

Minimalism and Lightweight Backpacking in France: A Material Culture of Detachment

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Minimalism is a growing consumerist approach based on deliberate detachment from one's material needs and acquisitions. The aim of this paper is to examine a singular case of minimalism which has developed in the sports sector, based on the stylization by detachment of the practice of hiking: ultralight or lightweight backpacking. While the sports market is traditionally characterized by the accumulation and renewal of equipment, this sport subculture aims the radical reduction of equipment weight and is promoted in France by an online community of practice. Lightening one's equipment implies adopting an original material culture of detachment (mostly by innovation through withdrawal) which goes hand in hand with a an alternative subjectivation of practitioners based on a form of voluntary simplicity and asceticism. This enculturation has political consequences, contributing to reconfiguring behaviors, norms and consumer values in the light of alternative markets, partly detaching oneself from "consumer society".

Keywords: asceticism; detachment; hiking; lightening up; minimalism; voluntary simplicity

Introduction

Minimalism is a consumerist approach based on deliberate detachment from one's material needs and acquisitions, combining deconsumption, the quest for sustainability and freedom from material accumulation and waste (Bertolini, 2000; Ozcaglar-Toulouse, 2005). It is often associated with the notion of voluntary simplicity (Johnston and Burton, 2003, Elgin, 2010), from which it is to some extent distinguished by a focus on the application, in a continuous process, of two principles: "identify the essential,

and eliminate the rest” (Rodriguez, 2018)¹. Although both a minority and plural movement (in relation to other trends of responsible or ethical consumerism, including degrowth, frugality, ecoresponsibility, zero waste, etc., Dubuisson-Quellier, 2018, Shaw and Newholm, 2002), it is today the focus of growing media attention and proven popularity in many activity sectors, sometimes leading its followers to engage in a veritable lifestyle based on detachment (Ballantine and Creery, 2009).

In order to understand these consumption changes, it is interesting to refer particularly to the works developed by Goulet and Vinck (2012) concerning innovation through withdrawal and the many current sociotechnical rearrangements where detachment from preexisting and well-established items constitutes “the very objective of propelled transformations” (Goulet and Vinck, 2016). The interest of this approach lies in its ability to consider minimalism as a process of withdrawal, the fruit of a critical activity (from makers to consumers) that aims to make existing elements problematic and undesirable (whether human or non-human actors) and see their reduction or disappearance as a solution². For these authors, withdrawal and disintermediation represent a major trend today (following a period of modernism based on the introduction and multiplication of new products and entities) which is embodied in a great number of consumer behaviors, including the ‘free’ products (sugar-free, gluten-free, GM-free, paraben-free, etc.), short distribution channels, direct selling (Goulet and Vinck, 2017). If market is the arts of attachment (Cochoy et al., 2017; Callon et al., 2013), the purpose of this paper is, paying attention to an original minimalist sport practice, to explore the effects of devices of detachment between

¹ On the nuances between minimalism and voluntary simplicity, see Mangold and Zschau (2019).

² This process does not prevent, in a second step, the possible attachment to new entities.

humain actors and things. What kind of market and consumption culture can produce a conversion to sport minimalism?

At first glance, the industry and distribution of sports goods appear not to be concerned today by these reconfigurations. Yet, they constitute a particularly competitive mass market based on the quest for consumer attachment through never-ending technical improvements. This particular economic sector is characterized by an intensive process of innovation (Hillairet, 2005), “a move, admittedly not yet completed, from an economy of scale to an innovation-based economy, where product differentiation, diminished shelf life and range variety have become the norm” (Gaglio, 2011). One of the recent driving forces behind consumer attachment has been the development of ranges of ‘lightweight’ sports equipment (light, even ultra-light, Hallé et al., 2014), based mainly on innovations through withdrawal (Goulet and Vinck, 2012). Through a series of sociotechnical processes (refining shapes and removing material, using finer and lighter materials/fabrics/assembly, simplifying uses, etc.), the aim is to produce increasingly lighter objects, although very often more fragile or at least perceived as being so (Soulé et al., 2017). Becoming a consumer of ultralight equipment may corroborate one of the forms of consumer detachment (suggested by Candea et al 2015) linked to carelessness and a set of dispositions, favored here by certain market mediations, of low attachment to objects, accelerated renewal of goods and regular wasting.

Yet, with regard to the responsible consumerism movements described above, it is also possible to symmetrically consider detachment as a reverse movement of disengagement from dispositions to overconsume (accumulate or throw away), a decoupling of unnecessary equipment and unnecessary needs. Can this type of alternative market arrangement be found in the sporting field? Such a question forms

part of the thread running through works which have shown how far a number of sports consumers (whether lead users or ordinary users) were characterized by their strong ability to appropriate, distort, reinvent and, to a certain degree, detach themselves from manufactured offers and preexisting practices (Lüthje, 2000; Von Hippel, 2005; Pantzar et Shove, 2010).

The aim of this paper is to examine a singular case of minimalism which has developed in the sports sector based on the stylization of the practice of hiking by detachment: ultralight or lightweight backpacking. The originality of this particular case – an ordinary sports activity based on walking, an only apparently rudimentary body technique (Ingold, 2004) – is that it was initially focused on a material problem (carry less and better) resulting from quite pragmatic reasons: suffer less, compensate for weaknesses, improve performances. Thus, interesting for critical consumption studies is the fact that, whilst detachment was not originally or explicitly part of a political approach, it has numerous consequences in this area.

This empirical research case is based on an ongoing ethnographic fieldwork, focused on the main ultralight backpacking community of practice (Wenger, 2005; Gressier, 2009) in France, brought together via an internet forum³. It classically

³ A website (www.randonner-leger.org i.e. *hiking light*, referred to as RL in the rest of the article) constitutes the main home of this movement in France. Marginal but not insignificant (over 11,000 members), this community is of interest well beyond its own restricted circle: the site has a total of 200,000 and 400,000 monthly visits, mainly from non-member web surfers. RL was founded in 2005 by a lead user (Oli_v_ier; NB: forum members' pseudonyms are used in the article) and has progressively been conceived, developed and structured as an “encyclopedia or Wikipedia of lightweight backpacking” (according to one of the administrators – Big Cactus, 41 years old, project leader), as well as a place for discussion and sharing among fans of lighter equipment on the move. In May 2019, there were over 32,500 discussion topics for more than 524,000 messages.

