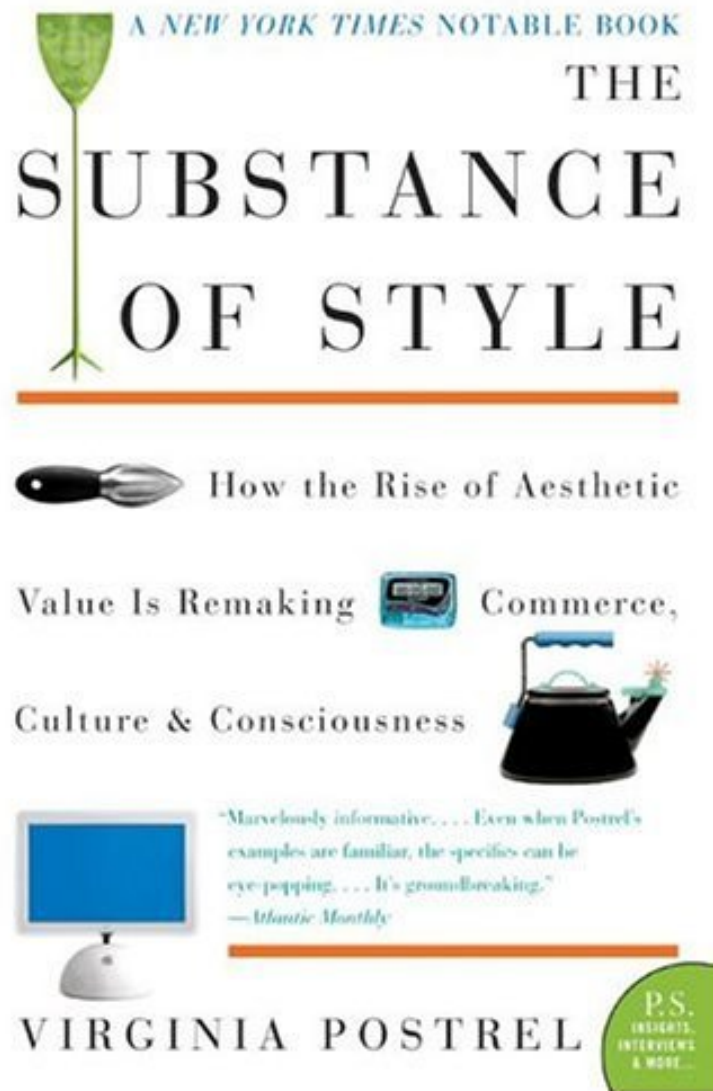


(Pdf free) The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value Is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness

# The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value Is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness

Virginia Postrel

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**Virginia Postrel : The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value Is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value Is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A clear, evocative, and persuasive book on the importance of designBy John E. Branch Jr.Virginia Postrel's title conveys her main contention: style, design, the look of things

(call it what you will) isn't valueless, superficial, or bad for you; instead, it has a positive substance of its own. She ranges far and wide in her discussion, examining (to name a few) the meaning of personal styling choices such as dreadlocks, the conflicts that arise in imposing design restrictions, the immense range of materials, textures, and colors offered to designers, even the availability of designed choices in the mundane matter of drawer pulls and toilet brushes. Some of the examples she marshals may seem obvious; in fact, her entire point may seem incontestable to some readers, given that we're now well acquainted with (to take just one example) the immense effort that Steve Jobs and others at Apple have directed toward the design of the iPod, the iPhone, the iPad, and the Apple Watch. But I think all this was less clear in 2003, when Postrel's book was published. What's more, Postrel does more than simply note examples of the spread of design. She also makes an argument against the view, widespread during much of the 20th century and before, that presentation is somehow frivolous, secondary, unimportant, detrimental to social equality, or dangerously deceptive in some way. I won't try to recap her argument here, but to me, the book is persuasive; even before I read it, reviews that I read contributed to changing my view of the entire subject. I would've enjoyed seeing some illustrations inside to match those on the cover. It's worth noting that Postrel's most recent book, *The Power of Glamour: Longing and the Art of Visual Persuasion* (published in 2013), includes many graphics; this probably illustrates the march of the design imperative that she's discussing in *The Substance of Style*. Nonetheless, Postrel's writing is clear and evocative on its own; you're in no danger of missing her point.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Ambivalent  
By Phil Simon  
I agree with some of the other reviews of this book: Postrel's premise seems to lose steam midway through the book. Yes, style and substance matter. But the author seems to lack a definitive viewpoint. Sometimes it matters to people who live in upscale communities, but it doesn't matter to others who choose to move out because they become annoyed with overly restrictive home owner associations. So, style and substance matter sometimes...and may matter more in the future. I would have preferred a more decisive stance. Also, the anecdotes are certainly interesting and varied, but they don't seem to advance a central premise. Unless I read the book wrong, they just serve to illustrate that we are seeing more interest in style over the past 20 years as technological advances have made so many things ubiquitous and cheaper. Great, but what should we do with this information? I would like to have seen that question answered. I don't mean checklists (which I despise), but how will this help the average reader? If this were a sociology book, then I probably wouldn't have bought it. Instead, the book doesn't really seem to answer the question inferred by its subtitle "How the Rise of Aesthetic Value Is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness." I figured that it was a business book and it really isn't, in my humble view. This isn't a bad book and Postrel is a gifted writer. I just had some different expectations when buying the book.

