

This body of work, consisting of three journal articles, two documentary films, three conference papers and a magazine article, investigates the Do It Yourself practices of cigar box guitar makers, exploring how this practice, defined as 'performative DIY', differs from other DIY practices. Amongst other questions, it asks to what level do these makers see themselves as professional or amateur makers and professional or amateur performers?

This study, led by Atkinson, is part of his ongoing enquiry into the relationship between amateur and professional design practices. DIY and amateur making are currently undergoing a huge renaissance under the banner of the Maker Movement. It remains true, though, that while the majority of DIY activity is of huge emotional and social benefit to the practitioner, the vast majority of this particular activity is carried out for the sake of the making practice itself and the social contact that accompanies it and in doing so, it forms an essential part of the maker's self-identity. The research involved semi-structured in-depth interviews with makers and manufacturers of cigar box guitars (including Chickenbone John in the UK and Shane Speal in the USA), cigar box guitar performers (Nig Richards and Hollowbelly); ethnographic observation of public cigar box events (individual performances and festivals such as 'Boxstock'); archival research

(Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, Tennessee) and secondary research using published texts, and led to participatory ethnographic research through Atkinson making and performing publicly with a cigar box guitar. The collaboration with Heath in the making of the documentary films "Three Chords and the Truth" and "Cigar Box Blues: The Makers of a Revolution" illuminated the skill and culture of this particular group of makers and performers to a significantly wider audience when it was broadcast by BBC Television in December 2019 and 2020.



Above: Chickenbone John in his workshop, April 2016

Chronological List of Published Outputs

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A:	7-9 Sep 17	DIY as Resistance	Conference Paper
B:	24 Jul 18	Hairy Guys in Sheds	Journal Article
C:	6-8 Sep 18	Born in the USA	Conference Paper
D:	12 Jan 19	In the Zone ...	Magazine Article
E:	18-20 Sep 19	Cigar Box Guitar Forums	Conference Paper
F:	18-22 Sep 19	Three Chords and the Truth	Documentary Film
G:	16 Dec 19	Cigar Box Blues	Documentary Film
H:	15 Oct 20	It Might be Rubbish	Journal Article
I:	16 Dec 20	Born in the USA	Journal Article

Note: This is a chronological list of when the outputs within the body of work were actually published and does not reflect the order in which they were submitted or when the research was done for each output, which often overlapped (see 'Methods' section for details). Click on each [title](#) to go to that output.

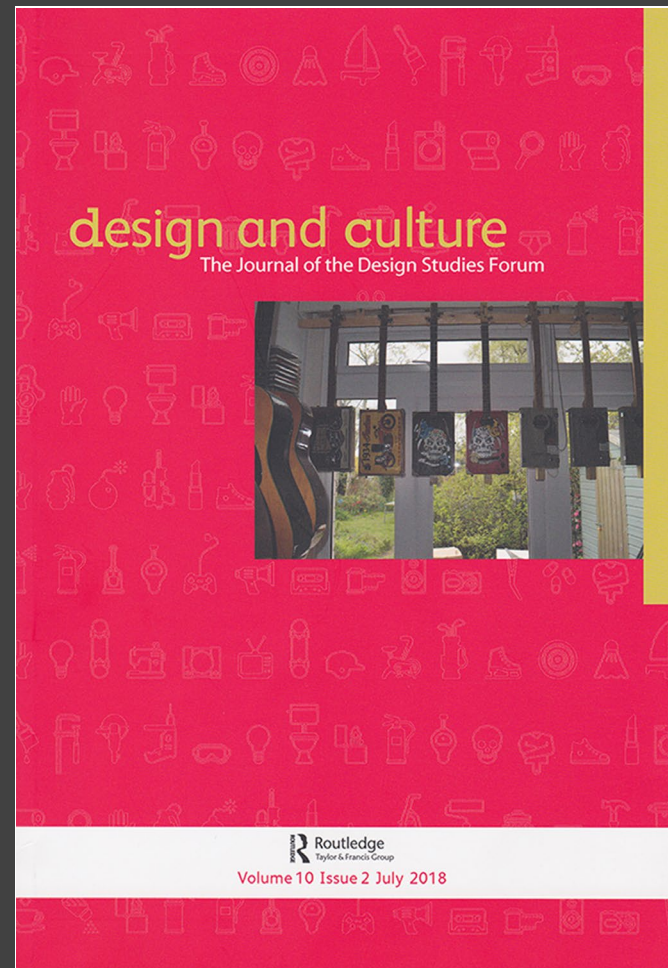
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Output A: Conference paper. Atkinson P., DIY as Resistance, given at *Making and Unmaking the Environment*, the DHS Annual Conference in Oslo, Norway, 7-9th September 2017. [Click here for content.](#)

