Post-critical perspectives in Social Movement Learning: The case of deconsumption

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to highlight the potential contributions of the post-critical perspective to social movement learning (SML). To achieve this aim, the study employs a thematic analysis of findings derived from a systematic literature review on deconsumption (an umbrella term understood as rejection of consumerism together with materialistic values prevalent in the Western consumer societies, encompassing movements such as voluntary simplicity, freeganism etc.). Identified themes are presented within the framework of post-critical pedagogy and analysed through its lens. This approach allows the researcher to demonstrate the implications and insights of the post-critical perspective in SML and adult education. This article argues that integrating the post-critical perspective into SML can yield a novel understanding of pertinent issues within this subfield. Such an application not only broadens the scope of adult education but also expands post-critical pedagogy itself.

Keywords: deconsumption, consumer society, ethical consumption, post-critical pedagogy, social movement learning

Introduction

In their *Manifesto for a Post-Critical Pedagogy* (2017), Hodgson, Vlieghe, and Zamojski attempt to name and describe new observable trends and currents of thought which go beyond the critical perspective currently dominating social sciences. Although the title of their work may evoke different connotations, the manifesto defines that which is already present, rather than proposing a set of actions directed at realizing some vision of the future. This does not make their work superfluous, as it sheds light on a way of thinking that is often overlooked and marginalized, yet valuable and worthwhile (Hodgson et al., 2017). This way of thinking has been called 'post-critical pedagogy'. Since 'post' means

'after' or 'later than', post-critical pedagogy is a perspective that comes after the critical one. Rooted in the critical tradition, it does not reject its postulates. It represents a kind of evolution – and not revolution (Hodgson et al., 2017).

The post-critical paradigm has gained traction in certain realms of adult education, particularly within higher education studies (Hodgson et al., 2020). However, its application remains unexplored in other domains, such as social movement learning (SML). This paper argues that integrating the post-critical perspective into SML can yield a novel understanding of pertinent issues within this subfield. Such an application not only broadens the scope of adult education but also expands post-critical pedagogy itself.

The primary objective of this paper is to elucidate the potential contributions of the post-critical perspective to SML, shedding light on its implications and insights. To achieve this goal, the article explores the phenomenon of deconsumption, defined as an active rejection of consumerism (Bauman, 2008), coupled with materialistic values prevalent in Western consumer societies (Baudrillard, 1998). While certain deconsumption practices have been discussed in the context of SML, linking deconsumption with adult education (Popławska, 2020; Walter, 2013; Etmanski, 2012; Sandlin & Walther, 2009), a more in-depth exploration within the realm of SML is warranted due to the movement's particular relevance to contemporary challenges such as climate change, consumerism (Bauman, 2008), and social inequality.

This study undertakes a thematic analysis of findings derived from a systematic literature review on deconsumption practices. By identifying key themes, the paper examines them through the lens of post-critical pedagogy, establishing connections with existing theoretical frameworks in the domain of post-critical studies. Through this analytical approach, the paper demonstrates how numerous deconsumption practices can be comprehended from a post-critical perspective. Given that the selection of a theoretical framework inherently prioritizes certain issues while overlooking others, the paper will only discuss those aspects of deconsumption which are deemed significant from the post-critical perspective.

The first segment of the paper will include an examination and reconstruction of the fundamental principles of post-critical pedagogy. Afterwards, the term 'deconsumption' will be explicated and contextualized alongside other pertinent theoretical concepts. Following this, the systematic literature review method will be outlined, accompanied by a concise portrayal of the research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques. The subsequent section will present the research findings within the framework of post-critical pedagogy. Lastly, a dedicated segment will be devoted to a discussion on potential implications for SML.

Post-critical pedagogy

The most effective approach to present the main characteristics of post-critical pedagogy seems to lie in its juxtaposition with the critical tradition. While the latter concentrates on negative aspects of the world, such as: oppression, struggle, discrimination, and alienation; placing utopian visions of the society in the future, post-critical pedagogy strives to highlight the positive dimensions of the present world, caring for them and nurturing them, thereby showcasing the potential for transformation in the here and now. Consequently, post-critical pedagogy focuses its reflection on those aspects of life which are overlooked and undervalued within the critical perspective, presenting them as intrinsically valuable. A fundamental difference between critical pedagogy and post-critical pedagogy lies, therefore, in their distinct attitudes toward the world. Critical pedagogy often stems from a sense of hatred towards the world, perceiving it as

overflowing with evil. In contrast, post-critical pedagogy adopts an attitude of love towards the world, affirming and cherishing its positive aspects, motivating individuals to explore and pass on these virtues to future generations (Hodgson et al., 2017). Vlieghe and Zamojski (2020) describe these two stances as mutually exclusive. The perspective of love involves an expansive view of the world, wherein one recognizes and celebrates its value. The attitude of hatred narrows one's focus to specific adversities to be challenged and overcome.

Post-critical pedagogy is closely associated with philosophy of responsibility – in contrast to critical tradition's alignment with philosophy of emancipation, as suggested by Zamojski (2014). Though not established as distinct schools of thought, these terms encapsulate certain philosophical orientations. The philosophy of emancipation perceives the world as oppressive and controlling, urging humanity to emancipate itself via reason and a suspicious attitude. This perspective employs a language of conflict, war, strategy, resistance, and oppression (Zamojski, 2014), which resonates with the previously examined attitude of hatred towards the world. Conversely, philosophy of responsibility regards the world as fragile and subject to human mercy. It impels humanity – which poses a threat to its state due to various technological advancements – to nurture and care for it (Zamojski, 2014). Humanity is, therefore, summoned to assume responsibility for the world. This necessitates the acknowledgment of the intrinsic good present in the world – a good that is endangered, vulnerable, and within the sphere of human influence (Zamojski, 2014).