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Changed the way I think about style, fashion and aesthetic considerations generally.  
By Christopher K. Gray  
I have not read many books since entering middle age that have metaphorically grabbed me by the lapels, batted me around, and screamed "WAKE UP and actually THINK about your assumptions!" In this book, the author manages to do just that. She also manages to make the experience a lot more pleasant than the previous metaphor might indicate. Since I was a teen, I've belonged to one of the intellectual tribes that almost reflexively derides style and fashion, product design and packaging, as a sort of artsy-fartsy, shallow indulgence. These were things unworthy of serious thought or consideration. Worse (for people less intelligent than myself and my peers, of course), external packaging and delightful appearances threaten to mislead others from or even displace entirely what was REALLY important: function and substance. But after reading this book, I've found I cannot think this way anymore. Virginia Postrel presents compelling arguments backed by facts and numerous entertaining anecdotes, arguing for the genuine importance of delivering aesthetic virtue, of pleasing the senses, in addition to delivering function, both as a goal to be pursued and as a subject of serious thought. She effectively refutes the common arguments used to justify the dismissive attitudes of hidebound people...well...like me. This is not a perfect book. Occasionally, the author seems to wander off on tangents while serving up anecdotes. But I'd recommend this book to just about anyone. Whether you are a committed soldier in the eternal war between style and substance, or have never given the matter a moment's thought, "The Substance of Style (P.S.)" will give you a lot to think about.

Whether it's sleek leather pants, a shiny new Apple computer, or a designer toaster, we make important decisions as consumers every day based on our sensory experience. Sensory appeals are everywhere, and they are intensifying, radically changing how Americans live and work. The twenty-first century has become the age of aesthetics, and whether we realize it or not, this influence has taken over the marketplace, and much more. In this penetrating, keenly observed book, Virginia Postrel makes the argument that appearance counts, that aesthetic value is real. Drawing from fields as diverse as fashion, real estate, politics, design, and economics, Postrel deftly chronicles our culture's aesthetic imperative and argues persuasively that it is a vital component of a healthy, forward-looking society. Intelligent, incisive, and thought-provoking, *The Substance of Style* is a groundbreaking portrait of the democratization of taste and a brilliant examination of the way we live now.

From Publishers Weekly  
At the Great Indoors, a hugely successful department store chain, customers can choose from

among 250 lavatory faucets. If that represents too little variety, there are more than 1,500 distinct models of drawer pulls. Like it or not, we live in an age where we can minutely dictate every aesthetic choice, to an extent our ancestors would certainly have found disturbingly wasteful and superficial. It is this censure that New York Times economics columnist Postrel is dead-set on dismantling. Aligning herself against "pleasure-hating" modernists like Walter Gropius and Adolf Loos, Postrel adopts the position that fashion has meaning. One of her argument's charms is that she allows Joe Q. Ray-Ban his own justification for his purchase ("I like it") against the interpretations of theorists who insist an interest in surfaces is linked with deception, status or falsehood. Postrel's apt example of the proliferation in toilet-brush design is an effective rebuttal against such theorists--after all, nobody buys a sleek toilet brush to impress neighbors who will never see it, so aesthetics must constitute much of the rationale. Increasingly, form is simply part of the function. Postrel begins by explaining that appearance has a meaning commensurate to loftier values, then examines the many manifestations of this truth. While her argument is intellectually sophisticated, Postrel's journalistic training ensures the examples she cites are well-chosen and the prose remains crisp and readable. Gracefully representing one endpoint of a certain debate, this ambitious book may someday become a classic of the genre. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist It's enough to make your head hurt, this very conscious, contemporary, intellectual interpretation of Keats' "Beauty is life, life, Beauty." On the other hand, social scientist and author (The Future and Its Enemies, 1998) Postrel brings together some very compelling arguments, insights, and examples about the value of aesthetics today. Nothing is quantified; instead, she points to qualitative examples like the GE Design Center in Selkirk, New York, devoted exclusively to the creation of new plastic forms. To Starbucks and the iMac, each a symbol of looks that sell--at a higher price. And to the 1,500-odd different drawer pulls available at the Great Indoors. Aesthetics is how we make the world around us special, a feature recognized as early as 1927, when adman Ernest Elmo Calkins opined about "Beauty the New Business Tool" in the Atlantic. It enhances communications (cf. PowerPoint) and identities (Hillary Clinton's hair). Ask any Afghan woman who risked prison to style her hair and paint her face; aesthetics is at one with life. Barbara Jacobs Copyright copy; American Library Association. All rights reserved "What a great read! It will heighten your awareness of our newly sculpted aesthetic world."