

5 Consumption

In the previous chapter, collecting was described as a practice related to but also distinct from GAS. We demonstrated socio-cultural aspects associated with collecting habits, such as social standing and gender differences. We further showed psychological processes which corresponded with procedural assumptions described in blogs on GAS. Pronounced interest in musical gear characterises GAS, the middle letter standing for ‘acquisition’ defining it as a fundamental aspect of the phenomenon. Consequently, it is linked with consumption, even if the urge to acquire new gear is resisted. Consumption research can help us understand relevant processes from the cause that triggers interest in a product up to the eventual acquisition.

This chapter begins with positioning consumption research in the context of cultural studies rather than critical theory. Consumption is not limited to purchasing a commodity but necessarily includes the steps leading to an acquisition and the way the item is used once it has been acquired. A useful first perspective in our research of consumption is ‘serious leisure’ (Stebbins 2009), which provides a sociological framework for theorising GAS amongst ambitious amateur musicians. We then expand the already established close relationship between gear and identity with valuable theories and empirical studies from consumption research. Belk’s (1988) concept of the ‘extended self’ is central to understanding why instruments are important to many musicians. This concept is extended by empirically derived frameworks on desire and necessity that examine the impulsive and compulsive buying behaviours documented in Wright’s (2006) interviews with guitarists. Other relevant concepts like ‘prosumption’ and ‘craft consumption’ are explored to theorise DIY practices such as fabrication, modification and combination of music equipment. Finally, we investigate online practices, as these have become commonplace for many musicians. What can be expected to spark GAS is ‘eBaying’ and exchanges on message boards that, for example, establish ‘taste regimes’ (Arsel & Bean 2013), which standardise practices and define must-have items.

5.1 Consumption Research

Consumption research is an interdisciplinary field of research that deals with the explanation of consumers, their consumption behaviours and the production, distribution and purchase of goods (Stebbins 2009: 1). According to Clarke et al. (2003: 3ff), consumption has traditionally been studied from three perspectives. Economics and marketing explore the financial aspects surrounding production, and history and geography look at consumptive practices in time and space. These two approaches are less relevant to the study of GAS but not irrelevant. The third perspective on

consumption is from anthropology, sociology and cultural studies. Such research examines the social and cultural aspects of consumption, making it a useful lens for studying musical practices around equipment.

As it is beyond the scope of this book to summarise the history of consumption research comprehensively, we limit our discussion to the most relevant work in the context of GAS.²⁴ When considering consumption, it is tempting to focus on the increasing commodification of society, on the power it has given to manufacturers, and on the related effects such as citizens becoming passive victims of advertisers, which concurs with critical theory scholars like Adorno and Horkheimer (Graeber 2011: 489). This traditional view was shaken by cultural studies scholars like Dick Hebdige (1979), who saw consumers in a more active and self-determined role. MacKay (1997: 3) summarises this new way of thinking:

rather than being passive and easily manipulated . . . young consumers were active, creative and critical in their appropriation and transformation of material artifacts. In a process of bricolage, they appropriated, reaccented, rearticulated or transcoded the material of mass culture to their own ends, through a range of everyday creative and symbolic practices. Through such processes of appropriation, identities are constructed.

Due to the consumer's greater power, the relationship between consumption and production is now understood as reciprocal. Social and economic forces determine demand, which can be subject to manipulation (Appadurai 1986). Manufacturers respond to the requests of their customers and customers to some degree to offers and marketing campaigns. As Miège (1979: 300) puts it:

The cultural industry is not in the end a responsive pre-existing demand. Rather, basing itself on the dominant conceptions of culture, it must as a first stage, at the same time as it puts new products onto the market . . . , create a social demand, give it a consistency, in other words lead certain social groups selected as commercial targets to prepare themselves to respond to the producers' offer.

Within popular music, Frith (2001: 27) argues that the popular music industry does not determine popular music culture. Although the industry influences culture, it is forced to react to culture continually. This view must be considered in the context of musical equipment because instrument manufacturers need to know the musicians' attitudes and preferences in order to sell. At the same time, GAS is likely to be related to marketing strategies that fuel the desire for new musical objects. This balance in power is important because it allows for musicians the practices of consumption,

²⁴ For a summary of influential works by Karl Marx, Georg Simmel, Henri Lefebvre, Jean Baudrillard, Michel de Certeau and Pierre Bourdieu, see Stebbins 2009, pp. 56–81. For an introduction to consumption research, see Graeber 2011.

‘prosumption’ and ‘craft consumption’ when customising their instruments and using them in ways not intended by the manufacturer. As Belk (2007: 737) points out, consumption is not only defined by the activities leading to an acquisition but also by the activities that follow from the acquisition. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) hold a similar view, claiming that consumption goes beyond buying because time, experiences and feelings are involved as well. In other words, consumption does not end at the time of purchase but includes the use of the acquired product. This definition makes consumption research valuable for the theoretical consideration of GAS as musical practice.

There is some research proposing consumer types. Stone (1954) was the first to create a typology of orientations towards shopping. The ‘economic shopper’ pays attention to price and quality, while the ‘personalising shopper’ sees the shopping activity as an opportunity for social interaction. The ‘ethical shopper’ bases their decision on moral principles, the ‘apathic shopper’ buys out of necessity. Transferring this thinking to musical practices suggests that the economical shopper is likely to be widespread amongst musicians. The right balance between price and quality is one of the primary criteria for musicians when considering a purchase (Wright 2006: 28), as is the temptation of a good deal (Wright 2006: 38, 40). The personalising shopper can be found in music stores. Often musicians stop at a store to meet up with other musicians or staff and have a chat, or they travel to a store with bandmates as a social event. Online discussion boards serve a similar function. It is unclear how widespread the apathic shopper is, but GAS-related blog posts indicate that some musicians give their music precedence over buying and spending much time contemplating equipment. Ethical shoppers may exist, but they are probably a minority. Moral aspects of music equipment could be related to the working conditions of music instruments factories or the use of rare material. For example, guitar manufacturer Gibson has been fined for using illegal timber from Madagascar for its instruments. They admitted having violated the Lacey Act, which aims to protect Madagascan wildlife by stopping deforestation (Black 2012).²⁵

Stone’s (1954) study was based on an all-female sample, which raises the question of gender differences like those discussed in connection to collecting. Campbell (1997) argues that women see shopping as a leisure activity more than men. As per Campbell, there are some exceptions, especially regarding technology items like cars, computers and DIY equipment. Musical instruments are also likely to fall into this category, which coincides with Danziger (2004: 161), who finds that men are more inclined to buy musical instruments than women. She further concludes that the two genders do not differ in their discretionary purchases when pursuing a hobby

²⁵ Chris Gibson (2019) discusses how the ecological crisis affects musical instrument manufacture and traces guitars back to the tree, focusing on three ‘more-than-musical’ themes: materiality, corporeality and volatility (see also Gibson & Warren 2016).

and that persons below 44 years of age are more prone to such buying behaviours (Danziger 2004: 84). Another variable is the household type; persons with children are more active buyers, regardless of gender (Danziger 2004: 161).

Danziger (2004: 6f) defines four kinds of purchases. A ‘utilitarian purchase’ describes an acquisition of an item that is not essential but does fulfil a practical function. An ‘indulgence’ is a luxury item that is not too expensive to make one feel guilty about the cost and provides emotional satisfaction in everyday life. ‘Lifestyle luxuries’ are objects that are not needed but still useful, such as a watch or a car. ‘Aspirational luxuries’ are purchases made without functional reasons, of which collectors are prone. Such motivation, as per Danziger (2004: 84), derives from the joy of ownership and the thrill of the hunt, which indicates that pursuing a hobby and the corresponding buying is often more satisfying than completing a collection. All these reasons and psychological processes are similar to those described in connection with collecting. What is more, the four types of purchases also apply to musicians. ‘Utilitarian purchases’ as small accessories or wearing items could be equivalent to guitar strings or drumsticks. How the three other kinds of purchases can be compared depends on musical justification. ‘Lifestyle luxuries’ and ‘indulgences’ could be an effects pedal that is nice to have but not essential, and ‘aspirational luxuries’ could be anything from a T-shirt of a favourite instrument manufacturer to expensive vintage instruments that complement a collection.

Campbell (2005: 23f) summarises four consumer images that dominate the literature on consumption. Following the previously highlighted school of critical theory, critics of mass society see the consumer as a passive individual easily manipulable. In contrast, economic theory commonly regards the consumer as an active and rational actor whose purchases are limited by budgetary requirements. More recent views see the consumer as a ‘self-conscious manipulator of the symbolic meanings that are attached to products, someone who selects goods with the specific intention of using them to create or maintain a given impression, identity or lifestyle’ (Campbell 2005: 24). This view is much more consistent with the musical practices described in the earlier chapters. Campbell (2005: 23f) sees a fourth, more recent type in the craft consumer. Such a person combines common goods to create something original and unique, which goes beyond mere personalisation. Since most musical practices require careful selection and combination of gear, musicians are expected to be prone to craft consumption.

5.2 Leisure Studies

Making music and collecting musical instruments are activities that cover a wide range of intentions, from purely recreational without ambitions to dedicated semi-professional or professional work. Most of these intentions fall into the area of leisure. Stebbins (2009: 10) defines leisure as an ‘uncoerced activity undertaken during

free time. Uncoerced activity is a positive activity that, using their abilities and resources, people both want to do and can do at either a personally satisfying or a deeper fulfilling level'. This definition does not include professional activities (Stebbins 2009: 17f) though it should, as leisure time is more than just recreation because the motivation derives from a purpose or desired goal (Stebbins 2009: 10). Musical aims span learning and mastering an instrument, becoming familiar with new styles, joining a band, playing live, recording albums and progressing as a musician, thus gaining musical expertise, even if the player does not intend to turn their leisure activity into a profession. Striving for a goal can be an important feature of leisure, and it likely plays a role in the context of GAS, which is motivated by a certain sense of development and purpose.

Stebbins's extensive work on 'serious leisure' is closely related to consumption because most leisure activities require special equipment. We draw on this useful perspective to distinguish leisure from consumption:

In their essence the two processes are clearly different. That is the end of consumption is to *have* something, to possess it, whereas the end of leisure is to *do* something, to engage in a positive activity. Nonetheless exceptions to this generalization exist, for there are times when consumption and leisure are so closely aligned as to make it impossible to distinguish the two in this way. Consider the hobbyist coin collector who travels abroad in search of a rare piece. (Stebbins 2009: ix)

For Stebbins (2009: 3), the motive for purchase is decisive in this context. If the batteries for an effects pedal were to run out, buying new batteries would be seen as a nuisance, whereas buying batteries to use a new effects pedal for the first time is about leisure because it is likely to be exciting. Consequently, the motivation and emotional attitude determine whether a purchase is to be considered an obligatory or leisure-related consumption (Stebbins 2009: 82).

Stebbins distinguishes between three kinds of leisure engagement: casual, project-based and serious leisure. 'Casual leisure' is defined as an 'immediately intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it. It is fundamentally hedonic, pursued for its significant level of pure enjoyment, or pleasure' (Stebbins 2009: 22f). Since most music-making requires a minimum of dedication and practice, hardly any musical activity can be classed as casual leisure, except perhaps playful music apps. 'Project-based leisure' is more committed. It is a 'short-term, reasonably complicated, one-off or occasional, through infrequent, creative undertaking carried out in free time, or time free of disagreeable obligation. Such leisure requires considerable planning, effort, and sometimes skill or knowledge' (Stebbins 2009: 24). Many more musical activities fall into this category, for example, a musical side project, preparation for an open stage or other forms of one-off performances, such as learning another instrument to help an ensemble out with a particular gig. While 'casual leisure' is motivated by the pure enjoyment of the activity, 'project-based leisure' can be pleasurable or fulfilling.

Most of the musical activities related to GAS fall into the third category, ‘serious leisure’, the form of leisure that requires considerable effort and investment but also offers personal fulfilment (Stebbins 2009: 16). Stebbins (2009: 14) defines serious leisure as the ‘systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity sufficiently substantial, interesting, and fulfilling for the participant to find a (leisure) career there acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience’. The wording is noteworthy because a ‘career’ seems to contradict the definition of leisure as a non-professional activity. Strong identification with a hobby defines serious leisure and, as such, is associated with qualities like earnestness, sincerity and importance (Stebbins 2009: 14). These qualities can be found in six distinctive characteristics of serious leisure (Stebbins 2009: 17ff). A serious leisure enthusiast requires significant personal ‘effort’ to develop specialist knowledge and skills, which takes ‘perseverance’ to acquire. It is the prerequisite for pursuing a ‘leisure career’. Such a career is motivated by several individual and social aspects. The efforts invested in the leisure activity are motivated by the hope of ‘durable benefits’, the positive outcomes that lead to ‘self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-expression, regeneration or renewal of self, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, social interaction and sense of belonging, and lasting physical products of the activity’ (Stebbins 2009: 18f). Consequently, serious leisure activity is for many the basis for a ‘distinctive identity’, an identity lived in a community that shares attitudes, practices, values, beliefs and goals. Such communities are often online, where new serious leisure activists learn about the common ‘ethos’.