combines several techniques to produce and analyse qualitative data “to account for the “actor's point of view”, ordinary representations, customary practices and their indigenous meanings” (Olivier de Sardan, 1995: 73) in an inductive and grounded approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1973): collection of archives and local written sources (press, stories, video, etc.), gathering of life stories of ultralight backpackers (41 in depth interviews to-date⁴), netnography (Kozinets, 2010; Boellstorff et al., 2012) of community web practices – communal discussions, narratives, testimonies, especially online interactions – reading, contributions, comments, mails⁵, and backpacking participant-observation focused on lightening experiencing (from learning to hiking through provisioning or crafting) dating from fall 2018. From a methodological point of view, interpretation is based on “interweaving, convergence and overlap [as] guarantee of plausibility” (Olivier de Sardan, 1995: 85). I have analyzed life careers (including self-analysis of my own commitment) and of the operational processes (learning, appropriation and incorporation) related to lightening up, to understand how subjects are build up as lightweight backpackers. The aim is to describe and interpret the way in which material and ideal links are established and, above all, disentangled between human and non-human actors (objects, environments) in order to co-produce a consumer subculture singularized by detachment.

⁴ The sampling is based on an important diversification of interviewees profile to search and triangulate contrasted discourses and variable implications in acculturation to detachment.

⁵ I have combined non-participant and open participant observational stance: since 2018, I am identified in the community as “Eric le rouge”, the ‘anthropoMUL’.

Ultralight backpacking community has emerged in France⁶ in the 2000s with the French name *Marche Ultra-Légère*, referred to, in the paper, as *MUL*⁷ for both the movement and its members. It can be considered at the same as a lifestyle sport (Wheaton, 2004) supported by a lifestyle movement (Wahlen and Laamanen, 2015, Haenfler et al., 2012) sharing and encouraging, beyond change in hiking subculture, a renewal in consumption culture. It aims for and promotes the radical reduction of equipment weight (generally dividing the weight of one's backpack by three) for autonomous and safe backpacking⁸. Ultralight backpacking is a mainly itinerant form of practice, which involves spending nights in the outdoors. This implies juggling unhabitual material constraints, including the need to move, eat and take shelter. *MULs* carry autonomously everything (or nearly⁹), in terms of equipment, food and means of shelter in a natural environment that is hardly, or not at all, equipped. Such factors clearly raise the pragmatic issues of weight, transportability (volume, bulk) and durability (solidity, repairability) for ultralight backpackers who have developed an original material and consumer culture based on objectification (Miller, 1987 and 2012) and a symmetrical process of “desobjectification”. It is founded on minimalism and

⁶ From the beginning, it has been influenced by Ultralight Backpacking movement which developed in English-speaking countries (particularly the USA) at the end of the 1980s, with its own founding figures (Ray Jardine, Andrew Skurka...), online communities (e.g. www.backpacking.net/makegear.html; <https://backpackinglight.com>), specialist manufacturers, etc.

⁷ In French, there is a voluntary and humorous pun around the homophony *MUL* and mule, pack animal, which carries loads.

⁸ Whatever the variable goals of the practice: hiking more simply or comfortably, further, longer, quicker or in more difficult and adventurous environments.

⁹ For example, using refuges or grocery stores for food from time to time (For more detailed information on food consumption see Boutroy and Vignal, 2018).

innovations through withdrawal, where they are no longer attached to superfluous needs and materials in order to be as simple as possible. For example, practitioners love to say that “the lightest things are the ones we don’t take”. They also aim for non-redundancy and versatility, replace equipment with lighter material, are creative in redesigning, make their own, even invent objects and techniques, distribute and share this knowledge free-of-charge, etc.

I will begin by describing how lightening one’s equipment and using/evaluating them during the hike imply adopting a real material culture of detachment, based on material and subjective dissociation from previous entities. I will see how this enculturation goes hand in hand with a lighter self and an alternative subjectivation of practitioners (Warnier, 2009) based on a certain form of asceticism. Finally, I will show how such minimalist stylization is not without political consequences, contributing paradoxically to reconfiguring or renewing behaviors, norms and consumer values in the light of alternative markets, in other words by partly detaching oneself from usual market relationships.

A lighter bag and a lighter self: A material culture of detachment

Becoming a *MUL* first and foremost entails systematically applying innovations through withdrawal (Goulet & Vinck, 2016). It consists in problematizing the uses and routines of the standard hiker, analyzing and rethinking their needs and then reorganizing their equipment by material separation, division and disposal in all phases of the activity: acquisition/selection/prior preparation of items, during the hike itself, afterwards with a critical review. It is a systematic and cyclical process from preparation to hike, both individual and singular (“an approach that is necessarily personal” aiming for

“adequacy between our own aptitudes and the requirements of the land”¹⁰) and collective (sharing experiences and direct and indirect advice, by internet and on the ground).

A lighter bag: Material detachment and simplicity

Becoming part of the *MUL* movement means seeing how to simplify and reduce one’s equipment by successively applying a range of different principles during preparation, and then experimenting with them in order to adopt, adapt or finally reject the choices. They represent a way of disqualifying preexisting entities, as well as sociotechnical operations to get rid of them.

The first principle is to unequip oneself, in other words identify and remove items that are of little or no use and that can be discarded. It is based on the idea that a standard hiker’s backpack is full of and overloaded with equipment that is superfluous and redundant, or that there is just too much of it (and too heavy to boot). Oli_v_ier (43 years old, teacher), the owner and founder of *RL*, can remember well the moment his life as a hiker changed during his first hike across Iceland with a friend in 2000. With equipment for two weighing 56 kg, the hike “became a time of great suffering” and led him to think about the weight of the backpack as they were hiking:

“It was more especially the moment when Nicolas said: “but (...) what do we actually really need?” I had been more or less in charge of preparing the equipment. And I had all my arguments ready to point out that “We need that just in case. And we need that just in case this happens. Just in case that happens”. (...) At the end of the day, I had greatly overestimated the quantity and type of equipment we needed. I answered that we needed lots of things”.

¹⁰ https://www.randonner-leger.org/wiki/doku.php?id=faq_de_la_randonnee_legere_mul

Discarding habits is explicitly a work of negotiation to reopen the black box. *MULs* get rid of what they call gadgets, duplicates and the “just-in-cases” we can do without. Adrienne (39 years old, IT analyst) also remembers her first autonomous hike (10 days, French Alps):

“What a nightmare! Because I took too much stuff. Way too much. Way too much food. Way too many things to reassure myself. Let’s just say too much superfluous stuff I didn’t need”.