It is crucial to emphasize that post-critical pedagogy does not oppose the critical tradition; instead, it acknowledges and appreciates its numerous accomplishments, particularly the unmasking of various mechanisms of oppression and discrimination (Hodgson et al., 2017). As noted by Ergas (2017): 'Education certainly requires a response to relevant issues of inequality and oppression raised by critical theorists; nevertheless, there is also a need to introduce a balancing positivity [...]' (p. 58). The authors of the manifesto assume a similar perspective: 'We could, of course, show more of the ways in which education today is marketized, privatized, data– and output–driven, and we will no doubt continue to do so in a certain manner. But we know this.' (Hodgson et al., 2017, p. 80). Post-critical pedagogy builds upon the insights of the critical tradition, which has effectively exposed numerous threats to the existence of positive aspects of the world. Due to these threats, these aspects are now placed in the centre of attention and nurtured (Hodgson et al., 2018).

The necessity of adopting the post-critical perspective in social science finds further validation in Latour's assertion that criticism has 'run out of steam', and lost its transformative potency (Latour, 2004). As has been noted, in the critical paradigm, the world is perceived as inherently filled with evil. This leads to a demand of continuous, never-ending work of exposure and unmasking. Consequently, the pursuit of an ideal state of the world remains elusive, as the reality opposed by criticism persists endlessly, with acts of oppression, power dynamics, and injustices being constantly reproduced[1] (Hodgson et al., 2018). Moreover, as suggested by researchers: '[…] we have no grounds to believe that debunking reality – giving further proof of the wrongs inherent to the world – will make people change their actions, and therefore, will change the world itself' (Hodgson et al., 2018, p. 17).

As has been suggested, post-critical pedagogy shares the critical belief in the potential for transforming and renewing the world (Hodgson et al., 2018). In this perspective, however, it is characterized by a state of 'hopeness' in the present. This attitude is different from naïve optimism since it does not entail uncritical acceptance of the current reality. Rather, it involves a genuine recognition of the value inherent in

humanity's present actions. 'Hopeness' denotes the capacity to perceive the good that exists in the here and now, a good that is deemed worthy of preservation and protection. The authors' preference for the term 'hopeness' over 'hope' arises from its nuanced meaning. 'Hope' inherently looks towards a future yet to be realized (Lewis, 2017, p. 32). 'Hopeness' is to be understood as 'hope without the hoped for' (Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2019, p. 150), which makes it consistent with post-critical emphasis on the present moment.

Another crucial aspect of post-critical pedagogy is its assertion that certain principles are worth defending, which stands in contrast to current post-structuralist relativism (Hodgson et al., 2017). It is, however, important to note that post-critical pedagogy is based on an attitude of 'principled normativity' rather than 'procedural normativity'. Principled normativity moves away from conventional approaches focused on achieving desired goals through adherence to recognized norms or established theories. It is not founded on *a priori* norms that reality must conform to. Instead, principled normativity emerges *a posteriori*, arising from performing activities perceived as valuable and meaningful. When guided by principled normativity, individuals adopt an attitude towards their actions which does not involve imposing a predetermined goal to be attained (Hodgson et al., 2018). It is centred on the premise: 'X is good and, therefore, deserves attention and care.' This stands in contrast to procedural normativity, characterized by the notion: 'X is good, so Y should be done to attain X.'

Post-critical pedagogy is further grounded on the concept of pedagogical hermeneutics. Unlike the dominant belief in the critical paradigm, which often regards community and commonality as unattainable, pedagogical hermeneutics presents an alternative perspective. It perceives the potential for communication and collaborative action as both feasible and carrying transformative potential. In this view, community is regarded as a task to be accomplished, something to be caused (Hodgson et al., 2018). Pedagogical hermeneutics rejects the notion that mutual understanding is unreachable and instead embraces the conviction that establishing a shared space is possible, even amidst individual differences (Hodgson et al., 2017).

There is a growing body of literature employing and discussing the perspective of post-critical pedagogy, and while the discourse surrounding its propositions is engaging and captivating, certain aspects hold greater relevance to the present article than others. Post-critical scholars have so far directed their attention mostly towards higher education (Hodgson et al., 2020), teaching and teachers (Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2019), or upbringing (Hodgson & Ramaekers, 2019), which might appear distant from the matter at hand. However, as will be shown in this paper, the outlined concepts can effectively be applied to the context of social movements and SML[2], broadening the range of subjects that fall within the scope of post-critical pedagogy.

Deconsumption

The term 'deconsumption' holds major significance in this paper and requires a clear explication, due to its relative novelty and potential lack of clarity. Contemporary post-industrial Western societies are commonly denoted as consumer societies in academic discussions (Golka, 2012; Bauman, 2005; Baudrillard, 1998). Members of these societies exhibit an inclination towards accumulation of wealth, particularly valuing novelty. Such attitudes have been met with critique from various theoretical viewpoints, including: postmodernism (Bauman, 2007; Jameson, 1997), degrowth theory (D'Alisa et al., 2020), posthumanism (Soper, 2012), ecofeminism (Cochrane, 2020), critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2012; Melosik, 2012), and others.

Central to grasping the meaning of deconsumption is Bauman's concept of consumerism (2008), which serves as a key reference for understanding the essence of deconsumption – an endeavour that involves its deliberate rejection (or an attempt to do so). There is a crucial distinction between 'consumerism' and 'consumption', based on two elements. Firstly, consumerism is rooted in the logic of constant dissatisfaction, perpetuating an insatiable cycle of constantly emerging needs. Secondly, the attributes inherent in consumption practices – such as: the cult of novelty and material acquisition, tendencies toward accumulation, the pursuit of immediate gratification and social prestige, prioritization of aesthetics over ethics, as well as an aspiration for individuality and originality – transcend their conventional boundaries, permeating other spheres of existence. As articulated by Bauman: '[…] the pattern of consumer behaviour gains hegemony in social and private life' (Bauman, 2008, p. 14). Thus, consumption patterns extend into numerous domains of life. These 'contaminated' areas encompass: interpersonal relationships, domestic spaces, identity construction, communal interactions, educational and developmental realms, professional pursuits, as well as socio-political commitment (Bauman, 2008).