Above: DHS Conference poster

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/17547075.2018.1467724>

Output B: Journal Article. Atkinson, P (2018) Hairy Guys in Sheds: The Rough and Ready World of DIY Cigar Box Guitar Makers, *Design and Culture*, 10 (2): 139-168. [Click here for content.](https://doi.org/10.1080/17547075.2018.1467724)

Above: Cover of Design & Culture 10 (2)

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Design and Displacement

Design History Society
Annual Conference

6-8 September 2018
Parsons School of Design, New York

Output C: Conference paper. Born in the USA: The Geographical, temporal and cultural displacement of the cigar box guitar, given at *Design and Displacement*, the DHS Annual Conference in New York, USA, 6-8th September 2018. [Click here for content.](#)

Above: Screenshot of DHS 2018 Conference website

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Output D: Magazine article. Atkinson, P. In The Zone..., *CBG Review*, January 2019: 13-18. [Click here for content.](#)

Above: Cover of CBG Review, January 2019.

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PLATE
Product Lifetimes And The Environment

NEXT EVENT:
VIRTUAL CONFERENCE; 26TH -28TH MAY 2021
ABSTRACT DEADLINE EXTENDED TO 22ND OCTOBER 2020

PLATE 2019 CONFERENCE

Berlin, Germany - 18-20 September 2019

Output E: Conference paper. Atkinson P., Cigar Box Guitar Forums: Fostering competency, creativity and connectedness in communities of practice and performance, given at *PLATE 2019* conference in Berlin, Germany, 18-20th September 2019.

[Click here for content.](#)

Above: Screenshot of Plate Conference 2019 website

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Output F: Documentary Film. Heath, V. (Director), Atkinson, P. (Writer)
Three Chords and the Truth. Premiered at Filmfestival Muenster,
Germany, 18-22nd September 2019. Please press play to watch.

Above: Still from *Three Chords and the Truth*

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Output G: Documentary Film. Heath, V. (Director), Atkinson, P. (Writer)
Cigar Box Blues - The Makers of a Revolution. First broadcast by BBC
Television, 16 December 2019. Please press play to watch.

Above: Still from *Cigar Box Blues*

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<https://doi.org/10.20900/jsr20200038>

Output H: Journal Article. Atkinson, P. (2020) "It Might Be Rubbish, but It's *My* Rubbish": How the Makers of Cigar Box Guitars Resist Throwaway Culture, *Journal of Sustainability Research*, 2 (4).
[Click here for content.](#)

Above: Cover of the Journal of Sustainability Research

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/jdh/epaa058>

Output I: Journal Article. Atkinson, P. (2020) Born in the USA: The Cigar Box Guitar, object displacement and Performative DIY, *Journal of Design History*. [Click on image for content.](https://doi.org/10.1093/jdh/epaa058)

Above: Cover of the Journal of Design History

An overview of how this body of work was created and incrementally built, using a mix of research methods including semi-structured in-depth interviews, archival research, participant observation ethnographic research, netnographic analysis and secondary research.

The starting point for this research came about following a research seminar with SHU staff at the start of 2016, in which Atkinson discussed the ongoing research he was doing into the design history of the electric guitar for a book to be published by Reaktion. Atkinson was asked if he had looked at people who made their own guitars. He located a few builders of solid-bodied, 'standard' electric guitars, but the results did not really fit with the book he was writing. During that search for builders, though, he discovered a wide community of makers that built, played and sold simple, three-string cigar box guitars. He was vaguely aware of such instruments, having seen Seasick Steve play them on television, but had no idea of the scale of the activity or the social scene that accompanied it.