Unnecessary things include, for example, planning numerous changes of clothing. In May 2019, a beginner hiker, Vincy9900 listed his provisional equipment for a hike over 40 days (GR10, Pyrenees) and was immediately reprimanded by a more experienced practitioner GrandeLoutre: “3 t-shirts and 3 pairs of boxer shorts, no, no and no again. 1, maximum 2, of each and wash them as often as you can”¹¹. When reviewing their washing techniques and criteria of hygiene or comfort, a number of lightweight hikers forget about changes of clothing altogether, even in the case of long hikes. As Jeanjacques, Ezequiel54 and Pala2 told me, discarding the normal habit of eating hot food immediately makes it possible to get rid of all your cooking equipment and associated behaviors. Certain choices may also be questioned during the hike itself. Several interviewees say that at the beginning they would even discard equipment while hiking (sent back by mail or items having become unnecessary quite simply abandoned). “Minimalism takes priority. It’s a question of (re)defining what is really essential, even if each of us has our own definition”, as summarized by a specialist magazine¹².

¹¹ <https://www.randonner-leger.org/forum/viewtopic.php?id=36054>

¹² <https://www.expemag.com/article/technique/dossier-randonner-leger>

After sorting and discarding items, the second principle implies withdrawing an element through versatility and non-redundancy. It implies finding sociotechnical solutions, sometimes by adapting equipment, which makes it possible to use the same object for several purposes (often through affordance) and thus remove items which have become of no use. Walking poles are frequently used for numerous *MUL* bivouac shelters (withdrawal of pegs or rods). Cooking pots become containers by separating the bowl from the rest. A foam mattress can fit along the back of a backpack by removing the frame. A number of minimalist shelters like a ‘tarp’ (a sheet of waterproof fabric) become rainwear, so no need for a poncho. In certain cases, it ‘merely’ means implementing *shifts* (according to Akrich, 1998) in how objects are used to reveal other potential uses. For example, Aleppo soap can be used to wash the body, hair, teeth and laundry. In other cases, it is necessary to *adapt* or *extend* an item (e.g. adding supports to tent canvas for durable use with poles)¹³.

The third principle involves making lighter each of the item practitioners remain attached to in two different ways. A first highly valorized method consists in withdrawing and simplifying parts of an item they already have. We have here an excellent observatory for consumers’ “arts of doing”, tweaking ability and even resistance (Penaloza & Price, 1993). *MULs* show unlimited creativity and often very wide technical resources (cutting, unstitching, stitching up, drilling, welding, etc.), for example making holes in the handle of a knife, removing pockets or elastic from clothes, etc. Backpacks are a favorite target for detachment action, including shortening or removing straps, cutting off accessories of no use (ice axe holder, inside and outside

¹³ A great number of these DIY adaptations were first carried out by lead users, before sometimes being taken over by specialized manufacturers.

pockets), removing belts or frames, etc. Through the forum, an expert (Fredlafouine) responded to Naxh, a young *MUL* in training who had just presented her latest backpack:

“Not bad for a start, but if you get rid of the top flap + front pocket + belt pocket + cut all the straps to the required length + get rid of the load adjustment straps + get rid of the straps that have no use on the backpack straps... In short, get rid of everything that is of absolutely no use and you should be able to reduce the total weight by 30 to 40%. It still won't be anything like a really light bag, but for the price, it'll be ok and strong 😊 Just to give you an idea, I got a Forclaz¹⁴ down (just by using scissors/stanley knife, no sewing machine) from 1100 g to 566g".¹⁵

This may also involve resizing (e.g. resizing a towel, adjusting a sleeping pad to the size and shape of one's body, etc.) and reconditioning consumables (removing packaging, adjusting the number of food items in a pack, putting oil, condiments, denatured alcohol into smaller bottles, cutting soap into smaller pieces, etc.). Such practices often lead to arguments, sometimes between *MULs* and non-*MULs*¹⁶ who often belittle the former when they meet, “Ah, you mean the ones who remove all their labels”, “Those who cut off the end of their toothbrush”. At the heart of debates on the subject is the opposition between criticism of the extremism or even absurdity of the methods (removing a few grams with the risk of making the item less functional¹⁷), and

¹⁴ A mass-produced backpack by a distributor brand (Décathlon).

¹⁵ <https://www.randonner-leger.org/forum/viewtopic.php?pid=330162#p330162>

¹⁶ In life stories, a number of *MULs* show a form of disbelief similar to when they discovered RL.

¹⁷ As I have experienced myself (backpack deteriorated by excessive cutting), there are many testimonies of failures or excessive detachment, especially at the beginning of one's career. See for example: <https://www.randonner-leger.org/forum/viewtopic.php?id=17339>

a global and systematic concept (removing between 10 and 20% of the total mass of each item means getting rid of any unnecessary kilograms).

A second method used to lighten an item consists in discarding a piece of equipment that is too heavy and *replacing* it with a much lighter one that is purchased or, as one of the community's ideals, made by oneself¹⁸. It may be part of an equivalent product whose weight has been reduced by removing material (streamlining), replacing materials (aluminium with carbon fiber for poles, cordura with cuben fiber or silnylon for fabrics, etc.), removing features, (simplifying uses; e.g. by removing pockets, zips, gear holders, etc.). It may also mean using a piece of substitution equipment, which implies a greater dissociation process, including replacing a plastic food container by a zipped freezer bag, a traditional tent by a 'tarp' for instance. Detachment from the traditional high hiking shoe is also characteristic of such complex operations. *MULs* have called this equipment into question on account of the problems it causes: it is a heavy weight to be lifted with each step, rigid and above the ankle (limited flexibility and reduced sensations). Over and beyond its traditional safety purpose, this item is a true emblem of hiking¹⁹ and it is not easy to break the link. Doing so implies simultaneous detachment from items reconsidered as being problematic (rigid sole, high stem), the introduction of one that breaks with tradition (trail running shoes), a rearrangement of the technical system (with a backpack weighing 8 kg or less, there would be no more risk of twisting one's ankle) and the production on the ground (Ingold, 2004) of new know-how (e.g., a more supple walking technique).

¹⁸ For bricolage, see *infra*.

¹⁹ Professional guide, Nutzz (35 years old) explained that, during his training, he regularly received sceptical remarks (from trainers, other former trainees) because his "low shoes called into question the dogma of high shoes".

Finally, the possibility of detaching oneself from material items by paying for services (night in a refuge) or supplies (shopping, meals) may also be mentioned, as may the use of natural resources (collecting and filtering water, picking fruit, fishing, etc., Boutroy and Vignal, 2018).

