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Abstract

Decluttering is a social phenomenon that continues to be practiced in modern culture. It is the practice of reducing an individual's own possessions due to numerous factors such as freeing up one's own living space, detachment of ownership towards the loss of purpose of the item of the owner, and current economic conditions that necessitate removing materials from the home. This phenomenon has led to multiple individuals engaging in personal bartering and reducing the demand from different companies to create more products, thus discouraging them from continuing to produce goods to be sold to the public. This paper argues that decluttering functions as micro-level praxis of social ecology. By engaging in the intentional reduction of personal possessions, the individual performs a critical response to the imperative of the capitalistic framework towards production through a change of perspective towards a social-ecological act. Bookchin's social ecology lays the foundation of the research through his discussion on the relationship between nature and society, the social hierarchy and the domination of nature, the development of a "grow or die" mentality, and the call for an ecological society. This paper argues that decluttering is fundamentally a micro-level praxis of social ecology wherein a localized lifestyle choice becomes foundational towards a social-ecology approach to one's own possessions and perspective on material ownership. This praxis allows the individual to challenge hierarchical consumption patterns and foster communal ecological processes that would greatly benefit the individual and the environment.

Keywords: *decluttering, social ecology, micro-level praxis of social ecology, normative ecology, minimalism*

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INTRODUCTION

Decluttering is defined as the process of removing excess clutter. It is a household task that is part of organizing one's own space and living as minimally as possible.[1] The history of decluttering can be traced back to the ancient art of Feng Shui, wherein it has been growing popularity of minimalism and follows the trends in architectural and interior design.[2] But in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, minimalism has been used increasingly in relation to consumerism as well as decluttering which saturated individuals with products. At its core, Minimalism involves a deliberate reduction in ownership and a rejection of overconsumption, which allows individuals to prioritize their well-being and find deeper satisfaction in their daily lives.[3] It is not merely about physical decluttering or reduced consumption; rather, it offers a wide range of benefits, such as finding joy in a simpler lifestyle, valuing time through more purposeful use, and achieving financial savings through intentional spending.

Over time, the concept of minimalism transitioned into the act of decluttering, which became accepted as an emotional, psychological, and spatial process. The process of decluttering is commonly made up of three fundamental steps:

> In a first step of the decluttering process, even if only for a few seconds, goods are selected, examined, and reflected upon in terms of their usefulness and (personal) value. In this step, it is often necessary to consider the value of goods for other members of the household. This can be accompanied by negotiation processes about whether to keep things or not. In a second step, some of the goods are removed from their usual place of storage, while others are put back. Often, the returned goods are then re-sorted and re-ordered. After this selection process, the phase of disposal or transfer takes place as a third step. While a large part of the goods will probably be disposed of, it is also conceivable that goods are resold or given away. It can be assumed that there are very different contexts and situations in which decluttering takes place.[4]

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1 Viola Muster, Samira Iran, and Marlene Münsch, "The Cultural Practice of Decluttering as Household Work and Its Potentials for Sustainable Consumption," *Frontiers in Sustainability* 3 (2022): 958538, 1–2, https://doi.org/10.3389/frsus.2022.958538.

2 Ashmita Thakur and Deepti Pande Rana, "Minimalist Apartment with Feng Shui Philosophy Interior," *International Journal of Landscape Planning and Architecture* 9, no. 2 (2023). Accessed November 28, 2024. https://architecture.journalspub.info/index.php/JLPA/article/view/1128.

3 Anna V. Wilson and Silvia Bellezza, "Consumer Minimalism," *Journal of Consumer Research* 48, no. 5 (February 2022): 798–803, https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucab038.