Given that the prefix 'de-' commonly signifies reversal or undoing, the term 'deconsumption' is interpreted here as an endeavour to diminish, reverse, or unlearn consumerist behaviours. In essence, deconsumption entails a rejection of consumerism as defined by Bauman. This concept involves a deliberate refusal to participate in the perpetual cycle of dissatisfaction and acquisition inherent in consumerist patterns, aiming instead to attain contentment with fewer material possessions. Deconsumption constitutes a conscious disengagement from the spectacles of consumption and a principled resistance to the values and notions characteristic of consumerism. Therefore, it also involves a decontamination of the previously mentioned spheres of life.

In literature, this phenomenon – alongside related concepts – is also referred to as: 'ethical consumption' (Humphrey, 2016), 'subconsumption' (Baudrillard, 1998), 'anticonsumption' (Ziesemer et al., 2021), 'sustainable consumption' (Brough et al., 2016), 'green consumerism' (Akenji, 2014), and others. This terminological chaos is further amplified by differing interpretations from various scholars. At times, these terms are treated interchangeably, while in other instances, they evoke distinct connotations. To mitigate this confusion, the present paper adopts the term 'deconsumption' exclusively, avoiding its interchangeable use with other terms. The selection of this term is motivated by its affinity with the concepts of 'degrowth' and 'deconstruction'. Deconsumption, as understood here, entails a deconstruction of the prevailing mindset of consumerism, and endeavours to, at least partially, realize the ideas of degrowth. Importantly, deconsumption possesses a broader scope than ethical consumption, as its practitioners may be guided by self-centred motives, such as personal well-being and self-development, in addition to – or instead of – altruistic concerns.

It becomes evident that numerous contemporary social movements fall, to varying extents, within the scope of deconsumption. These movements encompass: voluntary simplicity, veganism, freeganism, minimalism, the zero-waste movement, eco-village initiatives, fair trade movement, and others. However, it is crucial to recognize that not all manifestations of these orientations can be categorized as deconsumption. For instance, an individual can adopt a vegan lifestyle without any major unlearning of consumerist practices due to the extensive availability of various vegan products. Consequently, members of these movements are classified as deconsumers only when their actions entail a rejection of consumerism (or an attempt to do so).
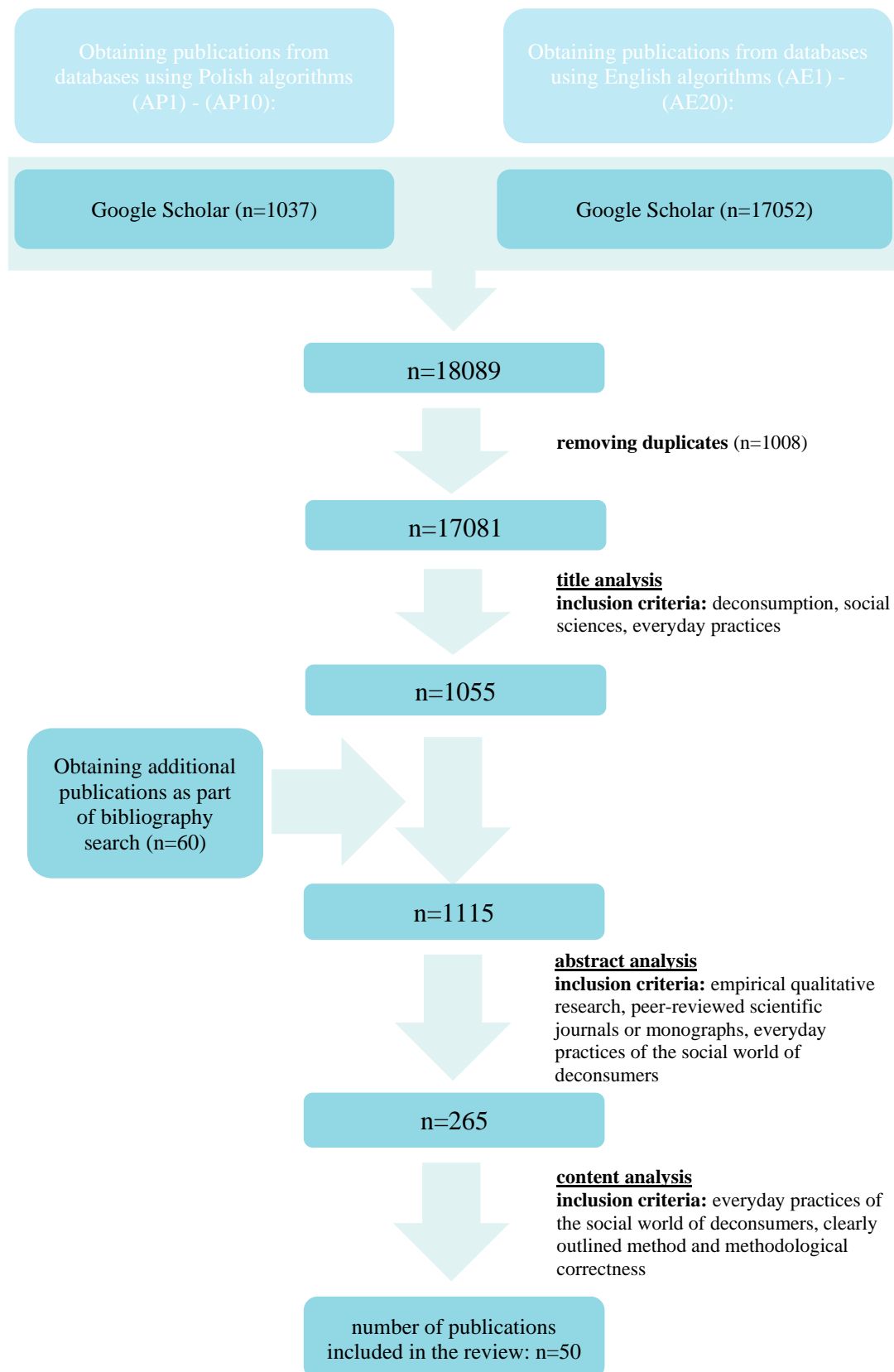
Method and research design