The nature of serious leisure implies a prolonged, possibly lifelong activity that may require substantial effort and investment before it bears fruit. The motivation for this activity stems from a continuous search for rewards, which Stebbins (2009: 20) divides into personal and social rewards. Personal rewards entail enrichment and self-actualisation as well as developing skills, abilities and knowledge. Self-expression is another personal reward related to the expression of already developed skills, abilities and knowledge. Serious leisure activities after a day of work also encourage other personal rewards such as self-gratification and recreation or regeneration, something that can lead to joy and deep fulfilment. If skills are sufficiently developed and become of interest to others, the activity can yield a financial return. So could profound knowledge of musical instrument technologies and practical skills help a serious leisure pursuer repair, maintain or modify instruments for other musicians for money. Such help is likely to improve self-image. In terms of social rewards, Stebbins emphasises social attraction, such as the association with other serious leisure participants or group accomplishments, which in music could be any activity that involves a band. Because of the high level of engagement, serious leisure activity can lead to tensions with other commitments such as work or family (Stebbins 2009: 20). With the three types of leisure and the typology of rewards, the serious leisure perspective ‘offers a classification and explanation of all leisure activities and

experiences, as these two are framed in the social, psychological, social, cultural, and historical conditions in which each activity and accompanying experience take place' (Stebbins 2009: 13f).

Previously, we have highlighted the close connection between leisure and consumption. A serious leisure enthusiast in music will most likely need to invest in instruments before they can start learning. As skills develop and preferred styles become clearer, other specialised gear may be required. According to Stebbins (2009: 115), such continued investment can 'perhaps even [be] seen as an indispensable part' of being a musician and 'enable their buyers to perform better'. About violin players, Stebbins (2009: 127) notes that there 'seems to be an almost universal desire to upgrade'. He further states:

Amateurs and hobbyists, in particular, must occasionally buy goods, the purchase of which can be most pleasant. A horn player sets out to find a new and better horn ... The immediate outcome is the prospect, made possible by the purchase, of better and more fulfilling execution of the hobbyist or amateur passion. Furthermore, the process of purchase itself commonly proceeds from a background of considerable knowledge and experience relative to the best products and their strengths and weaknesses. Such knowledge is central to the development of a positive sense of self, which Prus and Dawson (1991) argued can emerge from some kinds of shopping done for leisure. (Stebbins 2009: 93)

This line of thinking corresponds to what practitioners say about GAS in blogs and what we found in Wright's (2006) book. The motivation to upgrade the material objects used in a serious leisure activity has been described as 'facilitation' in consumption research (Hartmann 2016; Warde 2005). According to Hartmann (2016: 12), 'facilitation provides an infrastructure for doings—how to assist objects as carriers of productive moments; and objects—an appropriate material arrangement'. The gear played is significant to the musician not only because of musical characteristics such as playability and sound but also because of the beliefs and connotations associated with it. These beliefs are equally important for the performance as for the material properties of the instrument itself (Hartmann 2016: 12f). Because of this strong symbolic value that co-exists with the object's features, updating gear offers many serious leisure enthusiasts like musicians an opportunity to advance their leisure career, if only symbolically in terms of social rewards (Prus & Dawson 1991) or meaningfully in terms of personal rewards. These reward systems are only partly related to the impact that a new instrument may or may not have on the musician's development because many of the rewards are connected to enjoyment, self-actualisation, re-creation and social attraction, which do not require improvement of musical abilities.

Beyond Serious Leisure: GAS from an Expert Performance Perspective

If one extends the focus beyond leisure activities, the occupation with music equipment, especially in popular music, can also be regarded as part of the process of professionalisation. In the influential ‘expert performance’ approach in expertise research, it is assumed that, depending on the required physical constitution, anyone can become an expert in the field of their choice with about ten thousand hours of ‘deliberate practice’. By definition, deliberate practice ‘includes activities that have been specially designed to improve the current level of performance’ (Ericsson et al. 1993: 368). As such, these activities have been individually developed by a mentor to improve performance in the best possible way. In this process, the results are monitored and discussed with the practitioner. Studying violinists and pianists of different performance levels, Ericsson and his colleagues were able to show a connection between the extent of deliberate practice and the actual performance level. From this observation, they deduced that excellent performance is not the consequence of innate talent but a direct result of significant amounts of deliberate practice.

While there is common consensus on the considerable amount of practice being required to become an expert on an instrument, the importance of deliberate practice has been disputed ever since the study was published in the early 1990s. Recent research has included critical reviews, meta-analyses and replications of expert performance studies (Hambrick et al. 2016; Macnamara & Maitra 2019). It was found that the suggested amount of ten thousand hours of deliberate practice was often overestimated and that ‘[f]orms of domain-relevant experience other than deliberate practice (for example, work) positively and meaningfully predict expertise’ (Hambrick et al. 2016: 45).

A fundamental conceptual problem in their findings regarding musical expertise lies in the fact that the research conducted by Ericsson and his colleagues exclusively focussed on the prerequisites of European classical music and did not consider other forms of musical expression (Menze & Gembris 2018). As studies on musical learning (for example, Creech et al. 2008; Green 2002; Menze & Gembris 2018, 2019) demonstrate, there are decisive differences between classical music and popular music in terms of deliberate practice, practice strategies and domain-related knowledge. Further differences can be observed regarding the respective understanding of musical giftedness and talent (Gembris 2014). It strongly depends on the conventions within the respective genre and the sociocultural and historical context what is considered an expert performance. Consequently, when studying processes of professionalisation in popular music, a specific concept of musical expertise is required that should not only consider the flawless reproduction of an existing piece, personal interpretation and expression but also a variety of aspects, such as innovative style, improvisation, and maybe even stage performance.

Given the importance of tone in popular music, the ability to create an individual or appropriate sound for musical expression with the selected equipment can be interpreted as a relevant part of musical performance and hence of musical expertise (see Creech et al. 2008; Papageorgi et al. 2010). Furthermore, being able to select and combine the ‘right’ type of gear and adding the ‘right’ effects is a precondition for the realisation of individual sound ideas and the creative dealing with genre conventions. Considering that processes of learning and professionalisation in popular music commonly take place in informal learning settings (Green 2002; Längler et al. 2018) and how GAS-related practices are carried out in communicative interaction among peers and like-minded musicians, it is reasonable to understand such processes as a way to acquire domain-relevant experience (Hambrick et al. 2016: 45) and thus a specific form of popular music expertise that is not captured by the conventional concept of deliberate practice. Experience in handling musical equipment may also be seen as a by-product of years of instrumental practice, and its relevance in terms of expert performance could be questioned. We, on the other hand, argue that the explicit and implicit knowledge (‘tacit knowledge’, see Schmidt-Horning 2004) gained in GAS-related practices can contribute to musical creativity, the versatility of musical expression and aesthetic innovations and therefore must be understood as a relevant factor of expertise in popular music. This presupposes that the time invested in dealing with equipment does not distract from practising and playing the instrument, as critics of GAS have pointed out (Becker 1996; Kwisses 2015).

5.3 Gear and Identity

The previous chapters have shown that for many musicians, their equipment is more than just a tool for making music; it is part of their self-image as musicians and thus part of their musical identity (Hargreaves et al. 2012, 2016, 2017; North & Hargreaves 1999). As mentioned earlier, musical instruments mark a ‘loaded symbolic terrain’ (Théberge 1993: 166). When sound production is showcased, as in any public musical performance, instruments and equipment come into the spotlight, framing the perception of the performance and adding a further symbolic layer to the musical meaning. Closely related to musical forms of expression, traditions and genres, musical instruments inevitably impact the musicians’ artistic expression and perception. By determining their performance, image and cultural localisation, instruments are inseparably linked to the musicians’ musical identity.

GAS, by definition, is related to an increased interest in musical equipment, which commonly shapes the musicians’ (self-)perception and their self-presentation in the wider music community and beyond. It must be understood as a cultural praxis in which ‘people can co-construct each other’s musical, social, and personal identities’ (Hargreaves et al. 2017: 5). This entails musical instruments blurring the typical

division between identities in music (IIM) and music in identities (MII), as per Hargreaves et al. (2017: 4). On the one hand, the status as a musician is always connected to the instrument used or artificially staged, for example, to comply with conventions or to fulfil endorsement requirements. It is therefore part of the musicians' identities in music (IIM), which are defined by 'established cultural roles and categories' and linked to social influences. In a socio-cultural reading, the relationship to the instrument could be interpreted as an interaction with a cultural object influencing the musicians' individual development and accompanying them in becoming their artistic selves (Hargreaves et al. 2012: 126). Besides, instrument and gear choice provide information such as cultural contexts, aesthetic preferences or the musician's role in a band. So, gear is for them presumably the most visible manifestation of a 'badge of identity', predicting 'several other aspects of lifestyle and attitude' (North & Hargreaves 1999: 75). On the other hand, the importance attributed to music equipment and the passion implied in GAS suggest that both are also linked with the concept of music in identities (MII), understood as 'the extent to which music is important in our self-definitions as masculine-feminine, old-young, able-disabled, extravert-introvert, and so on' (Hargreaves et al. 2017: 4). Whether in the context of collecting or through the overt coding of certain instruments as the embodiment of male or female character traits, from the display of an extraverted design and lifestyle, or in the celebration of certain forms of musical expression attributed as loud and rebellious: musical instruments offer a wide range of readings that contribute to the negotiation of the musician's self-perception. For all its personal and cultural implications, GAS is closely related to the musician's musical identity, which in turn is seen as 'an essential part of the explanation of their musical development' (Hargreaves et al. 2012: 125).

Looking beyond the musical context, social science research has been committed to understanding identity not as essentialist but within the framework of post-structural theory (Bauman 2001; Foucault 1982). It is generally accepted that identity is not fixed but dynamic and changing in response to the environment. Accordingly, identity is a process and a practice that is situation-specific and develops in the course of a person's life (Giddens 1991). In today's postmodern culture, people actively construct, maintain and communicate their identity through the symbolic meaning of leisure as a way to progress and avoid existential crises (Elliott & Watanasuwana 1998). As we have discussed earlier, leisure activities usually require consumption in order to start, maintain and advance a serious leisure career. Building on this idea, we will now focus on research from the perspective of consumption studies to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between gear and identity and how this relationship may motivate GAS-related behaviours and attitudes.

Several studies show that possessions symbolise identity (Belk 1988; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton 1981; Dittmar 1992), and as identities develop through-

out a lifetime, new objects are acquired, and others discarded to reflect this development (Shankar et al. 2009: 76f). The close relationship between musicians and their material possessions can be explained by the concept of ‘extended self’ introduced by Belk (1988), which in principle claims that people regard their possessions as part of themselves (Belk 1988: 139). Tuan (1980: 472) argues that ‘[o]ur fragile sense of self needs support, and this we get by having and possessing things because, to a large degree, we are what we have and possess’. Therefore, possessions help create, reinforce and preserve a sense of identity, and they remind a person who they are and who they have been (Belk 1988: 150). McClelland (1951) argues that all objects can fulfil this function and become part of the self if the person is capable of exercising power or control over them. Besides, Belk (1988: 140, 145) builds on McClelland when he suggests that objects that can be used as tools or instruments are particularly effective in the construction and development of the self because these items enable the person to be different from what they would be without them. For Furby (1978), the power an item gives to its owner is also an important reason for becoming part of the ‘extended self’. This power can be either ‘instrumental’ or ‘sentimental’. Instrumental power relates to any usefulness, whereas ‘sentimental’ power enables the owner to maintain a sense of self, even when the self-identity inevitably changes throughout a lifetime. All these functions are evident in the case of musical instruments. One can hardly be a musician without owning an instrument or at least having access to one. Possessing even a single instrument or small gear collection may be sufficient to master the instrument, join a band, and to perform live or record music. Consequently, the possession of musical gear enables a person to see themselves as a musician and experience the lifestyle associated with it in the various subcultures of music, for example, ‘sex, drugs and rock & roll’ (Fernandez & Lastovicka 2011: 284f). An example of the sentimental power is ‘reflective nostalgia’ (Boym 2001) for instruments owned in the past and memories attached to it.

Identities change during life, and material possessions reflect this development. Although such development is directed towards the future, possessions are material reminders of the past, as they are a ‘convenient means of storing the memories and feelings’ (Belk 1988: 148). Here we see a substantial similarity between Boym’s (2001) concept of ‘reflective nostalgia’ and views on possessions in consumption research. As Davis (1979: 31) reminds us, the purpose of nostalgia is not only to reminisce but, above all, to provide a ‘readily accessible psychological lens for the never ending work of constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing our identities’. Therefore, remembering the past, reflecting on the development and thinking about future goals are supported by material possessions. Musical instruments are effective in this function because of the strong emotions that their players often associate with them as reminders of memorable experiences such as playing in a band and the joy of performing on stage.