4 Muster, Iran, and Münsch, "Cultural Practice of Decluttering," 2.

This particular process is one taken by an individual's own agency, influenced by their environment as well as their relationship with multiple factors that affect their livelihood, and allows them to reflect on the effects of decluttering on their own lives. Research over the years, despite not being connotated as decluttering, has led to the current phenomena seen today. Catherine Roster, in her research on the dispossession of consumers in the early 2000s, takes a close look at dispossessing people's emotions, cognition, and behavior as consumers bestow personal meaning on objects they give up. It is important to realize that dispossession entails more than ridding oneself of clutter or discarding excess material things. Roster further discusses that the process of letting go of possessions involves a psychological trade-off. Individuals must decide which items remain essential to their sense of self and which have become obsolete or irrelevant to their current identity.[5] For most individuals, letting go and constructing identity are intertwined with the objects presented as physical evidence of one's concept of life. In this particular aspect, Roster's discussion can be seen as early manifestations or inclinations to possess a growing distraction to excess that show actions of decluttering even at the beginning of the 21st century.

The early conceptualizations of decluttering continued through Niko Paech, to see a form of liberation in letting go of personal possessions. He argues that the reduction of material throughout is fundamentally an individual endeavor, wherein the practice of decluttering serves as both a rejection of excessive consumption and a deliberate movement toward personal autonomy and resource sufficiency.[6] Peach envisions a post-growth economy with less consumption, localized production, and sustainable living that challenges the dominant economic model of growth. He believes that in order to free ourselves from material excess we must rethink production and consumption patterns as well as our excessive way of life through voluntary simplicity.

One of the biggest contributors to the discourse and growing body of studies on decluttering is Marie Kondo and her works, particularly her seminal work, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying: The Japanese Art,* which introduced decluttering, inspiring an approach to organizing that united functional organization with deep psychological and emotional change. Kondo's method for organizing and decluttering suggests that one should keep only that which sparks joy for them. By focusing on what to keep, we learn to throw away things

5 Catherine A. Roster, "Letting Go: The Process and Meaning of Dispossession in the Lives of Consumers," in *Advances in Consumer Research*, vol. 28, ed. Mary C. Gilly and Joan Meyers-Levy (Association for Consumer Research, 2001).

6 Niko Paech, *Liberation From Excess: The Road to a Post-Growth Economy* (Oekom, 2012), 75.

that we do not need but also the things we want to cherish. Kondo believes that clutter clearing is not just a tidying process but that it is a life-changing process that reconnects people with their values. She explains that the question of which possessions to keep is ultimately a reflection of one's desired way of life.[7] By framing decluttering as an introspective journey, Kondo elevates it from a chore to an act of self-discovery and empowerment. Kondo's work has helped make a structured yet emotional approach to minimalism popular around the world in the practice of decluttering. She combines elements from Japanese culture, where there is a mutual appreciation for simplicity and harmony.

Apart from individual activities, Kondo's practices have seeped into popular culture, inspiring television shows, social media trends, and the minimalist lifestyle. Kondo further elaborated that "When you put your house in order, you put your affairs and your past in order, too."[8] Her work highlighted the multiplicity of the effects of decluttering as a personal and environmental connection to the self that has adversely affected even an individual's approach to one's own career. This ideology connects decluttering with environmental consciousness and makes it ethical due to intentional living. The projects taken up by her works give millions a chance to regain control of their physical and mental spaces with a simple blueprint to tackle today's problems of excess and disorganization.

Decluttering is therefore a routine and essential practice to maintain an active role in consumer society. It is a rising phenomenon that even businesses that heavily advertise new products do not provide customers with much guidance or assistance when it comes to getting rid of items. It's also noteworthy that decluttering is still a relatively "young phenomenon" and has not been well studied in household work studies and its positive effect on the environment. Due to this lack of attention to its effects, the paper aims to highlight that decluttering manifests the goals of social ecology discussed by Murray Bookchin, in which humans' relationships and social situations directly affect the environment.