Photo from Atkinson's original study

Atkinson set about undertaking a programme of primary ethnographic research involving semi-structured in-depth interviews with makers of cigar box guitars. A purposive sampling system was used, with interviewees asked for suggestions of others who made them. He recorded eight interviews which were professionally transcribed before manually coding the content into themes. The analysis of these themes, along with some secondary research using published texts, was written up as a journal article 'Hairy Guys in Sheds: The Rough and Ready World of DIY Cigar Box Guitar Makers' ([Output B](#)) and submitted to the journal *Design and Culture* in January 2017. This initial work established the making of cigar box guitars as a particular subset of DIY, gave a brief historical overview and addressed issues of self-perception as professional or amateur makers and performers, authenticity and motivations for making.

Further archival work on the history of the cigar box guitar and its roots in mid 19th Century America was conducted at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville, Tennessee in July 2017.

When the call for papers for the 2017 Design History Society conference was announced, Atkinson put a conference paper together around the theme of resistance to mainstream consumption, comparing and contrasting two interviewees from the cigar box makers study with two new interviews of people who built their own motorcycles from scratch. This paper, 'DIY as Resistance' ([Output A](#)), was delivered at the DHS conference in Oslo which ran from 7-9 September 2017.

Following discussions with a work colleague, Virginia Heath (Professor of Film), it was decided to collaborate in turning the article Atkinson had submitted to *Design and Culture* into a documentary film. In January 2018, they applied for internal funding of £5000 from the Art and Design Research Centre (as it was then), which was matched by external funding of £5000 from the film production company FactionNorth. Together, Heath and Atkinson selected three suitable interviewees from the original study to be reinterviewed on film, and began shooting the film footage for the documentary 'Three Chords and the Truth' ([Output F](#)).

It was also decided that there was a need to shoot footage of 'Boxstock', the annual cigar box guitar festival held in Wolverhampton organised by the leading light of the movement in the UK, Chickenbone John. Of particular value here was the director, Heath, casting a feminist eye over the largely male world of cigar box guitar makers. In total a further 12 makers not involved in the original study were interviewed on film. Heath developed an emotional temperature map to control the pace of the film and to help the extensive footage to be edited and mixed with soundtracks of the makers performing to create a poetic documentary film.



Recording sound at Boxstock 2018

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Directly following the Boxstock event, Atkinson embarked on a programme of participatory observation ethnographic research into the world of the cigar box guitar maker. He attended a workshop run by Chickenbone John in which he made a cigar box guitar himself, and began to perform with it in public. This provided fresh insights from a different perspective that were incorporated into later publications.



Atkinson performing as 'Whisky Paul' at Bamfest, July 2019

In July 2018, the Design and Culture article 'Hairy Guys in Sheds' ([Output B](#)) was published as an open access article in a hybrid journal.

A conference paper was given by Atkinson at the 2018 Design History Society Conference in New York held between the 6-8 September 2018. This paper, 'Born in the USA: The geographical, temporal and cultural displacement of the cigar box guitar' ([Output C](#)), utilised the historical research undertaken in Nashville along with further secondary research, and elements of the original ethnographic study. A trailer for the forthcoming documentary 'Three Chords and the Truth' ([Output F](#)) was screened at the end of the presentation.

At the end of 2018, the editor of the online magazine *Cigar Box Review* had read the article 'Hairy Guys in Sheds', and asked Atkinson to contribute an article to the January 2019 issue. This article 'In The Zone ...' ([Output D](#)) expanded on the research findings around motivation and the concept of 'flow', where makers lose themselves completely in the process of making. Although not a peer-reviewed academic article, the wide exposure led to further dissemination as it contained a link to the original article and referenced the forthcoming documentary film.

Editing of the documentary film continued through 2019, and a preliminary draft was presented by the production company FactionNorth to a commissioning editor at the BBC. The editor commissioned some further filming to be done to expand the length to 29 minutes ('Three Chords' was 21 minutes long) and wanted the film to highlight more clearly that much of the UK activity was taking place in Northern post-industrial environments to make it of more interest to a wider audience for broadcasting.



