

## Call for papers for the *Revue des Sciences Sociales* n° 77/2027

### “Minimalisms and body practices”

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Living without a car or in a tiny house; fasting or adopting a gluten-free, sugar-free or animal protein-free diet; practicing zero waste or decluttering; lightweight backpacking, barefoot running or disconnecting from digital self-quantification: what does it mean to do ‘with less’ or even ‘without’ in a society doubly marked by an increasing drive for ‘more and more’ and a growing awareness of resource scarcity? It is to this general question that the present editorial project aims to respond by examining the deliberate adoption of minimalist approaches through a specific prism: transformations of the body.

In the social sciences, some practices that are reflexive and critical of the ‘plus’ logic have already been considered: ‘voluntary simplicity’ (Alexander, 2011), ‘sobriety’ (Guillard, 2019), ‘degrowth’ (Latouche, 2006), ‘responsible consumption’ (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2018)... The underlying phenomena have also been the subject of more general conceptualisations, such as the ‘innovations through withdrawal’ (Goulet & Vinck, 2022) or ‘normative distance’ (Stroude, 2021). However, these terms are not synonymous, and it is ‘minimalism’ (Meissner, 2019) that we have chosen to retain and discuss here. From our point of view, this generic term has the merit of including a large number of social practices organised according to a logic of ‘less is more’: the idea is to do as well, better or even more with less or without. Minimalism is both a voluntary process, a dynamic of rearrangement through withdrawal, and a product of these dynamics. According to Dopierała (2017), minimalism is also characterised by a critical attitude towards consumerism, although ambivalent relationships with it can be identified. While minimalism has its origins in art (Meyer, 2004) and religion (where self-deprivation and asceticism have become ideal paths to spiritual development), it is also part of a broader trend towards the stylisation of consumption, which can become a lifestyle based on a search for emancipation and sometimes on a nostalgic relationship with a ‘lost’ or ‘deviant’ past.

Minimalism can have different meanings for those who practice it: it can have a political dimension, as in the attempt to reduce one's ecological impact by criticising consumerism and a capitalist model based on growth and accumulation. But it can also mean simplifying the material aspects of our daily lives in order to take charge of our individual well-being and optimise our personal resources. Marie Kondo, a Japanese consultant specialising in home organisation and author of million-selling books on personal development, could be a contemporary figure in this second direction. Her method is to get rid of the “superfluous” in order to keep only the “essential”, which is then ordered and highlighted in a refined space. As

we can see, minimalism is not necessarily reducible to an ecological quest or a frugal morality, and it can also have capitalist underpinnings (Sandlin & Wallin, 2022). This movement is linked to the market, and its adepts may be attracted by the promise of social distinction and self-optimisation (Fournier & Dalgarrondo, 2024).

The aim of this special issue is to take a critical look at the diversity of these forms of appropriation and expression of minimalism. The intention is to question the possible unity of these approaches behind their apparent multiplicity, whether in terms of terminology, purpose or means.

It should be made clear from the outset that this call is dedicated to chosen - and therefore not suffered - forms of minimalism. While research on vulnerability, precariousness and poverty are classic social science topics that have helped to shed light on the forced adoption of frugal lifestyles, the focus here is on deliberate forms of withdrawal, detachment or distancing. However, this does not exclude the ambivalence of minimalism, which can be perceived and asserted as deliberate while at the same time involving an objective reduction in the volume of resources (money, time, available space, etc.). Conversely, choices that appear to be entirely voluntary may be justified a posteriori, and their analysis may reveal hidden constraints. It therefore seems particularly heuristic to work on this tension between valuing less as an end in itself ('less is better') or as a means of optimisation ('less to do better'). This argues for understanding minimalism in its complexity as well as in its diversity: talking about minimalisms makes it possible to integrate the multiplicity of ways, aims and meanings that come together in the basic idea of doing without, doing less or doing with less.

But before being an idea, a rhetoric or a promise, minimalism is also a set of practices, skills and techniques. It is through the singular prism of body practices that we will consider the emergence of these different forms of minimalism. Whether it is a way of living, consuming, moving, eating or exercising (a non-exhaustive list of activities), engaging in a minimalist dynamic involves the body. It means learning new physical techniques, integrating new sensations and new ways of paying attention, developing different physical skills, engaging in different experiences and discovering new pleasures. Symmetrically, this leads to the deconstruction of embodied routines (Rigal, 2020), the inhibition of usual perceptions, the transformation of bodily patterns and the domestication of sensations that were originally destabilising. The body, in its plasticity and malleability, thus appears to be both a consequence and a stake in minimalism. No longer a suffered fate, it becomes a voluntary project (Shilling, 1993) and an important laboratory for self-transformation (Garcia *et al.*, 2024), a flesh-and-blood medium for experimentation and transition. What does minimalism do with the body? To what extent does the body enable (but also limit) the minimalist approach?