Bookchin's Social Ecology

Murray Bookchin, in his work "Social Ecology and Communalism," heavily focused on the relationship between humanity's social structures and cultures and the environment, and how that particular relationship would

7 Marie Kondo, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing* (Ten Speed Press, 2014), 34.

8 Marie Kondo, *Spark Joy: An Illustrated Master Class on the Art of Organizing and Tidying Up*. (Ten Speed Press, 2016), 25.

expose the root cause of our environmental problems in society. In his work, he has stated that:

> Social ecology is based on the conviction that nearly all of our present ecological problems originate in deep-seated social problems. It follows, from this view, that these ecological problems cannot be understood, let alone solved, without a careful understanding of our existing society and the irrationalities that dominate it. To make this point more concrete: economic, ethnic, cultural, and gender conflicts, among many others, lie at the core of the most serious ecological dislocations we face today – apart, to be sure, from those that are produced by natural catastrophes.[9]

Our problems are social, human-centered problems that have significant impact on the environment. Most of the time, such issues are the outcomes of the exploitation of natural resources. The products made for various social movements, for instance, are neither purchased nor used more than once A scenario is when persons create goods like t-shirts, banners, and buttons for activism, which rely on industries like fossil fuel-powered textile manufacturing. These products frequently incorporate synthetic materials and dyes that cause pollution, showing how even movements for justice or equality can adversely affect the environment.

These issues stem from a social structure that dominates the discourse that solving humanity's issues must come before anything else, and this leads to another anthropocentric approach to our environment, but this time, it is justified by the justification of our abuse towards the environment as what is best for humanity to solve its problems at the moment. Bookchin further elaborates that "The cast of minds that today organizes differences among human and other life-forms along hierarchical lines of 'supremacy' or 'inferiority' will give way to an outlook that deals with diversity in an ecological manner – that is, according to an ethics of complementarity."[10] An example of this would be discourses on green capitalism, in that despite its appearance as environmentally friendly, it still demonstrates a social structure that dominates the environment. Green capitalism does not reject the anthropocentric view but rather indicates that smarter and more sustainable capitalism will lead to smaller footprints.[11] Green products and renewable energy tradable commodities allow nature to be valued only for its economic benefits to humans. Big solar farms or biofuel plantations

9 Murray Bookchin, *Social Ecology and Communalism* (AK Press, 2007), 1.

10 Murray Bookchin, "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought," in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism: With a New Introduction* (Black Rose Books, 1986), 77.

11 James Gustave Speth, *The Bridge at the Edge of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability* (Yale University Press, 2008), 63.

often take the place of local ecosystems to be sustainable, but at the expense of the bigger issue at hand. Bookchin reinforces this by stating that:

> The social sources of the ecological crisis, not simply by personalistic forms of consumption and investment that often go under the oxymoronic rubric of 'green capitalism.' The present highly cooptative society is only too eager to find new means of commercial aggrandizement and to add ecological verbiage to its advertising and customer relations efforts.[12]

For the sustainability of life on Earth, humanity needs to develop a respectful and mutually beneficial relationship with nature. This method acknowledges the interdependence of human systems and natural ecosystems, disputing the notion of humans ruling over nature. When we have respect for each other, we can work towards sustainable practices that stay within our ecological limits. Bookchin elaborates on this relationship, stating that:

> The truth is that human beings not only belong in nature, they are products of a long, natural evolutionary process. Their seemingly "unnatural" activities – like the development of technology and science, the formation of mutable social institutions, highly symbolic forms of communication and aesthetic sensibilities, and the creation of towns and cities – all would have been impossible without the large array of physical human attributes that have been eons in the making, be they the large human brain or the bipedal motion that frees human hands for making tools and carrying food.[13]

People have believed that nature was made for them and that they had a right to use it for a long time. So, they have always dominated it. As a result of this domination, nature has suffered a lot. The misuse of natural resources causes serious harm to the Earth. Bookchin elaborates that "To be sure, human second nature, in inflicting harm on first nature, created no Garden of Eden. More often than not, it despoiled much that was beautiful, creative, and dynamic in the biotic world, just as it ravaged human life itself in murderous warfare, genocide, and acts of heartless oppression. Social ecology maintains that the future of human life goes hand in hand with the future of the nonhuman world, yet it does not overlook the fact that the harm that hierarchical and class society inflicted on the natural world was more than matched by the harm it inflicted on much of humanity."[14] This results in soil erosion, deforestation, and the extinction of species. This tendency to look at the environment as a resource to solve socio-economic problem increases the impact even more. For example, large-

