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'This is Not a Shoe'
**An Exploration of the Co-Constitutive Relationship Between
Representations and Embodied Experiences of Shoes.**

By:

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Thesis Abstract

Through their narrative incorporation in fairy tales, song lyrics, in movies and on television shoes have become a 'loaded device' recycled as metonymy for the wearer or as metaphor for experience (Pine, 2006: 353). This research argues that in academic studies a consequence of their visual and symbolic ubiquity has been the material invisibility or 'humility' of the shoe as a 'thing' (Miller, 2005). Following Magritte's lead in his painting *The Treachery of Images* (1928-29) I suggest that a tendency to see and analyse the messages shoes convey, rather than the things themselves, has led to a lack of empirical interrogation into the role shoes play in everyday processes of identity and identification. This research addresses this lack, yet rather than separate the shoe from its representations to do so, it unites the material and visual to understand the relationship between representations and embodied experiences of shoes in processes of being and becoming. With a focus on the styles that comprise the Clarks Originals brand, particularly the Desert Boot, the study observes the 'situated bodily practice' (Entwistle, 2000b) of those who both produce and wear the shoes to understand them as medium rather than message in processes of identification and transformation. This approach enables us to identify the material and semiotic affordances that lead to their cultural visibility and to gain a picture of the complex 'networks' (Latour, 2005) and 'meshworks' (Ingold, 2010a) such significant objects facilitate. Consequently, the thesis addresses shortcomings in sociological approaches to fashion theory by offering a meso-level between structure and agency which undermines common dualities between production and consumption, masculine and feminine, and the material and visual. Ultimately, the research argues that Clarks Originals offer a valuable opportunity to understand how and why particular objects become culturally and socially significant and valuable.

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Parts of this thesis comprise sections developed from an article I wrote for a special issue of *Critical Studies in Fashion and Beauty* (Sherlock, 2014). Thanks go to the publisher *Intellect* for granting permission for the reproduction of this material. The thesis also expands on a conference paper I delivered for the 2011 interdisciplinary.net conference *Fashion: Exploring Critical Issues*, later published in the conference proceedings (Sherlock, 2012).

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For Steve



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Chapter 1: Introduction

This is Not a Shoe

1.1: Introduction

'Shoes are hot. They hang on walls in calendars. They grace the covers of coffee-table books and magazines, including at least one devoted entirely to footwear, *Shuz*. Shoe postcards are tacked to refrigerator doors with shoe magnets. Ivy dangles from shoe planters. Women accessorize with shoe bracelets and earrings encrusted with diamonds. Christmas trees-even fish tanks-are decorated with the Metropolitan Museum of Art's miniature replicas of famous shoe designs.'
(Benstock and Ferriss, 2001b: 67)

Benstock and Ferriss' observations about the ubiquity of shoes remain as relevant today as they were fifteen years ago when they published their book *Footnotes on Shoes*, a compendium of essays aiming to understand what in our culture has led to such a fascination. While the representations cited above emphasise more of an interest in women's shoes, shoes of all kinds have featured in popular culture both now and historically. Through their appearance on anything from greetings cards, calendars, art and advertising, to their narrative incorporation in fairy tales, song lyrics, movies and on television, shoes have become a 'loaded device' (Pine, 2006: 353) recycled as metonymy for the wearer or metaphor for experience, particularly in relation to their ability to effect the transformation of their wearer. In our everyday lives they have become a 'natural' signifier for identity and identification and linguistic metaphors such as 'if I were in your shoes', 'the shoe's on the other foot' and 'tough as old boots' are used without a second thought. On or off the feet, it would seem, shoes have become an immensely useful resource for thinking about who we are.

This doctoral thesis is part of a three-year ESRC funded project entitled *If the Shoe Fits: Footwear Identity and Transition* (hereafter 'ITSF') conducted in the Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield and led by Professor Jenny Hockey (2010-2013).¹ Recognising their transformative potential, the project used shoes as a lens to investigate the ways men and women 'take on and move between identities, both on a daily basis and throughout their life course'. It was also concerned with the role the body plays in this process of identification and how our own perceptions of ourselves mesh with the perceptions others have of us (Hockey and Robinson, 2009: 1). While the sorts of popular representations mentioned above played a key role in inspiring the research, further investigation into the relationship between these images and embodied experiences of shoes was beyond the scope of the project. The aim of this doctoral research has therefore been to complement the main project by specifically investigating the role of representation and cultural meaning in processes of identification.

At a time when we are continually seeing, making and sharing images, the question of the relationship between representation and experience in the sciences and humanities has never been more important. Over the last thirty years material and visual culture studies have both developed important perspectives on the social and cultural meaning of images and objects, yet the material and visual are rarely considered in relation to one another (Rose and Tolia-Kelly, 2012: 1). Shoes provide a prime example of this academic division. Until the ITSF project and earlier research conducted by Belk (2003) shoes had been analysed almost entirely in relation to their representations rather than empirically in relation to the embodied experience of those who materially engage with them - a critique rooted in fashion theory's post-structural tendency to focus on the sensational, historic and semiotic aspects of clothing (Tseëlon, 2001, Wilson, 1985). Invariably, shoes are studied in terms of what they *stand* for (usually femininity

¹ *If the Shoe Fits: Footwear Identity and Transition* (2010-2013) – an ESRC-funded qualitative sociological study at the University of Sheffield. Principal Investigator: Professor Jenny Hockey, Co-Investigator: Professor Victoria Robinson, Research Associate: Dr Rachel Dille, Postgraduate Researcher: Alexandra Sherlock. For more information on research outputs visit www.sheffield.ac.uk/iftheshoefits

and sex) and this has reinforced a particularly dominant discourse which can be understood to have a structuring influence on the ways we experience or understand them. Stereotypically, 'shoes' (as opposed to footwear) are understood as feminine objects, concerned with the 'irrational' excesses of consumer culture, rather than an item of clothing that enables the majority of the world to function physically and socially. I suggest therefore that a consequence of their discursive ubiquity is the material 'humility' of the shoe, a term used by Miller to indicate the way objects, through social processes of objectification, become taken for granted and thus powerful (Miller, 2005, Miller, 1987). A tendency to focus on the messages shoes are used to convey has meant we have become blind to the shoe as a *thing*. One might argue, therefore, that we have been drawn into Magritte's trap: just as Magritte's statement 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' (this is not a pipe) in his painting *The Treachery of Images* (1928-29) revealed a tendency to conflate image and object, so too have we conflated images of shoes with the artefacts themselves. This has caused us to think we already know shoes and this assumption has obscured what Hockey *et al.*, describe as a 'wealth of important sociological questions about footwear's contribution to broader experiences of gender, social class, ageing, health and the everyday' (2013: 1.3).

While shoes are indeed highly symbolic, represented more than any other item of clothing in an extraordinary range of contexts, they are also intimately personal, they change the way we move and mediate our physical encounter with our environment. Here I suggest shoes provide a unique opportunity to understand the material and the visual as co-constitutive and in continual dialogue. Following Rose and Tolia-Kelly I propose that rather than judging what objects and representations mean, *practice* should be foregrounded as a way to question 'how things are made visible', 'which things are made visible' and 'the politics of visible objects' (2012: 4). By empirically observing the practice of the shoe as a symbolic resource I suggest we are able to glimpse the processes through which bodies and materials come to *afford* meaning and the shoe is able to emerge less as a *message* and more as a *medium* in processes of identification and transformation. By understanding the visual and material in conjunction, shoes therefore provide us with an opportunity to 'reconceptualise' or 're-materialise' the visual as an embodied and material realm (*ibid.*) and to 'remember that the politics of *doing* the visual are as material as matter is visual and that both are engaged beyond the ocular' (*ibid.*, 3). Ultimately, therefore, the research attends to the 'relationships *between* the "visual" and the "material", [...] to explore what kinds of new thinking might emerge in that intersection' (*ibid.*, 2).

The study uses Clarks Originals, a well-known culturally significant brand of shoe worn by men and women or all ages, as a focus to explore the 'embodied, material encounter and engagement' (*ibid.*, 4) with the shoe in both its material and visual form. Furthermore, through the inclusion of the identities of those who design, produce, market and retail the shoes I join Braithwaite (2014, 2012) to balance research predominantly concerned with the consumption and singularisation of shoes through wear (e.g. Belk, 2003, Hockey *et al.*, 2013, Hockey *et al.*, 2014a, Hockey *et al.*, 2015, Dilley *et al.*, 2014, Ferreira and Scaraboto, 2015) to understand the intersubjective processes of meaning-making that happen between the various bodies (by which I mean the minds and bodies that constitute embodied individuals) that materially engage with the shoe throughout its entire 'biography' or 'social life' (Appadurai, 1986, Kopytoff, 1986, Hoskins, 1998). The 'use' of the shoe is therefore reconceptualised to consider its incorporation in processes of identification that extend beyond wear to consider the complex and shifting 'networks' (Latour, 2005) or 'meshworks' (Ingold, 2010a) that the shoes both afford and constitute. Throughout the study, particular shoes emerge as 'quasi-objects' (Serres, [1980] 2007) that disturb perceived subject-object distinctions. In this way, the chapters build on existing material culture theory that understands the co-constitutive nature of objects and subjects in everyday life (ie. Malinowski, 1950 [1922], Gell, 1998, Miller, 2005, Appadurai, 1986, Ingold, 2010a, Latour, 2005), yet they go further to understand the role representations play in mediating this process. Consequently, the aims of the thesis are threefold:

- To reveal the relationship between representations and embodied experience in order to develop understandings of identity as an embodied process.
- To show how a study of shoes can contribute to fashion theory methodologies in a way that confounds existing structure agency dichotomies.
- To foreground materiality in order to return the lived and experiencing body to an existing corpus of post-structural and postmodern studies of shoes.

1.2: The Data

To address these aims the thesis draws on three data sets. First, the ESRC-funded *If the Shoe Fits* research project at the University of Sheffield (2010-2013) provided the starting point and background for the study. Since very little empirical research had previously been done with wearers, this research yielded an important data set through which to start to identify intersubjective processes of meaning-making in relation to the practice of representations. Raw data from the project was therefore analysed to situate and contextualise the experiences of my own participants. Furthermore, the project's existing analysis and publications (e.g. Hockey et al., 2013, Hockey et al., 2014a, Hockey et al., 2015, Robinson et al., 2012, Dilley et al., 2014, Robinson, 2015, Robinson, 2014) provided a basis on which to build my own original contribution.

The ITSF project followed a 'year in the life' of participants' shoes to gain an empirical understanding of people's daily footwear use, particularly in relation to embodied experiences of the everyday shoes that had yet to make it to academic studies of footwear. It started with twelve focus groups with self-selecting participants in the North of England, the first of which was a pilot study featuring a range of individuals, followed by themed groups focused on the experiences of people over sixty-five, mixed ages and genders, young women, women who identified themselves as 'shoe lovers', young men, people with health/foot problems, bereaved people (for information about shoes that survive us), climbers, men who particularly like shoes, parents, and Muslim women. Case study participants were then selected to represent a range of experiences in further depth. This involved two interviews (conducted at home with a participant's shoes); a go-along activity for example a shoe-shopping trip or an activity/hobby to observe their shoes in use; a 'shoe key' in which they would list all their shoes and a 'shoe log' where they would record their daily shoe choices over the period of a few days; and a scrapbook in which they could stick images they related to and reflect on their relationship with shoes.

The second data set, generated as part of the PhD study, comprises a qualitative and inductive survey of shoe references on television, in film, in newspapers and magazines, and shoe-related products - or products that featured shoes - in a large department store (for example on greetings cards, clothing, gifts, jewellery, packaging etc.). This study looked for themes in terms of the ways shoes might be represented in popular and consumer culture to evidence and question some of the assumptions made in existing literature, particularly in relation to the representation of gender through shoes. An identification of the shoe as metaphor or metonymy emerged strongly, and this related to the way shoes were talked about in the ITSF focus groups. The study also performed a methodological function: by exposing myself to so many images of shoes I was forced to really look at the ways they are used, thereby unmaking or 'making strange' (Mannay, 2010) the shoe as it is more stereotypically understood. This enabled me to shed preconceptions and understand the shoe as medium rather than message. The examples gathered during this research subsequently helped to inform the chapter themes and are woven into the discussion, again to situate participants' accounts in relation to broader media/consumer culture contexts, discourses and practices.

The third data set, from which the main body of this thesis draws, comprises participant observation and ethnographic interviews with employees and consumers of the footwear brand Clarks International (known as *Clarks*). The aim was to follow the biography of a particular shoe from its design through to consumption and divestment in order to understand how, why and in what circumstances particular shoes become culturally visible. Throughout data collection with staff at a store in a large northern city and at the head-office the Desert Boot and the associated Clarks Originals iconic styles (for example the Desert Trek and Wallabee) emerged as the main focus for subsequent analysis. Over the period of two months at Clarks headquarters in Street, Somerset, thirty-three staff were interviewed and observed predominantly across the fields of design, range management and marketing (for a full list see appendix B). Some participants were interviewed or observed two or three times and some were videoed and photographed in order to analyse their material engagement with the shoes as representations and objects. Fifty-five interviews took place in total and extensive ethnographic field notes were taken. On returning to Sheffield two focus groups were then conducted with self-selecting wearers of the Originals styles, one with women and one with men. A Desert Boot collector (who was also a team leader at a Clarks store) was also interviewed as well as the world-renowned Sheffield artist Pete McKee who had endorsed the Desert Boot through a limited-edition collaboration in 2010.

1.3: The Structure of the Thesis

The thesis starts with a literature review situating the research amongst existing studies of identity and footwear. Critical awareness of this literature performs a dual function: it enables me to build a picture of contemporary shoe discourses – themselves representations that may guide and inform our own experiences of shoes – and it also establishes the argument that methodological inadequacies still exist within the fields of sociology and fashion theory. In brief, a focus on ‘the shoe’ as semiotic sign, historical artifact or fetish object sensationalises shoes and abstracts them from the body and everyday experience, while a focus on the phenomenological experience of shoes fails to consider their symbolic efficacy. This problematic dichotomy reflects broader concerns about a persisting structure/agency dualism in academic research. The chapter then explores alternative approaches to perception and meaning that help to restore bodies and materiality to semiotic studies of shoes, for example the fields of ecological psychology, social semiotics and Peirce’s pragmatist approach to icons, indexes and symbols. Following an analysis of Couldry’s ‘Media as Practice’ (2004) the chapter moves away from a traditional approach to representations of shoes as signs to be read, and situates them as resources to be *practiced*. I suggest this is an exciting new paradigm for the study of the relationship between the symbolic and material that, rather than seeing representations of shoes as being *about* our experience of them, treats them as being materially located within our experience of them.