Next to the ‘extended self’, the ‘humanisation’ of objects described in consumption research is noteworthy in the context of GAS. People sometimes see the human in non-human forms, a process described as ‘anthropomorphising’ (Epley et al. 2007; Guthrie 1993). Consequently, they ascribe human features, beliefs and emotions to objects, which takes form in practices such as naming objects (Aggarwal & McGill 2007: 468). Fernandez and Lastovicka (2011: 289) observe in their study on fetishes amongst electric guitar players that many of their respondents tend to personify their instruments through ‘social roles such as confidant, companion, collaborator, wife, or muse’. Previously, we already reported on Joey, a former successful guitarist, who attributed his fame to his guitar ‘Goldie’. The companionship to the guitar is clear in his statement:

it did become a companion. I actually had it in every hotel room I’d go in [when the band was on tour]. It’d never stay with the equipment. I actually slept with it a couple of nights—that was the safest place [for the guitar]. I’d be writing a song and I’d fall asleep and it was right next to me. So we, we’re companions, and we became very close. (Fernandez & Lastovicka 2011: 289)

This high degree of intimacy and emotional attachment with even sexual undertones coincide with interviews that Wright (2006: 34, 36) conducted with numerous guitarists. In the case of the guitar, this anthropomorphisation seems relatively natural given that instrument parts are named according to the physiological nomenclature of the human being: head, neck, body and waist (Fernandez & Lastovicka 2011: 288). Anthropomorphisation often leads to the next step, ‘personification’, when the guitar is perceived to have a unique personality, something expressed by name and gender (Fernandez & Lastovicka 2011: 288; Wright 2006: 34ff). In its most developed form, an instrument has a ‘soul’, and its owner collects cherished memories, stories and associations made with it, much like a ‘human’ friend or partner. In his autobiography, singer and songwriter Frank Turner (2016: 72f) describes the persistent loss he experienced when his acoustic guitar was stolen from the van at a tour stop in Finland in 2007:

In the ten minutes that we’d been inside the venue, someone had come along, jimmied open the back door and taken my instrument—my friend ... I’ve never seen the guitar since, much to my sadness ... So I guess my old faithful axe got sold in some Muscovite car-boot sale and who knows where she ended up. I still think about her every now and again and hope that at least someone’s playing her ... As much as I try not to be materialistic about things—after all, we take nothing with us when we die—it’s still pretty hard, as a musician, losing your old friend.

A similar emotional attachment to his instruments becomes apparent from another statement by Joey:

Each guitar has a soul. Why do I have 117 guitars? ... Every guitar brings out a mood in me. Not only a different sound but a different mood. The story behind the

guitar—you don't usually know the story behind it but you know *your* own story—guitars that have been with you for 40 years, they all have a *story* ... they all take on a soul. So, the stories behind my own guitars give them a characteristic—of course we're still doing 30 or 35 shows a year, [and] I'll remember, that's the guitar I played with the Turtles or Chubby Checker and that was a great show and the memories ... I'm making new stories. (Fernandez & Lastovicka 2011: 292f)

The guitar's tonal qualities are equally human-like, as it is often described as 'singing', and The Beatles song 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps' (1968) lends it even more human emotions. How this anthropomorphisation and personification takes shape in other instruments has not yet been investigated. The bass has a similar shape to a guitar, so the physiological connotations are probably perceived the same way. However, the 'singing' and 'weeping' qualities may be less pronounced because the bass is rarely used as a melodic lead instrument. That may also be the case with keyboard instruments. As Moore (2001: 157) points out, rock fans have traditionally been sceptical about keyboard instruments because there is no direct connection between sound production and result, whereas the guitar directly translates actions such as string bending or picking into expression. Wind and brass instruments are even more closely connected to their players; the breath as 'engine' makes playing more personal and unique than a guitarist's hands and fingers. For this reason, humanisation can be expected for wind instruments. In contrast, drummers may find it difficult to see their instrument as a human agent because drums link directly between physical gestures and the resulting sound, so the rhythmic, as opposed to melodic, nature of the instrument is emphasised. Besides, the kit's physical form bears no resemblance to human physiology. Drummers still name and value their kit but for principles other than those for the guitar. These differences in humanisation are relevant because, as the quote from guitarist Joey has shown, different perceived personalities can encourage a player to acquire more instruments, not so much for their physical characteristics but emotional reasons.

'Contamination' is another process related to the 'extended self' that affects the relationship and emotional connection with a possession (Belk 1988). A newly acquired instrument is not yet part of the extended self. For many new owners, this happens through 'possession rituals' (McCracken 1988: 85ff), which reduce the initially unaccustomed feeling of a purchased item and give it personal meaning. This is all the more important if the item is second-hand. In this case, it needs to be 'decontaminated' of the previous owner's self and 'recontaminated'. Fernandez and Lastovicka (2011: 289) describe an example of this process based on the experience of player Joey:

You have to make every guitar your own ... So I go through a ritual ... You strip it all down—you take off the strings, you take off the knobs, you take out the wax, and you just start buffing that thing. Getting all the last life off, and putting your

life on it. After I buy a guitar it will probably be the only guitar I play for the next few months. I'm making it my own; it's kind of a process of making it your own.

The process of decontamination and recontamination overhauls an instrument and ensures full functionality and unrestricted attachment. The only exception to this fundamental requirement is when the previous owner was an esteemed celebrity (Fernandez & Lastovicka 2011: 289). Hoping for inspiration by the aura and magic of the valued artist (Belk 1991, 1996, 2001a), the contamination will likely be preserved. Contamination is significant concerning GAS and gear collecting because, once an instrument has become part of the extended self, the owner may be more reluctant to part with it, which can lead to a constantly growing collection of gear.

Special Case: Digital Goods

So far, we have limited our discussion to 'real' physical instruments. In connection with the guitar, we have seen that digital amplification technologies in hardware devices such as modelling amplifiers have often been perceived as inferior to valve amplifiers, and even transistor-based devices are not equal to valve gear. This suggests, at least for guitarists, that the more advanced electronic and digital technology is, the less valuable the device seems to be (Herbst 2019a, b). Similarly, electronic drum kits are often perceived as a practical alternative to loud and large acoustic sets (Andertons n.d.; Bache n.d.), and for keyboard instruments, analogue devices are still popular and often expensive (Pinch & Reinecke 2009; Pinch & Trocco 2002: 317ff). With the expansion of computational power and the development of digital audio workstations, digital instruments have increasingly become an alternative to hardware devices. Software synthesisers are not limited by physical designs and allow the free combination of sound-generating elements. For guitars and basses, there are now many virtual amplifier simulations based on different technologies that computationally emulate the physical behaviour of components or use 'acoustic fingerprints' in the form of impulse responses of loudspeakers recorded with specific microphones (Eichas & Zölzer 2018). For drums, there are more and more sophisticated forms of drum computers that contain groove templates from real drummers, but none support musicians in the same way as synthesisers and guitar or bass amplifiers do because computers replace humans in their performance. However, commercial drum sample packs with multiple samples and velocities can expand the sound capabilities and quality of an electronic drum kit. In this context, it is interesting to discuss how digital objects may be compared with traditional music equipment in terms of identity and popularity and how they relate to GAS.

Little is generally known about the perceived value of immaterial digital items. One exception is music collecting, where digital collections are less tangible and more prone to loss than physical collections (Fox 2004; Giles et al. 2007; McCourt 2005; Sklar 2008; Styvén 2010). According to Denegri-Knott and Molesworth

(2010), digital items are located in a liminal space between the material and the imaginary world and are therefore less suitable for extending the self and showcasing possession. Others like Lehdonvirta (2012: 22), however, argue ‘there is no such thing as completely immaterial consumption’, and so virtual goods can satisfy desires, but in different or more limited ways than with material goods. Despite their limitations, digital goods can feel real to their owners (Lehdonvirta 2012) and extend their perceived self (Cushing 2011, 2012). Similarly, it has been found that motivations for digital purchases equal material goods in terms of status (Wang et al. 2009), increasing social attractiveness (Martin 2008) and expression of identity (Bryant & Akerman 2009). Accordingly, consumers can become attached to virtual goods (Belk 2013) just as to material goods, and possession rituals are used to make them their own (Denegri-Knott et al. 2012). As Belk (2013: 479) argues, digital goods can stimulate desire, evoking daydreams and fantasies. All these findings suggest that musicians might develop strong connections to digital music tools and thus experience desires typical of GAS. Siddiqui and Turley (2006), however, note that musicians consider digital instruments less authentic than their material counterparts, which is due to the lesser physical presence, the lack of tactile qualities (Belk 2006) or the ‘aura’ (Belk 2013; Benjamin 1968) that manifests itself in the identical replication of the item, as opposed to the small and inevitable differences in any material production. Belk (2013: 481) therefore concludes that digital possessions can become part of the extended self but are unlikely to be as effective as material possessions and that they have a lower symbolic value. In the context of GAS, this could mean that digital music tools have the potential to be desirable but less so than ‘real’ physical instruments. Since hardware instruments need space and are usually more expensive, it can be expected that especially musicians who have limited space for storing physical instruments or those with small budgets are prone to develop a stronger interest in virtual instruments.

5.4 Desire and Necessitation

At the heart of GAS is the question of which gear is genuinely needed for musical purposes and which devices are only desired for the sake of consumption and possession. The latter is for GAS opponents one of the fundamental concerns because they wish to be perceived as reasonable players, not as owners of equipment (Wright 2006: 63).

In the context of collecting, we have looked at McIntosh and Schmeichel’s (2004) seven-phase model of the collecting process, which repeats indefinitely and makes collecting a lifelong activity. Consumption research offers further empirically tested theoretical frameworks for understanding the urge, desire and necessity associated with GAS.

Desire

Material desire is at the centre of consumption, especially those consumptive behaviours associated with leisure activities, such as making music or collecting musical gear. Desire has been theorised in many ways. As Graeber (2011: 493) stresses, most reasoning has identified a feeling of absence or lack as the root of desire. However, Graeber refers to Spinoza (2000), who argues that desire is not caused by the longing for a perceived lack but by self-preservation, the desire to live. Both explanations come from completely different perspectives, but either supports the close relationship between material possessions and identity discussed earlier. Identities change and lead to new acquisitions, which in turn are motivated by the desire to develop an identity. Therefore, the strong will to live and develop is expressed in various desires, one of which is materialistic.

A central element in many definitions of desire is imagination (Graeber 2011: 494). Imagining the objects of longing helps to intensify the feelings and ultimately increases desire further, while at the same time developing hopes for a better life (Belk et al. 2003: 328, 341). The relevance of imagination for desire is supported by Wright's (2006: 22) vivid description of a 'GAS attack': 'Your mind races, as you imagine the rest of your life with this baby in it—how much more skilled, happy, and fulfilled you would be. Then you begin to imagine how incomplete and unfulfilled the rest of your life would be without it'. It is therefore fundamental to GAS to image a better future, which could lie in the hope of becoming a better player (Jones 1992: 91) or gaining social recognition for the equipment played. Graeber (2011: 494) argues that desire is always rooted in imagination and that it 'tends to direct itself toward some kind of social relation, real or imaginary'. This social relation is often motivated by recognition, an underlying motive for constructing and developing the self. Therefore, material desires tend to be nourished by social motives, which may be explained by sociological concepts such as prestige, capital and habitus (Bourdieu 1984, 1991).

There have been numerous studies that position desire in a similar field to impulsive and compulsive consumption. According to the American Psychiatric Association (1985: 234), compulsions are 'repetitive and seemingly purposeful behaviors that are performed according to certain rules or in a stereotyped fashion'. O'Guinn and Faber (1989: 150) speculate that compulsive buyers may have an above-average desire for products and a low level of willpower, but stress that it is fuelled by the motivation to relieve anxiety or tension rather than by the desire for material acquisition (see also Lejoyeux et al. 1996). In other words, it is not the object but the purchasing act that is the characteristic feature. Compulsive buying differs from impulsive buying. While compulsive buyers suffer from a chronic loss of impulse control that becomes a routine with potentially severe consequences for daily life, impulsive buyers tend to focus on the acquisition of specific items (O'Guinn & Faber

1989: 150; Rook 1987). In his book on GAS, Wright shares many interview statements by guitarists who show such impulsive behaviour. One respondent explains, '[m]y first thought is "I want that." Never mind that I have some perfectly good guitars at home that I haven't mastered' (Wright 2006: 32). This quote underlines the irrational character of GAS; the guitarist understands that the guitar is not necessary, yet this hardly diminishes the desire for the instrument. Another guitarist explains that he has learned to satisfy impulsive desires because otherwise, they would hunt him for a long time:

My favorite GAS purchases are when I pick up a guitar at a dealer or a guitar show, and I cannot seem to put it down. It's as if the guitar has become a part of me, and I sit there playing all kinds of things I normally wouldn't play—like I'm playing out of my head. These moments are rare, but when they happen, I've learned that the best thing to do is to just find some way to buy that guitar right then and there. (Wright 2006: 40)

In such cases, he would be prepared to beg his wife for money or take a loan if he could not afford the instrument immediately. If he did not buy it, he would be sorry later. Since he knows from experience that all the impulsively bought instruments would be played, there would be no reason to feel bad about these purchases. Another guitarist suggests that impulsive acquisitions are useful as a self-reward and thus act as emotional regulators:

I had a very good Fernandes Sustainer type black Strat with gold hardware. I had some troubles²⁶ with my work, and the problems put me down, and GAS arrived! I had to give myself something as a gift! So I decided to change my guitar with a more characteristic, individual sounding instrument. Went into a shop, and had my eyes on a Legacy. It was so unknown for me that I took it in my hand, plugged in, and knew immediately that I found HER! (Wright 2006: 29)

Like the previously discussed player, this guitarist stresses that he still plays the guitar every day and does not regret the impulsive acquisition.