12 Bookchin, *Social Ecology and Communalism*, 2.

13 Bookchin, *Social Ecology and Communalism*, 3.

14 Bookchin, *Social Ecology and Communalism*, 8.

scale farming helps feed people, but because of over-farming and pollution, it has adversely affected soil health and water systems. Similarly, relying on fossil fuels to meet energy requirements has contributed to increasing levels of CO2 in the atmosphere, which has led to global warming. Human-centered approaches ignore the Earth's limited ability to regenerate, leading us to unsustainable practices.

Social ecology advocates the deconstruction of these repressive powers to allow for an egalitarian society in which human communities live harmoniously with nature. For Bookchin, ecological sustainability cannot be separated from social justice, which entails radical, complex change in social and ecological systems. He further elaborates that "Social ecology is an appeal not only for moral regeneration but, and above all, for social reconstruction along ecological lines. It emphasizes that, taken by itself, an ethical appeal to the powers that be, based on blind market forces and ruthless competition, is certain to be futile."[15]

Bookchin's social ecology urges a radical shift in the relationship between humankind and nature: we must instead rely upon the self instead of the environment to solve human problems. He emphasizes that "Social ecology is an appeal not only for moral regeneration but, and above all, for social reconstruction along ecological lines. It emphasizes that, taken by itself, an ethical appeal to the powers that be, based on blind market forces and ruthless competition, is certain to be futile."[16] Social ecology believes that ecological problems are caused by social, hierarchical, and exploitative structures. These problems can only be solved by dismantling such structures. Social ecology aims for responsibility for one's environment and building a community centered around cooperation, equality, and ecological health.

In conjunction with social ecology, Bookchin would also conceptualize the idea of communalism. For Bookchin, communalism would describe the political aspect of social ecology that seeks to possibly replace the capitalistic framework of consumption with a more democratic and personal assemblies between individuals. He further stated that:

> It seeks to radically restructure cities' governing institutions into popular democratic assemblies based on neighborhoods, towns, and villages. In these popular assemblies, citizens - including the middle classes as well as the working classes - deal with community affairs on a face-to-face basis, making policy decisions in a direct democracy, and giving reality to the ideal of a humanistic, rational society.[17]

15 Bookchin, *Social Ecology and Communalism*, 10.

16 Bookchin, *Social Ecology and Communalism*, 12.

17 Bookchin, *Social Ecology and Communalism*, 99.

The concepts of social ecology and communalism would integrate individual ownership and agency towards a moral agency of the many, wherein resources are managed on the basis of the principle of the term defined by Bookchin as "usufruct," which is defined as the ethical right to use both resources and land itself, is centered on a person's necessities rather than its possessive nature that is entailed within the idea of private property.[18] In developing the idea of communalism, Bookchin believed that social ecology would provide the first steps towards using one's personal agency towards a systematic change that would restructure the approach to ecological approaches and issues in society.

While Bookchin's social ecology primarily addresses a macro-level restricting of the ecological approach through communalism, the paper proposes that the act of decluttering itself would function as a micro-level praxis of social ecology. In this context, the term "micro-level praxis" would refer to the individual and intentional actions taken within the private sphere, specifically the household, that would mirror and support the macro-level goals of the social-ecological changes that expound on Bookchin's concepts from a personal level that would affect the perception and approach towards personal possessions set upon by the capitalistic hierarchy of domination.

