

“It might be rubbish, but it’s my rubbish”: How the Makers of Cigar Box Guitars Resist Throwaway Culture

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2 “It might be rubbish, but it’s *my* rubbish”: How the Makers of Cigar Box Guitars Resist Throwaway Culture

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6

7 ABSTRACT

8 This paper analyses ethnographic research carried out into the activities of a particular group of makers whose DIY activities
9 are centred on the creation, dissemination and performance of home-made musical instruments in the form of cigar box
10 guitars. From a series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews, it emerged that these objects are almost exclusively based on
11 notions of recycling, reuse and repurposing, and as such extend the life of component parts that would otherwise be discarded.
12 Also, as hand-crafted labours of love, the resulting instruments are often the focus of strong emotional bonds to their makers,
13 and are used for extended periods, being added to, altered and reconfigured over time as new components become available
14 and the makers’ skills improve. For many makers, partaking in this activity has been their first foray into creative production
15 of any kind, and often, they need to find solutions to problems they encounter in the process of making of their instruments. As
16 a consequence of the usually very solitary nature of the activity, these makers make extensive use of online forums and
17 networks to become part of a community of practice, openly sharing their knowledge and experience to help each other, and to
18 celebrate their achievements of productive labour. It is argued that the ‘magic’ of the instruments produced and the support of
19 a social media network is directly linked to the extension of product lifetimes of the objects made.

20 **KEYWORDS: DIY; Amateur Making; Cigar Box Guitars; Recycling; Repurposing; Extending Product Lifetimes**

21

22 INTRODUCTION: HISTORY, CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

23 Cigar box guitars (and also diddy bows, cigar box fiddles, canjos, banjos and ukuleles – see Figure 1) are very simply
24 constructed objects which historically have been created through the repurposing and upcycling of old wooden boxes or tins
25 and other discarded objects, and the recycling of reclaimed materials. Originally these acoustic instruments appeared around
26 the middle of the 19th Century in America as impoverished people built them out of necessity, but in the late 1990s the cigar
27 box guitar reappeared as a reinvented, amplified instrument – presented as a reactionary object driven by a desire for an
28 alternative to mainstream consumption. Citing frustration with the excessive costs of some factory-produced instruments from
29 mainstream companies and the unnecessary exploitation of precious, unsustainable hardwood resources the ‘Cigar Box Guitar
30 Revolution’ encouraged people to reclaim used materials, make themselves such instruments and to get out and perform with
31 them in public. The scene rapidly grew and now cigar box guitar festivals are held across the whole of the United States. When
32 the American blues player ‘Seasick Steve’ appeared on BBC television in 2006, his promotion of these instruments initiated
33 the cigar box guitar scene in the UK.

34 The extended lifetime of cigar box guitars is clearly an issue of longevity rather than durability. As Cooper [1] explains:

35 A Product’s longevity describes its life-span (or ‘lifetime’) and is thus a somewhat different measure [to durability], being
36 partly determined by factors other than attributes formed through design and manufacture. These factors include user
37 behaviour towards a product and wider socio-cultural influences.

38 It is argued here that the behavioural relationship between the makers and their instruments and a number of specific socio-
39 cultural influences are key elements in this resistance to mainstream consumption, making the production of cigar box guitars
40 of particular interest to research in sustainability.

41 Anticonsumption is an established and well-explored area of academic study, usefully delimited by Makri et. al. [2] who
42 identified product life-extension and repurposing as particular areas worthy of further study. Yet, from their extensive

43 literature review, it appears that amateur making and do-it-yourself practices as methods of anticonsumption have not yet been
44 fully explored. One study by Scott and Weaver [3] does discuss amateur making (and even includes cigar box guitars as an
45 example). The article concentrates on repurposing objects to extend product lifespans. Cigar box guitars are an example of a
46 process the authors label ‘amalgamative repurposing’:

47 Broadly speaking, repurposing can take three forms: functional repurposing, in which the object is not altered but used for
48 a different purpose; aesthetic repurposing, in which the object is altered but the purpose is the same; and amalgamative
49 repurposing, in which the object undergoes some sort of transformation to serve a different purpose. These three different
50 forms of repurposing differ in the amount of skill, effort, and involvement they require, with amalgamative repurposing
51 requiring the highest amount of skill and involvement.

52 The authors position repurposing as ‘an intersection of sustainable consumption and anticonsumption’ and relevantly conclude
53 that ‘creativity and fun may be a key motivation for repurposing and perhaps other sustainable consumption behaviors.’

54 Creativity and fun are key driving components of amateur making, and although craft practice itself has long been an area of
55 academic study, the analysis of ethnographic studies with respect to amateur makers has only relatively recently become more
56 established. One of the most cited authors researching in this respect is the historian Gelber, who since the early 1990s has
57 produced a series of academic articles and books about the social aspects of DIY in the USA [4]. In 2000, Attfield’s seminal
58 ethnographic work *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* highlighted the critical analysis of the work of amateur
59 makers in the UK and the makers’ relationships with the objects they create as being worthy of serious academic attention [5].
60 I have previously addressed the diverse nature of amateur making activity and located it in relation to professional design
61 practice [6], and in *The Design of Everyday Life*, Shove, Watson, Hand, and Ingram examine Do It Yourself making as the
62 consumption of craft [7]. In his concluding chapter to the edited volume *Repair Work Ethnographies*, Jackson notes ‘the
63 various kind of hacks, kluges and workarounds that support repair in amateur and enthusiast environments [8]. Another
64 Jackson’s ethnographic studies have focused on two important aspects of amateur making; the motivation and rewards gained
65 from its undertaking [9], and the role played by the locations in which such practices take place [10]. Gauntlett’s book *Making
66 is Connecting*, assesses the impact of social media on the sharing of DIY knowledge [11]. Although not an ethnographic study,
67 Knott’s *Amateur Craft: History and Theory* explores the important contribution amateur craft has made to the material culture
68 of the modern world [12].

