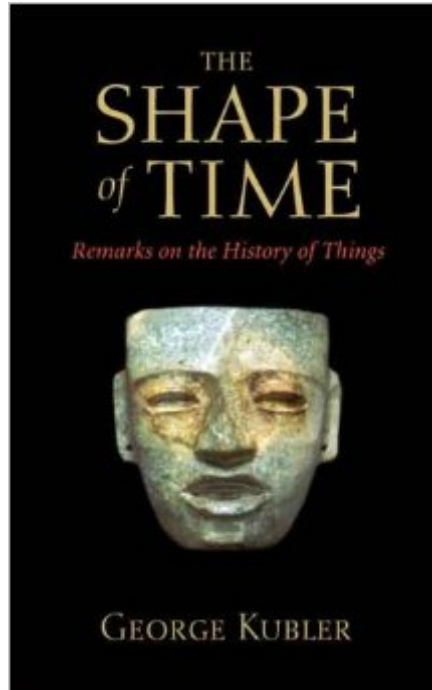


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# The Shape Of Time: Remarks On The History Of Things



## Synopsis

When it was first released in 1962, *The Shape of Time* presented a radically new approach to the study of art history. Drawing upon new insights in fields such as anthropology and linguistics, George Kubler replaced the notion of style as the basis for histories of art with the concept of historical sequence and continuous change across time. Kubler's classic work is now made available in a freshly designed edition. "The Shape of Time is as relevant now as it was in 1962. This book, a sober, deeply introspective, and quietly thrilling meditation on the flow of time and space and the place of objects within a larger continuum, adumbrates so many of the critical and theoretical concerns of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. It is both appropriate and necessary that it re-appear in our consciousness at this time." —Edward J. Sullivan, New York University "This book will be of interest to all students of art history and to those concerned with the nature and theory of history in general." In a study of formal and symbolic durations the author presents a radically new approach to the problem of historical change. "Using new ideas in anthropology and linguistics, he pursues such questions as the nature of time, the nature of change, and the meaning of invention." The result is a view of historical sequence aligned on continuous change more than upon the static notion of style — the usual basis for conventional histories of art. "A carefully reasoned and brilliantly suggestive essay in defense of the view that the history of art can be the study of formal relationships, as against the view that it should concentrate on ideas of symbols or biography." —Harper's. "It is a most important achievement, and I am sure that it will be studied for many years in many fields. I hope the book upsets people and makes them reformulate." —James Ackerman. "In this brief and important essay, George Kubler questions the soundness of the stylistic basis of art historical studies. . . . *The Shape of Time* ably states a significant position on one of the most complex questions of modern art historical scholarship." —Virginia Quarterly Review.

## Book Information

Paperback: 144 pages

Publisher: Yale University Press; Revised edition (April 17, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0300100612

ISBN-13: 978-0300100617

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.4 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (7 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #72,739 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #11 in [Books > Textbooks >](#)

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## Customer Reviews

This is a book about art history, written by an art historian, though it was given to me by one of my professors of anthropology while I was studying archaeology at Arizona State University. For one reason or another, I have taken this volume off my bookshelve many times, opened it to a random chapter, and read a paragraph, a few pages, or a chapter at a time. Never more than that. I have often tried to connect the theory in this book to archaeological questions, but I have mostly failed in my attempts to visualize an operational method of applying its lessons. It has become increasingly evident to me, as I struggle with the contents of this work, that this is in fact less a theory of art history and more a history of historical and cultural change: a work of anthropology, or at least one of anthropological interest. Kubler is not attempting to explicate the influences of history on stylistic changes in art. He is, in reverse, introducing the analysis of art forms to issues of historical change. This may be (perhaps suitably) a distinction of little merit to some. However, it is enough to curl the toes of at least some members of the anthropological community. Stylistic or symbolic interpretations of art through history--perhaps a more traditional history of art--are replaced by the notion that human actions or ideas, manifested through time, are reflected in art across history and that differing works of art can be recognized as manifestations of the same actions or ideas through time. If you don't understand this, then perhaps you are as confused as I am right now. Kubler begins with the following statement of assumption: "Let us suppose that the idea of art can be expanded to embrace the whole range of man-made things, including all tools and writing in addition to the useless, beautiful, and poetic things of the world." He is therefore effectively expanding the definition of art to include all material and ideological culture, thus extending the more limited discipline of art history into the realm of general anthropological theory. Actually, Kubler is expanding the definitions of both art and history. "the moment just past is extinguished forever, save for the things made during it." The accumulation of material and ideological culture alone survives to represent the evolution of humankind. This point may be self-evident to the archaeologist. However, it is a profound statement nevertheless, pointing out, if nothing else, that what may have been perceived as limits of archaeological inquiry, may be, in fact, the actual objective of such inquiry. The present is the intermediary between the future and the distant past. "Actuality is when the lighthouse

is dark between flashes: it is the instant between the ticks of the watch: it is a void interval slipping forever through time: the rupture between past and future: the gap at the poles of the revolving magnetic field, infinitesimally small but ultimately real. It is the interchronic pause when nothing is happening. It is the void between events. Yet the instant of actuality is all we ever can know directly." With language like that, how could you not love this book! Jeremy W. Forstadt

Few people treat the concepts of \*fast\* and \*slow\* time in a cultural sense, (not a clock sense), quite so well. In this context Kubler also provides a clear working definition of an artist's entrance into an era, and what comprises real artistic invention as opposed to the replication of stereotypes. Still fresh decades after Kubler wrote this core text; Kubler defines the dynamics of artistic innovation with the same clarity that Thomas Kuhn did for the sciences in that other core text: The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.

This book is a must for anyone who follows a structuralist view of art. Clear, simple but nonetheless covering the widest possible scope in relation to "things", it is an authentic theoretical jewel, a brilliant work by Mr. Kubler, one of the most serious and broad minded academics of our time. HIGHLY recommended!

I have read it a number of times. Each time feels new and so much thought awakens!

Great book, definitely worth a read!

Magisterial and profound!

Great item for the design and architecture students!

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