Decluttering As a Manifestation of Micro-Level of Social Ecology

Murray Bookchin's social ecology is naturally aligned with decluttering practices because it disrupts hierarchies that are the root cause of overproduction and overconsumption. Bookchin expounded that these two structures are responsible for ecological damage since they encourage humans to abuse nature. Decluttering challenges the consumerist idea that drives overproduction by urging people to ask themselves if having it all is really necessary. This helps avoid unsustainable production cycles that extract from nature, reflecting the social ecologist's vision of social and ecological just societies. When using minimalist principles to declutter, it can disrupt the commodification of the environment as sufficiency rather than surplus is advocated.

The shift from surplus to sufficiency is more than a lifestyle adjustment: it becomes a direct disruption of hierarchical consumption patterns that have dominated how consumers would perceive their possessions. These patterns are a manifestation of what Bookchin explained as a system of domination that influences both human society and our relationship with the world.[19] In

18 Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Cheshire Books, 1982), 50.

19 Bookchin, *Social Ecology and Communalism*, 8-10.

decluttering, the individual is able to separate themselves from the materials they own and disassociate their possessions from their sense of being. This act of decluttering becomes a micro-level act towards the dominant perspective of possessions in favor of a social and ecological perspective that becomes a foundation towards a social, ecological, and communal approach to the world. The micro-level praxis in decluttering would primarily present itself in two manifestations: First, a manifestation of a personal social movement. And secondly, a manifestation that becomes a challenge to the hierarchical consumption patterns of capitalism through decluttering.

Decluttering as a Manifestation of Personal Practice towards Social Movement

Decluttering as a personal social movement is the foundation of the micro-level praxis of social ecology. This particular personal act shared by individuals stems from compulsive buying and seeing the ramifications of these impulses affect themselves and others. This accumulation, according to Meissner, brings about an excess in our lives, one that is instigated by what is fed into our attention: the internet and the commercial media.[20] It is something we experience ourselves and becomes a reflective action to refuse to spend as well as refuse to ride the wave of consuming and purchasing items from our impulsiveness. By refusing to purchase unnecessary items, it would lessen the demand and therefore lessen the damage the environment suffers due to oversupply and manufactured demands. In this sense, the personal practice of decluttering becomes the basis for our perception and action towards future purchases and valuation of our possessions, and in the process, we become critical towards the capitalistic nature of ownership and its effect on the environment.

A society based on mutual respect and justice, as called upon by Bookchin, could be driven by the personal practice of decluttering and transformed into a social movement. Decluttering as a personal practice connects through individual behavior and relation to one's own environment and to others, towards the cultivation of possessions that forces a systematic change and approach to different producers of the world. Implications of these were also present, as presented by Sandlin and Wallin in their 2021 study, wherein the COVID-19 pandemic showed how individuals being kept inside their homes became more aware of the items and possessions they had at home in relation

20 Miriam Meissner, "Against Accumulation: Lifestyle Minimalism, De-Growth and the Present Post-Ecological Condition," *Journal of Cultural Economy* 12, no. 6 (2019): 1–16, https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2019.1570962.

to their function and purpose.[21] Decluttering as a personal social movement shows how we can interact with our environment to solve human problems, and it facilitates sustainable ecology that starts in our own homes but also supports a social movement that is human-centric in nature. In an article written by Tokar in relation to Bookchin's contributions to social movements, he emphasizes that the necessity of ecological solutions must be human-centric due to its inherent nature of being a social act rather than an enforced idea placed upon individuals.[22] He explains that the success of the majority of social movements stems from the foundation of addressing human problems as opposed to industrial problems, wherein the changes would benefit us individually and collectively. These social movements resonate with Bookchin's call for communalism, which seeks to decentralize the approach to social ecology from the capitalistic perspective to the human person and environment.[23] By intentionally letting go of personal possessions, decluttering becomes a communal ethos of a "moral economy" that Bookchin enforces to resolve the effects of capitalism on our own approach and perspective to ourselves and the environment. In this manner, the act of decluttering becomes a catalyst of an ideological change which is shared among individuals towards social ecology,[24] and in turn becomes a communal practice that becomes a response to the dominant ideologies of possessions stemming from capitalism.