69 Why is the cigar box guitar such a strong contender as an object of sustainable consumption? What role does being part of a
70 community of practice play in supporting sustainable aspirations? This study aims to answer these research questions and add
71 to the bodies of knowledge described above by specifically exploring the ways in which the builders of these instruments, both
72 individually and as a community, inherently resist throwaway culture.

73
74 **Figure 1. A selection of ‘cigar box guitars’, canjos and ukuleles constructed from cigar boxes, various other wooden**
75 **boxes and tin cans made to commission by Spatchcock and Wurzell. Photo by the author.**



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77

78 MATERIALS AND METHODS

79 Following a purposive sampling exercise (where each participant was asked to suggest other makers they were aware of), a
 80 series of eight semi-structured, in-depth interviews of between 45 minutes and one hour in length were conducted with
 81 builders of cigar box guitars, none of whom were professionally trained luthiers. All of the participants were, of course,
 82 offered confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms, but all of them requested to be referred to by the names they were
 83 known by within their cigar box guitar circles (which may or may not be their real names). The core questions asked of each
 84 participant were the same. These included questions about their backgrounds and training or qualifications, the length of time
 85 they had been producing cigar box guitars, and their motivations for doing so. Further questions explored the location where
 86 the making activity took place, where they sourced their raw materials, the particular processes they used in design and
 87 manufacture, the amount of time they spent each week making and whether for them it was a part-time or full-time activity.
 88 All of the interviews were recorded using a voice recorder and were transcribed word for word into text files by a professional
 89 transcription service. The resulting textual material was coded manually by the author into a series of thematic points.
 90 When analysed, some of this material informed an earlier research study by the author, which explored the creation of these
 91 instruments in the UK [13]. At a later date it was decided to create a short documentary film on the subject [14]. During the
 92 filming of this documentary, and later during the filming of an extended version commissioned for terrestrial television [15]
 93 (Figure 2), further semi-structured interviews employing the same set of questions were conducted with three of the

94 participants in the original study and another twelve makers not involved in the original study that attended a cigar box guitar
 95 festival event which was filmed as a part of the documentary. These filmed interviews were also transcribed word for word
 96 and manually coded. A list of the participants showing their age groups, the amount of time they have been involved in making
 97 cigar box guitars, whether they are part time or full-time makers and whether they were interviewed for the initial study or the
 98 documentary or both is shown below (Table 1). The participants, if not full time makers, had a variety of occupations
 99 including an actor, an IT consultant, two teachers, a ceramicist and warehouse worker. There was only one female interviewed.
 100 This was not by choice, but because despite all efforts other female makers were not located. Taken along with the similarities
 101 of ages of those interviewed, this reinforced the initial view that this activity is largely dominated by middle-age men from a
 102 middle-class background.

103
 104 **Table 1. Participants.**

Interviewee	Age group	Involvement (Yrs)	PT/FT ¹	Initial study Interview	Documentary Film Interview
Nig	45-50	14	PT	✓	✓
Margaret	45-50	14	PT	✓	
Woofie	45-50	14	FT	✓	✓
Rob S	30-35	8	FT	✓	
Nick	55-60	6	PT	✓	
Chickenbone J	55-60	15	FT	✓	✓
Rob C	30-35	17	FT	✓	
Dan	50-55	3	PT	✓	
Hollowbelly	50-55	14	PT		✓
Den	50-55	8	PT		✓
Dusk Brother 1	30-35	4	PT		✓
Dusk Brother 2	30-35	4	PT		✓
Dirt Pie	60-65	10	FT		✓
Aiden	30-35	5	FT		✓
Andrew	55-60	5	PT		✓
Rick	25-30	7	PT		✓
Jeff	55-60	10	FT		✓
Greg	60-65	5	PT		✓
Black River	60-65	12	PT		✓
Bad Mood	45-50	12	PT		✓

105 ¹ PT – Part Time makers produce CBGs as a hobby for themselves or sell them in low numbers. FT - Full Time makers have
 106 no other source of income other than from selling CBGs they have made.

107
 108 Due to the nature of the filming process, a good deal of the filmed material was not used in the final edits of the
 109 documentaries. Analysis of that material is employed here for the first time to expand on the original finding that a key
 110 element for many UK makers is that wherever possible, the materials used should be recycled, reused, repurposed or upcycled
 111 rather than bought, and to explore other , new, elements such as the strong emotional bonds created between the makers and
 112 their instruments.

