KUBLER

Yes, Warburg.

REESE

Another figure out of the scene now.

KUBLER

Yes. That's the trio. Yes, the Hamburg trio.

SMITH

Was there discussion of Warburg at NYU, at the Institute?

KUBLER

No.

SMITH

Were you familiar with what was going on at the Courtauld [Institute]?

KUBLER

Yes. And I was later invited to lecture at the Courtauld under the unfortunate director.

SMITH

Oh, Blunt? Anthony Blunt?

KUBLER

Anthony Blunt.

SMITH

Did you have any encounters or contact with Julius Held?

KUBLER

Yes. I heard his lectures when I was a student at the Institute and admired them and admired him. He was a man of marvelously even temper. He was everybody's friend.

SMITH

What about Richard Krautheimer?

KUBLER

Krautheimer was more thorny.

SMITH

What do you mean by that?

KUBLER

Oh, one had to approach him properly.

SMITH

Did you have reason to approach him?

KUBLER

I heard his lectures. I didn't follow his courses. I never wrote a paper for him. I was always struck by his thorny, protective manner.

REESE

Could you say something about his lectures that you heard and about the kind of method--?

KUBLER

Oh, I always admired him. I thought his lectures were marvelous.

REESE

Written out or--?

KUBLER

They were written out, as I remember. Krautheimer was always worth the time. But difficult to deal with personally.

SMITH

I take it your criteria are a balance between attention to detail and the ability to draw out more general conclusions about the particular culture. So, interpolating from what you said about Focillon--

KUBLER

Yes. And I think it is implicit in what I said about empiric foundations and logical construction.

SMITH

What was the state of Latin American studies when you started out?

KUBLER

In this country?

SMITH

Yes, in this country.

KUBLER

They were very confined to extremely technical historical papers in Hispanic American Historical Review. Detailed papers about limited questions and no sense of problem. One wondered why it had been written, excepting that the man had access to the archive and things of that sort. [laughter] Latin American studies consisted of a lot of routine operations. Nothing very stimulating in them, excepting when Latin Americans were doing it. Then they went philosophical and became readable. But North American Latin Americanists were the dreariest bunch. [laughter]

**1.6. TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE TWO
MARCH 27, 1991**

SMITH

What kind of contact did you have with Meyer Schapiro and the Partisan Review developments in the field of art criticism?

KUBLER

With both, practically no acquaintance.

SMITH

So you didn't hear lectures by Schapiro at that time?

KUBLER

No.

SMITH

His work was not discussed particularly?

KUBLER

Not in my hearing. He was at Columbia [University] then.

SMITH

Though I think he was already beginning to establish himself as a voice.

KUBLER

Yes. I've disagreed with him radically in print. So that's the radical part.

SMITH

Yeah. [laughter]

**1.7. TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE
MARCH 28, 1991**

SMITH

I was noticing in reviewing my notes that at Yale [University], in the residence hall that you lived in, you had maid service. It seemed like a rather high, fine standard of living. Was that normal for undergraduate life at Yale at the time?

KUBLER

Yes, it was. It was. There was also janitor service and firewood delivery. And the rooms had fireplaces, and the dining tables in the dining halls, in the commons, had linen and maid service. [laughter]

SMITH

How long did that kind of life-style continue?

KUBLER

It ran through the Depression and was discontinued only after the colleges were in operation, around 1940.

SMITH

Then when the college system was implemented, in 1934, you went to live in Jonathan Edwards College.

KUBLER

Yes. At the invitation of the master.

SMITH

What was the organizing focus of Jonathan Edwards College?

KUBLER

At that time it was musical, and it's always remained musical. It was also literary, and it was unlike the other colleges in not being particularly sporting. Later on it was more and more a center for premedical students because it's closest to the medical school. And, actually, the present master is a professor of surgery, who is a very competent master.

SMITH

Now, after you graduated, you continued to live at Jonathan Edwards, I understand, for a while. Is that correct?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

As a graduate?

KUBLER

On the invitation of the master I had a suite. It was very pleasant there, and I stayed there until I went to New York.

SMITH

Then when you returned to Yale in '38, did you continue to live on campus at that point?

KUBLER

No. We were then married in '37, and we broke up that household in Manhattan and moved out here to Mill Rock to a house on the hill.

SMITH

I noticed that in your later article on Focillon ["The Teaching of Henri Focillon"], you mention that your dissertation topic grew out of Focillon's interest in folk art.

KUBLER

That's right. That's right. He had a very early connection with Romania. The Romanian government invited him to Romania. He made various visits and actually had a hand in organizing an international congress of folk art in the thirties, so that he was one of the first figures in this. So you can see how his hospitality to my topic came out of his own interests.

SMITH

Was he knowledgeable about the santo tradition in New Mexico?

KUBLER

No. It was a surprise to him, and he recognized its affinity with parallel European appearances, and in Romania.

SMITH

What about in terms of his lectures? Would he integrate folk art with high art if it was appropriate, given the points he was making?

KUBLER

Yes. He was using folk art constantly for reference, a reference point for one reason or another.

SMITH

I had planned on talking a little bit later about Mexican folk art and that. But in terms of how he defined folk art, was he concerned about regularized traditions or would he accept individualized statements as folk expressions?

KUBLER

Both. Both traditions and individual expressions. He made a trip to Mexico, and I don't know how they got it back, but he brought us that gift from Mexico. [gestures toward piece of folk art]

SMITH

Then I believe that it was for [Erwin] Panofsky that you wrote your Etruscan paper ["Some Etruscan Versions of Corinthian Ceramics"]. Is that correct? Or was it for Karl Lehmann?

KUBLER

For Lehmann, yes.

SMITH

When Tom [Reese] and I were talking about that last night, it struck us that there's a curious parallel. In a class on classical archaeology, you were writing about what could be called commercial wares.

KUBLER

Yes, Corinthian. Proto-Corinthian.

SMITH

Proto-Corinthian, right. This provincial aspect. And then on your dissertation you chose another provincial area where a high art tradition is being reflected and inflected.

KUBLER

That's a good word: inflected. Is it conjugated?

SMITH

Is there an affinity you had at that time or continued to have for provincial expressions?

KUBLER

Yes. At that time and still today, Americans are so wrapped up in their own affairs that they're really very provincial. They remain provincial--we remain provincial. We remain provincial on a continental scale. The provincial continent. [laughter]

REESE

Was the paper your own idea, and how did Lehmann react to the choice of the subject?

KUBLER

He was very pleased with it and recommended it for publication in *Marsyas*, which was the house organ of the Institute of Fine Arts [New York University].

REESE

But it was a topic really that you--

KUBLER

It's a topic that I picked. I picked, yes. It had been treated archaeologically but not art historically.

SMITH

There is a strategic choice between deciding to write about the heights and finding something new to say or choosing an underworked area and developing it to the same level of sophistication as things that have been written about extensively. Were there particular reasons, in terms of figuring out how you were going to place yourself in a career, for the kinds of choices that you seem to have made, in terms of going to underdeveloped topics that had not been extensively written about?

KUBLER

Well, I think that's intrinsic to graduate study-- finding an area to be identified with and doing so. I think everybody probably goes through those operations but perhaps on a different axis.

SMITH

But, still, some people choose to write on Palladio and Michelangelo or the French impressionists. And then other people decide to go in other directions. In part, I'm wondering what is the affinity for you. Is there greater freedom in terms of what you can say, or is it the challenge of bringing this obscure material into--?

KUBLER

Well, it's an advantage that no one else is there. But the challenge is testing art historical method with very simple conditions, away from the metropolis, away from the grand traditions of the history of art.

SMITH

But isn't there also the disadvantage that people tend to think that because your topic is not important, therefore what you write is not important?

KUBLER

That's right. There aren't many readers. And others were very much concerned. I was a youngster in it, but there was this group of Europeans at Focillon's international conference, of which the papers were published. But I had been working for years in this direction of historicizing what seemed nonhistorical material.

SMITH

The other aspect that I wanted to discuss gets into your second book [Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century (1948)], of course, but in the thirties--twenties and thirties--there had been a tremendous increase in popular interest in Mexico. There was Stuart Chase's book [Mexico], Anita Brenner's book [Idols behind Altars: The Story of the Mexican Spirit]. The Mexican muralists had really tremendous popularity in the United States. I think at that time Alexander Girard had started his folk art collection. To what degree were you plugged into those kinds of interests and things?

KUBLER

Well, I didn't plug into the Works Progress Administration or any of those relief activities of the government. I didn't have anything to do with those. I remained an academic spectator of what they were doing. But the whole U.S. engoûment with Mexico was very interesting and was correctly placed around 1920 to '40. And then it transformed into a commercial hype about traveling to Mexico and group activities. [laughter]

SMITH

In terms of your choice of topic, or the specialization, I'm sure as a graduate adviser you have had not only to consider the interests of your students, but where they can fit in terms of the academic market.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

And I was wondering, to what degree, when Focillon was advising you and the other students, was he considering the development of the academic market or even the development of specialties within the Department of Art History that you probably already at that point were thinking about? What was it? [Sumner] Crosby was the medievalist.

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

Who completed his Ph.D. in '37.

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

And then Charles Seymour [Jr.] completed his in '38.

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

Just at the moment you were coming back from the Institute.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

And then [George Heard] Hamilton becomes the modernist.

KUBLER

Hamilton was the modernist, yes.

SMITH

So was there an element of that, in terms of his saying, "You should be the Hispanist"?

KUBLER

Well, yes, he had a very clear idea of what he envisaged the department as being and becoming, and he was backed all the way by President [Charles] Seymour [Sr.]. So that Focillon made the department at the behest of the president.

SMITH

Or vice versa.

KUBLER

Yes. But there was a good transmitter in Charles Seymour [Jr.], who was very much part of the plan and remained one of the central figures until he died.

SMITH

But the decision to become a Hispanist-- Would that be correct? Would you be a Hispanist or a Latin Americanist?

KUBLER

Well, a Hispanist--in principle--can be a Latin Americanist. It's very often the case, wouldn't you say?

REESE

Yes.

KUBLER

I didn't feel that I was being instructed to do anything that I hadn't considered before. I seemed to fit into the design for the department from the beginning.

REESE

Do you remember the courses that you gave in '38 and '39 when you first came to Yale?

KUBLER

Yes. I remember very distinctly that I began a course in pre-Columbian art, and with quite a number of students. My other assignment was a section of the general introductory course to the history of art. And not in that year, but during the forties, I became director of graduate study.

SMITH

In terms of the pre-Columbian course, you would have had [Herbert] Spinden's courses--preparation at NYU [New York University]--but were there other sources that you drew upon for constructing your course outline?

KUBLER

Oh, yes. All the literature I could find. There was a lot already. Archaeological literature going back into the eighteenth century and farther, and so on. There was a rich literature to work with.

SMITH

But not specifically art historical.

KUBLER

Not art historical, no. This all had to be given art historical dress, art historical coordinates. [laughter]

SMITH

How well understood was the iconographical tradition of pre-Columbian art at that time?

KUBLER

That was a subject that was most-- Well, one of the most common kinds of essays. The lecture would be on the meaning of this rather repellent part at some times. [laughter]

REESE

I think it's interesting that in the late thirties and early forties George Vaillant was coming to Yale--

KUBLER

Yes, that's right.

REESE

'Thirty-seven, '38 that Wendell Bennett came to teach here. John Rowe was an undergraduate here with his B.A. in 1940. Charles Gibson got his degree in 1941. So it's clear that in those two or three years' time when you began, there was a great deal of nascent activity within that realm.

KUBLER

Yes, that's right. There was enough of a collegial group in various cities on the East Coast to bring together.

SMITH

At that time--and I'm talking really specifically at that time--in order to solve some of the problems, you had to develop these interdisciplinary connections. Was there felt to be a tension between the art historical requirements and the anthropological?

KUBLER

Yes. That was intrinsic, and the anthropologists felt a rivalry--a nascent rivalry from the art historians-- which they didn't care for. The general attitude of the anthropologist still remains rather hostile to art historical ventures. They're very tractable as individuals, but as members of the anthropological profession they feel a threat from the humanistic approach, which is still very strong.

SMITH

Though there is a humanistic side to anthropology. It's not simply a social science.

KUBLER

Yes. [Alfred] Kroeber notably.

SMITH

Well, let's discuss some of the individual relations. I thought particularly that we should discuss Kroeber, since he seems to be another important building block in the development of your methodology. The first question would be

when you became aware of the need to communicate with Kroeber and what you were hoping to get from him initially.

KUBLER

Well, I read his papers and his books. I read everything he wrote, and I found it germane.

SMITH

Now, you were at this time working on the New Mexico religious architecture [The Religious Architecture of New Mexico in the Colonial Period and since the American Occupation(1940)].

KUBLER

Yes. And I was also working on my courses, and Kroeber's work was relevant for me and I studied it closely. I had repeated opportunities to talk with him because he was a close friend of Cornelius Osgood, and Cornelius Osgood was our neighbor in the next house. So that whenever Kroeber came to Yale, or to the East Coast, he would come to Osgood's house. And actually he asked to see me. So I would always be present when he came on a visit or for a lecture, and so on and so on. We exchanged views, and he was always sympathetic with what I was doing. But there remained in the background this professional concern about an intrusion upon their turf. [laughter]

SMITH

There has developed, actually, quite a literature in the anthropology of art. How would you distinguish between art history and anthropology of art?

KUBLER

Well, the anthropology of art is really about other things than the art historians' concerns.

SMITH

In what sense? How do you see the focus shifting?

KUBLER

Well, the detailed inspection and the detailed study of single objects is contrary to anthropological archaeologists' procedure of finding groupings and

resolving the individuality of the object in the group that has been defined by the anthropologist who is an archaeologist. So there is a fundamental antipathy of approach of excessive sympathy for the object on the art historians' part and too little understanding of the object on the anthropologists' part.

REESE

Yesterday, you were describing the teaching at the Institute of Fine Arts. Even in Focillon's lectures, the emphasis was very much on the kind of concrete problem solving and a movement away from theorizing. Nevertheless, you, in early points, seem to have a keen interest not in theorizing per se, but in the kind of methodological significance that results from these theories. Did Kroeber talk to you generally just about your work, like *The Religious Architecture of New Mexico* or *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century*, or did you talk about larger issues of configurations of cultural growth?

KUBLER

He was always interested in what I was doing. I was always interested in what he was doing until toward the end of his career, when he began to be a world historian and he went rather soft on the edges. His later work I didn't care for at all. But there's a paper of Kroeber with Jane Richardson on costume--on the history of costume over many generations--which is extraordinarily perceptive and precise, and it's a product of Jane Richardson with Kroeber. Jane Richardson, in a way, controlled Kroeber from going world historian.
[laughter]

REESE

Did you discuss the organization of *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century* with him?

KUBLER

Yes. He was always asking. He would always ask Osgood to ask me to his evenings, and he'd ask about my wife.

SMITH

When did you start working on that book?

KUBLER

Which one?

SMITH

Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century.

KUBLER

I would say about '36. The idea was present early on.

SMITH

And the structure of the book, how did that develop, if you recall? The decision to begin with what must be from an art historical point of view a rather long prelude before you actually get to the objects themselves.

KUBLER

Well, the core of the book is the conventual buildings: the Franciscan, Dominican, Augustinian buildings of the period, of which the existence was limited by the relationship of mendicant orders to the regular clergy of the episcopate. It was only in the period from the conquest until the 1560s or 1570s that Dominicans had a free hand, and after that they were brought under control by the bishops and by the secular clergy, who replaced the friars with priests, with secular priests, throughout the viceroyalty. Leaving the Franciscans, who were the most numerous, with only the option to go out farther north, farther west, try to repeat the missionary effort of the early sixteenth century. So there is a life to this phenomenon, about sixty, seventy years of the conventual architecture. I also treated related buildings in the book, but the core is conventual.

SMITH

Particularly the long chapters on demography and urbanism.

KUBLER

Yes. That's for studying.

REESE

I think that what is difficult for me to sort out in reading the introductions to *The Religious Architecture of New Mexico* and *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century* is the kind of order in which they were written. I think yesterday we talked about *The Religious Architecture of New Mexico* coming out of a trip down in the mid-thirties, and yet in that book-- You're publishing significant portions of *Religious Architecture of New Mexico* in '38 and '39. It's submitted as a dissertation in '40, but it was substantially completed in the late thirties, at the time you were just beginning to teach. Do you recall?

KUBLER

No, most of the writing of *Mexican Architecture* was done, I'd say, in the forties.

REESE

But *The Religious Architecture*--

KUBLER

The Religious Architecture of New Mexico was the dissertation, and that was submitted as a dissertation and published as a book in 1940. So that episode was over when the book was published in '40.

SMITH

Do you remember your first trip to Mexico?

KUBLER

Yes. In the thirties, '36, '34.

REESE

Can you tell us something about it?

KUBLER

It was a summer trip, and it wasn't very long. I made some connection with government resources that proved very useful. At that time there was a governmental service of the monuments, and their archives were extremely useful--plans, photographs, documentation. And I worked in those offices of that ministry.

REESE

Was there a trip with Paul Child to Mexico?

KUBLER

Yes. That was when I met Betty [Elizabeth Bushnell Kubler] in '36. Paul Child fell ill and went back to his school where he was teaching, up here in Haven Old Farms. I stayed out with Betty and her companion, Katie Hamlin, and we went to Oaxaca and saw a lot of Oaxaca and looked at churches. They were very patient about churches. [laughter]

REESE

So that was--

KUBLER

That was '36.

REESE

So that was the beginning of the Mexican Architecture.

KUBLER

That was the beginning of Mexican Architecture. Although I'd been considering it before. Namely as a background for the New Mexico book that I needed to know more about.

REESE

Now, there was another trip with Charles Gibson and Betty in the forties?

KUBLER

Yes. That's right. That's right. We were collecting data, drawing plans. Charles helped me measure and draw and was a very good companion. He became an important historian. He was not interested in the history of art or in the history of architecture, but he was interested in history--in the history of the Aztec peoples under conquest conditions, which was his great book [The Aztecs under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810]. But that's a general history of Aztec life in the sixteenth century

rather than an architectural study. That really was not his interest. He's a historian of the Aztec people during the sixteenth century.

REESE

Now, that trip was, I believe, about 1941. Did you go back to get more and more data as the forties progressed?

KUBLER

Yes. At that time Mexican officials in government services were extremely cooperative and helpful. There was a photographic archive that was ideal that had been accumulated during the thirties and twenties. This archive has disappeared. There's no trace of it left. It must have been sold off. But that archive was indispensable, and they were very generous. They were very generous with making copies from the negatives and letting me have the copies, and then I asked what I owed them and they said, "No hay que preocuparse." [laughter]

SMITH

In your introduction you acknowledge that you had been preceded in this topic by Manuel Toussaint and Robert Ricard.

KUBLER

Yes, Ricard's book was fundamental for me.

SMITH

In what sense?

KUBLER

As a history of the Aztec people. In the same topic Charles Gibson reworked in a very different way. But Ricard's book was very influential with me. I lived with that book--*La Conquête spirituelle*.

SMITH

You seem with this book to get in hot water with a lot of art historians, or at least there seemed to be criticism. One reviewer didn't like your use of phrases like "aesthetic behavior of these kinds," referring to the objects as forms of behavior.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

And then there was criticism that you did not, in fact, concentrate on individual churches but seemed to spread everything across into typology, so that--

KUBLER

The review of the book.

SMITH

Right.

KUBLER

Yes. Well, those reviewers were either historians or anthropologists. It's a difference of method that is still objectionable to anthropologists.

REESE

Could you say something about the other two scholars working in the United States in this area--John McAndrew and Elizabeth Weismann--who write in the same years.

KUBLER

Elizabeth Wilder, yes, who's later Weismann. Yes, they were both-- I went on a trip with them one year. I think it was '42. We went into Hidalgo and west to Michoacán. He had a world war vehicle, a big jeep. It was a strenuous trip and we went to a lot of places. McAndrew wanted to write a book on the sixteenth-century churches and found me intruding upon it a bit. I tried not to offend him too much. But in the end he resolved all his studies with a more special subject, which was the open-air chapels that are part of the monastic formula of the mendicant preaching to congregations in the open air, congregations so large that they can't come indoors. Preaching to them from a chapel that is open to the crowds and the courtyard. So he wrote a book on that which is very good--in much more detail than my treatment of the

subject. McAndrew always felt that I had taken away the subject from him that he had started, but he was very kind.

REESE

Was he one of the people who wrote this review about the statistical charts that he felt were out of place in a traditional art history book?

KUBLER

Yes. Yes.

REESE

And Elizabeth Wilder?

KUBLER

Well, she was a lover of Mexico. She loved Mexico and she loved everything Mexican. She wrote about it in a very feminine way, a very charming way. Her books are always rather feminine meditations on the topics. I don't think they had the structure of art historical work that one expects. Her books were appreciative and loving of the subject and charming to read.

REESE

How about the key Mexican figures? Toussaint, Justino Fernández. Did you see them regularly on trips to Mexico?

KUBLER

Always, always. And Toussaint was really the founder of the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, which is a very unusual government body entrusted with the history of art. But they see it as aesthetics, which is more and more palatable as the history of art grows older. But the Mexicans always resolved the history of art into their Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas. And that is open only to Mexican nationals. There are no foreign members. There are foreigners publishing in the Anales, but all members of the Instituto are Mexican citizens.

REESE

Was Toussaint very supportive of your work?

KUBLER

Yes, he was. He always was helpful. Fernández succeeded him as director of the Instituto. Fernández was always helpful--very critical and justly.

REESE

How would you characterize their work, in comparison with your own goals at that?

KUBLER

Well, Toussaint--

**1.8. TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE TWO
MARCH 28, 1991**

KUBLER

Toussaint was an essayist. He wrote charming essays. He'd go on a trip to a church and then come back and write an essay about it. He wrote essays, but he had no systematic character. As director of the Instituto he had authority and he was very generous with it. He always accepted my presence in a civil manner. Justino Fernández was more of an art historian, more of a systematic thinker. He was more rigorous than Toussaint. He wasn't an essayist. He wrote large volumes and dense volumes and he had method. He had a distinct method. He liked to take one subject-- He wrote a trilogy. One volume was all about the gigantic statue of-- Not Huitzilopochtli but Coatlicue, the snake woman--colossal figure. A book about it. Just that one piece and reviewing all the literature of the past on that one piece, which has been known since the eighteenth century. Then the second book was about colonial art. Then the third one was about Orozco, whom he admired very much. And these books are very solid, very dense books, very scholarly.

REESE

Were there other Mexicans you met in the 1940s whom you were close to?

KUBLER

Yes. There was a young scholar who was very promising, Toscano--Salvador Toscano. He died young, but his book is an effort at a systematic history of

Mexican prehistory, which is quite good but covering too much ground too quickly. Salvador Toscano and others. Justino Fernández's close friend was Edmundo O'Gorman, who was an archivist and one of the most fertile minds in Mexico, an inventive mind and a very good archivist. He wrote a great many historiographical studies, but he wasn't an art historian. The Mexican intellectuals of that period were a fascinating group. I don't know that they have been replaced with others as interesting.

REESE

Did you know them primarily through their work, or were there tertulias and other gatherings?

KUBLER

Both. Both. They gathered a lot.

SMITH

This was a period in Mexico where there was concerted effort to rethink the Mexican national identity. To what degree did that influence their thinking? Was it permeating their work?

KUBLER

Very much. Very much. Edmundo O'Gorman thought a great deal about this question in an extremely intelligent way. So did Justino Fernández, but more as an art historian. Edmundo O'Gorman is more like a Spanish intellectual than the other Mexicans.

SMITH

What do you mean by that?

KUBLER

Well, the wide-ranging studies of people like [Silvio] Zavala or the cultural historian whose name escapes me now. But there is a Spanish tradition of writing about Spanish culture which is very analytical.

SMITH

In terms of this Mexican national identity, how, as a North American scholar, does your work fit into that?

KUBLER

Well, they accepted it, and I never felt that I was intruding on priorities that were theirs. They were always very welcoming. I never had trouble with Mexican critics.

SMITH

So your work was accepted as something that contributed to a deeper understanding of what they think of the past.

KUBLER

Yes. I think they accepted me. Not as one of them, but as someone they were glad to see.

SMITH

The situation in Mexico was an example of this ongoing interaction of art history and ideological demands, which has its ebbs and flows. How do you view the relationship of ideology and art history? Is it counterproductive?

KUBLER

I think it's an indispensable relationship and that its study is mandatory.

SMITH

Well, the study of ideology is mandatory, but what about ideological motivations?

KUBLER

Well, the historical consideration of ideological drives would be the appropriate method--as historical subject. Without parti pris.

REESE

The colonial legacy of Mexico was always ideologically problematic.

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

What kind of discussions took place in Mexico and around your work about issues of the value of colonial art as an imperialist, non-Mexican creation?

KUBLER

Toussaint was probably the man who wrote most about it. Manuel Toussaint, the essayist, was respected for this effort and this achievement, precisely this achievement of reassessing the colonial heritage. First as an essayist and secondly as an art historian and as director of the institute he founded, the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas. With long foresight, it may be that the history of art is evolving gradually more and more to a position where aesthetics and aesthetics studies are more central than they had been in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

REESE

Do you remember any serious debates about the leyenda negra and the death and destruction caused by the European conquest really informing your treatment of sixteenth-century Mexican art history?

KUBLER

Well, the attitude of sympathetic consideration of the native populations is intrinsic to Mexican life today. There is no dissent about it. The sympathetic understanding of the Amerindian tradition that is part of colonial life--so that the hostilities of colonial life and the exploitations of colonial life vanished--ever since the Mexican revolution.

REESE

No, I was thinking largely about the question-- raised very frequently as we talk about the encuentro in '92--of "Are these buildings tainted by the enormous demographic sacrifice that takes place with urbanization around their constructions?" Were those issues the ones that were talked about in the forties? You treat it very clearly in your book.

KUBLER

Well, I don't think there was any disagreement between the Mexicans and me. I think they've always accepted my book with sufficient interest to use it, and there is an edition in Spanish published in Mexico, made and published in Mexico. Which could be better. It was printed on rather poor paper. [laughter]

SMITH

I'd like to shift back to Yale if we could and the establishment of the Department of Art History.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

You wrote a little bit about Focillon's lectures in 1940 at the establishment of the department. The group had been really gathered together for the two previous years. Is that correct?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

I don't think we need to talk too much about the content of the lectures because you have your lecture notes. But was there a distinction in what he was saying at this time from what he had been saying six years earlier?

KUBLER

Focillon?

SMITH

Focillon in *La Vie des formes*, or ten years earlier when you first heard him speak. In what direction had his ideas started to evolve?

KUBLER

He had been engaged, when we first knew him, in a big effort to establish himself as a medievalist. One of the results of that episode or part of his life was the book *The Year One Thousand*, which is highly regarded and very different from *La Vie des formes*. It's a serious historical work. *La Vie des formes* is an essay on aesthetics of a totally different character. So the Focillon we knew was the medievalist. *La Vie des formes* was in his past, and his current work was always about medieval topics--topics of medieval

architecture, topics of medieval life. He was more and more emerging as a medievalist until he died as an exile from France.

SMITH

To what degree did he talk about material culture in the sense that it now is talked about, not necessarily as an aesthetic object but as historical evidence?

KUBLER

I think he would be sympathetic to it, but it didn't figure importantly in his writing. Although his activity with the international congress of folk art is a token of concern for this subject on which he never really wrote very much. What he wrote was always, when we knew him, in his career as a medievalist, for which he was much respected.

SMITH

In terms of the structure of the department, the organization, how were classes developed and assigned? What were the initial decisions that had to be made in order to establish a coherent program for both undergrads and for graduates?

KUBLER

I don't think there was any firm plan at any time. It was known that so and so could do this, so and so could do that, and how to adapt those elements into a program. And that is the program that Focillon submitted to the president for the establishment of the department with the available people. Then they were gradually replaced by others, but the original form of the department remains pretty visible. Even though people with entirely different kinds of training have come to staff these courses, they go on. Of course there's been a lot of growth in the size of the department, many more, with something like twenty or twenty-five in the organization chart of the department. The courses are more numerous. The graduate students have tripled or quadrupled, four times as many as the beginning. It's just a bigger operation, but it's substantially the operation that we began with. With a recognizable method and more or less the same distribution of effort.

SMITH

Could you define that recognizable effort? I mean in a couple of sentences?

KUBLER

Visual education--visual education in seeing is intrinsic and basic. And a proper historical method in the use of sources is also part of the instruction.

SMITH

Why would a graduate student at that time choose to go to Yale as opposed to the Institute or to Princeton [University]?

KUBLER

Well, if it were for medieval, the temptation to go to Princeton would be strong. The reputation of Yale wasn't as good as that of Princeton. With Harvard [University]-- The whole effort at Harvard was oriented to the museum world and museum life and museum training. And it still is. They might disagree, but I think they have this tradition of supplying the museums with their directors and curators.

REESE

What about the Institute? What was the appearance of this much larger, more comprehensive graduate education center to art history in this country? And was it immediately sensed that way or was it--?

KUBLER

I think so. It was European. It was a European structure. A European university structure that had been planted in New York University and at the Metropolitan [Museum of Art], and it continues that way today. It's a graduate research institute of continuing quality.

REESE

You were the only colleague in the department who had been to the Institute.

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

What was the perception of your other colleagues of this other institution?

KUBLER

Well, they accepted it as a research institution for graduate instruction quite unlike anything else. For staffing, other universities looked to the Institute for scholars. If they want scholars, you know, they look first at what is available from the Institute.

SMITH

And secondarily to a place like Yale?

KUBLER

Depending on the quest, what is being looked for.

SMITH

Does that mean that you were charged first to produce teachers and then to produce scholars?

KUBLER

At the Institute?

SMITH

No, at Yale.

KUBLER

At Yale, the mission isn't so clearly defined. It's both an undergraduate responsibility and it's a graduate responsibility, but the two interlock and a lot of graduate students do assistant teaching. And the Yale education is designed that way, to have the graduate student be a teacher while studying.

REESE

I know that both Crosby and Seymour did their dissertation with Focillon, as you did. Were Carroll Meeks and George Heard Hamilton also dissertation students of Focillon?

KUBLER

I think Carroll was more closely associated with the architectural school. He was trained as an architect and only came after that to be an art historian, and he was always on the edge a bit. He came from architecture, and he had been Dean [Everett] Meeks's assistant-- teaching assistant--reading his papers and

so on. George Hamilton was the modernist and, as such, much affected by Focillon's teaching.

SMITH

You talked about the question of historical sources. What was the relationship of the new art history department with the Department of History at Yale? Was there much interaction at that time?

KUBLER

There had been. It had been very close when the graduate studies were known as History of the Arts and Letters. That was a temporary arrangement for accommodating graduate studies of art historical character. But that designation and organization were abandoned when the department was founded. The History of the Arts and Letters vanished. My degree and Crosby's degrees were given in History of the Arts and Letters. The department wasn't yet empowered to give the training for a doctorate.

SMITH

What was your assessment of the history department at that time?

KUBLER

It was regarded as one of the best in the world. It was a huge department.

SMITH

Did you take courses in it, either as a graduate or as an undergrad?

KUBLER

I knew many of the historians, but I didn't take courses, no. Oh, yes, I did. I studied historiography with-- I used his name yesterday, but it fled me now. Oh, Allison, J. M. S. Allison. Allison was one of the leading historians of the time.

REESE

What do you think the historians' view towards art history was during those very early years when Focillon was here and the new department was forming?

KUBLER

Well, there was some hostility to the appearance of a history of art department from the history department and from anthropology, who felt that crumbling of their wall. [laughter]

SMITH

What was your assessment of historiography at that time? I mean, who were historians whose work you appreciated? Who were historians whose work you did not like?

KUBLER

Well, it was a novelty. The history of history writing. Allison pursued it in the seminar, and it was a valuable seminar. Historiography is very important to art historians--to know how it's done, how it has been done in the past, and what is wanting in the future.

SMITH

Are you familiar with Peter Novick's book *That Noble Dream: The Objectivity Question*?

KUBLER

No, I haven't seen it.

SMITH

Where he surveys the history of the historical profession in the United States.

KUBLER

I must look at it. That's just out, isn't it?

SMITH

Well, it came out about two years ago, I think. One of the things that he talks about is the whole question-- I mean, that's the subtitle of the book: "the objectivity question." The need of historians to find an objective base for their work and the shifting ground of that. Since you're not familiar with that book, let me pose the question in another way, which is, how was objectivity posed

to you, both by Allison and by Focillon, and perhaps even by Panofsky or the Institute people? Was there concern about objectivity?

KUBLER

Well, yes. It's a behavioral concern of not being too emotional about one's responses to historical evidence. Emotion is to be controlled, but emotion has its place.

SMITH

One of the things that Novick discusses is that at this time there was tremendous debate amongst American historians over how to define objectivity. With Carl Becker leading a group that said there was really no basis for defining it and then other historians who were attempting to ground objectivity in something that was non-ideological. Were you aware of those kinds of debates?

KUBLER

Yes. And they always resolved into debates about scientific attitude as against the nonscientific attitude and in the validity of the nonscientific attitude. So it would be science against more personal attitudes or viewpoints and their inevitability.

SMITH

But I think one of Becker's arguments--and he was speaking as a well-respected historian--was that the scientific model was at best a metaphor for what was done by historians and actually too often misled people into thinking that they were doing something that was in some fundamental way similar to what biologists or physicists were doing. I think he was arguing that the question of establishing values was central, as opposed to establishing experimental data. In terms of the scientific method for you, how has that functioned in your mind as a model for what you are trying to do?

KUBLER

Well, I've never been a scientist and have none of the tools of the scientist, so that I admire and understand scientific work, but I'm incapable of producing one.

SMITH

Did you ever think you might be producing something that was "scientific"?

KUBLER

No. I never had that delusion. [laughter] But I do regard myself as an art historian.

REESE

Could you say something about what you might have known or believed to be Charles Seymour, Sr.'s vision for art history within Yale? And maybe something about Charles Seymour, Jr., and his father in the genesis of art history at Yale. Did you know the president personally?

KUBLER

Yes. He was a presidential figure of a man. He looked the president and he was president. His term as president was one of growth for the university and very great changes after [James R.] Angell's regime. I think Charles Seymour, Sr. and Jr., both of them, were willing to accept what Focillon told them he wished they would do. And in a way, the president asked Focillon to prepare a program. Which was done and approved.

REESE

It was clear, I guess, that Charles Jr. would have to go somewhere else, initially. To the National Gallery [of Art], was it?

KUBLER

Well, he wanted to have museum experience, and he had ten years of it and then he came back to Yale.

SMITH

I was thinking maybe we might shift again to another topic, which is your marriage.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

If you could just describe to us how you met your wife.

KUBLER

Well, it's been a very happy marriage. That's all I can say. [laughter]

SMITH

You mentioned you met--

KUBLER

We have four children, and we're very fortunate that they're such good people.

SMITH

Something that always interested me--I don't think it's really ever discussed enough--is the responsibilities and the roles of a faculty wife.

KUBLER

Yes. Oh, yes.

SMITH

Really, in many ways it has been an unpaid job. How have those worlds changed over the past fifty years we're talking about? Was there an understood code at Yale about what a faculty wife was expected to do?

KUBLER

Well, I think Yale has always been hospitable to appointing women. Women have been appointed to faculty posts ever since the 1850s.

SMITH

But I mean the spouses of professors.

KUBLER

Yes. The spouses of professors sometimes are professors too. Most professors, I would say, most married professors, do not have their wives as professors, but I don't think that faculty wives at Yale are discontented. They are not notably discontented. They take part in a great many activities of the

faculty. Betty never has, but she's always had other things that interested her, the theater, music school, things like that.

REESE

I guess the fact that Yale was a men's school for many years-- Colleges where the life of the fellows of the colleges really was a man's world during a large part of Yale's history.

KUBLER

Very early women were taken into the fellowships of the colleges, but not in great numbers. That may have led to some feelings among those who weren't fellows in colleges. But women were fellows in colleges from the beginning of the colleges.

SMITH

Could you just tell us a little bit about your wife's background and the evolution of her interests?

KUBLER

Well, she always has been a painter, and she studied at Fontainebleau in summer school. She was a Smith [College] student, and she studied history of art at Smith and she painted at Smith. So she's always been a painter and interested in the history of art. Betty's position in New Haven and at Yale has always been easier than that of most women because her family have been here for a long time. She grew up here and the university has always been welcoming to her, which is unlike the lot of many women coming from outside to New Haven. She was delighted to move with me to New York for two years while I was a student there--and then very distressed to come back to New Haven. New York was a very pleasant place at that time, and we left it with reluctance. But she's taken part in many things in New Haven and is much esteemed.

SMITH

You've mentioned she has musical interests. What have those been?

KUBLER

We go to concerts and we take part in the musical life of the town. And she used to sing in the choir. She sang for years with great pleasure. That was one of her great pleasures.

REESE

And the theater is the key.

KUBLER

Theater is the key activity. Long Wharf Theater, of which she is one of the founders and is the vice president.

SMITH

Was she involved in theater activities before Long Wharf?

KUBLER

Yes. And she has a lot of theater in her.

SMITH

Was she a performer as well as--?

KUBLER

Yes. She's performed.

REESE

I would just follow that up by asking about what it meant with four children to travel so much to do primary research and how that both affected or enriched your own work.

KUBLER

Oh, she's always been marvelous about it. We took the four children to Peru for a year, and that was beset by many difficulties. But she's very resilient and came through it very well, brought us all through it very well.

REESE

And later you were in Spain--

KUBLER

And later in Spain, yes. We had our youngest [Elena Ann Kubler] with us in Spain when she was small, and Betty taught her to read.

SMITH

How did your children feel about the research trips?

KUBLER

Oh, they enjoyed themselves and learned languages.

**1.9. TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE ONE
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SMITH

If one looks back at when the department is formed in 1940, almost immediately you're hit by World War II, which must have made the circumstances of building a department somewhat difficult.

KUBLER

Oddly enough, it didn't affect the department at all. The men were family men and they weren't drafted. No one was drafted. No one was withdrawn for war reasons. So we had that good fortune to be able to continue through the war.

SMITH

What about students, though? Weren't they--?

KUBLER

Oh, we had lots of students.

SMITH

You did?

KUBLER

Yes. And very good students. Very good students emerged during the time-- and large enrollments.

SMITH

Could we discuss some of the courses you developed at this time? We talked a little bit about the pre-Columbian. Maybe if we could continue with that. Was that a lecture course?

KUBLER

That was a lecture course.

SMITH

Was there a seminar course?

KUBLER

There was a seminar for graduate students, yes.

SMITH

Maybe we could take the pre-Columbian first and discuss the competencies that you expected the students to have mastered at the end of both the undergraduate course and the seminar. What were your expectations of the students and how did you measure them?

KUBLER

Well, I've always asked for written work--choose a topic, choose an object--and directed the research along the necessary channels.

SMITH

Is this for the graduate seminar?

KUBLER

No, this is for the undergraduates. The paper was the main thing, wasn't it, a research paper. And then an examination on recognition, usually, and writing about certain topics, set topics. Customary procedure, nothing novel.

SMITH

In terms of the undergraduate papers, what would you be expecting an undergraduate to demonstrate in the paper? How much originality would you be looking for?

KUBLER

Well, I would be on the alert for large transplants from printed work.
[laughter] On the alert, also, for originality, which I often found. Very often undergraduate papers were good enough to be encouraged, for their writers to be encouraged to go farther with the subject and go into it farther, which sometimes happened.

SMITH

The paper would be restricted to a discussion of one object.

KUBLER

Not necessarily. Might be a text. Any sort of relevant idea would be eligible.

SMITH

The evolution of a form.

KUBLER

Yes. No special control set up for the papers.

REESE

Have you thought about the relationship of your teaching style to [Henri] Focillon's? Were you modeling your--?

KUBLER

Probably, probably. I'm sure I did model my teaching on his.

SMITH

In addition to the pre-Columbian, you taught Introduction to Art.

KUBLER

That was a period during the war when the whole department took part in the introductory course, each according to his abilities. And that's where Vincent Scully was trained. It was quite a taxing thing to prepare lectures and to make them palatable to a general audience. Very good training, very good effort.

REESE

Had Focillon taught only medieval, or had he taught a history of Western art course?

KUBLER

He was a member of a research institute in France. He'd also taught at the Sorbonne. At the Sorbonne, I think he taught general courses. At the institute, he taught professionals.

REESE

But at Yale [University] he did not give a survey class.

KUBLER

No. He would lecture on medieval architecture, for example. His topics were always medieval.

REESE

As you, as a young department, thought about the content of this general history of Western art, did you sense that there was something unique about what you were doing as opposed to what was done at Harvard [University] or Princeton [University]? That there was a Yale style?

KUBLER

Yes. I think so. I think so, and the style came both from Focillon and [Sumner] Crosby and [Charles] Seymour [Jr.], who were both of them very much concerned with undergraduate teaching, took it seriously. We all did.

SMITH

What other classes did you teach?

KUBLER

Well, I became director of graduate study early on, and so I taught seminars and I worked with a methods course, which you [Reese] may remember.

SMITH

You became director of graduate studies. Did that mean, then, that your undergraduate teaching load was reduced?

KUBLER

Yes. Then I taught the graduate students when there were enough graduates.

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.

SMITH

Could we talk a little bit about some of your graduate students in the 1940s? Let me augment that. If you could also include undergrad students that were particularly--

KUBLER

Well, I don't keep very good records, and my memory of students is poor, especially when they were many. We began to have many students during the war. Of that period I have memory of very few outstanding, if any.

REESE

Could I give some names that would--?

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

Jim [James S.] Ackerman.

KUBLER

Jim Ackerman, yes. Yes, of course.

REESE

Do you remember him as a--?

KUBLER

I remember him as a graduate student and a very able one--a very able one and marked for the distinction he has. He was a student with me in the pre-Columbian course.

SMITH

He went on to study at the Institute [of Fine Arts, New York University]. Did you discuss that decision with him at all?

KUBLER

Yes. I think so.

SMITH

Was that a recommendation from you?

KUBLER

Yes. I urged him to.

SMITH

Why would you direct some students to the Institute and not to stay at Yale?

KUBLER

Well, it depended on what they wanted to write about. Jim Ackerman was an architectural historian, and he wanted to write about Renaissance architects. The Institute was the place for him at that time.

SMITH

You have some other names?

REESE

John Rowe.

KUBLER

John Rowe. Well, I don't think I ever taught John Rowe. He was an undergraduate, you see, and I knew of him. His mother [Margaret Talbot Rowe] was on the staff of the [Yale University] Art Gallery. She was curator of textiles. So I knew of John more in that way than in his work. He was in anthropology. He was an anthropologist, and I think he was a graduate

student at the time. I don't think he came for any art history. He didn't come to my course.

REESE

Did you know Charles Gibson as an undergraduate?

KUBLER

Charles Gibson I knew as an undergraduate, and he accompanied us on a trip to Mexico, as I said. And he was a great help.

REESE

Was Colin Eisler a student at Yale?

KUBLER

Colin Eisler was also in a course with me, and I've forgotten which one it was. I have a very poor memory for classes. [laughter]

SMITH

You've mentioned Vincent Scully already.

KUBLER

Vincent Scully I knew only when he became a member of the staff.

SMITH

It seems that the Yale pattern is a little different than most. Accepted wisdom in universities is that you should not hire your own graduates. Yet obviously, beginning with the first group of faculty and even continuing beyond that, it seems that some of the expansion has come--

KUBLER

Yes. I think we always try to get the good and willing student to join the faculty. No, we had no policy about that.

SMITH

But I wonder--particularly since there seemed to be such a well-known folk wisdom in academia that students must go out from their home institution--

how the Yale art history faculty understood what they were doing and if you realized you were doing something that was different from the norm.

KUBLER

Well, when it was an urgent necessity for someone to go to Paris or down to Los Angeles, let him go. But no holds barred on bringing him back. And we did frequently bring good students back after they had turned elsewhere.

SMITH

What was the caliber of the social relations between the faculty and the students at Yale at this time?

KUBLER

Well, I remember when I was director of graduate study, I would meet students in this house every week for an evening. Conversation, talk, and refreshments. Just talk about the department, talk about whatever was on their minds. And I did that all during the time I was director of graduate study. I don't think that it's much the custom of Yale faculty to do that. I don't know of other cases of it. The Yale custom is family life, and the university is another life.

SMITH

What about placement of students? Were you involved much in finding teaching positions for your students?

KUBLER

No, never! And I don't think we ever did anything about it, because there were openings and the students found them. We recommended them when requested.

SMITH

What about placing publications by students? Did you--?

KUBLER

We helped them.

SMITH

You did help them. You would--

KUBLER

Give suggestions.

SMITH

--give suggestions. Both getting books published and articles?

KUBLER

Yes. Recommend them to go to the Art Bulletin or to the Journal of the [Society of] Architectural Historians.

SMITH

Would you call up or write editors yourself to particularly recommend anybody's work?

KUBLER

When work was sent to me, I would always read it. But I never solicited reading a paper for a publisher.

REESE

What were the social and intellectual relationships at Yale across departments? In other words, clearly in the forties you had a fantastic array of linguists, [Bronislaw] Malinowski in anthropology, historians, literary courses. Did one have a natural basis to establish contacts with other faculty members?

KUBLER

One was perfectly free to begin an exchange of views with anybody and go on from there. Sometimes, as in the case of [Cornelius] Osgood next door-- Osgood and I were neighbors, and we exchanged views all the time. He came to our house. I went to his house when [Alfred] Kroeber was visiting. That kind of exchange was fairly common.

REESE

Were the fellowship programs within the colleges important as well?

KUBLER

The fellows meetings were very sociable, and at the beginning they were very small meetings. There were only twelve or thirteen fellows in each college. Later on, and after the war, that number rose to one hundred, one hundred of the fellows of the college. There's no room for one hundred in the corners of the senior common room and the junior common room added to it. So that the college fellowship has deteriorated by reason of numbers.

REESE

Did you establish close relationships at Jonathan Edwards College?

KUBLER

Very close with almost all the other fellows of the original group and very rewarding. We met weekly. We always dined together weekly, once a week. Those were very rewarding evenings.

REESE

Were they the fellows alone or fellows with students?

KUBLER

No, fellows alone. Hajo Holborn, for example, was one. And Erwin Goodenough and Egbert Miles. You asked about Miles. I talked about mathematics with him.

SMITH

How long did you continue attending those weekly meetings?

KUBLER

Until they became so numerous. I dropped it. I go to the annual festivals of college, but I go to fellows dinners very rarely because they're so crowded.

SMITH

I'm going to throw out some names of other Yale professors. You did mention Hajo Holborn. He was in the history department.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

You had regular exchanges with him?

KUBLER

Yes, always at the fellows meetings. Those fellows meetings were very rewarding, and I missed them when they began to be superpopulated. I don't go to fellows meetings anymore. It's a great loss.

SMITH

Erwin Goodenough.

KUBLER

Erwin Goodenough, yes. He was a historian of religion and a very agnostic one.

SMITH

And also in religion is, of course, Jaroslav Pelikan.

KUBLER

Yes. Yes, I know Jaroslav Pelikan. I think I know fewer faculty today than I knew when I was a beginner. It was easier to seek them out then, at that time. Now it's rather difficult to get in touch with someone unless one has a driving interest in common.

SMITH

With the professors of religion, were the discussions useful to you in terms of understanding, in some heuristic way helping you look at the Mesoamerican religions?

KUBLER

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. One could discuss all sorts of things in those early small table talks.

SMITH

Edward [W.] Bakke?

KUBLER

Yes, I remember him. He was an economist.

SMITH

At the time you were discussing with him, were you getting involved with your demographic work?

KUBLER

He was an economist and rather burly. I never talked with him very much.

SMITH

The history of art does seem to have a lot of overlap with economic issues that don't usually get talked about very much.

KUBLER

It does. I may have discussed such questions with him, but I don't remember them distinctly. I was the only art historian in the college group of fellows.

SMITH

And then there is Robert Chapman Bates.

KUBLER

Oh, yes. He was a bachelor and he lived in college. He taught French. He's very witty--very witty and very good company.

SMITH

Let's see. [to Reese] Do you have any other faculty you want to--?

REESE

No, not really. I think we could hold off till we get more specifically into pre-Columbian and talking about [Wendell] Bennett and others.

SMITH

I wanted to go now into the question of Latin American studies, which does involve pre-Columbian, but not only. I thought I might ask you first about your relationship with Bennett and also with George Vaillant.

KUBLER

Yes. Well, I was always a member of the Latin American Council in those days. I would attend their meetings, and that's where I came to know Bennett. George Vaillant came to Yale occasionally. He was curator at the American Museum of Natural History and also a field archaeologist who had done important work in Mexican archaeology. George Vaillant would come to New Haven periodically, and I would see him and we'd talk about Mexican archaeology. Then, finally, he was on my degree committee for the doctorate, and I remember an examination for the doctorate at which he was present, invited by the department. He was a very good questioner.

SMITH

Who else was on your committee? Perhaps we could, just for the record, establish that. Focillon was your chair.

KUBLER

Yes. Crosby. Seymour. Any others? But I remember Vaillant with pleasure.

SMITH

I understand he wanted you to take his position at the American Museum.

KUBLER

No, I don't remember that. Where did you learn that?

SMITH

It's in one of the piles of notes I have, so I--

KUBLER

Yes. He died during the war. He was to be cultural attaché in Madrid, and it's thought that-- Preparing for going to Madrid, he'd been recommended to have numerous inoculations. And it's thought in his family and among his friends that these depressed him and that's why he went out in his garden in Philadelphia-- He was then director of the [University of Pennsylvania] University Museum at Philadelphia. He went into his garden and shot himself dead and did not go to Madrid. And it's thought that this excessive medication depressed him.

SMITH

Getting back to Wendell Bennett--

KUBLER

Yes. Wendell Bennett I knew in the Latin American Council. He was a very good and staunch friend. We had many, many hours of conversation.

SMITH

He was the general editor of the Handbook of South American Indians?

KUBLER

Yes. It was at his invitation that I wrote the article on the colonial Quechua ["The Quechua in the Colonial World"].

SMITH

Now, you had no prior involvement with Peru at that time?

KUBLER

No.

SMITH

Or Indian studies?

KUBLER

I had been to Peru. I think this is after the year in Peru for the Smithsonian Institution. That was in the late forties, early fifties.

SMITH

In 1948, when you taught at the University of San Marcos?

KUBLER

Yes. That was it. We arrived on the night of the revolution--or near the night of the revolution. And so the university was closed. I didn't teach at the university, but I got word to the university-- It was closed. There were tanks in the streets so you couldn't go in. But I got word to the university that I would meet the students in my house. So for that term I had a seminar of about

eight. The most brilliant men and women I could think of. They were marvelous. It was a seminar, and I put them to work on this demographic problem of the nineteenth-century Indian population, how to estimate it. We did it in the government archives with the tax registers.

SMITH

My understanding is that that study has no art historical component whatsoever.

KUBLER

None whatever. Excepting the rather attractive drawings on the flyleaves of the tax registers, all descriptive of the province concerned.

SMITH

So your Peruvian studies really begin more with pure social history.

KUBLER

Yes. That's what they wanted.

SMITH

Your seminar students were, then, not art history.

KUBLER

They were not art historians, no. They were historians. Economic historians, social historians, but no art historians.

SMITH

You had done, of course, your chapters on demography and urbanism for--

KUBLER

For the Mexican book [Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century (1948)].

SMITH

But I guess the obvious question is, where did you get your foundation to be able to direct a demographic study of this nature?

KUBLER

Well, I just made one up. [laughter] We made it up as we went. Where are the documents? We found the documents and then copied them, analyzed them, broke them down and put them together again.

SMITH

The essay "Quechua in the Colonial World," I thought you wrote that during World War II.

KUBLER

That was at Bennett's invitation, I think. Or was it?

SMITH

Yes.

KUBLER

Julian Steward was the overall director. Bennett was the director of the South American volume. Yes, Bennett's invitation.

SMITH

Did you go to Peru at that time to research that article?

KUBLER

Yes. When did that appear? Handbook of South American Indians, vol. 5.

REESE

I think it was substantially completed in '44, if I remember correctly. It appeared later, the article itself.

KUBLER

Yes. I did that before going to Peru. "The Quechua in the Colonial World."

SMITH

Again, that does not appear to have so much so--

KUBLER

That's an anthropological study, fitting the anthropological template.

SMITH

What puzzles me is, are you redefining your scope of interest and activities beyond art history? Or are you responding to requirements of the government?

KUBLER

I'm responding to conditions in Peru, particularly with the demographic study. The students needed a topic that they could handle within the time I could be with them. This seemed to be a good topic that was available and easy to work with. So it was the topic that seemed possible for this group of students.

SMITH

I mean, before you begin your Pelican history of art books, one might look at the decade of the forties and see someone who started as an art historian drifting into anthropology or sociology, and that there was a flux in the sense of the focus of your career.

KUBLER

I welcomed the opportunity of being there for the Smithsonian, to have this relationship to anthropology and to be in anthropology, to do anthropology.

SMITH

What were your perceptions of the Good Neighbor policy, which is, I think, the overall umbrella that allowed all of this activity to develop?

KUBLER

Well, we always unbelt towards Latin America when we're in trouble, when we need Latin America, and that's unfortunately not the regular case. We don't take Latin America seriously.

SMITH

The change in government policy and national interest allowed these activities to take place. Did you feel that scholars' recommendations were beginning to shape government policy or foundation policy towards Latin America?

KUBLER

It seemed during the events that that was the case. My own participation was nil, excepting for this case, which is marginal, peripheral.

REESE

Let me see if I can get into this subject in another way. It seems to me that the Peruvian [scholarship]--both on the caste systems [The Indian Caste of Peru, 1795-1940: A Population Study Based upon Tax Records and Census Reports (1952)] and "The Quechua in the Colonial World"--was tremendously concerned with problems of cultural contact and acculturation and obviously informed strongly by anthropological concerns at that point.

KUBLER

And shaped by the editorial format of the Handbook of South American Indians.

REESE

When did you really begin to read and think about problems of cultural contact? Clearly from The Religious Architecture of New Mexico [in the Colonial Period and since the American Occupation (1940)], they're there.

KUBLER

From the beginning, from my first contact with New Mexico.

REESE

I guess they're also in the Etruscan study, the Corinthian ceramics, "Some Etruscan Versions of Corinthian Ceramics." These two are in some way, indirectly, acculturation studies.

KUBLER

Yes. It's the cultural interaction of different groups, yes.

REESE

Do you remember, though, in that period of the late thirties and forties, specific readings that you might have done or specific kinds of studies that led you to think about cultural interchange and acculturation?

KUBLER

Well, I think I always taught that way. My lectures always had a substantial sociological foundation.

SMITH

Is that because of the subject matter or your approach? For instance, would you have as much sociology in a discussion of Italian Renaissance painting or architecture?

KUBLER

Yes. I would set up a question in such terms as well as art historical. But more as a preparation for the art historical approach than as a result of it.