Decluttering as an Ecological-Centered Response to Forms of Capitalism

Decluttering has also become a social ecological response to different forms of predominant capitalistic models in society: State-guided capitalism and oligarchic capitalism. State-guided capitalism would be:

> …A type of capitalism in which the government determines the individual firms or industries that should develop. Then, the government sets policies that favor the various few companies that it has selected. The main reason for the emergence of state-guided capitalism is that

21 Jennifer A. Sandlin and Jason James Wallin, "Decluttering the Pandemic: Marie Kondo, Minimalism, and the 'Joy' of Waste," *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 22, no. 1 (2022): 96–102, https://doi.org/10.1177/15327086211049703.

22 Brian Tokar, "On Bookchin's Social Ecology and Its Contributions to Social Movements," *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 19, no. 1 (2008): 51–66, https://doi.org/10.1080/10455750701859430.

23 Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 60-65.

24 Laurence, Godin, Barbara Smetschka, and Stefan Wahlen, "Editorial: Sustainable Consumption and Care," *Frontiers in Sustainability* 6 (2025); 2–3, 1568396, https://doi.org/10.3389/frsus.2025.1568396. 2-3.

leaders want to exploit the public wealth and benefit through the firms that have been chosen for development since they are the owners."[25]

The government's positioning towards capitalism towards its constituents provides the idea of choice masked under necessity and desire. Such examples would be governments having full or partial ownership of banks, as this serves as the cash flow of the people and thus becomes a pulse towards human activity and profit.[26] The dictation and direction of people's needs and desires from the government becomes difficult within the lines of decluttering, as they have little to no say in what people should be selling or should be prioritizing to sell or not to sell from their own possessions. State-guided capitalism attempts as much as possible to profit off the purchases made by the people in the agencies or businesses, they fully or partially own while manufacturing the goods; decluttering turns the people into the primary area of supply, from decluttering into a demand center that is also dictated by individuals.

Decluttering becomes an ecological response to state capitalism, wherein it becomes a disruption to the cycle of centralized production and its control over commodity. The social-ecology nature of decluttering challenges this symbiotic relationship through the citizens mandating their capacity and willingness to partake and consume based on their own necessities. Individuals begin to withdraw their participation from the capitalistic engine of consumerism that weakens the foundations of state capitalism. In the Philippine context, the rampant growth of "mall-culture" within the industry implies a state-driven consumerist perspective that is prioritized in the development of areas as compared to other industries and necessities.[27] In the practice of decluttering, this "mall-culture" weakens due to individuals veering away from overconsumption, which is pushed by this culture, and turn to other individuals instead who have what they need instead of what they are perceived to need. Bookchin's communalism through decluttering manifests itself in this micro-level praxis wherein, despite existing monetary exchanges over goods is still practiced,[28] it is no longer enforced or influenced by a dominantly external industry but by the necessities of individuals and their care for themselves and their ecological surroundings.

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25 Vadys Thierry Lieutcheu Tientcheu, "Modern Capitalism," (Atlantic International University, June 2021), 5.

26 William J. Baumol, Robert E. Litan, and Carl J. Schramm, *Good Capitalism, Bad Capitalism, and the Economics of Growth and Prosperity* (Yale University Press, 2009), 16.

27 Walden F. Bello et al., *The Anti-Development State: The Political Economy of Permanent Crisis in the Philippines* (Anvil Publishing, Inc., 2009), 45.

28 Bookchin, *Social Ecology and Communalism*

Another form of capitalism directly impacted by decluttering is oligarchic capitalism, wherein this form of capitalism is defined by government policies that protect the property and interests of the wealthiest individuals and their personal networks. While this system has reached over one billion people globally, its leaders often prioritize the enrichment of a small elite rather than seeking broad economic growth for the community.[29] Multiple businesses are headed by families specifically in the Philippines, with the likes of the Lopez, Ang, Sy, and Villar families that have shown their grasp and influence towards the economy of the Philippines.[30] The means of production is privatized and distributed amongst the citizens and as such, the profit is split with these families along with the businesses they own, which the public uses, such as shopping centers, expressways, and private housing.