“Every time you go on a hike, you remove something else. It’s a gradual progression” Ester explains (56 years old, teacher). As for Grandeloutre, he showed his provisional equipment for a long hike in the mountains via the forum and received numerous responses. He wondered, for example, how useful a ‘buff’ (neckband that can be used as a hat) actually is: “I must be the only person who’s not convinced by this thing”.²⁰ A debate then began between the pros (remain attached) and the antis (pushing for detachment) about its intrinsic usefulness or uselessness. Laxmimittal then suggested a shift in use by revealing the potentiality of one of the other items in the equipment list: “If you’re taking a silk sleeping bag for the night, why not use it as a scarf during the day? Exit the buff and other neckbands”.

The process of detachment is thus repeated regularly throughout the trajectory of a light hiker: each hiking, each encounter, each reading may lead the backpacker to question the use of something and reduce weight via the sociotechnical processes previously described. Unlike Ester's previous quotation, this learning is not a linear progression. It is also done by mistake or failure with the consequence of difficulties (e.g. hunger due to inadequate or insufficient rations), excessive discomfort or even endangering. Indeed, if learning *MUL* does not imply a detachment from safety, the lightening approach can lead to dangerous choices during the hike (hypothermia due to lack of clothing, near-accident due to inadequate technical equipment - e.g. absence of

²⁰ <https://www.randonner-leger.org/forum/viewtopic.php?pid=529108#p529108>

ice axe or crampon in the mountains). *MULs* have even adopted a “stupid light” category from American ultra-light backpackers to define these inefficient or even dangerous choices²¹.

In reference to Candea (et al. 2015), detachment therefore appears as a continuous process (with its breaks and incremental evolutions) based on the systematic multiplication of small detachments and sometimes re-attachment, in what *MULs* call “Yoyo effect”.

A lighter self: Detachment and asceticism

Becoming a *MUL* is described by the movement’s followers as a journey and a real conversion, which combines action on objects and subjects (Warnier, 2009) producing both material and subjective detachment. Belonging to this community thus goes hand in hand with a renewal of dispositions where freedom from constraints, detachment from accumulation and asceticism combine.

Experienced hikers who join the *MUL* movement often have to detach themselves from their habits and ‘beliefs’. In certain cases, the first problematization challenge involved is to disqualify the need to “carry heavy” which is a matter of course in traditional hiking. It implies a disposition that is not necessarily pleasant but normalized and incorporated. Ester recalls her first days as a hiker: “Nothing was too heavy for me!”. Adrienne, during her youth (namely in the Scouts), has embodied carrying heavy loads:

“When we’re 14 or 15, we’re actually mega proud of being able to carry half our own weight. We’re mega proud of carrying heavy things. I remember really well that it was practically a competition to see who would have the heaviest bag. And I

²¹ <https://andrewskurka.com/stupid-light-not-always-right-or-better/>

was a featherweight, I was really petite. I don't know how I kept going. How I carried my backpack. We were young, we were crazy [smiles]”.

This tendency to “hike heavy” is particularly marked in a virilizing tradition of mountain or adventurous hiking²², but is also part of a current vision of a well-equipped traveler ready to deal with any eventuality. Apprentice *MULs* (such as the ethnographer below) with a “heavy” hiker past must therefore reduce their weight threshold for loads they carry and review what is acceptable or not:

“As we were leaving, I tried to pay attention to how I felt carrying this semi-*MUL* backpack. The weight is not that light, but there's no impression of heaviness (no pressure on the shoulders, nothing stopping me from moving). After regularly carrying very heavy bags at high altitudes, I feel free and light. But we'll have to see after carrying it for a while, as the hike and my fatigue progress. (...) Although I've got three liters of water in my backpack (instead of one liter maximum since the beginning of the hike), I really don't feel like I'm carrying a lot. It's not that I'm strong: I see it more as a bad sign of “heavy” hiker capacities that are too well-internalized. I seriously need to break the habit of heaviness”. (Field notes, 3-24-2019)

To do so, it is necessary to subtly transform one's relationship with the load size (i.e. the mass) of one's equipment. By detaching oneself from manufacturers' data (which *MULs* consider with caution), accurate scales are an essential non-human factor in making visible the ‘gram’ that must be removed. A cardinal moment in lightening up the load, in the same way as a “rite of passage”, consists in making, and even publicly presenting, one's “list” on the RL forum. There is a series of essential operations during which the apprentice lists each item to be carried, categorizes it by its use (cooking,

²² Exchanges between *MULs* and non-*MULs* during hikes at times show conflicting conceptions.

sleeping, carrying, consumable), weighs it and completes a table (a spreadsheet, often printed with notes jotted on it). Transforming one's equipment into a list is a practice of purification as defined by Latour (1991), which helps to detach oneself from one's items, one's uses, one's habits and one's norms. It makes it possible to transform in mass each material item, to *realize* (going from the feeling or impression to the 'objectivity' of the gram) the weight of his sociotechnical choices. It enables personal introspection and even more a collective critical activity fueled on the one hand by the knowledge and know-how of a great number of testimonies and tools offered online and, on the other, by the comments, *critiques* and direct feedback of experienced practitioners (on the forum but also on the ground). As soon as a member of the RL community presents a hiking project or recounts a hike, he must show his list and his potential questions to the outside world who will intervene to challenge existing items and make getting rid of them the solution. In this regard, the forum overflows with calls to order for newcomers asking for advice without presenting their list, without which any problematization does not have much point²³. *MUL*-only hikes are also the opportunity for questioning: at the beginning of the hike, it is common for a "veteran" to get out a spring scale to check the weight which will be compared to weight at the end, once all the consumables have been used; during the hike, newcomers are asked to "unburden themselves"²⁴, so they can be questioned and kindly advised about what they had packed.

²³ "Hello, so that we can respond to your questions and worries, post your list in the form of a spreadsheet with the weight of each item (weighed if possible or at least the weight given by the manufacturer)" was the immediate response of Gui3gui to Guy who inexpertly only presented some of his equipment (<https://www.randonner-leger.org/forum/viewtopic.php?id=36091>).

²⁴ *MULs* moreover play with the metaphorical meaning of burden.