The literature review on the everyday practices of the social world of deconsumers was carried out employing the systematic review method (Petticrew & Rogers, 2006)[3]. The data corpus for the present research was constructed following the systematic review guidelines articulated by Makowska (2020) from October 16 to December 30, 2022. Initially, a systematic review of systematic reviews was carried out in order to shape the review's purpose: identifying studies concerning everyday practices of the social world of deconsumers. Research questions were formulated, including a pivotal one for this article: What are the principal themes derived from trans- and interdisciplinary investigations of deconsumers' everyday practices? The review's scope was defined in five tasks: (1) encompassing various manifestations of deconsumption (e.g., voluntary simplicity, freeganism, minimalism); (2) addressing diverse aspects of deconsumers' everyday practices, such as: values, social connections, self-presentation, artifacts, ideas, challenges, inspirations etc.; (3) encompassing English and Polish literature; (4) summarizing existing knowledge on the social world of deconsumers, highlighting research directions and gaps[4]; (5) promoting deconsumption discourse in education studies (pedagogy).

Subsequently, a pilot review (Kusztal & Piasecka, 2020) has been conducted to determine the inclusion/exclusion criteria for the review, which incorporated:

1. peer-reviewed journal articles or chapters in peer-reviewed scientific monographs
2. publications from 2012 onwards
3. social science research (e.g., sociology, psychology, pedagogy/ education studies, marketing, management, anthropology, media studies, cultural studies, political science, ethnography, development studies)
4. research on deconsumers' everyday practices
5. empirical qualitative research
6. works featuring well-defined methodology and methodological correctness

The pilot review unveiled terminological ambiguity in the context of deconsumption, as well as an interdisciplinary nature of this phenomenon, which influenced keyword selection and search algorithms. Initial research indicated the viability of limiting the search to the Google Scholar database due to its multidisciplinary nature and extensive records. In the following stages, a comprehensive review (October 18 - December 17, 2022) was conducted employing the established keywords, with research selection stages visualized in the following diagram:

Diagram 1. The Flow of Literature Search and Selection. Source: Own elaboration based on Mazur & Orłowska (2018).

Obtaining publications from databases using Polish algorithms (AP1) - (AP10):	Obtaining publications from databases using English algorithms (AE1) - (AE20):
Google Scholar (n=1037)	Google Scholar (n=17052)

n=18089

removing duplicates (n=1008)

n=17081

title analysis
inclusion criteria: deconsumption, social sciences, everyday practices

n=1055

Obtaining additional publications as part of bibliography search (n=60)

n=1115

abstract analysis
inclusion criteria: empirical qualitative research, peer-reviewed scientific journals or monographs, everyday practices of the social world of deconsumers

n=265

content analysis
inclusion criteria: everyday practices of the social world of deconsumers, clearly outlined method and methodological correctness

number of publications included in the review: n=50

The last stage involved data extraction followed by a quantitative, and then qualitative analysis and synthesis of research results, which allowed for the selection of key themes, exploration of current research directions and the state of knowledge, as well as insight into the issue of everyday practices of the social world of deconsumers.

(Post-critical) Research findings

In line with the paper's objective to explore deconsumer practices from the post-critical perspective, the presentation of results will be organized alongside the framework of post-critical pedagogy, which – on a more general level – includes: affirming positive aspects of the present, acknowledgment of the critical tradition, transformative hopeness in the present, pedagogical hermeneutics, principled normativity, and philosophy of responsibility.

As discussed, post-critical pedagogy seeks to affirm the positive dimensions of the present, based on an attitude of love towards the world. Taking into account numerous critiques directed at post-industrial consumer societies, and the widespread calls for sustainability due to environmental and societal concerns, the deconsumption movement can be construed as a positive phenomenon in the present. Everyday practices of deconsumers encompass various activities that seem to ignore the dominant consumerist cult of novelty and fashion, as well as the inclination to discard older possessions – as discussed by Bauman (2011). Deconsumers partake in producing their own goods for personal use (Anantharaman, 2022; Mendonça et al., 2020; Hoelscher & Chatzidakis, 2020; Duda, 2020; Kala et al., 2017; Kraleva, 2017; Carfagna et al. 2014; Kramarczyk, 2015; Brombin, 2015; Wilczak, 2016; Papaoikonomou, 2013; Portwood-Stacer, 2012; Isenhour, 2012). They engage in repairing or repurposing pre-owned items (Hoelscher & Chatzidakis, 2020; Mendonça et al., 2020; Duda, 2020; Papaoikonomou et al., 2016; Wilczak, 2016; Majdecka, 2013; Papaoikonomou, 2013; Isenhour, 2012; Portwood-Stacer, 2012), and redistribute unused possessions through diverse platforms as well as exchange chains (Wilczak, 2016; Bly et al., 2015; Chatzidakis et al., 2012; Isenhour, 2012). Their shopping habits are restrained, characterised by enhanced reflection and consideration during decision-making processes, often requiring additional time and effort (Saraiva et al., 2020; Duda, 2020; Pelikán et al., 2017; Kraleva, 2017; Zalewska & Cobel-Tokarska, 2016; Kramarczyk, 2015; Isenhour, 2012). They also exhibit indifference towards fashion trends and display a lack of esteem for widely endorsed brands, which typically enjoy a favourable status in dominant discourses. (Kramarczyk, 2015; Papaoikonomou et al., 2016; Papaoikonomou, 2013; Pelikán et al., 2017; Isenhour, 2012; Bly et al., 2015).

