

**In Particular(s): On Charlotte Jung's *Collected* (Timglaset, 2023)
Greg Thomas**

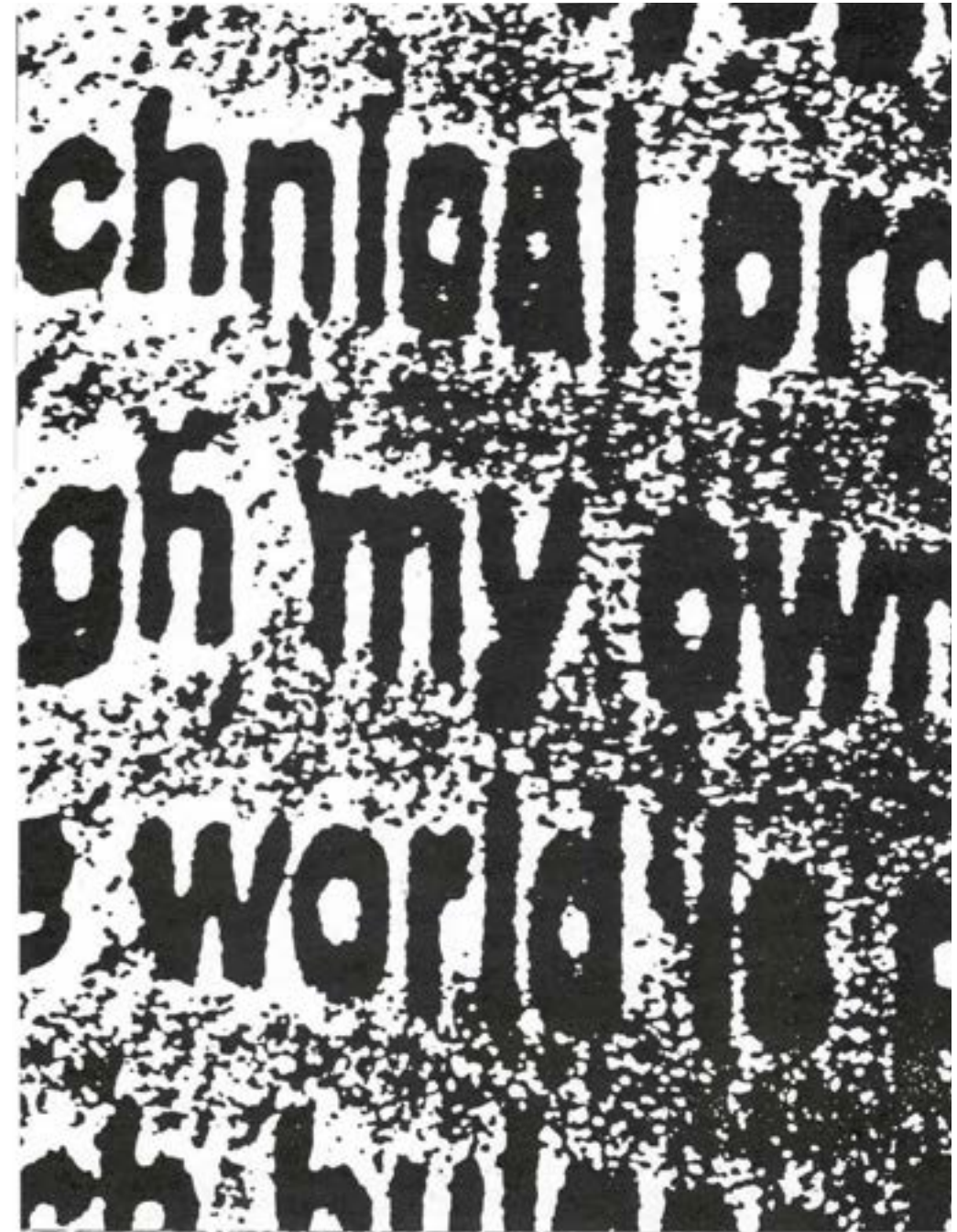
Why does minimalism have to be neat? Why should a minimalist poetics purport to objectivity, immutability, a stillness obviating questions? Why can't it be a way of framing complexity, ambiguity, the particularities of embodied experience, from fleeting joy to trauma, anxiety, and rage? In this intriguing, sometimes disconcerting, often strangely grounding collection of poems by Stockholm-born poet Charlotte Jung, we find the contents of various small chapbooks and pamphlets (10 discrete sequences in total) rehoused in a medium-length, landscape-oriented book by Malmö's consistently brilliant Timglaset Editions. These little gatherings of verse, set apart by slate-grey divider pages, run a stylistic and thematic gamut, relatively speaking, within the confines imposed by Jung's overarching love of semantic brevity and her interest in abstract and figurative visual form.