114 Figure 2. A still from the BBC Television Documentary ‘Cigar Box Blues: The Makers of a Revolution’.



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Another important aspect, which was not fully explored in the original study, is the extent to which cigar box guitar makers make use of social media to develop their resistance to throwaway culture. The makers all admit to making an extensive use of social media to counteract the feelings of isolation they experience while carrying out their making activities. Cigar box guitar makers evidently like to feel that they belong to a community of like-minded people—being part of virtual communities connected through social media as well as physical communities of people for whom meeting and playing their home-made instruments in public is a primary concern. In order to explore this further, a ‘netnographic’ approach was taken to analyse makers’ online activity. Netnography is ‘a research methodology of ethnography adapted to the study of online communities’ [16]. Analysing the content of internet-based activity allows insights into the drivers and motivations behind the behaviours of online communities.

Table 2. Facebook CBG groups founded as of 18 June 2020. ¹

Date Founded	Name	Group Type	Members
17 Jun 2009	Cigar Box Nation	Community/Store	55,028
02 Sep 2010	C.B. Gitty Crafter Supply	Store	14,818
09 Jun 2011	Chickenbone John’s Guitar’s	Store/ Build tuition	2,840
23 Jun 2012	Cigar Box Guitar	Builds/Playing	11,106
27 Feb 2013	European Cigar Box Guitar Fans	Builds/Playing	838
12 Nov 2013	Cigar Box Guitar Builders, Owners and Players	Builds/Playing	4,767
01 Dec 2013	Cigar Box Guitar Videos and Music	Playing only	1,673
12 Mar 2014	Homemade Stringed Instruments	Builds/Playing	6,494
09 Apr 2014	U.K. Cigar Box Guitars	Builds/Playing	1,206
09 Apr 2015	The Original Cigar Box Guitar Store	For sale/Exchange	2,908
16 Jun 2015	Cigar Box Guitar Yorkshire	Playing Tuition	160

07 Dec 2015	U.K. Cigar box guitar songs	Playing only	304
16 Nov 2016	The Cigar Box Guitar Builder	Builds/Playing	602
20 Nov 2016	Cigar Box Guitar Builders	Builds only	905
12 Jan 2017	How To Play Cigar Box Guitar	Playing Tuition	2,975
04 Jul 2017	Cigar Box Guitars	Builds/Playing	6,103
01 Nov 2017	Uncle Mark Cigar Box Wizard	Playing Tuition	1,923
01 Feb 2018	DIY Cigar Box Guitars	Builds/Playing	36,123
28 Apr 2018	Mainely CBG's	Store	697
08 May 2018	Cigar Box Guitar History	Community	1,792
26 Sep 2018	Cigar Box Guitar Music and Videos	Playing only	571
06 May 2019	Friends of C. B. Gitty	Build tuition	1,022
20 Nov 2019	5-Day CBG Challenge	Playing Tuition	608
02 Jan 2020	cigar box guitar enthusiasts	Builds/Playing	612
18 Jan 2020	Learn Cigar Box Guitar group	Playing Tuition	448

¹ This is not a comprehensive list, but based on a single search for 'cigar box guitars' within Facebook's standard settings for language/geographical region. Individual Facebook member pages using the term in their title are not included.

The virtual communities studied here interface through well-established websites such as Cigar Box Nation, Hand Made Music Clubhouse, The Musical Instrument Makers Forum or Homemade-Guitars. Interviews revealed that the main go-to website for people joining the scene is Cigar Box Nation, the website set up in 1993 in the USA by Shane Speal, the founder of the 'Cigar Box Guitar Revolution' [17] that boasts over 20,600 members. This site hosts instructional videos on making and playing, acts as a repository of downloadable plans, as an online store of parts and materials, and as a discussion forum for makers. Helpfully, the site counts the discussions that have accrued over the years under particular categories, with by far the most popular at the time of writing being 'Building Secrets, Tips, Advice, Discussion' (5,516 discussions) followed by 'Performances, How to Play, Lessons, Concerts' (2101 discussions). By comparison, all the other discussion categories, including 'For Sale: Cigar Box Guitars, other instruments, CDs and related items', 'Fests and Concerts: Organizing and Promoting' and 'Other Stuff – off topic, fun stuff, whatever', number only in the hundreds.

As well as the use of websites specifically aimed at cigar box guitar makers discussed above, general websites such as YouTube also play a huge role in encouraging the movement through the hosting of instructional demonstration videos as well as hosting libraries of cigar box guitar performances. However, reflecting changing online practices, the majority of online activity for the movement now occurs through Social Media including Twitter, Instagram and Facebook groups and pages including *Cigar Box Guitars*, *UK Cigar Box Guitars*, *Cigar Box Guitar Builders*, *Owners and Players*, *Cigar Box Guitar History*, and *DIY Cigar Box Guitars* among many others. A table showing 25 of these Facebook pages, when they were founded and the number of members each has is informative (Table 2). It shows that the popularity of the cigar box guitar has been fairly consistent, with, on average, two new cigar box guitar related pages being founded each year over the last 12 years. However, the average number of members per group, at 6,261, is a meaningless figure. The number of members varies wildly, with 4 groups having over 10,000 members (one group having over 55,000, another with over 36,000), but the majority of sites having far fewer: 10 groups have fewer than 1,000 members and 11 groups have between 1,000 and 10,000 members. In addition, most members of a particular group are also a member of one or more other groups, as can be seen by the same posts appearing on a number of different CBG Facebook pages. By far the most popular type of group is 'Builds/Playing' (9 groups) where the focus is on general building tips, and showing and playing finished builds. This is followed by 'Playing Tuition'

155 groups, where general lessons and ‘how to play’ tutorials are provided. Two groups are store sites, and the other types are a
 156 mixture of store, building tuition, exchange and community groups.