The emergence of these practices shows that deconsumers are able to think, imagine, and act 'otherwise', with some immunity to the dominant logic, which implies the processes of unlearning (Andreotti, 2009). While it is true that some deconsumers do make concessions (Anantharaman, 2022; Atkinson & Kim, 2014; Isenhour, 2012), it remains a fact that these practices, albeit intermittently followed, represent attitudes that diverge from the consumerist orientation. Consequently, these practices might be construed as positive aspects of the contemporary world – examples of different, more sustainable ways of existence. In contrast to the critical perspective that centres on negative aspects of consumerism, its omnipresence and inevitability, the post-critical standpoint can emphasise domains where a different way of life is possible, chosen and pursued in the present moment.

Within the post-critical framework, deconsumption can be viewed through the lens of Badiou's concept of 'event' (*l'événement*), which signifies an unforeseen occurrence

that remains inconceivable and absent within the confines of the established status quo or dominant discourse (Badiou, 2005). While deconsumption may bear resemblances to historical practices like asceticism and cynicism, its emergence within the logic of consumerism appears unpredictable and even 'impossible.' Vlieghe and Zamojski propose that the possibility of the 'impossible' emerges from the fact that the existing order is essentially a social construct rather than an immutable natural law (2019, p. 31), despite the apparent naturalization of culture, as discussed by Bourdieu (2004, p. 8).

Discussing the concept of *l'événement* and its impact on the established order requires the use of Badiou's idea of 'fidelity to the event.' When choosing to illuminate the realm of deconsumption, an inherent fidelity to the event of deconsumption is assumed. This entails ascribing notable significance to it, deeming it possible, and, perhaps inadvertently, disrupting the entrenched idea of consumerism being an all-encompassing issue (Badiou, 2005, p. 335). As outlined by post-critical scholars (Vlieghe, Zamojski, 2019, p. 31), it is crucial to unveil and accentuate *l'événement*, thereby explaining its meaning and importance for the world. Therefore, researchers who study and write about a certain *l'événement* themselves assume fidelity toward it, actively participating in its explication and affirmation.

Since fidelity to *l'événement*: 'creates something new (a counter-state, an exception) within the dominant order, not in opposition to it' (Vlieghe, Zamojski, 2019, p. 35), deconsumers exemplify it by harnessing existing opportunities within the dominant system to cultivate non-consumerist lifestyles. They use that which is available within the established order, without the necessity to escape it entirely. Evident illustrations include: the utilization of public transportation and bicycles (Anantharaman, 2022; Pelikán et al., 2017; Kraleva, 2017; Isenhour, 2012; Portwood-Stacer, 2012), propagation of deconsumption ideas and values through social media platforms (Mendonça et al., 2020; Przecherska, 2019; Wilczak, 2016; Zalewska & Cobel-Tokarska, 2016), and – most importantly – the resourceful practices of freegans capitalizing on urban waste abundance – a lifestyle contingent entirely on the wastefulness of city dwellers (Pelska, 2022; Barnard, 2016).

The notion that deconsumption can be regarded a positive phenomenon of the present world gains further traction as deconsumers themselves engage in discourse concerning various advantages stemming from their adopted lifestyle. Due to reduced consumption needs, they frequently curtail their work hours, simultaneously diminishing their engagement in shopping-related activities. This reallocation of time affords them extended periods of leisure, which they devote to pursuits such as hobbies, interests, interpersonal relationships (Lloyd & Pennington, 2020; Duda, 2020; Mendonça et al., 2020; Kala et al., 2017; Przecherska, 2019; Wilczak, 2016; Zaritska, 2015; Pelikán et al., 2015; Howell, 2013; Kramarczyk, 2015; Isenhour, 2012), and fostering a connection with nature (Kala et al., 2017; Zaritska, 2015). Another crucial implication of deconsumption is the enhanced capacity to identify personal needs, which is related to psychological well-being and a sense of an authentic life (Lloyd & Pennington, 2020; Kramarczyk, 2015). The absence of haste in daily affairs translates to heightened mindfulness during interpersonal interactions (Lloyd & Pennington, 2020). Furthermore, alignment with individual values and convictions brings deconsumers a sense of contentment and fulfilment (Kala et al., 2017; Wilczak, 2016; Zaritska, 2015; Howell, 2013). An increased sense of agency emerges as another frequently discussed benefit (Papaoikonomou & Alarcón, 2017; Wilczak, 2016; Carfagna et al., 2014; Lindeman, 2012; Papaoikonomou et al., 2012.). It, therefore, becomes evident that participation in deconsumption communities creates opportunities for personal growth, self-development, as well as informal and non-formal education, as documented by various studies (Anantharaman,

2022; Saraiva et al., 2020; Casey et al., 2016; Wilczak, 2016; Savio, 2016; Zaritska, 2015; Kramarczyk, 2015; Brombin, 2015; Cherry, 2014; Howell, 2013; Papaoikonomou et al., 2012.).

It is worth remembering, however, that the post-critical perspective is never possible without the critical one, and the awareness of evil is necessary to properly care for that which is good (Hodgson et al., 2017, p. 82). Since post-critical pedagogy builds upon the foundations laid by the critical tradition, the challenges faced by deconsumers should not be entirely ignored. Despite their adept utilization of certain aspects of the consumerist order, and their ability to align with their principles while still engaging with society, they encounter various infrastructural and social obstacles. Infrastructural challenges encompass issues such as: lack of affordable repair services (Wilczak, 2016), inadequate cycling infrastructure (Anantharaman, 2022), limited access to healthcare services and job opportunities in rural areas (Kraleva, 2017), and insufficient information about the production processes of various goods (Papaoikonomou & Alarcón, 2017; Shaw et al., 2016). Social obstacles include: difficulties in participating in consumption-centred social rituals (Boström, 2021); challenges in finding like-minded partners (Kowal, 2016); societal pressure to conform to consumer norms (Zalewska & Cobel-Tokarska, 2016; Isenhour, 2012); the notion of a societal 'glass floor' that sets minimal consumption standards (Boström, 2021); and gender-related stereotypes tied to consumption choices, such as the association of meat consumption with masculinity (Mycek, 2018).