The contributions may address at least one of the following three areas:

### ***Theme 1: The promises of minimalism***

The first line of research focuses on the market of minimalism and, more specifically, on the promises that underlie practices aimed at doing without or with less: saving money, better physical and/or mental health, discovering new pleasures, active aging, self-care, reconnecting with nature, political engagement, preserving the environment, and so on. From this perspective, the aim is to identify the promoters of these promises, the minimalist opinion leaders and even moral entrepreneurs, and to analyse their discourses, their argumentative strategies, the values, beliefs and imaginaries they promote, as well as the controversies they generate. What is the role of science in minimalist arguments? Since the digital world is a

privileged space for the circulation of these promises, one of the objectives will be to study the contexts (websites, discussion forums, social networks, applications, etc.) in which minimalist practices are promoted and the ways in which bodies are performed, transformed and reinforced, especially in a logic of “incarnation”, when the body is supposed to speak the truth (Hauray & Dalgalarondo, 2019). Symmetrically, we will be able to question the forms of mediation as well as the plural receptions of these discourses of promise among ‘ordinary’ or ‘amateur’ minimalists. It will be possible to examine the aspirations, motivations and meanings invested by those who engage in minimalist practices. As suggested in the introduction, these practices may relate to utilitarian considerations of effectiveness and efficiency that are part of self-care projects, but also of self-optimisation and/or personal resource management. Can certain minimalist practices, because of their ascetic dimension, be considered as ‘technologies’ and ‘techniques of the self’ (Foucault, 1994)? Through these processes, men and women seek to transform their singular being and transform their life into a creation that fulfils certain stylistic criteria. In this case, the stylisation, even the aesthetisation, of everyday life may be based on the desire to do more with less. Minimalist approaches may also involve forms of self-discipline, spirituality, economic, ecological and/or ethical considerations, with various and renewed forms of politicisation. In particular, the complex set of individual and collective meanings that underlie the mechanisms of detachment and normative disengagement from dominant political models will be explored.

### ***Theme 2: Minimalism in practice***

Doing without or with less is probably not just a matter of reducing, withdrawing or disengaging (from material equipment, digital tools and interfaces, means of transport, part of our diet, etc.). It is also, and perhaps above all, a matter of learning to do things differently, of building new attachments or associations (Goulet & Vinck, 2012), which involves acquiring specific knowledge, know-how and even sensible skills (Boutroy, 2021; Madon, 2024). These must be analysed through the prism of material cultures (Julien & Rosselin, 2005), techniques of the body, changes in consumption habits and other reconfigurations of the individual’s relationship with his or her environment. The aim is twofold.

On the one hand, it will be a question of identifying the practical methods that underpin and support minimalist participation: what kind of learning does it involve? Where and how is it acquired? In praxeological or pragmatic terms, what does it mean to do without (objects, techniques, entities, intermediaries)? Does minimalism necessarily involve the implementation of a full-scale technical system, as in the case of domestic decluttering, which is based on the systematic application of principles and methods formalised by influential leaders (Gollnhofer *et al.*, 2024; Sandlin & Wallin, 2022)? What constraints and difficulties does this entail on a day-to-day life and, conversely, what resources are engaged and empowered in such a process? In this respect, attention could be paid to the social environment: between incentives and constraints, what role do significant others play in the adoption of minimalist practices? What is the role of communities of practice in formalising, sharing and incorporating minimalist know-how (Boutroy, 2022)?

On the other hand, while minimalism is a set of practices that should be described in detail, they are not necessarily adopted in the same way by the whole population. Who are the people who make a significant investment in a minimalist approach? Who are the people who promote the minimalist approach, assuming that it is part of a form of politicisation (of the everyday life) (Pruvost, 2024)? Who, conversely, maintain their commitment at a more individual, tacit or depoliticised level? Is the adoption of minimalism the privilege of the educated middle classes, who are said to be the most reflective about their bodies (Boltanski, 1971), their diets (Régnier *et al.*, 2006) and the environment (Coulangeon *et al.*, 2023), and therefore the most likely to

engage in self-improvement? Isn't doing with less, when the dominant norm is always more, a reconfigured form of distinction and singularisation (Reckwitz, 2020)? The question is particularly relevant for the 'aspirational classes' (Currid-Halkett, 2017), who are already rich in material goods but desire a cultural and spiritual surplus. Doesn't living a minimalist life, even temporarily, sometimes mean adding another experience to the list of moments to be lived in a secularised existence, in the context of an 'experience society', a new avatar of consumerism (Miles, 2024)? Or are we experiencing a variety of minimalist practices according to social conditions (class, gender, age, etc.)? Are men and women equally involved in minimalist approaches? What about specific bodily practices? One example is the process of getting rid of the bra (Dubois & Berg, 2022) or 'traditional' hygienic protection (sanitary towels or disposable tampons). In the latter case, the use of alternative methods during menstruation, which combines health and ecological considerations, involves sensory and intimate learning, which is described as a true 'conversion' (Dutrait, 2022). In addition, it is important to understand to what extent the practice of minimalism reflects gendered socialisation: does it reconfigure, destabilise or, conversely, consolidate the gender order? Furthermore, are there signs of a social diffusion or even democratisation of voluntary minimalism? What is the influence of (primary and secondary) socialising influences on the will and ability to adopt and maintain minimalist practices? Does the diversity of embodied dispositions lead to differentiated practices?