157
 158 IT MIGHT BE RUBBISH, BUT IT’S *MY* RUBBISH

159 The actual construction of cigar box guitars obviously varies a great deal depending on the particular materials and
 160 components selected, but usually begins by identifying a suitable receptacle that could form a resonating chamber or
 161 soundbox. This could be any hollow wooden box (hence the common use made of old cigar boxes), a tin box or empty can, or
 162 a chamber made from domed metal items such as old car hub caps. The receptacle is then cut to allow a wooden neck to be
 163 fitted through it, which can be formed from any suitably strong piece of wood sawn and shaped to size, Prompting the use of
 164 reclaimed floorboards or doorframes, or offcuts of wood left over from other projects. The design and cutting of these two
 165 main components is rarely planned out beforehand in any great detail, with most of the assembly being done ‘under the saw’
 166 as the instrument is being made. Sometimes the instruments are purely acoustic, in which case sound holes need to be cut into
 167 the box to increase the volume. More usually the guitars are amplified by the inclusion of a piezo-type flat disc transducer
 168 pickup glued to the inside of the box, or an electromagnetic pickup (bought, reused, or sometimes wound by hand by the
 169 builder) fitted to the top of the box or tin underneath where the strings will be fitted. Although the use of an electromagnetic
 170 pickup potentially removes the need for a hollow body, solid-bodied ‘cigar box’ guitars are quite rare. The final components
 171 required can be bought or made from a variety of found objects (usually a mix of the two) – a tailpiece for the strings, a bridge
 172 and nut to support the strings above the body and neck of the guitar, and some kind of tuning device to tension the strings and
 173 tune them to the correct note.

174 One of the most high-profile and active proponents of cigar box guitars in the UK is Chickenbone John, who pronounces
 175 himself to be ‘The Godfather of the cigar box guitar’. He gave up a career as an architect when during a recession he found
 176 himself making more money from selling his home-made instruments than he was from his professional practice. Chickenbone
 177 John explains the driving force to use recycled materials and not worry too much about trying to achieve perfection. He says:

178 Making a ‘proper’ guitar takes a lot of time, but making a cigar box guitar is just a stick in a box and you can make it a
 179 simple or fancy as you want. It doesn’t have to be perfect, as long as it can be played, that’s all that matters. It’s a
 180 revelation to think that with the tools in your garage and a bit of scrap wood, you can make an instrument. As I learned to
 181 make these I taught other people. It’s fantastic to see the delight on someone’s face when they screw an instrument together
 182 in a day and play it. It’s the DIY not EMI thing, which the punk days had had, where you could make your own record.
 183 That ethos had fallen away with synthesisers and very highly produced music. So it was a real innovation for people to
 184 think ‘I’ll make my own instrument and do what I want’, and ‘yes, it might be rubbish, but it’s *my* rubbish’ not some mass-
 185 produced piece of stuff.

186 Other makers also express the view that there is indeed a level of kudos and authenticity to be found in using second-hand
 187 components, repurposing and upcycling parts and reclaiming and recycling wood wherever possible as opposed to buying
 188 anything new. Robyn Grieg-Brown of ‘Spatchcock and Wurzell’ states:

189 For the last seven or eight years now I’ve been making stringed instruments from recycled materials. Everything has to be
 190 recycled or reclaimed. Tins, old tins, vintage tins and reclaimed hardwood furniture. People give me tins, save me tins,
 191 from car boot sales, house clearances. I’m known as a ‘tin man’ at the local car boot sale! So, I’d find a tin or be given a
 192 tin, and it would tell me what it wants to be – whether a guitar, a ukulele or a banjo. And then I’d go look for a piece of
 193 hardwood. Being a Yorkshireman I can’t throw anything away. I go to the local recycling place, look in the skip and think
 194 ‘why has someone thrown that away? That’s just a perfectly usable piece of kit.’ So, making stuff from what – I’m like a
 195 Womble basically – people throw away is just, incredible. I mean, this is a nice piece of mahogany which as you can see
 196 has butts in there – it was a door frame originally.

197 While all makers revel in the recycling, repurposing and re-use aspects of their making, the most overtly ecological approach
 198 is exemplified in the work of one maker, Jeff, based in Cornwall on the south-west coast of the UK. A keen surfer and
 199 professional surfboard maker, he started his company ‘Dirtbox Guitars’ to further his passion of sustainable crafting. Like
 200 many makers, all his guitars are from recycled materials, but sustainable issues are central to his personal beliefs and pervades
 201 all his discussions around making. Jeff is an environmental activist, and is involved in keeping the local beaches clean and
 202 educating visitors to clear up and take their rubbish home. As a result, people who find objects on the beach take them to him
 203 as they know he will reuse it. He has even made someone a one-string diddly bow from an old speargun they found on the
 204 beach.