Given the prevailing consumerist ideology in Western societies, the presence of these challenges is to be expected. The criticism directed at consumerism has been instrumental in giving rise to the deconsumption movement, rendering it challenging to investigate this phenomenon without any critical context. Nevertheless, irrespective of the obstacles encountered by deconsumers, the examination of their experiences maintains a post-critical essence, as they persist in realizing their ideals and leading non-consumerist lifestyles despite the difficulties. The post-critical perspective acknowledges this critical unmasking of hindrances while also highlighting the positive aspects that thrive in spite of them. Deeming deconsumption a 'positive aspect of the world' does not mean that one becomes ignorant of the various problems related to this movement, extensively discussed by critical researchers (see e.g.: Carrington & Chatzidakis, 2018; Littler, 2013). It is simply not the task of this paper to further the critical perspective but to transcend it. From a post-critical standpoint, the researcher adopts a perspective of understanding 'what' and 'how' deconsumers accomplish rather than solely focusing on the need for their emancipation or the evil intricacies of the system.

As has been mentioned, post-critical pedagogy's concern with societal transformation is characterized by the attitude of 'hopeness' in the present, asserting that the potential for change exists in the current moment rather than being reserved solely for some project of a desired future. The present-day transformative significance of deconsumers' actions might be illuminated by the concept of prefigurative politics. The term encapsulates the idea of enacting within the present the ideals and values one aspires to see in a future transformed society, without waiting for a 'revolutionary disruptive event' in the future (Monticelli, 2021). Rather than plotting a series of actions leading to a desired outcome, prefigurative politics involves immediate behaviours that align with the envisioned reality. In a similar vein, post-critical pedagogy draws from Rancière's notion of verification (1991), which entails practical engagement premised on the assumption of a different reality. Verification '[…] is about making something come true by affirming it in practice' (Hodgson et al., 2018, p. 13). Zamojski calls such activities 'interventions':

> Intervention in post-critical research consists of introducing by the researcher into the social status quo that which is non-existent and impossible from the point of view of critical knowledge about the human world. The researcher therefore disturbs this status quo by initiating actions that can be taken by other people in very different ways. Therefore, he or she makes a proposal of joint action of a certain quality to the subjects; actions based on specific axioms. If his proposal is taken up by others, these axioms will become true, i.e. they will be put into action, they will be realized in the actions of people (Zamojski, 2014, p. 15).

Likewise, deconsumers actively 'verify' the possibility of a lifestyle contrary to consumerism through their interventions – by living in accordance with their convictions within the present order, despite the prevailing belief in the entrenched dominance of consumerist norms. Such prefigurative politics is seen as particularly valuable in the post-critical perspective, which believes that only *l'événement* has the capacity to reconfigure the status quo. As stated by Zamojski (2014): 'From the point of view of the world, an event [*l'événement*] is an incomprehensible utopia, and from the point of view of people faithful to the event, it is the essential measure of reality, it is the starting point' (p. 10).

Therefore, daily practices of deconsumers might be viewed as exemplifications of prefigurative politics. They entail a rejection, an unlearning of the consumerist paradigm and instead embrace new norms and values. Notably, some individuals involved in the study perceive their routines as expressions of political involvement, asserting that their everyday actions lead to socio-political transformation (Papaoikonomou & Alarcón, 2017; Carfagna et al., 2014; Cherry, 2014; Papaoikonomou et al., 2012; Portwood-Stacer, 2012). At the same time, there are those who do not explicitly consider themselves politically active but still address societal needs by, for instance, establishing independent educational facilities and centres catering to mothers (Kala et al., 2017). As can be noticed, the socio-political engagement among deconsumers extends beyond their household routines. Scholars frequently identify instances of 'soft' activism within deconsumer communities. Such instances include: motivating others to adopt similar lifestyle changes (Costa et al., 2014), sharing knowledge and information with individuals not practicing deconsumption (Saraiva et al., 2020; Wilczak, 2016), arranging educational events like lectures and seminars (Papaoikonomou & Alarcón, 2017; Chatzidakis et al., 2012), participating in cooperative volunteering (Gowan & Slocum, 2014), creating independent organizations (Chatzidakis et al., 2012), and establishing independent product certification systems (Papaoikinomou, 2013). The validation of interpreting deconsumers' everyday behaviours as manifestations of prefigurative politics is further reinforced by their profound recognition of socio-political and economic problems related to consumerism (Duda, 2020; Gupta & Acharya, 2019; Farkas, 2017; Casey et al., 2016; Bly et al., 2015; Carfagna et al., 2014; Howell, 2013.), as well as the altruistic motivations reported by some of the research participants (Pelska, 2022; Gupta & Acharya, 2019; Kowal, 2016; Shaw et al., 2016; Bly et al., 2015; Howell, 2013).