Decluttering becomes a response to this form of capitalism as well, due to individuals who are not part of a larger family business centralizing its profits and merely one that attempts to resolve an individual's needs without the need to expand its necessity to others. An example of this would be an individual attempting to declutter or even barter one's collection to others and having specific "dropping zones" owned by themselves or someone else they might be affiliated or associated with to assist in these transactions.[31] The agency to declutter becomes a response to the influence that oligarchic capitalism may hold towards centralized distribution and necessity, as it allows individuals to become more independent in their choices that align with their own needs and thus affects again the drive to manufacture for these businesses that are centralized to their products but more so the atmosphere or approach of the citizens. This act of decluttering through barter represents an ecological and decentralized response akin to Bookchin's social ecology, which allows the individual to veer away from oligarchic capitalism. In the Philippine context, the rise of both physical and online bartering communities during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, as analyzed by Filipino philosophers Ryan Maboloc and Menelito Mansueto, exemplifies a shift to indigenous modes of exchange that bypass existing structures and are centered on individuals in a centralized

29 Baumol, Litan, and Schramm, *Good Capitalism, Bad Capitalism*, 20.

30 Andrea Santiago, Shweta Pandey, and Ma. Theresa Manalac, "Family Presence, Family Firm Reputation and Perceived Financial Performance: Empirical Evidence from the Philippines," *Journal of Family Business Strategy* 10, no. 1 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jfbs.2019.02.002.

31 Rae Marie G. Leong-on et al., "Lived Experiences in Family Business among Business Graduates of a Private Higher Educational Institution in Iloilo City, Philippines," *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)* 5, no. 4 (2023): 1, 5-7, https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2023.v05i04.5719.

distribution system that benefits them.[32] These practices demonstrate an ideological shift that allows domestic and human management of goods that become the micro-level praxis of social ecology influenced by Bookchin's communalism towards the dominating structures and forms of capitalism affecting our ecology.

Both types of capitalism mentioned above sustain themselves through their control and influence over the individual's choice and selection of products, which binds them to rely on their products and continue the cycle of production that continuously drains our natural resources as well as damages our environment in the name of sustaining the capitalistic model they have for themselves and as a means for us as the consumers. This dynamic also reflects a response towards our environment, albeit the individual may or may not be aware of this type of effect towards the wider perspective of their practice of decluttering. The practice seemingly becomes an unconscious action towards the control these systems have over our impulsiveness, and that they cannot steer our desire to purchase as they want to, as our demand is less of what they provide, and more towards the space and comfort that we find in owning only what is necessary for us. Decluttering becomes a response as well to an action towards the aesthetic of ownership that capitalism provides and sees the reality of multiple possessions being more of a burden to the individual rather than the comfort it tries to portray itself as. This reduction of attachments to these materials becomes an indirect message to limit the production of materials that leads to the conservation of resources that may either be replenished or seen as a necessity to preserve in their perspective. As decluttering becomes the micro-level act of social ecology towards existing dominant systems such as capitalism, its critical core is fundamentally grounded in the personal agency of the individual. To bridge and understand the core of decluttering's continuous acts towards establishing its moral economy for individuals, it becomes necessary to examine how this practice becomes an expression of the individual's social agency.

Decluttering as an Individual Social Agency

The practice of decluttering becomes the catalyst for one's own practice and perception of how his/her possessions and idea of ownership change from this act alone. In this situation, decluttering becomes a reflection of a person's own individual social agency towards his/her surroundings, specifically

32 Ryan Maboloc, "Indigenous Wisdom and Human Solidarity in the Midst of COVID-19 Pandemic," *Eubios Journal of Asian and International Bioethics* 31, no. 2 (2021): 62-65. This article draws extensively on the foundational work of Menelito Mansueto regarding Philosophy of Liberation in the times of the Philippine COVID-19 Pandemic.

affecting ecology in an indirect way, as mentioned earlier byreducing production while changing the approach of the larger aspects of how products are sold and perceived by both capitalistic organizations towards the consumers' preferences and practices towards ownership of their products. As an individual social agency, these manifestations come into effect for the individual: Becoming reflective towards one's own possessions, becoming insightful of one's own volition towards finding meaning in owning less, an act of conscious effort to maintain the ability to reflect on the importance of one's possessions, and a realization of an individual's impact and perspective on the environment and the consumer-producer culture of capitalism.