205 As some of the makers note, there is no real imperative today to use recycled materials and upcycled components. Factory-
 206 produced instruments are now so readily available at such a range of prices points it is likely that most people could afford to
 207 buy one if they so desired. Even in making their own instruments, makers have access to mass-produced components through
 208 music stores or online stores such as Ebay, and new power tools and virgin timber from DIY stores if they so choose. The fact
 209 remains, though, that the overarching ethos of the movement is to resist such consumerism wherever possible. Many of the
 210 makers revel in the fact that they use no power tools at all, only pre-owned, often handed-down, hand tools; and the purchasing
 211 of virgin timber is not encouraged. Once involved in this process of recycling and repurposing rather than purchasing, it can
 212 become second nature and seemingly the source of much of the enjoyment. Some of the makers comment that they soon
 213 started to pay far more attention to what they were buying and more closely consider where it came from, and started to look
 214 instead at all kinds of diverse objects they came across in a different way, seeing the possibilities of how they could be
 215 employed as a part of various instruments (‘I could make a ukulele out of that’ or ‘That could be turned into a banjo’). Such an
 216 approach has been responsible for a number of wildly eccentric stringed instruments made from unlikely objects—from old
 217 garden shovels to steel dogbowls, toolboxes, old metal washboards and even the ‘crapocaster’, made from an old toilet seat.

219 THIS IS A PART OF ME

220 There is also a clear element of pride in what the makers of cigar box guitars produce that contributes to extended product
 221 lifetimes—a connection between the maker and the instrument itself which enhances its value to them. As one of the makers,
 222 Nig Richards, says when describing one of his guitars:

223 This is part of me. I mean, it’s come out of my head and out of my endeavours. It doesn’t exist anywhere else before I’ve
 224 got these little bits of scrap wood together and made it. I know it sounds weird but there’s an emotional attachment there.
 225 This for me is still the bits and pieces that I found to put this together. And then when I play the music and the sound
 226 comes out – it’s like – that’s part of me. That’s the sound that I want and I’ve made that. I’m not just playing it, I’ve made
 227 the instrument that it’s coming out of. I don’t know if anybody which hasn’t made one can understand what that means – I
 228 hope they can. That’s what you feel. It really is an extension of yourself. The sound appears and you think ‘Wow! You
 229 know, that’s me. That really is me, because this doesn’t exist if I hadn’t have made it’ This is my music coming out of 5
 230 dollars’ worth of cardboard and wire.

231 ‘Hollowbelly’ is more interested in playing cigar box guitars than making them, but nevertheless has a strong connection to the
 232 instruments that he has acquired over the years, stemming from seeing himself as part of a strong community. Brandishing a
 233 guitar he has been sent by a fan of his music, he says:

234 It’s great to be part of a community. The idea that somebody I’ll never meet in Pennsylvania would make and send over
 235 this guitar is touching, isn’t it? There’s an irony in the fact I had a £1000 National guitar, but I found the sound I was
 236 looking for from a stick, shoved in a box! It’s not about throwing money at something, that’s not where you’ll find the
 237 magic, but I had to find out the hard way.

238 Iain Moncrieff of ‘The Dusk Brothers’ reiterates the point about the ‘magic’ involved in making and playing a cigar box guitar
239 that he says doesn’t occur with mass produced instruments:

240 You never know how they’re going to sound. You spend, (turns to his brother Graeme Moncrieff) you spend about four or
241 five months making yours! Mine take about a week I reckon. And then you string them up, and you don’t know that whole
242 time what they’re going to sound like. And you string them up and you hit the first chord and you get this sound which is
243 unlike any other guitar that you’ve ever played. And, I don’t know, it’s quite magical really. It’s magical to make
244 something and then play it and it makes this sound which is just, different.

245 One noticeable aspect of performing with cigar box guitars is the large proportion of artists that post on the internet under a
246 pseudonym, and use a performance name or stage name when playing live. While this might not be restricted to the world of
247 cigar box guitars, the adoption of a performance name does seem to strike a common chord with players of cigar box guitars.
248 Perhaps this is following in the tradition of earlier American blues players such as ‘Leadbelly’, ‘Peg Leg Howell’, ‘Blind
249 Lemon Jefferson’ or ‘Scrapper Blackwell’; but likely it is also related to the ‘alternative’ image of the instrument and the air of
250 resistance that surrounds the movement. In the same way that playing a cigar box guitar allows makers to discover a particular
251 aspect of their musical creativity they may not have previously explored, performing under a different name certainly allows
252 players to easily step outside of their everyday existence, to experiment with an alternative persona, or to freely express their
253 inner feelings, strengthening their emotional ties to their hand-made guitars. As Hollowbelly says:

254 I’m not acting it when I do it. I play like I’m going to get killed the moment I come offstage – as if it’s the very last thing
255 I’m going to do. That’s why it sounds the way it does – because that’s what’s in me!

256 Such emotional bonds between the players and their instruments seem to be key to preventing the object being discarded at a
257 later date. Many makers report that they frequently re-make the same instrument a number of times, making changes to it if the
258 sound wasn’t quite what they were looking for, adding sound holes, or extra pickups to increase a guitar’s versatility, or
259 changing the appearance of the guitar by painting the body or applying different finishes including waxes, oils or even boot
260 polish. The reworking of an instrument in this way serves only to further develop existing emotional bonds. In this way,
261 makers proactively extend the product lifetime of the component parts they select, and through constant upkeep, repair,
262 alteration and additions to their instruments as they gain experience, they extend the product lifetime of the instruments they
263 create.