Most of the statements Wright (2006) collected demonstrate impulsive rather than compulsive tendencies. Signs of compulsion are found in a habitual frequency, for example, in this guitarist's confession: 'I suffer from acute GAS periodically. When my GAS kicks in, there is only one solution and that is to buy the gear that preoccupies my every waking moment. Scouring the internet, searching eBay, trolling for that special instrument, when will it end?' (Wright 2006: 35). Other interviewed musicians state that although GAS hits without an 'incubation period', they are aware of the emotional processes or stages of GAS and know that if they refrain from the acquisition long enough, 'anywhere from an hour up until a few

²⁶ Here and in the following chapters, we do not correct grammatical errors of interview statements in Wright's book. Neither do we mark the errors with 'sic!'.

days', the urge will eventually pass (Wright 2006: 33). In other cases, something needs to be bought to ease the compulsive urge:

And GAS always leaves a mark. Every attack builds on the other, forming a pyramid of unfulfilled wishes. Eventually, this will be too much, and I'll have to buy a guitar. Sometimes I buy something cheap, but fun, just to ease the pain. Basically, anything guitar-related will do, such as a stomp box or a nice new cord. This minute, I could easily name twelve guitars, make, model, colour, modifications and year I'd like to own. And, strangely enough, that really does make me feel better. (Wright 2006: 33)

The compulsive nature shows in the fact that any purchase will suffice. It is not so much a desire for a particular object as the urge for acquisition per se, which characterises compulsive buying behaviours (O'Guinn & Faber 1989; Rook 1987).

GAS is sometimes accompanied by feelings of guilt, shame, regret and despair over the purchase and a lack of self-control, indicating that GAS-affected consumption has more traits of impulsive than compulsive behaviour (Faber & O'Guinn 1989; Faber & Vohs, 2004; Garcia 2007; Lo & Harvey 2011, 2012; McElroy et al. 1991, 1994). For compulsive buyers, the acquisition usually takes place without the presence of friends or family (Elliott 1994; Schlosser et al. 1994), so it involves social withdrawal and isolation (Kellett & Bolton 2009: 90). Such indicators of compulsive buying are rare, at least for the musicians interviewed by Wright (2006) and those observed in sociological studies on online message boards (Cole 2018; Hartmann 2016). But then, it must be considered that people affected by compulsive GAS would probably neither talk nor openly express their feelings of guilt and shame in such special-interest forums, especially since GAS is commonly celebrated there (Cole 2018). In contrast, musicians who tend towards impulsive buying behaviour are less ashamed and therefore more vocal about their tendencies, as quotes from musicians in this chapter suggest. Furthermore, Rook and Fisher (1995: 306) define impulsive buying as a 'consumer's tendency to buy spontaneously, unreflectively, immediately, and kinetically. Highly impulsive buyers are more likely to experience spontaneous buying stimuli; their shopping lists are more "open" and receptive to sudden, unexpected buying ideas'. This definition is much more consistent with the characteristics of GAS described in blogs, Wright's (2006) book and other GAS-related studies (Cole 2018; Hartmann 2016). Moreover, in contrast to compulsive consumption, the buying impulse does not need to be suppressed (Rook & Fisher 1995: 306). Impulsive buying is not pathological, and almost everyone can be affected at times. In most cases, however, the impulse is controllable (Vohs & Faber 2007: 538), and the buyer usually feels no guilt or remorse (Atalay & Meloy 2011). The impulsive buying urge is triggered by the mood in a potential buying situation. People prone to impulsive buying behaviour can get the urge either from positive excitement (Rook & Gardner 1993) or from negative moods in the hope of being

cheered up (Mick & Demoss 1990). No matter which of the two urges triggers consumption, such purchases are harmless or even beneficial for mental health (Hausman 2000; Thompson et al. 1990), yet possibly at the expense of financial detriment (Fenton-O’Creevy et al. 2018). Both the moods and effects following an acquisition can be reasonably assumed in the context of musical gear. As the examples and GAS-related quotes in this book suggest, many musicians weigh up the positive psychological effects against the negative consequences on their economic situation, and while they are tempted, their rational control and willpower usually win. According to Hoch and Loewenstein (1991), most people reflect on their economic position, time pressure, social visibility and impulse in a potential buying situation and take a reasonable decision.

It is difficult to determine how closely GAS and compulsive buying are related. Compulsive buyers are likely the extreme, pathological end of the GAS continuum. Their total share has not yet been explored, so we must rely on research suggesting that between 2% and 16% of the US and UK population are affected by compulsive buying.²⁷ Considering the high emotional value that musical instruments and related gear have for musicians, we can safely assume that they are at least on par with the general population. However, compulsive buyers do not seem to be the main group amongst GAS-affected musicians. Impulsive buying appears to be much more closely related to GAS since spontaneous acquisition impulses are common amongst groups with a pronounced interest in practices based on a material core. Besides, impulsive buying is a natural, non-pathological habit because it is usually controllable. Relatively little is known about how widespread impulsive buying is in the overall population. According to the DDB Needham Annual Lifestyle Survey (1974–1993), 38% of the US population identified themselves as impulsive buyers during that time span. Given the ever-increasing capitalisation of Western societies and the ease of shopping online, impulsive buying must have seen a rise since then.

Baudrillard (1983: 127) suggests that ‘everything is reversed if we turn to thinking about the object. Here, it is no longer the subject who desires but the object that seduces’. Seduction is a significant factor of GAS, and it is central to the feeling of desire. Seduction contrasts rationality in that it implies a lack of control, which is why modern societies sometimes reject it. Voices against GAS reflect this rejection when they stress the importance of remaining in control and resisting the urge (Becker 1996; Kwisses 2015). However, although people are seduced to consume by marketers, consumers are often complicit in their seduction (Deighton & Grayson 1995; Reekie 1993). Humans ‘do want to be enchanted by desire’ (Belk et al. 2003: 327), and so Belk et al. (2003: 342ff) argue that people ‘desire to desire’ and fear

²⁷ Black (1996): 1.8–8.1%; Iervolino et al. 2009, Mueller et al. 2009, Samuels et al. 2008: 2–5%; Koran et al. (2006): 5.8%; Dittmar (2005): 13.5%; Magee (1994): 16%.

being without desire.²⁸ For this reason, Baudrillard (1979: 134f) sees self-seduction as an essential part of the motivating power of desire. According to Belk et al. (2003: 345), people want to be controlled by their desires but, as this is a hidden process, they are usually not aware of it. Instead, people ‘externalize the power of desire as residing in the object itself’ (Belk et al. 2003: 345) and therefore justify their desire with the attractiveness of the object used to externalise the underlying desire (Falk 1994). Concerning GAS, this implies that the desired object itself might not be the primary or sole motivator for longing and the intended purchase. Instead, it might reflect the inner psychological world. Likely, many of the other factors discussed, such as nostalgia, neophilia, role models and musical motives, also play a role, supporting the notion that GAS is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon.

Some of the guitarists Wright (2006) interviewed show signs of self-seduction. One player explains:

Most of the time I see an ad, and I start wondering if I really need another one [guitar]. Sometimes I go to a city and stumble into a guitar shop. I simply cannot go past it; I get grumpy if I don’t go in. Then it starts ... justifying. I don’t have that particular model. I need something cheap for carrying around (won’t mind it being stolen), I need something special, because ... well, because. I need something that’s missing in my sound. My collection isn’t complete without it. This is such a good value for money. I would like to look and sound like ____, and he has that model. It’s a really, really nice guitar to look at. (Wright 2006: 31)

Although this statement does not confirm the unconscious self-seduction that Belk et al. (2003: 345) describe, it does show that GAS-inclined musicians visit places voluntarily even if they know that this will awaken the desire for items they do not need. In line with this, another guitarist visits music stores, browses the Internet and watches videos, well knowing that this will spark GAS:

The seed is always a guitar store window or a manufacturer’s website. Germination transpires in the twisted mind of a frustrated picker: ‘That shiny new critter is exactly what I need to thrash the dickens out of ‘Sweet Home Alabama.’ Firey GAS emerges when your favorite axe-slasher is featured (on stage or in a music video) laying down an impossible riff with the same make, model, and color of dream-machine you’ve been salivating over for the last twelve weeks. (Wright 2006: 37)

Consequently, this desire to desire seems to be strong in musicians who are inclined to GAS.

The difference between wanting, needing and desiring is useful to consider in this context. Belk et al. (2003: 328) do not see a close connection between wanting

²⁸ There is an intricate relationship between desire and collecting in this context. Collections are motivated by desire, but the chance of completing a collection is a great cause for concern because it may also end the desire that a collector most likely wishes to keep (Benjamin 1968; Denegri-Knott & Molesworth 2010).

and desiring because wanting is too controlled and rational to cover the passionate aspects of desire. Need is more revealing when it is contrasted with desire. For Freud (1971), everything can become an object of desire, but need is based on the lack of an object. In a musical context, there can be the need to replace a broken drum cymbal. From a purely functional point of view, any cymbal would suffice. Desire, in contrast, is concerned with a specific cymbal, not just any cymbal. It could be a cymbal line or a specially manufactured model, such as an earth-toned or soil-aged cymbal buried in the ground for several months to give it a darker and warmer tone.²⁹ These cymbals are usually handmade, unique and expensive and therefore ideal as an object of desire.

Research on desire (Baudrillard 1972; Belk et al. 2003) is consistent with sociological work (for example, Bourdieu 1984, 1991; Foucault 1980) in that it is rooted in social motives and involving a complex interaction with the individual's bodily passions and mental reflections. Within this relational structure, Belk et al. (2003) empirically identify various elements of desire. One major element of desire is *embodied passion*. Desire is experienced 'as an intense and usually highly positive emotional state best characterized as passion' (Belk et al. 2003: 333). Their interviewed respondents used expressions such as lust, hunger, thirst and dreamlike fantasies. Sexual metaphors were common. In comparison to 'wanting', the authors find that desire is probably more intense, unintentional and illogical, shown in expressions such as 'cannot live without'. Many guitarists in Wright's (2006) book show this passionate trait, and often they explicitly mention desire: 'GAS is basically about desire. I have a strong desire to acquire a lot of guitars' (Wright 2006: 32). Another player emphasises the 'cannot live without' character:

GAS? It's a deep desire followed by dreams of getting the tone that makes you cry. A strange feeling that something is missing in life, followed by flashes of playing the guitar that you still do not own. This continues for long periods. Thoughts that develop are 'Can I live without this?'—'I need it now.'—'Why is life so unfair that other people can enjoy these things and own them and I cannot?' (Wright 2006: 30)

It is the distance to the unattainable object that characterises this passionate if unfulfilled desire. Hence it is not surprising that many GAS-inclined musicians compare their passionate desire with romantic relationships.

I think it is the same feeling that comes up when you are falling in love. I mean with a woman, of course, but also with a car or a Telecaster: butterflies in the abdomen, the ultimate craving—I must have her/it. You could also call it the libido, which makes life worthwhile and exciting. (Wright 2006: 34)

²⁹ <https://www.instructables.com/id/Earth-toning-soil-aging-cymbals-to-get-a-darke>; accessed 30 May 2020.

My heart starts to pound, my eyes water, my knees get weak, my focus goes totally to that instrument and whammo, it's a full-fledged case of GAS!. There is nothing in the world like it, other than falling in love. If that word's too strong, falling in lust. I get all tingly. It's an exciting feeling for sure. (Wright 2006: 34)

These two quotes suggest that GAS-induced desires can be as strong as the love between two people and that there may be similarities between the development of an interpersonal relationship and the process of longing for, buying and using the desired instrument. As many of the statements indicate, male musicians are visually attracted to an instrument (Wright 2006: 28), which they need get to know better to determine if there is something deeper beyond physical attraction. Descriptions are used such as: 'feel won't come until attractiveness has drawn me first' (Wright 2006: 28) and '[w]ith certain items ... the combination of physical characteristics and eye-holding beauty will, when they are together in just the right (magical) way, form a bond between me and what I am beholding. This is certainly more emotional than rational, but that's the core of beauty, anyway' (Wright 2006: 28). There is a similarity between GAS and love, from initial attraction to close attachment, which is associated with positive feelings and likely why musicians want to experience it again and again. For many players, such feelings must not necessarily be satisfied by an actual acquisition; for the development of attraction and passionate desire, longing may be enough.