REESE

In 1942 in the Art Bulletin, when you were writing about recent work that was being done on pre-Columbian art, you noted that, "Instead of being able to work with his first cousins--the philologists, the classical scholars, and the medievalists--in European archaeology," one entering the field of pre-Columbian studies must work with "anthropologists, ethnologists, botanists, zoologists, astronomers, metallurgists, meteorologists, paleontologists, and a whole host of other kinds of historians and scientists." That was clearly not something that one would have learned necessarily from Focillon or from [Erwin] Panofsky. It was emerging, really, in a very new way for you in the thirties and forties. That fascination with the scientist [G. Evelyn] Hutchinson, with the anthropologist Bennett, with the linguist Bates is I think what Richard is trying to get at. I mean, do you feel that that was just the only way you could go to get information? Or was it just the kind of culture at Yale that put you into contact with these people?

KUBLER

Both. Both. It was the only way to go, and it was possible. And no one said I shouldn't.

REESE

Because one thinks of very few other art historical fields in which these kinds of acts at that point in time were taking place--with such a rich mining of other disciplines.

KUBLER

Well, I had the good luck in Peru to start with social science and end with a product.

SMITH

Could we talk a little bit about the Museum of Modern Art conference on studies in Latin America in 1945? Were you involved in the organization of that?

KUBLER

I don't think so. I was invited. I don't remember any executive session of preparation for it. I was invited to take part in it, but I had no hand in its organization.

REESE

This is a conference in which [Tatiana] Proskouriakoff, Robert Rands, [Herbert] Spinden, and Bennett were all discussing these emerging fields.

SMITH

That seems like a critical conference, because it's going beyond Latin American studies to Latin American art and bringing all these people together.

KUBLER

Yes, and in the museum of Modern Art. Was that in connection with the big show at the Museum of Modern Art on twentieth-century Mexican art?

REESE

You know, I'm not sure.

SMITH

I thought that show was later, actually.

REESE

I know in this you made the statement--I'm quoting--"We should take advantage of this opportunity in Latin America to approximate the methods of the ethnologist and the archaeologist. We can enter into the spirit of the art more than we traditionally have done in our museum studies and in our costly library studies. We can enjoy the reality of a field in which masterpieces have

not yet monopolized interest and lost their relation to the environment." So this really seems to be a summation of many of the ideas that had emerged for you between 1938 and 1945. Would Focillon have approved of that statement, do you think?

KUBLER

I think so, I think so. He was always open to broadening the approach rather than narrowing it.

REESE

Did you feel that you were, in a statement like that, criticizing much of the art history that was done in this country? That it was not doing these things?

KUBLER

Yes. This was '45.

REESE

Did you feel any response from colleagues? Focillonists at Yale who were, in fact, doing monographs and very much concerned with some of these issues?

KUBLER

I don't remember any criticism from anybody on this score, and they would have read these things. In the forties there was a certain amount of dissatisfaction with the limitations of the history of art which was shared.

**1.10. TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE TWO
MARCH 28, 1991**

SMITH

Okay, you were saying there was a dissatisfaction.

KUBLER

And one looked for support from other disciplines.

SMITH

To me that's peculiar, because in the United States the history of art was basically just being born.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

And already there is dissatisfaction or a sense of crisis. How do you explain that?

KUBLER

Well, consider the present moment. [laughter]

SMITH

Well?

KUBLER

There's always a state of incompleteness?

SMITH

One would hope so.

KUBLER

Actually to be concerned about it isn't good enough, broad enough. The scope is wrong.

REESE

But it also includes this very early critique of the focus on masterpieces. Was this something that you had always felt strongly about, that studying isolated objects was wrongheaded?

KUBLER

Yes. The value system seemed out of kilter. I always thought a lot about the Dutch tulip craze in the seventeenth century and the astronomical prices that were paid for tulips in Holland in the seventeenth century. And then the collapse of the market and all of that value was destroyed. We see it still with the over-mercantile condition of the art market.

SMITH

At this time, as you were getting more involved with demography and anthropology, were you at all interested in developing a nomothetic model for art historical work?

KUBLER

A series of prescriptions for the proper conduct, no. No, I didn't see my way clear to that.

SMITH

Did you think that art historians might be able to develop laws of cultural development or aesthetic development comparable to what anthropologists were looking for? Were you intrigued by that?

KUBLER

No. I'm still skeptical about anyone who tries. For example, Colin Martindale. He's proposing an evolutionary model for the history of art.

SMITH

What's the relationship in your mind between a taxonomic approach to art history and developing-- What I call nomothetic, but I mean looking for fundamental laws, fundamental patterns.

KUBLER

Well, systems of classification tend toward being nomothetic by saying that it can't be any other way: this is the way it is and it's always true. A system of classification isn't a system of principles.

SMITH

Did you view the classifications that you developed in Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century not only as provisional--because all work we do is provisional--but as merely one possible way of classifying these objects among many?

KUBLER

I never thought of it otherwise, but I'm not aware of any other way of ordering the material. But possibly someone will.

SMITH

Yet, at the same time, in the mid-forties you criticize the movement towards area studies as not having sufficient attention to method and theory.

KUBLER

Yes. They were so purpose bound--area studies for specific purposes. It didn't seem educationally adequate.

SMITH

Now, who was determining these purposes?

KUBLER

Weren't they set up in Washington?

SMITH

Area handbooks?

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

They were funded by it.

KUBLER

They were funded in Washington and seemed like another boondoggle.

SMITH

And by method and theory were you referring specifically to art historical method and theory?

KUBLER

I thought there was an absence of attention to such matters in the area study program. History of art, if it was present, was being used as a system of illustrations.

SMITH

If we could, with that in mind, look at, say, the question of Mexican folk art and crafts.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

How did you evaluate what René d'Harnoncourt was doing?

KUBLER

I became aware of what he was doing only much later. I didn't know about it when he was doing it.

SMITH

Did you know the work of Frederick Starr at that time, which had been done significantly earlier?

KUBLER

He's one of the people in the Handbook of South American Indians. He's an anthropologist or an ethnologist.

SMITH

Ethnographer.

KUBLER

Ethnologist, yes. Frederick Starr, yes. I don't remember being affected by his work, but I always respected it.

SMITH

What about Dr. Atl?

KUBLER

Dr. Atl, yes, the artist and the painter. Very powerful painter.

SMITH

He also wrote about Mexican folk art.

KUBLER

Mexican folk art. It was very emotional. Super, super, hyper, hyper emotional.

REESE

Clearly during these years you are a pioneer, and one feels in your work this excitement about being a pioneer. But then, on the other side, there's an implicit criticism of mainstream art history. As you think back, do you reflect how you were feeling at that time and whether your role as a critic versus your role as the opener of totally new doors--?

KUBLER

Well, I think I learned that one can say something and not do it. One may prescribe something and not do it in the hope that someone will. [laughter] And that's that. That's the end of the lesson.

SMITH

When did you start working with the Tovar Calendar?

KUBLER

I've always been interested in these manuscripts. There's a large group of Mexican manuscripts, which is most of the body of what we know about ancient Mexico, writing by Indians and people interested in Indians. It was my first serious study of a manuscript problem. The Tovar Calendar is only part of another manuscript.

SMITH

Did you integrate that study into your course work so that your students were brought into it?

KUBLER

Yes. Yes. Calendar studies are extremely useful to this sort of art history.

SMITH

This is your first-- Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think this is your first major step into publication in the pre-Columbian field.

KUBLER

The Tovar Calendar?

SMITH

Yes.

KUBLER

Of this type, yes. It's my first step, yes.

SMITH

How did you feel you were positioning yourself with this publication vis-à-vis the other literature, both on the calendar and on pre-Columbian Mesoamerican art?

KUBLER

Well, it forms part of a group of studies, and they're related. One of them, the most recent of them, is a paper about the place of the Mexican calendar in-- The arithmetical position that it takes. I found that this was a sort of supercycle of something like twenty thousand years divided in four parts. We're still in the first part--first quarter of it--at the present moment. Amerindian prehistory is the first quarter of this cycle of time that is the time cycle of the Aztecs at the time of the conquest. That paper is fairly recent.

REESE

The book itself [The Tovar Calendar: An Illustrated Mexican Manuscript ca. 1585] was written in 1947 and 1948, although it was published slightly later [1951]. Do you remember the genesis of it with Charles Gibson?

KUBLER

Charles was a graduate student at that time, and he was preparing himself with his big book. I invited him to join me on this study. The structure of the book is mine, and then he did the transcriptions. He was more of a scholar of the language than I, so he tested the language problems that the manuscript offered.

REESE

What interests me as much about the book as its pre-Columbian content is its relationship to text and image studies done by medievalists in this country. Do

you recall the kind of reading that you did in bringing Western art historical methods to bear on this other topic?

KUBLER

I would have taken advantage of what I'd learned from manuscript studies of medieval date. "And here's another one."

REESE

Was it a manuscript that you would have shown to Panofsky in those years? Or to any of your former teachers at the Institute?

KUBLER

Well, I don't think it would have meant much to them. It would be so separated from their studies that it would be an imposition to ask them to do the groundwork that would be necessary to understand such a text. Charles Gibson was prepared to do so and did a very good job.

SMITH

In terms of discussions with anthropologists or historians of the preconquest period, were there points of view that you found more helpful than others?

KUBLER

Oh, yes. For example, with Wendell Bennett, I could have discussions about many questions that troubled me in writing, and he was always very helpful. I think I knew Wendell Bennett best among the anthropologists of the time. I didn't have that friendly relation with any other anthropologist besides Wendell Bennett. He was my main mentor in anthropological study.

REESE

There were two earlier studies of pre-Columbian material I know that you were concerned with. One was the Aztec sculpture ["The Cycle of Life and Death in Metropolitan Aztec Sculpture"] and the other was Mochica sculpture, which I take it you were interested in from the very late thirties.

KUBLER

Yes. That's right.

REESE

Can you talk about those studies and how they interested you?

KUBLER

I wanted to make a corpus of Mochica pottery, which is a very rich subject, and it is too large for the time I had. Fortunately, this work has been done by someone else, and very ably, in California.

REESE

Both of these genres, both Aztec sculpture and Mochica sculpture, share certain qualities. I'm interested in why you were particularly attracted to them as subjects. Have you thought about that?

KUBLER

Well, they were thematically rich fields, both Aztec and Mochica. In a way, all of this was preparation for the Penguin book on ancient America [The Art and Architecture of Ancient America: The Mexican, Maya, and Andean Peoples (1962)], a handbook for the whole of ancient America. I needed that kind of preparation for every part of that book.

REESE

This is a leading question, I'm afraid, but were you also particularly interested in subjects that would appeal to Western audiences and be able to confirm again the history of art historical technique?

KUBLER

Yes. Yes. The purpose of writing ancient art of America was just that--use it to enlarge our own conception of art and broaden the world picture of the history of art itself.

SMITH

In some degree this leads up to your Penguin volume, but as you were working on the Tovar and the two previous articles that Tom has mentioned, did you feel that art history as a discipline in and of itself had something essential to contribute to pre-Columbian studies, Mesoamerican studies? That

anthropologists were missing something or getting something essential wrong?

KUBLER

I did. I did just that. I did feel it was important and that it would be misunderstood by anthropologists with their tools.

SMITH

This again comes in a little bit later, but-- With the controversy over the calendars, there seems to be a great deal of disagreement with you, but it's deepened by criticism that you're in over your head. As an art historian you're not trained or competent to make these kinds of judgments about calendars.

KUBLER

Well, the case I mentioned of the calendar that is twenty thousand years of repeating cycles is very difficult to disprove. It took me a long time to find it, but it's very difficult to disprove and no one has done it. It fits all the conditions stated in the text I was using. Just wait and see how it fares, how long it lasts before being demolished. [laughter] I expect it might be demolished, but I don't know how to demolish it.

SMITH

I heard a professor say that somebody who did work whose value lasted more than twenty years was doing very uninteresting work indeed. [laughter] In terms of the sense of scholars' building-block work, how do you feel about that question of participating in a process in which you are one person contributing important but necessarily small bits and pieces of a larger structure? And that your work may--in fact, may have to be--superseded?

KUBLER

Oh, I'm thoroughly resigned to it. [laughter] It's fun while doing. What I'm doing is great fun. And then it's easily shelved.

REESE

Well, Latin Americanists would probably be very happy if they had enough students doing serious work to supersede the primary monuments every twenty years.

SMITH

I had another question that I had skipped over, which is the department's relationship with [Theodore] Sizer and the [Yale University Art] Gallery, the degree to which he used the gallery as a teaching gallery.

KUBLER

Well, Sizer and the gallery were very obliging to us and always made it possible for us to have access to objects and to use them in a teaching way and encouraged us to do so. It's been that way for a long time, and still is. The members of the department have been curators without salary, and only recently, since the time of Charles Sawyer, who was director-- Charles Sawyer wanted to have professional curators who did nothing else, and he started the policy of discarding the professor who was the curator as not sufficiently professional. This continues to the present day with the present director, Mary Neil. She has professional curators instead of professor curators. We used to be curators.

SMITH

Did you curate shows yourself? And if so, what kinds of shows?

KUBLER

Well, I curated the pre-Columbian collection, which is quite a good collection. And I trained students in writing the catalog of it, which made a very tidy volume, of which I wrote practically nothing. It was all written by students. It's a good catalog, but catalogs don't get reviewed. People don't pay very close attention to them. I was a professor curator.

SMITH

In terms of training your students, the professional curator is an aspect of the fact that you're training so many students. But as you were training your students, did you begin to take into consideration that some students did not desire to be researchers but desired to be curators, and therefore might need a different approach in terms of how they were developed?

KUBLER

Well, this way of doing it, that we were working out, is what they ought to know about the approach to the object. I have no doubt about that.

**1.11. TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE ONE
MARCH 29, 1991**

SMITH

This morning we have a few follow-up questions from previous sessions. Tom, you wanted to review some of the seminars that Dr. Kubler took at the Institute [of Fine Arts, New York University].

REESE

Yes, these are several seminars which we did not mention yesterday. I will just take them one at a time. Any remembrances you have. [Walter] Friedlaender's Principles of Baroque.

KUBLER

Yes. I remember it, but I remember nothing from it, Friedlaender.

REESE

Do you remember anything about him as a person?

KUBLER

It's a blank.

SMITH

Was his teaching style significantly different from [Erwin] Panofsky's or [Karl] Lehmann's?

KUBLER

It was monotonous. I remember monotony. It was devoid of baroque quality. [laughter]

REESE

Do you remember writing that paper or giving a report in that class?

KUBLER

I probably did. But I don't remember.

REESE

Another is [Richard] Ettinghausen's Mohammedan Art.

KUBLER

Yes. That was very profitable, very instructive, and I remember that with pleasure.

SMITH

In that class were there established any kind of principles about the study of non-European art that were pertinent to your later work?

KUBLER

Yes, and it was necessary for Spanish studies.

SMITH

Well, of course, yes.

KUBLER

And ancillary. I was interested in it for that reason.

REESE

Was it a lecture course?

KUBLER

It was a lecture course. It was packed with information. He was amply provided with slides. He showed a lot. It was not a course of ideas, but it was a course of facts. His lecturing manner was not the most ingratiating, and I don't think his audience liked him very much. He was rather haughty. [laughter]

REESE

Was the Friedlaender course also a lecture course?

KUBLER

That was a lecture course. These were not seminars. These were lectures in the Metropolitan Museum [of Art] in one of their small groups.

REESE

Another class was [Ernst Emil] Herzfeld's Art of the Ancient Near East.

KUBLER

Yes. He was then very old, but the course was extremely interesting. He talked about his excavations. I enjoyed that for his sake, yes.

REESE

Was the attendance at the course on Islamic art and on ancient Near Eastern art significantly different from those at lecture courses on Western European art? Smaller or larger?

KUBLER

Well, there were specialists. There were specialists who came to hear them from outside the Institute. That was one of the features of the Institute, that they were open to the adult public for free. Not the student public--the adult public.

REESE

You had mentioned yesterday the Special Problems with Panofsky was the methods class in which you wrote the Escorial paper.

KUBLER

That's right.

REESE

But there is another seminar or lecture course you took with Panofsky, on Michelangelo.

KUBLER

Yes. I remember that well. He commuted from Princeton [University] and often forgot his slides. [laughter]

REESE

Can you say something about what you remember about how it was organized and his method of presentation?

KUBLER

It was very much concerned with the sources for Michelangelo and his own appraisal of the importance of the works. I'd have to look at my notes.

SMITH

That raises a question I had been planning to ask you, which is, how important do you think it is for an art historian to make an evaluation of the work from a point of view of quality?

KUBLER

It's like the problem of the course. [laughter]

SMITH

Of the course?

KUBLER

Of the course itself. The history of art is already a value judgment, a value judgment that carries a whole panoply of value judgments in the art-- Not popular art, not rustic art, not nursery art, but adult art, art of lasting significance. A whole set of decisions is present in the term "history of art," of previous assumptions, underlying assumptions discarding most art and retaining only the cream level. Which is generally true, excepting when the course is specified as popular art or peasant art or rural art.

SMITH

For instance, often I think, particularly in the study of nineteenth- and twentieth-century art, there is almost a necessity for the art historian to say whether so and so is a good artist.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

This becomes less important when you go further back in history, because you take what you've got, kind of.

KUBLER

Yes, what survived. Or what was allowed to survive, yes.

SMITH

In your teaching, would you insist on students making those kinds of value judgments?

KUBLER

I try to steer away from them, and let them form their judgments as they became visually familiar with the literature and with the works themselves. I didn't try to affect their evaluations, but I tried to open the study of the objects as widely as possible.

SMITH

What about fellow students at the Institute? We didn't talk about who else was there when you were there that you had more or less close relations with.

KUBLER

Yes. I remember many of them--more or less well. Phyllis Williams [Lehmann] was one. Fred Hart was another. Many outstanding ones I remember. I would say that the whole student body at the Institute in those years was about one hundred, and it was very difficult to know all of them. The Metropolitan settings and the meetings were the only exposure to people. One didn't see them elsewhere.

REESE

Of the one hundred, were those largely professional art historians in training, or were there also people from the community who would come?

KUBLER

Those were also people from the community who were paying by the course. They would buy a course. In many of the seminars there were no such people--adult listeners who were paying by the course.

SMITH

Would these people be university-type people or society--?

KUBLER

More the latter. And women with time on their hands. Retired men with their wives sometimes. But those were more the courses of lectures drawing the adult citizens.

REESE

At that point there was no library of the Institute itself.

KUBLER

Yes. It had its library in the Lehman house. It was a good library and it still is a very good library. It's in the Doris Duke house on Fifth Avenue. The library is much larger than in my day. It's a first-rate art history library.

REESE

Was your contact with professors like Panofsky or Lehmann largely during and after class?

KUBLER

Exactly, yes. Panofsky was always commuting. Lehmann was commuting from New Rochelle [New York]. They commuted, so that contact was before, during, and after class, mostly after class. Panofsky would like to have us come with him to the bar. He found the bar-- Not because he was alcoholic, but he found the bar a congenial place. We'd have beers. But he was the only one to do that.

SMITH

Part of the formation of art history as a discipline does mean establishing a public constituency for it, where you have people who want--to use a word that we've been using a lot but haven't unpacked yet--a "rigorous" approach rather than, say, a Ruskinian, aestheticist approach. But did their presence and perhaps the need to build up a public interested in more intellectually serious art history affect the classes, the lectures, in some way? Was there a tension between the highest standards of scholarship and the need to speak to a broader public?

KUBLER

The presence of the adult outsiders in the seminars was very rare. It was mainly in the lecture courses. And in the lecture courses they didn't interfere

at all. They didn't speak, and there were appointments with the instructor for the papers, and one had access to the instructors as much as needed.

REESE

Was there any tension present during those years between the museum crowd and the scholarly, art historical--?

KUBLER

The museum crowd was never large. It's quite expensive, for one thing. And the people who came really had nothing to say and weren't invited to say anything. One said what he had to say in the lecturer's office on appointment, talking about the paper. [laughter]

REESE

What about the differences between archaeologists and art historians? Did that emerge at all during those years?

KUBLER

It wasn't a rift in any sense. Karl Lehmann was as much or more an art historian as an archaeologist, but his reputation was as an archaeologist.

REESE

Could you describe a little bit Karl Lehmann as a person, lecturer, scholar?

KUBLER

Yes. He was very slight in physique and he had surprisingly blond hair. It was naturally blond. He was a natural blond. He had a lot of hair and rather sharp features. I think he was Jewish, but he had this blond hair and it was natural, it was naturally blond. He spoke English very well with a certain accent. His lectures were always interesting, always laced with ideas, rarely drowning with fact.

REESE

You went to both lecture classes and seminars with Lehmann?

KUBLER

Yes. I was with him so much that he wanted me to come with him to Samothrace as one of the excavators, which I declined, because I'd decided that I would attend to Americanist studies rather than become a classical archaeologist.

SMITH

How did the faculty at the Institute feel about your proposed dissertation topic, the religious architecture of New Mexico?

KUBLER

Oh, I don't think they paid any attention to it, and I never submitted it to them.

SMITH

No, but did you ever discuss it with them?

KUBLER

I don't think so. I might have talked about it with Lehmann. I certainly talked about it with [Henri] Focillon.

SMITH

You were going to the Institute under the auspices of Yale University, right?

KUBLER

In a sense. I had left Yale graduate school for New York University and the Institute and was paying tuition there instead of Yale.

SMITH

But you did not intend to get your higher degree at the Institute.

KUBLER

I think I had a fellowship, actually. A fellowship with a little money for the tuition, which I accepted. I didn't ask for it. But I think I was sort of a Yale fellow at the Institute. Perhaps with a small stipend.

REESE

I wonder if you could give a similar sketch of Panofsky, of his appearance and personality?

KUBLER

Oh, he was, one might say, vibrant--vibrant. He lectured at high speed, but always intelligible and always completely coherent in what he showed. It was a joy to listen to him.

REESE

How old was he then?

KUBLER

I would say fifties. He commuted from Princeton, from the Institute for Advanced Study.

REESE

You said he frequently reported on his current work in the seminar. What was he at work on that you recall?

KUBLER

Well, at the time I was in the seminar, it began with his reading us a paper he'd just written. It was on a Renaissance topic involving antiquity. He read this to us as a model of the sort of paper he would like from us. So this was really a seminar in art historical writing. We talked a great deal in the seminar about the different ways of writing the history of art and examined and criticized examples of current writing, and it was a professional seminar on writing the history of art.

REESE

Do you remember either visits by José Gudiol or by [José] López-Rey at that time? Had they already been at the Institute?

KUBLER

Yes. There was a strong Hispanic push in the curriculum because of Walter Cook. Walter Cook was the head of the Institute, and he brought these people and chose well. I don't think they respected him as much as he respected

them. He was already out of scholarship and into administration--very good administrator.

SMITH

I'd like to go back to the statement you made in 1945 that Tom quoted from yesterday. As I was thinking about it more, it seemed to me that particular section seems to be a statement where you're positioning yourself philosophically. I would like to unpack it a little bit and find out--beyond the general statements of principle that are there--who it is directed against, who it is directed towards. [to Reese] Do you have the statement handy?

REESE

I'll look back at my notes.

SMITH

Maybe you could just read it into the record.

KUBLER

Should I read it aloud? "Instead of being able to work with his first cousins--the philologists, the classical scholars, and the medievalists--in European archaeology, the historian of art who wishes to acquaint himself with American studies is heavily dependent upon the work of anthropologists, ethnologists, botanists, zoologists, astronomers, metallurgists, meteorologists, paleontologists, and a whole host of other kinds of historians and scientists." That's the quotation.

REESE

I thought there was another--

SMITH

Actually, I think there was another one.

KUBLER

And then it follows, "This was 1942. Then in 1945 there was a conference on studies in Latin American art held at the Museum of Modern Art to encourage the establishment of new relations between the history of art and the disciplines of social sciences. In particular, these are political, economic, and

religious history; anthropological studies in their linguistic, ethnological and archaeological branches; developmental and social psychology; sociology; and human geography. We should take advantage of this--" And what's the date of them?

REESE

Nineteen forty-five.

KUBLER

'Forty-five. "We should take advantage of this opportunity in Latin America to approximate the methods of the ethnologist and the archaeologist. We can enter into the spirit of the art more than we traditionally have done in our museum studies and in our costly library studies. We can enjoy the reality of a field in which masterpieces have not yet monopolized interest and lost their relation to the environment."

SMITH

Okay, there is a statement of a program, but that's specifically for Latin American studies. But in terms of your view of art history at that time, how was that statement positioning you? Who were you criticizing implicitly in that statement?

KUBLER

I don't think I'm criticizing anyone, but addressing what I hoped would be future investigators of colonial art, especially Latin American. I'm talking to a future audience.

SMITH

But it does seem that you're saying, "We have the chance to avoid the errors that have plagued the study of the European classical tradition."

KUBLER

No, I don't think I meant to say that. I was then respectful and have always remained respectful of the history of art and its practitioners in my time, with exceptions. But I did hope to see an opening for younger people in studies that were less metropolitan and more provincial and rustic and colonial and non-European.

SMITH

Did you believe that non-European art might-- because of its different subject matter and different methodologies--lead to a reconceptualization of how art history in general should function?

KUBLER

Yes. Yes, indeed.

SMITH

What about the question of connoisseurship at this time? Was that a divisive issue amongst art historians?

KUBLER

No, it's a necessary sharpening of the sense of discrimination between prime and repetitious works of art.

SMITH

And, of course, in your pre-Columbian work I would assume that that's an important question.

KUBLER

One can transfer the techniques of connoisseurship very easily and be left with the need to proceed further.

SMITH

I've noticed that you had done this work on the [Walter and Louise] Arensberg collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

KUBLER

Yes. That was published.

SMITH

Yes, that was published. Were you called upon by private collectors to give advice often? Or by museums?

KUBLER

Yes. The Arensberg was a case of-- Fiske Kimball wanted that catalog [The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, II: Pre-Columbian Sculpture] and asked me to do it.

SMITH

Is that something that you as an art historian expected to do a fair amount of, to advise people on the nature of their collection?

KUBLER

Well, I didn't invite it or want it particularly, but this occasion arose repeatedly to do a catalog of a collection--the Arensberg collection and then the Yale collection itself. But I didn't become a consulting expert on the commerce in these divisions of art--ancient American art, for example.

SMITH

What about the question of the authenticity of pieces? As I understand, in the Arensberg collection there were several pieces which--

KUBLER

Several dubious pieces--and I said so. And the same with the Yale collection. I published all of the pieces that were not pre-Columbian but passing as pre-Columbian, giving reasons and encouraging the students who wrote the account of the pieces that were not pre-Columbian to do so.

SMITH

How much were you involved in buying works for the [Yale] University Art Gallery?

KUBLER

Almost not at all. That was always the director's privilege, and the professorial curators were not taken into account by the director when making his decisions or her decisions.

SMITH

Even in an area as specialized as pre-Columbian?

KUBLER

Even there, yes. The professor curator was held at arm's length by the director. The director wanted his own curators.

REESE

This reminds me of another possible split in the profession at that time, and that is those people who considered themselves architectural historians as opposed to those who considered themselves art historians, including architecture. What could you say about that?

KUBLER

Well, they split, they split. There's a Society of Architectural Historians which meets with the College Art Association. There are annual meetings. It's a distinctness that is insisted upon by the architectural historians, who generated this division between themselves and the rest of the art historians. I'd like to be part of both.

REESE

Was that something that Focillon had any definite opinions about, that there were architectural historians and art historians?

KUBLER

Oh, no. He would have thought of them as art historians, too. They are art historians. The architectural historians are art historians. He would have opposed this division of interest.

SMITH

I know yesterday you noted in passing about Carroll Meeks that he was very clearly influenced by his very early experience with Dean [Everett] Meeks and the architecture program. Could one make such distinctions, really, in the thirties and forties? That there were those who came out of architecture schools and those who came out of art history programs, both dealing with architecture?

KUBLER

Yes. It was already apparent. And Carroll Meeks was a case in point. Trained as an architect, but never practicing, but with a distinct point of view and never

consulted in relation to the other arts. He was always treated as a professional architect, which he really wasn't, because he had never practiced.

SMITH

In relistening to the tapes from yesterday, there was a strong impression that there was a tension between art history as an intellectual discipline and the museums. I'm wondering if I was mishearing that, or was there in fact a tension between the needs of a developing academic discipline and what was happening with museums, the growth of museums?

KUBLER

I think that was reflective of the situation here. We, as art historians, were struggling for recognition as a department. This was opposed by the School of Fine Arts, as it then still was called.

SMITH

But when you talked about the Harvard [University] art history program, there was a sense that it might not have been as strong as it could be intellectually because of its museum focus.

KUBLER

Exactly. They were manufacturing museum directors and museum curators.
[laughter]

SMITH

But that seems to reinforce the idea that there really is a division between art history and museums.

KUBLER

Very much, very much. Art historians become museum directors and museum curators. When they do, then they become museum people and have a totally different life-style--no longer with students but with a community or a city.

SMITH

Do you think the necessity of presenting art and communicating to a broader public pulls down the quality of their scholarly work?

KUBLER

Well, they don't have the detachment. They are in the business of maintaining interest in their museum and offering instruction--the opportunity to see works of art tailored to their constituency. So that the work of a museum official, whether it is a curator or director, is very different from the life of a professor in a university teaching students. A totally different kind of communication.

SMITH

Were you involved, or you and your students involved, in the presentation of the works of art in the permanent collection, in the labeling?

KUBLER

Somewhat.

SMITH

Preparation of background material, such as this little brochure that's been done, "Art of Ancient Americas"?

KUBLER

Yes. Surely whenever the opportunity for an exhibition arose, the students would be enlisted who wanted to work in that direction.

SMITH

In returning again to the early forties, there's a small quote from College Art Journal that you edited in 1944 on Latin American art, which said, "Nothing is ready for the Latin American past. One must contrive his own mechanisms of adaptation." I mean, to me, this stance is the symbol of a thrust within your own work to find a solitary path into unexplored fields, finding a field for creativity and an ability to order material. That the museum is a satiated field--as dirt archaeology is a satiated field, as are traditional Italian studies in art history. Can you reflect on that at all?

KUBLER

Yes. At that time I was concerned about opportunities for students in the field, and they were very few. The occasions for their participating in large

archaeological companies that were formed for the excavation of a site were very limited. Art historians were never considered. That was dominated by anthropology, anthropological archaeology-- It was a distinct division of archaeology, incidentally, with very firm boundaries. Anthropologists, not humanists.

SMITH

In your training of Latin Americanists at this time, were you thinking that most of them would be able to find college positions teaching Latin American art history?

KUBLER

Actually, that happened.

SMITH

But what did you expect?

KUBLER

Well, I hoped that would happen, that students working with me could find posts in which they would be allowed to continue such studies, Latin American studies, whether they're archaeological or colonial or modern. And that happened without any special effort from me but by a sort of evolution in American education that was going on at that time. Opportunities for students in this direction were opening up in this wave of change.

SMITH

Had you expected that the American university system would expand as rapidly as it did in the postwar period?

KUBLER

No. It did though. It did, and it was extremely open to new fields--unlike the situation we were discussing in Germany with unification.

REESE

I wonder if you could try to evoke the feelings you had as you first went into Mexico in the thirties and early forties trying to chart this vast number of monuments that were on roads previously untraveled. Just what was it like to

be a pioneer there, with the Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century [1948]?

KUBLER

The main problem was to find the key connections among the monuments. When that happened, it was possible to say things about monuments one hadn't seen that had disappeared. And if you couldn't get to the monument, you could say something about it by what you knew from contemporary documents. So that the book pretends to direct knowledge of more monuments than I actually visited. But I could say valid things about some monuments I never saw that had disappeared or that I couldn't reach. I didn't see everything.

REESE

I'm thinking, too, just the physical conditions of travel.

KUBLER

Oh, those were not overwhelming with car and mobility. It's just a matter of time and patience.

REESE

And the techniques you developed of sketching the plans of the buildings, the photography.

KUBLER

Well, all that labor had been done and was in government archives, preservation of monuments, which I had access to. The Mexicans were extremely generous with that material, and I could draw on those unpublished files and find documentation that had never appeared in a public form.

SMITH

What about when you moved into pre-Columbian work? Were there similar photographic archives that you could draw upon?

KUBLER

That's a different problem. These colonial monuments had never been published. Actually, the original plan of the government was to publish the colonial monuments of every state.

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KUBLER

That archive, since my use of it, has disappeared. It was an archive on which the government had spent large resources, on every state of the thirty-six. And that archive has disappeared. What has become of it I don't know.

REESE

Could you say something about the pension in Mexico and the political climate in Mexico during these years?

KUBLER

We had our headquarters in a family hotel. It's a pension, where the family owned the little compound. The rooms had a dining room and offered meals and service, room service, for guests. At this time the presence of spies and counterspies was everywhere in Mexico, including this pension.

SMITH

Was this during the [Lázaro] Cárdenas government?

KUBLER

Just after it. During, yes, and after it. When did it end, the Cárdenas regime?

SMITH

I think his sexenario was '36 to '42.

KUBLER

Yes. It was Cárdenas's time. Very agitated time. Beneficial change in Mexico, but with the war, spies were everywhere. And this pension had German spies who worked for Bayer Aspirin, and they would go out in the provinces and do whatever they had to do as spies. In the pension there were also spies from the U.S. who were spying on the German spies and on each other. [laughter]

Spies from the marines who were spying on spies from the navy, from the U.S. Navy. So that it was a constant theater of equivocation and mistaken personalities. We were always thought to be spies. We would go out on these long trips and come back to our rooms where we left our belongings, and it was always assumed that we were spies.

SMITH

To your knowledge, was the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] ever using art historians in Latin America or elsewhere?

KUBLER

Not to my knowledge. Not to my knowledge. The CIA didn't exist yet.

SMITH

Not at that time, but it's a common myth-- And perhaps not a myth, at least for anthropologists. I think an American scholar in some of these countries--

KUBLER

Yes. We were assumed to be spies. And we were not. [laughter]

REESE

Of course, the Good Neighbor policy was founded on the basis that scholars would make, if not spies, the best relationships for America.

SMITH

Well, yesterday you mentioned in Peru you arrived in this military coup. Here's the political turmoil in Mexico. And there's a certain degree in your essays of-- There are references, particularly in relationship to the "Indigenismo and Mestizaje" ["Indianism, Mestizaje, and Indigenismo as Classical, Medieval, and Modern Traditions in Latin America"], to political and ideological turmoils in Latin America. How did political considerations in Latin America affect--? And I guess Iberian studies, too, given that Franco controlled Spain until '76. How did political considerations affect what could and could not be studied in these countries? What could or could not be addressed in terms of theoretical issues? The repercussions of national and geopolitical questions upon scholarship that might affect the decisions that you made or that your students made or colleagues made.

KUBLER

I never found any. I was a private citizen traveling with my wife. We were private citizens. We always said we were private citizens. We used contacts in the country, useful contacts such as university people and museum people, to have access to the materials we needed, and we were never impeded or hindered in any way.

SMITH

To take an extreme example, I would think under Franco, in Spain, if a scholar went in wanting to study Catalan national art, that would have been frowned upon and perhaps discouraged in some way.

KUBLER

I don't think so.

SMITH

No?

KUBLER

I don't think so, no. The action of Franco's organizations with respect to scholarly travel was nil. As far as we were concerned-- We were there during lots of the Franco time. Never impeded in any way. On the contrary, access to the sorts of collections we needed-- photographs, documents--was always available.

REESE

A related question might be how things have changed in both Latin America and Mexico in the years that the professions of art history and archaeology have become large and institutionalized. Did you find it, actually, easier in your early days than in more recent times?

KUBLER

It was easier then than it is now. I would hate to be in the position now of doing what I did in Mexico. At that time it was still a rather loose governmental organization.

SMITH

Would it be a desire on the part of the Mexican government that Mexican art historians do the primary research, as opposed to North Americans? Or would it have to do with fear of things being exported?

KUBLER

No, there was no animosity. I never found any animosity as being a foreigner, an outsider. Mexicans were extraordinarily hospitable, especially the people working in ministries. Very agreeable people to work with, the people who actually controlled the documentary sections and the photographic archives. They were very generous, and they didn't have any tradition of people coming to ask for photographs. They gave them away. [laughter]

SMITH

So what has the change been, then?

KUBLER

Well, everything has become more bureaucratic, with bureaucratic obstacles to research. Those were rather late in coming.

SMITH

The bureaucratic obstacles motivated by what?

KUBLER

Bureaucracy, the nature of bureaucracy.

REESE

Yesterday we talked briefly about the war years at Yale, and you had noted that there was not a significant decrease in the number of students. But I wonder if colleagues in the department were involved in identifying, say, monuments that should be protected, or whether after the war-- Restoration activities in France and Italy, whether art historians became much involved in these efforts.

KUBLER

Yes. We had that at Yale. Many Yale professors and graduate students served the government in those ways.

REESE

But largely traveling abroad or doing--?

KUBLER

Traveling abroad and monuments service. For example, Würzburg, the palace at Würzburg was saved, literally, by a Yale graduate named [John] Skilton. He had a very direct hand in preventing the destruction of the palace, as a monument officer. And a number of Yale faculty were monument officers in Italy and in Greece and in Spain. They were also protecting collections.

REESE

Do you have specific recollections of the mood of art history during the war in this country? Of not being able to travel abroad or traveling abroad under conditions that were not those of the scholarship that one expected?

KUBLER

Well, I was never called for service because of my medical record--TB. So I stayed on and taught. The university changed radically with the preparation of military needs, in which the university was participating. So the education was transformed, and the place was full of military. The teaching load was much heavier. We stayed on all through the war, and I taught all summer and then winter and spring terms, too. But the summer load was additional to the regular load, and that summer load was art history courses with people who were going to be in the battlefield.

SMITH

Was there any specific military purpose for having these soldiers given art history classes?

KUBLER

No, these were the electives of the students in military service. They came in the usual numbers to the big lecture courses and what courses we had. So course work went on all through the war, all year long. That was the difference. I think that was true in many departments.

REESE

Then the faculty was reduced as well. Were [Sumner] Crosby and [Charles] Seymour [Jr.] here or--?

KUBLER

They were active here. They also had duties abroad in the monuments surveys. I didn't have any part in that, but they did.

SMITH

Was that because you were focused on Hispanic--

KUBLER

That's it.

SMITH

--and Latin America?

KUBLER

And Latin America and ancient America. I continued teaching the same courses.

REESE

Do you have recollections after the war? In other words, many careers were interrupted by the war and service. Yet, at the same time, the G.I. Bill brought many people like Don [Donald] Robertson back to Yale for language studies. Charles Gibson might have been an interrupted career. Since we've talked about the war, I wonder if you could think about the immediate postwar era.

KUBLER

The immediate postwar was an enlargement of our studies and an enlargement of the faculty. We took on more instructors.

SMITH

What about the nature of the students? Did they change at all? Were they older?

KUBLER

Yes, they were older. They were older, and mixed in with a great many more younger people.

SMITH

At other institutions the record seems to be that the whole caliber of the student body changed from-- I'll say from '45 to '52. Where you had a much older student body, ex-veterans, who were much more assertive of their own ideas and knew what they wanted to get out of their education.

KUBLER

Yes, I remember that atmosphere. Yes, it was a different audience. It was a different audience after the war, a more exigent audience, more critical.

SMITH

Did the students, from your point of view, have greater clarity about what they wanted to achieve?

KUBLER

Not really--with exceptions.

SMITH

So they might be more demanding, but not necessarily more intellectually rigorous.

KUBLER

Well, they were still college students. [laughter] They didn't have much yet. They hadn't gone through the mill.

REESE

I'm trying to remember the students at Yale during those years. And I think of, as I've said, Donald Robertson, Spielvogel, Gibson. I don't know if Robert [Ferris] Thompson was there right after the war.

KUBLER

Robert Thompson, yes, in the fifties.

SMITH

Now, you've said you expanded your faculty. Lecturers and professors?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

What areas were the expansions directed into?

KUBLER

Well, I can't tell you exactly and with direct knowledge, but the sciences expanded quickly.

SMITH

Oh, I was thinking in particular in terms of the art history department.

KUBLER

The art history expanded because of the demand in the courses, so that we employed more instructors and were able to have a ladder of promotion. I think that was a time when the department was no longer an experiment. It was taken for granted, and its needs were attended to more directly and more immediately than before.

SMITH

Would you expand the number of people teaching in European art? For instance, you had the medievalist. Would you have two medievalists at that point?

KUBLER

Yes. Oh, yes.

SMITH

What about expansion into Islamic art?

KUBLER

The whole period was one of the flourishing of medieval studies throughout the system of the American universities. Medieval studies came into a sort of golden age, which no longer is the case. Medieval studies have shriveled in

many universities where they used to be more important. So changes of curriculum are to be noted.

SMITH

The expansion of the areas.

KUBLER

Expansion of some areas of study, not at the expense of others, but shriveling of others. Medieval studies shriveled after the 1950s.

SMITH

Do you remember your first trip back to Europe after the war? I know you had mentioned one time that you met [André] Leroi-Gourhan in the forties.

KUBLER

Yes. That was a congress. We attended a congress just after the war. The French were still eating corn bread, which they detested--corn bread which we had provided them with. [laughter] I remember we traveled with an enormous amount of luggage with foodstuffs we knew would be needed in Paris. We were wined and dined in Paris, and we always had some supplies with us when we were guests.

REESE

Did you travel beyond Paris?

KUBLER

Yes. We went to Bordeaux, and we went to places we both wanted to see. We traveled quite a bit that summer.

REESE

Into Germany at all?

KUBLER

No, not at all. Only France.

REESE

What kind of recollections do you have of having revisited Europe after the war?

KUBLER

Oh, well, some of them were very amusing. Going to Margaux, where the Margaux wine-- That house at Margaux. I wouldn't call it a château, but that wine factory had been a Kommandantur of the Germans. They occupied it and kept it very orderly and didn't damage it in any way and didn't damage the wine cellar, which is a historic wine cellar. They had only recently left. So we were interested in seeing the wine cellar, which we did. The wine cellar was full of suspended alcohol in the atmosphere. It was cool, but just breathing for a couple of hours is intoxicating. We really came out into the summer sunshine intoxicated, without having drunk anything. So we decided to take the train up to the end of the Médoc, which is the point where the English always embarked and debarked in the Hundred Years War, to the Cathédrale engloutie by the sands of the Atlantic, and sobered up in the waves.

SMITH

I wanted to get into your College Art Association involvement, but before that I wanted to ask you, how did the McCarthy period play itself out at Yale University or in the art history department? Were there problems?

KUBLER

No, it was a distant storm. It didn't touch us at all.

SMITH

In terms of the College Art Association, when did you start attending its meetings?

KUBLER

I suppose from the time I became an instructor.

SMITH

'Thirty-eight. Could you give us a thumbnail sketch of the climate of the meetings of that time? The highlights.

KUBLER

It was a very small association then. It's much bigger now. The meetings were interesting and worth attending. Becoming acquainted with colleagues all around the country. It was a very useful organization. To this day it still includes artists. Artists attend the annual meetings, and there are sessions they arrange on their own. There is that division.

SMITH

The studio instructors.

KUBLER

The artist will come to hear lectures by the art historian, but the historians don't go very often to the meetings of the artists.

SMITH

What about the leadership of the organization at that time? Can you give us any recollections?

KUBLER

It was the older art historians, with a professional staff assisting them. The professional staff really ran the affairs of the College Art Association.

SMITH

Within the organization, did you feel that there was room for the kind of perspectives that you and others were bringing into the field?

KUBLER

I think so. They were accessible. Speakers on topics of my interest were not infrequent.

SMITH

Both theoretical interests and specific topic interest?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Was there any expression of resentment at new theoretical importation into the field?

KUBLER

I don't remember it.

SMITH

We had talked initially about, for instance, the Dean [Everett] Meeks class, and I would presume that most of the people attending the meeting at that time were still teaching those kinds of classes.

KUBLER

Yes. Well, Dean Meeks was another generation. [laughter]

REESE

Was there a sense of camps among art historians?

KUBLER

Well, yes, of course. Each campus was a camp. [laughter]

SMITH

Maybe we could expand on that, since I think you've talked a little bit about Harvard and--

KUBLER

Yes. The distinct missions of the universities, yes.

SMITH

--NYU [New York University] and Princeton, but maybe we could go beyond that to some of the other campuses. For instance, did [University of California] Berkeley have a contingent at that time? What was your perception of Berkeley or of [University of] Wisconsin [-Madison]?

KUBLER

Berkeley never made much of a representation at the College Art Association. I think the smaller campuses sent more speakers and persons attending. But Berkeley's history of art didn't seem to be as notable as Stanford [University],

for example, or UCLA. If I have an accurate impression-- But I never was-- I became editor of the Art Bulletin, but I was never part of the administrative machinery of the College Art Association.

SMITH

What about the University of Chicago?

KUBLER

University of Chicago was very active, and I was invited to teach there for a summer. I knew people at the University of Chicago who were respected professors.

SMITH

How would you compare their method with the Yale method or the Yale approach?

KUBLER

I don't know of any distinct character that the University of Chicago's history of art had at that time. They had a whole battery of courses. A German was--

REESE

[Ulrich] Middeldorf.

KUBLER

Middeldorf was a principal figure and the organizing figure of their activities. But I never had the sense that it was a distinct mission.

REESE

How about the University of Pennsylvania, both in the field of archaeology and art history?

KUBLER

The archaeology was much stronger; art history was always the lesser organization. And the University Museum is a remarkable museum.

REESE

You knew Robert [C.] Smith well in those years?

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

Could you say something about Robert's--?

KUBLER

Yes, the Portuguese specialist who spoke Portuguese so well that he was arrested in Lisbon during the war. [laughter]

SMITH

Arrested? How come?

KUBLER

Well, it was suspicious that a foreigner--an obvious foreigner--should speak Portuguese so well. So they arrested him to see who he was. [laughter]

SMITH

Well, we'll get into the Portuguese studies later. And maybe we'll discuss him somewhat then. How did you come to be chosen as editor of the Art Bulletin?

KUBLER

Well, that was always the work of a committee and of the College Art Association on the Art Bulletin, on its publications, which also included the Art Journal. That committee picked me. I think there's probably the work of one person who would be-- I've forgotten his name.

REESE

But that was during the period between 1945 and '47.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Did you receive institutional support from Yale to undertake those tasks?

KUBLER

Not really. Not really. Perhaps I was relieved of a course, but I had no funding and the College Art Association gave me no salary. It was really a donated service.

SMITH

What was the state of the Art Bulletin when you inherited it?

KUBLER

It was very healthy, and I tried to introduce a new feature or two. I remember getting René d'Harnoncourt to submit something for an exhibition he had organized--Oceanic art--but I really didn't change anything permanently.

REESE

It put you in a unique position to sense the temperature of art history at that moment in receiving so many articles.

KUBLER

Yes. I started as a book review editor, and then they made me editor.

REESE

Were the articles largely from senior professionals? Or already had a large number of articles by younger--?

KUBLER

All up and down the ladder. There were lots of articles submitted, and then lots were rejected.

REESE

Were there any episodes that emerged from such conditions?

KUBLER

No. I don't think so. No. I don't remember any. It was a three-year term, I think.

SMITH

Did you feel a necessity of balancing different approaches to art history method?

KUBLER

Well, I tried to favor subjects I was interested in. In encouraging René d'Harnoncourt-- He didn't write very much, wasn't in the habit of writing, but had interesting ideas.

REESE

About the same time, in 1945, you were the guest editor of a special issue of the Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians dedicated to Latin American art.

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

Do you remember the conditions under which that invitation occurred?

KUBLER

No, and there was nothing singular about them. They had been interested, the architectural historians, in amplifying the range of their publication, and did so effectively.

REESE

Do you recall whether it was something you proposed to them or that they invited you to do?

KUBLER

Well, I think I suggested it to them and they accepted for that issue. Since then, they've always been very open to the history of all forms of building and to connections with the rest of the history of art. But they had that already.

SMITH

Let's go back to the growth of the department at Yale. We might start with the chairs of the department as you recall them. If you could give us a thumbnail sketch of the various chairs and of the department's perception of its goals, how that might have developed. I presume Focillon was the first chair.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

When he died, who succeeded him as chair?

KUBLER

Crosby--Sumner Crosby. And Sumner Crosby stayed as chairman for a long time and with the approval of the rest of us. He was almost a permanent chairman. Then the rest of us took our turns after him. So that the department was really administered by Crosby for, oh, at least ten years, maybe longer.

SMITH

Did he have particular views about how the department should grow?

KUBLER

He was attentive to the needs of everyone. That's why he stayed so long. [laughter] And he was very wise, a very wise chairman.

REESE

The first new faculty member to be added to the original core was Vincent Scully?

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

Do you recall the moment in which Scully was invited to the faculty and discussions about the role modern architecture would play within the new department?

KUBLER

I don't remember. I don't remember any special discussion or that his appointment was a problem. It seemed obvious.

SMITH

Whose idea was it?

KUBLER

Well, perhaps it was just so obvious that he should be asked-- I've forgotten-- His shingle style [The Shingle Style and the Stick Style: Architectural Theory and Design from Richardson to the Origins of Wright] had appeared, and that was much approved. We knew there were more. [laughter]

REESE

He had heard Focillon lecture.

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

And had he taken classes with you as a graduate student or undergraduate?

KUBLER

Yes. I taught him.

SMITH

I noticed in Tom's notes there's a comment that Lehmann scolded you for allowing Scully to do a paper on Greek art. Do you recall that episode?

KUBLER

No. It's vanished. No, I don't remember. Oh, I think Lehmann disapproved of Scully's famous book.

REESE

The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods.

KUBLER

The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods, yes.

SMITH

Okay, that's what it is.

KUBLER

He disapproved of that, yes. I do remember. I tried to have Lehmann appointed to a chair at Yale. But he was appointed elsewhere, and I had no success with the suggestion at Yale.

REESE

Where there any other senior faculty from outside Yale whom you remember being invited, particularly during these early years? The Lehmann appointment would have been in the fifties, so--

KUBLER

Yes, if it had gone anywhere. But there was opposition from the classics department. The Department of Classics was undergoing a transformation. They had had a long period of being dominated by archaeologists, and they wanted to return dominion to the philologists. The philologists were in the ascendant, and they rejected any more archaeologists. That's why Lehmann was--

SMITH

Would that have had to have been a dual appointment, given his background?

KUBLER

Not necessarily. It wouldn't have made any difference to us whether he was in classics or in history of art or both.

REESE

Frank Brown was at the classics department for a long time.

KUBLER

Frank Brown was classics, yes. He was an archaeologist, but he was also a philologist. He had strength in both camps.

REESE

I was interested in pursuing the courses, the range of courses, that you were teaching after the war. Were you teaching courses in prehistory or ancient civilizations beyond pre-Columbian?

KUBLER

No. After the war I was more and more concentrating on ancient America and colonial Latin America.

REESE

Where you teaching any methodology courses?

KUBLER

And methodology courses.

REESE

You did teach that that early.

KUBLER

Yes. I taught them steadily before, during, and after the war.

SMITH

What about students who were interested in African art or East Asian art, other non-European art? Were you the person who would direct them?

KUBLER

No, but Robert Thompson was appointed to be the Africanist, and remains.

SMITH

When was he appointed?

KUBLER

Oh, I would say late fifties.

SMITH

What would you have done before his appointment? Would you have had students who would come to you and say, "I'm interested in an aspect of African art"? What would you tell them?

KUBLER

I would suggest that they go to the anthropology department.

SMITH

Really?

REESE

Did you ever teach African, Islamic, or Asian art as a part of the courses that you did?

KUBLER

Not really, no, no. Not within a serious use of time.

SMITH

So the Introduction to Art class that, I presume, you had to teach from time to time--

KUBLER

Yes. I took part in the introductory course along with the rest of the department. Each of us lectured on his specialty. That's the way that course was run for a long time. That was a huge course with four hundred undergraduates attending.

SMITH

So that would really be a focus on the development of European art, from Egypt to--

KUBLER

No, it was world art.

SMITH

World art.

KUBLER

World art, with scant attention to the lesser breeds. [laughter]

REESE

I'm particularly interested because of Scully's The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods what general training he might have had in the field of prehistory, of cave painting, in the methodology of dealing with European prehistory.

KUBLER

Yes. That book is very personal to him. It's his vision of Greek art, of Greek architecture, of Greek temple art, yes.

REESE

But I'm thinking specifically of the potential sources in the Yale faculty of his interests.

KUBLER

It's very much his book. It was very much his book.

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KUBLER

The thesis of the book [The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods by Vincent Scully] is contested by professional Hellenists.

REESE

Did the arrival of Vincent Scully bring about any change in how art history lecturing within the department was perceived? In other words, clearly the drama of Scully's lectures is something still remarked upon by many people.

KUBLER

Yes. The only person to match him is [Robert Ferris] Thompson. Thompson's lecturing style is perhaps related to Vincent's. Vincent's, however, and Thompson's are very different. Thompson's is very anecdotal and full of other performances--musical performances and so on. Vincent is pure Vincent.

REESE

Would you see any connection between Scully and [Henri] Focillon's style of lecturing, or are they very different?

KUBLER

Very different. Very different. The emotionality of Vincent's was absent from Focillon.

SMITH

In terms of your own personal involvement in selection of faculty-- For instance, someone whose focus is modern architecture, would you be very much involved in that selection?

KUBLER

Would I be invited to have an opinion, you mean.

SMITH

Well, you probably would be invited to have an opinion, but would you have a strong opinion in any event? Would it be something that would be a field where you would feel that you had a need to express?

KUBLER

I don't think so, no. Modern architecture, I haven't spent enough time on it.

SMITH

So, in that sense, you would tend to defer to the colleagues who are--

KUBLER

Oh, I would defer, yes. I wouldn't expect to be on the committee.

SMITH

What about, say, approaches to scholarly works, scholarly writing? There is a range--

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

But would you be concerned about whether someone's writing was perhaps more literary than scholarly, than rigorous?

KUBLER

Well, I would be inclined to prefer to be consulted on works of rigorous scholarship.

REESE

The question I asked about Scully's lecture style was in following up discussion yesterday about the lost history of lecturing as a style, as a rhetorical form. I was wondering if you could recall other people who preceded Vincent Scully with whom this very dramatic presentation was there? Or whether it's something really that was emerging, new in the profession?

KUBLER

There may be a tradition of it at Yale [University] in other departments, especially the English department with people like Chauncey Tinker. Chauncey Tinker's style is not unrelated to Vincent's. [laughter]

SMITH

For instance, would it be a factor in the selection of somebody--? Well, let's say Scully at the time.

KUBLER

It might be.

SMITH

That the art history department needs to get a little more visibility, and perhaps we need a lecturer with more flair?

KUBLER

It might be.

SMITH

Was it in that case, do you know?

KUBLER

I wasn't in on Vincent's promotion to professor. I was away, I think. It may very well be that he had become necessary.

SMITH

We've alluded to institutional politics before. That President [Charles] Seymour [Sr.] was very instrumental to the foundation of the department.

Dean [Everett] Meeks. And the fact that there was some opposition and ongoing hostility from the classics department, anthropology. Perhaps another department was mentioned.

KUBLER

History.

SMITH

History, right. What happened with the art history department's relationship with central administration after Seymour was no longer president?

KUBLER

Well, the department is still very secure and not-- Demand for its services is not reduced. On the contrary, voluntary enrollment is increasing, so the department is needed, continuously needed.

SMITH

Was there ever any question of making art history classes mandatory? Part of the general requirements?

KUBLER

Well, it's always been among options, but never mandatory by itself in a separate category.