Shooting documentary footage

Final editing of 'Three Chords and the Truth' was carried out concurrently with extra filming for the BBC version. The extra filming involved shoots on location in Birmingham, at one of Chickenbone John's cigar box guitar building workshops, and in ex-mining villages near Barnsley, where a maker who was an ex-miner was interviewed.

Following the extra filming, Atkinson wrote a conference paper focusing on the sustainability aspects of cigar box guitar making, and the makers' use of social media to support their activities. This involved a netnographic analysis of cigar box guitar Facebook pages and websites. The paper 'Cigar Box Guitar Forums: Fostering competency, creativity and connectedness in communities of practice and performance' ([Output E](#)) was presented at PLATE 2019 (Product Lifetimes And The Environment) in Berlin, 18-20 September 2019, again followed by a screening of the documentary trailer.

At the same time, the documentary 'Three Chords and the Truth' ([Output F](#)) premiered at the Filmfestival Münster, Germany. This was the first of six screenings at international film festivals around the world (see 'Dissemination'), during which time the extended version of the film, 'Cigar Box Blues - The Makers of a Revolution' ([Output G](#)) was first broadcast on BBC One terrestrial television on 16 December 2019.

Following the presentation at the DHS conference in New York, Atkinson was invited to submit a full article for a Special Issue of the *Journal of Design History* titled 'Design and Displacement'. An article 'Born in the USA: The Cigar Box Guitar, object displacement and Performative DIY' ([Output I](#)) was submitted in October 2019, but the Special Issue itself has been delayed. This article highlights the displacement of status of the cigar box guitar from a low-grade object of necessity into a high-grade, electrified instrument, and the argument made that cigar box guitar making is an example of a new form of DIY that Atkinson named 'Performative DIY'. This article was published online in advance of print on the 16 December 2020, just days before 'Cigar Box Blues - The Makers of a Revolution' was rebroadcast on BBC Four television.

Similarly, following the PLATE conference in Berlin, Atkinson submitted an expanded version of his paper as a full article for a Special Issue of the *Journal of Sustainability Research* titled 'Resisting Throwaway Culture—The Role of Consumers in Achieving Sustainable Product Lifetimes'. The article 'It Might be Rubbish, But it's *My* Rubbish' ([Output H](#)), contained further netnographic analysis of social media usage by cigar box guitar makers and further secondary research into the surrounding sustainability issues of product lifetimes and repurposing. It was published on 15 October 2020.

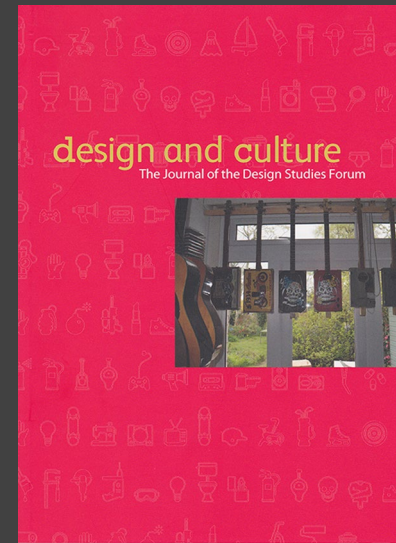
Details of dissemination for the journal articles

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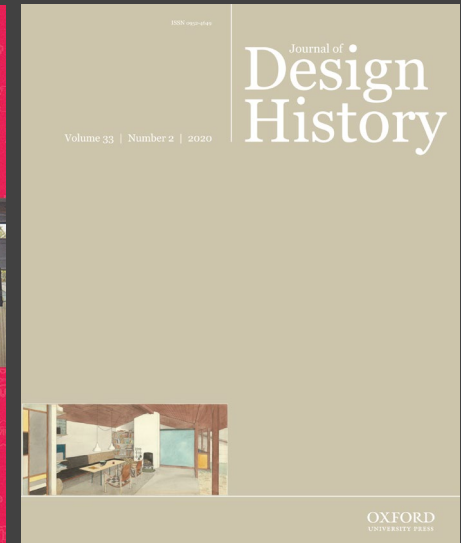
The first published journal article, *Hairy Guys in Sheds* ([Output B](#)) was published as an open access article in a hybrid journal. This meant it could be promoted to a much wider community outside of academia, and as Atkinson became more involved with the virtual community of cigar box guitar makers, links to the article were shared widely through various websites and social media sites having an interest in cigar box guitars. As a consequence of that dissemination, by the end of the REF2021 assessment period this article had been viewed 4,430 times on the publisher's website, and 1,886 times on ResearchGate. Altmetrics show that the article had been shared on FaceBook and Twitter in the UK and in the USA.