One of the most worthwhile aspects of this work, particularly taking it as a contribution to post-concrete poetics, is the general disinterest it shows in graphic arrangement as a way of shoring up or ornamenting linguistic meaning. To extrapolate by example, consider two classics of the concrete era, Eugen Gomringer's "wind," in which the words look like they are being blown about in the breeze, and "silence," in which the window format seems somehow to secure the objectivity of language by visually capturing the silence it describes. A subtle pictorialism or impression of concrete clarity holds sway. Now contrast those pieces with the five constituent poems of the first sequence in Jung's collection, *MBRYO*, originally printed by Puddles of Sky in 2019: "(belly) / seedling, / germ ssssss [the s's cascade down part of the page] / mbryo / h (ea) rt." This mantra-like progression, evoking somatic experience, floral or foetal origins, and microscopic life, is Gomringer-esque in its extreme sparseness, and in its related and implied search for a kind of veracity or profundity exceeding conventional printed language.

However, whereas in Gomringer's work that quest is granted symbolic closure through the use of visual form to—as it were—ground semantic meaning, Jung instead offers us little graphic feints and pulls around the edges of the words, suggesting a meaning just beyond our reach, wavering at the threshold of comprehension. The brackets around "belly" might be half-pictorial but they seem half-improvisational, gestural, too. Why the extra spaces between letters and parentheses, for example; how does that aid our scan of the poem as a visual symbol? Is the comma after the seedling something sprouting from the ground or womb? Why is an embryo with a missing *e* any more embryo-ish than one without?

The sense that what we are reading, and seeing, is the document of a search for some form of truth or resolution that language can't quite deliver is a feeling we

**From *Après Artaud*
W. Mark Sutherland**



Film Festival
Stuart Ross

A movie about two people. A movie about two can openers. A movie about death crawling through a supermarket. A movie about the tension between competing products. A movie about a wise turnip. A movie about silent music. A movie about books with no pages. A movie about a pill that erases memory. A movie about I can barely lift myself up out this chair. A movie about a movie about exhaustion. A movie about walking into a wall. A movie about a porcupine that becomes sheriff in a small prairie town. A movie about an unfilled grave. A movie about ashtrays. A movie about lining up at night. A movie about noses.

get, in different ways, from other writers of the male-dominated first wave of concrete, such as Robert Lax and N.H. Pritchard. But in Jung's case it seems to speak to an awareness of the writer's perspective not as objective in its minimalism—surpassing the 'polluting' influence of authorship or individual spirit—but provisional, contingent, bound to a body and to a point in space and time. That impression of doing concrete poetry over again with the body in mind is, in a sense, both the grounds for and the result of the feminist connotations of Jung's practice, in particular its exploration of motherhood, pregnancy, sex, and sexual violence. The beautiful, Swedish-language selection *SMÅLTVATTEN* ("Meltwater") brings words such as "mamma" ("mother"), "sorg" ("sorrow"), and "kär!" ("container") into loose semantic association, as if we were getting to the root of some traumatic episode of lived female experience that we are, in the end, brought too close up to for us to unpick as narrative. *HOLE BEING* brings a similar set of connotations to bear, while in *A B C D E*, the first few letters of the Roman alphabet are blown up to fill the page, and cradle the remainders of words that allude—like other sections of the text—to troubled familial relations and motherhood:

Abstortion /... **C**-section /... **d**olly / **D**addy...

At times, the reader senses they are being nudged towards, and shielded from, a particular and deep source of darkness in the narrator's past. However, we should not seek to infer any more about the author (as distinct from the narrator) than this smattering of subtext seeks to tell us. The disarmingly stark sequence *RAPE*—which marks a complete tonal shift within *Collected*, adopting a much more didactic and activist tone—lays out its topic in general terms. One double-spread is covered with the repeated title-word, interspersed with sentences in a lighter, grey type that reveal bleak statistics: "one in three of female victims of rape and one in four of male victims of completed or attempted rape...experienced it for the first time between the ages of 11 and 17."

So, no, minimalism doesn't have to comfort us, shore us up in our certainties, or shield us from the pain of embodied life. In Jung's hands it can, however, invigorate, intrigue, and provoke.