REESE

I'd like to come back just for a minute to Bob Thompson, because I know he has said to me in the past that you personally were responsible for encouraging him to come back into art history. Do you recall--? He had been an undergraduate at Yale [University] and then left and came back. Do you remember any of the specific--?

KUBLER

No, I don't. I don't remember this decision of his, but I remember him in seminar as a very valuable member of the class.

REESE

Did you direct his dissertation?

KUBLER

No, I don't think so. Perhaps. Yes, I think I followed it while he was writing it.

SMITH

So you were on his committee.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

But then his chair presumably would have been in anthropology?

KUBLER

No. He was appointed in history of art.

SMITH

Yeah, but I mean his--

KUBLER

He was never any part of anthropology.

SMITH

But his field is African art, correct?

KUBLER

Yes. But I don't believe the anthropologists would have him in their list. He has an enormous following among the undergraduates. He, like Scully.

SMITH

Who were some of the other faculty members whose recruitment you were particularly involved in? Where your opinion was a leading opinion in bringing the person to Yale?

KUBLER

Well, while I was chairman, I had that opportunity. But since being chairman, I've not had any such opportunities. [laughter]

SMITH

While you were chair, were there particular people that you wanted? You've mentioned Karl Lehmann.

KUBLER

Oh, yes, I was privy to many appointments, involved in accepting or quashing them. But I've forgotten the names and the case histories.

SMITH

Without necessarily mentioning names, in terms of the quashing, I would presume that anybody whose name would be suggested as a potential candidate would be, certainly, in the upper levels of scholarship or would have a body of work that would be quite impressive to reach even the point where they would be considered for an appointment at Yale. So what would be the rationale--not so much in terms of the person, but in terms of the vision of the department--for deciding that somebody was not really suitable for the Yale department?

KUBLER

Well, lack of publication or inadequate publication. Publications that are inadequate.

SMITH

Even though they might be plentiful?

KUBLER

Even though they might be plentiful. The quality of publication would be first consideration. And I'm speaking, I think, for the department. And the promise as a teacher of equal importance.

SMITH

But in terms of publication and quality of publication, what I'm trying to get at-- Was there an underlying assumption or underlying cultural conception of Yale art history that would focus your attention on one scholar rather than another scholar? Even though their publications might both be equal in

quantity and perhaps someone outside might say, "Well, they're both of equal scholarly value, though their approaches are different."

KUBLER

Well, as I remember-- And I haven't had any opportunity to have an opinion since retirement. But as I remember, the ideal profile was always that of being read a lot and having a powerful presence as a lecturer.

SMITH

"Read a lot" would presume that there would be, for instance, certain journals--

KUBLER

There are books and articles enough to be a body of work.

SMITH

But would there be certain journals that would be more important than others?

KUBLER

Well, yes. Certainly Playboy would not be one. [laughter]

SMITH

Well, yes.

REESE

I'm afraid this might be a roller coaster ride and unfair, but I have tried from memory to put down some of the names of the people who were brought on to the Yale faculty during the fifties, a point in time where you were playing some important administrative roles. I wonder if you might say something about each. Just what you remember about them, their training. Bob [Robert] Herbert.

KUBLER

Yes. I was not in on that appointment.

REESE

Because he was trained at the Institute [of Fine Arts, New York University] I take it, and must have been an important appointment from outside the Yale faculty. George Hersey.

KUBLER

George Hersey's appointment I had nothing to do with.

REESE

William McDonald.

KUBLER

William McDonald I did, and that was very unfortunate. He was a classical scholar and quite a good one. I backed his appointment, and then he took offense at being denied promotion. He was brought into the lower rank. He took offense at being denied promotion, and he had the support of two others who also were going to have to wait a long time to be promoted. So they made a cabal, and the result was that they resigned.

SMITH

They were denied promotion by the faculty of the department?

KUBLER

By the faculty, yes.

SMITH

You had voted against promotion.

KUBLER

We voted against promotion.

REESE

If I recall, it was in conflict with the AAUP [American Association of University Professors] general guidelines about "six years up or out" that this was brought there on the Yale faculty.

KUBLER

That was it, yes.

REESE

Several faculty had been here that time. Therefore, there was--

KUBLER

Eligible, eligible for--

REESE

It was forced to either promote--

KUBLER

Or out, or get out, yes.

REESE

Or out, because of that external guideline.

KUBLER

Well, this was regarded as McDonald's work.

REESE

Jules Prown.

KUBLER

Jules Prown?

REESE

Did he come during the years when you were chair?

KUBLER

No, he was one of the more recent arrivals in the department and a very valuable member. He is. The mention of McDonald brings up-- That was a very grave crisis for all of us, being deserted, in a way, by these valuable people, who if they had been more patient would have been promoted. There was a third one.

REESE

[Edgar] Munhall? [Nelson] Wu? [Spires] Kostoff?

KUBLER

Kostoff was one of the group. And then the most pathetic one was a baroque specialist.

REESE

Bill [William] Crelly.

KUBLER

Crelly suffered most from this episode. I had no part in this. After being chairman, I was privileged by not having any part in the internal affairs of the department. I was more and more on my own.

SMITH

The only thing I'd like to pursue on this--and I think we could wrap it up pretty quickly--is if there were any particular individuals that you initiated the recruitment of, that you had definitely wanted to bring to Yale.

KUBLER

No, I never did. I never did. My one attempt was Lehmann.

SMITH

Okay. We thought maybe we should get back to the postwar period, the immediate postwar period in the 1940s, and the time you had--

REESE

I'm thinking particularly about the study that you did with [G.] Evelyn Hutchinson on guano archaeology and how that project came about, how the collaboration with Hutchinson developed.

KUBLER

Well, I've known Hutchinson and talked with him a good deal about a variety of matters, and I wrote this paper without having consulted him. When I'd written it, I showed it to him. He pointed out things that I needed to know, and those were incorporated in the article. But I've always enjoyed his company.

SMITH

You had, as part of [The] Religious Architecture of New Mexico [in the Colonial Period and since the American Occupation (1940)], developed your dendrochronology.

KUBLER

Oh, yes, that was it.

SMITH

Now, ten years later you have the guano chronology. So during that period of time you seemed to be concerned about establishing some measure of dating things. Then it seems to stop being a major aspect of your work. Is that because you decided that absolute chronology was not as important?

KUBLER

Well, the case of the guano chronology is a case in point. During the time I was concerned with that article and working out a scale for the Peruvian coast-- A time scale for the Peruvian coast, which proved to be the correct one. At that same time, the carbon-14 chronology was being worked out, and the carbon-14 chronology confirmed the guano chronology for the north coast of Peru. So that I was correct, but my method was not usable outside the coast of Peru, [laughter] whereas carbon-14 chronology is valuable worldwide.

SMITH

The need for absolute chronology still seems to be--

KUBLER

Absolute chronology is desirable.

SMITH

And we still lack absolute methods for the--?

KUBLER

Well, carbon 14 is it.

SMITH

Though, as I understand, in some of the southwest American artifacts you have dates that vary from 8,000 to 80,000 B.C. That's a pretty significant gap in terms of the conclusions you draw.

KUBLER

Depends on contamination.

SMITH

In terms of your own work, as your work shifted into the pre-Columbian work, where I suppose it would be more necessary, did you determine that you did not need to have absolute dating as much as you had before?

KUBLER

No, on the contrary, the more absolute dating that we can discover the better.

SMITH

In [The Art and Architecture of] Ancient America: [The Mexican, Maya, and Andean Peoples (1962)] you do present your own proposals about chronologies of things.

KUBLER

Oh, they're very-- My chronologies are based on existing work by others. They're not my work.

SMITH

Nonetheless, they were controversial conclusions that you drew.

KUBLER

Perhaps, but the chronologies are, as much as possible, reflections of proven cases.

REESE

The choice of the guano archaeology must have been determined by a need to date very specifically certain objects that fell within those things.

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

What were, for you, the most important artifacts that you were trying to date through that method?

KUBLER

It was pottery. Mochica pottery, which is produced over a long time for which the chronological position was floating. Nobody knew quite where to put it. The guano archaeology was a case of burial sites on one island where guano was a commercial product ever since the 1840s. Those stacks of guano are stratified, and the appearance of the potteries at different levels in the guano. So that the style can be dated by position in the guano, of which there are records of the great stacks as they were being exploited, for the agriculture of Europe much more than for us.

REESE

Again, it was the earlier interest in Mochica pottery that you had originally, in fact, consulted [Alfred] Kroeber about.

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

It's interesting to me also, as we look at the density of projects, that you were involved in very different fields, from Aztec sculpture to calendars to ethnohistory in Peru to Mochica pottery. Could you say something about your scholarly habits of work? Do you work on one project at a time? Or do you keep several things simultaneously moving along? Have you thought at all about analyzing yourself in that way?

KUBLER

Usually, I am completely involved in whatever I'm writing and not attending to anything else. But I find that I come back to earlier articles and find good reasons for rewriting and amplifying and then enlarging them. So that in tending to do that more than writing new work-- Revising the older work in the light of what's happened in the interval.

SMITH

Published older work or unpublished work?

KUBLER

Published work--published papers.

REESE

But generally the tendency is to do one project at a time.

KUBLER

I work on one thing at a time.

SMITH

But it did seem like in the forties you were working on Mexican Architecture [of the Sixteenth Century (1948)], Tovar Calendar--

KUBLER

Well, they're all at different stages of publication. That's the thing that makes them interfere with one another.

SMITH

And the two Peruvian books [The Indian Caste of Peru, 1795-1940: A Population Study Based upon Tax Records and Census Reports (1952) and Cuzco: Reconstruction of the Town and Restoration of Its Monuments (1951)] are of a different nature.

REESE

What about the relationship between your teaching and the ideas you have for research? Does the research precede the seminar or does the teaching sometimes produce a focus for the research, a complementary--?

KUBLER

Both ways. Preparing lectures often suggests topics for research, and teaching the material also suggests needs that can be worked on.

SMITH

Can you think of any particular studies that emerged out of your lectures?

KUBLER

Well, perhaps everything I've written has somehow been in the lectures, at least germinating.

SMITH

Germinating in the lectures. That is the distinction, I think, that we're trying to get out.

KUBLER

Yes, the teaching is the place where one has to have something to say, and then having taught it, one can find more without teaching it.

REESE

I've always found in reading your work that there is something very dramatic about the idea of each article that often seems to start from some angle of vision that's unexpected. If we take the guano archaeology, it's not a subject that would occur to everyone. Was it looking at photographs of guano? What was the moment that captured your imagination?

KUBLER

I think that's-- Yes. I found, in my reading, a photograph of the 1850s of one of these huge stacks of guano, and I knew that there was pottery in there and that the records of that pottery showed that it had come from that island and probably in the vicinity of that stack. So I could proceed from there.

REESE

Did you see a certain humor from it as well?

KUBLER

Yes. [laughter]

REESE

What I'm asking is a serious question. Did the humor itself give you a certain amount of added energy?

KUBLER

Oh, yes. It induced me to go to the guano islands and experience the fragrance of the islands. [laughter]

REESE

I don't want to get too far afield from Richard, but since we're talking about research methods, if it is okay I'd like to ask if you have noted, in the time that you've spent working on scholarly research, changes in your own working methods. I'm thinking not merely about the compilation of data, but the actual writing. I mean, do you divide research from writing in a very rigorous way?

KUBLER

Oh, very much so. Research is extensive and writing is intensive. It's a different operation bringing it together. What to write becomes evident only during research.

REESE

So it's a fascination--

KUBLER

And then writing points to lacunae in the research, and one has to go back over the material again.

REESE

Can you describe your own process of beginning to research a subject? I know it's hard to generalize about everything because each phase is distinct, but--

KUBLER

It's usually reading everything I get my hands on and expanding the area of literature that I can discover that's relevant. And then having collected that and thinking about it, a plan of writing emerges and I try to write it.

REESE

At what point does the definition of the problem emerge? Is it prior to the research, generally, that you fix upon what the problem is?

KUBLER

No, the problem emerges from the research. But there has to be a decision that the research is going to be profitable.

SMITH

I guess I'm puzzled about how the problem can emerge in the research. Because how can you do the research--?

KUBLER

It hasn't been done. Well, those are intuitions of profitability. Is this going to be worth the while? Is this going to be worth my while?

SMITH

Does that mean that you attempt to approach the raw material with a clean mind, in the sense of no clear predispositions?

KUBLER

I guess that this is going to be profitable.

SMITH

But you don't go into it with an idea of what the problem might likely be.

KUBLER

Well, sometimes. Sometimes the problem is visible. But sometimes it's elusive. One has to dig it out. But it's there intuitively. Intuitively there is something there. That was the case with the guano archaeology.

SMITH

Well, let's take Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century. When you started that book, how well formulated was the problem at the beginning?

KUBLER

Probably the formulation by Robert Ricard was the start of that book, and I benefited greatly from Ricard's treatment.

SMITH

In the Tovar Calendar did the problem emerge in the course of doing the research or--?

KUBLER

There are models for that sort of study. One can follow an accepted model and depart from it. The use of the article is in departing from the model, so very often there is a model from which one departs.

REESE

Do you generally write from an outline? Do you structure--? Once you've completed your research, do you envision a structure and then write?

KUBLER

There is a point when I can't find anything more to read. That's about the time that I see the outline of what can be said.

REESE

Could you talk about the writing process for you? Do you write for long periods of time, short periods of time? Is it the pen?

KUBLER

When I'm writing I do nothing else. I try to be economical rather than verbose.

SMITH

You say you do nothing else, but at the same time you have to teach. So how would you balance the demands of teaching and the demands of writing?

KUBLER

Well, I just go and teach.

SMITH

Because you have your lecture notes already prepared, you have your repertoire in hand, as it were?

KUBLER

I can always review the previous notes.

REESE

Do you have habits of writing morning, evening, all through the day?

KUBLER

In the writing mode it's all the time, all the time that's available. Just write it until it's written.

REESE

And you've always written in longhand?

KUBLER

Yes. I don't like typing because I can't hear the words, I'm hearing the typing. But longhand, with a no. 2 pencil, I can hear my words--how they fit and where they're repetitious, where they're excessive, where they don't sound well.

REESE

Is writing an enjoyable activity for you?

KUBLER

Very, very. I enjoy it. I always enjoy it, because I try not to write until I'm ready to say something. Like writing letters--you write them when you have to.

REESE

Do you spend much time with dictionaries at all when you--?

KUBLER

Oh, yes, yes, and thesaurus, Roget--alternate expressions.

REESE

Have you thought at all, both when you write and when you read others, about art history as literature? Art history as a language which can be-- You know, something that is distinct from other forms of writing.

KUBLER

I think a lot about its being readable and interesting. Will this be interesting, and how could I make it interesting?

SMITH

Interesting to whom?

KUBLER

Well, to my idea of a reader, of a reader who is very much like me, who would be satisfied by what I am doing. [laughter] In other words, it's a personage. The reader is a personage of no determined characteristics, excepting that he's rather like you, the writer.

REESE

Yesterday, or two days ago, Richard touched briefly on your reading habits, but that was specifically as an undergraduate. When you think about your own writing about history-- Could you say something about other art historians who write in a way that has some of the qualities that you particularly enjoy? Not that they write like you, but write in a style that has a quality that you liked.

KUBLER

Oh, yes. I can think of many, and in different fields. For example, the writing of [André] Leroi- Gourhan in *Les mots et les choses* is delightful to me.

REESE

How about [Michel] Foucault or--?

KUBLER

Leroi-Gourhan. It's a book of his called *Les mots et les choses*. I think it's in two volumes.

SMITH

[Claude] Lévi-Strauss?

KUBLER

Lévi-Strauss, yes. I've never taken Leroi- Gourhan as a model or Robert Ricard as a model, but I admire their method and their use of language.

SMITH

What about English-language art historians?

KUBLER

[Erwin] Panofsky was very good in English.

SMITH

As a stylist.

KUBLER

Better than in German--much better than in German. His German is less elegant.

REESE

I think particularly Panofsky's correspondence, where there are brilliant pieces of humor.

KUBLER

Oh, he's such a wit, such a wit.

REESE

I think of some of your twists of ideas with humor.

**1.14. TAPE NUMBER: VII, SIDE TWO
MARCH 29, 1991**

SMITH

In line with this is the work with publishers and editors, and their influence, if any, on the subjects you've chosen or the way in which you write.

KUBLER

I would say it's very little. I never had to rewrite a lot for a publisher and I've never written anything on demand from a publisher excepting in the case of the Pelican books. In all my relations with publishers they've always been pacific--yes, peaceful. I've never had any quarrels with publishers. When they've accepted what I've written, it doesn't have to be changed very much. I never had any of that fighting with publishers, and I've never expected my works to sell widely, so I never had conflict with publishers on the commercial side either. I take their terms.

SMITH

With the Pelican series, in some respects that was a commercial venture. Maybe you didn't look at it that way, but I know that [Nikolaus] Pevsner did.

KUBLER

It certainly was for the publisher.

SMITH

Did that influence--?

KUBLER

But I never felt that the Pevsner series was a commercial series. It was, but it wasn't for me.

SMITH

Are there editors that you worked with over a long period of time?

KUBLER

I've worked with Yale [University] Press for a long time, but their editors change a lot. I don't remember owing a debt to a publisher for literary questions.

SMITH

I wasn't thinking so much of a debt as just a--

KUBLER

Occasionally a journal editor will make very useful suggestions with which I agree, but I don't depend upon editing, as I think some people do.

SMITH

Have you concerned yourself at all about developments of publishing trends within the art historical field and whether they were an expansion or a contraction of topics or approaches over periods of time?

KUBLER

No, I haven't thought about it much, but I'm always glad that when I need a publisher, there's one for the article or the book without too much waiting.

SMITH

Aside from the Pelican series, you have not started a book knowing who the publisher would be up front?

KUBLER

Oh, yes. I often have without knowing who the publisher would be, and it would turn out to be Yale Press. [laughter]

REESE

In relationship to the question about your reading habits, we've talked about the way you do a subject. Do you continue to read fiction avidly, as you did in your undergraduate years, and do you find any play between, you know, your reading of literary fiction and your work?

KUBLER

No. I think that sort of interplay is rather more in technical subjects such as anthropological studies. An anthropological study is often food for thought, or a mathematical paper can be food for thought. But fiction, poetry are rarely suggestive of material that I would like to pursue further. I generally get it from books by other people on technical subjects.

REESE

I remember one time you were commenting that you'd read a great deal of Henry James at this point and of Thomas Mann at another. Do you still pursue that kind of reading? I'm talking about since the fifties.

KUBLER

I've read less and less fiction. I've read more and more in technical studies of one kind and another.

SMITH

Perhaps continuing on this trend, or away from the fiction and poetry, would be your self-education or your reading in general intellectual movements in

the postwar periods. And the most obvious one would be existentialism. Could you--?

KUBLER

Yes. I'm on the edge of it, but I never get deeply involved.

SMITH

Did you read Sartre and--?

KUBLER

Yes, and Foucault.

SMITH

What about phenomenology and Husserl, Heidegger?

KUBLER

I'm not deeply versed in those authors, but I'm aware of what they're doing.

SMITH

[Hans-Georg] Gadamer or [Jürgen] Habermas?

KUBLER

I know of them, but I'm not a student of them.

SMITH

These philosophical schools have not been important in terms of provoking your thoughts.

KUBLER

Not directly. I get them indirectly and in a fragmentary way.

SMITH

In the fifties there was a whole explosion of interest in holistic psychology: Erich Fromm, the Gestalt movement. Did you--?

KUBLER

I was aware of it.

SMITH

Again, but not deeply.

KUBLER

Yes. But not deeply.

SMITH

You would not have been--

KUBLER

Not investing in it.

SMITH

You would have not assigned any of these texts as ancillary readings.

KUBLER

I don't think so. I don't think so, no.

SMITH

What about in the field of linguistic semiotics?

KUBLER

There I have dabbled more.

SMITH

But are you familiar with the Prague school? With [Jan] Muka_ovský?

KUBLER

When the topic comes to me, I'm much more engage in it than when I no longer need it.

SMITH

I raise this partly because these are not things that appear in your footnotes, but one wonders if you've been reading these things.

KUBLER

I know of them and I've dabbled in them, but I've never invested in them deeply.

SMITH

You mentioned yesterday that you began to think less of Kroeber's work. I was wondering if you could specify more when that occurred. Was it a change in you or was it a change in Kroeber? Or both.

KUBLER

I think it was a change in Kroeber. Kroeber's early work is more impressive than his later work, which was the work on which his reputation was built, when he became interested in world history without the necessary equipment. He was citing historians instead of writing history.

SMITH

Are you talking about Configuration of Culture?

KUBLER

Yes. The late books are unconvincing.

SMITH

So would this be stuff that he was already writing by the time you met him?

KUBLER

No. When I knew him it was not long before his death. But his later work is just less thoroughly grounded than his early work. His early work is very thoroughly grounded.

SMITH

When did you begin to start reading the works of Lévi-Strauss and the structuralist anthropologists?

KUBLER

Oh, I would say in the forties, fifties.

SMITH

Were you familiar with the work of [Maurice] Merleau-Ponty or Marcel Mauss?

KUBLER

Marcel Mauss, yes. Merleau-Ponty, less.

SMITH

Well, I know you have criticisms of Lévi-Strauss. I wonder if you could outline them for us. I mean, for instance, do you find the binary method convincing?

KUBLER

Yes. But not useful.

SMITH

Not useful. Because of the level of generality?

KUBLER

Yes. I wouldn't say that I need Lévi-Strauss. [laughter] I have used him, but I haven't needed him.

SMITH

I was going to say, are you familiar with the controversy between Lévi-Strauss and [Edmund] Leach?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

How did you interpret that? Did you draw any conclusions?

KUBLER

I would stay with Lévi-Strauss.

REESE

In an earlier conversation that we had, you were talking about scholarship that has a spark of life to it, that breathes. When you read Lévi-Strauss or Leroi- Gourhan or Foucault, is it to use it or to find the person and their mind?

KUBLER

I think the latter. I think it's the latter-- find the mind, find the configuration and use what I can.

SMITH

The whole of a culture as a structure that Lévi-Strauss outlines in various places, for instance in *Tristes Tropiques*, where he takes the three Indian societies in Brazil with similar artistic motifs, but shows how the meanings of these motifs are fundamentally different because of their position in the structural formation, is that something that you could apply to the Mesoamerican situation?

KUBLER

I haven't needed it. But the Mesoamerican situation is an archaeological situation rather than an ethnological one. And Lévi-Strauss is more an ethnologist than an archaeologist.

SMITH

But still, wouldn't a conclusion from his position be that the jaguar image or the serpent image, even though it appears in all these different cultures, must have different meanings, because you have to locate it in a whole different social structure?

REESE

What about the Frankfurt school, [Walter] Benjamin and others? Were you conversant with that?

KUBLER

No, I did not know Benjamin.

REESE

And the French, [Jean] Baudrillard--?

KUBLER

No.

SMITH

You did mention Foucault. Is there some particular aspect of Foucault that you found intriguing?

KUBLER

I'm not in him now. [laughter] I'd have to go back.

SMITH

I know this is skipping ahead, but when you mention somebody like Foucault or [Jacques] Derrida or Baudrillard, I begin to think of graduate students from the seventies on who are going to insist on doing their topics within a Foucauldian framework or a Derridean framework. Did that happen to you?

KUBLER

Never.

SMITH

Never.

KUBLER

Excepting, possibly, Focillon.

SMITH

But in terms of your own graduate students, there was never an insisting on using poststructuralist methodologies?

KUBLER

No.

SMITH

Is that because the students who wanted to would have known enough to go to somebody else?

KUBLER

Yes, they would have. Actually, the art historian does not need a literary theory that badly. It's not a necessity.

SMITH

No, it's not a necessity, but there are plenty of books being written which--
What about feminist theory?

KUBLER

Well, I'm certainly in favor of women.

SMITH

But in terms of your own readings, has feminist theory influenced your
thinking about the societies you studied or the artwork?

KUBLER

I'm aware of feminist aspirations and sympathetic with them, but I haven't
spent any time reading about it.

SMITH

And again, in terms of your students, would there be students who would
want to use feminist theory to interpret the art that they want to study?

KUBLER

I haven't had any students for eight years.

SMITH

And before then?

KUBLER

Before then, I have taught many women, and always as human beings rather
than as women.

SMITH

Well, let's go back to the Peru experiences which were discussed a little bit
yesterday. You had some further questions that you wanted to ask on Peru.

REESE

I just wanted to review a little bit how the request for you to go to Peru came
about, and then just a little bit about your remembrances of travel, of
conditions, of friends, of scholars you met there.

KUBLER

Yes. Well, it was commissioned by the Smithsonian [Institution] through an agency that then existed for Latin America. The assignment was to teach at [University of] San Marcos and to teach whatever was needed after consultation with the authorities at San Marcos. I think I said yesterday when we arrived it was at the outbreak of a revolution when [Manuel A.] Odría came to power and the university was closed. So I arranged with the university to teach in the house we had rented.

SMITH

Had you gone down there intending to teach an art history course?

KUBLER

I went with instruction to consult with San Marcos about what they wanted me to teach, which I did.

REESE

What was your sense of economic and social conditions at that point, in the late forties, in South America?

KUBLER

Well, I could speak for Peru, and I visited Colombia on a research matter. Peru, even though it was in military hands from the day of our arrival, was peaceful, excepting for the slaughter of about three thousand persons in a cannonade on the day of the revolution in the harbor city of Callao. Otherwise, it was bloodless. Odría was in full authority, and the streets were patrolled and there was a toque de queda-- one had to be indoors at dusk. The city was quiet, but the university was closed.

REESE

You were then living in the house of Alex Ciurlizza?

KUBLER

No.

REESE

That was later.

KUBLER

No. We hired a house not far from Alex Ciurlizza in San Isidro.

REESE

Did you take a number of trips to Cuzco and to other important--?

KUBLER

We did. We did with students. Betty [Elizabeth Bushnell Kubler] doesn't like high altitudes, and I went to Cuzco on my own because of the altitude. But she did come with us to Ayacucho and Huamanga and that region, which we did in conjunction with a young anthropologist, José Matos, who is now distinguished for his studies of the *barriadas* of Lima, which he's made a lifework of, and he's known the world over for it.

REESE

Where did you travel in Colombia?

KUBLER

We went to Bogotá to look for the work of an eighteenth-century bishop, Martínez de Compañón.

REESE

And did you go to Tunja?

KUBLER

No, only up river to one of the colonial cities of great beauty.

REESE

Tunja Popayán?

KUBLER

Popayán, up to the Magdalena River.

REESE

In that period did you visit Arequipa or Catamarca?

KUBLER

Oh, yes, we were in those cities. We traveled in Peru. I traveled some in Colombia.

REESE

Did you go also into Bolivia, into La Paz?

KUBLER

No.

REESE

Were you seeing equally pre-Columbian and colonial sites along the road?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

When you go to a site for the first time, do you have a procedure for how you look at it?

KUBLER

Depends on one's time, of course, and at no time did I have opening for any sustained work at any site. It was always brief visits to cities and places and sites, but never any extended work. The only extended work that was done was what I mentioned with the demographic question.

SMITH

When you go to a site, is there any procedure that you follow in terms of examining it? Do you try to take notes of any sort?

KUBLER

Well, I ordinarily would prepare an agenda. But with these short visits, one went to get the general layout and get the sense of the condition of the ruins, and that's all one can do in a brief visit. One can't pretend to do anything serious in two days. [laughter]

SMITH

Would you take any rough measurements, if only to confirm previous measurements?

KUBLER

If there were details that were of interest and measurements were necessary, I would do so. If I saw some interesting vessels in a local collection, I would photograph them and measure.

SMITH

Color photographs or black and white?

KUBLER

At that time it was still black and white. Color wasn't so abundantly used. It wasn't so easily available.

REESE

Did you find conditions in Peru significantly different from those in Mexico? I'm thinking of research conditions.

KUBLER

I was much impressed with the respect of the Peruvians for historical matters and the presence of historians in every community. History is revered in Peru. History is part of the national character. They respect history.

REESE

I know Luis Valcarcel was working on this project with you indirectly.

KUBLER

He was head of an institute where José Matos was the younger person. It was an institute without many members, but much respected, and Luis Valcarcel was much respected. But José Matos was the younger man, and Valcarcel was already rather old.

REESE

Did you have the sense of being really alone among North Americans, or did you find colleagues in the field? John Rowe and--

KUBLER

There were many people in the field, and one looked them up when knowing of them. In Lima, they were of help. But really in Lima, owing to these political conditions, we were left very much alone, and the students rejoiced in having a course to go to. [laughter]

SMITH

How long did the university remain closed?

KUBLER

Oh, for a couple of years or more.

REESE

I know there were also difficult times because Betty became ill.

KUBLER

Betty was ill, yes. She had Ménière's disease, which was a disease of the inner ear. Appalling vertigo, for which she was hospitalized. The Ciurlizzas helped with our children, looking to the servants and so on and so forth. We had plenty of help in the house.

REESE

Were you writing during the time you were there on other matters on any of the other books?

KUBLER

While I was writing on this demographic report as we did it, it took several months. We worked on it for three or four months. So we collected all the data, and then it had to be processed.

SMITH

Your second extended trip to Peru came with the Cuzco earthquake.

KUBLER

Yes. That was for UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization].

SMITH

How did that develop as an assignment for you?

KUBLER

Well, I was chief of mission, and there were Peruvians assigned to me. We entered every house in Cuzco and wrote a report on it, which I signed.

SMITH

How did it develop that UNESCO came to you to be the chief of mission? Were there any particular art historical connections involved with that?

KUBLER

I don't know how that happened. The person to whom I was responsible at UNESCO was a Belgian, a Belgian with a Flemish name, van der Hagen. I think he was in charge of South American matters, cultural affairs with Peru. And I reported to him, to van der Hagen. How he knew of me I don't know, but probably from San Marcos and people who had known me in Peru.

REESE

How soon after the earthquake did you arrive and how much time did you actually spend?

KUBLER

Wasn't it '51? It was fairly soon after the earthquake. I think the earthquake was in the winter, the previous winter. We arrived not long after. It was a party of several. There were two Peruvians, and then there were local persons in Cuzco on a list. As I said, we went into every building and checked in person, and measurements and photographs. We had a photographer, a Cuzco photographer, excellent person.

REESE

Who was he?

KUBLER

I've forgotten his name, but he was very good company, very jovial.

SMITH

Did your report then lead to sufficient funds being directed into Cuzco?

KUBLER

A report was published. It is quite a handsome publication of Cuzco. I don't know if you've seen it.

SMITH

No, I haven't.

KUBLER

But in it we made very specific recommendations covering three points, of which the Peruvians complied with one, which was the restoration of the churches. But we also recommended the building of a belt highway cutting Cuzco out of the highway traffic of that valley, so that it could resist the development of Cuzco that was happening, and isolating the center from that peripheral development. That was not observed. Then we recommended that they introduce into Peru some of the new adobe techniques that were being elaborated in the Southwest [United States] and California, adobe construction which in earthquake is surprisingly resistant. To be aware of all that new technology of adobe, which had a chemical aspect, too. That recommendation was ignored, but they did restore the churches as requested, and extensively. They followed all our recommendations [regarding the churches], but ignored the others.

REESE

Do you remember where you stayed and how long you were there?

KUBLER

We were in a hotel on the main square, a very pleasant city hotel. We were lodged there. And I had a counterpart who was an architect in Cuzco.

REESE

It must have provided occasions in which men entered convents and other female institutions for the first time.

KUBLER

Exactly. I was particularly taken with the mother superior of Saint Clair nuns-- Santa Clara nuns. She was a remarkable woman, a great personality. But I wasn't supposed to be there. [laughter] I was there only by orders of the city government.

REESE

Was Wendell Bennett--? I'm trying to think of the associates you had in Peruvian studies who would have been important colleagues and contacts during those years. Bennett clearly.

KUBLER

Bennett, [William] Duncan Strong. Duncan Strong and I went to the guano islands together. Duncan Strong was quite an important archaeologist, and his company was very pleasant.

REESE

Now, is that on the trip to Lima or the Cuzco--?

KUBLER

I think that was during our second trip to Cuzco, to check a second time, in '53.

SMITH

When you came to Peru in '48, were you beginning to think of what you might write about Indian civilizations and their art and architecture?

KUBLER

Yes. I'd been teaching Peruvian history and archaeology from an art historical point of view.

SMITH

At that point, how did you view the relationship of Mesoamerican and Andean historiography? Not the civilizations, but the historiography.

KUBLER

If I understand you, the character of the historical writing of the two areas?

SMITH

And the degree to which you felt comfortable about what was in print to pass on to the students.

KUBLER

I think the literature on Andean archaeology was less mature than that of Mesoamerica.

SMITH

So much less had been done of the--

KUBLER

Less had been done, and the older works were nineteenth-century, or twentieth-century works in nineteenth-century manner--as travel books more than as archaeological works. So that Peruvian archaeology was distinctly behind the archaeology of the Mexicans.

SMITH

Did this in any way emerge out of the respective positions of the governments and the funds that they were able to commit?

KUBLER

I think so. Peru is not a large population. I think it's ten million, and Mexico is three times that. Mexico has more resources and more tradition for it. Oddly Peru respects historical studies, including archaeology, even more than in Mexico, but they have produced less archaeological writing.

REESE

I'm trying to think of whether other key figures--John Rowe you said you have known.

KUBLER

John Rowe I've known. I knew him in New Haven. And John Rowe is a perennial visitor to Peru. He's now in California at [University of California] Berkeley.

REESE

And was [John] Murra already--?

KUBLER

Murra was already in place in Peru. We were friendly. Gordon Ekholm was more an ethnologist, but he was also an archaeologist from the American Museum of Natural History. And I saw a good deal of him, too, Gordon Ekholm.

SMITH

One of the things, as I was reading this afternoon-- The diffusion theories seem to have a sudden emergence into prominence in the conference in 1949. Did you attend that conference?

KUBLER

Yes. Wasn't that in Paris?

SMITH

It didn't say, actually. It just says International Conference of Anthropologists.

KUBLER

International Congress of Americanists.

SMITH

Americanists, okay.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

What was the state of diffusion theories before that conference? How did you respond to the sudden burst of enthusiasm for these kinds of explanations?

KUBLER

Well, diffusion theory begins in the sixteenth century with discovery and the conquest. It was regularly assumed for the next three centuries that Amerindian populations were from Asia and that the diffusion had happened in prequest time. Then the archaeological view--archaeological and anthropological view--came to be quite the contrary to that received opinion

of the colonial era. Late nineteenth-century archaeologists began to question the diffusion theory and to end up, really, with the contrary, that there had been no connection with Asia since before the great melt of the Ice Age, which then was taken to be about 10,000 B.C. Now it seems maybe 12,000 B.C., beginning about 12,000 B.C. The present status of the question in the minds of orthodox anthropologists is still that any Asiatic connections are very old and broken at the time of the Ice Age, but not resumed after the Ice Age.

SMITH

But in '49 there's a sudden efflorescence, beginning with this conference. Do you recall who the individuals were that were promoting the diffusionist thesis at that conference and why?

KUBLER

The remaining diffusionists were not many in number. They were a minority. I can't remember, but they were in disgrace.

SMITH

Even at that time?

KUBLER

Even at that time.

SMITH

It seems from looking at--

KUBLER

And diffusionists are still.

**1.15. TAPE NUMBER: VIII, SIDE ONE
MARCH 29, 1991**

KUBLER

I sided with those who believed in the breaking of contact with Asia.

SMITH

But the position seemed to have enough credibility that it had to be responded to in a credible, scholarly manner.

KUBLER

Yes. It had to, yes.

SMITH

Then I noted that in the early sixties, the enthusiasm for diffusion theories evaporated as rapidly as it had come up again. Do you have an explanation for why discussion stopped again?

KUBLER

I wasn't aware of it as having had a revival. The only thing I have in mind is the book I showed you, Werner Müller on diffusion taking place in the Arctic Circle during the Ice Age, which is a new idea.

SMITH

That's a more recent book, though.

KUBLER

Yes. That's a recent book.

SMITH

We could go on to the contact that you had with Nikolaus Pevsner and the commissions to write the two new books.

KUBLER

Well, I had met him at meetings, and he wrote me to consider the first book, which was-- Wasn't it colonial art?

SMITH

Yes, colonial.

KUBLER

The colonial book [Art and Architecture in Spain and Portugal and Their American Dominions, 1500 to 1800 (1959)]. I think that that was the more difficult book to write of the two. The second one [The Art and Architecture of

Ancient America: The Mexican, Maya, and Andean Peoples (1962)] I was better prepared for at that time. The first book needed a lot of work, yes. Needed a lot of work that I hadn't done.

SMITH

I noted that in the preface you comment that initially the book was to cover a longer period of time and to be more global in scope, to look at Spain and Portugal's Asian and African colonies as well. Was that Pevsner's conception?

KUBLER

Well, he never intervened. He always allowed me to do as I pleased.

SMITH

In terms of the relationship between you and Martin Soria-- The two sections or the three sections are divided between the two of you. Did you have much interaction?

KUBLER

Not much. Not much. He was working mostly in Spain or in Michigan, where he was at East Lansing [Michigan State University]. We worked very amiably together with very little conflict. He didn't want to do the architecture, and he confined himself to the painting and sculpture and crafts. So that the division of labor was mutually acceptable--no conflict.

SMITH

So once you had determined what the actual parameters of the book would be, then the two of you could work completely independently.

KUBLER

Oh, yes, yes. And he was in Spain a lot at that time.

REESE

I'm trying to clarify the chronology, too, because I believe in one of the introductions you say that in 1947 he had written to you or spoken to you about doing the volumes. But then you leave in '48 and '49 for San Marcos in Peru. Then you're back in '50. You go again to Cuzco in '51. Do you remember

when you really began plotting the writing or the kind of research? Did you break it up into segments in terms of focusing your energies?

KUBLER

Are we speaking about the pre-Columbian book?

REESE

Yes. I actually remember two stories. One was that you at one time mentioned to me that Pevsner had wanted a volume that covered pre-Columbian and Latin American and Spain. That you had tried to make him understand that that was simply too much for any single book to hold, and therefore it became something--

KUBLER

You reminded me of something I forgot to say. Yes, that did happen. There was that original hope on Pevsner's part to get more into the volume than actually happened.

SMITH

Then the two books and the summaries, from Pevsner's point of view, were commissioned at the same time.

KUBLER

No. I rather persuaded him after the appearance of the first book to commission the second book.

SMITH

But you said you had written a first draft of the second book in '51, '52, which was then later discarded. But that was written before Pevsner asked you to write the volume?

KUBLER

Yes. The draft of it existed, but it was a short draft. It wasn't a text.

SMITH

At that point, you were not writing it specifically for the Pelican series.

KUBLER

No. It was in my lectures. It was in my courses, and I dredged it out of my courses, really, and amplified it with other material.

SMITH

I have a note here that Walter Cook had been a central figure in-- Well, actually, what I want to do is then also divide this book from the *Ars Hispaniae* book [*Arquitectura de los siglos XVII y XVIII*]. Are they basically the same?

KUBLER

Ars Hispaniae is shorter.

SMITH

But same content?

KUBLER

Less scope, but more development of many parts.

SMITH

So Walter Cook had arranged the commission for that particular work, and the commission for that came after Pevsner had asked you and Soria to write [the Pelican volume].

KUBLER

That's right.

SMITH

So it's a book that's dependent--

KUBLER

It's dependent on the Pevsner volume.

SMITH

But restructured for the Spanish audience.

KUBLER

It was restructured, yes.

REESE

The editor of the *Ars Hispaniae* series was José Gudiol.

KUBLER

Gudiol, yes.

REESE

Who you knew through--

KUBLER

Through Walter Cook. And I knew him in Spain, also.

SMITH

How much research had you done in Spain prior to beginning the drafting of this book or the writing of this book, the research for this particular book?

KUBLER

Not much. Not much. We traveled all over Spain in preparation for these works.

SMITH

Did the publishers provide adequate funding to do the research?

KUBLER

No. I was on leave. I had a Guggenheim or something like that. We traveled and photographed.

REESE

Do you remember the year and situation of the first trip to Spain, the extended research for the *Ars Hispaniae* volume?

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

It was early fifties.

KUBLER

When did that come out?

REESE

It came out in '57.

KUBLER

'Fifty-seven.

REESE

I have that you were commissioned to do it in 1953 by Gudiol, but I can't remember the year in which you and Betty [Elizabeth Bushnell Kubler] were in Barcelona.

KUBLER

That would have been in the forties, yes. We started in the forties. We had our youngest child [Elena Ann Kubler] with us, who was very small then. She was born in '46, so that traveling was in '48. I remember doing a lot of writing on the road and in hotels.

SMITH

At this time what was the state of funding sources for scholars doing work in Latin American or Iberian studies? Were there places one could comfortably go to get reasonable-size grants for art history work?

KUBLER

I never had trouble getting funding for those outings. Guggenheim I think I had three times. Then there's another one, the American Council of Learned Societies. Between those I had financial help on most of my research trips.

SMITH

Was funding becoming more and more available at this period? More easily accessible for research in these particular fields?

KUBLER

I think so. I think it was more available than now, perhaps.

REESE

I have here that you had Guggenheim grants in 1952 and '53 and then again in 1956 and '57, which were used in the writing and research.

KUBLER

That's right. I used part of that in Belgium, where I was looking for Portuguese material.

REESE

They were also very busy years, because the Arensberg catalog [The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection II: Pre-Columbian Sculpture] came out in 1954 and the catalogs of the [Alan] Würtzburger [The Würtzburger Collection of Pre-Columbian Art] and [Fred] Olsen [Olsen Collection of Pre-Columbian Art] collections in 1958. Those were also years where-- If I recall, you were chair of the department in the fifties. So it was--

KUBLER

Busy time. So busy that I've forgotten it. [laughter]

SMITH

In terms of the ancient America volume, then, really the commission for that came from Pevsner in '58, '59?

KUBLER

At my suggestion. I don't think he would have included ancient America without my suggestion.

SMITH

How was Pevsner to work with?

KUBLER

Oh, very pleasant. Very agreeable and long-suffering.

SMITH

Did he make clear what he needed in terms of the series format and requirements?

KUBLER

Well, he would expect his authors to consult the series and to behave accordingly, which I did. I took most of my instructions from previous volumes in the series and modeled the volume on the series as it had already appeared. I don't think he was very good at close direction of each volume. He left you alone.

SMITH

So again, as with your other work, you did not have significant revisions, except what you determined for yourself.

KUBLER

Pretty much. Matters of style, of printer's style.

REESE

I think perhaps the most useful way for us to proceed would be to focus on a place rather than the chronology, because it's so interlocking at this point in time. I wonder about your recollections about the travel in Spain. You centered yourself in Barcelona?

KUBLER

We were in Barcelona in the fall, in the autumn, and into the winter. In the winter we went down to the Málaga coast for the child. We had the child, our youngest, with us. Then we traveled constantly when the good weather came. We went all over Spain.

SMITH

Of the buildings that you discuss in that volume, how many did you see yourself?

KUBLER

I would hesitate to think that I saw more than 20 percent of them.

SMITH

So, largely, you are relying on the extant literature.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

I mean, the question of writing a synthesis is sometimes controversial in academia, but these are a little bit more substantial than many syntheses.

KUBLER

Well, the same is true of Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century [1948]. I did not see all the buildings mentioned in that volume, but I was able to speak with authority about them because I had plans and drawings from government sources, so that one can mention buildings one hasn't seen.

SMITH

In the Spanish and Portuguese volume you are, again, relying on primary source material rather than other historians?

KUBLER

I think so. Yes.

REESE

I'm again thinking of Barcelona and friends there. What can you say about them? Gudiol, Montserrat Blanc.

KUBLER

We knew Gudiol and Montserrat Blanc, of course, in the Arquiv Mas relationship. And Montserrat was the wife of a very--

REESE

Santiago Alcolea.

KUBLER

Santiago Alcolea. Santiago Alcolea was a great help. We saw a great deal of him and traveled with him occasionally. That connection with Arquiv Mas and the Instituto Amatller-- Instituto Amatller eventually bought Mas and owns Mas at the present day. So that was a wonderful place to do studies in

architecture, in the Instituto Amatller, which had the duplicate file of Arquiv Mas. So I could prepare travels in the library of Instituto Amatller.

REESE

How about the Madrid, the Castilla, region? Who were the personalities?

KUBLER

Well, there again, it was Diego Angulo and the library of the Instituto Diego Velázquez, which was quite good. But not as good as Amatller.

REESE

Could you give a kind of sketch of Angulo as you remember him?

KUBLER

He was very taciturn. He spoke very little, but when he spoke it was with authority.

REESE

How would you describe your relationship with Angulo over the years?

KUBLER

We were friends. He was an older friend and helpful, very helpful. He would always give me an introduction if I needed it.

REESE

Could you give a similar sketch of Gudiol?

KUBLER

Gudiol was more commercial. More on the commercial side. He was deeply involved with Arquiv Mas. He was not so distinctly academic as Diego Angulo. Diego Angulo was pure professor, and Gudiol was more a businessman.

REESE

Other art and architectural historians in Madrid? Fernando Chueca?

KUBLER

Chueca we saw a lot of. We've always been close friends with Chueca, and I greatly admired his work.

REESE

Can you say something about the tradition within which he wrote?

KUBLER

It's more the belles-lettres tradition of interesting essays. His first major book was really an essay, a very brilliant and stimulating essay, which I later discounted, but profited from after first reading. *Invariantes castizos: [el arquitectura española]*, isn't that the title?

REESE

Yes. Were there other people who were particularly influential for you? Not only in the field of art, but literature in Spain at that time.

KUBLER

We had friends in Madrid and in Barcelona. In Barcelona we were almost adopted by a family with many artists in it. So they took us with them in their social lives in Barcelona, which is very pleasant. That family was Llimona, a family of artists. José Llimona.

REESE

Then in Madrid?

KUBLER

In Madrid we had the pleasure of being lodged at the *residencia del Consejo Superior de Investigaciones*. That was a whole society of scholars and professors and just the right place to be whenever you wanted to know something. You'd find the thread right there at the *residencia*. And we've always used it going back to Madrid.

SMITH

Were there social or intellectual historians of Spain that you turned to to get contacts? Whose work did you find the most useful and meaningful?

KUBLER

Probably Chueca, Fernando Chueca. I didn't think like him, but he knew the material so well. And we traveled with him.

SMITH

As you were working on this book, did you come to new conceptualizations of Spanish architecture?

KUBLER

I think so.

SMITH

For yourself?

KUBLER

For myself, yes. And they're in the book.

REESE

Were there tertulias as well as--?

KUBLER

Yes. Oh, yes. We were in the tertulia Trés Café on Alcalá--Café León. And it was the tertulia of a very congenial man of letters. He would gather scholars at the tertulia. We were regular attendants at the tertulia, benefited greatly from that. There was a priest who was keeper of manuscripts in the Biblioteca nacional, very useful. They were all useful.

REESE

Rodríguez Moñino?

KUBLER

Rodríguez Moñino was the host. How did you know the name?

REESE

Because you had written an essay in homenaje to him.

KUBLER

Yes. It was Rodríguez Moñino. It was his tertulia, and he and his wife-- They had no children. The children were the tertulia.

SMITH

In terms of the Portuguese material in the book, where did you get your source material, and did you spend a fair amount of time in Portugal?

KUBLER

We lived in Portugal for several stretches and took the trouble to learn Portuguese and speak it.

SMITH

You'd mentioned the Brazilian material you had to go to Belgium for. What was the reason for that?

KUBLER

That search was for Brazilian material in Minas Gerais. The Franciscan shrines, places like Conoñas do Campo. Then that grew out of Portugal, of course, and the architecture of Portugal. The eighteenth-century architecture of Portugal was the matrix, together with some south German and Austrian influences.

REESE

With the exception of the early draft for the Pelican pre-Columbian volume of '51, '52, the *Ars Hispaniae* volume, which came out in '57, was the first of the three, followed by the Pelican Spain and Latin America, and finally the pre-Columbian volume. It was the first to appear. Was it the first one you wrote, and did you indeed write it during these times in Spain?

KUBLER

The pre-Columbian volume?

REESE

No. I'm thinking now of the *Ars Hispaniae*, *Arquitectura de los siglos XVII y XVIII*.

KUBLER

I wrote much of that in Spain.

REESE

So it was the first really to be completed. In an oral history like this, one doesn't know how much one puts on the personal record, but I remember as a student of yours using the cards, the research cards, that you had used in compiling that. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about the way in which, if you remember, you organized material in preparing one of these large-scale attempts at synthesis.

KUBLER

Well, I had little histories of each building on those cards and could refresh my memory, and these gave references to other literature. This was an index for the writing. And then the collection of photographs. Those were the instruments with which I wrote.

SMITH

To what degree did you integrate the writing of these books into your teaching? Would you try out ideas for particular buildings or even for chapters in lectures?

KUBLER

I don't think I used them much in teaching. When they were available, especially the ones in English, I would put them on the reading list. But the ones that weren't in English I would suggest to the ones who read Spanish or Portuguese.

SMITH

Did the classes you were teaching begin to shift towards Iberian architecture?

KUBLER

It depended on what I offered. I would change the offering from year to year, and it would bring out a different crowd.

SMITH

What I'm wondering is if, since you were spending so much time thinking about Spain and Portugal and the colonial period, would then that mean that

the lecture classes you would offer, and the seminars, would tend to be focused more on that period? And then as you shift into ancient America--?

KUBLER

That would be a different group.

SMITH

But from the point of view of how teaching and research interact, you know, would you use the teaching to test out ideas for the books?

KUBLER

Especially in seminars, yes. Yes. That wouldn't be possible in an undergraduate lecture course. That's very difficult. It's not built for discussion, but the seminar is.

REESE

I remember that the research cards for the *Ars Hispaniae* volume had three sections: one on architects, one on buildings organized geographically, and a third which was organized by a series of problems, the development of a certain form of mental pattern. So that they were largely very laconic and factual in content. What I'm trying to reconstruct a little bit is in the actual process of writing on the road-- Oh, I left out-- There was a fourth thing, which were the large volumes of photographs, which were arranged geographically. In writing the material on the road, at that point, were you consulting all of these cards or were you ready to write a given section? It seems to me a very different enterprise than some of the others because of the complicated chronological-- The complicated areas of histories, different types of monuments. And to do this while you're actually moving rather than laying everything out.

KUBLER

Well, actually, I traveled with quite a few books. We had a station wagon. There was room. This wouldn't have been possible without a car, but I did pack a library with me.

SMITH

In these two volumes, these companion volumes, *Ars Hispaniae* and *Pelican*, it seems this is the first time when you must come to grips with the question of biography of individual artists or architects, and in many cases readers would be expecting to learn about the individual responsible for the building. Yet I think you have a distinct opinion about the place of biography in art history. How did that opinion develop in the course of working on this book, determining how you were going to treat the role of the individual artist?

KUBLER

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.

SMITH

But that's an interpretive choice. Another art historian might have decided to organize it around individual architects and schools.

REESE

Clearly [Rudolf] Wittkower had done that in his *Pelican* volume.

SMITH

You had to think that question through as to why the placement and the buildings would be more primary than the individual artist and passing down the traditions.

KUBLER

The grouping was by style and similarities connecting the personalities, rather than by the personalities.

SMITH

On the obvious level, it seems like you were taking many of the things that you would do naturally with Latin American or ancient American architecture-- Where the question of an individual artist is beside the point.

KUBLER

Maybe they share that. [laughter] And, actually, Spanish architectural personalities are not very concrete. They are not very definitive. They're mostly maestros de obras, which is perhaps a medieval survival.

REESE

Did you find the process of writing the *Ars Hispaniae* volume, in some way, greater in terms of difficulty than the previous volumes you had written? Was there a complexity of scale?

KUBLER

No, I didn't find it difficult. It went easily. It went easily, and even though we were on the move so much, there was always time.

SMITH

A minor technical question, but did you write that book originally in Spanish?

KUBLER

No.

SMITH

Did you do the Spanish translation, then, yourself?

KUBLER

No. That was done by the editors. That was commissioned by the editors.

REESE

Did you write it in a linear way from beginning to end?

KUBLER

No, more sketches and bits and episodes and outlines. Then when those had reached a certain volume, revision and revision and correction, verification, usually done in New Haven.

SMITH

I'd like to end today by discussing the communication and interaction between American and European art historians in the postwar period and the development of international congresses and so forth. You began to go to

Europe very quickly. It seems to me you have a number of different national traditions with different ways of conducting scholarly research, different ways of teaching, different ways of writing. The process of communication and interaction. What I'm trying to get at is, perhaps, what were the common denominators that brought people together?

KUBLER

Well, the ideal situation was the residencia in Madrid. That was the center of the network of university minds. Otherwise, it was the equivalent in a city. In Barcelona, Instituto Amatller and the Arquiv Mas, and the university people there getting in touch with the university in Valencia or in Sevilla. Sevilla is a wonderful place to work with excellent libraries and very accessible professorial groups.

SMITH

How important were international congresses at this time for meeting people and sharing ideas?

KUBLER

Not very productive. Not very rewarding. You went and gave your paper, and there was rarely any discussion of the paper at an international congress. Any discussion is in the reviews of the publication of the proceedings. But making acquaintances was very valuable. A congress, like a train trip, is a place where you don't make many friends. [laughter] You're lucky if you make one friend, and one friend per congress would be quite a lot. Actually, most congresses I attended, I had one connection who would be more or less permanent.

SMITH

To what degree was an international art historical language developing based on pre-Nazi German developments? The Germans came to the U.S. and became the dominant force here. They went to England and were similar--

KUBLER

During the nineteenth century, you mean.

SMITH

No, in the twentieth century, in the postwar period.

KUBLER

In the postwar period. Well, the exiles, you're speaking of the exiles.

SMITH

Right.

KUBLER

Well, the exiles were a great resource for their hosts.

SMITH

Do you think they provided an intellectual framework that allowed different national traditions to come together?

KUBLER

Very much so. In the Institute for Advanced Study [Princeton University], which is not a teaching institution, and in the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. But that's it. There aren't others, unless--What would you think there was?

SMITH

Oh, here in the U.S.?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Well, I think perhaps those two are sufficient, because they trained everybody.

KUBLER

Yes. That's it.

SMITH

And in England the Courtauld [Institute] was sufficient. When you spent a year at Cambridge [University]--

KUBLER

It was a spring or summer term. It was a summer term. Pevsner arranged for me to be a guest in King's College.

SMITH

Was that most productive for you in terms of the ancient America work?

KUBLER

I was writing, yes.

SMITH

You were not teaching at that time?

KUBLER

I was not teaching.

SMITH

Or lecturing?

KUBLER

I wrote, and the Haddon Library, which is an anthropological library, was very useful. I worked there. I had friends there who were interested in what I was doing. That was rewarding.

SMITH

British anthropologists or art historians?

KUBLER

Geoffrey Bushnell. Geoffrey Bushnell was an Americanist, and he was of a different stock of Bushnells from Betty's.

**1.16. TAPE NUMBER: VIII, SIDE TWO
MARCH 29, 1991**

SMITH

Was he [Bushnell] also writing about Mesoamerica?

KUBLER

Yes. The museum had an interesting collection.

SMITH

How did other scholars react to the idea of writing a book combining Mesoamerica with the Andean culture? Did that seem like something that was a reasonable thing to do?

KUBLER

It had been done before. There were other efforts to do it, as well as mine.