Such review and material detachment are reflected in a feeling of freedom from weight (moreover RL's logo is a feather). "Free yourself from your backpack" (a recurring expression among light hikers) means more freedom: discarding constraining objects to move with agility, walk faster or longer. The first light hike is always a moment of subjective revelation, an unbridling of the hiking experience. With a big smile, Big Cactus recalled his solitary hike in Quebec where an experienced friend (un)equipped him from head to toe:

"Well I actually started to trot I felt that light, and I did 45 km on the first day! It was fabulous. Because I'd never before hiked that much. I'd never been that light. Overtaking hikers with loads of mega heavy equipment, that felt so good. Quite funny actually. (...) Seeing all that scenery in front of me and telling myself "If I can just go 1 more km, what's behind the peak? And then what's after that? And then after that?" Now that made me... That was a fantastic feeling. It was a shock! Really. It felt fabulous (...) It was just out of this world."

Oli_v_ier also remembers a totally liberating feeling in 2001:

"And that was when I realized. The revolution. Going back was impossible. (...) The backpack no longer held me back at all. I could walk as fast as I wanted to. Climb up to check out a cabin, a shelter. While before, I remember, I would think "Oh no! Now I've got to stop, put my bag down. Climb up. Then come back down again. Put the bag back on my back. It's going to do my back in, etc.". And here, I got this feeling of freedom, immediately (...). And it's there all the time, this freedom to be able to adapt all the time".

'Purging' one's equipment conveys minimalist values and coincides with detachment from the material accumulation which can be characteristic of contemporary sports consumerism with multiplication and specialization of technical offers. According to Rodriguez (2018), behind the questions *MULs* ask (for each item, asking themselves "Can I learn how to do without this?", "Do I really need it?") lies a very concrete experience of frugality and adaptability where limiting resources and

identifying 'real' needs combine. In the context of leisure, learning to do more with less, simplifying your items and making them easier to manage (freeing oneself from unnecessary preparation or handling, being able to repair *in situ*) actually means consuming in a 'purged' and alternative way.

"A heavy backpack is one that is filled with anxiety" represents a sort of 'mantra' for the *MUL* culture, which is regularly repeated. Lightening one's bag is also a self-help technique where the hiker learns to detach himself from fears of lacking, suffering or being in danger. Hervé²⁷ (50 years old, a logistics consultant) remembers the fears he had to overcome at the beginning:

"Having a backpack that weighed less than 12 kg, well I thought they were joking. For me that meant... Well, it meant taking risks. It went against everything I'd learnt about protecting yourself... From any potential obstacle and threat".

In this respect, an important step for *MULs* (which some never actually manage to take) is the gradual detachment from so-called double-roof tents with their separate closed sleeping space inside. Abandoning this closed cocoon for a single-roof shelter implies and leads to a move towards simpler norms of comfort and protection and a high level of emotional detachment from non-human entities: no longer being afraid of animals and bugs (spiders, ticks, mosquitos), getting rid of the wall between oneself and the environment (rain, draughts, condensation, view on the outside with its night shadows, etc.). Naxh (25 years old, sales rep for a haulage company):

"Why cut yourself off from nature in a closed double-roof tent full of accessories (a place to put your phone, your lamp, your book) when a simple shelter protects us

from bad weather and means we can admire what we came looking for? Nature. This breath of fresh air that never stops boosting you”.²⁵

“I got lighter without compromising my comfort... Or rather by accepting it more and more easily” said Nutzz, who added that by doing so he had also “freed [his] conscience”. Becoming a *MUL* and converting to detachment refers, in many life paths, to an ascetic subjectivation of detachment (more or less ephemeral). After over a month of hiking in mountains, along the *Haute Route des Pyrénées*, in 2018, Hervé²⁷ “experienced the ‘Grand Bleu’ syndrome²⁶. I went over to the other side. Living with nothing, making do with very little”. He even detached himself from time, not only because his hike was guided by what he wanted to do since how long he walked was no longer important, but also because “I had become my own clock by watching how the shadow of my body moved”.

For Ezequiel⁵⁴ (33 years old, foreman), his rapid immersion into an extreme ultralight approach (eXtrem Ultra Light²⁷) went hand in hand with “an incredible spiritual unburdening. Thinking about nothing, I know what it means to do that. Mega simplifying, that gives you a simple life, lets you focus on the essential things”.

Highpictv (46 years old, university lecturer) is even more explicit:

²⁵ Message received via my personal RL page: <https://www.randonner-leger.org/forum/viewtopic.php?id=35733&p=2>

²⁶ In reference to a film by Luc Besson (1988) where freedivers escape from society by diving to the bottom of the sea. Several interviewees said they had experienced such a feeling of vertiginous detachment, so much so that they wondered if they would actually come back.

²⁷ This subculture of competing for the lightest backpack aims to have bags that weigh between 1 and 2 kg (except for consumables) and implies a form of extreme detachment.

“Detachment is the keyword. When you don’t have to ask yourself material questions anymore, you can really let go... It’s incredible. (...) It’s a material liberation that unburdens the mind”.

There is a form of ascetic detachment here (as defined by Foucault), in the form of “self-conscious perfectible practice” (Candea et al. op cit.), i.e. living in utmost material simplicity, fulfilling one’s essential needs and being able to let go of worldly contingencies, close to voluntary simplifiers (Mangold and Zschau, 2019).

Political dimensions of minimalist market rearrangements

“Some weigh down their bags with gadgets that are... Ultra light. Several phenomena lead to overequipping oneself: today’s society pushes us towards consumerism, we want to hike in the outdoors with all the comfort of our own home (paradox?), manufacturers inundate markets with new ‘ultra-light’ equipment and, faced with the fear of the unknown, we take refuge in the illusion that material things are there to save us”²⁸.

RL’s home page already expresses a certain idea of lightening the load which goes in the opposite direction to a strictly consumerist approach where the idea is ‘simply’ to replace a heavy item with an innovative solution sold by the traditional market players. I have witnessed it myself, a *MUL* does not expect industrialists to provide the response to needs he will review by gradually detaching himself from traditional norms (hyper-comfort, skills delegation, etc.). Reading between the lines, becoming a *MUL* implies relative detachment from an economic and social system which encourages you to buy and consume. This involves a number of diverse processes of disengagement vis-à-vis its norms (wasting, accumulation, market attachments, etc.). In that respect, enculturation to and through detachment may be redefined as political, and it is possible

²⁸ <https://www.randonner-leger.org/wiki/doku.php?id=presentation:sommaire>

to describe its main repercussions.