Belk et al. (2003: 335f) identify another element of desire, *desire for sociality*, which has several components. As with the social motives described in the context of collecting, the desire for material objects often arises through the hope of facilitating social relations, which either can be access to a social group or the fulfilment of conditions for staying in it. For example, specific musical gear is required to join a band. As the band advances and prepares to play more professional gigs or record an album, equipment investments may be required. A member might be forced to invest in better gear to adjust to the others or face problems staying in the band. In the context of desire, this requirement is not necessarily punitive—although it can be (Belk et al. 2003: 337)—because it may just as well mean dreaming of a particular piece of equipment to replace or extend the current set of tools. A second component of the desire for sociality is mimesis. Girard (1977) described 'mimetic desire' with attributes that could be transferred to GAS. Here, desire is initiated by observing other musicians who acquire or have acquired new gear. This form of desire means that the 'objects of desire are sought in order to be and feel like one of the others, not for the object per se' (Belk et al. 2003: 337). Some guitarists in Wright's (2006: 41) book describe a feeling of 'gear envy': 'I am in a constant state of "gear envy". It's not that I don't love my guitars or my amps, but when I find a pedal, a guitar, or something unique, I really have to fight my gut on purchasing it right there'. Constant comparison of one's gear with that of other musicians probably leads to GAS, or it

can be a habit rooted in GAS. The social context of GAS is even more evident in another quote:

One visits shops that treat you badly, eBay ... They also start to get the need to enjoy and, in turn, fuel your desire. This whole process develops into a group of addicts who enable each other by using the internet to share and educate where to find the best places to get a fix. This passes a point of no return where GAS is a pleasure that can only be experienced to be appreciated. (Wright 2006: 30)

Like collectors, GAS-affected musicians have discussion forums that fuel GAS-behaviour. Such behaviour could generally be problematic because it affirms consumption. The quote above, however, suggests that participation in such communities is motivated by pure pleasure, allowing musicians to indulge in their desires together.

Another element of desire relevant to GAS is the relationship between desire, *inaccessibility* and, relatedly, *hope* (Belk et al. 2003: 340, 343; Denegri-Knott & Molesworth 2010: 69). If an object is readily available, no strong feeling of desire is likely to develop. Certainty does not spark desire. At the other end of the spectrum is the unattainable goal. Without the possibility to acquire the item at some point, desire will not last. Although hope is not the same as desire, it is a fundamental component of desire because '[w]ithout the hope of obtaining the focal object, desires dissolve into mere wishes or impossible fantasies' (Belk et al. 2003: 343). Hope is thus the perceived possibility of achieving desire, while desire is the emotional attraction to the object itself. Just as desire is pleasurable, so is hope (Belk et al. 2003: 343).

In line with other models we discussed (for example, McIntosh & Schmeichel 2004), Belk et al. (2003) claim that desire is ultimately infinite and repeats in cycles. They argue that 'desire is seen as involving self-seductive imagination and active cultivation of desire. Desire is cultivated and kept alive until the object is acquired or until it becomes clear that it is beyond hope, that it will never be acquired' (Belk et al. 2003: 340). Once a desire has been realised, it ceases. An object that is owned cannot be desired anymore because desire must be nourished by lack as a fundamental requirement. Obtaining the desired item is sometimes accompanied by negative feelings, mainly due to the illogical and emotionally intense character of desire. Belk et al. (2003: 337ff) highlight that for some of their respondents, desire is negatively connotated with the experience of being out of control, which is frequently accompanied by feelings of guilt and sin and, in extreme cases, by addiction and intense cravings. A guitar player's statement reflects such strong emotions:

GAS often is nearly overpowered by buyer's remorse at times, even when the deal is sweet ... All the sounds of the music store seem far away, and you drift to a place where desire, anticipation, and apprehension orbit each other in an interaction that can only end the way asking a girl to dance does: exhilaration or agony. Usually it is agony for any number of reasons. She says no (it's overpriced). She says yes, but has bad breath (the finish is great, but the neck feels like a ball bat sawed in half).

Her voice is shrill (the pickups are as dead as disco). When everything is right, however, it is as smooth and satisfying as your favorite beverage on a hot summer day. But alas, just like that beverage, it can only satisfy for a short time before you need another. While you may always cherish that girl, that drink, that guitar, you will always have a wandering eye. (Wright 2006: 35)

Not only ‘risks’ and remorse are connected with desire because one of the main problems is, as the quote highlights, that it cannot be permanently fulfilled. At some point, a new desire arises. Despite the destructive capacities involved, Belk et al. (2003: 348) do not regard this unending cycle negatively but as a constructive and creative process that can be pleasurable, life-affirming and support personal and social development. Their assertion accords with Campbell (1987: 86), who states that ‘desiring mode constitutes a state of enjoyable discomfort, and that wanting rather than having is the main focus of pleasure-seeking’. As Campbell reasons, the main pleasure of desire is longing and indulging in the ‘discomforts of desire’ rather than enjoying the object finally purchased. Hence GAS-related desires can be pleasurable experiences with the potential for personal growth and musical development. However, healthy desire should not become compulsive, and musicians must avoid becoming what Baudrillard (1970) identifies as ‘hyperconsumers’, which are consumers tempted to buy more than they need, pay more than the goods are worth, and spend more money than they can afford (see also Ritzer 2012).

Despite the often humorous statements about GAS, there have been attempts to find remedies or even cures for it. Becker (1996), Cole (2018) and Kwisses (2015) emphasise the use-value of instruments and recommend focusing on playing instead of dealing with equipment, while Wright (2006) sees the solution in external forces such as the significant other. Since the turn of the millennium, a new line of research on anti-consumption has developed within consumption research (for example, Chatzidakis & Lee 2013; Lee et al. 2009; Yuksel 2013). It generally advocates three strategies: reject, restrict and reclaim (Black & Cherrier 2010; Lee et al. 2011). Rejection involves the refusal to buy certain brands or types of items; restriction aims to limit the number of purchases, and reclaiming is based on recycling or reusing items owned. Another more recent strategy targets the source of consumption, desire (Dholakia et al. 2018), which must be controlled by the consumer’s willpower to stop or prevent excessive consumption (Hoch & Loewenstein 1991; Montoya & Scott 2013; Siemens & Kopp 2011). Willpower was the focus of earlier studies (Carver & Scheier 2001; Koenigstorfer et al. 2014), and only more recently has the attention shifted to desire as the root of excessive consumption (Dholakia 2015; Myrseth et al. 2009; Redden & Haws 2013). Dholakia et al. (2018) argue that consumptive desire is limited and can be depleted. The underlying mechanism they see is ‘satiation’, which is the reduced desire and enjoyment that follows a series of acquisitions (Coombs & Avrunin 1977; McAlister 1982; Redden 2008). As they argue, for satiation to occur, a person does not need to purchase items; reflecting on past

consumptions will have the same effect (Dholakia et al. 2018: 262). Similar to the use-value approach (Cole 2018),

reflecting on the recent use of one's possessions through a structured thought listing-based intervention will arouse the individual's consumption-related desire for items on this list. As a result of this arousal, ... consumption desire will be used up and depleted, leaving less of it available in a subsequent task ... This, in turn, will lessen the consumer's interest in buying when a subsequent task provides such an opportunity. (Dholakia et al. 2018: 262)

This principle has proven to be efficient in eating and food choice (Galak et al. 2014). The strategy's effectiveness is also confirmed by the results of Dholakia et al.'s (2018) study. Participants who reflected on their previous purchases and the use of their possessions had better control over themselves in resisting the desire to buy new items. Concerning GAS, this could take different forms. Musicians may increase their level of reflexivity as a natural consequence of their maturity and experience in their area of interest. Social activities could be another cause for reflection. When thoughts are exchanged and mirrored through conversations with other people, be it family, friends or professional therapists, reflection is generally more effective. Talking to other people promotes reflection and, with it, a decreasing desire. Whether or not such interaction reduces the desire for new gear mainly depends on the conversation partner. As the case might be, GAS could be sparked as well.

Necessitation

While desire mainly derives from a combination of sociological and psychological factors, necessitation is more strongly related to a tangible need. Braun et al. (2016) have studied the process of an object becoming a necessity based on interviews with consumers about products without which they said they could not live. Although necessitation intuitively focuses on practical factors, the findings suggest that it might be a suitable theoretical framework for understanding some traits of irrational GAS behaviour. Braun et al. argue that it is essential to acknowledge that no product all of a sudden becomes a necessity. It arises from an experience or a series of experiences, which is changing how a person feels about an object (Braun et al. 2016: 209). Accordingly, the authors coin the term 'necessitation' for the perceptual shift of an object from a non-necessity to a necessity. This concept of necessity must be understood in a broader context. Following a social constructivist approach, the study of necessities requires consideration of societal and historical contexts that influence consumer desires and behaviours, as well as personally relevant historical or biographical developments.

The study finds that necessitation goes through five stages: 1) familiarisation, 2) transformation in the form of redemption or contamination, 3) memorialisation, 4) (re)integration and reconstruction, 5) solidification. In the *familiarisation* stage, a

person is introduced to a product. Similar to Rogers's (2003) theory of innovation, losing strangeness of the novel item must come first. Braun et al. (2016: 213) suggest that it takes three different forms: 'existential (the presence of a product in a consumer's environment), functional (the range of capabilities or modes of usage supported by a product), or symbolic (the role a product plays in a consumer's self-perception and identity negotiation)'. In this initial phase, no ownership or usage of the item is required to allow familiarisation; exposure through media or conversations with members of the social environment is sufficient. Concerning GAS, familiarisation with new musical equipment can take place in music stores or by watching videos, browsing trade magazines and catalogues, reading blogs and participating in message boards. These encounters serve to introduce and familiarise with diverse kinds of gear.

In the second stage, *transformation*, the product is not yet a necessity but is about to become one. For the product to become a necessity, there must be a critical event that changes consumers' attitudes towards it (Braun et al. 2016: 215). This event does not require the presence of the object itself; instead, the person makes an emotionally positive or unpleasant experience that is in some way related to the object and motivates the potential consumer to become more actively involved with the product. The sequence can either be 'contamination', a movement from a negative scene to a positive experience, or the opposite, 'redemption'. The authors do not offer musical examples, yet transformative sequences can happen regarding equipment and GAS. For example, an amplifier malfunctioning right before or during a gig would turn the otherwise pleasant situation of performing live into a bad experience due to the stress caused by the failure. Such an experience may strengthen the desire to buy a new, more reliable amplifier and to keep the old one as a backup. The transformation takes place through contamination. However, it would be different if the guitarist had encountered an amplifier of higher quality. Taking the example of a failing amplifier on stage again, the guitarist may be invited to play one of a fellow player. That device might give him a pleasurable experience at the gig, as it may offer more control over different tones with its larger number of channels switchable by foot, convincing the player of better functionality and wider tonal spectrum. Such an unexpectedly positive experience in an otherwise negative situation has a high potential to foster future engagement with the amplifier. Developing a positive attitude towards an object would be 'redemption'. Redemption is often associated with a positive outcome, such as higher quality, better functionality or a rise in social standing. The latter could occur, for example, when exclusion from a social group changes to acceptance. The unexpected success with the borrowed amplifier might provoke fellow musicians to see the player in a new light, which could lead to future collaboration or invitations to perform at other events. Experiences in connection with an item the musician does not possess facilitate further engagement. While this is a fictive example of a potential consumer using a borrowed product, there are other

possible scenarios. A transformative experience can be triggered when a musician is involved in a project or merely reading about an object on a message board, which would not even require the object to be present.

The relatively short third stage of *memorialisation* involves a recollection of the previous experience that leads to a decision (Braun et al. 2016: 217). This decision-making process requires the potential consumer to develop a positive opinion about the product, regardless of whether it has been shaped by contamination or redemption. Engagement and research on the object mark this phase and lead, similar again to Rogers's (2003) theory, to a deeper understanding of the functions and meanings. Memorialisation can also include moments of imagination of the object's future use, combining the concept of necessitation with desire (Graeber 2011).

In the fourth, *(re)integration and reconstruction* stage, the product becomes more meaningful to the potential consumer, as they discover more benefits than those apparent in the transformative phase (Braun et al. 2016: 217f). To continue the example of a failed guitar amplifier that led to an appreciation of another device with more foot-switchable channels, the player may realise that they like other types of valves. If their amplifier had EL34 valves, which are typical of a 'British sound', playing an amplifier with 6L6 valves that produce an 'American sound' (Stent 2019) could lead to an interest in learning a new style such as US southern rock or country. Alternatively, the player may find a greater appreciation for a more (or less) distorted sound and the favourable consequences it may have on expression (Herbst 2017c). Such experiences can drastically shape the way a player regards areas of practice, whether in their playing or in general.