In the third chapter, the methodology, I start by identifying a need to defamiliarise shoes with a media and department store survey. The survey is proposed as a way to understand how shoes are represented in contemporary popular culture while also making these practices *visible* so that they may be recognised in subsequent fieldwork with participants. I then introduce the culturally significant footwear brand Clarks, and specifically the Clarks Originals sub brand, as the focus for the remaining study. Building on the literature, project data and the media research, I argue for an interpretive and grounded approach to shoes and identity informed by both symbolic interactionism and phenomenology – epistemological approaches usually used independently. This enables me to explore how the symbolic and material interact in embodied processes of meaning-making and identification; as such, I draw on my own background as an anthropology MA material culture graduate conducting doctoral research in the field of sociological studies. I propose that the advances made in Material Culture Studies, including biographical research techniques (Appadurai, 1986, Kopytoff, 1986), provide the model for the research, and ethnographic fieldwork provides the means for data collection where knowledge

is developed through an elaborate set of observational methods in 'natural' environments. The resulting 'thick description' provides an account of complex and nuanced systems of actions and their contexts (Geertz, 1973: 311-312). This reveals the multiple values and meanings which accumulate around a single object or brand over time and the functions it serves for (and between) different users in different cultural, geographical and temporal locations. These users include both producers and consumers and reveal the meaning-making dialogues that occur through practices of representation, thereby further complicating the structure/agency distinctions commonly associated with the fashion industry.

In the first of the data chapters, 'Defamiliarising the Shoe', I briefly outline the findings of my media and department store survey. While authors such as Benstock and Ferris (at the beginning of this chapter) may confidently say representations of shoes surround us on a daily basis, this section aims to objectively account for these practices by entering the 'field' of representation over the period of a week in March 2012. During this time, images and references to shoes from forty-eight hours of a commercial television channel, two men's and two women's magazines, a weekend broadsheet newspaper (and associated supplements), recently released movies across a range of genres, chart music lyrics, and a survey of the products and packaging available at a local department store were recorded. In relation to the aims of the thesis this survey performs a dual function; to make representations of shoes visible in order to understand *how* they are being practiced, and to use these representational practices to help to understand the experiences of participants later in the research. Following on from the discussions of media as practice this chapter therefore starts to look past the (often gendered) messages shoes are used to convey to understand the semiotic affordances of the shoe as a medium in processes of identification, particularly in relation to the use of the shoe as a visual identifier, totem, narrative aid and source of cultural capital. While other, more marginal, themes emerged during this analysis it was these concepts that corresponded most clearly with the experiences of my participants.

In Chapter Five, 'The Material and Semiotic Affordances of Clarks Originals Shoes', I start with the experiences of the wearers of Clarks Originals to start to understand how particular styles of shoes become culturally visible and meaningful. The chapter utilises affordance theory (Gibson, 1979, Ingold, 2011a, Fisher, 2004, Windsor, 2004, Michael, 2000) to understand what the shoes and their meanings afford the wearer and how, through practice, cultural meaning is negotiated, embodied, mobilised and reproduced. Each wearer explained the various conditions necessary for the shoes to feel like a perfect fit (socially and physically). As such, a number of significant areas are identified which help to understand the role of the shoes and their meanings in what participants experienced as successful (and unsuccessful) identity transitions and transformations. These data start to empirically expand upon the observations made during the media survey in the previous chapter, thereby confirming the themes that guide the subsequent chapters. First, the shoe is identified as both the means and mode for the performance of cultural capital and the embodiment of the *habitus*, particularly amongst the men – several of whom prided themselves on being connoisseurs of the brand. Cultural capital is linked with a knowledge of those who have worn the shoes (be they celebrities or prominent members of their own peer group); meaning transfer through processes of endorsement is therefore identified as another way to understand the role of representations in the co-construction of subjects and objects. Through use and representation, the Originals styles can also be understood to have become *totemic* (both for wearers and producers): as symbolic resources they come to stand for and connect identities, values and ideologies. Here, I argue, their potential to become culturally iconic is inextricably tied up with their materiality, a materiality the data suggests often renders the shoe 'sticky', 'tricky' and resistant to control and attempts at rationalisation.

As mentioned in Chapter Five, wearers accounted for the range of knowledge and conditions necessary for the shoes to feel right and convincing. In Bourdieu's terms the shoes, when worn,

therefore enabled wearers to embody and re/produce a particular *habitus*. The greater the expertise with which this habitus is embodied in a particular 'field of practice', the greater the individual's *cultural capital*, resulting in social and cultural *distinction*. In Chapter Six, 'Becoming a 'Shoey'' these principles are further developed in relation to experience and expertise in other fields related to the biographies of the shoes, particularly in relation to the experiences of the Clarks Originals team and Pete McKee, an artist and Clarks Originals collaborator. Moving away from Bourdieu's focus on *class* as the means and motivation for the acquisition of cultural capital in his book *Distinction* (1984), the chapter addresses participants' reflexive and creative practices to explore the variety of symbolic systems through which the habitus is embodied, produced and negotiated. Here, practices of representation can be seen to play an important mediating role through which participants were able to acquire a *feel* for the shoes and the brand. Collecting, making, miniaturising and illustrating the shoes, for example, can be seen to enable individuals to comprehend, master and embody their materiality and significance. At its most extreme, the successful and extensive acquisition and embodiment of the meanings and materiality of the shoes affords the users' transformation into various degrees of 'shoey' – a term used by participants at Clarks to describe those with a particularly intuitive understanding of shoes and/or their meanings. For others, the absence of such knowledge and expertise spoke to a desired yet unrealised status, subsequently leading to implicit practices of stratification in terms of taste and distinction.

An important aspect of the acquisition of cultural capital is endorsement – a type of mediated or face-to-face encounter between the consumer and the brand. Wearers in Chapter Five spoke evocatively about media personalities and musicians who had worn the shoes and how these associations reinforced the shoes' cultural value and made them more authentic and desirable. Equally, brand connoisseurs spoke of times when associations between products and endorsers had seemed less convincing or artificial. Chapter Seven, 'Affective Bodies and the Endorsed Shoe', investigates the intersubjective processes of meaning-making that happen between the various bodies that materially engage with shoes in visible contexts. Building on existing literature, it is argued that in an increasingly dynamic consumer culture unsolicited endorsements are of key importance in terms of reinforcing or changing consumer perceptions (da Silveira et al., 2013). Indeed, getting the shoes on the 'right feet' was a central priority for the marketing department at Clarks. What existing studies have failed to do however is to understand the 'affective' and material nuances of how this process *works* in terms of embodied experience, perception and identification. Furthermore, a focus on consumer perception neglects the reciprocal affects unsolicited endorsements (often unexpected) now have on producers, and the strategies incorporated by both to deal with changing meanings in order to maintain a coherent and 'authentic' identity, and save 'face' (Goffman [1967] in da Silveira et al., 2013: 31). This chapter uses producer and consumer accounts of positive and/or unexpected endorsements to understand perception as an *embodied* practice involving interpersonal identification with 'affective bodies'; bodies in motion that make you stop and look (Featherstone, 2010). Using a material culture perspective, the circumstances in which meaning and value are transferred between subjects and objects in visible contexts is demonstrated. Throughout this process, I demonstrate how objects start to mediate metonymically and symbolically as people, often resulting in the personification of the shoe or the objectification of the person.

While Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven demonstrate how practices of representation can help us to comprehend, apprehend and even control objects, there is also a tendency within the object to resist control. In Chapter Eight, 'Trickster Shoes', Hermes, the messenger god and his winged sandals are used as a metaphor to remind us that the shoe as 'thing' is at the centre of the relationships discussed throughout the thesis. While the shoe and the ways we choose to represent it mediate or translate our experiences of ourselves in relation to the broader context in which we operate, this process is far from predictable or controllable. In terms of their material and semiotic affordances, as mediators, some shoes serve to both communicate and

disrupt messages. As such, the chapter identifies Clarks Originals and other shoes like them as 'quasi-objects' (Serres, [1980] 2007) or tricksters: they resist control and subsequently provide a resource through which both wearers and producers can creatively negotiate discourse.

1.4: Positionality and Broader Implications for the Research

While this study focuses on shoes - and I will argue for their uniqueness in certain contexts - the implications of the study extend far beyond footwear, particularly in relation to design pedagogy. Here I situate myself as a lecturer in fashion design and outline my intentions for the research. Entwistle criticises fashion literature for placing too much importance on the influence of fashion as a determining force on dress and identity. Drawing on an observation by Leopold (1992), she explains that this is partly due to a perceived dichotomy between production and consumption: while sociology, cultural studies and psychology tend to focus on consumption and the consumer (and this provides the vast proportion of their research); economics, marketing and industrial history have privileged the development of production. She argues that production and consumption are not distinct; they link and overlap. Therefore, an integrated approach is needed to offer a fuller account of the relationship between the two (2000b: 46).

As a former fashion designer, and now lecturer I can see the very real consequences of these one-sided accounts. In the small proportion of literature that focuses on production rather than consumption, the *development* of production is emphasised at the expense of *experience*, leaving those who produce fashion to be perceived (or worse, to perceive themselves) as either mysterious, powerful and manipulative, or (in the case of the vast majority of those working behind the scenes of the fashion industry), insignificant and inconsequential – part of a dominant system rather than subjective and embodied human beings who are also consumers and meaning-makers themselves (albeit with a distinctive embodied subjectivity). Indeed, this has motivated my decision to name and show my participants wherever possible, depicting them as real, living, experiencing, sensing individuals negotiating a capitalist consumer culture and the discourses it entails.

In my role as fashion lecturer I regularly witness future designers grappling with their developing dual identity as both consumer and producer while trying to reconcile themselves with the prospect of becoming part of a capitalist system often perceived to be controlling and manipulative. Driven by a desire to strategise ways to overcome these kinds of dichotomies, my own decision to move from design to academia was effected by this conflict. These fashion stereotypes, I will argue, are unhealthy for the industry both on the level of those individuals working within it, and for the wider society and environment in which it operates. Rather than using shoes to ideologically break down these dichotomies however (as might be assumed) this study aims to use empirical accounts of shoes to reveal that today, in practice, these distinctions rarely exist. Where they can be seen to exist, my aim is to bring a greater level of consciousness and understanding to the reasons these distinctions are sometimes necessary. As such, I follow McRobbie in her aim to 'combine the sociological work of demystification with one of reconstitution so that fashion is better able to attend to its own business' (1998: 12). Like McRobbie's study of the British fashion industry, the study is therefore also reformist in its aims to connect sociological and cultural analysis with a concern both for policy and pedagogy in the field of fashion design, production and manufacture. I will return to this point in my conclusion where I outline the implications of my findings for education, industry and future research.

This is Not a Shoe

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1: Introduction

'If there is a little bit of the Imelda Marcos in many women, there seems to be a little bit of the shoe fetishist in many men.' (Steele and Hill, 2012: 7)

Steele's hypothesis in her book *Shoe Obsession* represents one of the more recent and significant academic contributions to shoes in a fashion theory context. The book focuses on women's experiences, indeed *obsessions*, with extraordinary footwear – predominantly high heels – and the sexual connotations of these shoes in relation to the male gaze. While there may be some truth to her claims, the book represents a disproportionate concentration on the shoe as an exclusively feminine object with fetishistic appeal, which has obscured an understanding of shoes in terms of a broader range of identities. A study of the existing literature also suggests that in the past representation has been prioritised over experience. A lack of empirical research and a persisting emphasis on historic, semiotic and postmodern approaches has meant shoe stereotypes have tended to be recycled and reproduced rather than held to account - even those who critically engage with these stereotypes reinforce them through the very act of giving them more attention. Through an analysis of semiotic theory, material culture theory and practice-based theories of identity, embodiment and representation this literature review situates the present study as one of a small number starting to consciously redress this imbalance (e.g. Belk, 2003, Braithwaite, 2012, Hockey et al., 2013, Hockey et al., 2014a, Dilley et al., 2014, Robinson, 2014, Kawamura, 2016).

The chapter starts by framing the current study in past and contemporary studies of social identity, identification and fashion. It proposes that shoes, as fashion item (Walford, 2007), offer an original opportunity to contribute to an understanding of how identity 'works' in relation to structure and agency. The chapter proceeds by offering a broad overview of the research already done on shoes to identify the contributions and inadequacies in effectively investigating the relationship between shoes, fashion and identity. The literature reveals a post-structural bias in previous approaches based on a semiotic tradition that understands fashion and clothing as a language to be read rather than resource to be practiced. Literature in social semiotics, ecological psychology and material culture theory are then explored and consolidated to formulate ways to evolve semiotic interpretations that account for the integral role of the body and materiality in practices of representation and meaning-making. The final section of the chapter therefore comprises a study of literature that calls for a practice-based approach to studies of representation and meaning.

While the purpose of a literature review is to inform empirical research and make a case for the original contribution of the study, the materials discussed in this chapter also serve as preliminary data. They start to reveal dominant shoe discourses and the representative practices through which they manifest. The repeated use of shoes as metaphor or vehicle for intellectual illumination in academic writing and the media, for example, rather than the object of study perhaps emphasises the usefulness of shoes as symbols, especially for sexuality, femininity and consumer culture. Since this research seeks to understand the relationship between representations and experience in embodied processes of identification, these representations are not put aside but are considered in terms of what they might start to tell us about how shoes (as representations *and* objects) are practiced in everyday experiences of identification.

2.2: Clothing, Fashion and Identification

Broadly, this study aims to understand the role of shoes and their meanings in identity formation, maintenance, transition and transformation. So what is meant by *identity*? Lawler suggests 'identity' is an ambiguous term, 'slippery' to define and used frequently but with little regard to what it actually means or the consequences of its use (Lawler, 2008: 2). In his book

Social Identity Jenkins explains that identity is not something that one has, rather it is something that is done or performed in a process of being or becoming. There is no fixed goal, rather identities are constantly shifting and multiple. The sociological perspective on identity therefore is anti-essentialist: identity is not considered to be a primordial essence or truth that is fixed, 'natural' or unique, it emerges through social interaction and the continual classification of ourselves and others (Jenkins, 2008: 19). Jenkins proposes identity is therefore:

'[T]he human capacity – rooted in language - to know 'who's who' (and hence 'what's what'). This involves knowing who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are, and so on: a multi-dimensional mapping of the human world and our places in it, as individuals and as collectivities.' (Jenkins, 2008: 5, cf Ashton)

Knowing who we are is founded on knowing who we may be similar or different to (ibid., 19). Classification therefore is a sense-making process, without which life would be unimaginably chaotic and uncertain (ibid.). The various forms of identity with which people identify therefore means that identity involves *identification* (Lawler, 2008: 2). Drawing on Zerubel, Jenkins observes that 'one of the first things that we do on meeting a stranger is to attempt to identify them', to locate them in terms of what we know and have experienced (2008: 6). One's agenda and the social results of doing this can vary because 'whether between individuals or groups, there are hierarchies or scales of preference, of ambivalence, of hostility, of competition, of partnership and co-operation, and so on' (Jenkins, 2008: 6).