SMITH

You did not consider it too big a chunk to chew off?

KUBLER

No, because I'd taught it that way.

REESE

I think that there's one other thing that we might be able to finish up with, and that is the first Ph.D. students who wrote for you in the fifties. Spielvogel on Wari, John Hoag on Spanish sixteenth century, Donald Robertson on manuscript illumination, and Peg [Margaret] Collier on eighteenth-century Mexico. I wonder if you could reflect a little on the growth of the profession at that point and the emergence of the first new doctoral students really interested in the fields they had pioneered.

KUBLER

Well, those names you mentioned all did good work. The one who went farthest was Donald Robertson--Tulane [University]. Spielvogel, I think as a mother and housewife, rather dropped out, but she did a good paper, the Wari paper. And the other names?

REESE

John Hoag.

KUBLER

John Hoag has stayed in the profession as an Americanist, but he has many other interests as well. He's a polymath, and he doesn't produce much writing, but he's a valued teacher. He's now retired.

REESE

He had taught with you here briefly at Yale [University] or taught here in the department?

KUBLER

I don't think he taught in the department, no, no.

REESE

Peg Collier.

KUBLER

She is now a professor at the University of Connecticut at Storrs. She's very valued there, but she doesn't write anything. On the other hand, she had the initiative to discover the documents necessary for the study of that lovely annex to the cathedral of Mexico.

REESE

The Sagrario.

KUBLER

She had access to those documents. And she wrote a book about it, and she's never published that. She's never brought it out. Other scholars have been eager to have that material appear, but she never published.

REESE

Are there any other--?

KUBLER

Who else was there?

REESE

I think that is the group that I--

KUBLER

That was the group, yes.

REESE

I think that Betsy [Elizabeth] Smith comes later, in the sixties.

KUBLER

Betsy Smith, yes, yes.

REESE

Or finishes in the sixties. But were there any other early students who you remember as important? Perhaps who went on to other institutions to do their work?

KUBLER

No, I can't think of any offhand.

REESE

Joseph Baird was never a student of yours, was he?

KUBLER

No. We corresponded a lot. He went West, didn't he? He came from the West. He was an architectural historian, and he wrote a book.

SMITH

I think we'll discuss the ancient America book primarily tomorrow morning, but I wanted to find out how, in the fifties, your calendrical studies were continuing, and perhaps were you beginning to study Maya glyphs at this time.

KUBLER

All of this came out of the teaching, and these grew out of the teaching. I didn't go very far with them. The closest approach to a discovery in Maya glyphic terms was a paper I did at a time when I was associated with the [Yale] university museum and a group there. I decided to study the glyphs of Tikal in a formal sense--their formal properties rather than their significant aspect--

and found a chronological ordering of the glyphs of Tikal according to their proportional schemes. That I gave as a paper in a congress at a gathering in Guatemala, but it was never published. I think it's a valid paper and a paper that is worth publishing. I'm trying to get it published now, but it's way out of date.

SMITH

Did you drop the glyph work because you had too much other things to work on?

KUBLER

I had other things. Yes, I was watching with Mary Miller the breaking of the code. They were doing it very rapidly and very swiftly, very productively, and I dropped out of that game. [laughter]

SMITH

Could you give a thumbnail sketch of [Tatiana] Proskouriakoff?

KUBLER

She was always a research scholar at the Peabody Museum [of Archaeology and Ethnology] and much respected, a field archaeologist in many important minor excavations. She was very important in the decipherment problem and in the architectural history of the Mayas, being trained as an architect, so that she produced wonderful drawings of the ruins and made important discoveries in respect to the glyphs.

SMITH

Was she someone that you could have relatively frequent conversations with?

KUBLER

Oh, yes. We met frequently and discussed.

SMITH

Did she have an art historical interest?

KUBLER

I think she was almost more of an art historian than an anthropologist. She was very rigorous in her demands. She didn't think the archaeology of others was up to her standards. She was not very charitable to her colleagues--and hard to persuade of anything she didn't believe.

SMITH

Would that make her, for you, a particularly good person to throw ideas off of?

KUBLER

Yes. I enjoyed trying things out on her.

REESE

Was there a Peabody/Harvard [University] school or was it merely an assortment of interesting individuals?

KUBLER

It was a school. It was a school--the training school--very much so. It was a training center, an important training center.

REESE

Gordon Willey--

KUBLER

Gordon Willey, he's now retired.

REESE

When did you first meet?

KUBLER

I first knew him when he was at the Smithsonian [Institution], and I think he was of influence at the Smithsonian in getting my paper published on demography. When I was there he was more or less in charge of Peruvian studies, as a Peruvianist.

REESE

There is one more personality whom I was reminded of as you spoke about Proskouriakoff, and that was Charlot.

KUBLER

Jean Charlot, yes. Jean Charlot was also closely associated with the Carnegie Institution of Washington, which is what we're really talking about with Proskouriakoff and Gordon Willey and the others. Peabody Museum, the whole Peabody Museum setup, was where the Carnegie Institution had its archaeological center, so that all of my archaeology was run from Peabody Museum.

REESE

And was Charlot a close friend of yours?

KUBLER

Charlot was very active in Maya archaeology at the time of the excavations and publication of Chichen Itzá, and that was done by the Carnegie Institution of Washington in conjunction with Peabody Museum. Jean Charlot later left archaeology and returned to teaching art. He was an artist to start with.

SMITH

A muralist.

KUBLER

A muralist, yes.

SMITH

I believe he wound up at the University of Hawaii.

KUBLER

Yes, he ended up in Hawaii.

SMITH

In all of this you find time to write *The Shape of Time: [Remarks on the History of Things]*. Perhaps we can just discuss how that came to be written.

KUBLER

Well, that I owed to a respite afforded by a bout with tuberculosis. I had had it at the age of twelve, was cured in Arosa in the Kindersanitorium there. Then I had another bout at the time of the writing of *Shape of Time*. That's when it was written. I was in a hospital we had for tuberculosis, the Gaylord Farm out here in the country, and fortunately the chemotherapy for TB had just been devised. This is '49, '50.

SMITH

No. You wrote *The Shape of Time* in '59, '60.

KUBLER

'Fifty-nine. I'm skipping a cog. [laughter] So I was interned again in Gaylord in '59 for about three months and with the new chemotherapy. It was entirely successful. Just in time, just in time.

SMITH

Perhaps it provided you the three months of nothing else to do?

KUBLER

That's right. That's right, and I did nothing else but *The Shape of Time*.

SMITH

Had you been planning on writing that book previously?

KUBLER

Yes. I'd been keeping notes of ideas.

SMITH

What impelled you to want to write a book of that nature?

KUBLER

Perhaps it was a book by Focillon called *La Vie des formes* [laughter]--a continuation of the *Vie des formes*.

SMITH

You had mentioned, when we talked in November, that this book was looked upon quite askance by many of your colleagues in the art history field.

KUBLER

They don't have to buy it. [laughter] It's a book that is more interesting to [people] outside the history of art than in the history of art.

SMITH

Well, I think we'll discuss the content tomorrow, along with ancient American art, because as I was rereading the introduction to the second Pelican volume, I remembered that there are many echoes between the two.

KUBLER

Oh, yes. There are exchanges between the books, yes.

**1.17. TAPE NUMBER: IX, SIDE ONE
MARCH 30, 1991**

REESE

I just wanted to go back over one thing we mentioned yesterday. You were in Spain and Portugal first in '52, '53, and then in '56 and '57. On the second trip you said you spent a lot of time in Portugal. I wondered if you might talk about your first introduction to Portuguese studies and the people who were very important for you in that route.

KUBLER

Yes. The name of Carlos de Azevedo has always been my passport in Portugal. He was the Portuguese secretary for the Fulbright program, and my Fulbright grants to Portugal were administered by Carlos Azevedo. He was always my firm support in getting access to buildings and to people who knew about them. Always useful, always knowledgeable, and always helpful. So Carlos Azevedo is the principal. Then there was an elder businessman, Carlos Goetz. Goetz was in the used airplane business. He's also a collector of art and knew a good deal about Portuguese art. And he was of help. So those were my supporters and aids in Portugal.

REESE

What was your center of operation in Portugal?

KUBLER

Well, we lived in Lisbon and then cruised out to the country in the usual pattern, staying in the countryside. With a library, keeping records and taking pictures, and so on.

REESE

Was there a pension there that you--?

KUBLER

Yes. There was a marvelous place called York House. It's still going. The York House was in a sixteenth-century conventual building. It had been taken over by a French woman, who turned it into a very attractive hotel with her son, who was an interior decorator in Lisbon. That was a very pleasant headquarters, and we graduated to better and better rooms in this beautiful building which had survived the earthquake of 1750. Lisbon is like a hand--mountainous ridges and valleys in between. The earthquake demolished the valleys but left the ridges alone. This convent is on the top of a ridge, and it's the sixteenth-century building, almost intact, but turned into very inviting monastic cells. We graduated to the refectory, which was a long, long room with a tray ceiling and at the end a bathroom in a narrow corridor. [laughter] A bathroom twenty feet long and barely wide enough for the servant.

REESE

Did you find Portugal to be a very, very different setting than Spain?

KUBLER

Totally. Spain is almost waterless, but its rivers, its western rivers, all make Portugal green. Portugal is instantly green when you come into it. The frontiers correspond to the coastal waters coming from Spain.

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. 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.

SMITH

In terms of the traveling that you did, did this affect or lead to foreign students coming to Yale [University] in the art history program?

KUBLER

Yes, it did. We did have visitors, but not in many numbers. Portuguese find it difficult to study abroad.

SMITH

What about Spaniards or people from Peru, Mexico, etc.?

KUBLER

Occasional visitors. No steady flow.

SMITH

Were you involved in setting up study abroad programs for Yale students?

KUBLER

No. Only in advising our graduate students' dissertations.

REESE

I know that in the period following 1964, '65, when there was this void within the department left by the departure of [William] McDonald, that a number of Europeans did this. And before that there had been Europeans like Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann who had joined the Yale faculty. And Yves Bottineau, Jacinto Quirarte--a number of visitors came. Was that seen as something new within the department? To bring more Europeans and visitors from outside?

KUBLER

Well, that was always a part of the policy of the department, and it was made possible by the French government mainly, through [André] Chastel in Paris. The French government created a Focillon fellowship, so that many French

people came as one-year scholars and residing, doing research or teaching. [Jean] Bony was an example, and there were dozens of them. So that was the main contact with European students, the Focillon fellowship, which is still active. We still have a Focillon fellow every year.

REESE

When you went on leave to write, was your position often filled by people in the field? Did you have a strong voice in who might take your classes?

KUBLER

Once or twice that was possible for the department, and I had a candidate and it worked out very well.

SMITH

This is related, since you brought up Chastel. It was something I had been meaning actually to ask in one way or another everyone we're interviewing in this series. In France, art history has to some degree a state role. It's very much tied into defining national identity, and there's a great deal of government money for it. Has there been a role for art history to play in the United States in terms of helping to define American identification with the rest of the world, or has it--? How would you characterize during the postwar period the relationship of art historians and art history as a discipline to government programs?

KUBLER

Well, the relationship with the French government followed us into France. It was a study exchange. It was not a one-way exchange. We sent people to France.

SMITH

I was thinking within the United States, were art historians being asked by various levels of the government to advise on--?

KUBLER

This government?

SMITH

The American government. To advise on questions--

KUBLER

It's hard to say. It's very irregular, shifting with administrations and having strong support in one administration and then no support in another. So it's on and off as a domestic supply of money.

SMITH

Did the USIA [United States Information Agency] ever ask you to go abroad and lecture?

KUBLER

No.

REESE

Although they indirectly administered the Fulbright program. And you were several times--

KUBLER

Yes, I was. So I suppose that would be indirectly the connection.

SMITH

Where you ever asked to give advice on pre-Columbian art or culture to American government officials?

KUBLER

Yes. I remember there was a search on for people to advise the customs service on the legislation about the import of antiquities. What was genuine, what was fake, what the value was. I talked to an official from the customs office and nothing ever came of it. But I know that some people, for example Michael Coe, the anthropologist here, took a very serious part in this service, and I've heard him lecture on his experiences. It was a very amusing lecture--being a customs official, really.

SMITH

Many governments in the Third World have become more restrictive about what they will allow to be exported. How has that affected your work as a scholar or the work of your students?

KUBLER

None at all, because it is not in any way directed toward collecting, my work. It's very often available in museums, and there are large collections now in almost every major museum. It's not necessary to follow what the dealers have. There's never any close tie with the dealers necessary, excepting for students who want to be dealers. Sometimes we have a student work as a dealer.

SMITH

How important was it for you for the students to actually handle the objects?

KUBLER

Well, we did. We had the collection of Fred and Florence Olsen. They were people who were industrialists in Michigan and who settled in Connecticut. While they were in Connecticut, they became deeply interested in American antiquity and formed a large collection in their house at the shore and eventually gave that collection to Yale. So the Olsen collection is a collection that the students had to work with. We worked with it in a storeroom and on the display floors steadily year after year. Eventually the catalog was written by students.

REESE

There was another great early collection in which you have a good bit of knowledge, and that, of course, is the Bliss collection at--

KUBLER

At Dumbarton Oaks, yes.

REESE

I wonder if you could say something about the importance of the Bliss collection and that study center for pre-Columbian art here in the--

KUBLER

It didn't go on public display until the Blisses [Robert Woods and Mildred Barnes Bliss] put it on display in the National Gallery [of Art]. And in the National Gallery it was shown in the basement and not very well. But eventually the Blisses took it out of the National Gallery and built a little steel casket for that collection, which is a charming part of the Dumbarton Oaks buildings complex. And that's where it's still displayed. It's a very static collection--there are only occasionally rare additions to it. Which is true also with the Byzantine collection. They are static collections. They are not in growth.

REESE

When do you first remember visiting the collection, and what kind of memory do you have of the Blisses?

KUBLER

The Blisses I never knew, excepting visits to Dumbarton Oaks when they still lived there, when they still lived in Washington. They were charming people. Their house is a study center, which the Dumbarton Oaks has become, with three divisions: American antiquities, the Byzantine collection, and then the third collection is a remarkable library of landscape architecture. The grounds of Dumbarton Oaks are a museum of landscape art. So these three research institutes have gathered together at the Dumbarton Oaks, and this is the work of the Blisses. The landscape collection was her work and the archaeological collection was his work. And the Byzantine collection was both of them. He was a diplomat.

REESE

I was thinking of the larger question of the history of pre-Columbian studies in this country, of the institutions that have come along and energized the field and made possible important advances. Like Dumbarton Oaks, which supplies scholarship and a museum setting.

KUBLER

And conferences and publications. Their publication list is very impressive.

REESE

Are there others that you felt a really welcoming presence in helping stimulate something that in the early forties, as we talked about the other day, was practically nonexistent?

KUBLER

That's right. There were collections, but there was very little money attached to them. The Blisses made possible a lot of fellowships, and the libraries were constantly being improved and available. So that the fellowship list of Dumbarton Oaks really mirrors the whole profession of anthropologists and humanists interested in ancient America.

SMITH

How much fieldwork did you do for the ancient America book [The Art and Architecture of Ancient America: The Mexican, Maya, and Andean Peoples (1962)]?

KUBLER

I wrote it mostly in the library. I have never been a field archaeologist, excepting at Cuzco. At Cuzco, when I was there for the earthquake with UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization], I had a budget in which quite a residue remained at the end of the work I was assigned to do. I got permission to spend that on an excavation at Santo Domingo. Santo Domingo has that curved Inca wall on which had been an Inca royal structure, and the Dominicans had built on top of it and put their sanitary in what had been the Inca palace. So we excavated that area and disengaged the curving wall of Inca masonry from the rest of the basement of the church. That was later published in the detail that it should have been, but the report to UNESCO [Cuzco: Reconstruction of the Town and Restoration of Its Monuments (1948)] mentions this excavation. I had a staff to work with.

SMITH

You had mentioned yesterday that you saw about 20 percent of the sites that you discuss in the first Pelican book [Art and Architecture in Spain and Portugal and Their American Dominions, 1500 to 1800 (1959)].

KUBLER

I've never checked that figure. I think to see them all would have taken five times as long. [laughter] I measure that way.

SMITH

In terms of the ancient America book, what would be the equivalent? What would be the percentage of the actual sites?

KUBLER

Maybe 20 percent would be high. Because I know Peru well and I know something about Ecuador and something about Bolivia. But the rest of South America-- Well, I know a little bit about Venezuela and Colombia. But I don't know Argentina, I don't know Chile, I don't know Brazil. So I was writing about things I hadn't seen.

SMITH

Before we get into the two books, I had wanted to ask you if during this period of time there was a shift in the nature of the students who were coming into the program. What kind of changes were taking place in the nature of the students, and what kinds of developments were taking place in terms of the topics that they were choosing to focus on?

KUBLER

I would say that we were seeing more students from anthropology and more students from Latin American studies, and they came to courses in some numbers. That was a regular part of the enrollment in your [Reese's] time, I think.

SMITH

In terms of your graduate students that you worked with, as your books started coming out, would there be people coming--? Say after the book on Spanish and Portuguese architecture comes out, would there be more students coming to you whose interest was Iberian architecture?

KUBLER

I'd say that the students who came to Yale for Hispanic studies, whether European or American, came from other parts of the university to our courses. It was rare that anyone enrolled in the history of art from outside for that sole

purpose. There were perhaps over the years five or six students who came to do a dissertation or a thesis.

SMITH

So the students you worked with-- If I'm understanding you right, you're saying they came to Yale for the history of art program and then once there decided to work with you on a topic.

KUBLER

That sometimes happened, and sometimes they came to work with us directly. Sometimes they shifted or did part of their dissertation in the history of art but the rest in anthropology or in Latin American studies.

SMITH

Well, in terms of the dissertations that you supervised, I'm wondering if you look back now, if you see that there were certain waves of interest, or fashions even, of topics during the forty years that you were teaching.

KUBLER

There weren't so many. There weren't so many dissertations that one could begin to block them out into groups. [laughter] They came singly. [to Reese] Wouldn't you say?

REESE

I think clearly in the period following the appearance of the ancient American book, after '65, you have the largest number of students coming to work on pre-Columbian.

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

Whereas before, Donald Robertson, Peg [Margaret] Collier, John Hoag had worked more on the colonial and Spanish art.

KUBLER

That's right, yes. The students to Yale for those studies were to anthropology or to the history department, and sometimes to the language department. Sometimes we got a spillover from languages, from literature.

REESE

Although there were still a number of students in the late sixties and seventies--myself included, Cathy [Catherine] Wilkinson, Molly Volk, Barbara Anderson--who were studying Mexican and Spanish materials.

KUBLER

They were all wholeheartedly in Latin American or Hispanic studies, yes. Yes, they were the principal students who stayed with it.

REESE

But after that, Arthur [G.] Miller, who was a Harvard [University] student but studied with you a great deal. From that point on, though, they were a very, very strong, dominant, I think, group of pre-Columbianists. And Flora [S.] Clancy and Mary Miller. Have you had any students since the seventies who worked on Spain or colonial?

KUBLER

Yes. Rodríguez-- What was his full name?

REESE

Camilloni. No. Humberto.

KUBLER

Humberto Rodríguez Camilloni, yes, yes. He has stayed in the colonial field and in the pre-Columbian studies very solidly. He's at the University of Virginia at Blacksburg. There he has the chairmanship of the department of architecture. He took a degree both in architecture and in the history of art. He is the chairman of the architectural program at the University of Virginia. There's another Rodríguez who died recently--Rodríguez Roque. Did you know him?

REESE

I didn't know him.

KUBLER

Well, he ended up on the Metropolitan Museum [of Art] staff as a Hispanist.

REESE

Do you want to turn now to the ancient America book?

SMITH

Perhaps *The Shape of Time: [Remarks on the History of Things (1962)]*. That was written and published first, correct?

REESE

No, I think--

SMITH

The other way around? What was published first?

KUBLER

It was published '59, '60.

SMITH

You had been working on *Art of Ancient America* for almost ten years at that point.

KUBLER

I was doing both books at the same time. The *Pelican* book was near completion, and I used this illness for working out *The Shape of Time*.

SMITH

Let's do *Ancient America* first. I noticed you commented that you used *Shape of Time* to criticize art history from an anthropological point of view and *Art of Ancient America* to criticize anthropology from an art historical point of view. Perhaps you could review what you felt the deficiency of the anthropological/archaeological view of Native American societies and cultures was.

KUBLER

Grosso modo, lack of interest in the aesthetic component of any culture or all culture. [laughter]

REESE

I was going to review a little bit the history of the writing of Ancient America. In the introduction you noted that you had written an initial draft in 1951 and then that in 1957 after completing the *Ars Hispaniae* [Arquitectura de los siglos XVII y XVIII] you returned to write the Ancient America in a new format. Finally, you submitted that, I believe, in May of '59--the Pelican volume on ancient America. I'm wondering a little bit about what you recall about the decisions that motivated your complete reframing of a text you had written earlier in that period following '57.

KUBLER

That first draft was much more anthropological than the second. I saw that I had been guided by the requirements of my work for Handbook of South American Indians. I decided it wasn't going to be of the immediacy to the subject that was needed in the history of art, but discarded that structure and framed a new one for the second version.

REESE

I mean, were you feeling tensions emerging during the mid-fifties between the archaeologists/anthropologists, and the art historians? I know that there was a conference with [Tatiana] Proskouriakoff and many others present, about '55, in which you participated. One could begin to feel certain, for instance--

KUBLER

The anthropologists really were not in any conscious way impeding the history of art, nor were they offering any employment to historians of art on archaeological excavations. The presence of Proskouriakoff was an exceptional thing. She was an architect and an artist of consequence, and she thought very much as an art historian does. At the same time she had central roles in important excavations, so she is an accredited archaeologist of lots of excavations that she had participated in. Her opinion was sought and highly regarded. She was always a critic of anthropological methods. She never praised any archaeologist on any of the excavations she took part in; she was

always critical of their method. So there was an affinity with her among art historians.

REESE

I'm thinking of what you discussed yesterday when in '42, '43, and '44 you were pleading so strongly for the interdisciplinary collaboration between anthropologists, and now we find by 1955 a certain territoriality that seems to be arising. You think it was exclusively on the part of the anthropologists? Or was there equal guilt, perhaps, on the side of those few art historians who were collecting, and museums?

KUBLER

Well, we formed a team of art historians at one point. This team of about five or six was centered on the work of the University Museum at the University of Pennsylvania in Maya studies, and several students and I blocked out tasks for art historians in the excavation programs of University Museum of Pennsylvania. Now, there were five or six of us involved and doing separate tasks, and these were never recognized. These papers were never recognized according to the agreement that we had with the University Museum when it came to publication. The University Museum concluded with its plan of publication for Tikal but discarded the work that Arthur Miller and others had done of Tikal, including the paper I wrote on the glyphs of Tikal. They've always refused to permit the use of their photographs, on which we base our work, for our publications if we were to publish outside the University Museum. Nor would University Museum accept them in its publication program, so that none of these five or six papers that emerged were published by University Museum. I think variations on the papers may have appeared, but the papers, as intended, were not published by University Museum. That was a great disappointment.

REESE

I know you've written a good bit about anthropology or art history and have made your points, I think, strongly there. What I wonder, though, is if you've thought at all about not merely the kind of theoretical argument advanced by scientific anthropology versus humanistic art history, but what kind of underlying conditions within the university, within the scholarship competition

for students-- What other things might have caused this increasing kind of break in the fifties and sixties, from these early days where you and Wendell Bennett were a team to work together on this material?

KUBLER

Well, at the University Museum and at the University of Pennsylvania the key figure in the Tikal project was William Coe, the brother of Michael. William Coe and Michael Coe were not friendly. William Coe and Michael Coe were both anthropologists, both Mayanists, both in the same game. At one point there was an episode in which one of the brothers abandoned the other in a very dangerous situation--the collapse of the tunnel. I don't know which of the brothers it was. In any case, the Tikal project was under William Coe's direction. And William Coe is the one who has resisted after accepting the offer of our group to write these papers on Tikal. He's the one who refused use of the photographs for any publication we might make separately from University Museum. None of the commitments to publish our papers as they were submitted were ever honored. So we were left high and dry.

SMITH

You'd mentioned that it was difficult for art historians to get on archaeological teams. What about the availability of research funds for an art historian, either individually or as a group, to go to one of the sites and do original research independent of the archaeologist?

KUBLER

Well, Jeff Kowalski has continued as an art historian. He has been very successful on his own in getting grants for ambitious excavations at Uxmal, for example. So there's an art historian who has been able to break through the anthropological monopoly of grants on his own.

SMITH

Is that an unusual case?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

When did that take place, do you know?

KUBLER

Well, Kowalski was a dissertation candidate in the seventies, wasn't it? Yes.

SMITH

I wonder if this suggests that an underlying problem might be a shortage, that the anthropologists feel that there are not enough funds to do what they need to do and therefore they don't want art historians mucking about.

KUBLER

That's right. That's right. It's a very closed circuit of funding, and an art historian has to do it on his own.

SMITH

Well, there are art history funding sources, which I presume typically are directed to be able to send somebody to Prado or to the [American] Academy at Rome, etc. How do those funding sources feel about--?

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SMITH

Just repeat what you were saying about the attitude of traditional art history funding sources towards Latin American or ancient American research projects.

KUBLER

I don't think there's any problem there. But when art historians apply to anthropological institutions or bodies, anthropologists come first.

SMITH

So when an art historian whose interest is ancient America goes to a traditional art history source, they are in as good a position to get money as someone who wants to go to Munich to do research there?

KUBLER

On the whole, yes. And Kowalski has been able to work with one or another, sometimes with anthropological resources, sometimes with humanistic ones, but he manages to keep going on his own.

SMITH

Is there a problem in that the art history funding sources give smaller grants, typically?

KUBLER

Very likely. I think there's more for anthropology.

REESE

I'm still interested in trying to pursue this question of the moment at which the first signs of a rupture within even the ambience of Yale, the ambience in which you moved-- For example, Betsy [Elizabeth] Smith and [Floyd G.] Lounsbury were very closely cooperative together during the period in which she completed her dissertation on glyphs. I'm wondering how you would describe the early relationships with Michael Coe and others teaching the same material you were teaching within anthropology, and what kind of memories you have of the evolving nature of crossover students who had come from one program to another.

KUBLER

Well, Michael Coe thinks of me as uncooperative, which is probably correct. I'm uncooperative with anthropologists who resist the programs of art historians applying to anthropology. Michael Coe and I were teaching the same sort of thing in the general courses. I never found a reason to work with Michael Coe because of his-- He came to Yale in the fifties, and it was never possible for me to work with him and I never tried. [laughter] It's probably my fault.

SMITH

There we have what could be a question of personal incompatibility.

KUBLER

I think it's an incompatibility.

SMITH

But there also seems to be a broader issue of how art historians and anthropologists relate to each other, which goes beyond personalities.

KUBLER

I always got along easily with anthropologists before Coe's time. [laughter] Wendell Bennett, Lounsbury-- Lounsbury and I have worked together; Bennett and I have worked together. But it would be impossible to work with Coe because Coe wouldn't want to work with me.

REESE

Another figure, though, who in many ways seems to be on both sides in this equation, would be Gordon Willey, whom you've had a long friendship with yet disagreed with.

KUBLER

We were good friends, and we worked together on different projects and especially at Dumbarton Oaks. So the anthropological inclusion at Dumbarton Oaks is very compatible. I'm very compatible with them, but Coe is always the one resisting.

SMITH

How much does this have to do with a supposed conflict between a humanistic approach and a social science approach?

KUBLER

I can't say. I've never really had a chance to talk with Coe about this.

REESE

Well, I'm torn between two things that were discussed right now. One would be your important 1958 article on space in Maya courtyards ["The Design of Space in Maya Architecture"], which was very clearly an application of methods that came out of the history of art to the analysis of space. The other is to jump more directly into the Ancient America as a cleavage point in the professional relations between art historians and archaeologists, based on the

fact that you proposed radically different explanations in a major textbook which any young historian of anthropology or of the art of ancient America--

SMITH

Why don't we discuss the article a little bit.

KUBLER

The article on space?

SMITH

On space, right. The sense that you felt art history is absolutely essential to expand understanding of ancient American society.

KUBLER

Well, that's the gist of this book [Esthetic Recognition of Ancient Amerindian Art (1991)], mainly. The necessity for aesthetic recognition in cultural problems, which I think is on the whole ignored by anthropology, social anthropology. They have no place for it, and they don't want to be burdened with it. So from my end it's a losing game. [laughter]

SMITH

I know you've done this at various points in various essays, but if you could sort of succinctly give us your working definitions of the difference between a humanistic approach and a social science approach.

KUBLER

The social science and sociological analysis really has no room for aesthetic problems. There is no room.

SMITH

Is that because everything has to be quantifiable?

KUBLER

It must be quantifiable, and it has to be explained in ways that do not make it necessary in the traditional practice of sociology to apply to aesthetics. Aesthetics is unnecessary.

SMITH

You've said at some points that the art object is, well, useless in a sense, or ineffable.

KUBLER

Well, my formulation is more inclusive of everything. All objects are both tools and works of art. A reciprocal relationship--some are tools, some are works of art. But no tool is without some aesthetic meaning. No work of art is without some useful aspect. So it's a graded series both ways, and the aesthetic component is never absent from the tool--all tools are residually works of art--and vice versa.

SMITH

That aesthetic part includes an ineffable aspect. I think you used the word ineffable in one of your later essays. What I'm getting at is, would you agree that the aesthetic object has a degree of irrationality built into it?

KUBLER

It's part of the emotional side of life. This I think has really been left out of the social science program. From our point of view.

SMITH

If you could give your working definition of a humanistic viewpoint-- Which I recall [Giovanni] Previtalli said you had escaped from, but you denied.

KUBLER

Well, my present point of view is in the book.

SMITH

Your most recent book [Esthetic Recognition of Ancient Amerindian Art].

REESE

In An Anthropologist Looks at History, [Alfred] Kroeber said, "Histories of art accordingly promise to be of increasing importance in the comparative history of civilizations. Art expresses values. It deals with them perhaps more directly than any other cultural activity, and in every civilization there resides a value

system." And he continues with this. Do you feel that many of the anthropologists working in the fifties and sixties were, in fact, ignoring those values?

KUBLER

I think so. Recent theoretical developments in anthropology and anthropological archaeology are excessively scientific and continuing to ignore the aesthetic component of their subjects of study.

SMITH

This may be an unfair question, but I'm wondering-- In the last twenty years there's been somewhat of a revision of the understanding of Maya societies and how they were organized. Does that revision correspond to what you would know from the art historical record?

KUBLER

Well, Mary Miller, my colleague, was one of the authors of the book called *Blood of Kings*. This recent revision of the understanding of Maya society depends very much on the restudy of the representation of rites of blood sacrifice in Maya art. The other division of the advance in understanding Maya inscriptions and arts is in respect to the theory of government and the presence of these kingships. So the *Blood of Kings* states both these directions of the new quotation marks, "interpretation of Maya civilization." I think they were all present there long before they were codified, as they have been now, but what lies beyond the *Blood of Kings* remains to be seen. I don't think the *Blood of Kings* is a final word, a final caption for the whole of Maya civilization.

REESE

To return briefly to the article on space and Maya architecture, it seems to me that such a formulation must have depended, you know, very largely on ideas in the history of art that had grown out of works like Bruno Zevi's and Siegfried Giedion's and others that would then apply to the New World. Can you recall something about the kind of genesis of that article and how early you began thinking about it? Was it something explored first in classes?

KUBLER

I think so. It came out of teaching and the consideration of Maya design of space.

REESE

Did you think when you presented that paper for the first time that it would have any shock value for anthropologists? Did you assume that they simply would be grateful to have a new insight?

KUBLER

Well, I said it at a congress. I think it was a congress of Americanists. It's a line of investigation that could be picked up and carried farther. I've noticed in the work of architects who were engaged in Maya archaeology an awareness of this problem which is independent of my paper on the subject. But I don't see big institutional investigations of Mayan architecture getting involved in this problem, again. It's there, but no one is working on it.

SMITH

Have other ancient American architectures been subjected to the kind of architectural analysis that you were developing in that article? For instance, Teotihuacán.

KUBLER

I don't see field archaeologists taking serious notice of this possibility. They do their measurements and perform their calculations, and they go ahead with their reconstructions more or less indifferent to the problem of space--of the space they're handling or mutilating or destroying. [laughter]

SMITH

Are you suggesting that you can't actually measure or describe a building without knowing its inherent meanings for the people who created it?

KUBLER

Well, I would like to know what Mayas thought about their spatial designs, and the only way to begin is to describe them--describe them more adequately than the anthropological archaeologist would want to do. I think this is part of Proskouriakoff's dissatisfaction with archaeology and archaeologists of anthropological training.

REESE

There's another figure who we have not spoken of at all, Miguel Covarrubias. Were you friends?

KUBLER

We knew him in Oaxaca. He was on business in Oaxaca during our stay there once while I was working on the architectural book. Miguel Covarrubias was a commercial artist and a very successful one and a society artist. At the time of his death he was working on a trilogy, one on ancient Mexico. During the writing of his trilogy he became an ardent diffusionist--about '59. And the books that he brought out were filled with diffusionist arguments lifted from the proposals of people defending that position. Before he died he had become identified with diffusionism, which was being abandoned by anthropologists. We were talking about this. [laughter]

REESE

I'm thinking about those individuals-- Proskouriakoff trained as an artist, [Jean] Charlot as an illustrator, Covarrubias as an artist, and I'm sure there were others. Did you feel that they brought another dimension, really, to the writing about--?

KUBLER

Charlot, I think he did, perhaps more temperately than Covarrubias in his diffusionist frame of mind.

REESE

Earlier, I had said that I thought that it might be important to talk about the impact of Ancient America on the field.

KUBLER

On the field of?

REESE

On the field of anthropology, but also art history. Clearly, there were issues about method and what one looked at, selection of objects. But there was also the very important contested zone about calendar, about correlations. I

wonder if you could bring us back over to difficulties of trying to, in fact, work out the final jigsaw puzzle in which all of these various sequences fell into place.

KUBLER

Well, calendar studies are subject to a great variety in the quality of the sixteenth-century records. There are reliable sixteenth-century records and there are unreliable sixteenth-century records. Sorting these out is still going on, but the reliable ones are documents that are widely scattered and have been studied intensely in the nineteenth century with commentaries that are still the only commentaries that we have. So the question is to restudy the manuscripts themselves and retest the conclusions of the original editors such as Eduard Seler and others.

REESE

I'm afraid I probably led you askew because I used the word calendar rather than chronology, and I was really thinking of the problem of the chronologies and the early disputes about the GMT.

KUBLER

Yes. They all go together--the correlation with the Christian calendar. There are still great problems to be solved in those directions. For example, Codex Borbonicus 21, 22-- Those two panels offer not only description of the solar year and the ceremonial year, they also are historical calendars. It's a calendar in which the basic elements indicate a cycle of 20,176 years, of which we're still in the first quarter. And this is what that manuscript is about.

REESE

I'm trying to get this in another way, perhaps, because it's such a sprawling question. You described in writing the *Ars Hispaniae* volume that you would write different pieces of it and out of those that one could fit into it write a larger whole. In the ancient America book I've assumed that one could proceed in the same way, except without dates that were absolutely fixed. At some point the little parenthesis following the monument demanded to be filled in with some kind of an absolute date. I'm trying to reconstruct a little bit the process of writing the book and of then facing the problem of leaving the

whole thing together within a chronology and what you recall about your thought process during that. Not your final decision one way or the other, but just a way in which you--

KUBLER

Oh, I think the problem of correlating the chronologies is on the whole in good order, and we're very close to being able to leave the periods as indicated in a text for our calendar by centuries. So that we can use the sequence of centuries--B.C., A.D.-- with relative security in Mesoamerica and in the Andean archaeology. Carbon 14 and other dates are multiplying constantly, and there are more and more indications that we can assign any object to a century in our sequence of centuries, which is very different from having to deal with the classic, the preclassic, the postclassic.

REESE

The book for you was clearly a piece of original scholarship, not merely a recapitulation of accepted wisdom, as some textbooks tend to imply. Who was your audience for the Ancient America?

KUBLER

I was thinking of the general reader. The general reader of the [Nikolaus] Pevsner history of art. And that might include an anthropologist. [laughter] It might include an art historian. I hoped to satisfy both.

REESE

Not necessarily students, though, but an educated adult public?

KUBLER

Yes. Which all students are in the process of becoming. [laughter]

SMITH

Yesterday, when we talked about the craft of writing, there's something we didn't talk about, which is the question of how you develop an approach to describing an object. I think it's particularly important in this work. Any description in a Euroamerican cultural language begins to impose certain values and interpretations on something that developed on a very different

framework. How would you approach this question? How do you go about describing your objects in words?

KUBLER

Well, an architectural assemblage has to be described in space. A painted assemblage has to be described in the illusion of space--some illusion of space. A jewel has to be described in terms of the order in which jewels exist, and so on. Each kind of artwork has those descriptive requirements that differ according to the artwork. So that the wording requires as penetrating a study of the organization of that particular kind of object as possible. Very often there isn't an adequate way of describing a textile or a jewel or a monumental sculpture excepting in its own terms. There's no generic way. Perhaps every work of art needs to be described in some measure to capture its singleness rather than its membership in a group, or both at the same time. And we're going to go on and on with the things that are desirable in describing works of art, but always changing with what the work of art is under consideration.

SMITH

How important is it for you to include in some degree your own emotional reaction to the piece?

KUBLER

That's a separate task, and it should include the history of opinion--according to the space that's available. And you rarely have much space. In a general text like Pelican, there's difficulty going into the history of the writing on a object or a place.

REESE

Do you remember at all the process of actually writing the final draft for Ancient America and the precise body of time you did it? Or was it, again, done with pieces elaborated over a very long period of time?

KUBLER

I think the latter, yes. It was done in pieces and over a long time and rejecting drafts and replacing. I don't know if one has an impression of patchwork from using the book, but I imagine that book has been used for general

information--general information rather than for descriptions of specific works. Classes of objects are the main subject.

SMITH

Classes of objects, and yet the objects must be described in their uniqueness.

KUBLER

And yet they're unique. As works of art they're unique.

SMITH

What about the selection of the objects that you decided to focus on? The buildings, etc. To some degree that choice, I guess, is conventional. I mean, there's an opinion that's formed, but to what degree did you feel that you had to include or exclude things that were outside the convention?

KUBLER

Well, there's the chronological armature. That has to be filled, and it must be filled adequately for each area. The work of selection is what is most important for the reader to know and how much to give the reader. And of course you're limited by what is known, [laughter] and it's changing as you're writing.

REESE

It brings up, of course, the question of the quality.

KUBLER

Yes. Importance of quality. Sometimes it's important for understanding other things.

REESE

So in that way it's really a symbol, or at least a window into other problems.

KUBLER

Yes. Some objects lead you into others.

SMITH

Is it possible for you to use examples from that book to demonstrate the concept of the prime object from *The Shape of Time*?

KUBLER

At this distance from that book I think of prime objects more and more as black holes [laughter]--black holes of immense energy, but it is really invisible. Perhaps we don't have any prime objects. We only have reflections of them.

REESE

But was it in a very literal way the writing of the *Ancient America* book that focused your attention on that problem of prime object versus masterpiece?

KUBLER

Maybe. I think that book [*The Shape of Time*] has essentially to do with the experience of pre-Columbian objects, and it shows in the design. There is no illustration excepting in the chapter headings, isn't it?

REESE

I have at least one question about your reactions to the first reviews [of *The Art and Architecture of Ancient America*] that came out. I'm thinking reviews by anthropologists. Were you surprised?

KUBLER

Oh, I was pleased on the whole with reviews, yes. Even the sharp ones, the sharply critical ones. I welcomed those.

REESE

In other words, that the book could generate controversy about the objects was a very desirable--

KUBLER

Oh, yes, yes. I was glad of controversy. And I don't think there ever was an answer, but I was glad to have it, to know of it.

REESE

Do you feel, in that way, that the book has really advanced the resolution of the problems that you were laying out in controversy?

KUBLER

I've presented the problems, and it has many translations. There are many translations of the book now, many languages. It seems to have a life of its own. And I've never changed a word of it in any of these editions.

REESE

Actually, I think we've skipped, because I was thinking of Ancient America and you were thinking--

KUBLER

Oh, I thought you meant The Shape of Time.

REESE

Yeah, we had moved to The Shape of Time.

KUBLER

Yes. I've been talking about The Shape of Time for the last minute or two.

SMITH

I was thinking of the use in the Ancient America of the concept of the prime object.

KUBLER

Yes, yes, in principle. I'm thinking about ancient America in that book, but the rest of human art, too.

SMITH

At any rate, perhaps the ancillary question of that is the process by which ancient American art has been turned into masterpieces and joined the canon. Your thoughts on that aspect, and whether canonicity helps us see ancient American art or is an impediment.

KUBLER

Well, that's for the reader to decide. I think it does have a use in understanding the rest of world art. And the rest of world art is useful in

knowing satisfactorily American pre-Columbian art. They're part of the same world game which is played everywhere.

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KUBLER

Let me see-- For this discussion of *The Shape of Time: [Remarks on the History of Things (1962)]*-- The existence of all these translations. It's now in its twenty-third printing, and all of these editions seem to put it in a category of being a little work of art itself. There's never any suggestion that I change anything in it. There's all sorts of criticism of concepts in it, but the form of it seems to be irreproachable. Otherwise, why would people keep reading it. Which suggests that it is to be considered as a modest work of art.

SMITH

The Shape of Time appears to me one of several books that had profound impact at their time and mark in some ways an epistemological revolution in American academia. One of which is Thomas [S.] Kuhn's book [*The Structure of] Scientific Revolutions*.

KUBLER

Same time, yes.

SMITH

Exact same time, and shortly before then was Kenneth Burke's book *The Image*. So I'm wondering to what degree you were aware of what Kuhn and Burke were doing and what your opinion of their books is.

KUBLER

I didn't have them in mind while I was writing it, no. But I did recognize that family resemblance, of which I would regard mine as the least important.

SMITH

Stephen Toulmin looks at these books as representing a shift from a Popperian logico-positivism to a relativist point of view in American academic thought. How do you--?

KUBLER

I like that--relativism. Everything is relative to something else. [laughter]

REESE

I wonder if we could turn back to the genesis of *The Shape of Time*. We talked a little bit yesterday about it, but in May 1959 you had submitted, I believe, the ancient American volume [*The Art and Architecture of Ancient America: The Mexican, Maya, and Andean Peoples* (1962)]. I don't know, was the Spain and Latin American volume, *Art and Architecture in Spain and Portugal[and Their American Dominions, 1500 to 1800]*, submitted earlier than the Ancient America or finished--?

KUBLER

That was with [Martin] Soria and that was the first book. That was the prior book, and then I persuaded [Nikolaus] Pevsner to admit the Ancient America to the series.

REESE

I'm just trying to think of the chronology of finishing Ancient America and then your illness that you spoke of last night and then the actual writing of *The Shape of Time*. Do you remember when you first found that you had tuberculosis?

KUBLER

I had a checkup and X ray, and I was told that I better get to Gaylord [Farm] and have the new chemotherapy, which I did. It took about three months, and then we had another three months in Italy. I think that was a really good time, a good period of the writing of the first draft.

REESE

Was that in 1959 or in 1960?

KUBLER

'Fifty-nine and '60. I had nothing else to do. [laughter]

REESE

Which is precisely, you know, the question of how you went about writing it. You had probably not as much access to your books at home.

KUBLER

No.

REESE

Could you tell us something about what you recall about the process of outlining and actually writing *The Shape of Time*?

KUBLER

I was in bed a lot of the time and I was thinking. As I was thinking, I would write out ideas that might go into this book, of which I already had the title. These slips were really the first draft. Then, in Italy, I wrote the whole thing out.

REESE

Did you proceed from a general outline?

KUBLER

Before I began writing I had a fair amount outlined, yes.

REESE

Had you ever outlined any of these ideas in classes? In other words, I'm thinking particularly about the move from very concrete subject matter in the history of art to an abstraction or generalization.

KUBLER

Many of the things in that book are things that I began saying in the methods course in relation to the work of other art historians.

REESE

So they were reflections upon problems that other art historians--?

KUBLER

That had been suggested in that course, which I did for years.

REESE

But there was never an outline of a methods class that would resemble in any way *The Shape of Time*.

KUBLER

No. This was a new formula--suggested by [Henri] Focillon's book *La Vie des formes*.

REESE

What reading, if any, did you do during this time you were hospitalized and thinking about *The Shape of Time*?

KUBLER

I read a lot of Henry James. [laughter]

REESE

Do you think there was any connection between the two?

KUBLER

Well, I wanted to read more and more of Henry James, and I don't think there was any overflow or overlap that I was aware of.

REESE

Thinking again of the process of writing, did you write in a linear way on pads or did you write on notecards?

KUBLER

The original accumulation of things to develop was on three-by-five cards as they occurred. They fell into place in retrospect when I felt ready to write.

REESE

You were rereading *La Vie des formes*?

KUBLER

No. I didn't look at it much, no. I remembered it. I remembered its format, and the book came out as almost a twin volume.

REESE

I mean, there's a large number also of references to other disciplines, not only in the physical and natural sciences. Were those from memory or were there books that you would probe for connections?

KUBLER

I was aware of those books without access to them. Then when I got back I could check them, and I made another draft with the references. The text itself could stand without the references, but I think it's more fun with the references. I'm always glad for footnotes. It's a musical voice, it's a different voice. The footnote is a different voice, and it's part of another melody.

REESE

I'm curious about the evolution of the writing. You had an outline early and then you had cards. When you did go to Italy, where you wrote a lot of it-- There were large parts of it already in place by the time you went to Italy. Italy was a polishing of the manuscript?

KUBLER

The pieces of the chapters came into being gradually as I was writing it and rewriting it. I remember rewriting it completely after I returned to New Haven. So there are really three or four drafts, beginning with these three-by-five jottings.

REESE

Do you remember anything about the decisions that brought you to rewrite it? In other words, what qualities were you searching for in the various drafts?

KUBLER

Internal coherence and development of idea from section to section. It has, what, four or five chapters?

SMITH

Who was the ideal audience for *The Shape of Time*?

KUBLER

Well, people knowing and concerned about art.

SMITH

Did you expect that your colleagues would be sympathetic to the work?

KUBLER

I didn't know--and I still don't know--whether they are. [laughter]

REESE

Before we leave the question of its writing, I'm particularly curious about the style of the book, which is noted by many for its terseness. Which is distinct, I believe, from many of the other analytical projects, which require a different kind of descriptive and analytical language. Was that something that you were conscious of?

KUBLER

Yes. I intended it to be terse rather than discursive.

SMITH

When you have said that you intended the book to criticize art history from the point of view of social science, is that in order to adopt a social science rhetoric?

KUBLER

Yes. That's one of the themes of the development, adding a social component to the aesthetic one, a sociological component which runs all through the book.

REESE

I mean, I think it's very interesting that it could be perceived, as you say, as a reflection upon the state of art history as one analyzed it in the methods classes that you had conducted. Which suggests to me that there are, you know, two things working. One is retrospective--analyzing what has been done--and the other is projective, in terms of "there could be."

KUBLER

Yes. That's intentional, and the sociological component is a voice, a constant voice in the composition.

SMITH

To what degree do you think art historical writing has been retarded by the use of everyday, common-sense language? Instead of developing a set of more scientific kinds of terms.

KUBLER

Well, I would prefer to have the consideration of art remain public rather than unapproachable property of a guild such as scientists, physical scientists.

SMITH

I was thinking of the connection with "Towards a Reductive Theory of Visual Style." In that essay, one of the things that you seem to be trying to do is to reshape the language so that different terms are used to describe common phenomena and the terms are more limited in their definitions.

KUBLER

Or add a few.

SMITH

And add a few.

KUBLER

It's enough to add a few to the stock. It's in constant change anyway. That's one of the meanings of the title.

SMITH

In Shape of Time you add a few concepts which, perhaps-- The prime objects seems to have been a very-- Controversial isn't the right word, but it's been a difficult concept for people because it's idealized.

KUBLER

It is, yes. I still have additional notions about it, such as a black hole. It doesn't exist--or does it exist? But as an excess of energy--as a point of high energy--there must be some relationship.

REESE

To what extent did you want the book to be not only terse but also very open-ended, suggestive rather than concrete?

KUBLER

I hoped for that, that it be suggestive of further thought than mine.

SMITH

Well, if we take *The Shape of Time* as a self-prescriptive work, to what degree did you follow up on its program in the empirical work that you began doing in the sixties? Did you become more conscious of looking for prime objects and sequences?

KUBLER

No, I had this out of my system and I went back to my everyday work. But I never really wanted to change anything in *The Shape of Time*, even with criticisms that I-- I value the criticisms of *The Shape of Time*, but they don't lead me to revise it. [laughter]

SMITH

Some of the discussion around it suggests that-- Well, people such as James [S.] Ackerman were complaining of a crisis in the state of art history. Were you responding to those kinds of complaints in this book?

KUBLER

Perhaps the general state of affairs in the history of art was inducing me to write this book.

SMITH

Did you feel that there was a crisis?

KUBLER

Well, I would say a stasis rather than a crisis, a stagnation. A condition of stagnation rather than a condition of medical crisis.

SMITH

What was the source of the stagnation?

KUBLER

The persistence of traditional ways of discussing works of art. The persistence of a certain rhetoric which is no more than a fusion.

REESE

You earlier, in response to a question by Richard about Kuhn's book, were talking about that it was part of a certain class of books, perhaps. Can you think of other books that would be of its form, class, that you have read, either previously or subsequently, that you would put in this constellation? Books like *The Shape of Time* that you particularly have been engaged by?

KUBLER

I'll give that thought. I can't think of any offhand. Do you have any suggestions?

REESE

No, I really--

KUBLER

[to Smith] And you?

SMITH

Beyond the two that I've mentioned, none that I think would necessarily be relevant to the area that we are talking about. I mean, if we were to pursue Kuhn a little bit, the thing that was so scandalous about Kuhn's position was the idea that there was no objective truth determining scholastic endeavor, but instead these consensual paradigms. If you accept the implications of Kuhn's work, the empirical data that one is working with are not really the determinant factor, but the social relations that scholars are involved in. How did you feel about that?

KUBLER

I thought it was interesting. It was interesting and debatable. In the best sense of debatable was the debate. And it is still under way. He is changing the terms slowly.

SMITH

Yes, I think he retreated from his 1960 statement. But the way you've described your own work methodology, you begin with the objects even and an intuition that there would be a--

KUBLER

I begin with the problems. [laughter]

SMITH

What I thought you said was that you begin with the objects and an intuition that there will be pay dirt in there, and as you dive into the objects the problem emerges and defines itself.

KUBLER

Or is there a beginning with a problem? And then the objects cluster with the problem. Does one find the problem in the objects or does one find the objects with the problem? I suspect I find the object with the problem. This problem must be considered with such and such objects.

SMITH

Let's say if we look at the historical development of your work through *The Religious Architecture of New Mexico* [in the Colonial Period and since the American Occupation (1940)] and *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century* [1948], even the very titles suggest that you start with the objects. And then in your later work, perhaps your titles suggest that you moved towards the problems.

KUBLER

Surface more. Yes. I think that's right.

REESE

Of course, the premise of *The Shape of Time* is that the objects are made in partial response to a problem.

KUBLER

They are solutions to problems to begin with. And that problem is part of the problem, discovering what the urgency was.

SMITH

There seems to be an endemic sense of crisis within art history. I was thinking as we were going through this about your 1945 talk, where there's a sense of crisis almost immediately upon the birth of the new art history. Then the late fifties, Ackerman. Then I was thinking, of course, of [Donald] Preziosi's book [Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science], which talks about a current sense of crisis. Art history doesn't seem to have a clear idea of what its object is. Do you agree with that sense of art history having a problem of not knowing what its object is?

KUBLER

Well, I think it's a very healthy sign to be concerned about where a profession is going and what for.

REESE

We talked a great deal in respect to Ancient America about the particular attitudes of anthropologists towards defending their territory. The Shape of Time seems to draw upon that larger experience of dealing with non-Western art within the history of art. But The Shape of Time specifically seems to turn back towards the traditional art historians and challenge them. Had you felt, in your own work, not only a certain closure on the part of anthropologists but also on the part of the history of art?

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

So you mean there were similar closures from that side?

KUBLER

Yes. I think so. There are cracks in the building everywhere. [laughter]

SMITH

But was it a closure of the history of art, or is it a closure that is involved with the Eurocentric tradition? For instance, a tradition which privileges the identity of the individual artist and the concept of genius.

KUBLER

Well, the American evidence, the pre-Columbian American evidence, is fortunately in my opinion independent of Europe's interest, totally independent. The connection with the rest of humanity is so remote now. And the independence of America--of the American development--is increasingly older as the study of this problem continues, making Ancient America a testing ground for theories about art. I think that's part of my idea about *The Shape of Time*.

REESE

I'm trying to think without having it all worked out yet in my own mind about the implications of a universal history of art--as opposed to a more pluralistic view--in which we would say there wasn't a Mesoamerican aesthetic that was distinct from other cultures. Of course, the fact that one is learning from a large body of art historical practice in Europe that one then applies, or at least applies where relevant, to the pre-Columbian art with the hope that it will elicit new answers-- I'm wondering about the question of whether you in some way feel there is a universal set of paradigms that we can use to elicit information from any and everything, or whether one needs separate--

KUBLER

Well, that's to be tested. The American evidence is increasingly important as one defines such procedures of testing for independence first and then for similarity of developmental pattern--or differences of developmental pattern--in sequences that seem related or similar. Are they related or are they merely similar, you know? Those concerns are very workable, but they have to be done in a systematic way. It's a big enterprise.

REESE

Can you imagine a survey on still a larger scale than those you've done in which you try to do a history of world art finding principles that will allow you to engage in such an enterprise? Or do you think that would be fruitless?

KUBLER

Well, I won't do it. I won't live long enough. But [Colin] Martindale's book [The Clockwork Muse: The Predictability of Artistic Change] is interesting because he's extending Darwin's evolutionary system to a study of very short periods of time with evolutionary changes in these very short periods of time. His periodization is something like twenty times twenty years. Twenty units of twenty years back of the present. He's looking for evolutionary change in the history of things, the history of ideas. It's an interesting extension of Darwinian evolution to historical time of recent and very short duration. He does it by statistical methods with the arts and with literature and finding evolutionary changes that are defined by a set of equations he's devised. Six sets of equations that seem to describe mathematically these evolutionary changes in language and in art and in technology.

REESE

Since you're reading this book so intensely right now, I really wonder if it might be fruitful to see if we could find out whether, in fact, we're right at the genesis of reflection upon it in the form of an article. Is this the kind of beginning you often--?

KUBLER

I don't know. Martindale sent me the book because he cites *The Shape of Time* frequently. I wrote him a note thanking him for the book, and I haven't heard from him. But I would like to hear what he has to say.

SMITH

I'm curious to know the degree to which, while you were writing *The Shape of Time*, you were responding to such articles as Meyer Schapiro's essay on style.

KUBLER

What was the date of that?

SMITH

I think '52.

KUBLER

'Fifty-two, yes.

SMITH

I was just going to double-check it, but I think it's '52.

KUBLER

I was opposed to that side of Meyer Schapiro's work.