The final stage is *solidification*; here, the person 'conclusively perceives the product as a necessity—a product he or she cannot live without' (Braun et al. 2016: 218). At this point, affected persons see products 'as indispensable requirements for their well-being' (Braun et al. 2016: 219). The authors argue that a product, which has become a necessity, has obtained 'a permanent presence mentally and/or physically' (Braun et al. 2016: 218). Although they do not explicitly state that the necessary object must be or is bought during the solidification stage, the qualitative examples provided suggest it. They further highlight that products do not have to go through all stages and that some may be repeated (Braun et al. 2016: 219). That is interesting regarding GAS because it is characterised more by the urge to buy—the process of necessitation—than by the value a player places on an item already owned. Hence GAS is likely to happen in the first four stages, from familiarisation to *(re)integration and reconstruction*. Here the object is gradually seen as a necessity, which creates the urge to acquire it. If it is eventually possessed, the experience probably confirms the purchase to be the 'right choice', but it would end the GAS cycle for the item or group of items, at least for a while. Solidification must accordingly be understood as the time from purchase to the beginning of a new necessitation process. Therefore, Braun et al.'s (2016) theoretical framework on necessitation

serves as a useful empirically tested model to help understand the process of a ‘GAS attack’.

5.5 Prosumption and Craft Consumption

Prosumption

At the beginning of this chapter, we noted the trend in research to attribute more power to the consumer, who is considered to have a more active and self-determined role. In social sciences and cultural studies, the focus shifted from one extreme to the other. Social theorists in the classical period of social sciences such as Adam Smith (1776) and Karl Marx (1867) placed a clear emphasis on production, while later scholars like Baudrillard (1970), Bell (1976) and Galbraith (1958) concentrated on consumption. In his development from Marxist writing to a more consumption-sided perspective, Baudrillard finally concluded that the distinction between production and consumption is an ‘artificial disjuncture’ (Baudrillard 1976: 112). He began to think along the line of what has more recently been described as ‘prosumption’, based on the postmodern understanding that all production requires consumption and vice versa (Pietrykowski 2007; Ritzer 2015; Ritzer & Jurgenson 2010).

The term ‘prosumption’ was introduced in 1980 in Toffler’s futurist writing. Toffler observes that in pre-industrial societies, production and consumption were inseparably linked. The Industrial Revolution artificially, though never wholly, separated this process, but Toffler (1980: 265f) theorised that postmodern societies brought back the ‘prosumer’. Since the turn of the millennium, mainly fuelled by Web 2.0 (Ritzer & Jurgenson 2010: 14), research has paid increasing attention to prosumption.³⁰ It must be understood as an analytical term because it is impossible not to use the terms production and consumption together (Ritzer 2015: 413f). Both terms must be understood as subtypes of prosumption that mark the extremes. These extremes are a theoretical possibility but an empirical impossibility because there can never be production without consumption (Ritzer 2015: 415f).

Modern societies are characterised by prosumer capitalism (Ritzer 2015: 422). Examples are found in all kinds of self-service operations such as gasoline stations, fast-food restaurants, self-checkouts at supermarkets, DIY (Ritzer 2015: 426; Ritzer & Jurgenson 2010: 18f), as well as in most activities on the web, including social media, YouTube, Amazon or Yelp! (Ritzer 2015: 426; Ritzer & Jurgenson 2010: 18f). There, the user is doing work that creates content, which otherwise would require paid work (Ritzer & Jurgenson 2010: 30). Prosumers usually perform such work free of charge, sometimes in return for bargains or just for pleasure (Ritzer & Jurgenson 2010: 25).

³⁰ For an overview, see Ritzer et al. 2012.

There is relatively little research on prosumption in music. Focussing on the arts, Nakajima (2012) identifies three forms of simultaneous involvement in production and consumption. Firstly, any production of artworks requires the consumption of tools and materials such as brushes, paints and canvases. Similarly, making music is a productive activity that, in most cases, requires instruments and other gear. Secondly, artists have always built on ideas and techniques of other artists, which is a form of consumption. It is much the same in music, not only regarding role models but also regarding composition, technology and playing styles and techniques. Thirdly, in contemporary art, the boundaries of producing artists and consuming audiences are much more blurred. Analogously, the rapid growth, availability and affordability of musical instruments in most parts of the world have led to a large number of amateur musicians who play at home, in cover bands or create original music. Nakajima (2012) further discusses ‘readymade’ as another practice that enables amateurs to produce art. Prosumption in music-making has become common not only in the creation of artworks but also in terms of musical gear, as musicians with no expertise in electronics or engineering can choose from an ever-expanding range of DIY kits to build instruments, effects pedals and amplifiers.³¹ Although these kits allow customisation at best, they are a good example of prosumption in music technology.

Another area of prosumption concerns the generation of knowledge (Ritzer et al. 2012: 382), most visible on websites like Wikipedia, online blogs or social media. Concerning music technology, companies benefit from the involvement of prosumers. For example, the online forum of the innovative guitar amplifier company Kemper has a subforum ‘Feature requests’. It can be regarded as a kind of customer service for users of this technology, yet these musicians are unpaid ‘co-producers’, contributing to research and enterprise work for free by suggesting modifications or enhancements to the technology (Arvidsson 2006: 70). Moreover, marketing research has recognised that brand communities cannot be imposed on potential customers but require consumer participation (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Involving users through online message boards or ‘user corners’, which on the Kemper website present videos of guitar players demonstrating the amplifier, is thus an effective strategy for empowering prosumers to engage themselves in brand development. Modern brand management

is not about imposing ways of using goods, or behaving or thinking as a consumer. Rather, it is about proposing branded goods as tools, or building blocks whereby consumers can create their own meanings. What people pay for ... is not so much the brand itself as what they can produce with it: what they can *become* with it ... Customers are thus expected to add more or less personal dimensions to the brand,

³¹ For example, see <https://www.modkitsdiy.com> for guitar effects pedals or <https://buildyourownclone.com> for amplifiers.

to accommodate it in their life-world, to produce something—a feeling, a personal relation, an experience—with it. (Arvidsson 2006: 68)

Accordingly, the more musicians can ‘work’ with their equipment and customise it, the more likely it is that they will develop strong bonds to it, as can be seen from the value players attach to certain brands or instrument models. An example of strong bonds to a manufacturer is given by a guitarist in Wright’s (2006: 37) book:

My GAS reaction only occurs when I look at guitars made by Leo Fender. My gut reaction is I immediately feel inspired to play! I want to pick the guitar up, feel the neck in my hand, how that particular guitar balances, and how it contours to my body. I don’t know why that is, but it does not occur with any other guitar; not Gibson, not PRS, not Ibanez, not Rickenbacker. I’m only truly inspired to play a made-by-Leo guitar.

Emotional investment in a brand helps to forge and extend the bond to a manufacturer or an instrument series, which not only benefits the brand but possibly also the prosumer because they feel more passionately about their owned instruments.

Marketing can easily give the impression of manipulation, but in another view ‘prosumption could be seen as combining the best of production (the power associated with being a producer) and consumption (the joys of being a consumer) and as being free of external control and not being subject to alienation and exploitation’ (Ritzer et al. 2012: 387). Prosumption has numerous advantages for its users; they gain emotionally but also materialistically through access to tools or through earning money by making music, even if not in a professional capacity. In other words, prosumption involves an exchange of unpaid labour for access to tools, emotional gratification and indirect economic gain resulting from a serious leisure career.

Few developments other than Web 2.0 have made prosumption more a part of modern life. The creation of online content shifted the focus away from companies like Yahoo towards ordinary Internet users. One area of particular interest in the context of GAS is online auctions such as eBay, which give musicians access to rare gear and promise opportunities for bargains. Some research has focused on prosumption (Denegri-Knott & Zwick 2012) and desire (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth 2010) in eBay practices that provide a useful framework for understanding GAS-related behaviours on the platform. eBay is a perfect example of prosumption because the work, ranging from offering the items and bidding to shipment and reviewing, is mostly done by its users. Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2010) argue that the vast choice on eBay creates a crisis amongst users, which is processed by flânerie and daydreaming. Both seduce the user to consume by stimulating desire and allow for experimentation with different consumer identities in the home’s comfort.

In the previous subchapter, we discussed the willingness of people to self-seduction. Going to music stores, visiting websites of instrument manufacturers and auction sites like eBay are remarkably similar to window shopping that Benjamin

(1968, 1997) described as characteristic of the urban flâneur. Others have observed flâneur behaviour as one of the consumers' positive experiences (Clarke 2003; Featherstone 1991, 1998). For Featherstone (1998: 921), online window shopping is 'enhanced flânerie' because the user is not limited to physical or spatial restrictions.

According to Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2010: 63), eBay is a powerful source for imagination and desire that can lead to daydreaming. They argue that 'eBay is not only a resource for the acquisition of needed goods but also an aid to consumption that takes place in the imagination as the construction and maintenance of a daydream rich in the possibility of an ideal state of being' (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth 2010: 67). Here again, we see the strong link between material possessions and identity and, more importantly, material acquisitions as a means to a happier life. Such happiness often becomes evident from expressions about GAS, for example, the already quoted description of a GAS attack by Wright (2006: 22): 'Your mind races, as you imagine the rest of your life with this baby in it—how much more skilled, happy, and fulfilled you would be'. Like desire, where it must be challenging but still possible to acquire the desired object, daydreams require a certain distance and must appear achievable (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth 2010: 60). For McCracken (1988: 110), daydreams are by-products of the mismatch between reality and ideals that signify an idealised state of existence, exemplified by Wright's vivid illustration of the GAS attack. Daydreams are not limited to objects, but the fact that items can be bought makes the dreams more tangible. As has been shown, specialist magazines work effectively to simulate desire, particularly for items like instruments (Belk 1997, 2001b), and Théberge (1993: 159ff) and Jones (1992: 89) find a positive relationship between magazines for musical instruments and interest in gear. eBay, according to Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2010: 68f), fulfils a similar role. Firstly, it introduces people to objects they did not even know existed. That is visible in a guitarist's statement: 'When I stumble across that rare instrument I thought would never surface and it's for sale—look out' (Wright 2006: 35). eBay, 'full of surprises, dangers, opportunities and promises allowing consumers to craft pleasurable daydreams' (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth 2010: 59), provides never-ending triggers for GAS. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, websites like eBay offer users the opportunity to acquire the desired object at the touch of a button, which may lead to greater emotional involvement. Ariely and Simonson (2003: 116) find that eBayers may be 'particularly susceptible to escalation of commitment because participation in an online auction can often trigger an intense emotional response'. Other studies suggest that bidding in auctions is motivated by hedonic benefit (Standifird et al. 2005), and with its specific format, it produces winners and losers, thus enhancing emotional excitement (Ariely & Simonson 2003). This heightened level of emotional stimulation makes eBay a 'pleasure dome where consumers engage with novel, elusive and potentially desirable glimpsed objects to create a meaningful act of consumption' (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth 2010: 66).

Websites like eBay provide diverse kinds of pleasure. Monitoring the value of items can be enjoyable, either to strike a bargain when the chance arises or purely to know its price. Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2010: 65) report about a respondent who drew pleasure from knowing ‘how much vinyl records were going for’. Similarly, it can also be enjoyable for collectors of music equipment and ‘regular’ musicians to study how the value of esteemed instruments develop. Another pleasure on eBay is what Turner (1982) describes as ‘liminoid’ or a state ‘in-between’, which for Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2010: 60) is characteristic of digital consumption. A purchase made on the Internet or remotely by phone creates a temporary situation; the item is owned but not yet in physical possession, which could be either, a negative situation or a pleasurable experience, as a guitarist suggests:

If those feelings of desire and anticipation aren’t enough, I can also buy a guitar over the phone or online. Procuring a guitar in this manner, the GAS takes on an added measure of agony over whether the guitar will match its description in the advertisement or on the website. Needless to say, the level of agony grows considerably if one has ever received a guitar damaged during shipment. Nearly fifteen years ago, a brand new \$700 Gibson Firebird arrived at my doorstep with a broken headstock. In spite of not having received another damaged guitar since, the ensuing two-month fight over the loss affects my GAS symptoms to this day. (Wright 2006: 39)

While this quote stresses the disadvantages, waiting for the delivery can be enjoyable because it combines the pleasant emotions of desire with the anticipation and certainty of possession anytime soon.