Collaborative learning of detachment and attachment to others: An open culture of sharing

RL is both a community of practice and a lifestyle movement which federates individuals sharing, in the first intention, a strong interest in material detachment in hiking. It creates numerous interactions in order to co-construct a material culture of lightweight backpacking and formalizes activities and tacit knowledge into concepts and know-how (Monnet, 2016). Learning how to detach oneself and acquire associated knowledge and know-how are clearly founded on renewed and selected forms of paradoxical social links combining both distance (fragile commitments, use of pseudonyms and limited opportunities to get to know one another, members in different places, asynchronous relationships) and attachment (sharing, cooperation, intensity and reciprocity of exchange and relative tolerance albeit not free from debate and even conflict). *MULs* appear to become attached to the forum itself²⁹, as they are “plunged” into and transformed by it. For all that, RL remains indissociable from its founder and manager Oli_v_ier. His discrete presence on the home page (his photograph, personal email address for contact) show that he is still the owner of the site, which he finances with his own money. At the beginning of 2019, the information I openly presented on the forum following several months of research gave rise to rich debate on the life of the community, and great thanks from *MUL* members for what the forum had given them. In turn, Oli_v_ier joined in and expressed the attachments which had formed behind this generalized reciprocity:

²⁹ Most of the members say they have had periods of ‘binge reading’ and intense site visiting, at least when they were learning (often spending several hours a day on the website).

“Testimonies like those above always make me very emotional, thank you for sharing them. All those who have contributed by sharing their passion, their stories, their tips, their ideas, their time devoted to moderation, to wiki or to the web development of the site are also thanked, it’s a collaborative work. Several members told me, with emotion, that this site had changed their lives, seeing this gratitude in their eyes, that’s all I need . For me too, backpacking light, this community and this site have given me such a lot, much more that I can express here”³⁰.

Shanx (27 years old, IT engineer) explained that “the forum has given me so much that it just wouldn’t occur to me not to share”. As for Florencia (51 years old), a well-known DIY figure and great contributor to the site, she criticizes “the consumers of information. RL is not a ‘help yourself’ site... I ask my question and then I leave”. In the same way as the free software communities studied by Demazière (et al., 2011), the *MUL* community is a paradox, combining “limited acquaintance” and “strong cohesion”, freedom and formalized regulation (e.g. chart, moderation). RL moreover also shows an original form of ‘open source’ based on detachment from the “dominant rather private model”, and “the possibility of freely sharing, distributing, modifying and reproducing information” (Chance and Meyer, 2017).

“The forum has helped me. I’m happy to help the forum and the association. That’s the idea of free software, isn’t it? If we’re interested in something, then we’re going to contribute to it. Not everybody is capable of contributing to code, but we can contribute by diffusing the software, by helping out with documentation, translation. So I’ll be delighted for the forum to be for others what it’s been for me. I’m happy to give a hand to Oli_v_ier when he needs it” (Opitux, 41 years old, IT specialist).

³⁰ <https://www.randonner-leger.org/forum/viewtopic.php?id=35733&p=2>

The influence of the ‘free’ approach is moreover very prominent among the founders and managers of the community, and sensitivity for many members³¹. Furthermore, the history of the RL site is also part of a detachment process vis-à-vis GAFAs, including development via free software, abandoning Google as search engine (replaced by tools offering better data protection, e.g. Duckduckgo then Qwant). In addition, the choice was also made to be relatively detached from esthetic concerns for site construction in order to focus on content.

The importance of bricolage and promotion of DIY on RL, close to the maker movement³² (Berrebi-Hoffman et al. 2018), shows a little more clearly the wish to detach oneself from “private” approaches through the disclosure, collaboration and modifiability of goods and information in circulation. From rudimentary creations using recycled waste (camping stoves and windbreaks from tin cans, bowls from plastic bottles) to more sophisticated designs (shelters, backpacks, sleeping bags, padded jackets), the forum³³ (and internet in general) is a luxuriant “outdoor laboratory” (Callon et al., 2001) of self-manufacturing. Even if industrialized raw materials are sometimes used (in particular brand fabric membranes such as silnylon, cuben and skytex), and complex know-how learned (in particular in the field of sewing machine), RL is seen as a recent and low-tech avatar of social design (ibid.): uncomplicated conception, socialization of simple objects to be made, materials that are easy to find today (many salvaged and recycled), easy ways of modifying canvas, etc. “All the DIY I’ve done,

³¹ Adrienne, who used to work for Wikipedia, “thought it was fantastic and I really got into sharing knowledge, into pooling everything, that kind of stuff. And free licenses. Things I see a lot of on RL: a band of geeks who are just as keen on free software as they are on lightweight hiking. (...) For me, they’re actually just hiking geeks”.

³² The community has organized several DIY camps, later significantly renamed as *fablabs*.

³³ E.g., https://www.randonner-leger.org/wiki/doku.php?id=sommaire_bricolage

I've shared it on the forum. It was natural to give back what the community gave me" (Big Cactus). "It's a kind of open source system" Nutzz explained. Florencia considers moreover some of her inventions as the result of collaborative projects; she works on her specifications, asks the community questions and it answers, she develops her equipment, shares her product, others rework the prototype and adapt it to their need. In return, as well as sharing her knowledge (plan, description, feedback, etc.) on the forum, she also replies to many personal mails about her creations. While the notions of creative commons and free licenses are only rarely explicitly mentioned, a large part of the forum and discussions are *in fact* promoting copyleft (i.e. moving away from copyright). The majority are not great handymen, but they represent an ideal for all and an incentive to (re)design and share, in other words to detach oneself from industrial manufacturers and designed goods such as black box. I have therefore not met a single *MUL* who has not, at some time or other, at least adapted or modified the use of some objects. In that respect, there reigns in the midst of this often low tech³⁴ melting pot of tweaking (the word is often used) tips and advice something of the hacker spirit (Lallement, 2015), and relative emancipation from the dominant production order through "low-resource solutions (...) integrating the creativity of the user himself" (Dittmar and Tastevin, 2017).

This sharing economy has made part of all exchange free and reciprocal, and detached it from the utilitarian approach. It is therefore of no surprise to find that cooperation, loan and donation also concern material exchange within the community. Although not a long-term member at the time and therefore without an established

³⁴ Being pragmatic people and sometimes quite technophiles, *MULs* are not against high tech for certain uses (e.g. GPS for orientation).

reputation on RL, Sonicflood777 (35 years old, heavy machine operator) posted a request to buy a pair of second-hand mountain trousers in 2009. She then made a list of the items she did not yet have because of lack of money: “I hope I’m not doing the wrong thing by asking for donations or low prices... I saw that people have already done that, so I thought I’d give it a try...”³⁵. 10 years later, during the interview, her eyes still shone as she remembered the response: many members offered the equipment she needed and sent it to her by post (pans, sunglasses, mat and more).

