

Minimalism, a Calming Revolution

10 November 2017

By Joshua Doucet

Dear Kyle Chayka, in your editorial titled “The Oppressive Gospel of ‘Minimalism’,” you argue that minimalism is a type of cultural sickness. You state that minimalism is indistinguishable from other forms of consumerism, and suggest that the practice has several rules or precepts that one must conform to, to be a minimalist. Also, you assume that minimalism is an anxiety-inducing lifestyle that is reserved for the “elite” who have a large quantity of capital. On the contrary, minimalism is not just for the privileged. Minimalism is an ambiguous lifestyle for anyone who chooses to make a positive impact on their own life, as well as the life of others.

Both of us can agree that minimalism is a term that was once used to describe an artistic style in the mid 1900’s, but is now seen as a trendy lifestyle choice. Modern day minimalism is usually characterized by people who have discarded or donated most of their possessions for the sake of living a simpler life. Those who practice minimalism typically do not own unnecessary duplicates items, and the items that they do own, add a significant amount of value to their lives. Although, you and I can agree on a basic understanding of minimalism, our viewpoints on the subject differ drastically regarding who can practice minimalism, and how it affects individuals, as well as their surrounding communities.

Your assumption that minimalism is a lifestyle that is exclusively reserved for the wealthy, or the “elite,” is an inaccurate generalization. Yes, affluent individuals have significantly more buying power than the lower-class, but that does not mean that they have the most opportunity to minimize. Those who have minimal income are more susceptible to hoarding possessions, because they may be fearful of scarcity. Stocking up for tough times sounds like an extraordinary idea when money is tight, but when has stocking up gone too far? Most people do not need an old t-shirt for every day of the year, or a giant bucket of rusty nuts and bolts. People from all social-classes have an opportunity to minimize, not only their possessions, but also their priorities, and their relationships.

Kyle, you claim that minimalism is full of precepts that must be followed to minimize one’s lifestyle, but this is simply not true. Minimalism is ambiguous, and has a large spectrum of definitions. Many people, including myself, use minimalism to determine if the possessions owned still have value. If an item no longer carries significant value, donate it. One person may need four pairs of pants; another person may need ten. You perceive minimalism strictly as a lifestyle where people discard most of their personal possessions; however, this is not the only way to define the topic. Minimalism can be used to reduce the number of priorities or tasks in a person’s life, so that focusing on what matter most becomes more straightforward. Next, certain people may have an extensive social circle, full of shallow relationships. These people could use minimalism to reduce the time spent with numerous acquaintances, so that a significant block of time can be spent with one friend to build a deeper relationship. Anything can be minimized, and there are no rules. Minimalism is a subjective practice, and it carries many benefits.

The benefits of minimizing extensively outweigh the drawbacks. In your editorial, you claim that living a minimalistic lifestyle is anxiety-inducing, because people must ask themselves “Do I own the right things?” Surely, this question must cause anxiety for some people.

Nonetheless, if you are minimalistic or not, many people ask themselves this question anyway. So, it is illogical to associate this question as a disadvantage to practicing minimalism. When someone minimizes their lifestyle, amazing things happens. By banishing all the things in life that no longer serve a legitimate, meaningful purpose, the opposite of anxiety, calmness, blankets a person's reality. Minimalism seeps into a person's life, and suddenly they have less distractions, less things to clean, less things to fix, less decisions to make, and more time to live. When people minimize, they find clarity, and this clarity transcends beyond the individual into the surrounding community.

When people adopt the belief that owning less equates to an improved well-being for themselves, the surrounding world benefits as well. Kyle, you insinuate that minimalism is a form of consumerism that is far from revolutionary, but your statement lacks evidence. When people are content with owning a smaller number of items, people buy less, and when people buy less, there is less waste, therefore, people are wasting less money, and conserving valuable resources. Also, minimalists often realize that certain possessions do not need to be owned to take advantage of their use.

A minimalist sees a ladder, a lawnmower, a kayak, and perhaps an automobile as items that can be rented, and shared with other people in their community. When a person is not using a lawnmower, several other people can take advantage of the tool. Minimalism promotes the act of renting or reusing, instead of purchasing or recreating. Thus, creating more value from less resources. By sharing material possessions, we need to consume less, which is quite revolutionary from an economic and an environmental standpoint.

Overall, minimalism is far from oppressive. The breadth and depth of minimalism allows the practice to be subjective, and open to interpretation. People from all social structures can participate in minimalism, thus it is not exclusively reserved for the privileged citizen. When being minimalistic, a person has more time, and less distractions to accomplish the things that matter most. Most notably, minimizing is beneficial not only to an individual, but to the community surrounding the individual. So, take a second look at this revolutionary lifestyle, and consider donating those old t-shirts, or your stack of old dusty movies. See for yourself how minimizing can benefit your own lifestyle.