This process would be untenable however without resources through which to classify and identify ourselves and others. As such, clothing, dress and particularly *fashion* - one of the most visual forms of consumption (Crane, 2000: 1) - are understood as resources that are used to practice social classification and identification (Barnard, 2001, Jenkins, 2008). Indeed, as one of the *most* visually represented items of fashion, shoes maintain an important role in this process. Drawing on Pond (1985) considerable evidence exists to identify a belief that *Shoes Never Lie* and throughout this research in everyday conversation the frequent comment "so what do my shoes say about me?", often expressed with a self-conscious apprehension, suggests the perceived potential shoes are believed to have to give-away or betray their wearers. As identified by ITSF research they therefore provide a valuable opportunity to understand how identity 'works' in a social context (Hockey et al., 2013, Hockey and Robinson, 2009).

The role of fashion can be further understood in relation to the 'internal-external dialectic', a term Jenkins derives from the symbolic interactionism of Mead and Cooley to describe identity as a reflexive, simultaneous and constant to-ing and fro-ing in which self-identity must be validated through social interaction and the ability to self-consciously take on or assume the position of the other (2008: 41):

'The individual presents herself to others in a particular way. That presentation is accepted (or not), becoming part of her identity in the eyes of others (or not). The responses of others to her presentation feed back to her. Reflexively, they become incorporated into her self-identity (or not). Which may modify the way she presents herself to others.' (Jenkins, 2008: 71).

Goffman's dramaturgical framework (1990 [1959]) is often used to explain this process. He compares social interaction to a theatrical performance. Both involve an actor, an audience, a set, and 'expressive equipment' which could be considered to portray a certain manner, as with bodily gestures and facial expressions, or an appearance or status, as with clothing (Goffman, 1990 [1959]: 32). In addition, each performance consists of a 'front stage' and a 'back region'. The desired performance is carried out in the front and the activities or rehearsals that would

disrupt this illusion (if the audience were to witness them) are carried out in the back.² This dramaturgical framework could be interpreted to reflect the individual as artificial or even insincere and deceptive, especially as Goffman later goes on to explain the conscious manipulation of the performance by confidence tricksters, theatrical actors and within corporate environments.³ However, he uses a quote by Ezra Park which counters this interpretation, explaining that the performance, rather than being insincere, can convince not only the audience but also the actor themselves. The performance becomes reality and a part of the actor's identity:

‘In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves – the role we are striving to live up to - this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be. In the end, our conception of our role becomes second nature and an integral part of our personality. We come into the world as individuals, achieve character, and become persons.’ (Park in Goffman, 1990 [1959]: 30)

In this sense, what is real or false is an irrelevant question to Goffman, as the imaginary can become real through a process of interaction. What is important however is that a performance must ‘come off’ as real in order to become so (*ibid.*, 77). An identity will not work without the consent and agreement of others (or the disapproval, if so desired), one cannot simply decide on an identity for it to become real (Lawler, 2008: 29). Goffman explains how one must play at, or practice, a certain role in order to become it. A child for example must play at being an adult before it can become one: ‘errors and mistakes are often corrected before the performance takes place [...]. In this way an impression of infallibility, so important in many presentations, is maintained.’ (Goffman, 1990 [1959]: 52).⁴ He interprets this becoming process as a ceremony that must be performed successfully to achieve transition between identities (*ibid.*, 82).

Goffman's ‘ceremonial’ description can be explored further in relation to ‘rites of passage’, as theorised by Van Gennep (1977 [1909]) and Turner (1975), which explore the rituals associated with particular life course transitions. Here we might think of the significance of first shoes, school shoes, the first pair of heels, and shoes selected for graduation, weddings and even burial (all events discussed by participants in interviews and focus groups for the ITSF project). In his studies of the ritual ceremonies that mark birth, childhood, social puberty, betrothal, marriage, pregnancy, fatherhood, initiation into religious societies and funerals (1977 [1909]: 3) Van Gennep identifies three stages: rites of separation, rites of transition and rites of incorporation (*ibid.*, 11). In each case the subject is removed from their everyday life, then placed in a liminal state before being incorporated back into the everyday (Mitchell, 2006: 387). Turner extends and develops Van Gennep's theories beyond the purely ritual to extra-ritual. He described the Van Gennep's rites of passage as defining

‘at least a moment when those being moved in accordance with a cultural script were liberated from normative demands, when they were, indeed, betwixt and between successive lodgements in jural political systems. In this gap between ordered worlds almost anything can happen.’ (Turner, 1975: 13)

² For example ‘secret consumption’ - consumption that doesn't fit with, or would contradict, the frontstage performance - might be sequestered to the back region (Goffman, 1990 [1959]: 51).

³ Goffman uses a quote by Simone de Beauvoir that portrays women's use of the brassiere, girdle, hair-dye and make-up as an attempt to present the illusion of a woman that does not actually exist. It is suggested that the successful identification with such a perfect illusion provides ‘stabilization’ for the woman (Goffman, 1990 [1959]: 65).

⁴ Naomi Campbell's famous fall in 1993 while modeling Vivienne Westwood's ten inch ‘mock-croc’ platform shoes is perhaps an apt example of when mistakes might undermine an identity performance.

Turner identifies this liminal state as the facilitator of social change where one is able to stand aside from their social position, and all social positions 'allowing for a potentially unlimited series of social arrangements' (ibid., 14). One might consider, for example, adolescence a liminal state, or indeed transitions between school, work or even migration; the often experimental clothing worn during these times is an example of the innovation, change and evolution transition effects. While he is careful to point out that taboos exist in order to maintain some degree of control and stability, he identifies that '[w]ithout liminality, program might indeed determine performance. But, given liminality, prestigious programs can be undermined and multiple alternative programs may be generated' (ibid.). The point here is that time and place are important considerations when trying to understand how transformations occur (or don't).

Identity is therefore in constant transition and clothing serves as the material means through which transformations can occur. While symbolic interactionism helps to explain the significance of clothing in processes of identification and transformation, its application is nothing particularly new (For example Tseëlon, 1995, Tseëlon, 2016). What is new however is the addition of media resources (for example brands and endorsements) and materiality (of shoes, bodies and environments) to a process where materiality, the body and representation can be seen to be co-dependent in reflexive and ritualistic processes of identification and transformation. Processes where, as Belk and other material culture theorists suggest, we become what we own because possessions become important parts of our 'extended selves' (1988, 2003).

2.3: Framing Shoes as Fashion Object

In his book *The Seductive Shoe*, Walford states that despite its primary function to protect us from the elements, 'footwear, in the Western world is under the influence of fashion' (2007: 9). To frame shoes as fashion item is of course not to suggest that all shoes are fashionable, or that all shoe-wearers are concerned with fashion. Here, one might make an important distinction between the terms *footwear* and *shoes*, which aligns with similar distinctions between *dress* and *fashion*. In her book *The Fashioned Body* (2000b) Entwistle explains: '[d]ress is a basic fact of social life and this, according to anthropologists, is true of all cultures [...] no culture leaves the body unadorned [and] in almost all social situations we are required to appear dressed.' She goes on to explain that while the definition of 'appropriate' dress varies from culture to culture, dress and adornment can universally be regarded as 'one of the ways bodies are made social and given meaning and identity' (2000b: 6-7), particularly in relation to the transitions discussed above. Wilson elaborates that what is added to dress since the growth of European cities, in what is now known as 'mercantile capitalism', is *fashion* (2003: 3). Fashion, in its crudest sense, is an economic system and industry born of and sustaining a capitalist culture (ibid., 49). It is of the moment, obsessed with newness, difference and continual change: '[f]ashion, in a sense *is* change' (ibid., 3) and as Entwistle argues, unlike the changing styles of dress in non-westernised cultures, this change is fast, systematic and regular (2000b: 48).⁵

In post/modern, mass-produced and media-saturated cultures, fashion, like dress, is therefore object but it is also *image* (Wilson, 2003: 9) and the continual representation of clothing styles on television and in magazines, advertising and on the internet is fundamental to a distinction that can be made between fashion and dress. The dissemination of fashion depends on practices of representation and these meanings are incorporated in the internal-external dialectic of identification. Branding, endorsements and advertising provide an important mediation that helps shape the process of social identification through fashion. Indeed, Leigh and Gabel highlight the importance of *brands* as symbolic resources for group membership,

⁵ In contrast, Loschek argues that the social factors that motivate fashion existed before and independently from capitalism (2009: 25). Nevertheless, capitalism has adopted, sped-up and expanded fashion into the global system we now experience.

impression management and identity transformation (1992). In this sense, a study of *shoes* (rather than footwear) situates this category of clothing within a system of representation through which people must navigate in order to identify themselves. It is therefore only through empirical studies of shoes and their meanings in practice that we can fully articulate the circumstances in which identity transitions succeed or fail.

2.4: Sociological Approaches to Fashion

To further understand why a study of shoes is necessary, and to consider what insights they give us that are not already covered by fashion theory, an overview of the development of fashion theory is necessary. Fashion and its relationship to identity has long occupied the attention of sociologists. Simmel (1957) and Veblen (1957) were two of the earliest to pay particular attention to the social significance of fashion and its role in identification. In the context of increasing populations in urban cities, with their concentration of vast numbers of strangers in close proximity to one another and the development of mass consumption both these sociologists observed the emerging importance of visual signifiers, which allowed people to quickly situate themselves in relation to others. Since then, the motivation to engage with changing styles in modern societies has been considered (often disparagingly and suspiciously) to be the acquisition and maintenance of prestige or class (Barnard, 2007: 13):

‘The elite initiates a fashion and, when the mass imitates it in an effort to obliterate the external distinctions of class, abandons it for a newer mode – a process that quickens with the increase of wealth.’ (Simmel, 1957: 541)

Fashion is therefore understood to provide the culturally meaningful material for the conspicuous display or performance of class and/or taste that facilitates social hierarchies, social mobility and group membership. This notion was extended further by Bourdieu in his studies of taste (Bourdieu, 1984, Bourdieu, 1993 [1984]-a, Bourdieu and Delsaut, 1975) where, within certain fields, fashion is identified a form of *cultural capital*; the learned and embodied competencies that enable an individual to achieve social distinction (Bourdieu, 1986: 281).⁶ Bourdieu developed his theories of cultural capital in relation to French culture in *Distinction* (1984) where the advantages gained from cultural knowledge, habits and taste were used to understand how social groups ‘acquire status and indulge in practices of domination and exclusion’ (Prieur and Savage, 2013: 248). McRobbie expands on the exclusionary nature of cultural capital and ‘taste’ in relation to power and social inequality. ‘The possession of cultural capital’, she explains, ‘provides its owner with a key instrument for maintaining social dominance over those who are not in possession of these competences [...] these social groups are able to ridicule or abuse those without such expertise thus ensuring their crippling sense of social inferiority, indeed shame, by means of this symbolic violence’ (McRobbie, 2005). Fashion as a form of objectified and embodied cultural capital can therefore be understood as a means to achieve social power and influence.

For Simmel, Veblen and Bourdieu the framework within which to understand fashion was class. As indicated by Simmel above, fashion was understood as a part of the elite culture which the lower classes would emulate to achieve social mobility. In contrast to this view, since the development of cultural, post-structural and postmodern studies in the 1960s and 70s (for example Hebdige, 1979, McRobbie, 1989, Willis, 1978, 1990, Hall and Jefferson, 1976, see also

⁶ Bourdieu distinguishes three forms of capital: *economic capital*, traditionally the most commonly analysed form, understood as accumulated labour objectified in monetary form and oriented towards the maximization of financial profit; *cultural capital* (as explained above), and *social capital*, understood as accumulated or inherited social connections or networks, which, again, can be converted to economic capital (1986: 281) (i.e. ‘who you know, not what you know’). In his later work with Wacquant (1996), a fourth category, *symbolic capital* is theorized to understand the use of symbols to legitimize ownership of other forms of capital and achieve prestige fame or recognition (Klimczuk, 2015).

Polhemus, 1994), fashion and the pursuit of prestige has been increasingly understood to be influenced by the 'trickle up' influence of sub-cultures, street-style and 'new style elites' (Entwistle and Wilson, 2001: 2) and a process of social selection initiated by 'innovators' rather than the upper classes (Blumer, [1969] 2007).⁷ This notion has advanced rapidly since the widespread dissemination of styles brought about since the digital revolution. Thornton responded to these changes in her study of youth club cultures in the early 2000s in which she coins the term *subcultural capital*.⁸ She advances the understanding of subculture from the 1970s work of the *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies*, which understood the term as a defined group of disenfranchised youth (mostly working class) using symbolic forms of resistance against a dominant mainstream parent culture - a dynamic she found 'empirically unworkable' (Thornton, 2013: 22). Instead, Thornton describes subcultures as 'taste cultures' and the term 'subcultural' as a synonym for 'underground' or alternative (ibid., 22). Similarly, Belk *et al.* argue for 'microcultural capital', which, rather than operating within the status systems of social class, 'operates within the cool status system of microcultural groups or cliques' (2010: 200). Here, *coolness* is understood to be a new status system replacing social class, especially, but not exclusively, amongst the young (Belk et al., 2010: 184). The 'quest to be cool', or at least not to be perceived 'uncool', is therefore understood to have become a driving factor behind consumer culture and fashion, which serve as a means to acquire subcultural/microcultural capital (ibid., 186).

In view of these developments, while many have asked the question 'what is fashion', thereby treating it as an *a priori* category, it is more helpful to ask the question 'when is fashion' (Loschek, 2009). For Loschek clothing or dress become fashion through mimicry and this can only happen when there is communication about it. For a particular style of clothing to become fashion it actually has to be worn by some people and recognized and acknowledged to be fashion (Rouse [1969] in Entwistle, 2000b: 48). Fashion, then, involves being visible or invisible, or in Loschek's terms 'in' or 'out' (2009). To say someone is fashionable is to presuppose that someone else is *unfashionable*, or perhaps a 'fashion victim' (Schiermer, 2010). Drawing on Leopold (1992) Entwistle explains that this 'fashion system' - comprised of manufacturing, marketing, retail and cultural processes - serves to 'produce "fashion" and in doing so structure[s] almost all experiences of everyday dress' (2000b: 48).⁹ Wilson argues it is therefore impossible to operate outside fashion: 'even the determinedly *unfashionable* wear clothes that manifestly represent a reaction against what *is* in fashion and even the most dowdy clothes worn by the most uninterested wearer may at any time be taken up and become all the rage' (Wilson, 2003: 4-5). Fashion can therefore be perceived as a dominant economic and social structure to both love and hate; a 'two-faced child' of capitalist consumer with a political or ideological agenda and the potential both to oppress and liberate (ibid., 13-14). Indeed, Schiermer summarises fashion as inherently paradoxical: '[f]ashion is at one and the same time a means for expressing one's individuality and the very power that threatens it.' The challenge for the modern individual, he explains, is to navigate between these two poles (Schiermer, 2010: 91). By extension, the challenge for the researcher is to understand the circumstances in which the individual asserts agency and navigates these social and cultural structures.