“I was impressed by such generosity! So it’s just the normal thing to do, to give a lot back since then. I give a lot on the forum, mainly to students and youngsters who don’t have much money”.

The equipment exchange section of RL also includes donation ads for books, pans, clothes, backpacks, etc. More especially, many of these donations take place directly between members outside the forum or sometimes within a labyrinth of commercial and non-commercial exchange. Following a number of *MUL* outings together, Einganien (48 years old, prison warden) noticed that Naxh was poorly equipped. With duplicate items at home, he sold her a cover and backpack (“at a ridiculously low price” Naxh added). On the day of delivery, Naxh was surprised to see

“an enormous packet. Einganien had also sent me many presents, including a headlamp, a cup and a Tyvek mat. He’d already given me a lot of knowledge and experiences, and now I found myself with the whole range of the well-experienced *MUL*”.

Through its sharing culture, becoming a *MUL* in fact opens the door to the sharing economy.

³⁵ <https://www.randonner-leger.org/forum/viewtopic.php?id=8927>

From alternative market rearrangements to partial voluntary simplicity

While “doing it yourself means you can take a small step outside the commercial networks” (Ester), *MULs* are not focused on challenging commercialization and traditional acquisition channels head-on. As passionate hikers, many are even aware they remain major targets for manufacturers. Redfish for example shared an ad for the pre-marketing of a new backpack by Décathlon (2-13-2019), which quickly made members want to try it:

“Ezequiel54 (2-15-19): Yes, I know, it’s an impulsive buy, but I’ve ordered it! (...)

Redfish (3-23-19): OK, so... seen in the shop... and bought (I know I’m weak). 😊
(...)

Einganien (2-28-19): I might have been tempted by the bag, but what’s the point of having heavier than what I’ve got for less volume, gotta stop impulsive buys 😊

»³⁶.

This type of regretful comment is regularly found in the forum concerning the consumerist inability to resist the temptation of novelties (whether to test a more optimal solution or through technophile craving), alongside the teasing comments of others (e.g. “bunch of equipment geeks”). *MUL* confirms here that minimalism can, in certain aspects, be distinguished from voluntary simplicity: getting rid of anything that’s unnecessary doesn’t mean refusing new items considered of importance and value (Mangold and Zschau, 2019).

Detachment culture does not therefore lead to withdrawal from the commercial economy system or challenging of capitalist system (ibid.), but rather results in a

³⁶ <https://www.randonner-leger.org/forum/viewtopic.php?id=35651>

rearrangement of consumer and market cultures. There is detachment from mainstream professionals, doubt vis-à-vis major manufacturers (“avoid their bullshit marketing” according to Ith), mistrust towards traditional distributors of sports products whose offers are sometimes inadequate, and sellers whose advice is often questioned. Consequently, the expertise of *Au Vieux Campeur* the leader in the outdoors market in France is regularly rejected for incompetence, with a traditional conception of hiking that is incompatible with *MUL*:

“And if someone without experience goes to a so-called reference shop (*Au Vieux Campeur* at the top of the list), he’ll be convinced he has the right idea; I’ve already seen a sale assistant there sells a pair of heavy high leather walking shoes... for St Jacques [Pilgrimage, i.e. mainly road hiking]” (Shanx)³⁷.

This phenomenon is linked to the development of online shopping, which has encouraged the emergence of specialized e-boutiques in the niche market of ultralight products (in France: Arklight Design – created by Peyo, a pioneer of *MUL*, High Mobility Gear, etc) and access to foreign manufacturers via global platforms (Amazon, Aliexpress). Using these mediators is made easier by the advice, evaluation and very in-depth product and supply chain knowledge shared by RL which may be referred to as “consumerist third party” (Mallard, 2007) on account of its ability to redefine demands and offers (including the withdrawal of the seller middleman). Unlike hiking blogs or Youtube channels often suspected of being influenced by the brands, the reliability of advice given on the forum is guaranteed by the joint expertise of its amateurs, but also by the voluntary refusal of all advertising (“It also gives me great pleasure to be on RL

³⁷ <https://www.randonner-leger.org/forum/viewtopic.php?id=35210>

because it's an advertising-free site, noncommercial", Lamouchy³⁸) and an enormous moderation effort to root out and banish any disguised advertising.

The relationship with manufacturers is more mixed. Moving away from the major industrialists (going as far as to call for boycotts for non-ethical behaviors, e.g. the predatory marketing operations of *The North Face*) diverges from a certain attachment to small and sometimes artisanal highly-specialized companies. The *MUL* consumer culture is generally characterized by detachment from brands as commercial systems, with a critical stance in terms of confidence and identification, a preference for simplified esthetics stripped of all equipment symbols, and techniques for material detachment of labels, even logos, on industrial objects (combining pragmatic concerns – lighter equipment – and social – anti-ostentation). The usual signs of distinction are also somewhat rejected via targeted attachment to products deemed “good enough” (functional, durable) proposed by distributor brands (in particular Décathlon) and more recently by the rise of Chinese brands, subcontractors who have become actual producers, including Aegismax, 3FUL, Naturehike, etc.

For big buyers, “letting things go” also means not accumulating too many sports items and, according to the expression used in the forum, “emptying your cupboards” as well as buying equipment second-hand. Via the development of a very active section for exchanging among individuals, RL is an effective mediator in the field of second-hand trade. The rubric “Buying/Selling/Donating/Exchanging/Borrowing”³⁹ represented 34% of all discussions (volume > 64,000 subjects and as many transactions) at the beginning

³⁸ <https://www.randonner-leger.org/forum/viewtopic.php?id=33801>. Oli_v_ier regularly declines partnership offers with brands.

³⁹ Purchases and sales represent most of the subjects, but the title is also an indication of the diversity in the forms of exchange created by the forum.

of 2019. It is therefore easy to buy new or second-hand equipment, try it out and test it in use and, if dissatisfied, to consider reselling it⁴⁰. Refusing waste is therefore a strong characteristic of *MUL* consumer behavior, which include limiting one's purchases or passing them on (by selling, lending or giving), favoring sustainable products, and maintaining/repairing or recycling them (e.g. turning an item of clothing into a bag).

