

Trends, currents, and phenomena emerge and disappear. Sometimes they return in a new form and describe a circular movement in time and space. An example of this is minimalism. It is almost impossible to view trends in aesthetics as separate from our socio-economic climate. Economist George Taylor even came up with the Hemline Index, suggesting that the hemlines on women's skirts rose with stock prices. Although a correlation between exposed thighs and the economy seems a little far-fetched, it is unsurprising that our relationship with money is inextricable from the items we buy. The recent surge of minimalism throughout the West thus makes sense, in a time of growing distrust in the US presidency and warnings of a 2020s economic recession. With such economic and political disenfranchisement comes an idealisation of an ordered and assured world – which is exactly what minimalism seeks to achieve. The growing popularity of Marie Kondo's Netflix series, therefore, does not seem like a coincidence. Yet, the rise of less is not unique to the 21st century. Minimalism finds its roots in Adolf Loos' "Ornament and Crime" of 1908, which characterized it as a sign of pure and lucid thinking. The first big wave of minimalism coincided with the economic downturn of the 1930s. The experimentation in fashion and design developed in the 1920s came to an abrupt halt and in its place emerged a modest and simple style. During this time of sudden disillusionment with the economy, designers sought to project a sense of optimism characterized by sleek shapes and simplicity. This style was in fact coined as modernism, a movement which simply borrowed its reductionist qualities from minimalism. Similarly, our world nowadays is also becoming increasingly segregated, with the last two decades sharing a rise in political and economic turmoil. With the 2008 Financial Crisis causing major job losses, trends seemed to change overnight. Retailers decided to supply less and focus on specific items that had previously done well. As a result, pieces that were flashy and stamped with logos seemed to decrease in popularity while pieces that were subtler in nature gained respect. The embellished low-rise jeans and pink Juicy Couture sweatpants we saw in the early 2000s disappeared and were replaced with sleek gender-neutral pieces in neutral tones. Although we are in an age where trends come and go quickly, minimalism seems to be growing steadily, with renewed interest in Scandinavian design, minimalist blogs, and even Kim and Kanye West showing off their minimalist mansion on Vogue. The similarities between minimalist trends as a result of the economic climate in both the 1930s and our current decade are apparent. Is this just a coincidence? Or do we really seek comfort from economic disillusionment by questioning whether the items we possess truly spark joy?

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