SMITH

Was this something that was perturbing you, in the sense that discussion of Schapiro's work would come up in graduate seminars?

KUBLER

I didn't want to put it in *The Shape of Time*. I didn't want to attack anyone, but I did disagree with Meyer Schapiro.

REESE

In an article in *Perspecta*: [The Yale Architectural Journal] which was published in the late sixties, I believe, you made this statement which--

KUBLER

What was the title?

REESE

I don't have it here, but it is on what architects can learn from history.

KUBLER

Oh, yes. That was sort of a tailor-made title made by the tailor.

REESE

I'm looking here for the exact quote, but-- Oh, yes, it's 1965, "What Can Historians Do for Architects?" So the reverse of what I said. You said, and I quote, "The art historian, he is also a kind of policeman, patrolling the beat against the myth makers. It is as if the historian had to apprehend and bring myths to justice. He has to be on the watch in the public interest for foolish and implausible or outsized, inflated ideas about the present and the past. And since every artist is virtually interested in the myth of himself, a natural

empathy often arises between him and the deflating historian who pricks his bubble. Yet the historian is the victim of the very same myth-making process, in that he has to present a compact symbolic notation for what has happened."

KUBLER

That was just rambling speculation.

SMITH

But in "Indianism, Mestizaje, and Indigenismo [as Classical, Medieval, and Modern Traditions in Latin America]," you begin the very first sentence, "Our knowledge of the past runs to stereotypes." Which I think is a logical continuation of that statement.

REESE

I'm just curious what your reactions are to these words.

KUBLER

Well, in both those pieces, those are aperçus, and they're not developed in an orderly way, but written on request.

SMITH

Certainly many art historians consider themselves to be gatekeepers and police officers of the cultural heritage. Are you suggesting another way of looking at these police-keeping functions?

KUBLER

Well, this was written for architects, wasn't it? Reminding them of the necessity to have some order in the house. [laughter]

REESE

But I'm particularly interested in this role of constantly testing, challenging the established notions.

KUBLER

Or behavior.

REESE

Or behavior. Is this something that you feel has always been with you? I mean, is it something that someone who knew you in the Harkness Hoot would have said about you at a very early age?

KUBLER

Maybe. Maybe it's a temperamental disposition. But constant criticism is difficult, and without criticism architects get lost.

REESE

I was thinking of this not merely as addressed to architects, but whether it would be addressed to art historians in *The Shape of Time* or anthropologists in *Ancient America* or to, you know, any group with a territorial boundary to be protected.

KUBLER

Well, I returned to the aperçus. They're undeveloped.

SMITH

Well, I think there are two further questions I'd like to pursue. One is a practical one and perhaps can be wrapped up quickly, which was, did you have any participation in the development of the National Endowment for the Humanities [NEH]?

KUBLER

None.

SMITH

Were colleagues' opinions being solicited as to how the NEH should be established and how the peer-review process might work and what kinds of programs should be funded?

KUBLER

If so, none reached me.

SMITH

The other thing is a little broader. I think we won't really be able to develop it until the next time we get together, but your relationship with [Erwin] Panofsky and the interaction of your thinking with Panofsky's thinking with the publication of *Renaissance and Renascences*. I wonder if you could outline for us what kinds of connections you maintained with Panofsky after you left the Institute [of Fine Arts, New York University] in 1938.

KUBLER

Whenever I was near Princeton [University], I would pay a visit--after telephoning. I remember one very pleasant evening with the family. They were making music. They were a very musical family. They were playing.

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KUBLER

I made perhaps three or four such visits, and then that particular journey was no longer necessary. I was going on my way to Ohio, but my ties to Ohio changed. So I didn't call on Panofsky again, and that's the end of it.

SMITH

So what time frame are we talking about?

KUBLER

Oh, three or four years before 1950.

SMITH

Were you communicating by correspondence?

KUBLER

We corresponded, yes. And when I brought out an article on rib vaults ["A Late Gothic Computation of Rib Vault Thrusts"], he took a great interest in it and wrote me a letter. We've had a continuing correspondence on that topic of rib vault thrusts and their interpretation.

SMITH

Did he have an interest in or knowledge of ancient American art?

KUBLER

He wouldn't talk about it because he didn't know anything.

SMITH

Given the iconographical aspects of the work, whether he would be curious about that--

KUBLER

We usually talked about Gothic architecture, which he was always very much interested in.

REESE

If we could, I'd like to return to the reception of *The Shape of Time* following its publication. As colleagues and others might have read the drafts-- Do you remember whom you allowed to read *The Shape of Time* in draft versions and what kind of discussions might have ensued? Charles Seymour [Jr.] or--?

KUBLER

I think the readers for the press [Yale University Press]-- I never knew who the readers were. But I talked about it with Charles Seymour and with Sumner Crosby and with George [Heard] Hamilton. I talked about it, and I think they all read it. They were interested, but they didn't make any suggestions for changing it.

SMITH

Would they assign it in their classes?

KUBLER

I don't know. I doubt it.

REESE

I was wondering in some way whether they would have felt challenged by the proposals that you were making about a more inclusive art history, whether they would have felt indirectly criticized.

KUBLER

I thought, in talking with them, that they agreed with me and that they felt a sympathy with the argument, those colleagues.

SMITH

We talked earlier, when we began, about-- You mentioned there was a distinct Yale method. We were talking specifically about the forties, in the Focillon tradition, when Focillon was still alive and the tradition was still strong. But at the time that you published *The Shape of Time*, did the department still have a cohesive identity and unity? Was there a distinctive Yale art history method that could be traced back to Focillon and around which there was an élan and an agreeability?

KUBLER

Yes. I think it lasted that long. In the fifties was when it changed. The staff changed. We were more eclectic and more kinds of training were on display. [laughter] We were, in a sense, too parochial in the beginning of the history of the department. This opening up in the fifties, in the sixties, was to the benefit and improvement of the department.

SMITH

With Panofsky and the publication of *Renaissance and Renascences*, that book seemed to have a lot of echoes in your later works and was published as you were finishing up *The Shape of Time*.

KUBLER

I liked it very much. Very stimulating. Very stimulating book. It still is. It's the most adventurous of his books.

SMITH

Did you see it as a break with what he had been doing previously?

KUBLER

Yes. He had been a very conservative student among the students of Gothic architecture. But in *Renaissance and Renascences* he broke away with an entirely novel theory of a hierarchy of renaissances. Re-beginnings, new beginnings. New beginnings over and over or inside the last beginning, new beginnings.

SMITH

So was that kind of pattern that you appreciate, that you look for in art historical or intellectual writing, a sense of a model for understanding phenomena that's general but then can be applied to specifics?

KUBLER

Well, in Panofsky's Renaissance and Renascences I found confirmation of what I'd been thinking, in the theoretical parts, which are notably different from what Panofsky had been thinking before he published this. And that in turn is in part made up out of essays he'd been writing.

SMITH

Did this lead to renewed contact, increased levels of communications?

KUBLER

Yes. We corresponded.

SMITH

Did he become someone that you wanted to test your ideas out with?

KUBLER

Well, he was a very busy man, and I didn't want to infringe on his time.
[laughter]

**1.21. TAPE NUMBER: XI, SIDE ONE
NOVEMBER 18, 1991**

SMITH

When we left off last time we had finished talking about The Shape of Time: [Remarks on the History of Things (1962)] and its origin. It appears that at the time you began to consider more deeply some of the questions that [Erwin] Panofsky had raised in Renaissance and Renascences. I wanted to ask you, at this point-- As I said, you began to consider some of the questions raised by Panofsky in Renaissance and Renascences. You had mentioned last time that you renewed your contact with him after 1960-61. I was wondering if you could describe a little bit the nature and the extent of that contact with him.

KUBLER

Well, I was his student when I was at New York University in the Institute of Fine Arts, as it was called, which is up near the Metropolitan Museum [of Art]. He lectured to large classes, and he held a seminar in a business building on Madison Avenue, where we would often go to the bar for the seminar. It was a very enjoyable seminar with some people who later became major figures in the history of art.

SMITH

Now, you had mentioned that after you graduated you maintained some contact with him, primarily over the question of Gothic architecture.

KUBLER

Yes, it was the rib vault question in which he was interested, and he was interested in the paper ["A Late Gothic Computation of Rib Vault Thrusts"], but he disagreed with parts of it.

SMITH

What was the nature of this disagreement?

KUBLER

Oh, it was over the functioning of the rib.

SMITH

Was it a technical disagreement or a philosophical disagreement? I know sometimes it's hard to separate.

KUBLER

I think it was more of a technical disagreement than a philosophical one.

SMITH

So you had more or less compatible ideas about art history and its practice.

KUBLER

Oh, yes. Very much so. My thought at that time was molded by his. I disagreed with parts of it. I was in essential agreement.

SMITH

On the use of iconology, too.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

What would be the parts that you disagreed with of his approach?

KUBLER

At the moment, it escapes me. But it wasn't a fundamental disagreement. It was a disagreement over minor points.

SMITH

But of course he seems to have been less concerned over questions of form than you are.

KUBLER

That's right. At that time I was more of a morphologist than he was, and he was more of an iconographer than I was.

SMITH

So after *Renaissance and Renascences* was published and you read that work, you said your contact with him was renewed. Did you initiate that?

KUBLER

Yes. I remember going to his house near Princeton, or in Princeton, at the Institute for Advanced Study [Princeton University], and talking with him there. We were more in agreement than ever.

SMITH

Perhaps you put more emphasis on the principle of disjunction than he did?

KUBLER

Yes. But I think that he was himself concerned to find the disjunctions, and increasingly so as he grew older.

SMITH

If you read Renaissance and Renascences, it's not a theoretical work, particularly. You have to glean paragraphs and sentences out of it to determine the guiding principles of it. Your work is much more crisply articulated in terms of its theoretical foundations.

KUBLER

We were going the same road. I went my way on it, and he went his way on it, but we were going the same road. He was finding the parting lines, the parting frontiers, in Renaissance and Renascences. But he had the wit to give them different names.

SMITH

I wonder in terms of methodological approach, though-- He in his work was very much focused on a specific question and puts forward a solution which has broader implications but which in his presentation makes claims only for the situation it's describing--that is, the divergent views of antiquity and Western art from Charlemagne to the Renaissance.

KUBLER

Yes, he was within that envelope.

SMITH

And your work tends to reach for a more universal kind of--

KUBLER

To expand. To expand the scope of the notion. Yes. The way in which knowledge or practice is perpetuated. And what the lines of fission are.

SMITH

In '59 you wrote "On the Colonial Extinction of the Motifs of Precolumbian Art," which preceded Panofsky's book, though his lectures had been given before then. I'm wondering, how did the concept of disjunction help you achieve some resolution, a partial resolution of some of the questions and disputes that you had, that you were working with, in that article in '59?

KUBLER

Well, I probably worked it out in conjunction with what he had published, so it builds on that book perhaps.

SMITH

Well, your article precedes the book.

KUBLER

My article precedes. This had been part of his teaching before it was published.

SMITH

So the principle of disjunction-- Yes, this is important. I was wondering if the principle of disjunction was something that you were groping towards, and then his formulation clarifies issues that you were struggling with, but didn't have a clear definition of.

KUBLER

I would hesitate to say how the background for the use of disjunction came about. I don't really remember. He was using it and I was using it, but this was after my article.

SMITH

I'm going to ask you some, in a sense, naive questions in order to get a response from you. You had written that the principal modes of survival of ancient forms are in reality the modes of extinction. And I wonder in the transition from pre-Columbian to colonial art in Mexico or in Peru whether there were any real continuities of any kind.

KUBLER

There were. There were in the continued practice of calendrical manuscript. The preparing of manuscript treatises of native origin on the native calendar and their illustration. These survivals from American antiquity go back very far. It's a very long tradition, and it's very poorly known because of the destruction of the materials.

SMITH

But there was some survival, not just physical survival, but--

KUBLER

Some survival. And there were schools. For example, the Franciscans had a school for the sons of Indian chiefs.

SMITH

I see.

KUBLER

And people were brought to that school in Mexico City from all over the viceroyalty. They brought together this body of knowledge, and they were encouraged to put it down. This was part of the Franciscan policy. The Franciscans were the great teachers among the mendicants. The Dominicans were more bridges between antiquity and the colonial present. And the Augustinians were more the theologians. Those were the three mendicant orders, and then the Jesuits. The Jesuits arrived, and the Jesuits became the great teachers.

SMITH

Now, in Chicano studies currently, and for the last fifteen years, I think most Chicano studies scholars would argue that the syncretization of Coatlicue with the Virgin Mary in the Virgin of Guadalupe would be an example of the continued survival of pre-Columbian thinking. In your perspective, would that be a true survival? Would that be a continuity?

KUBLER

Well, I wouldn't generalize it before having charted all the modalities of this alleged survival. In whose hands was it? What was the preconquest base? What was the mendicant purpose, and which of the mendicants was it? Or was it the Jesuits? Who was behind it? It's a very complicated issue. Much of this material is without any indication of its place of origin or tribal group. But one suspects that there are a few types that were frequently repeated. The area between those types was lost. Those types were adapted for survival. Any Amerindian approach to the idea of a virgin mother would have been picked up.

SMITH

Let's assume that the only evidence was art objects, painting, architecture, etc. Could we tell solely from a history of art where the source of such syncretizations came from? Whether they came from an Amerindian artist or from the priests and the colonial authorities?

KUBLER

It might be difficult to decide the question on the evidence that is available, but one can speculate. In some cases it's very clear how intense the European molding was, and in other cases it's very clear how intense the survival of native modalities was. It changes. It's constantly increasing, with more and more material being discovered, especially in mural painting. New murals are being discovered frequently. I would say that's the most frequent terrain of discovery, rather than the discovery of new manuscripts.

SMITH

Is there a relationship between cultural survivals and demographics? For instance, would one expect to find more cultural survivals in Guatemala or Bolivia because of the much higher percentage of Amerindian population?

KUBLER

Well, it depends on the period and the date. At an early date, whether it's Guatemala or Peru or Mexico, there are few Europeans, and the European population is surprisingly slow to increase. It probably increases faster than the Indian population decreases--it never becomes an overwhelming number of people. It's always a limited and threatened number of whites among a huge Indian population wherever the populations are large. But the demographic study is constantly changing with fresh evidence. All sorts of new evidence.

SMITH

Are you thinking of anything in particular now?

KUBLER

Well, for example, the feather paintings. The feather paintings in European style became known, and more and more of them are known. Every now and then some more show up. These are strictly Amerindian techniques and much valued by the Europeans, who were the customers for it, for the feather

industries, which had been very widespread in Mexico, particularly, and Guatemala before the conquest.

SMITH

This raises a question of how one defines an artist, or the artist. I was thinking of Otto von Simson, who in his book on Chartres Cathedral [The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order] says that one has to define the artist in a broad sense so it includes Abbot Suger and the artisans and the burghers who put up the money, etc. How do you go about defining "the artist"?

KUBLER

Well, I would think of it as the artisan. I don't think the artist had any reality in these populations, these native populations, but the artisan had a real standing. He had a guild standing. The feather workers were analogous to a guild.

SMITH

So you are saying the feather painters would not have to have someone tell them to do paintings in European style. Once they determined there would be a market for such paintings, they would do those paintings on their own initiative.

KUBLER

They did so into the seventeenth century, and later. There are eighteenth-century examples. It becomes less and less common.

SMITH

Because of changing European tastes or--?

KUBLER

Yes, and the increasing availability of painted canvas, canvases. And murals above all. Murals were the cheap way of decoration over large areas. Much less expensive than feather painting or easel painting or altar painting. The mural is constantly being discovered. Examples of sixteenth-century origin under many, many coats of plaster. So that the finds are numerous, and the corpus is increasing. There are very diligent scholars of these murals, like

Constantín Reyes Valerio in Mexico City, who believes that this was a great body of sixteenth-century art in Mexico, the mural.

SMITH

These were executed by Amerindian artists?

KUBLER

These were executed by Amerindian or mestizo artisans.

SMITH

Trained by Europeans?

KUBLER

Trained, perhaps, by Europeans, and some of them having European names. But not many of them had names. [laughter] The big field of production was the mural, in the churches, the cemeteries, the chapels. An enormous lot of mural painting was achieved and probably using a native or a mestizo artisanate.

SMITH

When you evaluate the question of survival and disjunction, how much weight do you give to imagery, to technique, and to the system of thought that the work is part of?

KUBLER

Well, with Christian iconography the weight is very heavily in favor of a non-Indian source. [laughter] In the painting of murals for Christian churches and sites, the pressure to conform to Christian patterns is very great. The Indian character is betrayed in certain details of execution, the way of rendering a feather, the way of rendering a garment.

SMITH

Now, the way of rendering a feather or a garment, would you consider that evidence of cultural survival?

KUBLER

Yes, as much so as survival of a word in the Indian usage. A word that was of Indian origin and known to enough Europeans to slip over into colonial usage.

SMITH

Again, I come back to this phrase from the essay that you wrote: "The principal modes of survival of ancient forms are in reality the modes of extinction." So that would imply that the appearance of an Indian image in a Catholic mural actually is evidence of how the Indian system of thought has been subverted, broken up, and its elements reincorporated into the colonial system of thought.

KUBLER

By the seventeenth century, the incidence of such native elements is less and less. In the eighteenth century, it's almost altogether wiped out. There are eighteenth-century copies of older work where a native presence is present, is noted, but less and less.

SMITH

I wanted to move on to some of the specific studies that you did in the 1960s on pre-Columbian art. The first thing I want to discuss was the seminars that you developed on Teotihuacán that seemed to be held over a two- to three-year period of time in 1965 to '67. When you began the seminars, were you thinking of a publication coming out of that work?

KUBLER

I forget. I forget whether I ever had a coherent plan. But the seminar was well attended, and I used some of it for my own work, not the students' part, but my own contributions. I never had time enough for that side of it.

SMITH

For which side of it?

KUBLER

For the precolonial presence.

SMITH

In colonial--

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

But Teotihuacán focused on--

KUBLER

Teotihuacán would be another case. That's a case of a very imposing political presence throughout Mesoamerica, Teotihuacán. And that's a problem that is still incompletely charted.

SMITH

Oh, the history of that source of power.

KUBLER

It's as though we knew that Rome existed, but we weren't sure where the receiving ends were and what the channels were. What the influence of Teotihuacán is--Endemic throughout Mesoamerica. And what connection is it? Is it a memory of a revealed civilization, or is it coeval with the vanished civilization? Or--

SMITH

When you organize a seminar on a topic such as Teotihuacán, you have a topic which is still largely unexplored.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Does that pose opportunities for students that they would not have, say, in a seminar on the history of Rome? Does it pose the possibility of doing more original research?

KUBLER

Well, I don't know that it would be different as to type. It might fit into a method, a method of investigating cultural dependence given the evidence of

works of painting, architecture, sculpture, pottery, etc.--material crafts that are the evidence. But how far can you push that evidence without more excavations? Of course, those are going on all the time, and more and more evidence is being assembled all the time. But those conclusions are already in the literature. It's as though the yield from more excavation was dwindling. The more there is, the less interesting it is, because it's redundant. The evidence is redundant.

SMITH

But still necessary.

KUBLER

But you never know what the transformations are that are going on underneath the appearance of similarity.

SMITH

Was that one of the goals that you were trying to achieve in this seminar?

KUBLER

That was the sort of thinking that we worked with. How can you be sure that the resemblance of architectures of the Valley of Mexico with those around Guatemala City are coeval? Or is it a case of a renaissance? Is it a case of a rebirth elsewhere? So then techniques of dating are critical.

SMITH

Who were involved in these seminars? Do you recall any of the particular individuals?

KUBLER

They were graduate students, undergraduates. People like Mary Miller, whom you know.

SMITH

Yes. She has since gone on to do some very important work in that field.

KUBLER

Oh, yes.

SMITH

Were there other former students in the seminars who have gone on to--?

KUBLER

Yes, there are a lot of them, but none of them so productive and successful as Mary.

SMITH

Was Joyce Bailey in any of these seminars?

KUBLER

Yes, but she was a little unstable in her persistence with a problem with which she identified. Joyce Bailey was-- Do you know her?

SMITH

No, I don't.

KUBLER

Joyce Bailey was inclined to hop around.

SMITH

I mean, I know she did--

KUBLER

She didn't have a permanent post for a long time, and I think there was some health problem.

SMITH

So that undercut her ability to make a contribution.

KUBLER

She wasn't so successful as Mary.

SMITH

What about Flora [S.] Clancy? Was she in those seminars?

KUBLER

Flora Clancy is a very successful member of that group. She's at Tulane [University], and she's a successor to Donald Robertson. Her work is very highly regarded among art historians. I don't know how well she fares with the anthropologists. I would think that her diction is too much art historical for anthropological consumption.

SMITH

What was the general structure of those seminars? How did you pose the problem to the students? Of course, they all had to do research papers, but--

KUBLER

That's essentially it.

SMITH

Was this a semester-long seminar or a year-long seminar?

KUBLER

I would make them weekly for a couple of hours and begin with information and set them to picking a topic as quickly as possible and then guiding them in the execution of the research.

SMITH

Did you assign the topics or--?

KUBLER

No. If the student was unable to decide, I'd pick something and suggest that this would be workable. There were numbers of those.

SMITH

I was looking at some of the papers, and the topics seemed--if you don't mind me saying so--somewhat esoteric, but in a positive sense, in that they were very focused and very detailed. It struck me these were not topics that someone coming new to the field, as one presumes a graduate student to be, would necessarily come to by him or herself.

KUBLER

Well, I sometimes overestimated the working ability of the student and suggested a topic that defeated the student.

SMITH

Without necessarily mentioning the name of the student, can you think of topics that were particularly troublesome?

KUBLER

Well, it wasn't that they were troublesome topics so much as that the students weren't committed enough.

SMITH

Okay.

KUBLER

A student with a degree of commitment was able to do the research.

SMITH

So was all the necessary research available in secondary sources?

KUBLER

No, it would require being able to read Spanish easily. The work couldn't be done adequately using English alone.

SMITH

Were there special archival sources in terms of photographs that the students had to pursue?

KUBLER

Well, they could use the repertory of publications on the subject. That would be adequate. And if the argument proposed was well supported, that was okay.

SMITH

Some of the papers seem to be-- I'm maybe using the wrong term, but taking a census of the appearance of certain kinds of motifs to get across what seem-- I forget the exact number, but a quite large number of distinct monuments

within Teotihuacán. I presume all those sources were also available in the printed repertoires of the--

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

But is there a question of judgment whether a motif is present or not, or is it simply pretty straightforward? One would look at the photograph of the bas-relief, for instance, and be able to determine on a simple yes or no basis?

KUBLER

Well, to detect the changes owing to remoteness between the centers, such as Guatemala City and Mexico City, is important. But it sometimes is--and mostly is-- way beyond the resources of the student, because the student can't go to Guatemala City and test the clays.

SMITH

Right.

KUBLER

So it has to be done with available knowledge.

SMITH

How reliable is work based solely on photographic duplications?

KUBLER

Well, it's not anywhere near adequate. One needs to have access to the specimens themselves. And that means a lot of travel. Sometimes a paper was convincing enough on very limited evidence to merit praise, but with cautions about publication without further research, without going to Guatemala and Teotihuacán. Because very often the students had never been to any of the sites. They'd only heard about them in the course or read about them. But that's a limitation of any field.

SMITH

From your point of view, what were some of the topics that were researched that were particularly important? Where the students came up with a really genuine insight into the questions surrounding Teotihuacán and cultural transformation and disjunction?

KUBLER

Well, I would say that in a group of five or six that there would be two or three good papers, and the rest were not to be taken seriously.

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SMITH

That would be primarily because of the quality of the thought, I would assume, and analysis.

KUBLER

Yes. The good papers stood out. The not so good papers stood out the other way.

SMITH

But in terms of topics, in a field like pre-Columbian art, a choice of a topic, how important is that?

KUBLER

Well, there's always the question of feasibility. Is this feasible? I would often reject a number of proposals before a viable one appeared or was suggested. Or I would end up suggesting one.

SMITH

How well versed were these students in pre-Columbian art history before they took the seminar?

KUBLER

Well, they might have come from an anthropology course. They might have been fired up by a summer trip. They might have been reading on their own.

Very often these students in the seminar were people who had been in my lecture course.

SMITH

But it sounds like there may in fact have been a number of students who came into the seminar with basically zero knowledge of the scholarly--

KUBLER

They generally came in innocent.

SMITH

Well, that has its pluses as well.

KUBLER

But more or less motivated, and more or less able to decide what to do.

SMITH

I raise this question in part because as I was looking through your papers, I saw a number of letters to you from professors and students at other institutions saying, "I'm interested in doing my dissertation on such and such, and I understand that so-and-so, who's working with you, is doing his or her dissertation on a similar topic. Do you have any objection?" And it struck me as unusual, because for instance in Italian Renaissance, no one thinks twice that of course there are going to be a hundred dissertations a year on topics that overlap. Yet in pre-Columbian, there seems to be enough of a concern about not overlapping that a certain amount of trouble was taken, care to write to the people involved.

KUBLER

Well, that's a penalty of a small enrollment. A small number of candidates for the seminar.

SMITH

Would you advise students not to write on something that you knew that somebody else was writing on?

KUBLER

If that was the case, yes. I would say, "Oh, so-and-so is doing this. Get in touch and see what the situation is."

SMITH

In European art history you increase the knowledge by having competing viewpoints on the same subject matter, and that value did not seem to be appreciated by pre-Columbian scholars.

KUBLER

It's too thinly populated in the history of art. Too thinly populated. So one hates to lose a student. In other fields, one is glad to lose a lot of students.
[laughter]

SMITH

Well, you've taught a lot of European art classes as well.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

How would you compare the difficulty of taking a seminar in European art with the difficulty of taking a seminar in pre-Columbian art? That's highly subjective I know, but--

KUBLER

Well, I think probably the rarity of such studies in the American case is part of the interest. Whereas in the much more thickly populated European fields, good students are rare. The possibility of doing good work is more difficult in European studies.

SMITH

Are Iberian studies, Peninsular studies, thickly populated?

KUBLER

I would say no. They would be like pre-Columbian studies. One has to know a good deal.

SMITH

Did you concern yourself about getting students? Did you feel that you had to make sure that you always had enough graduate students to work with you? We were talking at lunch about client demand. Is that something that was of concern to you?

KUBLER

The undergraduate courses usually had twenty people in them, sometimes more. The undergraduate course was where they acquired the basic knowledge to go farther. A few showed up that way. It doesn't take very many people to have a good seminar. You can have a good seminar with three.

SMITH

In fact, if you have too many people, it's counterproductive.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

I noted that the translation of Felix da Costa's Antiquity of [the Art of] Painting was also connected to a student project. Is that--? It's the translation itself and the study of it.

KUBLER

I've forgotten what the situation was in that case. I had no trouble with Portuguese, reading Portuguese. I don't remember any difficulties with the language.

SMITH

What I was wondering-- Actually, what fascinated me was that two of your works in the sixties, the Felix da Costa work and the iconography of the art of Teotihuacán, seem to grow out of seminars that you did, and that seems unusual to me.

KUBLER

Well, that was the way it was then. You taught a certain number of courses, undergraduate courses, and then your graduate work came out of those results. We had a lot of students at that time.

SMITH

The history of art department?

KUBLER

Yes, yes. And still do.

SMITH

When did the history of art department population begin to grow? When would you say the explosion came?

KUBLER

Well, it was after the forties.

SMITH

So already in the 1950s.

KUBLER

It was already notable in the fifties, and it had begun in the forties with the presence of the French scholars, [Henri] Focillon and [Marcel] Aubert, both of them medievalists. They attracted many students. And they both lectured always in French.

SMITH

The students whom you worked with closely, the students who chose you to work with as their adviser, would you say that they were different from other students at Yale [University] in the art history program?

KUBLER

No. They happened to have an interest in the subject, or feigned an interest in the subject.

SMITH

So they weren't particularly brighter than other art history students or more methodical in some way.

KUBLER

No. The same sort of people. But with an interest in this side of the world.

SMITH

Might there not also be--? If we see a tension within art history between the essayistic and the scientific, would they not tend to gravitate towards a scientific approach, an approach that tries to topologize and typologize?

KUBLER

Yes. They were sensitive about method. Or they had become sensitive about method, historical method.

SMITH

I mean, because I assume-- In fact, within the art history department at Yale, there were divisions.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

There were people who did not appreciate--to use your terminology--a methodological approach to art history, who favored a more interpretive approach. I think of Vincent Scully in particular, who was vocally critical.

KUBLER

That's right.

SMITH

I wanted to discuss *The Iconography of the Art of Teotihuacan* [1967], the text-image conjunction and disjunctions that you were studying. I wonder if we could start out by your posing the problem as you remember it when you began the study. What was your initial perception of the problem of text-image relationships at Teotihuacán?

KUBLER

Well, I saw it as a problem in communication with images of objects rather than symbols of writing. Teotihuacán does not seem to have had an extended system of writing like that of the Mayas, and this was itself of interest. The dependence upon highly stylized parts of bodies, animal and human, and graphic schemes for ideas. But no extended system of writing like that of the Mayas.

SMITH

So in your opinion at that time, what needed to be done to understand these images of Teotihuacán? What was inadequate with scholarship up to that point? Not that it was bad scholarship, but what was lacking?

KUBLER

Well, fundamentally, what was needed was concentration on single forms in multiple contexts.

SMITH

Meaning like the jaguar form?

KUBLER

Multiple contexts could be found, and compare the contexts. And what are the crossovers? When a jaguar form is on a human form, or not. When a human form is on a jaguar.

SMITH

Now, how did that differ from what had previously been done?

KUBLER

Well, it was an extension of what had been done previously.

SMITH

So you were not necessarily breaking new ground?

KUBLER

No.

SMITH

You were simply trying to do--

KUBLER

Extending a method of determining the scope of a form such as a foot.

SMITH

Well, how much did you utilize previous studies? Such as those by [Eduard] Seler or [Hermann] Beyer or [Alfonso] Caso.

KUBLER

They were basic, and they were used by the students. Whereas the state of my books shows-- [laughter]

SMITH

Yes. I was wondering, in terms of other text- image studies-- In your seminars and in yourself personally, how helpful did you find, say, Kurt Weitzmann's work on text and image in Byzantine art or Wickoff's work on the Greek and Roman friezes? Were those useful to you in terms of trying to conceptualize your problem and arrive at a solution?

KUBLER

Not really, because of the variable factor of the presence of writing. The concept of writing is limited, very severely limited, in Maya practice. It's a very limited form of writing. The number of statements that can be made in this Maya system is not large.

SMITH

I noticed that you have-- I mean, you observe that the primary statement is the naming of somebody or something. So therefore the art itself becomes the main purveyor of the story.

KUBLER

You don't know what it means. You don't know what it means, but you can classify it by its appearance. Its appearance and its context. This drives the

problem into smaller and smaller scope, so that a student would end up by looking at the occurrence of hands and feet in the same position.

SMITH

So simply the position.

KUBLER

In the same cartouche. When a foot and a hand are in a cartouche, it means they've been isolated for possible meaning.

SMITH

A possible meaning, which had--

KUBLER

A possible meaning that is undetermined.

SMITH

But was it determinable? Was that a goal?

KUBLER

It wouldn't be determinable, but one might extend the scope of it and find that it had a determined meaning, or proposed determined meaning, and test it against other occurrences of hands and feet.

SMITH

So you have bodies. So you can develop a range of expressions?

KUBLER

A range of expressions, yes.

SMITH

I'm still considering how you developed your models for the design of the study. So the next thing I'd like to talk about is the nature of the taxonomies based on binaries and why binaries seem to you an important way of analyzing that material.

KUBLER

Well, examination of the repertory at a place like Xochicalco or Teotihuacán shows a variety, a difference of vocabulary. The presence of a vocabulary--the assumed presence of a vocabulary--and differences from site to site would suggest linguistic difference. How far can you go with that? Very often a student would accept an assignment and come with a result which seemed to lead in the direction that was apparent to us both. I'd encourage the student farther along that line.

SMITH

Can you think of any specific examples that were particularly impressive?

KUBLER

I've forgotten. These are very rudimentary problems of method in an unknown language. A language that one is not sure of at all.

SMITH

Now, you were talking about trying to chart change, yet you were treating the monuments synchronically.

KUBLER

I tried to avoid the suggestion that the meanings were very stable over long periods. Preferring the analysis of differences as indicative of some change of meaning, rather than assuming that resemblance was always the clue to meaning. Differences of association are suggestive of difference of meaning.

SMITH

So again an extension of linguistic principles?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Were you reading much in semiotics at this time? Did you and your students examine semiotic theory?

KUBLER

Well, it was very much in the air, and it was talked about. Language was recognized as a very important component of the history of art, the reflections of the language in images and vice versa.

SMITH

At any point did you consider that you would need to do computer programming to do the kind of analysis that you wanted to do?

KUBLER

It wasn't that complicated. It wasn't that abundant. The evidence wasn't abundant enough for recording in that fashion and manipulating in that fashion. We were manufacturing symbols. We were manufacturing what might be symbols that could be handled when abundant and frequent enough in computer language, in computer treatment.

SMITH

How did you and your students work on this? Did you develop a system of cards with a symbol and then--?

KUBLER

Well, it depended upon the problem. Each problem required a different method, a different procedure.

SMITH

But you had to determine frequency in the specific location, did you not?

KUBLER

I remember we never had very large numbers to deal with.

SMITH

Well, ninety-seven lexical items seems somewhat large to me. I mean, I know that's small compared to what computers can handle.

KUBLER

It could be handled by ordinary methods. So much bookkeeping can. Just plain bookkeeping, old-fashioned bookkeeping of occurrence and variation.

SMITH

What remained unresolved at the end of the study for you? I mean, you had your proposed solutions, but what remained unresolved in your own mind that might demand further work, if not from you, from other people?

KUBLER

Oh, carry it farther. I remember occasionally reassigning a problem to another student after the first one had left and having the benefit of an accumulation by the first student. With that student's permission, the other one continued. That's the way theses and dissertations get generated.

SMITH

How many theses and dissertations were generated out of this work?

KUBLER

I've lost count.

SMITH

That many.

KUBLER

Oh, I never kept count. [laughter] It's probably a small count.

SMITH

A small count, but nonetheless--

KUBLER

But in fifty years I must have taught five hundred people at this level of seminar work.

SMITH

And how many would go on to do dissertations? Or how many did go on to do dissertations?

KUBLER

One or two a year. One or two a year would be going for a degree. But a degree that required other work as well. They weren't taking degrees for work in pre-Columbian studies.

SMITH

They weren't?

KUBLER

No. They were taking degrees for work in the history of art. And their pre-Columbian work was part of their course work.

SMITH

But some of them went on and did their dissertations on pre-Columbian subjects.

KUBLER

Some of them did, and others did other subjects. Of the five hundred, I would think there were perhaps, over the years, less than fifty.

SMITH

Who did pre-Columbian--

KUBLER

Who did pre-Columbian theses or dissertations. Or attempted.

SMITH

Yes, attempted.

KUBLER

So many attempt and don't finish.

SMITH

Yes. Well, that's--

KUBLER

But about fifty, I'd say. About one a year. Some years, no one.

SMITH

Another conceptual model that seemed to be important in that study was [Claude] Lévi-Strauss's bricolage.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Again, what drew you to that concept? It also seems that you are extracting from Lévi-Strauss's this one concept and taking it out of the bulk of his thought.

KUBLER

Well, bricolage is a term of little respect. [laughter] It's a castoff of the household wares that accumulate in a family. That's bricolage. It's odds and ends that are left over from other activities. Now, Lévi-Strauss's idea of bricolage is promoted to a cultural principle. But it has the same name. It's odds and ends left over. Odds and ends left over, worn out. I ought to look up bricolage in-- But that's the general meaning of bricolage.

SMITH

And a bricoleur is a handyman, crafts.

KUBLER

Yes. Bricolage. All sorts of craft work of doubtful value.

SMITH

It's the word for do-it-yourself.

KUBLER

Yes, that's it. And he made it into a cultural principle.

SMITH

What was it about that principle that you felt was particularly relevant to the Mesoamerican studies?

KUBLER

Well, the plainness, the lack of complication of much of the production in pottery, for example. The pottery systems are not of great complexity. I don't know if Lévi-Strauss would have called them part of bricolage. I think he was applying it to concepts.

SMITH

That's my understanding.

KUBLER

A mess of ideas, a mess of notions, would be his concept of bricolage. Cultural history. Not very well understood and not properly used and--

SMITH

Productively not properly used.

KUBLER

Left over from better applications.

SMITH

In your seminars, you and the students would be reading or reporting on semiotics, structural anthropology, and so forth. Would those be parts of the way you structured the--?

KUBLER

If that became part of the problem, yes.

SMITH

Then not for the class as a whole, but you would say to student A, "I think in order to resolve this, you need to think about what Lévi-Strauss has to say."

KUBLER

That would be the process.

SMITH

What would be the common readings for the entire class? I tried to find it in your files, and I couldn't.

KUBLER

It would always depend upon the interest of the student. If the student's interest was in pottery, the literature on that pottery would be his reading, or her reading.

SMITH

What about the common reading for the class? The reading that--

KUBLER

There really wasn't any common reading.

SMITH

Oh, okay.

KUBLER

When my Pelican books came out, one was pre-Columbian [The Art and Architecture of Ancient America: The Mexican, Maya, and Andean Peoples (1962)] and the other was Latin America [Art and Architecture in Spain and Portugal and Their American Dominions, 1500 to 1800 (1959)]. Those had bibliographies, and I assigned those. But before that, I assigned that kind of bibliography as was required in the Pelican volumes.

SMITH

You would not have everybody read the same article and come back and discuss it?

KUBLER

No. We would discuss an idea. We would discuss a book, yes, that had been assigned. Yes.

SMITH

What might be that assigned book? I'm thinking in particular the-- Say the Teotihuacán seminars or the Maya seminars.

KUBLER

Well, I would assign them the best book that was then out. That changed every few years. It was a very rapidly changing field.

SMITH

Well, I get the drift. So the reading would tend to be technical, and methodological readings would be individual.

KUBLER

If it was Teotihuacán I'd have them read as much as they could in the languages they knew and make a selection of evidence.

SMITH

Might someone go and read Lévi-Strauss, say a chapter out of *The Savage Mind*, and come back and report on the concept of bricolage?

KUBLER

I don't remember that ever happening, but it could have.

SMITH

It could have, but you don't remember it.

KUBLER

I've really lost track of many of those projects. Let's say there were five hundred. [laughter]

SMITH

Keeping on the subject of Teotihuacán as our kind of main focus, to discuss the mesa redonda in 1966, where I think you caused some problems for a lot of people because you argued there was no real continuity between the Teotihuacán civilization and the Aztecs. I don't think this was particularly-- It wasn't a brand-new position for you at that time, was it?

KUBLER

No, I had held that view for a long time.

SMITH

But apparently at this mesa redonda you caused a considerable amount of controversy.

KUBLER

Well, that was contrary to the opinions then held by Mexican principals.

SMITH

Do you recall any of the specific reactions of people at the conference?

KUBLER

No. And if there was disagreement, it was not expressed to me. I don't remember disagreement on that point.

SMITH

We have to discuss your continuing relationship with anthropologists, but perhaps the Tikal project would be the better place to discuss that. But what about--? Here you are putting forward a position which runs counter to the official state ideology of the PRI [Partido Revolucionario Institucional] and the Mexican government. Did this cause you any problems?

KUBLER

No. It may have limited my activity, but I was already overactive.

SMITH

What do you mean it may have limited your activity? In what sense do you mean that?

KUBLER

If I had wanted to proceed farther with a topic dealing with Teotihuacán and going into it more deeply than I had, I would probably have been discouraged from doing so.

SMITH

By the Mexicans?

KUBLER

By the Mexicans.

SMITH

And they would have discouraged-- You mean by limiting your access to sources and materials?

KUBLER

Permits to excavate-- But I never wanted to be an excavator.

SMITH

Right, yeah.

KUBLER

I was excavating ideas. [laughter]

SMITH

And you had a lot of other people to accumulate the--

KUBLER

Yes. I had benefited from the work of other people, and I always acknowledged it.

SMITH

What visually in the material from Teotihuacán suggested the inadequacy to you of explanations that everybody else seemed perfectly happy with? That is, what visually suggested to you the idea that a continuity between Teotihuacán and the Aztecs was preposterous?

KUBLER

Well, first of all, the collapse of Teotihuacán is seven centuries before the Aztec domination of the Valley of Mexico. Seven centuries. That's a long time. And the reappearance of Teotihuacano motifs in Aztec iconography is uncommon, as uncommon as the reappearance of classical Greek fifth-century forms seven hundred years later. Teotihuacán was in a way like Greek art. A coherent system of images and sounds and meanings of which the meaning was forgotten.

SMITH

You could see this, but why was it that very few other people-- Nobody else. The people who were working with the material couldn't see it.

KUBLER

Mexican nationalism holds the Aztecs in the highest repute. And everything fed into the Aztec civilization. Everything else fed into it. But that isn't proven. A lot of it had been discarded and forgotten over the past, over the Mesoamerican past. That would be giving the Aztecs a credit they didn't deserve.

SMITH

Well, okay. We can see why the Mexican politicians would-- After all, by and large, they're not trained in any-- They may be educated men--

KUBLER

Yes. If it's Mexican, it's Aztec.

SMITH

But what about anthropologists or other art historians? Other people who looked at the material, and they saw continuities where you saw ruptures. How did you explain for yourself this division in professional opinion?

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SMITH

How did you explain that you saw rupture, but most of the other scholars dealing with this material chose to see continuity?

KUBLER

I was persuaded. I persuaded myself that the ruptures were more apparent than the continuities. And the arguments for that are in this book.

SMITH

In [The Art and Architecture of]Ancient America: [The Mexican, Maya, and Andean Peoples (1962)].

KUBLER

In Ancient America, yes. It was largely based upon an intuitive sense of how continuous can a non-European civilization be supposed to be. Its continuity is probably less likely than that of European civilizations. The pressures to continuity are greater in European history than they are in pre-Columbian society, where the centers of development were very widely distributed. The centers of development were very thinly populated, so that wide communication, blankets of communication, didn't exist. The extinction of patterns of continuity in ancient America was far greater than in Europe.

SMITH

My question to you is not so much to rehash the logical argument you constructed, because that is in your written work. How did you explain to yourself the fact that you saw ruptures when so many other people saw continuities? How did you explain the discrepancy between your vision and their vision?

KUBLER

Well, more or less the principle I just outlined, which I had used in teaching when I was teaching both medieval studies and American studies. The disruption of European civilization by the Middle Ages was much less than the disruptions which were apparent in the meager record of far fewer people in America.

SMITH

I don't mean to belabor you with this point, but my question is not so much a question of the historical record, but of historical vision and interpretation.

KUBLER

Yes, yes.

SMITH

So assuming that you're completely right--which for the purposes of these interviews we must assume--how come all these other people were so blind?

KUBLER

Well, I believe most archaeologists would not disagree with what I'm saying. Those who would disagree are Mexican or Peruvian nationalists who have much greater investments, moral and otherwise, in the theory of big continuities, unruptured continuities of civilization.

SMITH

Okay.

KUBLER

But, actually, their archaeological record is extremely disrupted, and repeatedly disrupted.

SMITH

What about European and American anthropologists? I mean, Gordon Willey said you chose to see plurality because you were an art historian, but he as an anthropologist chose to see-- What was the word he used? Unity, I believe.

KUBLER

I think anthropologists are more inclined to read civilization as continuous, and art historians are more inclined to see it as discontinuous, more fragmented.

SMITH

More fragmented. What is there, in your mind, about the art historical methodology and the intellect of vision that you've developed that requires you, if in doubt, to see difference and rupture?

KUBLER

The archaeological record is misleading. Well, it suggests very long continuities. The historical record is misleading when it doesn't suggest continuities.

SMITH

I mean, an anthropologist will see a foot turned--

KUBLER

An anthropologist will see continuity where an historian will see rupture.

SMITH

So, I mean, to give a gross example, if an anthropologist sees a foot done in the same way over a thousand-year period, and if everything else in the two images is completely different, they'll still say, "Aha. The feet are the same, so therefore it's--"

KUBLER

The feet are the same. And the art historian won't say that. It's a vision.

SMITH

But why? I mean, in your own mind. I mean, I know you can't speak for the anthropologists--

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Well, you probably will at some point in this interview, but why, particularly in the art historical--? Was there something in the training you received from [Henri] Focillon and [Erwin] Panofsky and [Karl] Lehmann that says--?

KUBLER

One is trained to see differences of quality.

SMITH

Right.

KUBLER

I think that may be the answer to your question. The training, as to quality, as to richness and expressiveness and multiple dimensionality, is part of the training of the art historian. The anthropologist doesn't care for those kinds of distinctions. The anthropologist wants to bundle things up more securely. The anthropologist is looking for continuities. The art historian is not. As a matter of fact, he distrusts continuity.

SMITH

Now, that implies something about the nature of the artistic act and how much autonomy one gives to the artist. Whether one defines the artist individually or collectively. Is that correct? I mean, would that be a correct inference?

KUBLER

Well, you can put it on a quantitative basis. On the head count of styles. Your styles. Your styles of pottery production. Your styles of pottery production in Europe and in the ancient world, apart from America, are innumerable. Innumerable. Unnumbered. The archaeological recovery of the American past has very few styles. Too few styles.

SMITH

But you've also said earlier today that we're uncovering more and more and more, so that would suggest that our conclusions are based to some degree, for better or worse, on inadequate information compared to what we could have.

KUBLER

But the more archaeology there is in America, the less fundamental difference is being found in expression, in all of the things that are important to the art historian or the person concerned with European art. Those qualities are not so urgently present to the anthropologist as they are to the art historian. It's the difference between the thinking of the art historian and the social scientist. The old figures for population of this hemisphere were-- The old figure, which was first published about 1911, was that the total population-- Indian population, native population--was no more than 11 or 12 million people. Then some population counts were published by historians and ethnologists which made it necessary to raise that figure. They couldn't raise it to more than 25 million, and 25 million is probably too many. And 11 million may be too small. But let's say somewhere in between--15 million people, the size of a city. The size of--

SMITH

Of course, Europe was not that highly populated in the early Middle Ages.

KUBLER

And yet the area is smaller.

SMITH

True.

KUBLER

And the cultural happening is on a much rapider belt than in America.

SMITH

You were saying in the pause that perhaps the need for change increases with the increase in population density.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

What prompts you to think that?

KUBLER

Well, more has to be made. More of everything has to be made. And it wears out.

SMITH

And more individuals are involved.

KUBLER

And taste changes, and more people are involved. It's not merely the manufacture of the women outside the tent. It's a different world. It's an utterly different world as far as expression is concerned. The values that are expressed are different.

SMITH

All right. Now, when we get to *Studies in Classic Maya Iconography* [1969], there you switch from the synchronic mode of the *Teotihuacán* book to a diachronic mode, to focus precisely on the question of the dynamism of this imagery.

KUBLER

There's more of it, and it's in a much smaller area. And it's an intense and restless operation. Whereas Teotihuacán is a-- The earliest Teotihuacán objects are of around the time of Christ, or not older than 1000 B.C., but with an ending point at 700 A.D. And the reassembling of those impulses is very slow from the 700s to about 1400. But the Aztec phenomenon is very brief and very superficial. It's deeply rooted, but it isn't a phenomenon of large populations over long periods. We know so little about these people suggested by archaeological excavation. We know so little about them, and it's the difficulty of estimating the size of the population and the duration of what they were achieving. It's all very vague.

SMITH

Well, let me pose something else that is somewhat of a purposefully naive question. Since much of our data is based on monumental buildings and-- What if we had much more access to the ephemeral arts of ancient America? Do you think that might--? From what you know about basketry and reed work, or sand painting perhaps, feather painting, or unfired ceramic work, would that change? Would we see a much more dynamic culture in the more popular arts?

KUBLER

I don't think so. I think it would remain familiar--of the family. Of the family and over a duration limited by historic, by climatic conditions, by disasters, by-- But the smallness of the aboriginal population of America, of the American hemisphere, is an indication of great discontinuity. Great discontinuity and impermanent achievements. Maya is an exception. The Incas are an exception. The Aztecs are another exception. Zapotecs of Monte Albán are an exception. But those aren't terribly imposing remains.

SMITH

I'm just wondering, accepting your argument-- You present this argument in your classes in the 1970s, after the rise of Chicano nationalism. Might you have students who would say, "No, no, no. You're wrong"?

KUBLER

Yes, of course. Chicano means the glorious Aztec. That's the significance of Chicano to the Chicano. The glory of the Aztecs.

SMITH

Aztlán, yes.

KUBLER

Aztlán. And it's part of their need.

SMITH

I mean, what you're saying is highly charged with emotional meaning.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

And also for a Native American. A Native American activist might get upset about what are the implications for not only the Mesoamerican, but for the North American populations.

KUBLER

Well, that's the historian. The historian speaks, not the patriot or the racially offended person.

SMITH

Part of what the Chicano activists and the American Indian activists are saying is that from now on, only Mexicans can do Mexican history, only Indians can do Native American history.

KUBLER

Until they become more historical. If they wish to remain tribalists and nationalists, let them do so, but not confuse it with history. And they are the racists.

SMITH

Or racialists.

KUBLER

The racialists. That's the difference. They are the racialists.

SMITH

It is a very highly charged subject.

KUBLER

Very charged, very charged.

SMITH

Some of the things that you've said have made me uncomfortable.

KUBLER

I tried to avoid it in the books.

SMITH

You've tried to avoid it in the books. Because it would simply lead to fruitless debate?

KUBLER

Yes. And it would also blind people to the beauty of some of what was being shown them.

SMITH

Blind which people?

KUBLER

The readers.

SMITH

I mean, blind the Chicanos or--?

KUBLER

No. The readers.

SMITH

European-Americans.

KUBLER

As an historian, and an art historian, I was concerned to show the quality of this, of all of this. And everything that's in the book is of quality, high quality. Now, that's not an anthropological concept at all. [laughter]

SMITH

I think it can be incorporated, but-- Can't sometimes something be aesthetically significant but not be of high quality? Because of the influence it's had.

KUBLER

Of course.

SMITH

I mean, could not a prime object be of secondary value in terms of quality?

KUBLER

Of course.

SMITH

Well, there are some art historians who would say, "No. Absolutely not." What about--? Going on about these controversies and the people you've offended with these statements-- In 1970 there was the archaeology conference at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York on the iconography of Middle American sculpture.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

And here there was articulated opposition to what you had to say.

KUBLER

That is right. And they were all anthropologists. [laughter] I was the only art historian.

SMITH

Well, perhaps we should begin to move into this question of art historian versus the anthropology gang. Were you invited to participate in this conference in order to be set upon?

KUBLER

I think so. [laughter] In order to be set upon by the anthropologists.

SMITH

Now, who invited you? Do you recall?

KUBLER

Oh, it was the committee, and it was a very distinguished group. Gordon Willey was one of them, and so on. People of that quality. The best.

SMITH

I think one of the things that came out of that debate was your emphasizing the importance of detecting the critical and evaluative work that's-- The act in each work. That is, every time a work is created, there's a criticism and an evaluation of that artistic tradition taking place. And that should be the goal for the art historian.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Whereas it's not clear whether that is a goal for the anthropologist.

KUBLER

It is possible to apply in ancient America.

SMITH

Where do you feel that that goal has been most successfully and satisfactorily accomplished? The goal of detecting the critical and evaluative act in an individual work in the ancient American context. Where have you been able to look at the work and without written resources still be able to a certain degree speculate, but to create an argument about that artist's relationship to his or her society and tradition?

KUBLER

With the archaeological knowledge we have, it can be done anywhere at any moment.

SMITH

But where has it been done most successfully? In terms of your own work, where have you felt most pleased, most satisfied with your ability to do that?

KUBLER

Well, in Maya studies, Peruvian studies, southwestern studies--wherever there's a lot of interesting work. [laughter] And as a matter of fact, everywhere. Everywhere.

SMITH

Well, this is a somewhat unfair question, perhaps. I'm asking you to look at your past work and say, "Aha, when I analyzed this or this building, or this stele vase, that was a particularly fine analysis. That came the closest to my ideal of what I should be doing."

KUBLER

I think of it more in terms of books and articles. Each book and each article was written with this qualitative concept in mind and with foreknowledge of the limitations of the American material.

SMITH

I understand that. I assume that all of your work moves within that, so--

KUBLER

I always soft-pedal the qualitative argument when it's in the American case because it's such a different situation than the European.

SMITH

The gist of my question was to see if you could pinpoint in your own work what you feel most-- I mean, we have our goals and we achieve them to the degree that we achieve them, but we never achieve them one hundred percent. If we did, then we wouldn't-- We'd stop doing our work. But where in

your work have you felt that you came closest to achieving the goals that motivate your work?

KUBLER

Well, it was always-- Every article was written for a different purpose, and every book is written for a different purpose. So each book has its purpose and each article has its purpose, and very often the purpose is to arouse debate. Or by means of arousing debate, to open the eyes of the reader to the qualities that have been discussed. Art history is a qualitative operation, a defense of quality wherever it's found.

SMITH

A defense of quality?

KUBLER

A conception of quality wherever it is. Finding out how to find it. [laughter] Having sufficient familiarity to find quality. Familiarity with collections through visiting them, teaching them. To have a sense of the quality that makes it worth talking about.

SMITH

I assume all of this runs through all of your work. I guess what I'm asking is, does some of your work more fully realize those goals? Is there an article or a book or a section of a book that in your own personal view has come closest to realizing these goals?

KUBLER

Oh, no, I can't distinguish among them in that way.

SMITH

You don't have any favorite children.

KUBLER

No. I don't have-- I think they all could be better than they are.

SMITH

Well, that probably-- [laughter]

KUBLER

And that I say without false modesty.

SMITH

Okay. Let's talk somewhat about the Tikal project, which was not a successful project, evidently. Did that grow out of your studies in classic Maya iconography? Was that going to be the next logical step?

KUBLER

Yes, and it-- I've forgotten how the invitation to organize a group of art historians to do this came about, but I think it was the work of Michael Coe's brother.

SMITH

Oh, William Coe.

KUBLER

William Coe. It was his initiative, if I remember. Yes. I organized a group of students to work on it, and they worked on it for several years. Then the Tikal project refused to publish the essays that had been written. They still haven't been published. It just collapsed.

SMITH

Now, you were invited to work on this from an explicitly art historical--

KUBLER

I was invited to direct this with a group of students. An art historical study of Maya art. Flora [S.] Clancy was one of them. There were six or seven.

SMITH

Let me go through some of the names of people who were involved. Nicholas [M.] Hellmuth?

KUBLER

Nicholas Hellmuth. Yes, he's still in the field.

SMITH

It sounds like he was to focus on the iconography of Tikal glyphs.

KUBLER

Yes. I don't think he ever produced anything.

SMITH

Michael [E.] Kampen?

KUBLER

Kampen. He became interested in east coast archaeology.

SMITH

Maya in Quintana Roo?

KUBLER

In a Maya context, yes.

SMITH

I know he was supposed to work on Tikal graffiti.

KUBLER

Graffiti, yes. Part of that was actually published. He got that published, yes, elsewhere. But the Tikal project would refuse to release the photographs that were necessary for someone like Kampen to publish, and I don't know how Kampen got the photographs out of the Tikal project.