264 ONLINE COMMUNITIES

265 Scrutiny of the online behaviours of cigar box guitar enthusiasts was achieved through a simple ‘netnographic’ analysis of the
266 different types of postings within the Facebook groups listed above. This provided an insight into the ways in which members
267 connect with each other, promote participation and transfer knowledge on an open basis. For the purposes of this exercise, an
268 analysis of 50 randomly selected posts were coded and fell within five basic types. These are listed below with a few examples
269 given of typical posts within each group.

270 *Self-promotional posts - Making:*

- 271 • Look at this cigar box guitar I’ve just made/ have for sale
- 272 • I’ve found these cigar boxes/ components I’m going to use
- 273 • Advertising cigar box guitars/ components for sale

274 *Self-promotional posts - Playing:*

- 275 • Video of me playing my latest cigar box guitar at home/ on stage
- 276 • Download my latest tracks here/ links to YouTube videos
- 277 • Advertising CD’s for sale

- 280 *Calls for help:*
- 281 • I’ve got a problem making this cigar box guitar – can anyone suggest solutions?
 - 282 • I want to use nails as frets – what problems am I likely to have?
 - 283 • What’s the best position for this particular pickup?

- 284 *Instructional posts/videos:*
- 285 • This is how to make a cigar box guitar/ solve a problem/ Downloadable plans
 - 286 • Reviews of related equipment, tools, pedals or amplifiers
 - 287 • How to play ‘Spirit in the Sky’ on a cigar box guitar

- 288 *Promotional posts:*
- 289 • Advertising Cigar box guitar-based performances / festivals/ trade shows
 - 290 • Sharing ‘found’ posts/ videos of players, instruments etc.
 - 291 • General promotion of the scene – cartoons, old photos etc.

292

293 To see if there was a pattern to the distribution of these different types of posts a sample of four Facebook groups was chosen,

294 and the posts over a period of one month (May 2019) were analysed. The deliberately diverse groups (in terms of number of

295 members and activity levels (posts per day)) chosen were *Cigar Box Guitar*; *Cigar Box Guitar Builders, Owners and Players*;

296 *UK Cigar Box Guitars* and the community group *Cigar Box Nation*.