Becoming reflective towards one's own possessions is the first transformative manifestation of decluttering, as it begins with a person's current state of perception being observed by oneself. The process becomes more than simply identifying our own possessions, whether they should be kept or not; rather, it demands an introspection of why we own these possessions and the true value they have in our lives. This act manifests a prefigurative consciousness that ecological researchers Raekstad and Gradin argue in their analysis of social ecological movements from Bookchin that personal evaluations are essential to shifting our ideological tendencies from capitalist reification of objects towards a social-ecological approach.[33] By introspecting the value of our possessions, we engage in restructuring our insights towards our volitions in the purpose and meaning of our possessions, in relation to ourselves as human beings.

Becoming insight of one's own volition towards finding meaning in owning less due to decluttering stirs beyond material possessions and now moves along an ethical perspective of ownership. The act itself is not depraving oneself of possessions but finding meaning in what a person already has and the importance each item holds in their lives. This decision becomes a habit and exercise of existential reflection and action that attempts to reclaim our autonomy towards the effects of mass production and the endless advertisements that feed desires to own more than we need. We begin to understand that our possessions obscure our way of finding meaning in the objects in our lives.

In having our volition and shifting perspective towards our own possessions, decluttering manifests a continual practice of mindfulness that can sustain itself and maintain our perspectives on ownership and the environment. This conscious effort that manifests through decluttering cultivates a commitment to maintain our own awareness of the significance it has in our personal, societal, and environmental perception. Our resistance towards capitalistic production

33 Paul Raekstad and Sofa Saio Gradin, *Prefigurative Politics: Building Tomorrow Today* (Polity Press, 2020), 20-22.

allows us to shape our own values towards our possessions and the space we have for ourselves and the effect it has on our environment. The continual process of reflection redefines our idea of possessions and material objects as a personal and moral responsibility that helps us better understand the importance of our own value put in what we have and own. We are able to discern between the necessity and excessiveness of what we have and decide on our own the things we buy and keep in our lives.

In line with Bookchin's perception of a self-directing consciousness, we cultivate, as well, a sense of ecological responsibility in our decisions about decluttering and allowing ourselves to act in a manner that does not feed into the consumerist cycle,[34] but rather a cycle of maintaining what we value while echoing the sentiments of preserving resources that positively affect how capitalistic organizations would act in production, due to our conscious efforts to declutter and keep only what we value as individuals.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the discussions in the paper, the concept of decluttering, fostered by minimalism, becomes a localized lifestyle that serves as a micro-level praxis of Bookchin's social ecology and a challenge towards dominant systems within the idea of consumerism and possessions found in the different forms of capitalism. By examining the correlation between one's detachment from personal possessions through decluttering and Bookchin's concept of individual agency and communalism, the research contributes to the discourse towards consumer ethics through reframing the act of decluttering as a personal practice towards social movement against the inherent imperative nature of capitalism. While social-ecological critiques are able to analyze the macro-level institutional shifts needed for society, the study highlights the importance of the individual's agency that is able to disrupt the hierarchical consumption patterns in capitalism that endanger our environment while impacting our own being.

In the practice of decluttering, individuals perform their ideological shift stemming from the act of separating their sense of being from their possessions and becoming a counterpoint to the ideology of capitalistic domination that Bookchin identifies as one of the root causes of ecological crisis in the world. This practice becomes the foundation of the ideological transition towards a human-centered commodity rooted in communalism and moral economy wherein resources are valued for the benefit of everyone.

34 Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 47.

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