

Being Less

Minimalism from a Feminist Perspective

I am less — this is something I learned early on growing up as a girl. I was considered to be less. What I said, thought or did was not as important or valued as much, as what the boys did. Maybe even more importantly there were also other demands placed on me for being a girl. Simply because of the fact that I was a girl, I was supposed to listen more and talk less. These profound insights of what it meant to live in a patriarchal culture greatly came to influence the development of my behavior and deeply shape my personal identity. To some extent this was an unconscious process, but I also have memories of when, in trying to grasp the far-reaching consequences this would have for my life, I questioned the validity, and reason why this was so. I never got a straight answer of course, “it’s just simply how it is”.

What I did not know at the time was how these first insights into patriarchy, together with my daily social experiences in school and with friends and family, also had a great impact on my relationship to language. This realization came years later, when I finally decided I had to follow, what had then turned out to be a very persistent creative urge, and start writing. To write had long been a deeply rooted desire in me, but I’d always brushed it off as, “everyone wants to be a writer”.

It took several years for me to find my true written form, and for the most part this was not a joyful search. It became evident to me, that the experience of being less, and to a large extent silenced as a girl, had given me very ambivalent feelings toward language. My creative channel, and deep down experience, was that of a muted woman. She couldn’t speak. Language had become, not primarily a tool for communication, with an inherent possibility for expansion and attained existence. No, rather what I found was an instrument for exploitation, subservience and accommodation. The tool I was to work with evoked dark and painful associations to limitation, constraint and confinement. There was also an aspect of language being treacherous. Deep down every woman is acutely aware of the fact that a no is not always a no. A few years back I saw an interview with the accomplished Swedish actor Marie Göranzon. She was commenting on how the physical difference between men and women alone caused women to have either a conscious or unconscious fear of men. “Literally the man in this way always has the upper hand”, and you as a woman develop a strategy for how to handle this. Women sacrifice their tool, their language, with its potential for independence and integrity, and end up using it as an instrument for subordination, a latently forced compliance. For me language turned out to be, on one hand the only way out, a necessary “evil”, in order to communicate and exist, and on the other hand that

same language formed a constant threat of taking over and obliterate that which was trying to find its way up and out into existence, (but deep down in me wasn't allowed to).

The paradoxical question became: How do I give form to, and communicate a silenced experience? Where my inner most truth was, there was no language. Giving something form became in itself a falsehood. A consequence of this was, that the closer I came to my true inner text, the smaller the poems became. This was the only way to not really enter into the structure of language, but still being able to use it for expression. It seemed, that when I was communicating from my core, the poems insisted on taking a minimal form. The small printed black text on the large white page was a cogent illustration of the claustrophobic minimal room I had carried within me, and which boundaries I had to stay within. The extreme minimalist form was also a way to minimize the defining and suffocating structure I had developed such a complicated relationship to. An unintended, but liberating effect of this was that this minimal printed expression paradoxically took up a vast amount of white space, a compensatory, as well as redeeming act. I also found that by almost strangling language, the language was forced to enter into a visual dimension. This created a fascinating way of reaching further, and outside of the structure that had limited and enclosed me. Yes, to find my way into a written existence, I had had to go outside of, and beyond language.

Charlotte Jung

Charlotte Jung is a concrete minimalist poet and experimental playwright. She's originally from Stockholm, Sweden, and today she divides her time between the Stockholm countryside and her adopted hometown Chicago. Charlotte's debut collection *C* was published in 2019, and she has since then published; *MBRYO* (chapbook, Puddles of Sky Press, 2019), *(SEED)* (chapbook, Timglaset Editions, 2020), *HOLE BEING* (chapbook, NoPress, 2021), *ABCDE* (chapbook, Trombone, 2021), *CO2* (leaf collection, nOIR:Z, 2021) and coming 2022, *RED RULES bent* (leaflet, Viktlösheten Press) and *FINAL FIGURES* (leaflet, Non Plus Ultra). Please see www.charlottejungwriter.com for more information about Charlotte and her writing.