### ***Theme 3: Spaces and temporalities of minimalism***

Adopting a minimalist approach also reconfigures our physical relationship to time and space. Living in a tiny house, travelling without a car, living without a mobile phone, being a vegetarian or walking barefoot all imply an objective renewal of distances and durations, as well as the way we perceive them. Patience, constancy and perseverance, as opposed to haste and versatility, for example, seem to be fundamental qualities emphasised by minimalist bodybuilders (Favier-Ambrosini, Delalandre & Quidu, 2022). But is minimalism limited to slowness and, topographically speaking, to the immediate environment? Does becoming a minimalist mean detaching oneself in order to reconnect better with one's environment, whether urban (e.g. the reinvestment of public spaces by parkour practitioners) or natural (e.g. from a rewilding perspective, picking wild plants)? To what extent does the adoption of minimalist practices or lifestyles reconfigure relationships with others, with nature and with oneself, perhaps in terms of 'resonance' (Rosa, 2019)?

Thinking about the temporality of minimalism also means situating the (seemingly) contemporary interest in minimalism in the context of history, its cycles and its alternately maximalist and minimalist diastoles and systoles. To what extent do the minimalist methods disseminated and marketed in the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century not only borrow from earlier approaches, but also update them, both in their practical content and in their symbolic resonance, following the example of the "paleo" (Weedon & Patchin, 2021) or "primitivist" (Dalgarrondo & Fournier, 2020) imaginary? In the field of physical training methods, for example, Fortune & Attali (2022) show how 'MovNat', the art of moving in a natural environment, draws on Georges Hébert's 'natural method', formalised a century earlier, while adapting it to the needs of a renewed and globalised fitness market.

Being detached in order to be reconnected (to oneself, to others, to one's environment) must also be conceptualised as a long-term process, a dynamic, a becoming, a transition. The challenge here is to formalise careers towards, but also within, minimalism: how does one begin a minimalist approach? Are there certain periods in life that are more conducive to critically questioning the logic of more and more? What is the role of previous socialisation and/or major turning points, biographical ruptures, bifurcations (Bessin *et al.*, 2010) and other radical

conversion experiences? How do people maintain and develop their habit of minimalism? What factors support it? Do certain domestic and family configurations help or hinder people in sustaining the changes they have begun? Can we identify minimalist career trajectories? Does becoming a minimalist in one area (e.g. adopting a vegan diet) remain confined to that area, or does it cascade into other areas of life? Is this mechanism of accumulation, diffusion or ‘spillover’ effect systematic? How does it work? Can intra-individual dissonance between domains be tolerated? But do some people go beyond minimalism? If so, how and why (saturation, exhaustion, family changes, etc.)? Finally, the minimalist approach is seen here as a non-linear dynamic, a process with its own uncertainties, vicissitudes, disappointments and frustrations, not to mention its own drifts and setbacks. How do people change when they encounter minimalism and become minimalists? To what extent does this change take root in the body, helping to forge new dispositions? The aim is to explore the reconfiguration of relationships to time and space brought about by minimalism, on the assumption that the transformation of one rarely occurs without affecting the other.

The papers included in this special issue will contribute to one or more of the above themes, drawing on a variety of field studies, but all of them will highlight the importance of the body, its practices, techniques, emotions and transformations in the minimalist approach. These questions will be addressed through a variety of disciplinary approaches (sociology, history, anthropology, geography, political science, information and communication science) and theoretical models.

Authors are invited to submit their article proposal before 15 November 2025 in the form of an abstract of no more than 4,000 characters. The proposal should mention the focus of the article, the title, the theoretical framework, the empirical material, the field(s), the sources and the methodology. The abstract should also include a reference bibliography (in addition to the 4,000 characters) and a short presentation of the authors.

Proposals should be sent jointly to the journal’s address, [rss@misha.fr](mailto:rss@misha.fr), and to the four coordinators of the special issue:

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If the proposal is accepted, the original article (maximum 40,000 characters) must be submitted by 15 May 2026.

The issue will be published in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2027.

Authors are asked to comply with the journal’s editorial standards, which can be consulted online at <https://journals.openedition.org/revss/299>.

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