SMITH

Arthur G. Miller?

KUBLER

Arthur Miller has had a very bright career and is now working very hard in Oaxaca. But his Maya study was never published by the Tikal project. You see--

SMITH

He was working on mural painting, I understand.

KUBLER

That's right.

SMITH

And then-- Let's see. Clemency Coggins.

KUBLER

Clemency Coggins is at the Peabody Museum [of Archaeology and Ethnology], Harvard [University]. An illustrious figure she is. Among Mayanists.

SMITH

She was working on pottery painting.

KUBLER

Her Tikal work that would have been published for this group was never finished.

SMITH

Then one last name, Mary Elizabeth Smith.

KUBLER

Yes. She's at Tulane [University]. She's a professor and very highly regarded. Her work is Mixtec.

SMITH

Mixtec, yes.

KUBLER

And she has-- All of these people have done first-rate work.

SMITH

Now, this was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, not by the Tikal project with the University of Pennsylvania.

KUBLER

Well, the Tikal project cast off all responsibility for it and refused to publish any of it.

SMITH

They invited you to participate in this, correct?

KUBLER

They invited me to participate with students, and these were the students.

SMITH

Some of them were junior faculty, though. Weren't Arthur Miller and Kampen-
-? They were faculty, I thought.

KUBLER

Not at that time. No.

SMITH

No? Oh, okay.

KUBLER

They were graduate students.

SMITH

Now, let me-- I noticed that there were a series of little indicators of trouble to come. In '68 there was some correspondence between you and Olga Puleston, who was with the Tikal project. There seemed to be some discrepancy over how terminology was to be used.

KUBLER

Well, she was not a member of our group, but she-- I've forgotten what the issue was.

SMITH

She indicated that you were using the term "themes" in a way that the University of Pennsylvania team, the Tikal project, preferred to use the word "attributes."

KUBLER

I see.

SMITH

And then you wrote back to her that "attributes" began as a venerable art historical term, with specific context developed in European art, and that it was then applied by archaeologists at the beginning of the century to Maya art. There seemed to be some going back and forth on whether to use the word "motif" or "accessory." What is the significance to these questions about standardization of vocabulary?

KUBLER

It was just a matter-- I would say, it's of no more consequence than the editorial policy of a magazine, of a journal. Of preferring one usage to another.

SMITH

Was this one of the things that led to problems? The fact that what you were talking about would need some change in vocabulary.

KUBLER

I don't think so. I don't think that was significant, no.

SMITH

Next thing I noticed--it was in 1970--J. Eric Thompson refused to allow you the use of his catalog, saying that, "Any revision would have to be the work of a trained epigrapher such as Christopher Jones or Ian Graham."

KUBLER

Oh, he was quite right.

SMITH

He was right on that, but was he right in not letting you use the catalog, then, for your studies?

KUBLER

Oh, we were using them all the time.

SMITH

I saw a correspondence in your files indicating you couldn't use them. You could not proceed with your work because of--

KUBLER

Well, I wasn't given access to his unpublished files. That's the meaning of that. But we used his book all the time.

SMITH

From the tenor of the letters, it was a serious problem. You could not proceed--

KUBLER

He was cutting us off.

SMITH

Why would he do that?

KUBLER

I don't know.

SMITH

You also noted that Zimmermann had been allowed to use the unpublished catalog at the same time, so there seemed to be an element of--

KUBLER

Whose catalog?

SMITH

Thompson's catalog. Thompson was prohibiting you from using his catalog--

KUBLER

And Zimmermann too.

SMITH

No. He allowed Zimmermann.

KUBLER

Oh, he allowed Zimmermann.

SMITH

So there seemed to be complaints about unfair treatment.

KUBLER

Well, at that time, the team were graduate students.

SMITH

Your team.

KUBLER

Yes. And I think that must have been the reason.

SMITH

Why? That still isn't clear to me.

KUBLER

They weren't his graduate students. [laughter] He had his own stable.

SMITH

There's still something very murky and mysterious about this, but--

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

And then in '76 you get cut loose by Michael Coe entirely. Now, what was Coe's reason for deciding to cut you off from the Tikal project?

KUBLER

It wasn't Michael Coe, it was his brother.

SMITH

Oh, I thought it was Michael Coe.

KUBLER

He was in charge. He was in charge of the Tikal project, not Michael. Michael had nothing to do with the Tikal project.

SMITH

Oh, okay. There seemed to be something in the correspondence, again, that indicated--

KUBLER

No.

SMITH

But at any rate, what was William Coe's motivation?

KUBLER

William Coe. William Coe, for reasons I don't know, decided that we should be cut off from support by the project.

SMITH

What reasons did he give you?

KUBLER

Well, he didn't give any reasons. He just cut it off, and that was that. We hadn't produced very much, and perhaps that was the reason.

SMITH

But then what reason would there be for not allowing you to use the photographs?

KUBLER

To keep us from publishing elsewhere.

SMITH

Elsewhere. What I'm trying to get at, is to what degree--?

KUBLER

I have an article that I want to publish still that needs some of their photographs and drawings, but-- I don't think it's a bad article. I never published it.

SMITH

Have you requested permission from them for the photographs and drawings?

KUBLER

I think so, and I was told no.

SMITH

What reason did they give?

KUBLER

"Your project was cut off."

SMITH

What I'm trying to puzzle out of this is, to what degree are there genuine intellectual concerns and to what degree are we talking about proprietary interests?

KUBLER

I don't know. I can't tell you. [laughter] I never demanded an explanation.

SMITH

It reminds me, of course, of this recent controversy over the Dead Sea Scrolls. The explanation that the scholars committee gave was they did not want to have any unauthorized interpretations.

KUBLER

Yes. That's coin of the realm. [laughter]

**1.24. TAPE NUMBER: XII, SIDE TWO
NOVEMBER 18, 1991**

SMITH

Why should anybody be afraid of somebody else's interpretation? It seems to be outside the bounds of what scholarship is supposed to be about, which is the give and take of ideas.

KUBLER

Well, I think there's also the matter of previous commitments which can be alleged. "We promised this to somebody else."

SMITH

But again, why should anybody be afraid of two people putting forward two different interpretations of the same material? It happens all the time in European art.

KUBLER

A lack of faith in, or trust in, the person you're cutting off or persons. That's the simplest explanation.

SMITH

Is there a legitimate reason in your mind for proprietary interest in academic studies?

KUBLER

We were not expert Mayanists. We were art historians. It was a group of art historians. They were not anthropologists. They were chosen because they were art historians. And that was the encouragement that I received from the then director of the Tikal project. Before Coe.

SMITH

Oh, it was the previous director before Coe--

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

--who invited you. Or who initiated the process.

KUBLER

Yes. Michael's brother at one time favored the project and favored the group. He knew them, and they are all distinguished scholars now. But then they were youngsters.

SMITH

Would you have strengthened your position if you had included more senior art historians on the project?

KUBLER

There weren't any. [laughter]

SMITH

So you were attempting to create senior art historians?

KUBLER

I was dealing with the material I had, hoping to make a little enclave there, art historians among anthropologists.

SMITH

Among anthropologists. I noticed there was a parallel project on the Tikal hieroglyphics and their iconography that was headed by T. Patrick Culbert from the University of Arizona. An anthropologist. Was that a competitive project?

KUBLER

I don't think so. I think he was put in charge.

SMITH

Of your project? I thought they--

KUBLER

Put in charge of their part of that program. In other words, the person with whom we had been dealing, who I think was Michael's brother, turned out not to have the authority or the steadfastness to finish the project, and so it was turned over to someone else. And this was part of the discrediting of Michael's brother. I don't know the inside story.

SMITH

Were you caught up in this in a sense?

KUBLER

No. I wasn't involved at all.

SMITH

Was your project caught up in the sense that when William Coe was discredited, this project gets--?

KUBLER

It probably got lost.

SMITH

It gets lost. It's part of--

KUBLER

Actually, I submitted my part. I've never been able to publish it because they won't release the photographs. And we can't find the manuscript. But I can reconstitute it from the notes I have.

SMITH

If you could give me personality sketches on some of these people who were in the-- Let's start with T. Patrick Culbert.

KUBLER

I don't know him.

SMITH

What about his work? Do you feel sympathetic to his work?

KUBLER

He's competent. He's competent. He's an anthropologist.

SMITH

Does he have a sense of the iconographical tradition in art history?

KUBLER

I don't know if he has it from art history, but he has it from Maya studies. For Maya studies.

SMITH

For Maya studies.

KUBLER

I think I would trust the anthropologists with it more than the art historians. The art historians would be a gamble. But these were good art historians.

SMITH

There is a sort of broader question, which is the art historian in the humanistic tradition is more self-consciously making an interpretation which is nothing else but an individual interpretation, a take on something. An anthropologist is more inclined to view him- or herself as uncovering some fundamental truth. Is that a problem in ancient American studies, that interpretations are somehow or other viewed as insufficient?

KUBLER

Yes, I think so. I think so. I think a humanistic interpretation is regarded by anthropologists as hogwash. [laughter]

SMITH

As methodologically unrigorous?

KUBLER

Methodologically useless to the anthropologists.

SMITH

Let me sort of play devil's advocate for a bit. You have, in discussing some art historians, said they were emotional and not sufficiently rigorous and methodologically sound. But are you not, then, in sort of a halfway position? Because the anthropologist--

KUBLER

I don't remember saying this. Where did I say it?

SMITH

In March, when we were discussing. But certainly, I mean, there are some art historians who are--

KUBLER

I was discussing the anthropologist's view of the art historian, no doubt.

SMITH

Well, no, I think you were discussing some other art historians who are of a more essayistic, belles-lettristic persuasion.

KUBLER

Oh, there are a lot of those. Yes.

SMITH

I mean, for instance, not a name that we discussed, but certainly Henry Adams in Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres is an art historian, but he's not--

KUBLER

He's not in our generation.

SMITH

Yes. He's not rigorous in any sense.

KUBLER

That's almost a century ago. [laughter]

SMITH

Well, we won't call any names about the present. But you were being criticized by the anthropologists for being insufficiently rigorous and methodological. Isn't that really a question of different forms of methodology?

KUBLER

It's a different approach. And they rejected it.

SMITH

It seems to me-- For instance, in your debate with Peter Furst in 1970 over whether the jaguar images were evidence of shamanistic continuations from Paleosiberian culture, it would seem to me as an outsider that you're being more methodologically sound because you're limiting the acceptable terms of the argument.

KUBLER

Yes, it's always dangerous to take a term from one world area and apply it to another without permission, so to speak. Shamanism--there are perfectly good Amerindian words for that concept. Why use the northeast Asian?

SMITH

Because people wish to posit a universal culture, a pre-Ice Age or an inter-Ice Age kind of-- You know, what Joseph Campbell talks about with the bear cult.

KUBLER

Well, one should be very careful with the invention of terms. Much more careful than anthro- pologists are. [laughter]

SMITH

What about J. Eric Thompson? What kind of person was he?

KUBLER

Eric Thompson was a British gentleman, and he died having recently been knighted. He was a very comfortable fellow, and he did his dictionary of Maya glyphs, which is very useful--being superseded now by other studies. But I never knew him well. I saw him perhaps twice. He was at the Metropolitan Museum.

SMITH

And Peter Furst? What kind of person was he?

KUBLER

Peter Furst was more of a shaman. He was like a shaman. [laughter] A big, burly man. A burly man.

SMITH

That suggests that he was also dramatic in his approach, too.

KUBLER

Yes. A lot of panache.

SMITH

Now, you were mentioning that Michael Coe is here at Yale [University], right?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

And he frequently sat in on doctoral committees?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

But you also mentioned early today that this was not always an easy relationship, that there were difficulties.

KUBLER

Oh, yes. [laughter] He has accused me of being uncooperative in a letter that was longer than it needed to be.

SMITH

Uncooperative about what?

KUBLER

Uncooperative. About everything. [laughter] But I took no offense. It was his charge, and I didn't ask him to support it.

SMITH

What initiated this letter? Can you remember any set of circumstances?

KUBLER

I don't know. It came out of the blue. I never knew why he wrote the letter.

SMITH

Uncooperative about how to approach-- The question on the floor is, what was Michael Coe up to?

KUBLER

I don't know. I never have known. Out of a blue sky.

SMITH

What was he like to work with on committees?

KUBLER

Oh, we never had any conflict. He would come to our department when there was an anthropological side to a dissertation that was being written in the department. It often happened.

SMITH

Would that be pre-Columbian, too?

KUBLER

Pre-Columbian, American, Amerindian.

SMITH

But presumably-- I mean, you are the expert on those materials. You didn't need another person to come in to handle ancient American society or culture.

KUBLER

Well, the department thought that it would be proper, and I agreed. And anthropologists come. So he attended meetings. I think he was newly made chairman, and he felt that I had ignored or-- Yes, ignored invitations to anthropology examinations. Which was, in my opinion, not true, because I had gone to some. But I hadn't gone to all of them, so he gives me, in two pages of typewriting, I'm being uncooperative. I thought that was unwarranted. I never answered, never mentioned it again. It had no consequences.

SMITH

There is a stereotypical image of academics bickering amongst each other over insignificant questions.

KUBLER

Yes. This is one.

SMITH

This is one. You would say this is the case where the stereotype is correct.

KUBLER

I would say this was a one-sided bicker. Not a bickering, because that suggests continuity. [laughter]

SMITH

But one of the more substantive questions in terms of the debates with anthropologists was the question of value versus material culture.

KUBLER

Well, that's the same game we were talking about.

SMITH

But I had a question to you. Isn't all material culture a statement of values? I mean, isn't that a statement that you're making in *The Shape of Time*: [Remarks on the History of Things (1962)].

KUBLER

Of course it is.

SMITH

But your statement-- The feeling is anthropologists are insufficiently tuned into values. Are they overly concerned about the values and underconcerned about the form?

KUBLER

They are social scientists, and they follow the canons, the prescriptions, and the rule book of the social scientist.

SMITH

There was one thing that you mentioned, which is that useful objects are the objects in a society that change at the slowest rate. I think this was from an essay you wrote in the early 1960s. And therefore, if one wanted to look at the most dynamic aspect of society, the aspect of society where there are concerns about change and debates over direction of change, one looks at art, or I would suppose art and literature, the creative arts.

KUBLER

The arts of expression.

SMITH

Which in ancient America means largely the monuments.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

How does that kind of discrepancy play in this art history versus anthropology argument? Is there a discrepancy between everyday objects and the elite art?

KUBLER

None whatever. They're part of a continuum. But the anthropologists are social scientists, stressing science, objectivity, the suppression of feeling, the suppression of everything that could be regarded as pain or pleasure. Pain or pleasure has nothing to do with it. Aesthetics is about pain and pleasure.

SMITH

So somehow they view social change taking place without--

KUBLER

They are social scientists, and pain and pleasure has nothing to do with it.

SMITH

But how does social change take place without pain or pleasure? Or pain and pleasure?

KUBLER

Well, the behavior of the anthropologist, we're talking about the behavior of the anthropologist. His conditioning as a social scientist gives him that austere rigor about pain and pleasure.

SMITH

I'm thinking now of Durkheim, who is certainly very important in the scheme of things.

KUBLER

Oh, yes.

SMITH

He's very concerned about pain and pleasure.

KUBLER

Oh, of course. He understands art. [laughter]

SMITH

What about Malinowski? How do you feel about Malinowski, Bronislaw Malinowski?

KUBLER

I think less highly of him. I knew him here.

SMITH

Oh, you did. Did you feel that his analyses of South Sea art, Trobriand Island art, were--?

KUBLER

They were scientific.

SMITH

They were scientific, okay.

KUBLER

Scientifically satisfying.

SMITH

Skipping ahead several generations, two generations, are you familiar with the work of Pierre Bourdieu?

KUBLER

Bourdieu?

SMITH

Bourdieu, yes.

KUBLER

I know the name.

SMITH

But he's not-- You have not read him.

KUBLER

No, I haven't read him.

SMITH

Okay.

KUBLER

Tell me about him.

SMITH

Maybe over dinner. One of his anthropological subjects has been aesthetic taste in modern America and Europe.

KUBLER

Well, I ought to know him better.

SMITH

Actually, you should. You should definitely know him.

KUBLER

Bourdieu.

SMITH

Let me switch-- Well, no, I have one question on this. How much was this debate that you were engaged in understood and appreciated by other art historians?

KUBLER

Debates?

SMITH

Between you and anthropologists.

KUBLER

I never drew them into it. I thought it was *infra dig*.

SMITH

But yet what you're trying to do is to establish a fundamental importance for and autonomy for an art historical vision in an interdisciplinary situation.

KUBLER

Well, I don't have that kind of time to preach to the unconverted.

SMITH

Preach to the unconverted? Okay. [laughter]

KUBLER

I can teach the converted, but I can't preach to the unconverted.

SMITH

This is a question, a point in fact-- Two things on the Tikal project. Your study was to be issue number 39 of the Tikal Reports?

KUBLER

Yes, that's right.

SMITH

And that did not appear in any form.

KUBLER

Nothing appeared, nothing appeared. My article I thought was satisfactory, but I was sorry that the others were found unsatisfactory. But the truth is that they are respected scholars now. The names you listed, I had praise for each and every one of them.

SMITH

Yes, you did. What effect has the guerrilla warfare in Guatemala had upon studies, on Maya studies, over the last twenty years?

KUBLER

Well, the main effect is the displacement of the archaeological theater. The archaeological theater is now in Belize, where in effect the oldest manifestations are being found.

SMITH

Would they have been found otherwise?

KUBLER

Probably not.

SMITH

Has anything been destroyed or lost in the course of the civil war in Guatemala?

KUBLER

Less than in the depredations of the commercial exploiters, who are perhaps the same people.

SMITH

Oh. Explain that.

KUBLER

Well, the troops or the armed forces in the field are probably not above making a profit.

SMITH

The government forces?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

What about the guerrilleros?

KUBLER

Well, they would have to fight the government forces.

SMITH

Yes, but in terms of--

KUBLER

But the government forces can perfectly well perform excavations on their own, knowing that they can sell them for a vast profit.

SMITH

Has it been dangerous for anthropologists or archaeologists or art historians to do work in Guatemala?

KUBLER

Well, those categories are very much concerned for their own hides. They don't go near it.

SMITH

I presume in a similar way studies in Peru have been cut back in the last few years.

KUBLER

Same thing. The Japanese have been doing very good work in Peru.

SMITH

Really?

KUBLER

They have an open field.

SMITH

You had mentioned when we were driving that the history of art and the history of culture do not relate very well to each other. That struck me as a

very peculiar statement, because I think the two subjects, given a certain amount of distinction, are actually very interlocked.

KUBLER

But the mesh. It's a matter of mesh. The mesh of culture is about one of the biggest you can find on the market. Cultural history, that lets everything through, or catches nothing. But the history of art is much finer mesh. Much smaller operation.

SMITH

Well, how would you define culture?

KUBLER

The behavior of everybody for awfully long periods of time.

SMITH

Could you discuss somewhat about your class lecture notes, the style that you developed them in and your method of presentation? How did you prepare for your lectures, in other words?

KUBLER

I wrote an outline. I always wrote an outline.

SMITH

You would never write out a verbatim text.

KUBLER

Oh, no. No. Only for public lectures. Public lectures have a blessing that nobody can speak before invited to. But students will speak, and should speak. I much prefer talking to students.

SMITH

Would you allow your lectures to be interrupted with questions?

KUBLER

All the time.

SMITH

All the time?

KUBLER

All the time. They weren't lectures. They were what the French call causeries, causerie about a stated subject.

SMITH

So you would go through your outline and ad lib, as it were, on the topics.

KUBLER

Yes. I want to be sure these points leave plenty of time for talk.

SMITH

And these are for your lecture courses?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Now, how many students would be in the lecture courses?

KUBLER

Oh, well, I thought you were talking about seminars.

SMITH

No, the lecture courses.

KUBLER

The lecture courses. Oh, at the most-- Well, it depends. When I was beginning, it was two hundred.

SMITH

These would be the survey courses.

KUBLER

The older I got, the fewer students I had to lecture to. The number diminished to seminar size.

SMITH

How often would you revise your lecture notes?

KUBLER

Every time I read them.

SMITH

So you might add a book or delete a book or--

KUBLER

Oh, yes. I might write another lecture about a book that I did want them to read.

SMITH

How many books and articles would you normally assign to an undergraduate to read in a course? What would be the typical reading load?

KUBLER

Oh, there would be a general handbook for the whole field and nothing else. The moment the student knew his choice or her choice, she was free to go ahead. Then it was up to her or him.

SMITH

And this would apply obviously as well to the graduate courses, that reading was more self-directed.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

But again, was there any kind of university-wide concern about how much reading or the work load that might be involved in a class? So that students taking four units--or whatever the standard would be, five units-- would be doing a similar amount of work as they might be doing in another course.

KUBLER

The only criterion as far as I could find out was-- The only criterion was whether the students were complaining. If the students were complaining, it got to the department.

SMITH

Did they ever complain to you about having too much work to do?

KUBLER

No.

SMITH

No. Okay.

KUBLER

No. I don't remember any student complaints. But I sat on committees where there were student complaints to be dealt with.

SMITH

How frequently were the student complaints valid?

KUBLER

When there was an incompetent person or offensive person.

SMITH

These would have to do with more one-on-one interaction.

KUBLER

It was very rare.

SMITH

What about the use of film in art classes? Did you use film?

KUBLER

Almost never. So hard to get to be relevant at that time.

SMITH

Were there good films on ancient American or Iberian?

KUBLER

They were just beginning to be made.

SMITH

How do you feel generally about the use of films? Would they be valuable to the kind of point you're trying to make?

KUBLER

I think probably they should be shown for pleasure. For pleasure, in order to warm the course up, and then forget the film.

SMITH

Or if you have to go out of town for a meeting or something.

KUBLER

Just warm the course up a bit. And put in a bit of amusement.

SMITH

Let's say, could a film of Chichén Itzá give you a better feel of that--? Do you know of any films that give you a better feel of monuments, ancient American monuments, than simply looking at good photographs?

KUBLER

Every film is better than a good photograph.

SMITH

Oh, really.

KUBLER

Every film, no matter how poorly it's made, is better than a still photograph. Something's in motion. The camera is in motion.

SMITH

Usually, yeah. This is a difficult question, but how do you train students to think visually in a highly verbal environment such as a university?

KUBLER

Well, we do it with slides. The steady image, not the moving image. And the illustrations in their textbooks. And the occasional visits to the museum and looking at the objects. But then they're always in motion. [laughter] They're not looking.

SMITH

The German method is terribly tedious kinds of exercises like counting the folds. When we interviewed Craig Hugh Smyth, he complained that when he was in school he hadn't realize how dreary art history could be, because of these exercises. Do you find those kinds of things useful? Counting folds or fenestration or loops.

KUBLER

For myself yes, but for others no.

SMITH

Why for yourself?

KUBLER

Well, because sometimes it makes possible a distinction.

SMITH

Ah.

KUBLER

This is not the same as that.

SMITH

Did you find that students were becoming more visual as the century progressed? I mean, Marshall McLuhan in the early sixties talked about our moving from a literate society to a media society. Did you find any evidence of increasing visual literacy on the part of students?

KUBLER

Only among the ones who were capable of becoming more civilized, [laughter] who were the good ones. But then they were doing many other things, too.

SMITH

I'd like to talk briefly, change the topic completely. Your involvement with the Comité International de l'Histoire de l'Art in the sixties. You mentioned that you were actually quite active in that for twenty years, and it seemed in the sixties you sat on the committee on administration and supervised the revision of its constitution.

KUBLER

As I remember, we never did anything.

SMITH

Well, there's certainly a lot of paper generated for not doing anything.
[laughter]

KUBLER

A lot of paper generated, yes. I think these international societies, many of them are of this character.

SMITH

Let me point out a couple of issues that seem to jump out of this mass of papers. One was there seemed to be a problematic relationship to anthropologists, archaeologists, and orientalists. Some wanted to expand the organization so that it would include those, and others wanted to limit it so it would remain the traditional European fine arts. Do you remember those discussions?

KUBLER

I remember that kind of discussion, yes. Opening or closing. And the--

SMITH

I mean, to you is there any significance to the issue?

KUBLER

Well, it seemed reasonable to open the society to more people of supposedly common interest.

SMITH

What were the opponents afraid of?

KUBLER

Losing control of the funds.

SMITH

Oh, okay. [laughter]

KUBLER

The funds are considerable. They're generally government subsidies to learned societies.

SMITH

Let me throw out some names of people who were involved when you were involved. Millard Meiss.

KUBLER

Oh, yes, I knew him well. A very good scholar and a very generous person and admirable in every way.

SMITH

How well did he function in this kind of international environment?

KUBLER

Very well, very well. He was careful about what he accepted to do, and then when he had accepted, he did it.

SMITH

How about Hans [R.] Hahnloser?

KUBLER

Hahnloser I didn't know so well. I knew him at meetings. He's a medievalist too, I think.

SMITH

I guess he was executive secretary or secretary-treasurer of the organization.

KUBLER

Yes. I remember him with no displeasure.

SMITH

André Chastel.

KUBLER

André Chastel was a person of importance. And you knew it. [laughter]

SMITH

Did he--?

KUBLER

He was important.

SMITH

He was important scholastically, but also because he had the French government behind him.

KUBLER

He always kept his foot in the trough.

SMITH

So were there particular positions that he would take, or were there aspects of his--?

KUBLER

Well, he was always on the governing board of the association. He died recently.

SMITH

Yes, he did.

KUBLER

But he was a French aristo.

SMITH

What about Giulio Carlo Argan? Do you remember his involvement?

KUBLER

Argan? Yes, I remember him. He was more of a politician.

SMITH

Now, what do you mean by that?

KUBLER

Well, he was Italian, I think.

SMITH

Yes.

KUBLER

And he worked the political strings in Italy. He was based in Rome, and he had his finger in everything.

SMITH

Are there people in the U.S. that are comparable to Argan or Chastel in terms of their ability to--?

KUBLER

Probably, yes. And their gift for administration.

SMITH

But Argan is also considered a scholar of considerable stature.

KUBLER

Yes, but-- Well, Argan-- No, I won't grant stature. [laughter]

SMITH

And a theoretician as well.

KUBLER

And a theoretician.

SMITH

What about Anthony Blunt?

KUBLER

Well, there's another politically damaged case.

SMITH

Yes, well--

KUBLER

A bad political judgment finally killed him.

**1.25. TAPE NUMBER: XIII, SIDE ONE
NOVEMBER 19, 1991**

SMITH

You were saying about the Tikal project.

KUBLER

The Tikal project underwent a change of direction owing to the decisions taken in Philadelphia at the [University of Pennsylvania] University Museum.

SMITH

So a new person came on to direct it?

KUBLER

A new person came on to direct it, and the work for the Yale [University] group was arrested. It was stopped.

SMITH

It was stopped.

KUBLER

To other choices.

SMITH

On the Tikal project, after your group was dismissed from this, have any other art historians participated--?

KUBLER

None.

SMITH

None. On any form of Mesoamerican research?

KUBLER

Not that I know of. Not the Tikal project. The Tikal project reverted to the archaeologists.

SMITH

Well, let's get back to the question of the Comité International [de l'Histoire de l'Art]. You had mentioned last night after our taping session that you felt a certain degree of dubiousness about the value of such organizations.

KUBLER

Yes, for the committee members who are invited to come at the Comité expense and-- The members' own contribution, or some part of it-- It seemed it was a parade and a charade. There was no real work to do. There was no real responsibility taken. One was asked for no contribution to the proceedings, and it was all in the hands of the regular committees. These foreign visitors were foreign visitors, and nothing was expected of them and they came unprepared.

SMITH

Though you were, for several years, chair of the committee on administration for the Comité International. How did you get to that position? How did that happen?

KUBLER

I was elected. And I attended when I went to the annual meeting, and all the work had already been done. There was nothing, and there were no decisions taken. All the decisions had already been taken in other committee meetings

prior to the arrival of the foreigners, the foreign members. The foreign members were, I'm sure, for dressing. Window dressing.

SMITH

There did seem to be some disputes, or some problems, over the direction of the Répertoire d'Art et d'Archéologie, the nature of the journal and the direction it should go in, how expansive it should be. Did you have any participation in these discussions?

KUBLER

Not really. We were told what had been decided.

SMITH

Did you have any opinions at that time?

KUBLER

No questions had been submitted.

SMITH

Another issue that you seem to have been involved in was the Comité International protested to the Vatican its decision to ship Michelangelo's Pietà to the United States for this tour.

KUBLER

I don't remember that, but that would have been an announcement, not a decision. And not a discussion of the decision.

SMITH

Another thing, there was a letter from Millard Meiss to you in 1961, and this was when you were discussing revising the bylaws and constitution of the organization of the Comité, changing it to a société. You described yesterday that nothing really came of all that effort. But he said at this point, and I found this curious--

KUBLER

Millard Meiss.

SMITH

Millard Meiss said that he did not believe that art history was strong enough as a discipline to stand on its own. It needed support wherever it could find it. Is that a common feeling among art historians? That they were somewhat on the periphery of the humanities?

KUBLER

I think so. I think that was generally shared. We had our own organization, the College Art Association, and it functioned according to the needs that arose in the profession. It also included artists. It always included the practicing artists.

SMITH

What about the function of a society like the Comité International in terms of creating a common language for art historians? Did it work towards that? When you bring together Americans, Britons, Germans, Italians, and the French, you are each working in very different national traditions.

KUBLER

These were ceremonial parades. [laughter] They were not working sessions. We were not invited to comment on the issues that were before the working committees.

SMITH

So at these congresses that happen every four years, there would not really be debate?

KUBLER

No, there was no debate. It was a parade. A parade of visitors.

SMITH

[to Reese] Do you have any questions on the Comité?

REESE

Well, I was not here yesterday, so the question I would ask is, who were the real powers behind the Comité?

KUBLER

People like André Chastel. André Chastel was for years the central figure and probably maybe still is.

REESE

And so it was really out of France that the power and organization of the Comité came.

KUBLER

That's right. The international aspect was a window dressing.

REESE

Did you discuss yesterday the 1973 congress in Granada, where there was a major attempt to open the field to the New World?

KUBLER

No.

REESE

Could you say something about your efforts in bringing about that conference in Granada? "Plus Ultra."

KUBLER

I remember participating in a discussion of the motto. I remember being told what the French wished to accomplish with this. The next advice I received was to be in Granada. And I was there.

SMITH

Did you recruit Latin American art historians to come? Did you help form national committees?

KUBLER

Wasn't asked to. I was never asked to do anything.

REESE

I remember that as we prepared the collected essays, you sent me a letter which was a protest of the compass of the Comité. Because it went from Constantine until-- I can't remember the cutoff.

KUBLER

The definition of the Middle Ages.

REESE

But then it was European. It really did not include any of the world outside of Europe. I have this memory of a letter of protest on your part. Do you remember any of the--?

KUBLER

I can look for such a letter. I don't remember it--which is what I have done with the meetings I attended. I sort of wiped them out as being of any significance as far as our international participation was concerned.

SMITH

Are there colloquia that were productive that you've participated in? Provided a model of--

KUBLER

There may be, but I have not been invited to any.

SMITH

Not necessarily under the auspices of this particular international, but were the mesas redondas productive meetings? The mesas redondas in Mexico.

KUBLER

I think more or less the same ceremonious aspect of-- The ceremony of having foreign visitors and having them participating. Being there, but not in any of the decisions.

SMITH

What about a meeting such as we discussed yesterday a little bit, the 1970 conference at the Metropolitan Museum [of Art] on Mesoamerican archaeology?

KUBLER

That was a round table. That was a round table with a specific program. Those were papers.

SMITH

Are those kinds of activities productive, do you find?

KUBLER

I think that one was, yes. I think that would have been, yes.

SMITH

Does that kind of interchange sharpen your thinking?

KUBLER

That would have been an interchange of finished work that had been commissioned and approved, or approved and commissioned, and reading of the papers and discussion.

SMITH

Last night when we were at dinner, you mentioned--this is, I think, a quote-- "God forbid that I ever become a chef d'école." [laughter] I was wondering if you could reflect on how you define a chef d'école and why you wouldn't want to be one.

KUBLER

In the French sense, it means a great deal of authority. We don't have such chefs d'école. We have changing committees, changing chairmen. We don't have heads of societies that are installed for life. That is the case with [André] Chastel, if I understand his position right.

REESE

Do you have any insights into what were the conditions that in fact produced André Chastel at a specific moment in time? Not intellectual formation as much as the ability to seize upon the opportunity to organize international art history.

KUBLER

I know nothing in detail of how Chastel gained his position. But his position was one of great authority in the affairs of the Comité.

SMITH

With that authority-- I mean, to play the devil's advocate, that kind of authority allows you to develop students and junior faculty that are pursuing the sorts of questions that interest you, so in a sense you can perpetuate a vision--

KUBLER

Yes, build a team.

SMITH

--of artistry.

KUBLER

You build teams, yes.

SMITH

Have you been concerned with developing a continuity, a spiritual progeny, people who will carry on the questions that have been concerning you and--?

KUBLER

Well, of course in the routine of teaching, that is unavoidable. And I never made political causes with the results of that activity. I never benefited from political exploitation of having been in authority as an instructor. I always paid attention to the work in hand, but I never-- Accepting-- When it was my turn, assumed the chairmanship, I did. Or the director of graduate studies, I did.

SMITH

Those were fairly early on in your career, it seems to me.

KUBLER

Yes, and then they stretched on for a number of years. Then I was through, and it was someone else's turn.

SMITH

So you feel no burning need to establish an institutional legacy.

KUBLER

No. An institutional legacy, no. The only step I've taken in that direction is to donate my books to the university, my professional books.

SMITH

In terms of pre-Columbian or ancient American faculty at Yale, did you have a decisive voice on who was hired? For instance, Mary Miller, was that--?

KUBLER

In that case, yes. But I was never consulted on an anthropological appointment, and with reason.

SMITH

Yes. But within the art history department--

KUBLER

Only in the art history department.

REESE

I wonder, if we can return not to the Comité per se, but to Europe's attitude towards America-- I mean, we've discussed a good bit, you know, the problem of representing the parts south to Americans. But do you have just any general feelings about the development of American studies in Europe and whether the Americans were way ahead of the Europeans or whether it was developing at the same time?

KUBLER

Well, I read about them in certain journals. For example, the Belgians. The Belgians are very much interested in what is going on in America, and so are the Dutch. There's a journal which records work of interest to both sides of the Atlantic. But that's an unusual case.

SMITH

One other question on the Comité, which is-- I noticed that one of the people you worked with was Lorentz, Stanislaw Lorentz from the University of Warsaw. What kind of--?

KUBLER

I remember the name.

SMITH

Can you give any kind of personality sketch of him and the role he played in this committee that you were chair of?

KUBLER

I don't remember him as active, excepting to be there. Being there was--

SMITH

What about the Comité as a platform for building bridges between the communist bloc and the North Atlantic countries? Did that kind of activity develop?

KUBLER

I wasn't aware of it being pushed in that direction. I don't think Chastel, who was very conservative in politics, I believe-- I don't believe Chastel would have done that. Chastel was a power in the Comité.

REESE

It was really a series of diplomatic alliances, I believe, and most of the members were in fact appointed for life and could name their own successors.

KUBLER

It was a very small committee, yes.

REESE

And they were in some ways, I believe, self-perpetuating. I only know secondhand from later moments, where there has been an attempt to get a structure that is more mobile and will turn over more quickly and where elected representatives would enter. But I don't think this same early structure has remained in place.

KUBLER

That's my impression too.

SMITH

Well, I think enough on that.

KUBLER

Yes. Foreign participation was ceremonial.

SMITH

So when did you pull out of active participation on the Comité International?

KUBLER

Well, I gave up accepting invitations to annual meetings.

SMITH

Would that be in the sixties?

KUBLER

And I don't know what my status is.

SMITH

You were the chair of a committee within the Comité.

KUBLER

I don't remember. I don't remember doing any business with that committee. It existed in their records, but I don't remember attending a meeting of its members.

SMITH

You did attend a meeting in Barcelona in 1962.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

And you had a meeting in New York City which was in conjunction with the international meeting.

KUBLER

Yes, but this was always ceremonial because it was-- The hosts were French.

REESE

Did you have a sense of an intellectual relationship with Chastel through [Henri] Focillon?

KUBLER

Not really. I never knew him well.

SMITH

See, actually Marcel Aubert was the power in the Comité until 1960, and then Chastel takes his place.

KUBLER

I didn't know that. I thought he had been in place before '60.

SMITH

I got that out of going through your two thick folders on this, and there was a record there of the transition of power of Aubert to Chastel.

KUBLER

I think it's a-- There's more behind these shifts of names than appears.

SMITH

In what sense?

KUBLER

Someone is really in power who is not mentioned. [laughter]

SMITH

Oh. Okay. Let's put that aside and shift back to your--

KUBLER

And I don't know who that was at the time of the [inaudible] between Aubert and Chastel. Aubert would have been a very old party at this time.

SMITH

Well, wouldn't Millard Meiss have been a power to reckon with? Would he have been someone comparable to Chastel in terms of--?

KUBLER

Yes. But I don't think he was consulted very much. I was not aware that he was part of the inner circle.

SMITH

In American terms, would he have been comparable to Chastel in terms of the influence that he wielded and his ability to manipulate funding sources?

KUBLER

Similar. Similar. Yes. Millard Meiss was a man of some wealth also, like Chastel.

REESE

Could you say something about what changes have occurred, let's say, in the development of French art history that would in many ways explain the differences between the country that produced a Focillon and much of the tenor of, let's say, postwar art history in France? Focillon's legacy in France. Yale had picked up an American legacy of Focillon. In some way I'm thinking about what happened after the war. Was there a Focillon legacy in France? Or was it totally transplanted?

KUBLER

Focillon died in exile. His memory was revered, but I don't think there were any political consequences. There was no suggestion of a successor to him. He was at the Collège de France, and his chair was occupied by somebody else and that was the end of it. But he had no political life, really. No significant political life. He participated in politics, French politics, but not in the trenches, so to speak. In the trenches of administration.

SMITH

Can someone be an administrator and a scholar at the same time, in your opinion? Is it possible to combine the kind of political perspective and--?

KUBLER

Some do, some do. Some have. It's a decision that isn't offered to many.
[laughter]

SMITH

Well, I'm wondering if perhaps, in your opinion, there are distinct modes of thinking involved in the-- An academic administrator and a researcher may be in opposition to each other.

KUBLER

Well, some administrators have been research scholars.

SMITH

Of note?

KUBLER

I think so. I think so. Assuming responsibility as a matter of conscience or as a matter of ambition, as the case might be. Unfulfilled ambition.

SMITH

The other faculty at Yale: Were you involved in the recruiting of Arthur [G.] Miller to the junior faculty position?

KUBLER

Yes. He was appointed while I was there.

SMITH

Did you play a leading role in getting him onto the faculty?

KUBLER

Well, he was known as a graduate student, and his work was approved and there was no trouble.

SMITH

What about Michael [E.] Kampen, who also joined the Yale faculty?

KUBLER

Michael Kampen was less clearly a candidate for a teaching post, and I don't think he ever had one.

SMITH

Oh, I thought he did actually, but--

KUBLER

He might have had an active instructorship, but it had no future. No future was intended by that appointment.

SMITH

Now, when Miller joins the Yale Department of Art History--

KUBLER

Mary Miller.

SMITH

Mary Miller, and then Arthur Miller-- Are they related in any way?

KUBLER

No.

SMITH

The two Millers join the history of art faculty. Does that relieve you of some of your teaching responsibilities vis-à-vis ancient America?

KUBLER

No. They teach too. They teach too. They do more of the undergraduate teaching and leave part of the graduate work in my hands.

SMITH

I was wondering, because in the 1970s your major books begin to shift back to Iberian subjects. We discussed yesterday the difficulties that you seemed to be having with doing Mesoamerican work, just in terms of the practical

difficulties of the Tikal project and the hostilities that were generated in Mexico with the authorities.

KUBLER

We were told to turn it off. [laughter]

SMITH

What I'm getting at is, to what degree were these external difficulties shifting your field of attention away from ancient America to Iberian topics?

KUBLER

Well, I'd always had concern with Spanish topics, and when this change in the responsibility towards the Tikal project occurred, I was very glad to resume Spanish studies. I spent a good deal of time on it.

SMITH

So in the seventies, did your seminars shift from ancient American topics to Spanish and Portuguese topics?

KUBLER

To some extent, yes.

SMITH

To some extent.

KUBLER

I had a seminar going with people who wanted Iberian topics.

SMITH

Now, in 1972 you published Portuguese Plain Architecture: [Between Spices and Diamonds, 1521-1706]. When did you start working on that book, do you recall?

KUBLER

It was in the sixties.

SMITH

Early? Mid? Late?

KUBLER

I think mid. Mid-sixties. It's very easy to read Portuguese if one knows Spanish. It's very difficult to speak Portuguese if one speaks Spanish. Many Spanish people cannot understand Portuguese people. Portuguese people can always understand Spaniards. Odd arrangement. An odd condition. But the language, Portuguese is phonetically much more like French. The sounds of Portuguese are nasal, as in much French.

SMITH

How did your research--? I mean, you spent really a decade of intensive research on pre-Columbian topics, on Teotihuacán, the Maya iconography.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

How did the work that you did on those topics help in your study of Portuguese architecture?

KUBLER

They were entirely separate. Entirely separate.

SMITH

There were no solutions to problems that you made?

KUBLER

They were different trains that I took. [laughter]

SMITH

But there were no conceptual solutions that you found in studying ancient American art that allowed you to unlock problems in Portuguese baroque architecture?

KUBLER

There may have been a connection in the underlying approach to the work, but really they were separate trains I was taking. Getting off one and getting on the other.

SMITH

Well, let's go to the book in particular. I'm going to ask, as we did with the Teotihuacán work, if you could, in your memory, your recollection, pose the problem that interested you when you began working on the book. This is distinct from the problem that ultimately the book is about, but what was the problem that hooked you to start working on a subject?

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*. *Chão*. So 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 *notestilo chão*.

SMITH

What was it about the *estilo chão* that intrigued you? What was the problem involved?

KUBLER

Well, probably 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.

SMITH

Now, the method that you developed seemed to me quite similar. The typology and sequencing of groups of buildings is similar to what you used in *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century* [1948]. But it was an evolution or a development from that.

KUBLER

Most books are highly selective. Most books were highly selective, in the first case being of the sixteenth century, and of mendicant origin mostly. And in the Portuguese case, it's also highly selective. To pick out only the plain architecture.

SMITH

To your recollection, how did your typological analysis change from the 1940s to the 1970s? Had you developed more sophisticated ways of approaching it?

KUBLER

I had different ways of approaching New Mexico and Portugal. I had different ways. They were not the same.

SMITH

And where did these ways come from? What suggested these ways?

KUBLER

Partly the prior literature on Portuguese architecture and the relationship to contemporary architecture, which is also present in the case of New Mexico.

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.

SMITH

I was rereading your description of Focillon's lecture style, in which you talked about a technique that you developed also. Rather than try to cover

everything, you built an architecture, you built a building, an edifice, out of a few samples, which you studied in much greater detail. So that in fact it was all part of the same project, but each of these--right?--allowed you a different kind of access to the problem. In the case of many of the books you'd written in the preceding decade, because they were surveys, there was not as much liberty, because you had to cover, by virtue of the assignment, a broad ground. But this was a liberty, a book with more liberty.

KUBLER

Yes. The Pelican History of Art [series] had its program, and one followed the program. But these I was freer in.

REESE

So what I was trying to recapture was, in some way, that new liberty. And yet a book that is covering a problem, plain style, with chapters that are not all cut out of the same mold. I mean, the joyeuses entrées. Each one of these is both separate and yet builds into the total. I was thinking about the process of how you came to those particular subjects, whether you sat and wrote an outline in advance and said, "These would be interesting subjects" or whether or not you had already worked on pieces of it before that you build into this larger whole.

KUBLER

I think the latter is the case, that the need for fashioning certain pieces of this structure was apparent during thinking it out. So it's a process of selection and what not to say and how far to go in one direction. I went a little too far in the opinion of some.

SMITH

One of the criticisms was your rejection of the Italian model. Which was an innovation on your part, challenging the idea that Italian architects had been the source for Portuguese architecture.

KUBLER

I think this was a case of domestic habits already present in Portugal allowing for a very bare and not overcharged ornamental style, a much simpler structure and ornament, corresponding to the impoverishment of the state.

SMITH

How would you define the difference of your approach from that of Carlos de Azevedo?

KUBLER

Carlos de Azevedo is a musician. He really is a musician. [laughter]

SMITH

Oh.

KUBLER

More than an art historian.

SMITH

I'm not sure how to follow up on that. [laughter] What about Ayres de Carvalho?

KUBLER

Ayres de Carvalho. I didn't know him very well.

SMITH

But his work, what about his work?

KUBLER

His written work?

SMITH

Yes.

KUBLER

I used what he'd done, of course. I think we're about the same age.

SMITH

José-Augusto França?

KUBLER

França is more of a critic than a historian of painting. He's very active in that Coloquio journal, the art journal that appears every few months. He's very central to that.

SMITH

Reynaldo dos Santos?

KUBLER

Reynaldo dos Santos is of Focillon's generation and a polymath like Henri Focillon.

SMITH

Did any of these people have ideas that were really pertinent to you, that you would incorporate?

KUBLER

I almost certainly did. [laughter] One can't build it all of stones one has quarried himself.

SMITH

Well, perhaps we should pursue that a little further, the relationship of the scholar to his predecessors.

KUBLER

Yes.

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SMITH

We take the metaphor of scholarship as an ongoing dialogue across the centuries, basically. How much should one, how much does one, rely upon the work of other scholars?

KUBLER

As much as one needs. [laughter] One has to need help or fashion it differently.

SMITH

What about originality? What is the role for originality in contemporary scholarship?

KUBLER

Originality of idea perhaps is the primary requirement. "Is the idea worth working?"

SMITH

Well, when you talk about taking the building blocks from these other scholars, what does that mean precisely? When you accept aspects of their research, their descriptions, what do you do then? What do you do that to your own satisfaction advances their work?

KUBLER

Building out a more complete view of the grouping that seems significant and ill attended in the work of predecessors. Plain style had really not occurred to the Portuguese, or to anyone anywhere else. The plain style could be taken seriously. *Estilo chão*. That was a novelty.

SMITH

Are we dealing with a form of vernacular architecture?

KUBLER

It is. It is that. It is that, a vernacular of considerable power.

REESE

Richard asked the question about scholarship as a dialogue, a communication of the scholars. Is that its primary function for you, or is it a much more solitary--?

KUBLER

Well, reading the work of a contemporary is a form of dialogue. The contemporary has had his say, or her say, and one has it and one-- Writing is part of the dialogue with the reading. Sometimes one has the good luck to do a *viva voce*, but rarely. In the case of the dead, it's impossible.

SMITH

But I also sense from what you said about conferences that viva voce is not often very fruitful.

KUBLER

Directed conferences are not very fruitful, no.

REESE

When you finish a book, do you actively wait for the reviews and dialogue that follow? Or by that time have you already put it to bed?

KUBLER

I think when I've finished it and I've started something else, I forget to read the reviews. I'm surprised when I find them.

SMITH

You forget to read the reviews?

KUBLER

Well, I read them when I find them, yes. When they come to my attention or if I'm sent them, which sometimes happens.

SMITH

Of course, this is usually two years after you've finished a manuscript.

KUBLER

Yes. It's slow.

REESE

That's really shaping that next edifice in the dialogue and letting it drift off toward the future. It's the primary--

KUBLER

You go on to something else.

SMITH

What about Jorge Segurado?

KUBLER

Segurado. I don't know him. I don't remember.

SMITH

Jorge Segurado. He also wrote on Portuguese architecture over some period.

KUBLER

Jorge Segurado. Yes. It isn't one of the first names I remember.

SMITH

We discussed Robert Smith last time as a personality.

KUBLER

Yes. Robert C. Smith.

SMITH

Robert C. Smith. Yes, we got that wrong last time.

KUBLER

Robert Chester Smith.

SMITH

What about his role, his model as a scholar for you? Did you find his work posing interesting questions?

KUBLER

Yes. He was older than I, and he was a very prolific writer, especially on Portuguese matters. But he was dedicated to the ornate side of Portuguese architecture and had no concern whatever with this plain style, so that I didn't need much from his work for the work on the plain style.

SMITH

I wonder-- In terms of the plain style, the appeal of the plain style is the possibility of doing a formal analysis without having to worry much about iconographical overlays. To look at the effects of form.

KUBLER

It's looking at architecture rather than its ornament. The attraction of Portuguese architecture to scholars, both Portuguese and foreign, was its ornateness, the ornament, the ornamental problem. That was Robert Smith's concern. He didn't say much about the architectural structure.

REESE

It's very interesting, in attempting to put together a lecture program this year about culture, one of the most difficult subjects to get at is what has been called the poetics of the plain. Because very little theoretical work in poetics of language or poetics has looked at the kind of plain vernacular. There are practitioners, like J. B. Jackson and like your work, which has concentrated on defining a lot of the fundamental problems. But unlike other fields, it does not have this apparatus of theory and complicated methodologies. Rather, it goes to the artifact with a very direct kind of respect, you know, for the processes that makes it an attempt to open it up. What other scholars have you found who have treated the poetics of the plain with particular relevance for your particular insight?

KUBLER

Well, many commentators on contemporary twentieth-century architecture have been concerned with the poetics of the plain. There is a resonance between New Mexico and Portugal and contemporary International style simplicity, purity.

REESE

For me, what's interesting in the introduction to the plain-style book is that you take an aesthetic which has long interested you, which is the plain style, but you also take a style which is rooted within a national tradition and in fact within a whole body of Portuguese scholarship, whether or not it's sufficiently treated. But then your primary interest methodologically is to liberate it from a Portuguese vision, so that in fact one is from Brussels to Italy to Spain, looking constantly at those-- I think you call them the "isotherms" in the introduction, these waves of influence that cross. I'm not sure there's a--

KUBLER

Well, I hope I made it clear that I wasn't going to be talking about those anymore than in the introduction. [laughter] I meant to get on with the subject.

SMITH

I found in reading a dissertation by one of your students, Flora [S.] Clancy, a sentence that caught me. She writes--this was in, I believe, the mid-seventies when she was writing this--"While iconography requires an understanding of analogic and metaphoric conventions for comprehension, the observer need not be literate to understand or respond to form. One cannot help but be affected by form. A large room, a small chair, a megalith, a cameo all elicit conscious or unconscious reactions on the part of the observer." Those are her words, but I wonder how much of that is Kubler's--

KUBLER

Oh, I'd say they're hers. They're hers. It's her language.

SMITH

It's her language, but how much of it is the Focillon-Kubler conception of formal analysis as interpreted by her?

KUBLER

Perhaps.

SMITH

I mean, would you agree or disagree with that statement?

KUBLER

It sounds more like her than it sounds like me. [laughter] She has a very clearly defined personal style, wouldn't you agree? Do you know her?

SMITH

No, I don't know her. What about the key concept I pull out of there, a visceral reaction to form?

KUBLER

I think it's hers.

SMITH

That's hers.

KUBLER

I think it's hers more than mine. She goes farther than I would.

REESE

When you were doing research on the Portuguese book, I know that you were in Belgium for a while.

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

You were in Italy working on it from those angles.

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

In those ways, did it intersect a lot of your other concerns? In other words, whereas the work in Italy, the Escorial work-- You know, all kind of crossing in special ways?

KUBLER

Yes, the Escorial is connected with the plain style. The excursion to Brussels was to find a possible correspondence to plain style in sixteenth-century lowland architecture, which was not the case.

REESE

You also, I believe, said that you did that book, you translated to Portuguese--

KUBLER

Yes, da Costa. Felix da Costa.

REESE

As a promise to a friend who had asked you for this book. Was that the plain-style book that a very close Portuguese friend had asked for?

KUBLER

I don't remember this.

REESE

I could have it wrong.

KUBLER

I don't remember this, no. But the Felix da Costa [Antiquity of the Art of Painting] is a history of painting, and that was a manuscript I found very interesting and enjoyed commenting on. But that was a different situation from the plain style.

SMITH

Were there questions on the plain-style book--again, whether those questions appear or do not appear in the book--that were left unresolved in your mind? That you could not answer to your satisfaction when you completed your study.

KUBLER

Well, I thought I'd answered my questions. I would have to go back and read it again.

SMITH

Were there things in the study that pointed you to future research work?

KUBLER

Well, yes. It firmed my intention to write about the Escorial.

SMITH

Let's move on to that book [Building the Escorial (1982)], which was published ten years later. When did you begin--? Well, we know you began research on that in 1936 with [Erwin] Panofsky.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

But when did you resume intensive work on your study of the Escorial?

KUBLER

I would say after the Portuguese, after the plain style. I may have been encouraging myself to write the plain style with the Escorial in mind, and checking the debt of the Escorial to the plain style, which I found to be nonexistent. A separate manifestation. Extremely personal to Philip II and his architects.

SMITH

What was there about the Escorial that drew you back to more intensive study about it?

KUBLER

The absence of any discussion of this problem of the plainness. His first architect was Juan Bautista de Toledo, a building master rather than an architect. His drawings exist for the building, but his successor, who was [Juan de] Herrera, redesigned the whole thing. The traces of Juan Bautista de Toledo are very few. Mainly in the foundations, the layout of the foundations. The direction of the building changed with Herrera. Juan Bautista de Toledo still has admirers and followers, and they dislike Herrera. And vice versa--the friends of Herrera discount Juan Bautista de Toledo. But I've thought, and still do, that the building is Herrera's on a ground plan of Juan Bautista de Toledo. The aspect, the visible aspect, is Herrera's. And in close alliance with Philip II.

REESE

Was there a single problem there that you feel really was for you essential? A problem in that book, rather than just numerous problems?

KUBLER

That of plain form, the plainness.

SMITH

In the reviews of the book, there is considerable discussion of the use of documents as historical evidence and the use of analysis of personal style. Could you speak somewhat about how you viewed the documentary evidence and the formal analysis that you had to do in relative balance?

KUBLER

I was guided by what I found in the very large documentation of the building, which has been published and is available to everybody. There are quantities of remarks in the king's own hand and in the architect's hand, and all of this is the body of evidence that I used.

SMITH

What about the formal analysis of the--?

KUBLER

Well, it suggests the conscious devising of an austere style, austere manner. Deliberately contrived and salvaged, or rescued, from the drawings by Juan Bautista de Toledo that have survived, which are not like the building as it stands. But the building as it stands is Herrera and the king. The king was constantly involved in it.

SMITH

When you were working on the Escorial book, what kind of seminars were you offering? Graduate seminars.

KUBLER

I've forgotten.

SMITH

I'm wondering-- With the Teotihuacán and the Maya work, the graduate seminars are very clearly connected.

KUBLER

I continued these pre-Columbian studies all during my teaching time.

SMITH

So you did not feel the need to do specifically Iberian seminars that would focus your attention--

KUBLER

No. I didn't teach the Portuguese book, and I didn't teach the Escorial either.

SMITH

How come?

KUBLER

I was too busy writing it.

SMITH

But, nonetheless, with the Tikal and the Teotihuacán and the Maya iconography, you felt you had to teach these graduate seminars so closely intertwined with that work. What's the distinction between--?

