

## CONSUMPTION, MARKETS & CULTURE

### Special issue call for papers:

#### LETTING GO: ECONOMIES OF DETACHMENT

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#### Rationale and Aims

Detachment practices are endemic in markets but rarely investigated. On the supply side, for example, manufacturers and their brands try to detach consumers from their competitors, or innovate by not only adding new features and characteristics to their products, but also removing aspects of them (Goulet & Vinck, 2012). On the demand side, we see numerous moves from consumers to detach from unethical products or give up ownership altogether and embrace the sharing economy. Detachment is thus a particular type of economic action aimed at dismantling previous configurations in order to build new ones. **This special issue aims to offer the first serious assessment of these strategies and of the significance of detachment in the formation of markets and consumers.**

#### From attachment to detachment

Some of the most important work within the new economic sociology has documented how the arts of attachment are implicated in the technical, organisational and social functions of markets (Cochoy, Deville, McFall, 2017). This work highlights the complexities of market attachments as both material links and subjective or affective ties. It also foregrounds attachment as a variable relation, often dependent on its implied other: detachment. However, while the first term of this relation is relatively well known, the second is seriously under-researched and deserves far more attention.

The aim of this special issue is to address this serious imbalance. The study of the arts of attachment obviously needs to be extended with a symmetrical analysis of the 'work of detachment'. Three key questions shape this emerging account of economies of detachment:

- 1) How do markets provoke attitudes and dispositions of detachment?
- 2) How do practices and strategies of detachment configure and re-agence markets and impact on consumer culture?
- 3) How do detachment strategies become qualified as political and with what consequences?

In their important book *Detachment: essays on the limits of relational thinking*, Candea et al (2015) remind us that detachment points to a certain disposition. Being 'detached' can indicate a deliberate absence of care or an involuntary state of distraction; how then do markets configure these dispositions and how are they understood and experienced as good or bad? Detachment as carelessness, for example, has provoked widespread and unsustainable practices, like the use of disposable and single use goods that are central to the dynamics of rapid turnover. These goods are designed to be easily and rapidly detached from the person who purchases them, but they also require a consumer disposition that is unconcerned with

the practice of constant wasting (Hawkins, Potter and Race, 2015). Conversely, the reflexive awareness of the effects of disposability can involve voluntary efforts to contest markets by refusing certain forms of consumption, or by managing the afterlives of goods by discarding them ethically through recycling (Gregson et al., 2015).

Of course, the dichotomy of attachment/detachment is not clear cut. These categories depend on and invoke each other, there is a ‘doubleness’ of attachment-detachment (Le Velly & Goulet, 2015; Muniesa, 2009), coupling and de-coupling (White, 2012) or commitment and non-commitment (Brembeck 2007) where getting detached from something can often mean becoming attached to something else. However, this does not diminish the claim that particular strategies of detachment in markets are distinct and demand far more attention.

Paradoxically, detachment processes are not necessarily about getting rid of markets; they are rather about reconfiguring or civilizing —i.e. “re-agencing” (Cochoy, Trompette & Araujo, 2016)— them in particular ways. New economic arrangements like the rise of the sharing economy actively promote detachment from property as central to the technical organization and social value of these markets. In this case, no transfer of ownership takes place: consumers gain the right to use products or services or enter a network on the basis of rental or access based payments (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012).

Contributors to this special issue are invited to explore the following subthemes or develop others:

- **Detachment as Disposition:** exploring how the conduct of consumer carelessness is configured, what diverse forms it takes, and its consequences (e.g. littering, use of disposable products, etc.).
- **Detachment as Re-Agencing Markets:** showing how markets are reconfigured by detaching various elements from previous organizational schemes and social ties (development of ‘alternative’ market arrangements like cooperatives, sharing or charity market systems; organization of new trading schemes, etc.)
- **Detachment as Political Qualification:** analysing the political dimensions and implications of various detachment processes (environmentalist campaigns for getting rid of plastic packaging; detaching the economy from carbon-laden goods and services; ethical consumption practices)

Other possible perspectives on economies of detachment are most welcome.

**Appeal.** The special issue will have theoretical and political relevance to readers of *Consumption, Markets and Culture* for several reasons. Firstly, it continues the significant focus in the journal on new developments in market and consumer studies. Following this orientation, this special issue brings into focus the neglected but increasingly important issue of the arts of detachment in economic contexts. It offers the first sustained analysis of what it means to ‘let things go’ in market settings. Secondly, the special issue has a strong interdisciplinary focus that establishes a rich and rigorous theoretical conversation between economic sociology, STS, politics, cultural studies, and consumer research. Thirdly, the special issue is aimed at attracting empirical research that will bring into focus a range of fascinating cases like, for example, decarbonisation, unpackaged supermarkets, recirculating waste goods in second hand markets and so on. Detachment is a powerful practice that, in certain circumstances, is increasingly shaping society. Understanding the conceptual and practical complexities of detaching opens a wide range of research questions and possibilities in sociology, market and consumer studies.

## Submissions

Submitted papers must comply with the manuscript guidelines for *Consumption Markets & Culture* (<http://www.tandfonline.com/gcmc>) and should not exceed 10.000 words (references included).

Manuscripts should be submitted using the journal's ScholarOne Manuscript site (<https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/gcmc>). Indicate that the manuscript is a candidate for a special issue and choose "Economies of detachment" in the list of available options.

The closing date for submission is June 30 2019.

If you have any queries you can direct these to the guest editors: [helene.brembeck@cfk.gu.se](mailto:helene.brembeck@cfk.gu.se), [franck.cochoy@univ-tlse2.fr](mailto:franck.cochoy@univ-tlse2.fr), [G.Hawkins@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:G.Hawkins@westernsydney.edu.au)

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