The much more recent article *It Might Be Rubbish* ([Output H](#)) was published in a fully open access journal, and similarly shared across social media. This article very quickly reached a large audience and by the end of the REF2021 assessment period had been downloaded 2,659 times and viewed 319 times.

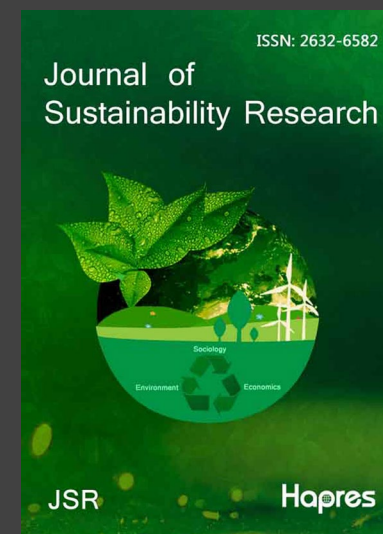
The final article *Born in the USA* ([Output I](#)) was published as an open access article in a hybrid journal only a fortnight before the end of the REF2021 assessment period, but nevertheless within 48 hours it became the most read article on the journal's website (a fact later tweeted by the journal itself as shown in the altmetrics data). By the 31 Dec 2020 it had been viewed 984 times and downloaded 62 times.



Above: Cover of Design & Culture 10 (2)



Above: Cover of the Journal of Design History



Above: Cover of the Journal of Sustainability Research

Listing of the individual film festivals screening *Three Chords and the Truth*, and broadcast details for *Cigar Box Blues - The Makers of a Revolution*, along with dissemination through local newspapers and radio.

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The documentary short *Three Chords and the Truth* ([Output F](#)) has been screened at a number of film festivals around the world:

1) European Short Film Competition, Filmfestival Münster, 18-22 September 2019

2) Albuquerque Film & Music Experience (AFMX), 24-29 September 2019 [where it was awarded 'Best Short Documentary 1st Runner Up]

3) 20th Woodstock Film Festival, Woodstock, New York, 2-6 October 2019

4) Manchester Film Festival (MANIFF2020), Manchester, 7-15 March 2020

5) Albuquerque Film & Music Experience (AFMX), selected for the 'Best of the Fest' event, 26 June 2020

6) 51st Nashville Film Festival, Nashville, Tennessee, 1-7 October 2020

The documentary *Cigar Box Blues - The Makers of a Revolution* ([Output G](#)) was first screened by BBC One Television on 16 December 2019 at 7.30pm. The broadcast was promoted through social media, and an article, 'Sheffield film uncovers DIY music movement hidden in garden sheds' was published in the Sheffield newspaper *The Star* on 13 December 2019. Viewing figures from the BBC put the audience at 287,000, plus 5029 iPlayer views. According to the BBC, this equates to a 15% share of the audience in that slot, (above average for the rest of the country which was 12%).

Atkinson and Heath talked about the film on Rony Robinson's daily radio show on BBC Radio Sheffield on 29 January 2020, and again on Howard Pressman's daily show on 17 December 2020, a day before the documentary was rebroadcast on BBC Four on 18 December 2020 at 7.30pm and again on 19 December at 2.50am. BBC viewing figures showed these two screenings reached an audience of 257,000 with iPlayer views at over 23,000. This means the film has now been watched by well over half a million people.



Above: Münster Film Festival listing of *Three Chords and the Truth*



Above: BBC Listing of *Cigar Box Blues - The Makers of a Revolution*