Examining deconsumption through the lens of prefigurative politics and Rancière's concept of verification reveals an additional aspect of social transformation carried out by deconsumers. The establishment and cultivation of close-knit relationships and communities plays a central role in their actions. This aligns with the perspective of post-critical pedagogical hermeneutics, which asserts the feasibility of creating shared spaces and nurturing communal bonds, regardless of individual differences (Hodgson et al., 2017, p. 16). Perhaps the most basic form of community discussed within the reviewed research is represented by online groups that materialize through diverse social media platforms. These digital realms foster a sense of belonging often difficult to achieve in offline contexts (Mendonça et al., 2020; Zalewska & Cobel-Tokarska, 2016; Majdecka,

2013). Other research participants, however, concurrently engage in offline deconsumption communities (Mycek, 2018; Kraleva, 2017; Savio, 2016; Wilczak, 2016; Howell, 2013; Papaoikonomou et al., 2012; Chatzidakis et al., 2012). In line with posthumanist values, certain communities extend to include cared-for animals (Morris, 2022). The sense of community often transcends fellow deconsumers, as exemplified by Hungarian ecovillagers who perceive connectivity with the whole global sphere (Farkas, 2017). Deconsumption communities offer a supportive platform for idea exchange (Howell, 2013; Anantharaman, 2022; Savio, 2016; Casey et al., 2016; Wilczak, 2016; Brombin, 2015). Notably, mutual help constitutes a significant thread within these circles (Saraiva et al., 2020; Gowan & Slocum, 2014). Amid the competitive attitudes of Western capitalism, eco-villagers and freegans shift from individual consumption, learning collective production and cooperation (Farkas, 2017; Savio, 2016; Gowan & Slocum, 2014; Portwood-Stacer, 2012). The democratic essence of these communities is evident through their recurrent collective discussions aiming at finding common solutions to various problems (Casey et al., 2016; Chatzidakis et al., 2012).

Social bonds and the capacity for meaningful interpersonal relationships play crucial roles in deconsumers' lifestyles. These areas of life are treasured, and they contribute to a feeling of satisfaction with life. Research on deconsumers often explores the realm of profound interpersonal connections, valued for their own sake (Duda, 2020; Kala et al., 2017; Lee, Ahn, 2016; Dimova, 2016; Savio, 2016; Zaritska, 2015; Gowan & Slocum, 2014; Chatzidakis et al., 2013). Within this context, the capitalist celebration of individualism encounters criticism (Farkas, 2017). The significance of community-building in facilitating deconsumption lifestyles becomes evident. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, these communities also demonstrate a willingness to educate and include outsiders. Beyond merely verifying the feasibility of adopting a non-consumerist lifestyle, deconsumers also verify the possibility of establishing, nurturing, and valuing communities. In line with pedagogical hermeneutics, they reject any preconceived notions about the impossibility of communal living (Hodgson et al., 2017, p. 16), unlearning hyper-individualism. Instead, they operate on the premise that communal bonds are attainable within an individualistic society, effectively manifesting this possibility at the same time. The examination of this aspect of deconsumers' lives, therefore, holds considerable interest for researchers adopting a post-critical perspective, valuing commonality, and seeing community as a task to be accomplished (Hodgson et al., 2018).

The post-critical idea of principled normativity denoting actions undertaken for their intrinsic value rather than their potential outcomes, becomes apparent in the attitude of certain deconsumers who recognize the adaptive capacity of the capitalist economy in response to evolving social realities and alternative consumer orientations. While research participants actively partake in socio-political endeavours, they acknowledge the limitations of their actions in inducing sweeping societal change at a macro level. Their continuation of the deconsumption lifestyle stems from the fact that it allows them to reproduce these alternative practices within the system. This is deemed valuable in itself due to the agency, responsibility, reflexivity, and heightened life satisfaction it engenders (Portwood-Stacer, 2012). Hence, deconsumption need not exclusively be construed as a means to an end – as a pursuit of a desired sustainable future – and evaluated primarily based on its macro-scale impact. The post-critical concept of 'pure means', introduced by Agamben, illustrates this attitude well. According to the researcher, human activity might be viewed either instrumentally, as means *to* a specific end, or as 'pure means', i.e. means *without* an end (Agamben, 2000; see also: Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2020). Embracing a post-critical stance may guide researchers away from fixating on instrumental assessments

(regarding the impact of deconsumption movement on the world), and instead prompt an emphasis on various positive aspects of this lifestyle, appreciating it as a value in its own right.

It might be observed that the theme of responsibility and ethics of care emerges within the reviewed literature, establishing a strong connection between the subject of deconsumption and the post-critical philosophy of responsibility. As previously noted, a significant number of deconsumers frequently advocate altruistic principles, actively concerning themselves with the welfare of animals, fellow humans, and the planet itself (Pelska, 2022; Gupta & Acharya, 2019; Kowal, 2016; Shaw et al., 2016; Howell, 2013). Nature is perceived as both valuable and fragile, with humans considered its integral components entrusted with the duty of care. Deconsumers transcend the conventional anthropocentric worldview, transitioning towards a more posthumanist perspective, wherein humanity is regarded as an intrinsic part of the environment. Nature ceases to be treated instrumentally but is respected instead (Kunchamboo et al., 2017; Kraleva, 2017; Brombin, 2015; Howell, 2013). The concept of 'new materialism' also finds mention, denoting the restoration of the interconnected relationship between objects, individuals, and the natural world (Carfagna et al., 2014). Consistent with the perspective elucidated by Zamojski (2014), deconsumers acknowledge the presence of the good in the world, the good characterized by its vulnerability and susceptibility to human influence; the good for which humanity is responsible. In the context of deconsumers, this extends to nature and animals, but also beyond – encompassing social bonds and human agency.

Contributions to SML

The foregoing discussion has already deleneated various instances of SML within the context of deconsumption. These instances encompass, among others, such activities as: unlearning the logic of consumerism, and learning (or teaching) about its hazards; fostering self-awareness through the recognition of personal needs; nurturing reflexivity and critical thinking by expanding the knowledge of socio-political, economic, and environmental intricacies linked to consumption; acquiring new skills in the area of repairing, redistribution and production of goods; learning communal life by engaging in the formation of social support networks and democratic communities; unlearning the anthropocentric logic inherent in capitalism; and so on.