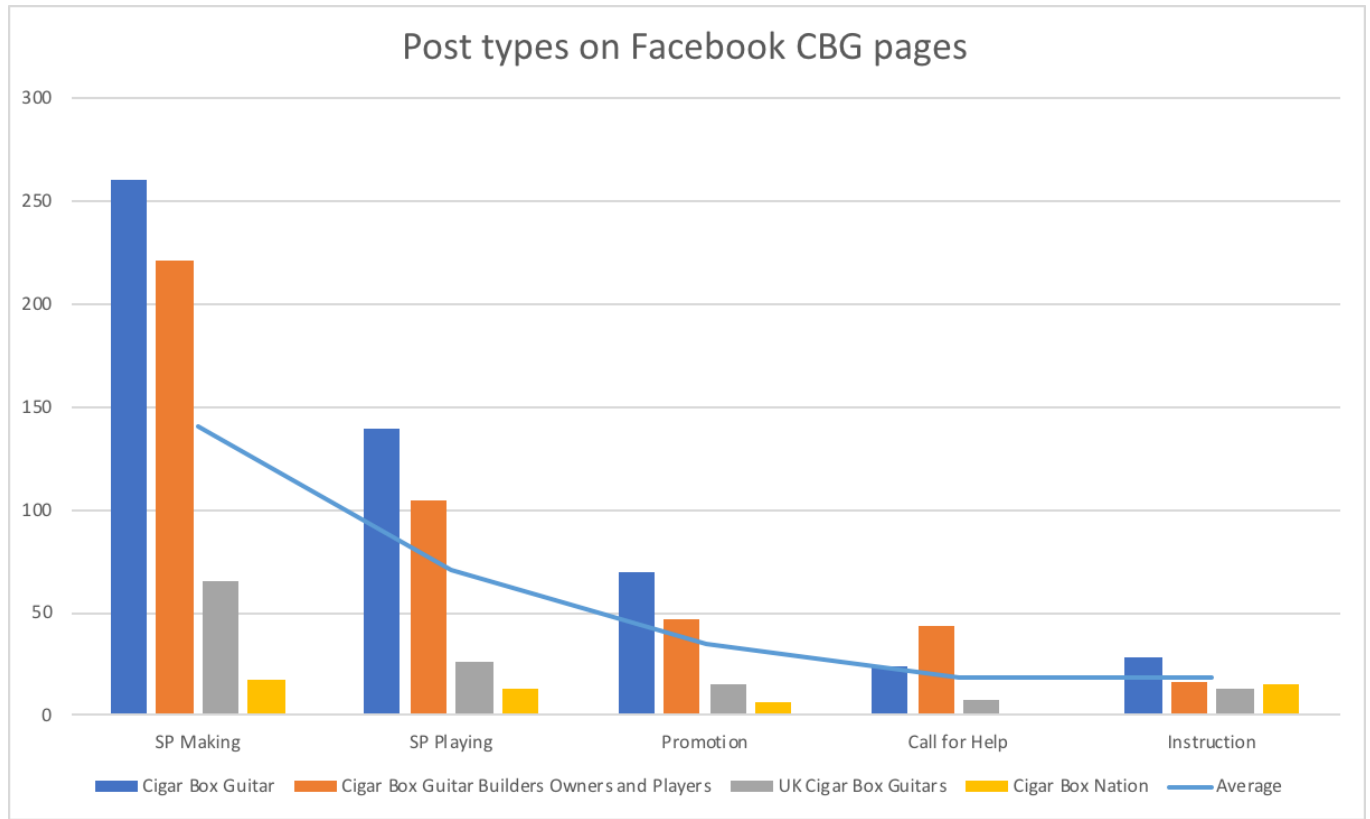
297

298 **Table 3. Distribution of post types.**

Facebook Groups	SP Making	SP Playing	Promotion	Calls for Help	Instruction
Cigar Box Guitar	260	139	70	24	28
CBG Builders, Owners & Players	211	104	47	43	16
UK Cigar Box Guitars	65	26	15	8	13
Cigar Box Nation	17	13	6	0	15
Average	140.75	70.5	34.5	18.75	18

299

300 **Figure 3. Graph of distribution of post types.**



301
302

303 The results (Table 3), particularly when graphed (Figure 3), show a remarkable similarity of distribution, despite the markedly
 304 different number of actual posts. When averaged out, by far the largest number of posts are self-promotional posts where
 305 people take the opportunity to display their making skills, followed by posts where people demonstrate their playing skills,
 306 which follows exactly the most popular discussions on the *Cigar Box Nation* website as mentioned above, showing a
 307 continuation of the dominance of these two topics. There is some crossover between these two types of posts, as very often,
 308 the people demonstrating their playing ability are simultaneously demonstrating the sound of an instrument that they have
 309 made. The next most common post types are more altruistic, promoting the cigar box guitar scene in general terms, advertising
 310 festivals or sharing historical photographs of cigar box guitars or related images. Next come calls for help, with less
 311 experienced members hoping for a solution from more experienced members, and finally come instructional posts, with
 312 members demonstrating how to perform certain making tasks, or providing lessons on how to play particular tunes, or
 313 uploading demonstrations and reviews of related equipment such as guitar amplifiers. Some crossover between all these results
 314 occurs as the same posts are very often submitted to a number of different Facebook pages, so the entries are not unique to that
 315 page or group.

316 The makers’ resistance to throwaway culture is further evidenced through many of the positive comments written in response
 317 to the post types described above (in particular the self-promotional posts around making and calls for help). Here the kudos
 318 arising from sustainable making activity is most pronounced. Makers are applauded for their creative ideas and innovate re-use
 319 of discarded or found objects, such as drawer handle pulls and door hinges for tailpieces to hold the ends of strings; control
 320 knobs made out of cork and old bottle tops, or turned from pieces of pipe and old coins; bridges made from old keys, threaded
 321 bolts or carved out of old bone; sound-hole covers made from old sink strainers, computer fan grilles or shower curtain
 322 eyelets.; and frets made from nails, baling wire or even plastic tie-wraps. The comments frequently evidence the free
 323 dissemination and ready take up of such repurposing suggestions through comments along the lines of ‘I’m going to use that
 324 idea’, or ‘Thanks for that – can’t wait to try it’. Where people have resorted to buying new items or tools out of desperation,

325 the responses usually include suggestions of more sustainable sources of pre-owned or discarded alternatives. This attitude
326 does not appear to be regarded as parsimonious in any way by the community; rather it appears to be regarded as a healthy,
327 positive and forward looking attitude.

328 Makers demonstrate awareness of the fact that while they all take a ‘back to basics’ approach to building and push the idea of
329 ‘authenticity’ in the pieces they produce, they also wholeheartedly embrace the use of the internet to make and maintain their
330 connections to online communities of makers. Chickenbone John says that ‘if it wasn’t for the internet, it would just be
331 happening in the dusty back room of a pub somewhere’, while Nig stated:

332 Interestingly, the whole new movement of people making – not just cigar box and biscuit tin guitars but all kinds of
333 handmade instruments – is dependent on the use of social media and modern technology because without it, it wouldn’t
334 have mushroomed the way that is has. I mean, I’ve been in contact and part of a movement with people who literally are all
335 around the globe. And so we’re in touch with each other and we feel part of this thing, so without the modern technology,
336 we wouldn’t be able to do it, but it’s a kind of strange almost dichotomous relationship we’ve got really between going
337 back to low-tech musical instrument making but using the latest in high-tech social media technology to actually grow and
338 keep the movement rolling.

340 DISCUSSION

341 There are a couple of interesting ironic elements surrounding the activity of making cigar box guitars. One is that, as shown,
342 its proponents widely identify as being against mainstream consumption, and even as strongly anticonsumerist. Indeed, a few
343 comments on online forums rail against those who have had the audacity to make a full-time living from making these
344 instruments, seeing it as being against the ‘rebel’ authenticity of the movement (however misplaced this notion of authenticity
345 may be). For the vast majority of makers, though, there is no shame at all in selling the outputs of their endeavours for profit.
346 If cigar box guitars are taken as an example of craft practice, the selling of creative output is, often, a normal part of that
347 practice. Cigar box guitars are, more accurately, though, examples of DIY and amateur making practices, wherein the
348 expectation and pursuit of profit is not usually an expected result of the activity. Secondly, as a number of the makers hint, the
349 reason for the popularity of the hand building of such basic instruments as cigar box guitars in an age when high-quality
350 factory-built instruments are readily accessible appears to reside in an active resistance against the homogenizing and
351 unsustainable nature of global capitalism and the passive acceptance of digital culture. However, the makers are very aware of
352 the irony in the fact that it is the digital technology of social media which has lowered barriers to participation in the pastime
353 and spread the necessary knowledge to enable their construction by amateur makers all around the world.