Politicization of consumption exists (Chessel and Cochoy, 2004) within (and outside) *MUL*. It generally remains implicit in the forum which is moderated in order to stay focused on the pragmatic issue of lightweight. It is likewise variable depending on practitioners' profiles, which implies controversy⁴¹ and compromise – for example, having a bad conscience about ethically questionable choices (buying via platforms) for financial reasons. Nevertheless, RL is a sounding board for individual behaviors in an attempt to use its sporting ethical consumer power by calling for boycotts in favor of “local” quality manufacturers (sometimes former *MULs*), reducing one's carbon footprint when travelling to sportsgrounds (go nearer, carsharing, public transport, travel less or not at all by plane), limiting one's effect on the environment (e.g. adopting

⁴⁰ This common practice among *MUL* practitioners does not have only an economic purpose (buying at the right price, getting money back), but also one that is ecological and ethical (give new life, reduce waste), and sports-related (helping new members become lightweight, sharing original items, etc.).

⁴¹ Laxmimittal (who advocates ethical consumerism by favoring local activities) gets angry, for example, at promotion of global platforms on RL: “You don't know whether or not to buy from Ali[express] because you don't even know if the product is going to arrive. But if real people with real experiences come and tell you it's ok, then you can do it, nothing stops you anymore. Ali dreamed of doing it, RL did it: completely free advertising, done by consumers themselves (...). And of course we sell everywhere and pay tax nowhere. It's not about denouncing such or such [*MUL*] (...) but rather about regretting the consequences of this mortiferous ‘system’” <https://www.randonner-leger.org/forum/viewtopic.php?id=34485>.

“leave no trace” behavior) when hiking, vegetarianism and animal awareness (e.g. refusing the live-plucking of ducks, etc.). But life stylization goes further.

“Once adopted, the *MUL* concept proves to be a good school of voluntary simplicity, and when you realize you can do more with less in hiking, it is just a short step to understanding that, until now, we have cluttered our lives with artificial needs” (Pierre)⁴².

More generally, the experience of outdoor leisure minimalism is dialectically related⁴³ to heightened awareness of the negative effects of overconsumption, and a variable and nuanced commitment to a more general approach to voluntary simplicity. As Etzioni suggested (1998), from downshifters to holistic simplifiers, followers of minimalism constitute a heterogeneous population depending on the type and level of their commitment. On a daily basis, *MULs* activate and adopt forms of alternative consumption to variable degrees, including reducing their needs, limiting purchases and detachment from possessions (donation, garage sales), as well as reducing waste, paying more attention to recycling and repairing; giving up individual cars and no longer using traditional markets (attachment to short distribution channels, ethical or organic consumerism), decluttering cupboard or home, etc. In certain cases, life stylization through detachment can lead to major lifestyle changes. For example Frédéric (41 years old) gave up his job as manager of an online business importing products made in Asia to become a freelance IT specialist, left the city to live in the country, and became a

⁴² <https://www.randonner-leger.org/forum/viewtopic.php?id=1923> This thread on the subject of “Voluntary Simplicity and being a *MUL* in the rest of one’s life” has received over 560 contributions and almost 118,000 views since 2006.

⁴³ In many life stories, responsible consumer practices already existed before becoming a *MUL*. Yet implementing detachment through and in a leisure activity appears, in all cases, to be a facilitator, even trigger, of a global transformation in consumption cultures.

degrowth activist and political actor in the local economy for the relocalization of activities and the promotion of organic agriculture. More often than not, somewhere between an ephemeral ideal after the hike and compromise (consideration of close family and friends, return to daily life, plurality of consumption cultures), life stylization is more measured and varied as it is the case for voluntary simplicity (Shaw and Newholm, 2002). Yet, interesting for critical consumption studies, the fact remains that the renewal of a sporting subculture through detachment contributes *in act* to greatly rearranging consumption behaviors in general. As everyday acts (Haenfler et al. 2012), sport consumption contributes to social changes, but the political nature of what can be called a lifestyle sport movement remains quite ambivalent. If *MUL* represents an indirect and praxeological promotion of alternative consumption in daily life (Wahlen and Laamanen, 2015), *MULs* do not act and see themselves as political and minimalist activists.

Conclusion

The *MUL* movement constitutes a providential observatory for innovations through withdrawal (Goulet and Vinck, 2012), where detachment is the starting point for sociotechnical rearrangements and the incentive for human actors to act, from designers to users, with the boundary being often questioned in practice. “Some of the most exciting work in this collection, however, lies precisely at the crossroads between detachment as process, state, stance and ascetic, such as when personal aspirations to detachment are worked through practices of material cutting and separation” (Candea et al., 2015). Lightweight backpacking is one of those hybrid cases where detachment is both a continuous process of commitment to a withdrawal approach, itself supported by regularly stabilized states (sustainable detachment in stages from such or such material items, needs or emotions). This material culture of detachment is also based on an

individual and collective work for a systematic questioning of previous attachments. We have seen that this “collaborative lightening” fuels a type of ascetic subjectivation and, as a consequence, a kind of ‘minimalization’ of consumption culture in a more responsible way. While the *MUL* movement does not constitute a radical break with the principles of ownership or commercialization, it nonetheless renews the questioning of the “consumer society” by favoring a relative disengagement from accumulation and its underlying repercussions well beyond the sphere of leisure activities. The gradual conversion to sporting minimalism implies recreational and temporary experimentation vis-à-vis alternative norms of consumption (frugality, recycling, making, anti-ostentation, sharing, gift, etc.), founded on a moral and political redefinition of detachment. It should be considered not as a lack of attention but, on the contrary, as a heightened awareness of the consequences of overconsumption, with important repercussions on everyday consumer culture. *MUL* community appears as a sport lifestyle movement which provides both praxeological and ideological frameworks to craft a minimalist world, “encouraging people to individualize the self by altering daily habits (especially consumption)” (Haenfler et al., 2012: 15). For consumer research field, this paper illustrates how conversion to a ‘simple’ leisure can be the turning point for a renewal of consumer standards. It shows “the extent to which consumption can contribute to the awakening of an awareness and action that is both civic and responsible” (Chessel and Cochoy, 2014: 9). Away from the most politicized movements of deconsumption, not without nuance, controversy or ambiguity, the *MUL* movement is as a mirror of the contemporary changes in ordinary critical consumers. But, as it has been shown in the case of everyday responsible consumption (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2009), the majority of these practices of detachment are diffuse and individualistic. In that sense, *MUL* seems to be close from downshifting or simplicity

movement (Mangold and Zschau, 2019), embedded in local or online communities promoting individual behaviors and responsibilities. This original case of the inclusion of political stakes in ultralight equipment shows, in any case, that detachment clearly appears as a powerful sociotechnical device that contributes to shaping our modernity.

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