⁷ In contrast to Simmel, Blumer ([1969] 2007) suggests it is innovators rather than the elite that synthesise styles, the adoption of which happens through a process of social selection that creates social identity rather than being dictated by it.

⁸ 'Subcultural capital' she explains, 'can be *objectified* or *embodied*. Just as books and paintings display cultural capital in the family home, so subcultural capital is objectified in the form of fashionable haircuts and well-assembled record collections (full of well-chosen, limited edition 'white label' twelve inches and the like). Just as cultural capital is personified in 'good' manners and urbane conversation, so subcultural capital is embodied in the form of being 'in the know', using (but not over-using) current slang and looking as if you were born to perform the latest dance styles. Both cultural capital and subcultural capital put a premium on the 'second nature' of their knowledges. Nothing depletes capital more than the sight of someone trying too hard.' (Leigh and Gabel, 1992: 30)

⁹ Barnard uses the Oxford English Dictionary to remind us that the term 'fashion' also means 'to produce'

In existing fashion theory, striking a balance between understanding fashion as both a structure and the means to assert agency has been difficult to achieve. Entwistle argues that due to a legacy left by the Cartesian prioritisation of mind over body, the dominant approach to fashion in the fields of sociology, cultural studies, costume history and psychology has tended to be largely theoretical, represented as a mysterious and abstract system in need of theoretical interpretation and rationalisation (Entwistle, 2000b: 13). Due to their lack of empirical grounding these studies oversimplify fashion and bear little relevance to the complex ways people actually interpret, embody or reject it in everyday and often mundane contexts. On the other hand, while studies of fashion abstract clothing from the body and the complexities of everyday practice, Tseëlon argues that studies of *dress* (mainly conducted by anthropologists) focus so much on the individual experiences or 'authentic reality' (2001: 439) of particular communities (often, although not exclusively, non-western) that they have little to say about fashion as economic and aesthetic system within a capitalist culture (ibid., 438). Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction, Entwistle highlights another imbalance in fashion studies between consumption and production (2000b) where agency is generally aligned with the consumer in terms of the ways consumer culture is negotiated, rather than part of the production process itself or a dialogue between production and consumption.

To overcome these obstructive dichotomies, Entwistle calls for a 'sociology of fashion/dress [...] which bridges the gap between these various bodies of literature and looks at the way in which fashion determines dress and dress interprets fashion' (ibid., 4). She identifies the body as the link between the two and calls for its return to academic studies. For Entwistle, understanding fashion in all its complexity is to understand the relationship between the different bodies operating within the fashion system. 'Thus,' she argues 'when we speak of fashion we speak simultaneously of a number of overlapping and interconnecting bodies involved in the production and promotion of dress as well as the actions of individuals acting on their bodies when 'getting dressed'' (2000b: 2). This allows us to see fashion simultaneously at the micro level of the individual experience of dress (both of production and consumption) and the macro level of the fashion industry (ibid., 4). Entwistle proposes, therefore, that to overcome these dualities between fashion and dress, and production and consumption, we need to use 'situated bodily practice as a theoretical and methodological framework for understanding the complex dynamic relationship between the body, dress and culture' (ibid., 11). She elaborates that:

'The study of dress as situated practice requires moving between, on the one hand, the discursive and representational aspects of dress and the way the body/dress is caught up in relations of power, and on the other, the embodied experience of dress and the use of dress as a means by which individuals orientate themselves to the social world.' (Entwistle, 2000b: 39)

Here, the term 'embodiment' is key. Entwistle conceptualises embodiment as a process through which the individual acquires, reproduces and contests meaning and knowledge through reflexive practices of self-presentation (ibid. 12). As previously mentioned, she criticises fashion literature for placing too much importance on the influence of fashion as a determining force on dress and identity, so by focusing on the subjective and situated experience of these various bodies we are able to see that fashion is not the only determinant of everyday dress. While fashion may define clothing styles, these styles are mediated by many other social factors such as class, ethnicity, age, gender, occupation, income, body shape, disability, cultural context, tradition and memory (ibid. 49), not to mention the physical landscape and climate in which one operates. Not everyone adopts a particular fashion style and those who do, do so in a situated, subjective and embodied way: '[i]n other words, in everyday life, fashion becomes embodied' (ibid. 4).

So where do shoes fit? In her work on *Identity as an Embodied Event*, Budgeon proposes the means to overcome distinctions between representation and the materiality of experience are metaphors and models that link image and embodiment, that 'implicate the subject in the object and lend insight to the constitutive articulation between the inside and the outside of the body' (Budgeon, 2003). Shoes, as the *most* visible and symbolic fashion item yet intimately personal item of dress, offer this opportunity. Shoes are part of what make us what we think we are, yet they can equally prevent us from becoming what we want to be. While many of the ITSF participants spoke of particular pairs of shoes feeling *right*, it was the times they felt *wrong* that were perhaps most revealing: many spoke of an inability or unrequited longing to wear a particular brand or style of shoe. Shoes therefore help to look beyond fashion as a *special* or a-priori category, to understand the circumstances in which particular items of clothing become fashionable and vice versa through processes of representation, embodiment and social interaction. Again, returning to Rose and Tolia-Kelly, shoes therefore enable us to question 'how things are made visible', 'which things are made visible' and 'the politics of visible objects' (Rose and Tolia-Kelly, 2012: 4).

2.5: Identifying Dominant Shoe Discourses: The Feminisation of Consumption

So how might we start to understand the politics of visible (or fashionable) objects? A reflection on my own and others' preconceptions about shoes as a topic of research might provide one insight. In 2010, following the completion of an MA in Material and Visual Culture I was sent a link to the PhD scholarship associated with the ITSF project. Despite my background as a fashion designer and fashion and textiles lecturer I owned very few shoes, and did not consider myself a 'shoe' type of woman. The association that sprang to mind for me was of a *Sex and the City* 'Carrie Bradshaw' character 'irrationally' obsessed with impractical and expensive heels. This was not an image I engaged with. A few weeks later another colleague suggested the scholarship to me, and, feeling I may have prejudged this opportunity, I took a closer look. The proposed participants, far from being women with hundreds of shoes, were to be men and women of various ages and with varying relationships to shoes. After reading the proposal I found myself fondly recalling significant shoes I had owned throughout my life and as a material culture graduate with an interest in the role objects play in identity I saw the value of the study.

After accepting the role of postgraduate researcher on the project I found that many other people's initial reactions to the research mirrored my own. Maintaining the justification for an academic study can often be a struggle, especially in a recession but particularly when the topic is fashion. Shoes, however, had acquired a considerable amount of 'baggage', and, for me, this was a challenge that made them all the more intriguing. Reactions to the research ranged from interest, curiosity and envy, to amusement, incredulity, and, on rare occasions, *disgust* that funding had been granted for such a 'trivial' subject. The recruitment process for focus groups lent further insight into the potential reasons for these types of reception. We found it difficult to get certain groups of people to volunteer to take part as the common assumption seemed to be that researchers would not be interested in either male experiences of shoes, the experiences of those who had very few shoes, or those who had no particular interest in shoes. Another observation was that the wording of the project seemed to make a difference, for example if we said we were conducting a sociological study of *footwear*, the proposal seemed to be taken more seriously than if we used the term *shoes*.

These initial observations raised some interesting questions: why might so many people regard a study of *shoes* as amusing and pointless, or as a feminine topic solely concerned with the sensational and irrational excesses of consumer culture? Why all these assumptions when most of us wear shoes, would find it difficult to function without them and, as we have found throughout the research and in general conversation, have such interesting stories to tell about them? Miller proposes that a modern western misapprehension that clothing serves to represent (or misrepresent) the inner core of the true being encourages us to make a false

distinction between the interior and the exterior: '[t]he assumption is that *being* – what we truly are - is located deep inside ourselves and is in direct opposition to the surface' (2010: 16). Therefore those who take clothes seriously are considered by some to be superficial, and those who don't are in some way 'deep' (ibid., 13-14). He describes this as a 'depth ontology', a point illustrated effectively by Brydon in her essay about the 'sensible shoes' worn by some female academics:

'To draw attention to the body by means of stylish or somehow 'extravagant' clothing would be to suggest a diminished intellectual capacity. The great mind of the genius, so this logic goes, is indifferent, indeed oblivious to the body and its ornament. Scholarly authenticity, then, is coded in footwear notable for its unnoteworthiness.' (Brydon, 1998)

Brydon proposes the academic striving for blandness is an extension of the Cartesian mind-body split, mimicking rational male dress to avoid the appearance of femininity, which would suggest emotion and irrationality (ibid.). In recent years, the representation of fashion as an acceptable topic in relation to a broader range of identities, particularly amongst men, has somewhat challenged this attitude, yet with respect to shoes, these stereotypes remain strong. While Riello and McNeil suggest 'lifestyle magazines, arch comedies and cable television programs have [...] created a new awareness of the cultural importance of shoes as elements of consumption and identity in contemporary society' (2006a: 21), this awareness has come with bias that is both feminine and negative. Sandlin and Maudlin (2012) argue that the depiction of the neurotic, narcissistic, emotional and impulsive female protagonist, as represented in a wave of commercial fiction such as Sophie Kinsella's *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* and Candice Bushnell's *Sex and the City* represents modernity's most recent evolution of the 'feminization of consumption' (2012: 177). Indeed in all of these narratives shoes emerge as a motif or metaphor for feminine identity that in many cases constructs the female protagonist 'in/through moralistic and misogynistic popular discourse' as the 'narcissistic' 'villain' or 'dupe' driven by insatiable need (Sandlin and Maudlin, 2012: 180). Furthermore the emphasis on particular high-end brands such as Manolo Blahnik, Jimmy Choo or Christian Louboutin also encourages a view of feminine identity as something predominantly (and perhaps superficially) dependent on and 'intricately tied up with' expensive brands (Winch, 2013: 69).

One might argue however that the feminine representation of shoes in these popular narratives and their associated motifs have provided an opportunity to debate the various advances, ambiguities and contradictions of postfeminist identity. Citing Bowlby, for example, Sandlin and Maudlin suggest that since the 1980's the consumer had been identified as more active, agentic, even genderless; 'seen not as a passive, duped conformist but an empowered individual negotiating a deal' (Bowlby [2001] in Sandlin and Maudlin, 2012: 182). Perhaps most famously this view was advanced in postfeminist theory, which, with a greater focus on the subjective perception of the consumer, celebrated consumer culture for the choice, empowerment, solidarity and subversive potential it afforded young women. Again, the HBO series *Sex and the City* (1998 – 2004), based on Bushnell's novels, emerged as a significant exemplar where it was argued that the women of SATC could be seen to 'enjoy the fruits of women's post-70s equality' and could 'rely on each other to pay attention to their worries [or to] care about their latest \$400 shoes' (Gerhard, 2005: 44). Yet, as Sandlin and Maudlin explain, this agentic consumer is more of an academic understanding and less apparent in the popular representations themselves, where female consumers are still constructed in terms of stereotypes (2012: 182). As McRobbie admits, in the rush to celebrate the freedoms associated with new forms of media and consumer culture, the media's capacity to transform progressive principles into new forms of constraint for young women - particularly in relation to technologies of the self - were under evaluated (McRobbie, 2008: 537).

With all this in mind the academic literature on shoes provides an interesting case study. It is perhaps no coincidence that a recent surge of academic reflections about shoes and identity coincides with the phenomenal success of the *Sex and the City* series (1998 – 2004). But rather than holding these representations to account, the literature tends to follow a similar celebratory theme. A close evaluation of the work of prominent shoe scholars, for example *Shoes and the Erotic Imagination* (Steele, 2006), *Shoe Obsession* (Steele and Hill, 2012), *A Delicate Balance: Women, Power and High Heels* (Semmelhack, 2006) and chapters by many of the authors in Benstock and Ferris' edited book *Footnotes on Shoes* (2001a), show shoes to be overwhelmingly represented in a feminine, empowering, spectacular and sexual context, where the authors often indulge their passion rather than critically engaging with it. Indeed, the high-heel appears as a focus of numerous other accounts, leaving readers to suppose that few other shoes are worth analysing.¹⁰ This literature demonstrates what McRobbie describes as a type of 'commodity feminism' engaging in 'pro-capitalist' 'complicitous critique': a 'deeply problematic' style of scholarship which 'examines cultural phenomena from a feminist perspective, but which appears to suspend critical engagement with the wider political and economic conditions which shape the very existence, as well as the circulation and availability, of these forms' (McRobbie, 2008: 539). Rather than recognising and redressing the absence of 'normative' shoes and embodied experience (for both women *and* men), literature on footwear therefore continues to fetishize the 'extraordinary' female shoe while using its cultural representations (rather than empirical observations) to do so.

2.6: Fashion Theory: Fetishising the Extraordinary Shoe

The notion of fetishism is a key example of the way experiences of shoes are sensationalised in much fashion theory. Broadly the 'fetish' 'is any object that arouses excessive devotion' (Hirsch et al., 2002) and fetishism is the process by which something is imbued with a value or power over and above that which already exists. While fetishism relates to a number of valuable and interrelated themes, for example the commodity (in respect to Marx's 'commodity fetishism' (1954)),¹¹ the magical or sacred (as is so frequently recounted in fairy tales (Davidson, 2006, Mackie, 2001)) and the memorial (for example the holocaust shoes (Feldman, 2008, Jones, 2001)), more often than not, when placed in the context of shoes fetishism tends to be sexual.

The analysis of the sexual fetishism of feet and shoes has a long history beginning with Freud's essay *Fetishism* (1950 [1888-1938]) in which he asserts that the high-heeled shoe is fetishized by men as a replacement for the missing phallus of the mother in order to alleviate castration anxiety. Hall describes sexual fetishism as licensing an 'unregulated voyeurism', a way of 'having-it-both-ways': representing while not representing the tabooed, dangerous or forbidden object of pleasure and desire (Hall, 1997a: 268). In this way, what is represented can only be understood in relation to what cannot be seen (*ibid.*, 266), and this involves the displacement and substitution of meaning. Whether one agrees with Freud's analysis of the sexual fetishism of high-heeled shoes or not, his theory has been extraordinarily influential in existing literature on footwear. Rossi's book *The Sex Life of the Foot and Shoe* (1977) for example states that 'the foot is an erotic organ and the shoe is its sexual covering' (1977: 1) and several studies of the Chinese practice of foot binding have further reinforced the shoe's sexual associations.¹²

¹⁰ In our work for the ITSF project this imbalance has started to be addressed, for example Dilley et. al. situate the display of 'emphasized femininity' – or femininity 'oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men' (Connell [1987] in Dilley et al., 2014) that extraordinary shoes afford women as an episodic and temporally situated practice rather than a continual norm (2014). Yet this research still forms the exception rather than the rule and does not yet consider everyday experiences or styles in relation to a broader range of identities.