354 The preceding sections describe the findings around three intertwined themes that together explain the sustainable aspects of
355 the cigar box making phenomenon, those themes being: the practice of recycling and repurposing; the emotional bonds
356 between makers and their instruments; and the participation in online and physical communities of practice.

357 The cigar box guitar is such a strong contender as an object of sustainable consumption because the majority of makers learned
358 how to build instruments through active participation in web-based communities and Facebook groups. Following the
359 examples of others, makers reported an enhanced sense of achievement when they had managed to create an instrument
360 without buying anything new to do so. Chance findings of suitable pieces of timber and the imaginative repurposing of items
361 that would have been discarded are an intrinsic part of the activity, and also a source of pride amongst makers, with the results
362 shared through social media. That element of pride in the results of their creative endeavours is a key component in extending
363 the product lifespan as the makers retain their instruments for long periods, allowing them to develop their musical repertoires,
364 gradually adapting and customising the instruments to perfectly suit their playing styles and reflect their self-identities. Once
365 inculcated into the making and playing practices, those personal developments are in turn shared via social media with other

366 makers, experienced and inexperienced alike, growing and development the movement. In this way, being a part of the
367 communities of practice plays an active role in supporting sustainable aspirations.

368 The sense of connectedness achieved through active participation in online communities, as well as the real life communities
369 of practice and of performance is a hugely important part of the world of the cigar box guitar maker. The main impact of these
370 communities on the makers is to move their practice away from being purely a Do-It-Yourself activity into one of Do-It-
371 Together or Do-It-With-Others, even if the participation is purely on the level of knowledge exchange rather than hands-on
372 construction. In doing so, increasing numbers of people are becoming involved in a creative activity (many for the first time)
373 where they realise they have the ability to make decisions and choices about what materials to use (and reuse) and the freedom
374 to use any found objects and upcycled parts to create unique products with which they develop an incredibly strong emotional
375 bond.

376 This study adds to the existing literature discussed above in increasing the understanding of anticonsumption practices, adding
377 a case study that exemplifies the wider socio-cultural influences that act to extend product lifetimes. While the role of social
378 media in the sharing of DIY knowledge has been previously explored, the role of social media in providing a focused network
379 of support for both making and performing around a single object has not.

381 CONCLUSIONS

382 For many of those involved, the making of cigar box guitars has unleashed previously hidden or unrealised skills and
383 unexplored levels of creativity, which has acted to develop their personal horizons in various ways. Many of the makers state
384 that this personal development has changed their whole lives, not only from adopting more sustainable approaches resulting in
385 a more emotionally rewarding lifestyle, but also in allowing the making and selling of homemade instruments to become their
386 main or only source of income. For some, this had saved the day when faced with redundancy, for others it had been a
387 welcome distraction that allowed them to escape the drudgery of monotonous or repetitive work. In a similar way, for those
388 that make instruments primarily for performing with in public, adopting homemade instruments has allowed them to expand
389 their repertoires in new ways and to explore new avenues in their music making and song writing. Frequently, as can be seen
390 from the blues-inspired performance names adopted by many of the players, the instruments have become part of an alter-ego
391 they adopt on stage, and as such make a contribution to their self-identity. As a result, the instruments they have created have
392 become of huge importance to their musical development and playing careers, with more than one participant stating that they
393 felt they could never go back to their previous unsustainable consumption of factory-produced musical instruments.

394 The above analysis shows that there are three aspects that act to strengthen the desire for makers of cigar box guitars to resist
395 throwaway culture. Firstly, having an object or a range of artefacts that have not only their own use value (in Marxist terms)
396 but also a personal, emotional value about which the maker can feel passionate, can act as a focus of makers' good intentions
397 with respect to sustainable consumption, recycling, repurposing and upcycling. Such objects provide a strong incentive to
398 carry out making as an active form of resistance. Secondly, the unique nature of the instruments from a sonic perspective, as
399 well as an individual tactile and visual perspective, means that cigar box guitars enable personal growth and development as a
400 musical performer in a way that other instruments do not. Thirdly, as the netnographic analysis revealed, being a part of active
401 virtual and physical support networks provides the necessary learning experiences, information, advice and positive emotional
402 support and encouragement for makers striving to develop their skills in order to operate in a sustainable and more emotionally
403 rewarding way. Without the support of such virtual and physical communities, makers might find continually striving to
404 achieve the extension of product lifespans far more onerous.

406 SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

407 The following supplementary materials are available online,

408 Trailer (1m 49s) for the documentary film ‘Cigar Box Blues: The Makers of a Revolution’.

409
410 DATA AVAILABILITY

411 All data generated from the study are available in the manuscript or supplementary files.

412
413 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

414 The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

415
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