KUBLER

I don't think any students appeared wanting to know about the plain style or the Escorial. It didn't seem to me to be a fair shake for the students. There's so much more.

SMITH

Were you continuing to teach the sort of material that you developed in the Penguin book on Spain and Portugal?

KUBLER

Yes. That was my routine of teaching. That was the pre-Columbian studies-- and Latin American colonial occasionally.

SMITH

Colonial, but not Iberian.

KUBLER

Not Iberian, no, not Spanish. Not Spanish art. I don't think I ever taught-- I never taught the Escorial, and I never taught the plain style. I was too busy writing them.

SMITH

You said that was also partly because there was no client demand.

KUBLER

And there was no client demand. The client demand was a steady one.

SMITH

For pre-Columbian.

KUBLER

For pre-Columbian, some part of pre-Columbian studies or all of it or--

SMITH

But you did have students, graduate students, who were working with you on--
- I guess it was Latin American architecture specifically.

REESE

And Spanish.

KUBLER

Yes. What did you do?

REESE

Well, I was there and Cathy [Catherine] Wilkinson was there. Molly Volk. The young man who worked on Murillo whose name I can't remember. He was working on the fame of Murillo. Richard Steinman?

KUBLER

Steinmetz.

REESE

Steinmetz. So there were some, but they were each working on painting or on architectural projects on their own.

SMITH

So there were no seminars of Spanish art per se.

KUBLER

I think I may have run a seminar for these students we've been talking about in which they would bring their work as they were working.

REESE

And Yves Bottineau came to teach at Yale at that time, and so did René Taylor, as visiting professors.

KUBLER

René Taylor was a Hispanist. Yes, they were Hispanists, and they came when I was on the--

REESE

I still am fascinated by-- Not saying what I think the book Escorial treats, but we're going to have you talk more about what kind of problems you were really getting at in that book and what fascinated you about it. The size. The difference between Juan Bautista de Toledo and Juan de Herrera.

KUBLER

Well, I think a lot of it is in the title. Building the Escorial. It's building. The focus of the book is building, and the documents are so complete, the documentation. The cost of the materials, the shaping of the materials, the bringing of the materials together is all documented. I tried to use that professorial concept of how a building achieves its form.

REESE

Was there a kind of bottom line for you in what the message was in this particular case?

KUBLER

I tried to trace it out as it happened, with the foundations being quite separate from the elevations, and the effect of the materials that were available on the form, these quarries. Where were they? How far away were they? And then the enormous number of foreign craftsmen from Northern Europe, from the Low Countries, for the slate for the roofs, for much of the ornament. The Italians.

REESE

But in the process of writing this book, you took one of the principal monuments of European architecture that is usually understood as being a personal kind of projection of Philip II for an individual architect and in some way pulled the rug out from under that. In other words, rather than at the end saying it was.

KUBLER

I think I left the relationship between Philip and Herrera as it is in the correspondence, a close one. A close one of almost daily contact on matters concerning the building, so that the architect and the patron were in unusually close connection. The patron was available. It was his summer occupation, and he was there much of the time in the rest of the year. Twenty miles from Madrid.

REESE

But the documentation itself seemed to be supporting the notion that there was no single architect, there was no single idea, but rather there was a multiplicity of problems that were constantly being resolved in ways that seem to create the monument. That the building itself has a matrix, seemed to have its own momentum, its own rationale that served both as a limit and as a stimulus to those who apparently directed it. But I wonder if you would agree with that, if you felt that that's what you were working towards in some way.

KUBLER

Well, I suppose any major enterprise of that magnitude seems to develop a will of its own. But it's always capable of reduction to what's in the plans, what's in the specifications, what's in the orders for the materials. It's all there, and if the supervision is uninterrupted, that personality of the building emerges more and more and more. It's there in the intention of the designers and the people otherwise responsible for it. I found the nature of the building in its building.

REESE

Had that concept been with you from the beginning?

KUBLER

Yes. When I began serious work on it, then that was my intention.

REESE

Did you expect the book to have a much broader methodological kind of lesson than merely its subject matter? Meaning the Escorial in the context of Europe in the 1560s, seventies, and eighties.

KUBLER

I was so immersed in this that it wrote itself. I didn't have any difficulties writing it. It wrote itself, if one can say that. [laughter]

SMITH

Were you suggesting a prescriptive model, in the sense that more attention needs to be put to the process of construction in architectural history?

KUBLER

One could draw that lesson, that the process of construction, design and construction, is revealing of the nature of the building.

SMITH

That might suggest that even though perhaps the initial appeal of the Escorial study was the plain style, the real critical factor was the archive.

KUBLER

I was drawn to it by the plainness, yes.

SMITH

But perhaps it was the archive that was actually the key to the book, that made the book possible.

KUBLER

Yes, I discovered the wealth of the evidence. Which is not easily found. One has to go and look at it in Simancas and other places.

REESE

For most authors and for many who have preceded you-- The prospect of taking such a monumental and complex archive-- And in fact, rather than

simply taking a single thesis and pushing it through, to build up from that bedrock, that tissue, those words you used in the book, towards an image of enormous complexity-- It seems to me unusual that you say it was easy to write, because, in fact, the complexity of it would seem to make it the most difficult thing to write.

KUBLER

It was always clear and easy to write. There were no agonizing uncertainties about the book. It wrote itself.

SMITH

Because the archives presented a story to you?

KUBLER

Well, the archives are so explicit. I spent many, many weeks in the archive and had access to everything that was needed. Of course, the archive is immense, and it also is very simply organized. The rationale of the archive is easily extracted and its relation to the building. The parts that are relevant.

REESE

Do you feel that imbedded in the book was a certain critique of those studies that attempt to deal with the building through personalities and personal style, through singular iconographical programs?

KUBLER

I had no quarrel with any work that had been done before. This one had not been done. This had not been done this way. So I was certain of what I was doing, and I didn't have to clear the way with other approaches. [laughter] The building of the Escorial. The act of building.

REESE

I mean, my reaction to the book was that it took a single monument that had usually been treated with--or which inspired people to want to search for--a singular explanation and ultimately reduced it down to this microhistorical level, where you in fact found the same kind of form classes that were essential, you know, to your arguments in *The Shape of Time: [Remarks on the History of Things (1962)]* in any work of art. That it kind of took the single

monument and in fact demonstrated a lot of what The Shape of Time was about in a single work of art.

**1.27. TAPE NUMBER: XIV, SIDE ONE
NOVEMBER 19, 1991**

SMITH

I have a note here from Tom [Reese], and I wanted to pursue the role of one name that I hadn't mentioned, that of Mario Chicó.

KUBLER

Oh, yes. He's an old and dear friend. He was. He died. I think he died.

SMITH

In Tom's note it says that Chicó was one of the people who introduced you to the estilo chão and got you interested in it originally. Do you recall that, any discussions?

KUBLER

I remember talking with him about it, yes.

SMITH

Did he feel that it had not been adequately treated?

KUBLER

He thought it was a good subject.

SMITH

Had not yet been treated by art historians dealing with Portuguese topics?

KUBLER

He realized that, yes.

SMITH

Now, he was also a student of [Henri] Focillon.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Did you meet him through Focillon?

KUBLER

No, but he told me that he had studied with him in Paris.

SMITH

You had similar interests, then. Was he someone whom you talked to about the ideas in the book as you were developing them?

KUBLER

I think so. We discussed it as it was going along, and I think we went on some automobile tours together to look at towns.

SMITH

Did the Gulbenkian Foundation fund any of your research?

KUBLER

Yes. I believe they funded-- I can't remember what it was they funded, but it wasn't much. It wasn't a big gift.

SMITH

I was wondering, to what degree in your work have your kind of daily decisions--or your immediate decisions on what to work on next--been affected by practical questions like the availability of funding to support a research trip or transcription of something or photographic archives?

KUBLER

There was never any trouble, and I don't remember any. It was just a matter of knowing where to apply and when, and there was never any delay, because I planned ahead and found out about how to do it. I don't remember ever being turned down.

SMITH

I mean, are there scholars who you might consider driven by finances, driven in the sense of their work as somewhat dependent on the availability of funds from different sources?

KUBLER

Oh, of course. There are a lot of starving scholars. [laughter] There are a lot of deserving teachers who can never secure a research fellowship because they've done no research. That's a sad case, but it's a very common one.

SMITH

But in that case it's usually the professor who has to be their chaperon, as it were.

KUBLER

Their sponsor, yes.

SMITH

Their sponsor.

KUBLER

But one can be one's own sponsor the moment one has something to show.

SMITH

Well, that's part of the apprenticeship process. Your graduate students, your doctoral students, how many of them did you take that kind of paternal interest in, in the sense of--?

KUBLER

Oh, practically all of them.

SMITH

All of them.

KUBLER

All of them needed money to start. There was more money around then than now.

SMITH

And in terms of getting them positions? Would you call around and see--?

KUBLER

I would always write for them whenever required by the institution or the person. I would always write.

SMITH

Would you do something even more beyond that, in the sense of calling friends at other institutions and saying, "I have so-and-so who is really good in this. Do you have--?"

KUBLER

That more for posts rather than for grants. I've often called a friend for a promising student.

SMITH

I was wondering--particularly in fields like ancient American and Iberian, where, in a sense, one almost has to develop the field in other institutions--if you felt the need to take an aggressive role and see if you could create a position at another school.

KUBLER

Gradually the people who'd studied with me were in posts of these studies in various institutions. So I had them as people to whom to praise a coming candidate.

SMITH

Tom wanted to ask you some more questions about the Tikal studies and I think about Portugal and the Escorial as well.

REESE

Well, I think we can go back to the Maya work, because Richard talked a good bit about the Tikal project. But I thought, you know, the other area of interest to pursue would be the whole question of Maya epigraphy and the history of

that decipherment and what kind of thoughts you have in retrospect about its evolution as a field and art history's relationship to it.

KUBLER

Well, the decipherment is a very technical operation involving a very large number of unknowns and relatively few pieces in the game. That side of the study never interested me very much. Whenever I approached it, I turned it into a morphological study. For example, I wrote a long paper on the glyphs of Tikal. It was a study of their changing forms, their changing dimensions and orientations, whether there was a long block or a tall block or a square block or a round block. There was a long-term pattern evident in the abandonment of wide, flat blocks in favor of increasingly more gracious blocks of different proportions. This process covered about eight or nine centuries. I wrote an article on this that I planned to have as part of the publication of the team we were discussing last night. But that was turned off by the Tikal people in Philadelphia, who would not let me use their photographs, which is why I never published the article. I gave a long lecture on it to a group of specialists in foreign writings, foreign forms of writing, but it never reached publication because I couldn't use the photographs or drawings.

SMITH

If I understand you correctly, then, it would be in a sense equivalent to discussing the evolution of the alphabet, perhaps, and how it's--

KUBLER

Well, the evolution of the forms of the alphabet.

SMITH

Without concern with what the specific symbols--

KUBLER

Without concern for the meaning.

SMITH

Meaning, right.

KUBLER

I left that to the epigraphers.

REESE

I mean, we've talked before about the kind of territorial domains of archaeology guarding its frontiers, which this relationship you've had to the Tikal project represents. But it seems to me that there is--peculiar to the study of Maya culture in particular, and perhaps more so than with Peruvian or the Aztec culture--a similar kind of cry of "Maya for the Mayanists" or even "Art for the linguists." I wonder if you just have any ideas about how that has somehow come to be. Is there anything inherent in Maya art itself, or in the types of people who have been attracted to it, that has led to that?

KUBLER

I think the explanation in my mind is that Mayanists are very few in number. It takes a great dedication, a great deal of time, the results are very slow, and the study isn't very rewarding. But they all know each other, and they are a closely bound community of specialists. They do not like amateurs intruding. I think my paper that I did not publish was one that was alien to their form of study and their method of approaching the linguistic side--putting the sound together with the sign. So that they felt that our work was useless, and that was the beginning of the end.

REESE

I mean, I wonder if I could get you to talk a little bit about the different stages in the development of the decipherment, from [J. Eric] Thompson and [Tatiana] Proskouriakoff and [Floyd G.] Lounsbury and others who have worked on the problem, and particularly your relationship to that emerging field of study.

KUBLER

Oh, I was a friend of Tatiana Proskouriakoff, and she was a key figure in the early breaking open of the way into, or the reading of, the glyphs. She really took the first big steps, and her method has been followed ever since. She died some years ago, and it was a great loss.

REESE

And Thompson.

KUBLER

Thompson, Eric Thompson, as I said last night, was an Englishman. This was a hobby of his, and it became a dominant interest in his life. He made the handbook of the glyph forms, which is still a very useful guide and is always cited. It has not been superseded by others. There are others which do different things.

REESE

What other scholars' work in that area do you have a particular kind of fascination for or interest in?

KUBLER

Well, they were all interesting people, and there weren't many of them. It was a very tight and closed circle of museum staffers and linguists and archaeologists who were pooling their efforts. Very interesting group, but very small. And very closed to the outsider.

REESE

I mean, you did, I would say, an enormous amount of work on this during the seventies. In other words, a number of articles-- Well, it's opening new doors in approaches to glyphic studies, but also looking at some very precise subjects of Palenque and others. What was it that pulled you in so to the glyph?

KUBLER

Well, it was the possibility of a morphological study, the study of the forms of the glyphs, of the shapes of the glyph blocks. That was the study that I put the largest amount of effort in.

REESE

How might you describe the development of this field following the emergence of Linda Schele and others, who came into it really--? As an artist, in Linda Schele's case.

KUBLER

Yes, she was an artist.

REESE

But that was happening-- At the same time you were developing a morphological interest in certain qualities, she was developing another approach.

KUBLER

A linguistic approach.

REESE

I'm just wondering, you know, what you might say about Schele's approach and your relationship to this changing field.

KUBLER

Well, I was not competent. I admit it. I was not linguistically competent. These are linguists, mainly. They are linguists. Without being a linguist, one can't circulate. One can't talk to them.

SMITH

In discussing the work with them and with others, how did you present the importance of the morphological studies?

REESE

Just by presenting it. I gave a lecture once and I wanted to publish it, but I wasn't allowed to use the photographs.

SMITH

But did you argue that this kind of work did have fundamental value in understanding Maya society?

KUBLER

I argued that this method would be fruitful with any long run of inscriptions, long in time, long in duration, the duration covered. There are other eight-hundred-year-long groups of inscriptions at different sites. This message could be applied to other sites. This morphological method.

SMITH

The morphological method would be a form of dating?

KUBLER

It would be a form of dating. If, as so often happens, the merchant owning the inscription saws it up into pieces, sometimes only a block large, one loses the inscription. But it can be put together again. It can be identified very easily as to where it belongs and where it comes from now, because the corpus is more or less finished, the corpus that has been worked on at Harvard Peabody Museum [of Archaeology and Ethnology] with Ian Graham directing it. That corpus is very slow to appear, but it's very thorough, and all the inscriptions will someday be available.

REESE

But I sense in your answer a certain kind of resignation at this point to the fact that the linguists have somehow succeeded in locking the doors--or at least people who consider themselves to be linguists.

KUBLER

Well, they open the doors. They open doors, and have really closed them to other approaches.

REESE

You think that's to the detriment of Maya studies.

KUBLER

I think this morphological study I made would be useful if it had appeared.

SMITH

I understand that Linda Schele developed-- In a sense, she developed a new paradigm for Maya studies. Do you agree with that?

KUBLER

I think she was among those who developed it. But I don't think she was the main figure. She was the noisiest figure. [laughter] She had no modesty about her work, or she has no modesty about her work.

REESE

Have you followed into the eighties and nineties the work that's being done in Maya hieroglyphs?

KUBLER

No. I have not. I've been doing other things. It's really unrewarding beyond a certain point. I think the age of redundancy has descended on the Maya glyphic scene. The discoveries are less and less instructive and more and more saying the same thing. The study of Maya glyphs from the linguistic point of view has become redundant. It's almost all done. There are very few expressions that aren't understood at least in part.

REESE

So in other words, once Proskouriakoff basically breaks the historical nature--

KUBLER

Once she sort of shows people how to do it, then everybody can do it.

REESE

So your feeling is that your work--

KUBLER

But one needs a linguistic tool, language. The language. The dialects.

REESE

But your work, then, was not in some way confronting the body of scholarship that Schele and disciples were, but coming from a different angle.

KUBLER

It was a totally different line, a morphological line. A morphology of the block, the shape of the block, proportions, its axiality, its surface characteristics. All of these are very telling about the position in time.

REESE

Have you been attracted at all to other forms of writing from these perspectives? The morphological perspective of--literally--character formation and calligraphy.

KUBLER

No. This is my only venture.

SMITH

I noticed in 1977 you participated in a symposium on Chinese calligraphy.

KUBLER

That's where I delivered this paper. They wanted to publish it, and I said, "No, I don't think I want to publish it with these papers. I will publish it for the Maya community of studies." I wish I had let them publish it, but they would have run into trouble with the use of the photographs that were restricted.

SMITH

I found it curious. In that symposium, there were nearly two dozen papers, and yours was the only one that was not specifically on some question or another of Chinese calligraphy.

KUBLER

That's right. It was.

SMITH

Who saw the connection--?

KUBLER

The whole thing was run by a very charming Chinese couple who were visiting in New Haven. They put this on. They heard about this paper, and they wanted it. So they insisted that I give the lecture. It was the only time I ever gave it. Oh, I guess I gave it once in Honduras, in Tegucigalpa.

REESE

And in Texas, I remember, you gave a version on the proportions in the glyphs.

KUBLER

Yes, the proportions. Yes, you heard that. Yes, it was the same lecture.

REESE

Would you consider your own suggestions about new ways of approaching the problem to be in some way the product of an autodidact trying to look at these glyphs from an art historical point of view?

KUBLER

Very much so from the point of view of the linguist. I was an outsider, and I was not qualified. They were quite right. But I think it had something to say that was independently confirming of the linguistic discoveries that were being made.

SMITH

In what sense confirming?

KUBLER

Of possibilities of dating by inspection of the forms. Linguistic in the case of the linguists, and visual in the case of my method.

SMITH

In terms of a humanistic interpretation of Maya culture, there was the debate over the possible peaceful versus warlike nature of Maya society and the historical transition into a more warlike state. There were also questions of whether economics and trade were motivating or ideology and religion were motivating factors. Do you think your approach would have had anything to contribute to those kinds of subjective interpretations?

KUBLER

No. I think what my approach was directed to was chronology, establishing a chronological sequence independently of what the glyphs said. The glyphs talk about time, but there is an outside way of putting those expressions into chronological order--which is morphological.

SMITH

Does art history as a humanistic enterprise have something to contribute to the evaluation of Maya society as a bundle of values and the transformation of those values and what may or may not have been important?

KUBLER

It may, it may, when the whole body of inscriptions has been deciphered. But it's far from that. The whole body. The whole body is a large number of forms and variants, and somewhere between one-half and two-thirds are understood. In part. In part. How much is not understood of the glyphs that it is believed have been deciphered remains to be seen. There may be overtones that escape the methods of reading that are used by present Maya scholars.

SMITH

Do you think art history would contribute to reading overtones?

KUBLER

Yes. But they'd have to become linguists to do it.

REESE

Would you consider what Linda Schele does to be the work of a linguist?

KUBLER

I think it is, yes. She knows Maya and several dialects well enough to see their connection and their applicability to different kinds of inscriptions. But that's beginning to be a study which very few are competent for.

SMITH

When you got involved with this project, the Tikal project, did you have a sense that there were opponents, there were enemies?

KUBLER

No, I didn't, because my contacts at the Philadelphia museum--at the University of Pennsylvania [University] Museum--were inviting. But I think that the direction changed. The direction of the efforts changed in the museum. There was a turnover. Certain figures left the museum and other figures came, and there was a change of policy. And this project was found to be useless and not worth the candle.

REESE

I'm trying to think through a kind of larger issue that seems to underlie this, but that I'm having a hard time putting my finger on. That is the almost cautionary nature of your work in the late sixties and seventies as you enter

the field of glyphic study, which you were approaching in some ways as a structuralist. I don't want to oversimplify it, but-- To look at wholes and to look with method and to look with order and to try to control the kind of building blocks you create so that others can build upon them. At a moment in which a number of scholars were in some way tearing down some of this method to free associate and to let things start tumbling very quickly open and creating a kind of movement that in some ways seems akin to the shift from structuralism to poststructuralism. But then suddenly this cycle of freedom closes down again and resists new voices entering again. It's interesting that those who come afterwards, like Mary Miller and others, seem to have taken another kind of path of, let's say for want of a better word, conciliation. Conciliation. Did you sense yourself in the middle of changes?

KUBLER

No, I felt that this episode was the result of a change in the organization of the museum in which the studies were housed. And that had to do with the change of the head. There had been a change of director. The new director was against this use of the resources which the museum was disbursing.

SMITH

You must have felt a certain degree of frustration and anger at what happened.

KUBLER

Well, I was sorry not to have the use of the photographs in order to publish the article.

SMITH

In the sense that this work had an incompleteness--you could not present it to the public in the form that you wanted--did that in any way affect other things that you were working on? For instance, you moved on to the Escorial book [Building the Escorial (1982)]. As you considered the problems facing you in the Escorial book, did you--?

KUBLER

Then I'd stop spending time on my inscriptions, yes. [laughter]

SMITH

But did you in the methodology of the Escorial book--? Were you thinking, "Well, now I'm going to demonstrate the importance of morphological studies"?

KUBLER

No, I didn't think of it that way. It was almost more a social study of the Escorial, of its organization, the relationship of its construction to the organizational form.

REESE

Can you analyze your own reaction to the kind of reception, or nonreception, of the work you were doing on the Maya glyphs? I mean, earlier you said, you know, that scholarship was this dialogue. This is a case in which you, I think, floated some very innovative, unique, not-before-essayed ideas for a whole field of study. Yet I'm now listening to you say, "But I left it."

KUBLER

I wanted to do something else after this paper was finished. I didn't want to do another one. I had other things on the docket. So I left Maya studies.

REESE

But it wasn't because you felt that it was infertile ground for the work you were doing, but rather that you felt you had exhausted whatever--

KUBLER

I had exhausted what I could do with the present equipment, so I left the field.

REESE

Have you found scholars rediscovering some of these articles in the seventies and trying to take off from places that you had--?

KUBLER

I'm not aware of anyone's having discovered this one. [laughter] Well, it hasn't been published.

REESE

But I'm thinking also of the work on kind of placement at Tikal and the question of different kinds of temporal meanings, of the cinemagraphic aspect--

KUBLER

All of those were windows opening from that study it would have been interesting to pursue, which if I had continued I would have pursued. Tikal was the best and most well preserved and the most promising site for this sort of study.

REESE

I mean, in analyzing those works before, in the preparation of the collected essays, I found to be for me one of the most fertile grounds that I had felt that you had really worked. Yet I found it also interesting that it was precisely the Mayanists who seemed to be interested only in the points where it intersected their work, as opposed to the points at which it opened new doors. Being outside of Maya studies, I just had very little insight as to why a field that seemed to be opening in other ways was closing down around other kinds of particularly morphological, but also interpretive questions. These involved very complex issues of the meaning of time, of art in the service of conceptual representation of rulership, of time and cinemagraphic function of perception of objects in time and space and light. Have students of yours from the years in which you were pioneering that work taken these further?

KUBLER

Mary Miller has made some interesting finds on her own, and she's very able. I was at the point where if I meant to continue with Maya studies, I had better master the language. I wasn't ready to do it. So I really left the field not from disappointment, but from unwillingness to sacrifice other interests to becoming a linguist.

REESE

So this pioneering edge seems very important in your career.

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

The correct entrance with the problem.

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

Not attacking the late stage.

KUBLER

I really couldn't become a linguist in a few months. It would be a matter of several years and exposure to the language in the country and to dialect forms and the sort of training a linguist has. I realized that I was wasting my time in those studies.

SMITH

Have you given any thought to returning to ancient American or Native American topics?

KUBLER

Well, I've enlarged my ideas about New Mexico in a paper I've written this year on the resemblances between, oddly enough, New Mexico, Paraguay, and the Californias, both of them. These four areas are areas where encomienda had been the principal colonial form of bondage and exploitation. So this is a sociological study rather than an art historical one. New Mexico, the pueblos; the Guaraní, Paraguayans; and the Californias. They have many traits in common through their mission systems.

SMITH

Are you discussing at all the effect of the encomienda system on the architecture?

KUBLER

Not on the architecture, but on the society.

SMITH

On the society. The society is the focus. The architecture isn't much mentioned.

REESE

But on settlement patterns in a general way?

KUBLER

Settlement patterns, yes. The mission forms. The mission forms are closely related in these four areas. Then there is the intervention of the Dominicans in the eighteenth century and earlier. It's the Dominicans who were the first to follow the footsteps of their bishop, Las Casas, in the condemnation of encomienda as early as 1524. The Dominicans bridge many periods and places with this Las Casian policy of resisting and refusing all forms of encomienda or mita--Indian, free Indian labor.

REESE

This for you is a study which goes way back to an article really from the forties, at least, contrasting Mexican and Californian settlements.

KUBLER

Yes, yes. It's an expansion of that article.

REESE

How did it come to light for you again as a problem? Do you remember the--?

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KUBLER

It was the realization that encomienda was the institution which the mission system was opposing and destroying. The four clearest cases are these.

REESE

But the Guaraní settlements I guess are new.

KUBLER

They are the Jesuit settlements. But the Jesuits are, like the Dominicans, the followers of Las Casas in his denunciation of encomienda, which is very well documented.

REESE

What I was after concretely was some sense of the mechanism that at this point in time shifted your attention from the book on the aesthetic recognition [Esthetic Recognition of Ancient Amerindian Art (1991)]. With that behind you, that your eye landed on once again the question of colonial. Was there a concrete thing, a request for a paper or--?

KUBLER

There was a request for a paper, and I offered this. I was working on it already, and I'll give it at Harvard [University] in May. It's to an audience not of art historians, but more a social science audience.

SMITH

[to Reese] Do you want to have any follow-up questions on the Portugal plain-style book [Portuguese Plain Architecture: Between Spices and Diamonds, 1526-1706 (1972)] or the Escorial [Building the Escorial].

REESE

I don't think so. Let's move forward.

SMITH

I want to shift back a little bit in time into another subject, a more general subject, which is your perceptions of the 1960s student movements at Yale [University] and if there were any effects on your classes. Were any of your students involved in the protest movements of that period?

KUBLER

I was aware of the movements, but I was not aware of them through the classes or the students. The students, our students in the department and the other students that came to the department, seemed untouched by these disturbances. They weren't discussed, the disturbances weren't discussed. They were in the air. Everybody was living them, but not talking about them very much. I wasn't at any time near any demonstrative dissenters in my work.

SMITH

Well, for instance, let's take some of the specific issues. The Vietnam War. You were not requested to cancel your classes in order to have a discussion of the invasion of Cambodia, for example?

KUBLER

No. I always had the illusion of perfect academic freedom in my work, no matter what was happening in the world. Yale was a place where there was a lot of lack of concern with these troubles. [laughter]

SMITH

Yet there was-- I mean, a persistent theme in the sixties was that the American university had become the handmaiden of the military-industrial complex.

KUBLER

I don't remember any effect of it on my work.

SMITH

Or on your teaching.

KUBLER

Or on my teaching. I never had to manifest any such interest. No one ever requested me to join.

SMITH

This is a personal question, but I'm curious to know what your feelings were at the time about the Vietnam War.

KUBLER

I followed it with dismay and disapproval.

SMITH

Were you sympathetic, then, to the student protests that were taking place around the country?

KUBLER

Yes, but I did nothing.

SMITH

Then the other major issue--and I understand this in some ways was even a bigger issue at Yale--was the question of civil rights and integration. What kind of effect did you perceive that having on the Yale community?

KUBLER

There again, it was a distant noise. It was a distant noise--it didn't come very close.

SMITH

There was the strike of the service workers and clerical workers.

KUBLER

Oh, yes. We had the marines in the town and pitching camp on the green and artillery in the streets. And the [Yale University Art] Gallery was put on a twenty-four-hour basis of patrolling. Betty [Elizabeth Bushnell Kubler] and I went down and slept in the gallery and walked the rounds for the signals to show that someone was manning them. We did that for several nights, and then the trouble was over. We went back to square one.

REESE

This was in '68 with the [Black] Panther trials, coinciding here with--

KUBLER

The Panther trials. That was it. You were here, weren't you?

REESE

Yeah. Coinciding with major kind of feelings about Vietnam expressed. The burning of the A and A [Art and Architecture] Building.

KUBLER

Yes, yes. Oh, yes.

REESE

The fire in the A and A Building.

KUBLER

That was really a scandal. That was a set fire.

SMITH

Beyond the demonstrations, of course, and the protest movements, equally important in terms of academic history, American university history, is that the norms of the post-World War II period were challenged across the board in the humanities and social sciences. The consensus school in history, the functionalists in the social sciences, were-- The hegemony that they had was challenged in part by the rise of first the structur- alists, then the poststructuralists, and then the deconstructionists. I'd like to discuss with you this challenge that students demonstrated to move away from empiricism and a positivist attitude about knowledge to embrace sort of totalizing cognitive maps, and the effect that it had within the art history department and with your students. For instance, did you have students in the post-'68 period who were Marxists, who would come to you with Marxist projects?

KUBLER

Yes. I remember two or three, and I encouraged them. But nothing came of them.

SMITH

They didn't complete the projects.

KUBLER

They didn't complete the work.

SMITH

What about the rise of Guevarism and Frantz Fanon in a Third World perspective, which I think would have tremendous impact upon Latin American studies? What kind of effect did that have on your work--? Not your work personally, but students who would present themselves to you.

KUBLER

I would say none. I would say none. I was never under any pressure to do anything about these movements, and I could ignore them because I had never given voice on them.

SMITH

So there were no challenges.

KUBLER

I'd never taken a side and I was never challenged, and I was allowed to persist in my inaction.

SMITH

There were no challenges from students saying, "We need a Native American studies center on campus, and we're going to be the ones responsible for studying the native cultures of the Americas."

KUBLER

No. At that time there was no such organized pressure evident on the campus.

REESE

You know, I think, though--

KUBLER

Wouldn't you agree?

REESE

I was going to add, though, that within the art history establishment, if you had spent a lifetime cultivating in fact the study of outsider or outside the canonical mainstream, be it Native American, African, pre-Columbian-- All of those people drawn into those fields of studies were often, you know, tremendously aware of the problem of the marginated cultural study. In other words, that this had been cast from the programs of academia and marginated. Therefore, within the sectors that George was teaching, one might find a number of people who already felt themselves committed to those larger critical cultural agendas.

KUBLER

That I took for granted, yes. There always were.

REESE

Although you did have, if I remember correctly, during the late sixties Marimar Benitez, who left academia for the Puerto Rican cause.

KUBLER

Yes, of course.

REESE

And Joyce Bailey must have been very involved in feminist agendas at one point.

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

Flora [S.] Clancy was very influenced by [Roland] Barthes and by semiology and by leftist agendas. They were present.

KUBLER

I never had the impression while teaching these people, lecturing to them, that I wasn't giving them what they wanted. They never succeeded in communicating such a thought to me.

SMITH

That's curious, because you have such a strong position on not having a priori conclusions. And yet when you deal with the post-'68 phenomenon in academia, there is the necessity of going into the subject in order to prove a point, albeit the oppression of such and such a group or the need of such and such a strategy to achieve liberation. And I'm wondering in terms of your work with the students, how you counsel them, how you discuss "academic objectivity," which increasingly is under assault epistemologically, with the very intense emotional and ideological concerns of some of your students.

KUBLER

I was never reproached for what I didn't say. [laughter]

SMITH

But what about what you did say? What did you say--?

KUBLER

I was never reproached really for what I did say or for what I did not say.

SMITH

But let's turn it around. What did you say to a student who was intending to prove that--?

KUBLER

I gave them the information they needed for the understanding of the things they were looking at.

SMITH

There was never a question of--

KUBLER

There was never a doctrinal issue.

SMITH

You know, that "Your conclusion is too predetermined. If you're going to be a historian, you have to have some kind of objectivity that is--"

KUBLER

I never had any such manifestation or representation made to me during all those years of teaching.

SMITH

Another challenge to the question of objectivity is raised by the French poststructuralist [Michel] Foucault in particular and later by the deconstruction school, which Yale is famous, if not notorious, for being the center of in the U.S.

KUBLER

Yes, [Paul] de Man.

SMITH

Yes. And Harold Bloom.

KUBLER

And Harold Bloom.

SMITH

How did those kinds of trends manifest themselves in your work?

KUBLER

I was aware of them, but we didn't talk about them.

SMITH

In art history?

KUBLER

We had other things to talk about. We had much to talk about in the classroom. The classroom was not programmed by any political issue.

SMITH

You have taken up discussion of Foucault, perhaps sometimes in an oblique manner, but I think he is a thinker you have tried to grapple with.

KUBLER

Yes, but not in the audience of a classroom.

SMITH

Okay, but in terms of--

KUBLER

And I was never asked to. I was never asked to account for anything in terms of Foucault or in terms of anyone else whom I hadn't suggested. I had given readings and a bibliography which pertained to the subject and to the discussion, but not to the political arena that might be drawn around it. No one ever thought to define such an area in the course of a year's work or a

term's work. It may be that I was shunned by student agitators, but I don't see why they would shun me.

SMITH

Well, for instance, your little note on Las Meninas is to me clearly a rebuttal to Foucault. And the whole, in its very brief form, is still a challenge to building his construction of a vision of power and the panopticon of vision off of very casual art historical references. And it's possible that Building the Escorial could be-- I could look at it not as a response, but as your own effort to engage in deconstruction theory.

KUBLER

My own image. My own imagery.

SMITH

Yes, your own imagery of deconstruction.

KUBLER

Perhaps that was acceptable. [laughter] I always had the impression that my thought was accessible, and I had most diverse kinds of classes. I've never felt a loss of communication with these undergraduate classes. Or with the graduate work. I always felt in harmony with my audiences. I remember no episodes. Do you?

REESE

No. I mean, I only remember the challenges to [Vincent] Scully, say, as master of Morse College, where--

KUBLER

Scully is a different matter.

REESE

You know, where he in many ways felt very strong empathy for the left, and yet could not quite go left enough. Or I'm sure Bob [Robert Ferris] Thompson, as a white scholar teaching black and Afro-American art, might have had severe confrontations. But many faculty at Yale, when I was there in '68, I think simply were trying to teach.

KUBLER

They were being confronted. Or they turned away.

REESE

Or they turned away from the issues. But I don't remember in your classes any of this, although many of the students were very much involved in these political events outside the classroom.

KUBLER

I was aware of that. I was aware of that. And I was always surprised that they never spoke of it to me.

REESE

I think it brings up in some ways, you know, your own status within the field and within art history as a profession. That people at that point had come to Yale to study specifically with George Kubler as an expert in a field that had not been, in fact, available on any other campus. And therefore the feeling of wanting to learn right from the pioneer and from the eminent scholar might have in many ways, you know, cushioned you. Or in fact not cushioned you, simply removed you from this moment of contention.

SMITH

But beyond the specific contentions, there's still, shall we say, an intellectual shift in America from a more empirical approach to an approach that favors totalizing answers, whether it's Marxism or a theory of feminism or poststructuralism. A demand for cognitive maps.

KUBLER

Well, I haven't been in the classroom now for eight years. Yes, eight years. It may be very different now. I might have no audience at all. [laughter]

SMITH

Well, I doubt that, but-- Did you have any personal interaction with de Man?

KUBLER

I didn't know him. I didn't know him on the street, either. I didn't know who he was. His past was bared only after he left, wasn't it?

SMITH

After he died. I wasn't thinking so much of his past as Yale's repute as the deconstruction center of the Western hemisphere.

KUBLER

Yes. Oh, yes. But that was pretty parochial. [laughter] It was confined to the English department.

SMITH

And Harold Bloom? Did you have any contact with Bloom?

KUBLER

I know Bloom well and he knows me, and we respect each other.

SMITH

Let me ask you-- I mean, if we assume for the sake of argument that Building the Escorial is your riposte to deconstruction, your image of deconstruction, why not then acknowledge that in the structure of the book and in the introduction? Say, "I'm presenting a methodological model for how deconstruction might work, corrected for the art historical intellectual universe."

KUBLER

Well, it would be recognized as having been dictated by you. [laughter] I don't think I was noted for any political remarks of any color at any time.

SMITH

Well, again, when you take Las Meninas, this very nice, very compelling handful of paragraphs, and yet you're challenging a large--

KUBLER

Many interpretations.

SMITH

Many interpretations and very powerful interpretations. Why not then expand it to discuss Foucault and the others who have used Las Meninas to construct their interpretations of structures of power, how intellectual study fits into the power system?

KUBLER

Well, I already have too much to do. Too much to do. Too much that's unfinished.

SMITH

But surely you knew when you wrote that and submitted it that you were in effect making a comment on something upon which there was an industry, almost.

KUBLER

Yes. It was wrong. It was wrong, the accepted view of the reading of that picture. That picture of a picture.

REESE

I think, too, your work always intersects these larger kind of paradigmatic movements in very unpredictable ways. So that the studies of ethnicity that were coming to the fore in the early seventies, you had done in the thirties and forties. In the same way that, you know, one never feels a kind of lens focusing them into contemporaneity, but rather the work seems to have passed through a lot of these questions that only later become subjects of enormous focus across the field.

KUBLER

And controversy.

REESE

And by then, you often have left them behind. So aligning yourself with them has not been so important. To create the filiations that would link you to what others have done doesn't seem to happen very often, avowedly anyway.

KUBLER

You can bury the truth in the present, so that it doesn't get known for a while.

SMITH

But filiation is very important to most scholars. Why isn't it to you?

KUBLER

What for? What is it important to them for? Filiation.

SMITH

Filiation? A sense of continuity, a sense of alignment, a sense of "This is where I stand. I stand in this camp as opposed to that camp."

KUBLER

Well, I must assume so many points of view that I have no one position.

SMITH

Okay.

KUBLER

A chameleon. A chameleon.

SMITH

But is that accurate, really? Are you really changing your spots, as it were? Your protective coloration?

KUBLER

No. Or perhaps I'm hard to recognize when I change field. I have a chance to start over again. Perhaps that's why I change field rather than always digging the same one.

REESE

So it's a chance to constantly reinvent--

KUBLER

Reinvent. Reinvent or invent other problems.

REESE

--or allow the subject to reinvent.

SMITH

Yet there are continuities, or there seem to be.

KUBLER

There is continuity among them--as we were talking on the street--as of the different kinds of plain architecture.

SMITH

Right.

KUBLER

Which used to be a large topic in twentieth-century thought.

SMITH

But also-- One of the things that really interested me as I was looking through your files was the seminar that you had done on marginalized art, a proseminar. It seemed to be something from the mid-fifties, so you had been already-- A time when it was certainly not fashionable to think about--

KUBLER

The art that's out of fashion.

SMITH

And this was. It was an interesting course because it brought together the pre-Columbian and folk art, not only Latin American but also various European folk arts, the Paleolithic art and African art and Oceanic art. There seemed to be a focus, in looking at the outline, on why these arts become marginal. So what draws you to marginal subjects?

KUBLER

Does marginalized convey the idea of becoming worthless by being marginalized? Is that what you're talking about?

SMITH

No. I don't necessarily think that any of the arts are worthless.

KUBLER

If a topic becomes marginal, it has been a topic that is deserted by the people that may have been interested in it at one time. I don't understand marginalization very well.

SMITH

Well, yes, but this was a word that you seemed to be using in the fifties to describe-- It was History of Art 108, proseminar: The Marginal Peoples and Their Art.

KUBLER

Well, that's what it meant to me then and what it means to me now. Marginalized, however, is a variable of extreme activity. Marginalizing something means doing something pretty awful to it, such as terminating it. [laughter] Getting it out of view.

SMITH

So that implies that one of your life goals is to bring things into view that are in danger of being "disappeared."

KUBLER

Well, perhaps. Perhaps that describes some of it. Marginalizing then becomes revivifying. I think my intention was to revivify rather than to marginalize. If I used the word incorrectly, it's my fault.

SMITH

Perhaps in terms of the arts that you were describing, they were in fact marginal at that point.

KUBLER

They were already marginal.

SMITH

Yes.

REESE

It's a canon problem, even then, of trying to reinsert into the study of art history these areas that were not considered by most art historians as part of

the corpus of objects and artifacts and cultures to be studied. I would assume that that's what their margins would mean. But, again, Richard was talking about this question of filiation and how you conceive of your work as--

KUBLER

Belonging to a school.

REESE

Or as very decidedly being unto itself. Something that resists in any way clear affiliations, at least if we talk about it with contemporaneous things, because the act of constantly reviving an earlier position and breathing new life into it, or reviving an art work or culture, is another process. But is there a kind of life project? Is there a kind of Kubler project for the history of art that you see as a lifework?

KUBLER

No. I would say that what I do is spontaneous, and I do it when I can between other things if it seems like a good idea.

SMITH

I think part of my questioning that I've been posing to you when I ask you what things have been unresolved in the studies you've done-- What I've been trying to query from you is, to what degree does the partial resolution of a project lead to further work? To what degree does the writing of a book--and the boxing off in a reasonably satisfactory way of a set of questions--mean that there's another set of questions that's not in the box, and therefore you need to move on? To what degree does your work build from book to book to book? Even if we're talking about different streams or different trains that you get on, that you switch across platforms from time to time.

KUBLER

I think I try to establish a continuous line, a continuous line of effort through many diverse settings. Some topics keep resurfacing, such as plain speaking, plain form, plain shape. There are different ways of tackling it, and I perhaps haven't exhausted them. [laughter]

REESE

But the idea of spontaneity is an interesting line to pursue, because, again, it perhaps reflects my inability to tie you down about the genesis of any specific article, as though I assume somehow that it's part of--

KUBLER

A grand design.

REESE

--some design. And in fact your inability to locate some sense of clear origin for it, you know, is because you see-- You envisioned it as a kind of challenge.

KUBLER

Yes. Or rather a terrain. And it's a terrain that seems to reappear as worth occupying. It's a terrain that doesn't get exhausted by one or two or three approaches. There's always more to say.

REESE

The territorial dimensions, occupying a terrain as a metaphor, are interesting too, because it can be a totally unexplored area, but it can also be one that needs to be in some way reshaped or recaptured or--

KUBLER

Redefined.

REESE

Redefined.

KUBLER

A lot of art history has that quality of redefinition by different people. It's always being redefined by different people, different approaches.

REESE

Do you find that there are certain scholarly minds, or artistic minds, whose work you feel a kinship with and whose work you always look for when something new appears for the same sense of spontaneity and surprise you're describing? Are there kindred spirits there that you could name or that you think about in that way?

KUBLER

Well, I can think of many people whom I admire for their spontaneity, yes.
[laughter]

SMITH

Such as--

KUBLER

Oh, theater folk. Actors are always surprising. [laughter]

REESE

Well, actually, the theatrical metaphor is an interesting one to pursue too, given Betty's and your long-term involvement in theater. The chameleon metaphor, the spatial metaphor as a terrain of a repertory company--

KUBLER

Yes. People assuming different roles.

SMITH

Did you find that the Yale art history program began to change its voice, the roles that it was assigning to its faculty, after 1970, as younger faculty members came in?

KUBLER

I think so. I can't say that I'm close enough to the department to see what the directions are, but it is a very definitely changing configuration. A changing configuration. Especially with the importance of the role of the women in the department, in the teaching department.

SMITH

With an explicitly feminist outlook on--

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

In your own mind, do you see a role for a feminist perspective in ancient American studies that would be fruitful?

KUBLER

It would be up to them to show it. I would like to think that that might happen. Perhaps Mary Miller will have something to say along those lines about the contribution of women to the study of American antiquity and the difficulty of finding any women in it. There are plenty of women in Maya art and in Aztec art, but they're more mythical than historical.

REESE

Well, I guess Proskouriakoff actually started feminist studies in a very modest way in her work.

SMITH

Were you concerned about maintaining the ancient American and Iberian studies in the Yale program? Having successors in both fields so that Yale would continue to be known as a center for both fields?

KUBLER

Oh, I think it's very well represented right now with Mary Miller and the new people in anthropology.

SMITH

But I'm wondering if you personally were concerned to make sure that Yale continued as a center for ancient American and Iberian studies or colonial Latin American studies in art history. Not simply in anthropology, but in art history. That the department maintain the legacy that you had established.

KUBLER

Such legacies are better reinvested in other subjects. There are always new subjects needing people and funds, and they can be drawn from the desiccating branches.

REESE

If you were given the opportunity in some way to form a group of five to ten people to embark on a kind of new program for art history in general--? I

mean, what kind of a faculty might you think about configuring today? Purely for yourself. In other words, not for teaching, but as a community of scholars in which you would like to be present.

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REESE

People you knew--

KUBLER

I can't think about people whose existence I don't yet know. I can only think of people whom I know.

SMITH

Well, so let us know. Tell us.

REESE

I'm thinking of not to kind of institutionally continue, but for a period really of now. In other words, in your own work, would it be an interdisciplinary group focusing on problems of art? Would it be a predominantly art historical group? Would it be a cross-cultural configuration? Would it be a cross-methodological configuration? And maybe the best way to do this is not to make it too vague, but to shift it to the work you are doing right now, I mean whatever book project you're kind of envisioning, you know, for the future. Richard said to me you were working or thinking about working on evolution.

KUBLER

Evolution in relation to art history. Art history as an activity in the field of evolutionary thought is demonstrated in the book by Thomas Munro, in which he refused to talk about Darwin--Evolution and the Arts--and he talks about Herbert Spencer. Herbert Spencer is his model. It's not Darwin. His evolutionary model is Spencer. And that's the only art historical contribution of art.

REESE

Are you now engaged in writing--?

KUBLER

I'm reading about this question.

REESE

Who are the kind of authors and what are the texts that you find right now most engaging?

KUBLER

Well, Colin Martindale and [James] Gleick. [Gleick's] book on chaos [Chaos: Making a New Science] and-- Colin Martindale is knowledgeable about the history of art, and he's concerned to approach quantifying the observations of art historians. He's a social psychologist at University of Maine.

SMITH

We need to discuss your current work, and there are some questions that are raised to me by-- But first I'd like to discuss your retirement and when it occurred. When did you retire?

KUBLER

'Eighty-three. And at that time it was mandatory.

SMITH

It was mandatory. You mentioned last night that it came as a surprise to you. You mean that suddenly you were faced with retirement without realizing that this was going to happen to you?

KUBLER

Well, it just happened. I hadn't thought of it. I hadn't thought of it, and there it was. [laughter]

SMITH

And then you were told, "Well, this is your last year, Dr. Kubler, and we've been so glad to have you here"?

KUBLER

Yes. But at the same time that I received that notification, I also was notified that I was being reappointed as a senior research scholar, of which at that time there were four in the university. They draw no salary, but they are allowed to retain their offices and have library privileges and faculty privileges, so that I keep the office. I have no duties, and I have no salary. I have a title, and I'm still in the phone book.

SMITH

When suddenly you realized you were going to be retired and you were going to have a tremendous amount of extra time on your hands, did that affect the kinds of questions you thought you might address?

KUBLER

I began to think about matters that I wouldn't have to teach. Previously I was always considering whether it was teachable. But now I'm drifting away from the history of art to topics that require a great deal of work, such as the history of evolutionary thought.

SMITH

I notice one of the first topics you discuss after you retire-- You begin to delve back into studies in European Paleolithic art, thinking in particular of the eidetic--

KUBLER

Imagery.

SMITH

--imagery. Had your interest in Paleolithic art been ongoing through the years?

KUBLER

Yes, continuous, and I was always interested in the work of [André] Leroi-Gourhan in France and of his predecessors.

SMITH

That seems another field where you're stepping on the toes of the archaeologists and anthropologists.

KUBLER

Yes. But I'm trying to keep it linked to the history of art.

SMITH

Yet when you write on eidetic imagery ["Eidetic Imagery and Paleolithic Art"], you publish that in the Journal of Psychology, which is in many respects a very big leap for you. It would seem from the outside a very big leap for you.

KUBLER

I forget how that happened. I think I learned that they would welcome an article on that subject, so I sent it.

SMITH

What kind of studies had you been doing in Gestalt psychology?

KUBLER

Reading. I was aware of the great interest in the twenties, which is where it stayed. [laughter]

SMITH

Where it stayed. Who in particular were you reading?

KUBLER

It's too far back.

SMITH

Well, in terms of art history in particular, I mean, Rudolf Arnheim stands out clearly as a proponent of Gestalt psychology in the arts, though he's certainly not 1920s.

KUBLER

I haven't read him diligently.

SMITH

What about Ernst Gombrich?

KUBLER

I have read Gombrich more diligently.

SMITH

Did you find Art and Illusion to be an effective book?

KUBLER

I liked it very much.

SMITH

The thing that's curious to me about eidetic imagery and your approach on that is the attempt to find a foundation for figuration in genetics, basically. And when you start talking about art history and Darwinism, I begin to see, "Aha, there's this need to root art history in something as fundamental as the genes."

KUBLER

The gene structure. Maybe. Maybe it can be done. Maybe it's there.

SMITH

Were you satisfied with the eidetic imagery article as a statement of--?

KUBLER

I've read very little comment on that article. I don't know if there is any comment. I have no idea of how it has been received.

SMITH

What about your own personal reception of it as you look back at it and you read it and you say--?

KUBLER

I think it's all right. I think it's all right, but it's probably addressed to the wrong readership in the Journal of Psychology.

SMITH

Psychologists instead of art historians?

KUBLER

Let's remember a very large family of magazines or journals, of many journals about psychology. Maybe that was the wrong place to put it.

SMITH

You mean there might have been other psychological journals that would have been more--?

KUBLER

There might have been an art historical journal that I should have found that might have taken it to get a response from the art historians.

SMITH

But I wonder if the art historian--

KUBLER

I think it's lost in the Journal of Psychology.

SMITH

I suppose I wonder to what degree the art historian can respond to an attempt to look for the genetic basis or biological basis for art and art history.

KUBLER

Well, that's the question of refocusing the evolutionary aspects of the history of art.

SMITH

You mentioned yesterday that your interest in evolution was-- You said, and this is a quote, you were "going outside art history in order to defend art history."

KUBLER

Yes, I think so. I think that's a statement of hypothesis.

SMITH

Defend art history from what?

KUBLER

Itself.

SMITH

Its current set of assumptions?

KUBLER

Its current set of assumptions, which are unstated in this respect. The only effort to state evolution and the arts is Thomas Munro, Cleveland Museum [of Art], *The Aesthetician*. Have you ever read it?

SMITH

No, I haven't. I probably will read it when I get back home.

REESE

Yes, because you reviewed that book in about 1960. I can't remember--

KUBLER

No, I never reviewed it, no. I did not review it, no.

REESE

You did not?

KUBLER

It came out in the sixties.

SMITH

So you were mentioning that there were no reviews of the book. It simply came out and disappeared. It was like a black hole.

KUBLER

Thomas Munro's book was almost totally ignored by the art historians. There are a few reviews of it. A few reviews, but they are not very penetrating.

REESE

But it was really a kind of compilation of ideas about evolution.

KUBLER

And all of it directed toward the theory of Herbert Spencer, which is the one that is discarded.

SMITH

I noticed in your folder on [Erwin] Panofsky and evolution, you had [Alfred] Kroeber's article "On the Principle of Order in Civilization as Exemplified by Changes in Fashion," where he looks at the size of dress hems and lengths, etc., over a 120-year period, as I recall.

KUBLER

It's a fascinating article.

SMITH

Yet one of Kroeber's conclusions is that the pattern that is revealed by looking at these changes over a century plus is that there could not possibly be any human choice involved in these fluctuations. They're too predictable. I wonder how one combines evolution, particularly Darwinian evolution, with its strong emphasis on randomness and the lack of choice, with your strong conviction in the importance of individual choice in every artistic act.

KUBLER

Of course there's a commercial impulse in fashion which has to be taken into account and which is not taken into account. There is no comparative graphic material displaying the state of the market in the relation of fashion to changes in the market. That's the missing link, among many others. A missing link.

REESE

I'm basically trying to go back to Richard's question about looking to science and to biology and to genetics as a terrain for the history of art. I wonder if you can say any more about how that works.

KUBLER

I wish I could. Maybe I can say something next year. [laughter] [tape recorder off]

SMITH

There are a number of things I wanted to talk about still, one of which is your ideas about myth and ritual, which are very fundamental to so much of what you've studied, possibly from Paleolithic art, certainly in Maya and Teotihuacán, and to a certain degree in the Iberian and colonial studies. And I'm wondering how you view the relationship of myth and ritual and what your kind of operative definition of it is. How do you know when you've seen a myth, and how do you know when you've seen a ritual?

KUBLER

Well, it's an indissoluble union. Ritual without myth is inconceivable, and myth without ritual has no expression.

SMITH

Does art always involve the expression of myth and ritual?

KUBLER

It can. It can be concerned with both.

SMITH

Does it usually, or has it usually?

KUBLER

Not always.

SMITH

What about excluding the modern civilized--?

KUBLER

Well, we'd better talk about art. [laughter]

SMITH

Yes.

KUBLER

What is art. [laughter]

SMITH

Okay.

KUBLER

Is it industrial art?

SMITH

Well--

KUBLER

Is it industrial art?

SMITH

Is it?

KUBLER

Is industrial art concerned with myth or ritual?

SMITH

Well-- [laughter]

KUBLER

Does industrial art mean myth and ritual?

SMITH

Okay, are you talking about basket weaving and pottery as industrial art, or ivory combs?

KUBLER

No, I'm talking about industrial art since the industrial revolution.

SMITH

I think a lot of people would answer your question yes. Perhaps the majority of people who have studied it.

KUBLER

Yes. In other words, it's difficult to exist without the heavenly twins.

SMITH

Well, I don't know if I'd agree with that--

KUBLER

Myth and ritual.

SMITH

Myth and ritual, okay.

KUBLER

But myth without ritual really doesn't exist, or ritual without myth.

SMITH

So you're saying most likely an object involves a relationship to myth and ritual? If you happen upon an object, be it a building or a bowl, an incensario or a lamp produced in Germany in 1929, you can hypothesize a relationship to myth and ritual, and the trick is to discover it?

KUBLER

Well, there are limited definitions of myth- ritual, and there are the expanded definitions of myth- ritual. And one has to be certain about the boundaries, which of the known boundaries of myth and ritual is concerned. Is it going to be early agricultural myth- ritual? Or would it be early pastoral myth-ritual? Or will it be early industrial myth-ritual? Or will it be early space age myth-ritual?

SMITH

But I notice you keep coming back to this word "early," as if early has a special connection to myth and ritual.

KUBLER

I chose the early period, the early for the existence of a life course, the so-called life course. Early, middle, and late industrial. Early, middle, and late preindustrial.

REESE

I think a question that's interesting is, what is the relationship between these three terms, art, ritual, and myth? I mean, can art precede ritual and myth or

engender ritual and myth? Have you thought about the kind of nature of the bond between these different items?

KUBLER

Well, I would think that art would do very well without either myth or ritual. It can exist in its own atmosphere. But myth and ritual are possible explanatory efforts.

SMITH

Then would you be sympathetic to John Halverson's argument that the caves in Lascaux and Altamira perhaps reflect nothing more than an art for art's sake, a jouissance of creative expression?

KUBLER

I would be inclined to think that they do correspond to myth and ritual, we don't know.