¹¹ Most studies of shoes focus on the meaning or *surplus-value* attached to shoes through media practices as opposed to their physical function or *use-value* (or indeed the relationship between the two). Indeed, shoes provide a defining example of commodity fetishism, to the extent they have been used in Jameson's study of postmodern culture to explain late capitalism's accelerated tendency to fetishize objects with meaning (1991).

¹² For a comprehensive and balanced account of sexual fetishism and shoes see Brydon (1998: 12-15).

Studies of shoes in relation to sex, sexual identity, femininity, power and high heels therefore far outweigh those of any other aspect of shoes (see for example Cox, 2004, Wright, 1995, Semmelhack, 2006, Semmelhack, 2008, Gamman, 2001, Steele, 2006, Steele, 1996, Halsted, 2006: 104, Small, 2015), and many often take a psychoanalytic rather than a sociological approach. While sociologists give such psychological accounts short shrift, Lawler reminds us that they should be considered if for no other reason than because people believe them to be real and they therefore have real world, sociological consequences (2008). Despite this, in their article 'Sociology and the Problem of Eroticism' Shilling and Mellor identify a tendency within sociology to ignore eroticism, sexual fetishism and its consequences for social order and meaning (2010). While it is not the purpose of this research to further investigate the erotic shoe, it would be interesting to see a study of shoes and sexual fetishism in a sociological context particularly with respect to the relationship between representation and embodied experience. One might argue, for example, that these psychoanalytic reflections have contributed to the reification of the shoe as fetish object. Indeed, Turim suggests that the cinematic inscription of shoes as sexual fetish object coincided with the reception of Freud's essays. She uses the example of the film *The Gay Shoe Clerk* and its use of the Cinderella trope - where the dainty glass slipper (described as fur in Perrault's original version) signifies the vagina and the successful fitting of the shoe represents the Prince finding his perfect 'fit' - to argue that '[n]ot only did Freud's ideas help explain the shoe fetish in certain film narratives, his essay disseminated concepts that led to self-conscious representations of shoes' (Turim, 2001: 62).

2.7: Alternative Angles on Shoes

A sociological analysis of the sexual fetishism of shoes could therefore be an interesting new angle in academic research which starts to hold some of these dominant discourses to account. Another approach would be to 'dis-articulate' the shoe as a symbol of feminine consumption and sexual fetishism and empirically rearticulate it in a way that deconstructs the various dichotomies constructed by such stereotypes. Feminised approaches to shoes can be seen to negatively affect not only women but also, by their very exclusion, men. They reinforce patriarchal stereotypes that see consumption, femininity, emotion and 'irrationality' as exclusive to women, subsequently confining men to rational or unemotional stereotypes. Therefore, rather than further critiquing the feminisation of consumption, which serves only to further demonize the feminine consumption of shoes, I propose to balance the scales, engaging instead with other forms of consumption.

In an essay about modernity, masculinity and shoes, Breward points out that the frequent preoccupation with shoes as sexual fetish objects has led to the neglect of their other roles such as 'economic product, anthropological marker, semiotic sign, or indeed as art object' (Breward, 2006: 211). Riello and McNeil also point to a need to develop the previously neglected study of men's shoes and suggest that sneakers and mixed sport-casual shoes present a challenge to established gendered notions of footwear (2006: 398). Indeed Gill (2006a, 2006b) and Boydell (1996) both demonstrate the potential of shoe research that steers away from sexual fetish in their analyses of training shoes/sneakers. While these studies represent a recent increase in interest in masculine experiences of shoes, most are historical accounts (Keyser, 2015), catalogues or compilations (Newson and Design Museum, 2015, Semmelhack et al., 2015) or primary accounts of experts or collectors (Heard, 2003, Sneaker Freaker Magazine, 2005), rather than academic interrogations. The ITSF project's journal article on trainers is thus in a minority (Hockey et al., 2015) along with Kawamura's recent sociological study of sneakers and masculinity (2016).

Aside from sneakers, very little research exists on men's shoes more broadly. This is partly due to the fact fashion theory's foundations lie in the field of art and costume history. The ways in which shoes have been studied has therefore tended to be through historic artefacts, accounts

and representations, most of which focus on women's shoes (e.g. Swann, 1982, Shawcross, 2014, Pratt and Wooley, 1999, Mitchell and Ward, 2008 [1997], Bossan, 2007, Walford, 2007).¹³ Those historians who have tried to broaden the analysis of men's shoes have admitted their attempts have been constrained by the materials available to them. While Riello and McNeil's book, for example, includes an essay on men's footwear and modernity, queer shoes and sneakers, they argue that they were hampered by their dependency on collections of the past, explaining that '[a]part from a few striking examples, men might almost not exist in the shoe museum [because] [t]he ordinary nature – or perhaps better to say normative nature – of men's shoes makes them unremarkable objects to collect' (2006: 397). Perhaps for the same reasons, those minority who have provided historic accounts of men's footwear have tended to do so in terms of their role in the construction of rational and modernist masculine identities (e.g. Breward, 2001, and, 2006) rather than any emotional or 'irrational' relationships men might have with their shoes. Historical accounts therefore make it very difficult to consider the embodied experience of the wearer.¹⁴ These discrepancies are problematic because, as Wilson explains, '[c]lothes are so much a part of our living, moving selves that, frozen on display in the mausoleums of culture they hint at something only half understood [...]' (Wilson, 1985: 1).

Since the 1980s a number of authors have argued for the 'masculinisation' of consumption, where an increased focus on the appearance of the 'new man', 'new lad', 'metrosexual' and 'ubersexual' (Rinaldo, 2011 [2007]: 77-79) emerged amongst the growing post/neo-Fordist middle classes in advanced Western societies (Galilee, 2002: 34). While these studies have (to an extent) started to embrace fashion and clothing, shoes – or even 'footwear' in masculine terms – have been largely left behind.¹⁵ Brydon and Niessen suggest that it is the 'academic denial of the body [that] has marginalized the topic of clothing and fashion within mainstream social science, driven there by strongly-rooted assumptions inherent to the Enlightenment's rationalising project' (1998: ix). Despite sociological attempts to restore the body and embodied experience to studies of fashion and clothing more broadly (notably Entwistle, 2000a, Entwistle, 2000b, Entwistle and Wilson, 2001), the conspicuous absence of sociological studies of shoes – perhaps due to their association with the undisciplined, emotional, irrational, expressive and sensing body – betrays the persistence of a rational mind-centred approach. Furthermore those who have empirically studied masculine experiences of fashion have identified a self-consciousness amongst participants where the ability to freely engage with, or even talk about fashion is restricted by the constraints of gender 'norms' or stereotypes (Frith and Gleeson, 2004, Barry, 2015). Careful consideration therefore needs to be given to the methods used to engage male participants in 'legitimate' ways and this is perhaps the reason trainers, as a sporting and functional item of clothing, have been able to make the transition to a focus for serious academic study.

Another alternative angle is to counter the spectacular shoe with the mundane or everyday shoe. The work of Lefebvre (2002 [1961], 1971) and De Certeau (1984) has led to an evolving and critical approach to everyday life which has extended to clothing (i.e. Miller and Woodward, 2012), and more recently (thanks to the *If the Shoe Fits* Research) shoes (Robinson, 2015, Dilley et al., 2014, Hockey et al., 2014a). Paterson explains that theorists of everyday life offer alternatives to entrenched 'structure' versus 'agency' debates in studies of consumption. He explains that activities previously considered routine or banal 'reveal very complex dialogues and transactions to do with identity, status, aspirations, cultural capital, and position within a social group.' (2006: 7) Drawing on Smart (2007), Robinson argues therefore that in contrast to macro approaches which tend to emphasise the structural aspects of experience, or micro

¹³ Many of these books have been published by shoe museums, or museums which house large collections of shoes.

¹⁴ While some, notably Evans (2013) have sought to restore the embodied experience of the wearer to historic accounts of fashion and dress this approach is still rare due to the absence of recorded evidence.

¹⁵ An increasing number of studies of sneakers pose an anomaly to this pattern. This in itself is revealing, which is a point I will go on to discuss.

approaches which emphasise agency, studies of everyday experiences of shoes (or indeed everyday/mundane styles) can offer a 'meso-level' where both the pleasures, constraints and transformative potential of clothing are understood in terms of people's everyday embodied experience (2015: 908). While much work is required to fully understand the significance of everyday and mundane footwear styles and practices in terms of a broader range of identities and transitions, one might claim that changes are certainly 'afoot'. These two perspectives: masculine and mundane experiences (*not* to be conflated) offer a valuable approach to shoes, yet to be developed.

An overview of existing literature on shoes therefore reveals methodological inadequacies in the field of fashion theory which need to be addressed. In short, much of the literature on shoes is purely *about representation*, it is rarely empirically grounded and therefore offers little opportunity to effectively understand the place of shoes or their meanings in relation to identity. This reveals a tendency in fashion studies to prioritise the mind in terms of interpretation, communication and symbolism - over the body, in terms of action, agency, subjective experience and the senses; manifesting in an examination of what the shoe 'stands' for rather than what it is and how it, and its meanings, are actually mobilised.¹⁶

A good example of this approach is Benstock and Ferriss's book *Footnotes*, which, although commended for its successful situation of shoes as much more than simple fashion accessories and 'an integral part of the lives of billions of people' (McNeil and Riello, 2006), has been criticised for embodying a postmodern approach and using shoes as exemplar, metaphor, or illustration of wider issues - 'writing lovingly about particular items of clothing while detaching clothes from the women that must wear them' (Auerbach, 2001). Consequently, the disembodied nature of this and other studies of shoes - as Wilson says - seem not only to separate them from the bodies that wear them, but also from the lives that animate them (1985: 1).

Throughout the literature discussed in this section one observation therefore remains consistent: while shoes are frequently identified as 'powerful things' (e.g. Riello and McNeil, 2006a: 3), a lack of sociological or empirical research means that few, if any, have been able to fully articulate how and why shoes become powerful and how this power is mobilised. Once again, what the literature discussed in this section does not tell us is how people's material engagements with shoes in their everyday lives contribute to their meanings, or how the shoes' cultural meanings affect these material engagements. While Riello and McNeil credit postmodernism's disintegration of the body and fragmentary approach to fashion for bringing shoes forth from academic obscurity (2006a: 21), in what some now described as the aftermath of postmodernism (Morgado, 2014) I suggest we need to deal with the consequences of these fragmentary approaches by returning the body and embodied experience to studies of shoes and fashion.

2.8: A Post-Structural Legacy

As mentioned in the introduction, theories of representation are traditionally addressed in isolation from the body and embodiment. The emphasis on representation in fashion theory, rather than embodied experience, is symptomatic of its post-structural heritage. In the present study I argue that shoes, due to their extensive use in visual culture and their very personal engagement with the body offer an opportunity to reunite the two. First however it is necessary

¹⁶ Here I must stress however that I use the word *fashion* rather than *clothing*. Many studies of clothing, conducted from a more anthropological perspective, do indeed include the body and the wearer (Woodward, 2007, Küchler and Miller, 2005, Johnson and Bradley Foster, 2007) These studies however tend to pay less attention to the wider implications of the fashion system and media representations, and even less attention to shoes.

to establish what 'representation' is generally understood to mean and how these interpretations might be evolved or adapted to overcome the mind-body dualism.

The most common way to understand representation is in terms of *language*: a set of signs to be communicated, read and interpreted. In studies of visual culture this is commonly known as the semiotic model. The term *language* is used in a broad sense to include 'any sound, word, image or object which functions as a sign, and is organized with other signs into a system which is capable of carrying and expressing meaning' (Hall, 1997b: 19). The linguistic interpretation of representation is attributed to the father of modern linguistics, Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. According to his theory, language can be broken into two elements, the *signifier* and the *signified*: the word, and the culturally constructed meaning that is brought to mind on the utterance of that word. While language consists of signifiers, meaning can only be constructed if these signifiers are ordered into a system of similarities and differences and 'it is the difference between signifiers which signify' (ibid., 32). Furthermore, because the connection between the signifier and the signified – the word and the meaning - are supposedly arbitrary, meanings can constantly shift, aligning themselves with other signifiers.

By showing that meaning is constantly shifting, and that language is a continual process through which meaning is constructed, Saussure was able to dispel the notion of language as a fixed *reflective* representation of a reality, or as a one-sided *intentional* act expressing solely what the speaker or writer wanted to say. 'Language, then, is the property of neither the sender nor the receiver of meanings. It is the shared cultural 'space' in which the production of meaning through language – that is, representation – takes place.' (ibid., 10). Hall describes linguistic and visual representation as 'an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture' (ibid.) - language produces meaning about the world *through* representing it (ibid., 7), therefore what we know about shoes happens through their representation.

This *Constructionist* approach - meaning constructed in and through language - has since evolved through the work of Barthes who extended the linguistic model to examples of visual representation, which he later also applied to fashion (2006). He showed that images could also be read as a text and, in his terms, analysed according to the *denotation* (Saussure's linguistic *signifier*) and the *connotation* (*signified*) ([1977] 1993). In his book *Mythologies* (2009 [1957]) he applied this process to decode elements of popular culture, revealing that the denotation and connotation add up to a 'message' or a second level of signification – a myth or 'meta-language'. Barthes looks at the ability of representations in popular culture, including advertising, to naturalise and fix (albeit temporarily) the connections between signifiers and signified meanings. Indeed shoes are often referred to in terms of a language to be read, certain shoes signify certain identities or meanings (Brydon, 1998, Pond, 1985).

In his essay *The Work of Representation*, Hall uses Foucault to elaborate on this signification process in a broader sociological context. Foucault situated the system of signification in history, accounting for change through time, the connection with social processes and particularly power (Hall, 1997b: 43). Foucault was more concerned with relations of power than relations of meaning (Foucault, 1980: 114-115). He described the ways a particular topic is discussed and represented across a range of texts, forms of conduct and institutional settings as *discourse*. As Hall explains, discourse, according to Foucault's interpretation:

'...defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. Just as discourse 'rules in' certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write and conduct oneself, so also, by definition, it 'rules out', limits and

restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it.' (Hall, 1997b: 44)

He believed that meaning and knowledge about particular topics (in this case shoes) is constructed through discourse, and these discourses differ dramatically from one period to the next. He also believed that it is impossible for subjects to situate themselves outside of discourse – we only know what we know - and therefore we always operate within and through it. Hall turns to the work of deconstructionist Jacques Derrida ([1967] 1976) to explain that meaning depends on the ordering of things into binary oppositions such as masculine and feminine, however these oppositions are never regarded equally or neutrally and one is always prioritised over the other.