With auction websites like eBay, this liminoid state is even more pronounced because of the ‘roulette’ game, in the words of an eBay user (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth 2010: 69). As soon as someone bids on an item, they simultaneously own and do not own it when the auction is still active. In such circumstances, ‘ownership is only partially actualized, and the individual can then still focus on the desire of ownership and perhaps also enjoy the pleasures of anticipating winning (or losing) the auction’ (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth 2010: 69). The simultaneous agony and pleasure of this liminoid state is apparent in a statement by a guitar player:

A real twist to GAS and collecting guitars has been the phenomenon known as ‘eBay’. While the website offers collectors an unprecedented quantity and variety of used guitars, the purchase of a guitar on eBay is often not the instantaneous ‘saw it, thought about it, bought it’ process typical with a retail or even an online guitar sale. Instead, because the actual price is unknown until an auction closes, there’s a drawn-out waiting period of up to ten days. In the case of a guitar I’m really GAS-ing for, this can seem like an eternity. Thus, a new emotion is inserted into the mix: suspense. This feeling increases exponentially as bidding apparently stalls at a low price, and the auction closing time looms near. The mind races: ‘Jeez, does any-

body else realize what's for sale here? Who am I kidding? Two bidders with psychotic tendencies and deep pockets will probably bury me in the last ten seconds. Maybe the seller's gonna panic at the low price and end the auction early. Man, only four minutes, twenty-nine seconds left to go!' It's this added unknown, and the feeling of continuously mounting tension coloring my GAS that makes my palms grow sweatier and my heart beat faster than in any guitar store. As a matter of cruel irony, achieving a victory on eBay subsequently mandates enduring the delivery—related anxieties mentioned earlier. (Wright 2006: 39)

The liminoid state of an auction creates suspense that exceeds most other retail situations. Competitiveness is an integral part of generating urges that go beyond the rational need, as another player reveals: 'I get nervous at the end of an online auction, because by then I can't live without the guitar—fully aware that I don't need it' (Wright 2006: 31). Even if the offer includes a 'buy now' function, this is not a real cure. As the player further explains, the fact that someone else can buy the item at any time creates a discomfort that only ends with acquiring the instrument, or else the person may suffer through the loss of an item that was never owned. Such a loss can take traumatic forms, leading to a sustained search to get hold of the item after all. Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2010) discuss a different case, that of a once owned object. It is the journey of science fiction writer William Gibson (1999), who had sold an inherited Rolex watch that he later tried to find and get back via eBay. Similarly, there are accounts from guitarists who speak of guitars that 'got away':

Then there are ones that got away. In the summer of 1972, I had a summer job to pay for college. I skimmed \$200 from the college fund to get a used Gibson SG. The next week I found a used Gibson non-reverse Firebird for \$200. I wanted that guitar; I wanted it bad. Alas, I didn't have \$200 more to skim. A few years after that I saw a two-pickup Gibson Melody Maker for sale at a gas station for \$40! I hesitated—\$40 was a lot to me. I went back to buy it later, and it was gone. (Wright 2006: 32)

Even if this case does not involve auctions, it still explains why musicians longing for a specific instrument turn to eBay in the hope of finding and acquiring the long-desired object.

As the previous deliberations show, eBay can be a source of GAS. However, interest in eBay is unlikely to last for long, as a study by Denegri-Knott and Zwick (2012) suggests. In their two-stage model, the first stage of desire and enchantment is followed by disenchantment. The user's affective and cognitive investment in their hope of emotional stimulation and pleasure characterises the first stage (Denegri-Knott & Zwick 2012: 446). New users must learn how to operate the auction system and become enthusiastic about discovered strategies that can lead to bargains or even entrepreneurship (Denegri-Knott & Zwick 2012: 447), for example, when music equipment is bought at a low price and sold at a profit. eBay thus fulfils several functions, from a mere time-filler in moments of boredom to exciting bargains and

economic activities. Money earned by buying and selling musical instruments can, for instance, be reinvested in other economic projects and ultimately finance a new instrument for the eBay user. Here prosumption is obvious; an eBay user always produces, even if consumption is their primary purpose. It is the ‘acquisition and deployment of competencies that make eBay a site of active and enchanted prosumption, rather than passive and disenchanting consumption’ (Denegri-Knott & Zwick 2012: 448). However, users eventually enter the second stage, that of ‘disenchantment’. It is characterised by a high degree of rationality, efficiency and routine, which ‘spells the gradual end to the enchanted experience of early eBaying, when the prosumptive process was still fueled by the magic of the technology, the endless promise of new discoveries, and the possibility to fantasize and daydream’ (Denegri-Knott & Zwick 2012: 446). Activities and prospects that once seemed exciting and magical become boring and tedious, mainly because of the activities’ repetitive nature. Finally, the desires created by the prospects of auctions, such as bargains or access to rare or vintage instruments, are overshadowed by the routine tasks of the system. According to Campbell (2004: 37), ‘we need regular exposure to fresh stimuli if boredom is to be avoided’. This stimulus is not provided by the system and can only be achieved through new user practices. If this does not happen, disenchantment may follow. As far as GAS is concerned, only musicians with a strong inclination to use auction websites like eBay may maintain interest and make it an integral part of their musical practice. For many others, auction or trading websites more likely spark only occasional interest. It can occur when a specific project is coming up or looking for a particular piece of gear. From theory, it cannot be assessed what relevance eBay and similar services have for GAS-affected musicians, so it will require further evaluation in our empirical investigations.

Craft Consumption

The growing understanding of prosumption reflects a change in social and cultural studies that gives the consumer more power without ignoring structures of production. As the previous considerations have shown, prosumption still has some of the traits of Marxism in that prosumers are exploited for free labour, despite the benefits it brings—emotional, social or sometimes economic. In postmodern societies and thinking, consumers are increasingly understood as liberated subjects with agency (Firat & Venkatesh 1995). Bricolage (Featherstone 1991; Lévi-Strauss 1962) is an important concept in cultural studies that enables consumers to use products in ways not intended by manufacturers. Another concept that places a strong emphasis on empowering practices is ‘craft consumption’, which avoids many of the exploitative elements still existing in views on prosumption. Craft consumption depends on craftsmanship that Campbell (2005: 27) defines as an

activity in which individuals not merely exercise control over the consumption process, but also bring skill, knowledge, judgement, love and passion to their consuming in much the same way that it has always been assumed that traditional craftsmen and craftswomen approach their work.

Here we see an overlap with prosumption because every production requires consumption, just as every consumption contains an element of production. From the viewpoint of craft consumption, it is the same person who carries out the production and exercises control over the entire production process, from selecting materials to completing the product, on their own or at least with oversight of outsourced specialist activities. Consequently, the created product is characterised by its maker's personality (Campbell 2005: 27). It is typical for the craft consumer to take mass-produced items as raw material for the creation of a new product, which is usually intended for personal use. This practice goes beyond mere personalisation or customisation of the product because it requires a high degree of personal investment in terms of knowledge and expertise, judgement and evaluation of materials and work, commitment and dedication (Campbell 2005: 31). These are the pillars that define craftsmanship (Sennett 2008).

Craft consumption can take many forms, be it assembling choices from marketplace resources or manufacturing originally designed items from mass-produced commodities (Campbell 2005). The definition suggests that to some degree, most musicians are craft consumers because they select and combine equipment to create their sound. In this respect, instruments are likely to differ, as guitarists, bassists, drummers and keyboardists may have more options for selecting and modifying their kit than, for example, wind instrumentalists. Given the wide range of tone-shaping devices for the guitar, from the instrument and amplifier to various effects in the signal chain, it is not surprising that the few studies on craft consumption in music have concentrated on this instrument (Cole 2018; Hartmann 2016).

Hartmann (2016: 12) stresses the importance of selecting the right combination of items in a craft consumption process, which in the case of the guitar means that the product is the player's sound. As he explains, the sound is

an integral part of the guitar playing performance, achieved through combining 'inputs' (guitar, amp and other gear) in combination to each other (the arrangement). Guitar players devote a notable amount of energy and thought to this process, paying careful attention to crafting sounds. The selection and combination of a range of objects—along with the guitarists' judgements regarding the objects' contribution and role in the creation of sound—help facilitate the acting of guitar gear in terms of producing sound, and through this, the overall performance of guitar playing. (Hartmann 2016: 12)

This quote demonstrates that creating a guitar sound requires careful selection of its 'ingredients', which includes the three pillars of craftsmanship, knowledge, judgement and commitment (Sennett 2008). It is important to note that no traditional

craftsmanship skills such as woodworking or electronic engineering are needed to create a unique guitar rig; assembling commodified parts into a ‘unique ensemble’ is sufficient for achieving a signature sound (Cole 2018: 1056f).

Cole (2018: 1065) argues that by emphasising the ‘use-value’ in musical practice, craft consumption is a way to overcome the over-commodification of musical practice. Studying online communities of musicians, he finds that guitar setups not created for ‘use’ are perceived as overly commodified and are therefore criticised or ridiculed. He observes that ‘although virtual communities may foster GAS (anomic consumption), they also establish the collective norms and values that can lead individuals to change their commodity consumption’ (Cole 2018: 1065). In other words, emphasising ‘use-value’ could be a way to counteract GAS, even in a social context such as online message boards that are prone to spark the desire for gear. This discussion inevitably concerns the two groups of ‘purists’ and ‘gear heads’ (Cole 2018; Hartmann 2016), which differ in their posting behaviour and motivation. Purists will ask for advice in terms of a specific need, whilst gear heads tend to start polls and discussions about the best equipment for a particular purpose to get input for their GAS-inflicted behaviour (Cole 2018: 1059f). Rather ‘than the user’s specific needs or the product’s usefulness for producing music, members attempt to define “best” outside any context of use as if this quality somehow inheres within the commodity itself’ (Cole 2018: 1060). For gear heads, the use-value for their playing is often only secondary compared to other qualities inherent to the object, such as its physical attributes, symbolic meanings or social values that make it a fetish (Fernandez & Lastovicka 2011). Cole (2018: 1060f) observes a strong sense of GAS amongst such gear heads and musicians’ general tendency to ‘feel consumptive exhaustion and fatigue’ despite the pleasures they get from ‘endless commodity discussion and product announcements’ in connection with their quest for improved tone. The advice often given to gear heads on message boards can be summarised as follows: making music rather than consuming equipment is the cure for GAS (Cole 2018: 1062). Furthermore, if the interest in gear exceeds the interest in making music, forum users perceive the rig as over-commodified. A way out is to play more music and make it more original through craft consumption, which should be guided by the intention to improve playability and expression instead of adding new or expensive pieces of gear. However, there is one problem that craft consumption and a focus on ‘use-value’ does not solve; replacing one element in the sound production chain may require changing other elements. A player buying a custom-made guitar might need, for instance, a different amplifier to do justice to the tone of the guitar (see also Hartmann 2016: 12).

Just as craft consumption involves a potentially endless chain of improvements and adjustments for enjoyment, many musicians want to prolong the process of consumption and advancement, which entails less desire for ‘finished products’ (Hartmann 2016: 8). That also applies to the practice of building instruments. A guitarist

regards fabricating instruments as a strategy to detract from GAS: ‘Building a guitar is one way of dealing with GAS, and it keeps me from buying one for a long time’ (Wright 2006: 31). Another one elucidates:

I also like to build guitars and am setting up a shop in order to help manage my GAS better. There are two good ways that my home made guitars help me with GAS control. First is that the activity of working on them helps to keep me out of stores and away from the computer. The other thing is that I don’t sell them, which means that less storage space is available. (Wright 2006: 40)

The two statements suggest that building gear helps reducing GAS. However, it takes another form of GAS-related behaviour because the focus shifts from commodified goods to parts. Instead of buying readymade products, the craft consumer, who is inclined to build their own equipment, buys components, modifies them and gradually improves the gear created. This form of consumption may ultimately require similar investments to buying readymade gear. Walter Becker already recognised the problem in 1996 when he pointed to the danger of the ‘Guitar Modification Syndrome’. Ultimately, the process of looking up websites of mass-produced music gear is merely replaced by other cognitive investments, such as searching and reading construction manuals and finding the necessary parts for production.

5.6 **Virtual Communities**

There is probably no other place where music equipment is discussed in more detail than on the Internet. Walter Becker (1996) coined the term in a print magazine, but most musicians will have learned about GAS in online message boards, social media or blogs. For Cole (2018) and Hartmann (2016), such discussions are not merely ‘idle fetishized chatter’ facilitated by Web 2.0, nor are they completely new because musicians have always ‘talked gear’ (Cole 2018: 1056).

Virtual communities such as special-interest message boards have been defined by Rheingold (1993: 5) as ‘social aggregations that emerge from the net when enough people carry on ... public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace’. People in online communities ‘exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud ... find friends and lose them ... and a lot of idle talk’ (Rheingold 1993: 3). Such exchange existed long before the Internet, but Web 2.0 has helped connect special-interest groups, build communities and connect people from distant places (Belk 2013: 484). Online meeting places are what Oldenburg (1999) describes as ‘third spaces’, which are neither home (first place) nor work (second space) but offer people the opportunity to meet and share ideas about their hobbies (Belk 2013: 486; Steinkuehler & Williams 2006). These spaces can be regarded as imagined communities, not strictly in the sense of Benedict Anderson (1983), but as special-interest

communities, whose members usually know each other only by their pseudonyms and not in person (Born 2011). Nevertheless, these communities replicate social phenomena like status and prestige (for example, Bourdieu 1984, 1991; Foucault 1980) and are a rich source of information and help. Professional retailers of musical instruments and other experts stress the value of online communities for the novice collector of musical equipment:

Read history and specifics, regarding your target brand, model, or instrument type. Share questions and thoughts with specifically directed internet forums. There is a gold mine of experience and knowledge there. Do not purchase instruments without either experience about the purchase technique or a more experienced and trusted collector. (Wright 2006: 111)

I've done a ton of reading and talking before going out and buying. Online discussion pages are a great place to get advice and feedback. I'm a lot more confident now that I know more about what I'll be looking for. (Wright 2006: 112)

Similarly, Pinch and Reinecke (2009: 162) observe that the Internet is invaluable for vintage equipment enthusiasts, 'modders' and regular players who exchange information about gear and how it can be used to improve their playing. Especially with equipment that is difficult to operate, as is the case with complex electronic instruments like synthesisers, the exchange of advice is motivated by the interest in musical expression. Despite the anonymity, the realness of these communities is evident in the way knowledge is used as power and how language marks hierarchy. Foucault (1980) popularised the idea that knowledge is power, and Bourdieu (1984, 1991) declared taste and habitus to be fundamental markers of a person's social status. Some research has examined the relationship of knowledge, power and reputation on the Internet in the context of home recording and music production (Carvalho 2012; Cole 2011; Crowdy 2013; O'Grady 2019). In an empirical study of sound engineering students, Porcello (2004: 734f) finds that

the process of learning to be a sound engineer must be thought of in great part as a process in learning to speak like one; an important part of becoming a professionalized 'expert' is gaining the ability (and the sanction) to speak authoritatively as an expert. Learning how to speak about sound positions one as an 'insider', and is therefore fundamentally implicated in the matrix of social and technological practices that constitute the profession.