SMITH

Well, you as an art historian, when you mention early, pastoral early-- Let's say early hunting and gathering. Those are societies where we have no literary knowledge of myth and ritual, or largely don't--perhaps in some specialized circumstances we do.

KUBLER

Usually it's only from modern survivals.

SMITH

Right.

KUBLER

Australian tribes or--

SMITH

But can the art historian, looking at the objects that have been left behind, make some observations about what the range of myth and ritual was likely to have been? Perhaps you cannot specify to the precise degree that one has when one has a literary text, but can you limit the scope of myth and ritual?

KUBLER

Older students, an older age of students, confidently did so. The present students of cave art, of Paleolithic art, don't risk the assumption.

SMITH

But what about you?

KUBLER

It's difficult enough to describe in a work.

SMITH

Well, what about you?

KUBLER

Well, I'm on the side of the recent restrained efforts to interpret cave art.

SMITH

So that might tend more towards the more precise morphological examination of the works?

KUBLER

It leaves you with morphology, because you have no evidence about the song, the music, the dances that accompanied the work or that were associated with the work, if indeed there were such dances.

SMITH

For instance the famous, perhaps notorious, Venus of Willendorf. How confidently would you say this figure is likely to be a fertility figure?

KUBLER

No confidence at all.

SMITH

So there's nothing in the morphology of the figure that would suggest to you a--

KUBLER

Steatopygia. Steatopygia. [laughter] That's all. Steatopygous. It would be classification. It's a classification of the representation.

SMITH

But as a humanist, you want to go beyond steatopygia and say therefore the human spirit that was obsessed with steatopygia was-- And then make some evaluation.

KUBLER

I don't think we can say we know anything about it until there is some unexpected discovery of an association. An association of a figurine in a demonstrably Paleolithic setting with associations that are telling of an explanation.

SMITH

Now, I would assume that the assignation of the name--even the name--Venus of Willendorf has some connotations in terms of, shall we say, Freudian psychology and an attempt to derive an absolute sense of what human psychology is. And therefore certain figures, certain morphological forms--

KUBLER

I would never use the name Venus.

SMITH

Right. For the same reason you would never use the word "shaman" to apply to anything outside of Paleosiberian?

KUBLER

In the proper linguistic setting, yes.

SMITH

But, nonetheless, a Freudian psychological interpretation would look at certain forms and say, "Because of what we know about human psychology, therefore we can assume that this appeals to certain libidinous aspects of human nature." And I'm wondering, in terms of your interest in finding a psychological basis to art, how one avoids the pitfalls of a reductive psychological analysis.

KUBLER

By saying very little. By saying very little. [laughter]

SMITH

It's not a word I normally use, but steatop--

KUBLER

Steatopygous. The Greek for "hip."

SMITH

What do you actually say other than what you have and--?

KUBLER

Fat thighs. A fat-thigh figure.

SMITH

We have a fat-thigh figure. What do you say beyond that? What do those words--?

KUBLER

Female. It's female. It's certainly not male.

SMITH

Can we absolutely be sure about that, given what we know about gender construction nowadays and the berdache tradition in Native American cultures and--?

KUBLER

Possibly it's an extremely fat youth. A fat male youth.

SMITH

Or a Buddha figure?

KUBLER

Buddha figure?

SMITH

Well, if you think about the Buddha figures that one-- You know, the fat.

KUBLER

I'd want to find it in a Buddhist temple, then.

SMITH

Well, actually I don't care if it's a Buddha figure or not. I'm just challenging your certainty that it's a female figure, since I think we can find in Asian art--

KUBLER

Isn't the vulva visible?

SMITH

Even if a vulva is visible, can we be absolutely certain that that's a representation of a vulva, having no associations?

KUBLER

Well, if it isn't a penis, it's got to be a vulva.

SMITH

Well, but we don't know how they represent penises, do we. [laughter] I'm playing devil's advocate now, I'm sorry.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

I mean, we know how they represent phalluses, but do we know how they represent penises, the nonexcited penis?

KUBLER

There are representations of penises in the cave carvings, but the interpretation of the Willendorf figure as a male is very difficult to defend. It would not stand up.

SMITH

Because of the morphology or because of our gender biases?

KUBLER

Because of the anatomy. Because of the anatomical formation.

SMITH

So you think there is, in terms of vision, something that refers to an absolute reality that is independent of ideological construction.

KUBLER

I didn't say that.

SMITH

Are you sure? [laughter] As you know, it's easier to play the devil's advocate than the investigator. I'm not trying to pin you unfairly.

KUBLER

Yes, yes. Surely. Well, bring on another example, another instance. Let's leave Willendorf.

SMITH

Oh. Well, there you get me. [laughter]

KUBLER

Stay in Paleolithic antiquity.

SMITH

I'm not sure. I don't know Paleolithic antiquity that well.

KUBLER

Neither do I. [laughter]

SMITH

What about the effect of codification upon myth and ritual? What does that effect have upon the stereotypicality of representation?

KUBLER

Codification to me means a written register.

SMITH

Yes. Which may or may not be available to us.

KUBLER

A written register of items of a given class.

SMITH

Why does it need to mean a written register? Why could not it be an oral register? For instance, we have--

KUBLER

Codification, all right.

SMITH

--in the book of Genesis many codifications which are oral that were communicated to paper many years after their--

KUBLER

Yes. I'm tempted by the etymology. I think of writing and books and codices and codes, codes which are inscribed on paper, in the older forms of the word.

SMITH

I mean, assuming the most conservative estimate, which is that only Homo sapiens sapiens had language, we still certainly have forty to eighty thousand years of oral culture and only, at best, four to five thousand years of written culture, and really only a literate culture for the last two thousand years of any significance. So that our sense of humanness rests much more in the oral. Our ability to pass information from generation to generation rests upon oral means rather than written means, so that codification theoretically should be oral.

KUBLER

Signing, simple signing, in Paleolithic art is very common. Making signs, which we don't understand. But there are lots of signs we don't understand. They are part of a code. They're part of a code we don't know.

SMITH

My original question was what kind of effect does codification have, whether oral or written, upon the rates of change of myth and ritual.

KUBLER

I don't know of anyone who has studied this. Do you?

SMITH

No. I wonder-- My question was to find out if you had given any thought to this.

KUBLER

No. [laughter]

SMITH

Yet in *The Shape of Time: [Remarks on the History of Things (1962)]* and "[Towards a] Reductive Theory of [Visual] Style," there's a principle put forward about how morphology can be examined both synchronically and diachronically at the same time. I'm wondering, given the amount of time you've spent on preliterate cultures, and perhaps the emphasis that you've put on Paleolithic cultures since you're retired, whether you've given this any thought, even if it's just speculative thought.

KUBLER

Well, the longer one looks at the signs of a human group of whatever age, the more evident it is that there is a code, that they have some meaning, they have some purpose. Simply of numeral strokes numbering the passing livestock. However it may be. One can imagine all sorts of coded marks that fit into an understood code among the people where they occur.

SMITH

That suggests that the triad of art, myth, and ritual is incomplete, that you need to expand it into a tetralogy by adding a codification.

KUBLER

Why not? Nothing against it. There isn't time to try it out.

SMITH

How do we study the rate of change? How do we determine the rate of change? What's the measurement that we can take, particularly with these areas of human history where you don't have objective standards? How do we create--?

KUBLER

Measuring change is a constantly varying task. It's never the same for unmeasured quantities. Quantities that haven't been measured have to be measured by some standard that already exists or a standard that is made for them. The history of measurement is going on constantly. It's a situation in which there are quantities that have never been measured. Appearing to consciousness and demanding a measure. And we may not have any kind of measure for the phenomenon.

SMITH

Well, for instance, in your study of Paleolithic art, do you have any sense of how you would begin to develop an objective measure of time against Paleolithic art? I mean, it seems to me currently we--

KUBLER

Well, one has the passage of solar time. That's always a useful stick if the event's of that magnitude. You have to name the events and what's to be measured and for what purpose. For sale? For comparison? For general classification of magnitudes? What is the purpose? A study of magnitude? A study of rate? A study of measures themselves? The possibilities are enormous.

SMITH

Your interest in finding a genetic basis to art suggests finding a basis to art that's outside of time, that's absolutely nonhistorical. And yet art passes through--

KUBLER

I wasn't aware of it.

SMITH

No?

KUBLER

No.

SMITH

Are you then saying that the genetic capabilities of human beings are also a historical phenomenon?

KUBLER

Probably. Probably. They have appeared at some remote time in the last million years, or a hundred million.

SMITH

In absolute terms of course they're historical. But in terms of human action as we know it, if there's a genetic base, that genetic base would provide a synchronic base for all human activity.

KUBLER

The events are happening independently of human genetics, I presume. The events you are talking of are outside the human means of perception. They are not part of the organism.

SMITH

The finished object is not part of the organism.

KUBLER

No.

SMITH

But the act that-- There's a possibility that the act that leads to what we now in the twentieth century call art is part of the human organism, is an ineffable part of the human organism.

KUBLER

Ineffable.

SMITH

Ineffable. Inescapable.

KUBLER

Unspeakable.

SMITH

Yes. Unspeakable. Fundamental.

KUBLER

That's a very good word. Unspeakable. Ineffable.

REESE

But of course evolution would be the key concept, right, to fill in the gaps between the genetic system and its evolution towards-- Right? A set of reactions to concrete needs and concrete conditions externally, so that the evolution of cognition, per se, could fit in the kind of field of studies you're doing of evolution.

KUBLER

Well, my studies of evolution are minuscule and merely begun. I know very little about evolutionary theory, but I'm trying to find out.

SMITH

I guess what puzzles me, or not puzzles me in a problematic sense, but only in the sense of to understand the direction you're going in and where you've been coming from, is why you feel evolution is so important.

KUBLER

I'm trying to think of a way to connect--

**1.30. TAPE NUMBER: XV, SIDE TWO
NOVEMBER 19, 1991**

SMITH

Why Darwin and why not Spencer? What's wrong with Spencer, what's good about Darwin?

KUBLER

Well, the biological work confirming Darwin is of impressive character. There is no confirmation of Herbert Spencer. No confirmation of Herbert Spencer's theory of evolution, but the only work discussing this is Thomas Munro's, and that's dedicated to crediting evolutionary theory to Herbert Spencer rather than to Charles Darwin, whom he rarely mentions and only in passing.

SMITH

Now, you'll have to excuse me, because my understanding is that Spencer is a Darwinian, but of a peculiar sort.

KUBLER

He is pre-Darwinian. He is pre-Darwinian, and they knew of each other, but Spencer's ideas were circulating before Darwin's. I think that is what induced Thomas Munro to prefer Spencer.

REESE

Now, it's interesting to me in your career how you will in fact look through these very different kinds of hypotheses as a means of exploring possibilities. For example, you know, *The Shape of Time* was so absolutely concerned with, in fact, a critique of biological metaphors and biology as the basal, a frame through which one dealt with art favoring instead the physical sciences. And yet in some way there must have been some unfinished business there for you that has led you back again to reexamine concepts deeply rooted within biology. I just wonder whether you're aware of certain kinds of questions and forces that lead you from, say, physical science, not as an explanatory concept but a concept which helps open thought-- Then the return to biological science is a way that can also open thought.

KUBLER

Well, it would be very strange if happenings in the history of art were exempt from evolutionary process. It would be very strange. The assumption in most art historical writing from the beginning to the present is that there is no connection with evolutionary thought, with evolutionary change. That seems improbable, that it should be exempt from evolutionary change, that its study should be conducted without reference to evolutionary change.

REESE

But in earlier work--I'm talking about *The Shape of Time*--there seemed to be a real impulse to free art as a realm from in some way being an illustration of either science or metaphor. Yet in this recent work that we're talking about both on imagery and on evolution, there seems to be a kind of reopening of the question that would easily allow one to say, "But is not art then simply becoming part of a configuration that's generating it by some system bigger than art?" In other words, I just wonder how you deal today with this relationship of art as a kind of way of sensing and knowing the universe and these larger systems which you are now interested in exploring.

KUBLER

Do you know of a book by Colin Martindale [*The Clockwork Muse: The Predictability of Artistic Change*]?

REESE

I have not read it, but I've looked at it briefly here.

KUBLER

Yes. Well, he's engaged in quantifying artistic change or literary change or the change in human production, quantifying it in a series of equations that can be applied to the history of change.

SMITH

But, again, with that and with Kroeber's article on fashion and dress design, there's a probabilistic element involved which explicitly challenges any role for human choice. So how do you reconcile within your own conception of art this role of choice and necessity?

REESE

Or problem solving and necessity?

KUBLER

Well, it would be a very strange assumption to exempt the making of art, to suppose that the history of art is free of evolutionary change in the biological sense.

SMITH

But evolutionary change, as I understand it, is not predetermined. It is random selection. If we skip over to this other book that you mentioned earlier, Chaos, and the new development in 1980s physics in terms of--

KUBLER

Gleick's book.

SMITH

Gleick's book. Instead of imagining the fundamental physical universe as being orderly, as, say, both relativity and quantum mechanics does, we imagine a universe in which there is no probabilistic certainty. There is the randomness of a chaotic situation constantly throwing forth patterns.

KUBLER

Well, the adoption of the term "chaos" by its proponents is a piece of publicity to make it interesting. Actually, it is a very disciplined effort to give a mathematical account of what happens in change, situations of change. And this group of mathematicians have devised a number of equations permitting them to explain change.

REESE

So change ultimately is the subject always that interests you. And then change through time--

SMITH

Disjunction.

KUBLER

The studies are concerned, both of them really, with change. Martindale and Gleick's journalistic report on what these mathematicians are doing. These people are all concerned with change.

SMITH

Change, but from a point of view of continuity. And your point of view has tended to be disjunction.

KUBLER

Well, it can be disjunction. Disjunction is one of its forms.

REESE

But also it's interesting that this concern with origins also has become essential, has been returned to the fore--to go back to the beginnings, in some ways to the origins of cognition, of communication, of thought.

SMITH

I'm going to shift the subject a little bit.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

It relates to the question of myth and ritual. You mentioned in one of your writings that historians of religion were important to you because they were not after the belief alone. It was one of your aperçus--

KUBLER

I don't remember where I said this.

SMITH

It's in the collected essays, but I would have to hunt for it. My question was more, in terms of historians of religion, who has been particularly important to you in terms of trying to understand the function of art in various societies, whether it's Catholic Spain and Portugal or Mesoamerican, ancient American societies. Or Paleolithic society, with a possible religion that we can only speculate about.

KUBLER

I don't believe I've ever got much comfort from historians of religion.
[laughter]

SMITH

There's nobody that's been particularly significant to you?

KUBLER

I don't think I've read much history of religion.

SMITH

Have you read Eliade? Mircea Eliade?

KUBLER

I've known and disliked his work, yes.

SMITH

Why do you dislike his work?

KUBLER

I don't believe it.

SMITH

Why don't you believe it?

KUBLER

It doesn't connect with anything I know. Mircea Eliade is a rhapsodist of history, and he invents histories.

SMITH

Invents?

KUBLER

He makes up history. He produces histories.

SMITH

Without your conception of what adequate basis?

KUBLER

I don't see what he produces as history, as being history. It's an imaginary excursion by Mircea Eliade through what he believes is history.

SMITH

What about, if we think in terms of anthropology, Mary Douglas's perspectives?

KUBLER

I don't know her work. She has become quite influential in the last twenty years with an anthropology of religion. No, I haven't read her.

SMITH

She has written on Mesoamerican religion.

KUBLER

I haven't read her.

SMITH

Okay.

KUBLER

Do you mention her in the same context with Mircea Eliade?

SMITH

She's become quite influential of late.

KUBLER

And for the same reasons?

SMITH

Well, I don't know if they're for the same reasons. [laughter]

KUBLER

This web of fantasy?

SMITH

She views religion as the fundamental human characteristic, the need to unite with the divine. To heal the separation that exists from being a material creature. So she is herself religious. She's a devout Catholic and views religion - I don't know if that fits Eliade, but she views religion as fundamental to the human existential situation.

KUBLER

Well, I wouldn't accept her as a historian. Nor would I accept Mircea as a historian.

SMITH

Okay, what about someone who was at Yale [University], and may still actually be at Yale, Jaroslav Pelikan?

KUBLER

He is a historian. And he is a historian of religion. I accept him as a historian.

REESE

The term you use-- "He's a rhapsodist." How do you define the rhapsodist? Is it in a certain kind of--?

KUBLER

Getting involved with inexplicable things through the use of a poetic sort of language. But in the process losing contact with history, the history that is supposedly being written.

SMITH

How would you define the difference between poetic language and aphoristic language?

KUBLER

Poetic diction is highly evocative. Aphoristic convinces me. Doesn't expand it. The aphorism is a shortcut.

SMITH

We talked about Chaos a little bit, but more fundamental to much of your work for the last twenty years was your taking up the concept of complementarity from quantum mechanics. I understand--correct me if I'm wrong --that your understanding of complementarity was derived largely from Gerald Holton's article "The Roots of Complementarity."

KUBLER

That's right. And it's no deeper than that.

SMITH

No deeper than that. His particular presentation had resonance for you.

KUBLER

It was timely for me. It's what I was reading then.

SMITH

In 1970, when you read it, why did you feel that complementarity had particular application to the humanities?

KUBLER

I'll have to go back over the passage.

SMITH

The work itself?

KUBLER

Uh-huh.

REESE

Well, the immediate context was the two rival views of anthropologists and art historians, and that both could be simultaneously true rather than exclusively--

KUBLER

Yes. Well, I'd still accept that.

SMITH

I have perhaps a broader question, which is the role and the dangers of metaphors as cognitive maps.

KUBLER

The role and the dangers--

SMITH

I mean, complementarity is a metaphor. It's a metaphor even when it's applied to physics. And when you lift a metaphor out of physics to apply to another field, it becomes meta-metaphorical, it seems to me.

KUBLER

The danger. I agree.

SMITH

And there seems to me in your thinking, the way you express yourself, a constant tension between finding the right aphoristic expression--which often involves a metaphor--and not being trapped by the limits of the metaphor, which is, after all, using one thing to express another thing.

KUBLER

All those are the defects of rhetoric. Of my rhetoric.

REESE

And the value. [laughter]

SMITH

I noticed in my perusal of your files that Louis Hjelmslev's theory of linguistics seemed to have a particular--

KUBLER

Hjelmslev.

SMITH

The Danish linguist. I was wondering, how does one translate language-based models to visual phenomena or to--? I mean, many people no longer think of art as visual but as manipulative, in the original sense of manipulative, something that's handcrafted.

KUBLER

Now, this is getting very complicated.

SMITH

Oh. Okay.

KUBLER

Language-based models.

SMITH

Well, you've used linguistics, semiotics. How do you translate those? What are the limits to the translation of a verbal-based model to a phenomenon which, whether one views it as visual in orientation or manipulative in orientation, is still nonetheless non-verbal? You're dealing with a form of human activity that has an existence independent of words. How do you take a model that you've used productively that grows out of words and translate it to phenomena that are independent of words, that exist without reference to words?

KUBLER

In the visual domain.

SMITH

Yes, in the visual domain.

KUBLER

What is there in the visual domain that would take the place of words? In other words, words can be used to approach visual experience by describing it in the manner of words. This seems an unavoidable procedure. How does one avoid it? Is it reprehensible? What am I to do with it?

SMITH

Well, if we take as a fundament of linguistics the voiced/unvoiced phenomenon, does that have a parallel in the visual domain? The voiced/unvoiced meaning the difference between b and p.

KUBLER

That I haven't thought about, the parallel between b and p and visual experience. I would suppose that a confusion of one form for another, one visual form for another corresponding visual experience, as to confusion between b and p.

SMITH

And we know from Gestalt--

KUBLER

A line that is seen as a shadow or a shadow that is seen as a line. That sort of confusion is common.

SMITH

Or foreground and background distinctions.

KUBLER

Yes. Versions of foreground and background.

REESE

Of course, the validity of the tool for the art historian would work in reverse. Not to ask what is the analogue of the voiced/unvoiced, but what are the visual phenomena that might be elucidated, furthered by, you know, looking for that other analogue elsewhere. Rather than say, "Let's start with the analogue in another discipline and find its illustration in art." It's a reversal of grounds.

SMITH

I mentioned Hjelmslev because for him the fundamental basis of language was the difference between b and p. It seemed that you were reading him extensively in some of your classes.

KUBLER

I don't remember reading him.

SMITH

Really? [laughter] Okay. I'd like to explore some of the things in terms of-- Did you read much of [Charles S.] Peirce?

KUBLER

At one time. Semiologist.

SMITH

Yes. Or psychologist, depending on how you slice him. Did you find his work motivating?

KUBLER

Yes. Stimulating. I didn't work with it long.

SMITH

Do you remember what you were working on specifically when you were reading Peirce? When you might have been reading him and what projects it connected with?

KUBLER

It may have been *The Shape of Time*. Peirce's work is of the early part of the century.

SMITH

Actually, nineteenth century. What about William James?

KUBLER

I did read him at one time.

SMITH

Was that useful?

KUBLER

Less.

SMITH

Less. What about John Dewey?

KUBLER

Even less. I don't remember mentioning him anywhere.

SMITH

Skipping over to a whole other philosophical tradition, did you read any Kierkegaard?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Was that useful at all?

KUBLER

I don't remember it as such.

SMITH

I'm wondering, to what degree did existential or phenomenological philosophy help you in terms of clarifying your thoughts?

KUBLER

I never applied to it for clarification.

SMITH

But I did notice--this is the problem of sneaking through people's files--that in your History 100A notes, a significant amount of that class was devoted to the study of Kant: the three critiques and Kant's philosophy of the psychology of man. These were notes that appeared to come from the mid-1950s. So you had spent a considerable time grappling with Kant, it would appear.

KUBLER

I did indeed.

SMITH

Tom, when you were in the methodology class, did classical philosophy still have a major role?

REESE

Well, I didn't take a class where George was teaching methodology of the history of art. But rather within the field of, let's say, pre-Columbian art, we were looking at methodology in a much more concrete frame.

SMITH

I see.

REESE

The work that had been produced on the interpretation of Teotihuacán. The methodology course by that time was taught I think by [Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann when I was there.

KUBLER

I think we did it together for a while.

REESE

But I think methodology classes are always a remarkable way to explore the relationship, you know, of your condition as an art historian, too.

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

You know, the past of art history into other realms.

KUBLER

And it has to be done without extended remarks because of the lack of time.

SMITH

You had mentioned several times that you are not a philosopher.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

Or you have an aphoristic style because you are not capable of extended philosophic exposition.

KUBLER

That's probably correct.

SMITH

I'm still curious how much philosophy you've tried to wrestle with in the past. How much classical philosophy.

KUBLER

I've tried to be informed when I thought that it would be useful in instruction.

SMITH

Okay, so it was instruction oriented.

KUBLER

Yes. For purposes of instruction.

SMITH

Have you tried to reconstruct the history of the aesthetic?

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

In what areas do you feel philosophy of aesthetics has not been satisfactory for the understanding of or the definition of artistic practice?

KUBLER

Well, in most of the writings that are independently regarded as forming the body of aesthetics, the aesthetics that have always interested me are those of everyday experience, the necessity for the aesthetic experience of anything in terms of pain and pleasure. Is it painful? Is it pleasurable?

REESE

And ultimately aesthetics, I guess, as a Western tradition itself, is something that warrants constant challenge from those looking at objects outside that tradition. So that that becomes the challenge, too.

KUBLER

The meaning of an expression that I want to use-- I find myself spending a good deal of time tracing out that meaning in the source from which it came, and that's often the limit of my experience of an author, rather than reading systematically through the lifework of that author.

SMITH

So while you're trying to solve a problem--

KUBLER

I find ways of short-circuiting access to the formulation I want.

SMITH

My next question, actually, was the degree to which you balance some of the basic concepts that have been part of your oeuvre: disjunction, bricolage, complementarity--

KUBLER

Is that all?

SMITH

No, there are quite a few others, actually. [laughter] But to what degree do they form a system of thought?

KUBLER

Not at all. Those are words floating on the surface.

SMITH

So the system lies deeper. If you use that metaphor, then we need to drop down another level or two to find where the Kubler system exists. Or are you suggesting there is no Kubler system?

KUBLER

Well, I have a way of writing, and I don't think of it as a system. It's the way I write.

REESE

Well, ultimately, the basic underlying message of *The Shape of Time*, right, is that any work by him is in some way a reaction to problems, very concrete problems, because by whatever we call it, the subject matter-- That's not the correct term, but a set of problems so that-- I mean, if one were to say that your work as a scholar is ultimately dictated by the subject matter and the problems that are inherent to the particular problem you choose, do you feel

that that's accurate? Or do you feel there is this other more systematic enterprise that Richard is referring to?

KUBLER

Well, I'm at a loss to define my system if I have one. And what I've written is what I've written.

SMITH

I suppose what we're asking really, and this is sort of an impertinent question-
- What is the ambition here? What degree of explanation are you searching for?

KUBLER

Usually to be understood by a student or students.

SMITH

But beyond that. For some art historians the problem is nothing other than "Let us make sure that we've got the date of the painting to a matter of months and that we have the placement of panels in a sequence of paintings. If we have a multi-panel painting, we make sure the panels are in correct order." That doesn't seem to be the sort of level of problem that you're interested in, though you may need to comment on those sorts of things.

KUBLER

Yes, one has to. I've tried to provide convenient and accessible explanations of my understanding of the works of art that I have most frequently studied and to explain those things to my hearers by means of a lecture.

SMITH

I'm wondering whether you could just outline for us what-- You've talked a little bit about the evolution and art history project, what the likely future projects are that you're going to be dealing with. What are the ideas?

KUBLER

I have no idea what more there is. I have this one in prospect, and it will take me a long time.

SMITH

And there are no other projects that are--

KUBLER

The placing of the history of art in evolutionary theory. That will take me a long time.

SMITH

And there are no other things that are beckoning to you as well that you feel a need to pursue.

KUBLER

Not yet. I doubt that I will finish this one.

SMITH

Really. You think it will take quite a long time to do properly?

KUBLER

Well, I'm going on eighty. I haven't much time. I don't expect to do very much more, but I'll try.

REESE

What kind of pressures do you feel under when you are talking about "I don't have much time"? I mean, do you feel that in fact your approach to the work somehow becomes different or that you proceed pretty much as you have?

KUBLER

Oh, I do it at the usual pace at which I work and in the way I usually work. I will do it in that way and it will come out resembling the rest of my work. It won't be resembling anything else but what I have done before.

REESE

But do you think of priorities in a different way, in terms of the classes of problems you want to deal with?

KUBLER

Well, I think this topic that we've been discussing of the relation of the history of art to evolutionary theory is a workable suggestion. I think it can be opened up to bring the history of art into line with the principles of Darwinian evolutionism.

**1.31. TAPE NUMBER: XVI, SIDE ONE
NOVEMBER 20, 1991**

SMITH

I noticed in your files you have some of the archives of Paul Frankl.

KUBLER

Yes.

SMITH

We had not really discussed him before. I would like you to just tell us about your relationship with him and how you came to have a portion of his archives.

KUBLER

I didn't know him well. At the time he first came to the country with his wife, he had this manuscript which he wished to be published. And he died. I told his wife that I would keep the manuscript and let her know if I found any way to get it published. It was in German, and it would have required translation. Did you look at it?

SMITH

No, I didn't really look at it.

KUBLER

Something happened to her. I don't know whether she died, but I never heard from her again. So there it is in my drawer. I haven't really read the manuscript, although I've read his books. But I leafed through the manuscript, and it didn't seem to say anything importantly new.

SMITH

Then another, I think, quick thing is you also have a rather extensive file on your relationship with Dumbarton Oaks.

KUBLER

Well, I was on the board there and I was a fellow there. I spent a lot of time and I'd go to the galleries.

SMITH

Do you feel that, as a board member, you had much influence on decisions that they made?

KUBLER

No. I participated in the discussions, but I wasn't ever asked to do any administrative tasks. I was always there as a scholar and as a board member.

SMITH

How important has it been to you, or was it to you at various points in your life, to see the consolidation of institutions devoted to the study of ancient American art in the United States? Have you devoted any energy to that?

KUBLER

Well, Dumbarton Oaks was a case, because that section was one of four. They are of equivalent status. They are separate organizations in faculties and libraries, and all housed in the same property. Very beautiful gardens and a marvelous library of landscape architecture. A Byzantine section, a pre-Columbian section, landscape architecture, those are the three principal ones.

SMITH

Then I also noticed--I thought this was quite interesting, but I think again we can treat it very quickly--that among the assignments you seemed to give your students were translations. In particular, I noticed there were several students who translated from various works of [Claude] Lévi-Strauss. I presume you were doing these before the English translations were commercially available in the U.S. What was your motivation in asking students to prepare these translations?

KUBLER

I've really forgotten this. I don't recognize it. I don't recognize myself there. Why would I do that? Asking them to translate? From what languages?

SMITH

French primarily, into English.

KUBLER

Not from Náhuatl or--?

SMITH

No. These were more theoretical texts. There was a chapter from *The Savage Mind*, from *La Pensée sauvage*. There was a chapter from *Structural Anthropology*, "Split Representation in American and Asian Art," that you had what looked like a graduate student translate.

KUBLER

It may have been a decision by the student to make the translation.

SMITH

And then submit it to you?

KUBLER

And submit it, yes. That's all I can think of. But I don't remember demanding or requiring, as part of the student's work, translation. No. I wouldn't do that.

SMITH

When we left off last night, we were discussing somewhat about eidetic imagery. After we finished taping, you began to talk about your own vision as being eidetic. I wonder if you could talk about how you personally see and what you learned about the psychology of vision from doing that study.

KUBLER

Well, it has a great deal to do with the relationship of the mind to the object. People with eidetic vision have very different capacities. Some of them, remarkably, extended over the persistence of the image in time. All of this is interesting in relation to the endowment of the visual artist. The presence of eidetic vision is probably more common among professional artists than it is

among the rest of the population. There's a possible professional advantage to the possession of the faculty that some artists have over others. The ability to extract meaning from eidetic imagery. Persistent imagery.

SMITH

Prior to doing this study, were you aware that your vision was eidetic, that you had an eidetic form of vision?

KUBLER

Well, I'd always been aware of it, especially in a half-light, less than the light in this room. It's congenital. I think it's congenital. A lot of people are totally unaware of it. I don't know if either of you is aware of your own eidetic capacity. Are you aware of it?

SMITH

I don't think I have eidetic--

KUBLER

Do you think you have it?

REESE

You know, I'm not sure.

KUBLER

It's present in about 20 percent of the population. It's been studied very intensively in the twentieth century.

SMITH

In doing the research for that article, "Eidetic Imagery and Paleolithic Art," which is rather brief, what kinds of readings were you doing that might not have appeared in the final version of the article?

KUBLER

Anything I could find.

SMITH

So you looked at psychological studies?

KUBLER

I looked up the topic in the appropriate literatures.

SMITH

Did you discover something about the nature of cognition and perception that you had not known before?

KUBLER

Not really, but what really impressed me was its universality among human beings. Some human beings everywhere are eidetic subjects. Many of them don't know it. I didn't know about it until I began to think about it. I began to think about it about ten years ago. But I never cultivated it. [laughter]

SMITH

Did you begin to think about it because somebody asked you to think about it?

KUBLER

No. I thought that it might be significant to visual studies. Studies of visual subjects. Highly visual subjects.

SMITH

Do you see a connection between that kind of study into eidetic imagery and the psychology of vision, with your current work on evolution and art?

KUBLER

Not really, no. It would be interesting to know about animal eidetic vision, but I don't think it's possible to study it, how widely spread is it in the animal kingdom.

SMITH

In the folder that you gave me pertaining to this, there was an article by John Halverson from Current Anthropology, "Art for Art's Sake in the Paleolithic." One of the things I noted that he wrote was that the artist or the individual with eidetic vision is able to see things in a way that's "unmediated by cultural tradition, ideology, or reflection." Would you agree with that?

KUBLER

Yes. This is in a sense a negative of what one sees. It's a shape, and it's usually of a contrasting value to the surrounding light. It's almost a negative of the image. Under certain lighting conditions, it is strongly a negative of the positive we see, but reduced to light and dark. And the best screen is the ceiling. In bed. [laughter]

REESE

So one looks at an object and then looks elsewhere and sees its reflection as--

KUBLER

And then you can see it in bed on the screen over your head for a limited time. It fades quickly.

SMITH

Then there was also in that file a comment by Whitney Davis from the art history department at UC [University of California] Berkeley. He talks of the goal of attempting to imagine "inchoate cultural and psychological states." Is that something that you are grasping towards, to try to see "inchoate cultural states"?

KUBLER

No, I don't share that with Whitney Davis. One has eidetic images of only retinal impressions, not of ideas. Ideas have no reality in eidetic projection. [laughter]

SMITH

Aha. So that's--

KUBLER

It's entirely visual. It's entirely of the eye. Of the retina.

SMITH

That would explain-- You had handwritten in a note at that point saying, "Meaning is the final question to be approached." "Meaning" presumably being the same as the idea. Is there a connection between morphology and the retinal?

KUBLER

I don't know what I had in mind when I wrote that marginal meaning. Perhaps I wanted to determine with Whitney Davis the meaning. [laughter] Meaning to be determined? Is that it?

SMITH

Meaning as a final question to be approached.

KUBLER

Yes. The meaning of eidetic vision.

SMITH

Or possibly the meaning of an image, the meaning imputed to an image.

KUBLER

The semantic value of an eidetic image. I think that's what I had in mind.

SMITH

But you do see a possible split between image and meaning, between form and semantics.

KUBLER

Yes. The image is there, and one can endow it. One can give it meaning. Or one can relate it to the rest of experience, other experience. So it does serve as a token, the eidetic image.

SMITH

I'd like to move on to some more speculative kinds of questions.

KUBLER

This wasn't speculative enough?

SMITH

No, not at all! One is, I mentioned last night that we might talk about the role of analogy, metaphor, and possibly allegory in historical explanation. How do you try to use these rhetorical forms without surrendering to them? In one of

your essays, when you talk about specialization of time, you use the analogy of a snail remembering the--

REESE

Transduction.

SMITH

Transduction, right.

KUBLER

The processes you mention are literary processes, and literary processes are the result of long traditions of literary practice and literary speculation. So that it's part of the domain of literary criticism, and those terms are all literature. Allegory. Metaphor. What else?

SMITH

Analogy.

KUBLER

Analogy. That escapes the literary net. What else?

SMITH

Well, those were the three that I mentioned.

KUBLER

Essentially those are literary processes one can study separately and together, with most tradition being from the study of literature. They are pretty much confined to literature, aren't they? Allegory.

SMITH

Well, there's the question of whether history is also inevitably part of literature. There's the debate over whether history can be nomothetic or whether its form of knowledge is limited by the fact that it is a narrative.

KUBLER

It is. Historical writing is a literary category using literary devices, no question.

SMITH

How important is narrative explanation to you as a historian?

KUBLER

Well, it's the easiest mode of discourse, things in the flow of time. The easiest way to present them. But it's more fun to tear them apart, to take them apart. [laughter] Take the continuity of time apart.

SMITH

Well, to take an analogy, an important analogy is the comparison that you have made between European and Latin American antiquity, middle ages, and renaissance, modern-- In terms of your own self-critique of that comparison, what are the gaps that you had to accept in order to develop and use a pattern of this nature, and how do you try to limit the dangers of an overly facile use of an analogy?

KUBLER

Well, I try to examine the properties of the field of study. If it's a colonial situation, that's very different from the precolonial situation or the postcolonial situation. So there's a different domain. One examines them differently and treats them differently as to how to write about the period. One doesn't write about one period in the same way as one writes about another period.

SMITH

I'd like to shift to the question of the prime object. To get a sense of your view of the prime object, I started thinking about many art historians' vision of the avant-garde. You have written briefly on that, but if we were to take a very traditional view of the development of nineteenth- and twentieth-century painting, could one consider Courbet, Cézanne, Picasso, and Pollock to each be examples of prime objects? Or their paintings, of course.

KUBLER

I would say no. What I was thinking of with this notion was something like a black hole, a point of energy. A point of energy, of power, of some power. Like a black hole. Black holes are doubtful, black holes are hard to see, and prime

objects haven't really been found. [laughter] Perhaps they've deteriorated. Perhaps they've vanished already or never existed. But the prime object, I think, exists in the shadow of a black hole. Where is it? How many are there? Where are they? What's in them? Perhaps nothing.

SMITH

Well, then, still there is the question of how one might apply the principle that you developed out of looking at a millennia-long tradition to questions that are only decades long, perhaps even contemporary concerns.

KUBLER

Well, there are objects that are like points of great energy. There are objects one can identify as attracting energy. But that's a different approach to the same idea.

SMITH

When you wrote on the vanguard in art ["Comment on Vanguard Art"], that was for a conference that you were invited to participate in.

KUBLER

Yes, I think so. I think it was the meeting of an academy.

SMITH

It's the only thing that I've seen of yours where you write even in an oblique way about twentieth-century or contemporary art. Are there other things that you've written that relate to--?

KUBLER

Well, I often think about it while I'm writing and use analogies and illustrations and so on. It's part of the continuum.

SMITH

So do you keep abreast of developments in contemporary art?

KUBLER

It's very difficult not to. [laughter] One lives in it.

REESE

Can we go back to prime objects for a second?

KUBLER

Sure.

REESE

As I've read you readdress this question of prime objects, and I've heard you readdress it, what interests me is the way in which in retrospect you enjoy so much the very ambiguity. In fact, as you get more distant, you enjoy even more the ambiguous possibilities of this original concept.

KUBLER

It doesn't grow more precise. It has more and more kinds of meaning.

REESE

Did you at the very beginning think about it in terms of its potential ambiguity? Or did you think of it at the point of origin as being something a little closer to defining something more concrete?

KUBLER

The first rather than the second, yes. It was deliberately of multiple possibility.

REESE

Do you think that's also something that is true about some of these analogues and metaphors that Richard was asking about? That it is in fact not their precision, but rather their suggestiveness.

KUBLER

Their field of suggestion, yes, or their power of suggestion.

SMITH

The other topic that I told you I wanted to talk about was whether there were topics or perhaps even manuscripts, aside from the Tikal-- Books that you would have liked to have published but did not because it did not seem practical at the time for one reason or another or you could not interest a

publisher. I'm wondering about the paths that you did not take at various points in your career, yet these were subjects that had a strong appeal to you.

KUBLER

Well, I'd have to give that some thought, and rummaging around in my papers to find abandoned trails. I can't offhand remember them, but there are I think a number. How many I don't know. [laughter]

REESE

These are the prime objects.

KUBLER

Studies contemplated but not begun, or studies begun but abandoned.

SMITH

To what degree might the factors have been practical, in terms of financing or travel or needing cooperation from governments that you might not be able to get?

KUBLER

Well, I don't think that there was that kind of discouragement. I think usually I would abandon the project because I got tired of it.

SMITH

Because the problem was too easily solved or too difficult to solve? [laughter]

KUBLER

It wasn't going anywhere. If it wasn't yielding to further invitation, better abandon it. [laughter]

REESE

One of the bodies of research that I remember in your office were the files with the enormously detailed notations of colonial manuscript illuminations.

KUBLER

Yes. Oh, yes.

REESE

Which were, if I remember, thousands of cards, drawings of motifs and iconographical themes.

KUBLER

Those were teaching aids, I think. And I did that a lot. I did that a lot, making indexed files that could be used. I started an ambitious study of Mochica pottery, and I did it that way. I collected a lot of examples and classified them and thought about them. And the topic is much better handled in a different way, which is field archaeology, because these objects come from a limited number of sites and the extent of that culture is much larger. And now, in effect, after twenty years or thirty years, it's much better known and in much greater detail, with some brilliant archaeologists in charge, like Chris [Christopher B.] Donnan, whom you know, and others. The West Coast is the place where one should be to study Mochica pottery.

REESE

It's interesting, as I listen to you talk, it dawns on me that that earlier method, of course, was the method of Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century, of many of the other early works. It charted the entire corpus of production and really thinking about how to classify and treat its development in a series of different slices. Was there a time for you in which that enterprise seemed to lose steam, or was it that your interest simply shifted elsewhere? Was it a questioning of that larger systematizing enterprise? Or was it just that, you know, you might prefer a different scale of enterprise, cut through the materials--?

KUBLER

Well, one can grow tired of a method, and this enumerative method is tiresome. So one changes method. Other methods are more amusing.

SMITH

I was reading the vanguard art article this morning, rereading it. Of course, Thomas Munro's name appears in there. So it struck me this is someone who's been gnawing on you for a good twenty-five years now.

KUBLER

What did I say in this particular context? It's just a mention of the name?

SMITH

It's just a mention of the name. But also the importance of looking at evolution.

KUBLER

Yes. Well, Thomas Munro has been a much cited and much read writer and regarded as the dean of the aestheticians.

SMITH

But I was wondering, actually, to get back to the question of methodologies, if you could talk about the methodology that you're thinking through, that you're planning on using for this study of art history and evolution.

KUBLER

Oh, I'm going to leave art history as it is. I'm not going to change anything about art history. I'm going to take art history as it is. Here it is functioning without a concept of evolutionary theory. In the absence of evolutionary concern. This is very strange. Thomas Munro is the only person to write extensively about it, using the wrong books. [laughter] Have you seen his big book? A five-hundred-page book on evolution and art?

REESE

Yes, I do know it. I read it a great deal in the mid-sixties.

KUBLER

Yes. It's a deadly book.

SMITH

I noticed in your "Comment on Vanguard Art--" Let me quote something: "Does evolution alter those thrifty, crafty ways of artists whose brief span allows them barely time to turn around within two or three good ideas? Human art fits within the evolutionary framework as well as within quantum mechanics or an expanding universe of quasars. But neither evolution nor astrophysics can supply an adequate account of the history of the works of art." So this is a statement that you made in '69, and it sounds like you've

moved beyond that, in a sense--that now you're questioning that there must be some connection between evolution and art history.

KUBLER

Art history is outside the present world in its professed ignorance of evolutionary theory. So it seems to me that that's a gap, a gap that is worth plugging.

REESE

Do you have any sense that part of your interest in this in fact is to show that art history might, in a fundamental way, transform our knowledge of evolution?

KUBLER

Be an instrument of evolutionary knowledge, yes. Very much so. Because it's on a very fine time scale. A very short time scale.

SMITH

So that art history would open up the discussion of evolution rather than evolution clarify our knowledge of art?

KUBLER

That could be a result. Yes. For art historians to think in an evolutionary fashion.

REESE

So the same way that eidetic imagery could perhaps be a clue to-- Or that artists could become a clue to the understanding of a comprehensive kind of vision--

KUBLER

In their operations they are behaving as subjects of evolution--in evolution. In evolution.

REESE

So in some way that project of George Kubler--

KUBLER

Personal evolution.

REESE

But that project of George Kubler, which is in many ways to define ways in which the history of art has a kind of fundamental way of knowing the world--can elucidate all those other realms--has always been there.

KUBLER

Yes. Always, yes. Yes. That's why I stayed. [laughter] That's why I stayed at the end. [tape recorder off]

REESE

One of the questions that I wanted to ask concerns the relationship, really, of teaching methodology in your career and the nature of your own work. In other words, how important teaching the historiography or methodology class, you know, has been to your own art history.

KUBLER

Well, I always made it a principle to have the students as equal participants in the enterprise, meaning that they were to write and to speak about what they were writing on an equal footing with me. So that those who did not wish to participate in that form of instruction rapidly dropped out, and I was left with the survivors.

REESE

When was the first time you remember hearing of the idea of a course in methodology? Not in the subject matter, but in methodology.

KUBLER

Oh, I don't think I talked about it much as methodology, but the different ways a different task can be done.

REESE

Did you create such a course at Yale [University], or was it the department that created such a course?

KUBLER

Well, 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--to answer your question.

REESE

Was it something that other of your initial colleagues in the history of art program also showed an interest in or participated with you in teaching?

KUBLER

No. No. Well, yes. I remember sharing a course with the Hollander.

REESE

[Egbert] Haverkamp-Begemann.

KUBLER

Haverkamp-Begemann, yes. He was a very good partner. He caught on immediately and took his share. And it was easy to participate with him.

REESE

But he would have come to Yale in about 1960 or in the late fifties.

KUBLER

Yes.

REESE

But you had been teaching a course from very early.

KUBLER

Yes, for some years before that, yes. It was really always a group of equals. I considered the students as equals, doing the same work as I was. I tried to make this apparent at every turn.

REESE

I'm commenting on it because it's so often pointed out that America lacked this kind of interest in either theory or method. In fact when *The Shape of Time: [Remarks on the History of Things]* first came out, it was much praised as one of the very rare American products that works in that way. That's why I was interested in whether you felt that in teaching such a class it was something unique, or whether you felt that it was something that had its analogues in other history of art departments or in other departments in the campus that you were--

KUBLER

Well, I didn't know at the time of anything like it, and I was not aware that it was being imitated, except that in the department, it was regarded as a successful and useful thing to continue. It continued, but never in the same way. There was a constant shifting of ground to cover, and one can go on almost endlessly in this way without excessive effort. It's always a system of discovery with equals also doing the work, the same work on different subjects. And that was the way it went.

REESE

And in that course, you were covering, as you were in your independent graduate seminars, the whole realm of artistic production.

KUBLER

Yes. The reading was of the writings that were of methodological interest. Methodological interest. Those might be Renaissance treatises or contemporary works.

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KUBLER

The course was never large. Sometimes it was three or four, never more than six or seven, but always different topics were the subject of study.

REESE

Did you feel that it owed in any way to the work and method of [Henri] Focillon or others you had worked with at the Institute [of Fine Arts, New York University]?

KUBLER

A great deal. The concept of the equality of the student with the conductor of the course, the teacher of the course, was Focillon's method. One was never a student with him. One was an equal, which is a difficult thing to do.

REESE

Would he, in his teaching, have focused on kind of the explication de texte, for example, of a work about the history of art, say looking at design or looking at other historical writings that could be analyzed and dissected for the benefit of the students?

KUBLER

As I remember it, his teaching was not of the seminar type. He was not interested in that. He had big blocks of lectures which he gave to huge audiences, and he would have the smaller courses on more restricted topics with smaller audiences of graduate students and undergraduates and visitors from other departments, which tended to be lecture courses rather than seminars. There were so many who wanted to hear him. He never lectured in English. It was always in French.

REESE

So it would be the Institute where the German seminar, basically a modern instrument--

KUBLER

It would be the Institute where the seminar was the order of the day, at the Institute of Fine Arts. Mostly in the Warburg building and in the hotel, and then finally in the Duke house. That was after my time.

REESE

Well, the other thing I wanted to ask about is your relationship to writing, and particularly to finding the appropriate kind of rhythm and quality of word and vehicle, linguistic vehicle, for the expression of your ideas. And how conscious

you are, or how conscious have you been, over your career about trying to find a voice that is your own. Not merely a voice--ideas, but also a kind of sentence structure, a kind of organization of words and sentences and ideas that is yours.

KUBLER

That's very difficult to answer. I have no record of myself performing.

ELIZABETH KUBLER

If I may-- You like to have precise words. You don't like to have a clutter of words. You want always to find the right expression for your meaning, and you have consistently done that. You hone down things. You're always looking, and you make me look for the right words.

KUBLER

Thank you. That was what you wanted to know. [laughter]

REESE

But perhaps you could say more about-- Because the search for the word addresses the question, I think, that Richard was talking about yesterday, about metaphor in many ways and the kind of concept that opens and that is very useful to you. But I'm also interested in the kind of construction of sentences and the kind of rhythms and how conscious you are about shaping these for a certain effect. In "effect" I mean not merely a formalistic effect, but a communicative effect.

KUBLER

As I began to say, I have no record of my voice in these decades. I don't remember what I said, but I remember that I was always consulting written notes, written notes which I was elaborating and lecturing from. Filling in gaps, but to an outline. To an outline, and the lecture was always governed by an orderly set of ideas. That's what I remember about my early teaching. Preparing these outlines which I could use over and over with the increments each year, and discarding some and adding more to the armature of the course. Whether it was a seminar or a lecture course, the method was the same. I always lectured from outlines and I spoke in seminars from outlines.

REESE

I mean, what I'm actually thinking about is something we discussed, I think, in the last interview, which is the very kind of laconic prose of *The Shape of Time*, which very much, I think, is a reflection of what Betty was saying, the search for the precise word which will carry that meaning and allow that to stand, and reflection can emerge around it. But in the later prose what I notice are sentences that grow in complexity and richness in their rhythmical structure. I would describe them as sentences which move in a direction, but then constantly break to open new doors, which are hinted at, and then shift back to another point. So they have a kind of open-ended quality to them which are constantly inserting larger questions into them. Almost like some German extended modifying phrases accomplish. But I was curious if you're conscious of these kinds of--

KUBLER

Less so than you, and you're uniquely qualified to say so because of your work on these essays *Studies in Ancient American and European Art: [The Collected Essays of George Kubler(1985)]*. And I thank you for that work.

REESE

One other way to approach this is your relationship to editors. Do you tend to resist an editor who wants to, kind of, correct your prose, "correct" in quotation marks?

KUBLER

No, on the contrary, I welcome it. I look forward to it and take much help from it, from a good editor.

REESE

Now, one thing that I wanted to ask that is perhaps so broad that I'm not at all sure that you'll find an easy entrance into it was what kind of vision you have about the state of professional art history today in the early 1990s. I mean, clearly you have come at a profession as a pioneer at the very beginning, and you've watched and participated in the expansion of this from this early core into an industry. I just wonder what kind of reflections you have about this course that it has pursued and what its present and future might be.

KUBLER

Well, I think it's symptomatic that the history of art has fallen behind the history of ideas. The history of ideas is much more complex than the history of art recognizes. The enrichment of the ideational structure of the history of art is very difficult to achieve. My concern with this retardation in the understanding of scientific literature and biological literature is symptomatic. It's only rarely in the practice of the history of art that one has any intimation of awareness of the world of science and what's beyond the humanities. And when it is tried, it is naive and inept. So I'm alarmed about the state of quiescence and acceptance of the past rather than involvement with the present and the future of the practice of the history of art.

REESE

And what do you think the most fruitful strategy for attempting to incorporate this vast body of new research that lies outside the domain is?

KUBLER

Well, opening up people's eyes to it. If I were teaching again, I think I would be interested in working out ways of sharing my ignorance of biology, or of physical sciences, with the students studying with me in the history of art.

SMITH

What has happened in all the disciplines is an increasing specialization, so that when one talks about biology or one talks about physics, there's actually perhaps two hundred disciplines, which have their own specialized journals. This has led to a rapid augmentation of knowledge. How does someone in the humanities even begin to hope to grasp what's going on except in a superficial manner? What's the point of trying to apply what is at best a very superficial understanding of very complex phenomena that even very few biologists or physicists understand in a totality?

KUBLER

It's not a difficult task to discover what a group of scientists bound together by a common interest are concerned with and what they are doing and what they have done and what the principles are. Those are very easily extracted from a few readings either of journals or of monographs or of the instruments used in

the teaching of genetic biology, for example. One can approach and not master, but be on familiar terms with, the inside of genetic studies without being a geneticist. It's no more difficult than discovering what makes a field interesting in the history of art where one is not familiar. It's no more difficult than that. It is a matter of finding the right readings, the readings that preferably are used in teaching, in teaching beginners. Those texts, and especially recent ones, are the most direct way into the world of experiment and fresh start. Of course it's all past work, but it's the basis on which you can begin to think about it. We don't do much of that in the history of art. We're more concerned to find out more about certain artists and more and more and more and more artists or architects or sculptors or-- More and more of the same instead of enriching a body of ideas with which one works.

REESE

We always forget too easily that the scientists are reading great literary texts, philosophy many times, and going to art exhibits. And as many of their ideas are probably embedded in the experiences from worlds where we feel comfortable.

KUBLER

They're better humanists than we are. A good scientist is usually very well informed about what we are doing and about what's in the galleries.

REESE

Do you have any thoughts on the texture of so much postmodernist deconstructionist writing today, in terms of its position in this quest that you say we need to do? Is it a helpful or is it some way a distractive enterprise?

KUBLER

Most decidedly helpful, and very necessary to know about the organization of those ideas and their limitations, especially with things like deconstruction which have a motif character and are worth understanding.

REESE

Have you been attracted at all to the large number of texts coming out of cultural studies, largely looking at the kind of decolonization of the world? I mean, have you been attracted at all to those texts?

KUBLER

I'm interested in anything that's new, significantly new, and I wish I had more time.

SMITH

Are you thinking in particular about somebody like Homi Babha?

REESE

Or people in anthropology to whom it's not necessarily the language of form or the method, but the kind of question of focusing on this as a subject which is highly productive. I mean, there is a certain discourse now that I think is dominating that field, but it's just to me astonishing.

KUBLER

Which is this field?

REESE

This whole field of cultural studies, which deals with everything from the kind of border cultures and diaspora cultures and the whole condition of societies in exile, societies in--

KUBLER

So this is really sociology.

REESE

An ethnography, a history, a literary analysis that's just opening. It's one of these other floodgates.

KUBLER

Sociology with rich tools, a rich choice of tools.

SMITH

There is also a visual analysis that often takes place with this.

KUBLER

Yes, and visual analysis. The whole structure of knowledge is evolved, and the responsibility of the members of the university.

REESE

It must be amazing for you, as it is for me, to walk into a university bookstore and to look at a world which, you know, in the thirties and forties you were begging people to even recognize. To see that a generation of sixties and seventies Ph.D.'s are, you know, now literally writing about these things in such a kind of prolific way that you can barely, once again, recapture the object that began the whole thing.

KUBLER

There's never time enough. There's never time enough, but the problem is to use the time well.

SMITH

Relating to Tom's larger question of the future of art history, I think one of the changes that has taken place over the last twenty years is a deemphasis on art as a visual medium. Marjorie Perloff in her study of the futurists [The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture] refers to art as really being a mode of invention, a way of manipulating things. So that one worries less about visual analysis than thinking about the way in which people conceptualize and put together objects which may or may not be primarily visual in their nature, but are nonetheless objects. A lot of this I think grows out of the art that's developed in the last twenty years in particular. How do you feel about a deemphasis on the visual aspects of art, or a reshift in the definition?

KUBLER

Well, once one has learned how to perform visual analysis of an art historical type, that's that. That's an acquisition. That's an acquisition. There are plenty of other things to go to, and people in the profession too often remain content with one tool, one tool in the bench, which is visual analysis.

REESE

But do you come to think more that visual analysis is not necessarily at the root of knowledge as much as it is part of some larger, more universal way of

knowing? I'm thinking particularly of many people writing about art now from a literary point of view, who would see all painting as basically a literary, textual construct, as opposed to the art historian, who would argue for the primacy of a visual base that is distinct from text as object. But I ask this because the work on psychology that you were talking about last night seems to, in some way, perhaps collapse those boundaries between, say, text based and visual based. Or does it for you?

KUBLER

Well, there is a need to amplify the modes, the modalities of approach, the modalities of method, to enrich the methodological tool bag. It's most easily done in approaching unfamiliar fields of study, preferably sciences and auxiliary studies that would enrich the practice and understanding of the history of art.

REESE

But largely as tools.

KUBLER

There isn't enough overflow from the sciences into the humanities. The humanities are static in relation to science. The sciences are infinitely more active in the change of the ideational content.

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