2.9: 'Ceci n'est pas une Chaussure'

For Foucault, then, if identities are negotiated through discourse, then this can be seen as potentially dangerous. The preconceptions about the research earlier in this chapter for example reveal the power of dominant cultural representations or discourses (both popular and academic) to 'rule in' feminine associations with 'shoes' and 'rule out' the masculine. Turim argues that the fragmentary and metonymical representation of shoes, for example the 'close-up of the well-turned ankle in the high-heeled pump', demonstrates the cinema's tendency to look at women through their shoes (Turim, 2001: 58). Consequently, high heels have become 'one of the most persistently important signifiers of femininity' in cinema, representing 'different feminine archetypes, from the domestic, to the fashionable, to the dangerous, seductive feminine shoe such as the femme fatale' (Bruzzi, 2011: 183). Drawing on the work of second-wave feminists such as Friedan, Greer and Rowbotham, Gamman therefore suggests that this fragmentary use of shoes in popular imagery constructs a sense of the 'women as object' (Gamman, 2001: 95).

It would seem that *because* shoes are so widely represented we think we already know them and existing literature has done little to question this. Existing studies have tended to focus on the message rather than the shoe and as such we have become blind to what Miller might describe as the 'humility' of the shoe as a 'thing' (Miller, 2005: 5). In existing literature they are often discussed in terms of what they 'stand' for (usually femininity and sex) rather than what they are and how they are subjectively perceived and consumed. As Miller explains:

'[O]bjects are important not because they are evident and physically constrain or enable, but often precisely because we do not 'see' them. The less we are aware of them, the more powerfully they can determine our expectation by setting the scene and ensuring normative behavior, without being open to challenge. They determine what takes place to the extent that we are unconscious of their capacity to do so.' (Miller, 2005: 5)

Part of the reason shoes have become so invisible and powerful is their propensity to be used as metaphor. In *Metaphor and Material Culture*, Tilley explains that metaphorical thought (and indeed visual metaphor) conflates one thing with another, for example something that is cultural is elided with something that is natural – for example boots for body. He argues that this collapses the nature/culture divide (1999: 37). It would seem, therefore, that through practices of representation, both in popular culture and academic studies, we have fallen into Magritte's trap of conflating the image (or text), object and meaning. Just as Magritte stated 'Ceci n'est pas une Pipe', one might as easily suggest 'Ceci n'est pas une Chaussure'.

Magritte's painting *La trahison des images* (*The Treachery of Images* 1928-29) intrigued Foucault. In a dedicated essay he explained the way the painting 'exemplifies the penetration of discourse into the form of things; it reveals discourse's ambiguous power to deny and to

redouble' (1983). With our tendency to conflate image (or text), object, and meaning through discourse the shoe doesn't just represent femininity it *is* femininity; over time it becomes difficult to consciously recognise a distinction between the shoe and the ideology it has come to represent. Magritte's methodology helps us to acknowledge that there is a distinction to be made between image/text, object and meaning, and it is discourse that merges the three. In a Derridian sense this process of deconstruction therefore potentially opens us up to perceiving images more critically. Rather than there being an objective interpretation of an image, one's perception of an image is revealed to be based on cultural convention and subjective experience.

2.10: The 'Truth' of Heidegger's Shoes: Perception as a Subjective and Embodied Practice

It is this idea of power that continues to concern those with an interest in the mass media – an area that contributes substantially to shoe discourse. Broadly, the media can be seen as a force that influences the way we see or interpret the world while shaping our social participation in it (Spitulnik, 1993: 294). For theorists following the Marxist tradition media communication is characterised as a linear process 'consisting of three discreet stages: message production, message transmission, and message reception'. In this view the message is the focus of meaning, and the meaning serves the dominant ideologies and interests of the [masculine] *capitalist* ruling classes and institutions (ibid., 295).

In this view, the practice of representation is generally understood to fetishize objects with surplus value in order to create new needs and desires and provoke on-going consumption. This process has traditionally been seen to threaten what might be considered authentic, traditional or natural. In his early essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1999 [1936]), Benjamin reflected on the dangerous capacity of technology (film and photography) to disrupt history, authenticity and therefore the authority of the object. He believed that the 'technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition'; plurality is substituted for uniqueness (Benjamin, 1999 [1936]: 215), hence the reproduced object loses the traditional sense of realness.

In his book *Postmodernism: or the cultural logic of late capitalism* (1991), Jameson used two images of shoes to illustrate this concern: van Gogh's classic painting *A Pair of Boots* (fig. 2.1 frequently described as 'the peasant shoes') and Pop artist Andy Warhol's screen-printed *Diamond Dust Shoes* (fig. 2.2). Jameson follows an earlier analysis of the van Gogh painting by Heidegger (2002 [1935-36]) in which the painting is perceived to refer to the world that was their lived context – 'in them,' says Heidegger, 'there vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of ripening corn and its enigmatic self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field' (Heidegger in Jameson, 1991: 8). In his view the painting reveals a truth about the shoes of the 'peasant woman', the way they are used, and the world in which they exist (ibid.). Jameson aligns this hermeneutic reading with high modernism in which representations supposedly retained a link to reality and truth. In contrast, Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* lack the immediacy of van Gogh's shoes, 'shorn of their earlier life world' – due to its 'flatness and depthlessness' (ibid., 9) there is no way for the viewer to read the representation hermeneutically and restore a wider truth to the painting. It is detached from the referent and acts as simulacrum: fetishised and objectified as a symbol of mass consumer culture rather than maintaining a 'real' and 'authentic' connection with the referent and the viewer.

While Warhol's images might fetishise the shoe as a symbol of consumer culture, Pine reveals that Heidegger also fetishised van Gogh's shoes, this time in a romantic way. The 'truth' he spoke of was in fact false. Rather than the shoes belonging to a 'peasant woman', toiling away on the land, they belonged to the artist himself – showing that interpretations of art are, and have always been, highly subjective. In line with Foucault's *regimes of truth*, Hall argues that



Fig. 2.1: *Shoes*, 1886, oil on canvas by Vincent van Gogh. Image courtesy of the *Vincent van Gogh Foundation*.



Fig. 2.2:

Diamond Dust Shoes (Random), 1980, acrylic, silkscreen ink, and diamond dust on linen. The *Warhol Foundation*.

what should concern us about representation is not what is true or false (in any event what is false can become true through representation in the sense it is reified and has real consequences). Rather, what should concern us is the power/knowledge system behind the representation and its effectiveness (1997b: 49). While it might be tempting to say that the subject may be able to empathise with, or phenomenologically and emotionally experience the van Gogh painting to a greater degree than the Warhol, Foucault reminds us that both painting and subject operate within a wider discourse - no meaning exists, and no person can operate, outside that discourse (Hall, 1997b: 55). In this way the painting does not have a completed meaning until the spectator views it and creates meaning within the framework of the discourse (ibid., 60).

This point relates to the field of hermeneutics, where understanding and interpretation are understood to arise from a circular rhetoric or dialogue between individual textual components and the larger whole (Arnold and Fischer, 1994: 56). More recent developments, particularly in the fields of philosophical and phenomenological hermeneutics propose there is never one true understanding of a text. Rather, interpretation is 'ontological' - we are in a continual state of 'coming into understanding' (Gadamer, [1960] 1989: 293 & 476 in, Arnold and Fischer, 1994: 59) where we are 'working out the possibilities of our existence as humans' (Arnold and Fischer, 1994: 59). Consequently, the way we interpret a text, image or object is driven by the need to interpret and understand ourselves, not an objective external reality. Furthermore, as Ricoeur explains, these interpretations also cause us to question our pre-understanding and imaginatively create new forms of understanding and being (Ricoeur, 1974, see also Geniusas, 2015). As the image theorist W. J. T. Mitchell succinctly puts it: '[f]or whatever the picture is [...] we ourselves are in it' (Mitchell, 2005: xvii). This might be effectively described as an embodied perspective, restoring the subjective and sensing body to our understanding of perception and undermining the notion images can be read objectively.

2.11: Restoring the Body to Semiotic Studies of Shoes

So how does this relate to shoes and identification? As mentioned, the general consensus within existing literature as well as in popular discourse is that one can tell a lot about another person by their shoes – that there is a 'truth' to them. Due to an academically embedded post-structuralist semiotic tradition the cultural decoding of shoes suggests the body is there to be read rather than itself playing an active part in the meaning-making process. This belief has gained such salience that in 2012 a social psychological study of 'Shoes as a Source of First Impressions' (Gillath et al., 2012) was conducted by the University of Kansas and Wellesley College to try to prove that people *could* make accurate assumptions about other people's personalities by simply looking at their shoes. The study was heavily flawed: all 271 participants (subjects and observers) were undergraduate psychology students, thereby vastly reducing the potential ambiguities associated with varying ages, ethnicities, political ideologies and economic backgrounds. Yet it provoked widespread media attention resulting in headlines like 'Why this boot means you may be depressed' (The Sun, June 14th 2012).

As we have seen, a consequence of such disembodied approaches is that they lead to a very one-sided Foucauldian perspective where consumer culture is seen as a dominant and tyrannical structure, and the consumer body is studied in terms of its production and commercialisation – a process in which it is proposed that 'doubt is created about the self in order to sell grace, spontaneity, vivaciousness and confidence' (Csordas, 2003: 6). The media, advertising and film industries, for example, have been criticised for having a considerable influence over the way we perceive our bodies and selves, implying a passive acceptance of dominant discourses and lack of agency. An alternative view however is that the body often complicates media messages, and the concept of embodiment – understood here as the. Budgeon explains, for example, that while the body may indeed reproduce representations it

also contests them (Budgeon, 2003). Similarly, Sobchack (drawing on Gallagher and Greenblatt) explains:

‘In the larger perspective of the cultural text, representations... cease to have a settled relationship of symbolic distance from matter and particularly from human bodies [...] The body functions as a kind of ‘spoiler,’ always baffling or exceeding the ways in which it is represented.’ (Sobchack, 2004: 7)

Structuralism and semiotics is generally held accountable for the perceived separation between representation and embodied experience that Sobchack and Budgeon critique. Yet it is misleading to suggest that all semioticians are to blame; rather it is the work of a few that needs to be held to account. If one goes back, Barthes explains the structuralist semiotic approach was originally only meant as a methodological aid to deconstruct the way in which objects and representations signify meaning, and to understand the constant interplay between images and meaning (Barthes, 2009 [1957]). The intention therefore was not to separate representation from experience, even though this may have been a consequence. Indeed, in many semiotic accounts the body and subjective perception are present (if at times latently) throughout accounts of meaning-making. In his essay *Lumbar Thought* (1998 [1976]), for example, semiotician Umberto Eco explains that the restrictive feeling of blue jeans caused him to assume a ‘demeanour’ which can be understood to contribute to their cultural meaning and communicative potential:

‘As a rule I am boisterous, I sprawl in a chair, I slump wherever I please, with no claim to elegance: my blue jeans checked these actions, made me more polite and mature. [...] in imposing an exterior demeanour, clothes are semiotic devices, machines for communicating.’ (Eco, 1998 [1976]: 192-194)

He goes on to explain that the syntactic structures of fashions influence our view of the world in a far more physical way than is often recognised (*ibid.*, 192-194). As Saussure’s semiotic methodology gained momentum, however, the sensing and mobile body became increasingly excluded in accounts of meaning construction. Marxist theorists such as Baudrillard (1981, 1983) developed semiotics in terms of mass-consumer culture and the mass-media to show that the symbolic potential of the sign and sign value created at the point of exchange completely usurps the use-value. In his work *Simulations* (Baudrillard, 1983) he claimed that the sign-value could now be totally detached from its material referent, creating a world in which meaning is free floating, and, in the right circumstances, able to attach itself to anything.

How, then, do we re-link representation and lived experience in order to transcend what has become an unproductive, at times nihilistic, separation? As previously mentioned, Budgeon suggests that what is needed are metaphors and models that link image and embodiment, that ‘implicate the subject in the object and lend insight to the constitutive articulation between the inside and the outside of the body’ (Budgeon, 2003). Shoes therefore provide an ideal opportunity due to their extensive cultural representations and the very personal connection they have with the wearer. This approach enables us to start asking questions such as how might we embody meaning through the shoes we wear? Which shoes afford what meanings? And, how might our embodied experience confound or complicate our interpretation of dominant discourses?

Crossley’s interpretation of the work of phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty is helpful here. To him the body is itself an effective agent: the body is not just acted on, it acts – it is a ‘visible-seer, a tangible-toucher, an audible-listener’ (Crossley, 1995: 46). To Merleau-Ponty perception is not just an inner representation of an outer world, subject and object are not separate entities, and his term ‘embodiment’ situates the body at the centre of all perception – no one ever perceives from nowhere, one always perceives from somewhere, and that somewhere is always the body

(ibid., 47). Therefore, any perception of anything is always subjective and embodied, even when generated by the mass media, film or television.

Film theorist and phenomenologist Sobchack takes this idea further by explaining that we cannot reflect on or analyse a representation without having, in some way, engaged with or experienced its subject (or something like it) immediately (2004, 2000), therefore, one's perception of a particular pair of shoes depends heavily on one's previous experiences of shoes. These experiences constitute our embodied capital: a sub division of Bourdieu's 'cultural capital' (Shilling, 1991) and the subjective way in which we come to understand what we see based on our historical and embodied experience. This idea continues to be explored in what has been described as the 'affective turn' in the humanities and social sciences. Originating with Spinoza (1997 [1677]) and theorised later by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Massumi (2002), theories of affect have sought to return emotion to studies of perception and embodiment where the perception of an object or body involves 'sympathy' or 'antipathy' (Spinoza, 1997 [1677]) and where things act on one another (Kisner, 2011: 20). This will be discussed further in Chapter Seven in relation to affective bodies and practices of endorsement. Suffice to say, the concept of embodiment and embodied perception offers a way out of the frequent, nihilistic and self-replicating approaches to consumer culture as dictatorial, oppressive and manipulative.

As previously mentioned, Entwistle elaborates on these ideas in relation to clothing, proposing the idea of 'situated bodily practice as a theoretical and methodological framework for understanding the complex dynamic relationship between the body, dress and culture' (Entwistle, 2000b: 11). Like Crossley, Entwistle makes a case for using Foucault's structuralist approach in conjunction with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in order to understand how structures of representation and the agency associated with embodied experience might relate and constitute one another (1973 [1935]). They both use the work of Goffman and Bourdieu to show that it is through the process of 'doing' and 'performing' that Foucault and Merleau-Ponty come together. Like Mauss, in his essay *Techniques of the Body* (1973 [1935]), 'they acknowledge how social structures are reproduced at the level of bodily practices.' (Entwistle, 2000a: 325): we learn by doing (Crossley, 1995: 54).¹⁷ Therefore, as Synnott argues, the body can be understood as 'both an individual creation, physically and phenomenologically, and a cultural product; it is personal, and also state property' (Synnott, 1993) – again, it acts and is acted on.