It is also worth mentioning additional SML-related endeavors, such as: informal instruction in the form of establishing normative frameworks adhered to by community members (Pelska, 2022; Savio, 2016; Majdecka, 2013), as well as the deployment of artifacts as moral reminders (Barnard, 2016). Physical space and artifacts also serve as catalysts for reflexivity enhancement. Research on Irish eco-villagers unveils practices like placing stickers depicting power plant pollution next to light switches or using large rocks to weigh down trash bin lids. These actions instigate moments of reflection within daily routines, ensuring a sustained consideration of the costs associated with production and consumption, preventing them from receding into the background (Casey et al., 2016). This aligns with McGregor's (2014) non-anthropocentric perspective on SML, positing that space and artifacts also play a role in the dynamics of social movement learning.

From the post-critical standpoint, the informal and non-formal educational practices of deconsumers can be interpreted as manifestations of their attitude of love towards the world, which is understood as a perpetual commitment requiring continuous effort and responsibility (Hodgson et al., 2017), and a desire to present that which is loved to the broader world (Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2019). Deconsumption undeniably demands a

significant investment of time and effort, involving activities such as: thorough research (Lloyd & Pennington, 2020; Papaoikonomou & Alarcón, 2017; Shaw et al., 2016; Costa et al., 2014), modification of one's habits (Kramarczyk, 2015), acquisition of necessary knowledge (Mendonça et al., 2020; Cherry, 2014; Papaoikonomou & Alarcón, 2017), and the like. Themes of engagement, care, and learning consistently emerge across diverse studies addressing the phenomenon of deconsumption.

The principal contribution of the post-critical perspective to SML seems to lie in its approach to social transformation and research subjects. Post-critical pedagogy views social movement participants as articulating and realising a collective vision or ideal in the present, echoing Eyerman and Jamison's concept of 'cognitive praxis' (1991; also referenced in Leung, 2011). A notable distinction, however, aside from the emphasis on cognition, is that the cognitive perspective remains inherently instrumental. Eyerman and Jamison (1991) discuss the utopian mission of social movements, wherein new knowledge generated through cognitive praxis is considered a means to an end – a potential catalyst for broad societal transformation, representing steps towards a larger, albeit elusive, objective. It embodies an attitude of hope rather than post-critical 'hopeness' (hope without the hoped-for). As has already been highlighted, in the post-critical perspective deconsumption does not have to be viewed as a pursuit of a desired sustainable future or assessed based on its macro-scale impact; it can be treated as valuable in itself.

The post-critical perspective aligns closely with Finger's (1989) viewpoint, opposing the instrumentalization of individuals who constitute 'vehicles of modernisation' and advocating for a shift in adult education where personal transformation is regarded as a seed for social transformation. While the apparent opposition to the instrumental approach is reminiscent of the post-critical perspective, it differs from it in at least one important aspect. With the concept of pure means (Agamben, 2000), post-critical pedagogy rejects any form of instrumentalization, allowing the SML researcher to forgo utilitarian assessments. Whereas Finger (1989) postulates that individual transformation *leads to* social transformation, the post-critical researcher may contend that individual transformation *is* social transformation – social transformation takes place simultaneously with an individual one. This understanding draws inspiration from Rancière's concept of verification as discussed earlier: rather than waiting for a different reality, one assumes and acts as if that reality were already true, thereby affirming this truth in practice. The notion that individual transformation is synonymous with social transformation aligns closely with the assumptions of many NSM scholars who '[…] have assumed the individual and the collective as two opposite ends of a spectrum in their conceptualisations of collective learning' (Kuk & Tarlau, 2020, p. 599).

The post-critical concept of *l'événement* introduces an additional dimension to SML: the role of the researcher. As previously noted, fidelity to the event is not exclusive to the participants of a social movement; researchers studying these movements also exhibit fidelity to the event, actively engaging in the SML process by dedicating care and attention to the movement and disseminating knowledge about it. The researcher can, thus, be considered an active participant of the SML process. Taking the example of deconsumption, the researcher, by highlighting peripheral aspects of the world that defy the dominant logic of consumption, performs a form of intervention. In much the same way that deconsumption can be viewed as *l'événement*, research on deconsumption also qualifies as *l'événement* because it transcends the predominant emphasis on critiquing the contemporary consumerist paradigm. Scholars investigating deconsumption demonstrate fidelity to the event of deconsumption by introducing innovative perspectives within the prevailing scholarly order (Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2019).

When examining SML from the post-critical perspective, it becomes apparent that the focal points are not centred around power dynamics, oppression, and emancipation. While the rich critical tradition continues to unveil and critique various instances of the reproduction of oppression and inequality, as has been done by numerous SML theorists (Kuk & Tarlau, 2020), a complementary role for the post-critical perspective emerges. It seeks to provide counterbalance by highlighting, preserving, and affirming that which is deemed valuable: hopeness in the present, socio-political engagement, democratic decision-making, self-efficacy, reflexivity, community building, mutual support, responsibility, care for the world, and so on. Such an approach to social movements ensures that these aspects do not become overlooked or neglected in the relentless pursuit of unmasking concealed oppressions.

Lastly, it is imperative to acknowledge that this paper serves as a preliminary exploration into the integration of the post-critical perspective into SML. Its purpose is to extend an invitation to fellow researchers, encouraging their participation in applying this framework and delving deeper into its potential implications.

Notes

[1] This might be observed in the reproduction of the inequality of power in classrooms where teachers are seen as emancipators and students as being in need of emancipation from an outside source (Lewis, 2017, p. 24). Such a reproduction has also been partially discussed by Freire (2005) in his concept of the banking model of education.

[2] It should be noted that certain post-critical concepts have been omitted in this paper due to their irrelevance to the matter at hand.

[3] The method has been elaborated on in an earlier paper discussing other results of this literature review (see: Szyszka, 2023).

[4] The present paper does not discuss gaps in deconsumption research. Those have been discussed elsewhere (see: Szyszka, 2023).

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Appendix 1

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