Sound engineer students learn the principles of sound and sound processing next to a complex technical discourse. That is not only required to communicate aesthetic ideas to different groups of people, from audio expert colleagues to more intuitive musicians, but also to develop a professional identity that is expressed through the ability to speak authoritatively (Porcello 2004: 738). This is not limited to the way a professional sound engineer speaks. The words and terminology used provide clues that help distinguish between 'professionals' and 'novices' (O'Grady 2019: 127).

Furthermore, the students must be capable of distinguishing nuances of sound on a much more subtle level than ambitious amateurs. These expert evaluations sometimes highlight tonal subtleties, which in Crowdy's (2013: 150f) opinion is a proxy for other values and means for social differentiation. Studying message boards for home recording enthusiasts, Carvalho (2012) observes that ambitious amateurs must master the language of professionals and be familiar with a variety of professional gear, their functions and specifications, even if the original is unaffordable and only available as a digital emulation (Kaiser 2017).

Cole (2011) builds on Porcello's (2004) findings, showing how cultural capital in the form of material possessions, knowledge and language shapes the online discourse of those interested in audio recording. He defines the prosumer not by the degree to which an actor sits between production and consumption but by combining the level of professionalism and consumptive behaviours. For him, 'the term "prosumer" also denotes a *pro*-fessional *con*-sumer', which refers both to the users and their technology (Cole 2011: 451). As the analysis of message boards for those interested in audio recording shows, prosumers in Cole's sense tend to use their 'vague knowledge' of professional gear and acoustic science to distinguish themselves from mere hobbyists. Again, those are easily spotted by true professionals who immediately recognise superficial knowledge from less credible sources such as message board discussions or amateur blogs. Prosumers become vulnerable by exposing their 'not quite an expert status' in the attempt to place themselves above the less ambitious recordists. Often the professionals in the community take the opportunity to 'ridicule and diminish the prosumer's expertise, judgement, and "ears"' (Cole 2011: 455). Here, knowledge and language mark social hierarchy in the field of music production, occupied by amateurs, serious leisure enthusiasts and professionals alike.

The other area of distinction related to message boards concerns the ownership of equipment. A 'professional consumer' cannot achieve this status through knowledge alone; they must have appropriate equipment as a prerequisite for producing music and as evidence of their status. Cole (2011: 453) notes that while prosumers require such technological capital to distinguish themselves from hobbyists, 'traditional professionals feel they are "above" the pursuit of technological capital and exhibit the "natural confidence" that accompanies a belief that social hierarchies are justified'. Similar to the belittlement of the prosumer's knowledge and skills, recording professionals often degrade the prosumers' gear by comparing it to 'the "base" tastes of the uneducated masses' (Cole 2011: 454) and by making it clear that prosumer gear does not meet professional demands.

Research on gear discussions in the context of music production is useful for the consideration of GAS. Not only is GAS prevalent amongst recording enthusiasts (Bourbon 2019; O'Grady 2019), but the discourse also suggests that investing in more professional music equipment is a crucial element of a serious leisure career.

Consequently, it is not enough for a dedicated musician to buy a specific piece of gear to last a lifetime, but quite the contrary, continuous investment is required. Two practices are relevant in this respect, the standardisation of practices through taste regimes and the facilitation of consumption, which we shall explore next.

Arsel and Bean (2013), inspired by Foucault's (1991) concept of 'regime of practice', consider 'taste regimes' central for the standardisation of practices that can take the form of expected equipment amongst musicians for specific purposes or different levels of professionalism. The authors define taste regimes as a 'discursively constructed normative system that orchestrates the aesthetics of practice in a culture of consumption. A taste regime may be articulated by a singular, centralized authority such as an influential magazine or blog' (Arsel & Bean 2013: 899f). For them, taste is not an attribute or characteristic of a person or thing but an activity because everything that has to do with taste, such as listening to music or appreciating food, requires an action. Therefore, tastes are developed and modified through practices (Hennion 2007: 101), which means they are never static (Shove 2003) but actively and continuously achieved through actions in socio-cultural contexts (Arsel & Bean 2013: 900). Studying 'Apartment Therapy', an online discourse on interior design, Arsel and Bean (2013) observe four phases in which new objects are introduced and discussed in virtual communities. In the first phase, an object is *discovered* by an individual who presents it to the community, often after some research, to discuss its use-value or symbolic meaning. Subsequently, the object found is *problematised* by the collective who discuss how it aligns with the community's core values and tastes. The discussion entails questions about how the object can be combined with other items and for what it can be used. Many problems are discovered and discussed, and these problems are not limited to the object itself. Rather, the object serves as a mirror for more abstract and overarching meanings, values and intentions. In the third phase of *ritualisation*, some consensus emerges from the joint discussions about how users should use the object and how this use fits the community's core meanings and values. This phase usually involves routines (Rook 1985) like keeping up to date with the discourse through frequent participation in the forum, reading other sources such as specialist magazines or using the object. Eventually, these activities lead to *instrumentalisation*, through which 'materialism and aesthetic consumption are transformed from a problematic obsession or affliction into a deliberate mode of goal fulfilment in the way that an athlete exercises or an artist does study for a painting' (Arsel & Bean 2013: 909). In other words, 'how to' guides are increasingly created, which eventually standardise the way the object is used and thought about. Ultimately, practices and tastes are standardised, as are the objects considered essential to any serious participant of the community.

In the context of a musicians' board, the discovery could be a new tool that is presented to the community where its implications are discussed as part of the prob-

lematisation phase. The tool might eventually be accepted if it aligns with core values or at least offers enough practical benefits to tempt musicians to ignore mismatches with their underlying convictions. After a while, standardised practices in the use of this equipment develop. An excellent example of this process is the previously discussed profiling technology for guitar and bass amplifiers, which confronted musicians with the dilemma that it is a digital technology, the diametral opposite of valve amplification. But it is also tempting because it produces authentic valve sounds with the additional benefits of digital devices like an extensive repertoire of easily selectable sounds. As relevant studies show (Herbst 2019a, 2021; Herbst et al. 2018), the technology was introduced through discussions on musicians' boards and magazine reviews, and it was problematised for years, including pseudo-scientific tests comparing different amplification technologies, until there was sufficient consensus that the technology did not break with the community's core values. Eventually, forum users began to write 'how to' guides and published videos with tips and tricks. In retrospect, discussing taste in such online communities, extended by traditional print magazines, helped establish the technology and make it acceptable to the broader community of amateur and semi-professional users. Nevertheless, it led to standardisation because the adopters of this technology either played user-generated profiles or commercial 'rig packs', or when creating individual profiles, they followed standardised methods in their efforts. Campbell (2004: 28ff) believes that modern societies and the socio-historic weakening of groups in a shift towards a greater emphasis on the individual resulted in 'unrestricted individualism' where 'no one but you is in a position to decide what it is that you want'. We, however, agree with Cole (2018) and Arsel and Bean (2013) that taste regimes and peer pressure still have a significant influence on consumptive practices. This expectation of owning standard tools for music-making may not necessarily trigger GAS because there are fewer emotions involved than from purchases motivated by desires. Using standard tools, though, introduces new devices to musicians that keep them occupied over a longer period of time, which may eventually lead to an acquisition.

In many respects, the Internet does not promote fundamentally different practices and social systems from those that exist offline. Musicians have always exchanged ideas about their equipment (Cole 2018: 1056), and magazines have sparked interest in instruments amongst musicians (Jones 1992: 89; Théberge 1993: 159ff) and influenced taste (see also Shuker 2010: 103, 134). Web 2.0 has given its users manifold possibilities to converse. For instance, record collectors have new opportunities to present their collection on message boards, websites or blogs, which are often 'part shrine, part ego preening' (Shuker 2010: 134). However, the Internet has drastically changed marketing and consumption. Marketers have realised that online users do not passively absorb messages and that success is achieved by providing users with systems that promote consumer interaction (Arvidsson 2006: 101). It is

much less about direct transactions than about dialogue and relationships (Ind & Rondino 2001: 14f). Consequently, the Internet has become a place closely linked to consumption activities (Kozinets 1999), even if not always obvious. Any place where people interact can potentially promote consumption. Discussions on message boards do not directly lead to purchases, but they create wants and desires that may result in acquisitions elsewhere online or traditional offline environments. Kozinets (1999: 254) defines ‘virtual communities of consumption’ as a ‘specific subgroup of virtual communities that explicitly center upon consumption-related interests. They can be defined as “affiliative groups” whose online interactions are based upon shared enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, a specific consumption activity or related group of activities’. Although few message board operators or their users would probably consider these places ‘virtual communities of consumption’, they may indeed be such if the shared leisure activity is based on a material core. What makes these communities receptive to consumption is that discussions about products or reports on acquisitions create ‘consumption knowledge’ that is ‘learned alongside knowledge of the online group’s cultural norms, specialized language and concepts, and the identities of experts and other group members’ (Kozinets 1999: 254). Kozinets (1999: 254f) identifies four types of message board users concerning consumptive activities. There is the *tourist* who visits or participates in the message board only occasionally and therefore has a superficial or passing interest in the consumption activities experienced in these places. The next type, not wholly different, is the *mingler*, who is similarly unaffected by the consumptive activities observed and only differs from the tourist in that they have stronger social ties to the community. *Devotees* have a great enthusiasm for consumption activities with only a weak social bond with the community, while the *insider* has both strong social and consumptive interests. As Kozinets (1999: 255) notes, there is a progression amongst message board users from visitor to insider, provided the community fits a person’s interest well.

Previously we discussed taste regimes on message boards. For these regimes to work, there must be some form of social hierarchy. According to Kozinets (1999: 257), devotees and insiders set the standards of the virtual community and are usually the authoritative voice when new items are discovered, problematised, ritualised and finally instrumentalised (Arsel & Bean 2013). The opinions of devotees and insiders, as experts and persons with an identity, however anonymous, tend to have more influence on purchase decisions than professional marketing campaigns (Kozinets 1999: 259). That is why members of online communities value transparency regarding potentially hidden motives, for example, when a fellow user is affiliated with a specific brand.

Online communities can have a strong impact on a serious leisure enthusiast who is a frequent participant. These communities ‘hold the potential to foster an anomic, insatiable, and uncontrolled, form of consumption and commodity desire;

for these reasons, consumption can potentially take on its secondary meaning of a “pathology” (Cole 2018: 1059). Although it would be difficult to find clear evidence, we can expect that GAS has become more common and possibly more pronounced with the advent and popularity of online message boards and other social media for interest groups such as musicians. A guitarist describes that ‘GAS is more prevalent now than it has been in the past, thanks to multiple stimuli—especially the internet’ (Wright 2006: 15). Cole (2018: 1059ff) concludes in his analysis of musicians’ boards that online discussions can ‘spin out of control’ in manifold ways. Buying items and selling them unused soon after the purchase, only to order something else, is such an example. This practice is known as ‘flipping’ and can be observed in threads labelled ‘What do you have in the mail?’ or ‘What is the best X’. The latter kind of threads encourages discussion of goods regardless of any needs or purposes for specific applications or contexts, which separates the use-value from the item’s inherent properties, thus leading to a fetishization. Another practice Cole (2018: 1059ff) describes is members posting photographs of their gear in photo essays, usually not during use but when ‘unboxing’, which is often documented in video form and uploaded to websites like YouTube. Cole (2018: 1059ff) shares our impression that such commonplace practices on online boards promote GAS. He concludes that many ‘respondents blame GAS on internet “hype” and the groups’ ceaseless commodity discussion and display. Thus, although members find their “tone quests” pleasurable, endless commodity discussion and product announcements ... can also lead members to feel consumptive exhaustion and fatigue’. Similarly, Hartmann (2016: 14) finds that experiencing how other players devote their time, energy and money in their quest for tone inspires message board users to do the same, as it helps to build commitment and maintain motivation in times of doubt or crisis.