If we return to footwear, these ideas are perhaps best exemplified in an article about shoes, which unusually acknowledges the symbolism of the shoe *in relation* to the subjective and embodied experience of the wearer. Webster's 'Red Shoes: Linking Fashion and Myth' (2009) aims to 'connect literature, fashion, and dress through meanings that are uniquely personal yet resonant across wider cultural and social groups' (ibid., 165). She explains that red shoes are familiar to many of us through the childhood transformational tales of Hans Christian Anderson's *The Red Shoes* and the classic feature film *The Wizard of Oz* (1939, based on the book by L. Frank Baum). Yet while fashion reiterates and capitalizes on these meanings, it is only through the ritual of wear that wearers activate their symbolic value and source of vitality: 'It is our participation in myth', she explains, 'rather than fashion that invigorates us. We access myth through the ritual, not of fashion, but of style' (ibid., 173-174). She quotes McDowell and Kaiser to explain that *style* is different to *fashion* 'style is fashion made personal. Style is part of who I am and who I could be' (ibid., 173). Referring back to Entwistle, she explains that '[s]tyle is part of dress, which is always an embodied, situated practice' (ibid.).

¹⁷ Similarly, Waskul and Vannini define Symbolic Interactionism as the best lens by which to study embodiment, combining the 'reflexive body' (Cooley), the 'dramaturgical body' (Goffman and Bourdieu), the 'phenomenological body' (Merleau-Ponty) and the 'socio-semiotic body' (Foucault) and highlighting their co-dependence. It seems somewhat contradictory however that they then separate these approaches into chapters. They do however make the useful addition of the 'narrative body' – which can be seen to be the linear connection that acknowledges the embodiment of the passage of time (Waskul and Vannini, 2006).

Again, practice (or 'ritual' in Webster's example) emerges as the means through which to understand how representations are embodied. Webster uses empirical accounts of wearers and non-wearers of red shoes to demonstrate that their symbolic meaning cannot be explained simply through our connection to childhood stories, rather their vitality accrues for each of us over time, through social interaction and processes of 'interpretation, enactment, and ritual' (Webster, 2009: 173). Furthermore, this happens for some shoes and not others, for example she compares Anderson's dangerous, disobedient, willful red shoes to Cinderella's glass slipper – unappealing both in terms of the impractical material and the 'sweet obedience' it symbolizes (ibid., 172). Red shoes, she argues, are lived out through people's everyday lives due to the fact they afford a sense of mobility, 'embodiment of choice [and] the *act of being* and becoming one's self' (ibid., 173). For Webster, then, fashion - in contrast to its structuring image - can be understood to provide us with 'agency's wardrobe' (ibid.).

In light of the theories of Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Entwistle and Crossley, Webster's article therefore brings us to a point where, through empirical investigation, we start to understand meaning as a dialogical process, activated and transformed through everyday practices and rituals involving objects and representations. In this way, we can start to see how cultural meanings are embodied through practice. Webster's focus on the *symbolism* and *myth* of red shoes, however, means that the role of the materiality of the shoes, bodies and environment in these practices is less apparent.

2.12: The Material and Semiotic Affordances of Shoes

In his essay *Techniques of the body* (Mauss, 1973 [1935]), one of the most influential essays on embodiment, Mauss, like Webster, proposed that collective cultural representations are reproduced through bodily practices like walking, eating or swimming. In the following extract, Mauss attributes the transformation of a walking style in Paris to the influence of American cinema. According to Crossley, he thereby finds a way to transcend a nature/culture divide by showing that culture is embodied (Crossley, 2007).

'I wondered where previously I had seen girls walking as my nurses walked. I had the time to think about it. At last I realised that it was at the cinema. Returning to France, I noticed how common this gait was, especially in Paris; the girls were French and they too were walking in this way. In fact, American walking fashions had begun to arrive over here, thanks to the cinema.' (Mauss, 1973 [1935])

While Mauss importantly acknowledges the role of the body and mobility in the reproduction of these cultural representations he neglected to ask how the representations came about in the first place. How and why, for example, was this walking style adopted (both in the cinema and outside it); why was it appealing to these particular women? How did they adopt the style? Which women did not adopt this style of walking and why? Warnier explains 'there is hardly any technique of the body that does not incorporate a given materiality': it is therefore erroneous (although frequently done) to separate the body from material culture or vice versa (Warnier, 2001: 10). Mauss's neglect of the materiality of the shoes that afford this walk, and the bodies and environments in which it was performed (or not) might lead the reader to assume that through popular representations Hollywood (or indeed brands and advertisers by extension) dictates while society passively follows.¹⁸ Indeed, this remains a common anxiety amongst some feminist authors who attribute the media, for example the American HBO series *Sex and the*

¹⁸ Rocamora makes a similar observation of Bourdieu's work on culture, class and consumption. She argues that when he discusses fashion the materiality of the fashion object is lost (2002: 355). Citing Crowther she explains therefore that he is more 'interested in the process of affirmation of difference [...] than in "the level of particularity which makes difference *real*"' (ibid., 356).

City, with the power to affect the consumption habits of female viewers in a disempowering way (e.g. Arthurs, 2003: 90).

Since Mauss, theorists have increasingly sought to restore the materiality of the body, objects and the environment to studies of identity. Drawing on Bourdieu's interpretation of the *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984), Ingold and Vergunst explain that the body is in constant active engagement with its material surroundings and it is this engagement that conditions the adoption of styles of walking, or indeed types of objects (2008: 2). Ingold uses Gibson's concept of 'affordances' (1979) to return materiality to embodied experience, explaining rather than being static 'lookers' we are always in motion through time and place and 'depending on the kind of activity in which we are engaged, we will be attuned to picking up particular types of information' (Ingold, 2000: 166). What we see when we look at things is not an objective set of features or values but their affordances - people only perceive and notice the elements of the environment that might provide or furnish them with something (Gibson, 1979: 127), a notion similar to Lévi-Strauss' identification of the 'bricoleur', who is attracted by and makes use of what is at hand (1966 [1962]: 17). The knowledge obtained through perception is therefore practical: The form and weight of a stone, for example, might afford its use as a missile if the need arose, yet it could also be a paperweight, a bookend, a hammer or a pendulum bob, depending on what the perceiver needed at the time (Gibson, 1979: 135). Equally if the person has no need for a stone they are unlikely to perceive it.

This theory is important as it frees us from the notion that there exists an objective truth about an artefact – while a shoe for example may have features that are objectively observable it is also subjective because the features that are observed depend on the perceiver. As he explains:

'An affordance cuts across the dichotomy of subjective – objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy. It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behaviour.' (Gibson, 1979: 128)

While Gibson's theory partially helps to explain why we might select a particular pair of shoes – certainly where function is a principal concern – his focus prioritises the physical environment and body. At the end of the book he does attempt to address the perception of pictures, yet he does not sufficiently translate this theory to cultural representations and meaning.¹⁹ Shoes therefore complicate this theory. As Michael explains in his article 'These Boots Were Made for Walking...' (2000), very few people choose a pair of shoes purely for their function, no matter how much they may protest this to be the case; they will also be chosen for their meaning (or lack of, as the case may be). It is therefore appropriate not only to consider an object's material affordances, but also its *semiotic* affordances. In his article 'An Ecological Approach to Semiotics', Windsor effectively makes this connection. He suggests that like tangible objects cultural signs can also be approached functionally. Rather than ask what the shoes mean (as with a post-structuralist interpretation), we should ask what their meanings afford a particular individual or 'niche' group. 'Hence, interpreting a sign becomes not a matter of decoding, but a matter of perceiving an affordance' (Windsor, 2004: 183). Yet while these theories importantly help us to understand the subjective perception and use of signs, this idea still does little to reveal the relationship between the material and the meaning – how do these meanings come about?

Using a multi-modal approach, the field of social semiotics also uses the term 'resource' as opposed to 'sign' as it 'avoids the impression that what a sign stands for is somehow pre-given and not affected by its use' (Van Leeuwen, 2005: 3). The term *semiotic resource* originated in

¹⁹ Ingold has been criticized for the same neglect of cultural meaning, see for example Michael (2000) and the debate which took place between Miller, Tilley and Ingold in *Archaeological Dialogues* (Ingold, 2007a, Miller, 2007, Ingold, 2007b)

the work of linguist Halliday who argued that ‘the grammar of a language is not a code, not a set of rules for producing correct sentences, but a ‘resource for making meanings’’ (Halliday [1978: 192] in Van Leeuwen, 2005: 2). In the field of Social Semiotics Van Leeuwen then expanded this idea to the grammar of other ‘semiotic modes’ and defined ‘semiotic resources as the actions and artefacts we use to communicate’ (Van Leeuwen, 2005: 2). It would seem, then, that shoes in terms of their constituent parts and materials might be considered ‘semiotic resources’: as material objects, they afford semiotic meaning which is dependent on the context of their use, the agenda of the user and also the structures that might influence their use. Van Leeuwen proceeds to develop this idea into a more rigorous method. He suggests that as soon as we establish what a ‘resource’ might be we can ‘[inventorize] the different material articulations and permutations a given semiotic resource allows, and describing its semiotic potential, describe the kinds of meanings it affords’ (2005: 4).

Using the concept of semiotic resources, social semiotics therefore provides a promising way of understanding the social production of meaning. Yet despite its multi-modal approach and recent development in the field of music theory (e.g. McDonald, 2013), the methods and existing research are still very much rooted in their linguistic foundations. It has therefore been restrictive in providing a complete picture of the use of material artefacts and associated representations in the social process of meaning-making. McDonald argues that one reason for this is that the role of embodiment has been neglected (McDonald, 2013). Similarly, Keane (2003, 2005) suggests that a consideration of materiality has also been excluded.

2.13: Peirce’s Pragmatist Approach to Semiotics

In his work on semiotics and materiality, Keane explains that due to the legacy of Saussurian linguistics the sign has become separated from the material world. In order to address this separation he argues for ‘an approach to signs for which the practical and contingent character of things is neither subordinated to, nor isolated from, communication and thought’ (2005: 183). Rather than prioritising signs as immaterial representations of a lower material presence we should regard them as semiotic ideologies that guide and are destabilised by practice (Keane, 2005: 189-197). Keane (2003, 2005) and Jensen (1995) therefore propose that a return to Peirce’s pragmatist approach to semiotics (1931-1958 [1909]) can reveal the interconnectedness of representations, materiality and embodiment (Jensen, 1995). Where Saussure focussed predominantly on the arbitrary and conventional relationship between the signifier and the signified, which became meaningful due to its place in a system of differences, Peirce ‘located signs within a material world of consequences’ and due to this materiality the logic of signification could be understood as vulnerable, causal, contingent and open to transformation (Keane, 2005: 186). Furthermore, he was interested in the ‘relations of difference which are established in the *practical* use of signs’ (Layton, 2006: 30).

Despite the potential of Peirce’s approach to reconnect materiality with meaning, when compared with the popularity of Saussure’s interpretation of signification his theories have been comparatively underutilised. This, I suggest, is due to their complexity. To understand the process of meaning-making Peirce used a triadic model which consisted of the object, the sign or ‘sign-vehicle’, and the interpretant (Jensen, 1995: 28) to understand the ‘‘life’ of signs in social practices’ (Atkin, 2010). While we may already have a basic understanding of the object and sign (although I will explain Peirce’s more detailed account below) the interpretant is an important addition. Broadly understood as the subsequent thought, action or conclusion the sign evokes in the mind of the interpreter (Burks, 1949: 673), but also understood as the ‘translation’ (Atkin, 2010), the interpretant accounts for the context, standpoint and ‘collateral’ (interpretive repertoire or capital) of the perceiver which might eventually lead the interpreter to act (Jensen, 1995: 3). The question for Peirce therefore is not *what* is meaning, rather *how*, *where* and *when* is meaning? (ibid., 24) – again, meaning is a situated practice where the material object affords meaning in particular circumstances and for particular people.

To understand how the signified relates to its object of signification, Peirce identified a trichotomy of non-discrete stages of signification: *firstness*, or *iconicity* (resemblance), *secondness* or *indexicality* (actual connection) and *thirdness* or *symbolism* (the closest to Saussure's rules and conventions).²⁰ Keane explains that an iconic sign 'exhibits its object', bearing some similarity to it – for example an image of a shoe is similar to shoe. He also encourages us to recognise the iconic sign consists of various qualities, or *qualisigns* none of which can become significant until they are 'bundled' together and embodied in material form (2005: 187-189) – for example redness cannot realise its qualitative possibility until it is embodied in shoe form. This form then brings various other qualities, for example highness, which may change the meaning of the red.

If we consider this bundling in the context of the representation we see that the image also incorporates other qualities which may change the interpretation of the shoe over time or in different contexts, for example the addition of a wearer, the lighting or the artistic medium. This *co-presence* or bundling of material qualities, Keane explains, encourages us to understand signs as open and polysemic – 'the qualities bundled together in any object will shift in their relative salience, value, utility, and relevance across contexts' (ibid., 188). As such, we can start to appreciate what might be described as the 'social life' (Appadurai, 1986, Kopytoff, 1986) of the object or sign, a biography which is inherently diachronic. This principle remains the same whether one considers a shoe or an image of a shoe.

In contrast to iconic signs, which need not always refer to an existing object (Keane, 2005: 190), indexical signs are perhaps the most important of Peirce's categories from my present perspective since they are resultant and point to the existence of the object – which might equally be the shoe, its wearer, or an idea. An example might be the sound of the heel, which indexes a person's approach; a 'swagger' might index heel height, or perhaps an empty pair of shoes indexes the absence of their wearer. Therefore the sign cannot exist without the object, emphasising what Keane describes as the 'materiality of signification' (ibid., 186). In a more complex example Keane suggests high-heeled shoes might index Thorstein Veblen's conspicuous consumption: '[o]ne appreciates the value of [...] high-heeled shoes by recognising their lack of utility, and from that draws the inference that someone who can afford to dispense with utility must hold a certain status.' (ibid., 191). All indexes therefore require the interpreter to infer a meaning, which might otherwise be described in Peirce's terms as *abduction* – i.e. the hypothesis that is most likely to be true (Douven, 2011). This inference is in part based on what we already know about the world, therefore the interpretation of indexical signs is also guided by 'semiotic ideology' – 'people's background assumptions about what signs are and how they function in the world.' (2005: 191) For example the shoe might be indexical of the status of its wearer – or indeed the gender, since most heels may be understood to be worn by women. As Dicks *et al.* explain:

[W]hat meaning-makers are using as resources – signifiers – carry with them residual traces or inflections of previous processes of meaning-making. These traces are a means through which power and ideology can impinge on the sensory moment. In this way, signifiers cannot be understood only by reference to the immediate ad-hoc improvisations or accounts of members. (Dicks et al., 2011: 233)

Yet while semiotic ideologies might guide how people interpret an indexical sign, Keane reminds us that the 'openness of things to further consequences perpetually threatens to destabilise semiotic ideologies', as such the 'semiotic orientation' for example of a shoe is as much about its 'unrealised future' as its past (2005: 191). This 'openness' clearly resembles the 'semiotic

²⁰ The categories are not discrete: he also identifies the links and crossovers between each, for example an indexical sign can be iconic and can become symbolic.

potential' and material affordances previously discussed in relation to the field of Social Semiotics and Gibson's Ecological Psychology. It also relates to the notion of *material agency*, deriving from Gell's work *Art and Agency* (Gell, 1998) and explored extensively in the field of material culture studies to understand the intentionality or instrumentality of things in the construction of new social contexts (Hoskins, 2006: 75). This will be explored further in Chapters Seven and Eight.

The significant point here is that the sign is a consequence of the semiotic or material affordances of the object, not the other way around. So how does this relate to the shoe as symbol - the third in Peirce's trichotomy of signification and the more conventional of the three? Watts (2008: 194-195) explains that icons and indexes play an 'essential' role in cognition, yet they are 'neither defined nor disposed towards perception': they can operate beyond human perception. However, the symbol depends on all three: the object, the sign (indexical and iconic) *and* the interpretant. Therefore Peirce starts to help us understand natural signs (icons and indexes), and symbolic signs (for example the shoe as metaphor), as part of the same 'continuous program of semeiotic functioning' (Watts, 2008)²¹ where the symbolic becomes a consequence of the material:

'To be sure, symbols evince a "higher-order" or more complex degree of semeiotic mediation because they are thoroughly bound up in a conventional relationship, but they nonetheless incorporate indices to point to objects of signification, while indices require icons to make evident the substantive character of objects.' (Watts, 2008: 195)

This can perhaps be considered in a more condensed way when considering Rose and Tolia-Kelly's comments on the relationship between the material and visual through *practice* (2012: 3). They describe practice simply as 'what humans do with things'. The way we practice things and what we do with them makes them visible in specific ways, in this case, for example, as metaphor.

2.14: Metaphoric and Metonymic Shoes: Linking the Material With the Symbolic

Metaphor is a symbolic practice of signification that falls into Peirce's third category and this type of symbolic use is prevalent in images of shoes. As categories of symbolic representation, they therefore provide an interesting way to investigate the relationship between representation and material experience. According to Lakoff and Johnson '[t]he essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another' (1980: 5). Their book, *Metaphors We Live By*, grew out of a concern that the dominant view of meaning in Western philosophy and linguistics was inadequate - having 'very little to do with what people find *meaningful* in their lives' (1980: xi). In their seminal texts Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and also Ortony (1979) broadened the academic understanding of metaphor from its poetic use to understand it as integral to the conceptual structures that enable the way we think. Since then an increasing number of authors in the fields of social semiotics, cognitive linguistics and *cognitive semiotics* (eg. Forceville and Eduardo, 2009: 5) have developed theories of metaphor to include modes beyond the verbal and linguistic, for example static and moving images, music, non-verbal sound and gestures (Forceville and Eduardo, 2009: 4). Amongst the many varieties and sources of metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson acknowledge the tendency to use *objects* to understand human experience:

²¹ Since Peirce, the conventional spelling for the study of signification has become 'semiotics', yet, as identified by Parker, Peirce often used the spelling 'semeiotic', which more closely resembles the etymology of the word from its Greek origins. Consequently, when authors are directly referencing Peirce's ideas they will often use his original spelling (1998: 231).

‘Understanding our experiences in terms of objects and substances allows us to pick out part of our experience and treat them as discrete entities or substances of a uniform kind. Once we can identify our experiences as entities or substances, we can refer to them, categorize them, and quantify them-and, by this means reason about them.’ (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: xi)

These types of metaphor are described as *ontological*: ‘ontological metaphors’, they argue, ‘are necessary for even attempting to deal rationally with our experiences’ (ibid., 25). This expands our understanding of the popular anthropological phrase ‘things are good to think’ deriving from the work of Lévi-Strauss in which he highlighted the tendency of *The Savage Mind*, particularly in totemic cultures, to use animals and plants metaphorically to conceptualise their own social structures (1966 [1962]). This practice happens from an early age: as children we are taught to understand identity in terms of objects, something that Bourdieu explains in his *Outline of A Theory of Practice*: the mind is predisposed to understand through the medium of metaphors – using objects to metaphorically represent the structures and practices of everyday life (1977: 91). Shoes are therefore extremely potent in their capacity to engage us because from a very early age we all experience them. This is what has afforded such affective metaphorical and allegorical use in so many fairy tales such as Perrault’s *Cinderella* and Anderson’s *The Red Shoes*.

Verbal metaphors are also linguistic device we are familiar with from an early age and in some cases they are used so commonly we forget what they originally refer to. Sayings like ‘if the shoe fits, wear it’, ‘walking in someone’s shoes’, ‘getting one’s shoes under the table’, ‘on a shoe-string’, ‘filling someone’s shoes’, ‘the shoe is on the other foot’ and ‘dead men’s shoes’ all refer to some element of human experience especially in relation to identity, identification and empathy with others. Pine suggests that every shoe tells a story and that their ‘narrative possibilities’ in this regard explain their frequent use in art to signify anything from mass consumer and popular culture (in Andy Warhol/Roy Lichtenstein’s pop art), to feminism (Meret Oppenheim’s *My Governess*, 1936), or sexual fetish (Yayoi Kusama’s *Suitcase, Shoes*, 1963). While the metaphorical use of shoes is a common area of interest in literature *about* shoes (Pine, 2006, West, 2001), as we have already seen with Heidegger and Jameson, as metaphorical symbol they also provide a useful resource for authors who are writing about more abstract concepts.

Metonymy, a category of metaphor, bears a particularly important relevance to the way shoes are represented which links closely to Peirce’s pragmatist approach to semiotics. Metonymy, is when we use one thing to refer to another that is *related* to it (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 35). While both metaphor and metonymy are grounded in experience, the grounding of a metonymic concept is more obvious than the metaphor because it involves ‘direct physical or causal associations’ (ibid.). Indeed, Lakoff and Johnson go further to state that ‘[s]ymbolic metonymies are critical links between everyday experience and the coherent metaphorical systems that characterise [...] cultures’ (ibid., 40). This becomes even more apparent when one considers ‘synecdoche’; a type of metonymy where the part stands for the whole, for example where the shoe ‘stands’ for its wearer, their personal circumstances, personality, character, social or economic status. Well-known examples include Andy Warhol’s 1950s shoe illustrations, metonymically named after celebrities (fig. 2.3), and, perhaps one of the most powerful uses of synecdoche are the images of the piles of shoes belonging to holocaust victims in the unsettling photographs at Auschwitz and other concentration camps (fig. 2.4) - each empty shoe stands for its absent wearer, and the sheer quantity allows one to start to identify with the almost incomprehensible loss of life.

Indeed, due to their indexical association with bodies that wear (or might wear) them, the shoe is often used to communicate difficult or sensitive subjects. In many cases the symbolic efficacy

Image removed due to copyright

Fig. 2.3: 1956, Andy Warhol, 'Zsa Zsa Gabor' shoe, part of the 'Crazy Golden Slippers' exhibition at the Bodley Gallery. The *Warhol Foundation*.

Image removed due to copyright

Fig. 2.4: Auschwitz, Poland, a storage room full of shoes taken from the Jews in the death camp. *Yad Vashem*.

of the shoe in these contexts is reinforced when metaphor and metonymy are combined. In his article on the 'Interaction of Multi-modal Metaphor and Metonymy' (2009), for example, Urios-Aparisi, uses an abortion advert featuring a knitted baby's bootie set to Brahms' Lullaby to highlight the power of metaphors that use metonymy to convey their message. In the advert the camera focuses on a yellow knitted bootie. Shortly after the male voice-over starts, a strand of yarn is gently pulled and the boot gradually starts to unravel as the advert explains the benefits of contraception to avoid abortion. In this advert the bootie stands metonymically for the baby and its unravelling is a metaphor for foetal termination (2009: 107-109). In Peirce's terms, the symbol would be impotent without the boot, which is both iconic – it represents that which it refers to – and indexical – it points to the absent wearer (the baby). The act of undoing metaphorically represents the imagined baby's immanent non-existence. The advert bundles various icons and indexes, for example the voice, the music, the boot and the action to create a new meaning for the boot – one of sadness and loss. Based on our cultural capital or collateral, the meanings we infer from these iconic and indexical signs contribute to their symbolic message.

This idea will be further explained in relation to empirical data throughout the thesis. At this stage, however, the important point to underline is that the Peircean model helps to reveal the value of breaking the process of signification into stages; not to understand the arbitrary relationship between object and symbolic meaning but to gain a better understanding of how materiality and experience afford symbolic meaning. It also highlights the value of abstracting qualities from objects in order to gain a much more nuanced understanding of the discrete moments of experience that construct the broader value system through a process of 'habits and intuitions rather than rules and cognitions' (Keane, 2005: 188).

2.15: Medium Versus Message: A Practice Based Approach to Representation

The discussion above suggests that analytically it is more fruitful to turn one's attention from shoes as *message* to a study of shoes as *medium*. In 1964 media theorist McLuhan made the important observation that 'the medium is the message' (2001 [1964]). He suggested that by focussing on the message in media communications we are less likely to notice the broader structural implications of the medium. He describes the 'content of a medium' as a 'juicy piece of meat carried by a burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind' (ibid., 19). As in the case of Magritte's pipe, McLuhan's idea encourages the researcher to resist being blinded or distracted by the message; rather to focus one's attention on the medium as a more inductive way of questioning how meaning is made. The separation of the medium (or shoe) from the message therefore has important implications for the current study. My own preconceptions about shoes, the reactions of others to the research, and the stereotypes identified through existing literature suggests that associations between shoes, femininity, sexuality and consumer culture have become naturalized to the extent we have become unable to question shoes in other ways. Through a study of the literature we have seen for example that through practices of representation, body and object conflate, leading us to objectify the person and personify the object. By deconstructing the symbolic shoe, I suggest, representations are revealed less as images that shape our experience of shoes (although this of course still happens) and more as the medium or *practice* that enables us to use shoes to make and know ourselves.

In his article 'Theorising Media as Practice' (2004), Couldry explains that the problem associated with the study of representation in the fields of media and cultural studies is that their starting point is an analysis of the text (particularly in the case of semiotic studies like Barthes') and/or the production economy (in the case of Marxian approaches and mass culture theory) - as though the representation itself or its political and economic function should be the focus of our attention. Drawing on Ang, Couldry reveals a fundamental misconception inherent in these approaches to media studies: the aim should not be to study media, rather to study 'what it means or what it is like to live in a media-saturated world' (2004: 125). What do people do and

ask in relation to media? What types of things do people say that relate to the media? (Ang [1996: 72] in Couldry, 2004: 119). It is here that he proposes greater links between media studies and the *practice theory* developed in sociology and anthropology (predominantly in relation to the work of Bourdieu (Couldry, 2004: 121)) to understand representations as *practiced* rather than *read*. Rather than ask what do representations of shoes mean, we ask instead how are they used to make meaning? In this context, when people make reference to various types of popular culture representations it does more than reinforce or reflect synchronic notions of shoe codes, or a language of shoes to be interpreted – it reveals the ways these meanings are incorporated and practiced in social contexts (such as a focus group, interview or in everyday life) to communicate and make new meaning and ‘do’ identity. As such, shoes and their associated representations become part of a set of resources or materials used by the individual in what is described as the ‘symbolic project’ of the self and which ‘the individual weaves into a coherent account of who he or she is, a narrative of self-identity’ (Thompson, 1995: 210 in, Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998: 132).

Following Couldry’s approach to media as practice therefore, we are able to glimpse the ways representations in popular culture shape the way we perceive and practice shoes, while the way we practice shoes shapes the way they are represented. Elliott and Wattanasuwan describe this as dialectical process where the mass media is ‘both a means to transfer or create meanings into culture and a cultural product itself’:

‘This dialectical relationship drives a cyclical flow of symbolic meanings derived from culture and transferred into the semiotic world of advertising, then interpreted and used by consumers to construct internally their self-concept and externally their social world.’ (1998: 136).

Similarly, Sobchack explains that the representative medium of *film*, for example, is never just passively consumed, ‘it is always also “incorporated”, and “lived” by the human beings who engage with it within a structure of meanings and metaphors in which subject-object relations are cooperative, co-constitutive, dynamic and reversible’ (Sobchack, 2000: 68). Therefore, departing from research that has tended to see media and representation as a structuring dominant force, we are able to reveal our relationships with representations as dynamic and interactive – moving away from traditional approaches to representations of shoes as signs to be read, situating them instead as resources to be *practiced*. This is an exciting new paradigm for the study of the relationship between the symbolic and material that, rather than seeing representations of shoes as being *about* our experience of them, sees them as being materially located *in* our experience of them. Furthermore, as will become evident in the later data chapters, an understanding of the materiality of these experiences can often confound structure/agency dichotomies.

2.16: Conclusion

In this literature review I have established the potential of shoes, as fashion item, to understand how social structures are reinforced, navigated or contested through practice. Yet I have argued that a post-structural understanding of shoes as a semiotic device for communication has hampered efforts to fully appreciate how they and their meanings ‘work’ in relation to everyday processes of identity and identification. A study of the literature therefore identified a need to evolve studies of meaning to account for the relationship between the object, the body and the social/cultural/physical landscape they inhabit, thereby countering or deconstructing existing stereotypes - or at the very least or holding them to account.

I have also argued that a bias in existing literature towards the consumer (often female) and the extraordinary shoe (often the high heel) has marginalized an understanding of the role of everyday and mundane experiences, the experiences of men and of those who produce shoes.

This has reinforced existing dualisms between the masculine and feminine, and production and consumption, which need to be undone if we are to understand the full spectrum of use beyond that of the female consumer, and to understand feminine experiences in context.²²

The usefulness and power of shoes as symbols - particularly as metaphor and metonymy - is another important aspect revealed by the literature, yet a tendency to focus on symbolic representation and meaning rather than the practice of representation has precluded an understanding of how these meanings are constructed and put to use. I proposed, therefore, that an empirical investigation of the material and semiotic *affordances* of shoes could present an opportunity to better understand the relationship between representations and experience, and provide an insight to the way culture is embodied through processes of identification.

²² Indeed, a look at the representation of shoes in academic literature suggests a tendency to conflate these binaries into the feminine consumer and the masculine producer. An emphasis on male designers such as Christian Louboutin and Manolo Blahnik has further reinforced these distinctions.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1: Introduction

'One of the difficulties of sociological discourse lies in the fact that like all discourse it unfolds in strictly linear fashion whereas, to escape over-simplification and one-sidedness one needs to be able to recall at every point the whole network of relationships found there.' (Bourdieu, 1984: in, Hebdige, 1998: 80-81)

As suggested in the previous chapter, the tendency to start with the image in visual culture methodologies precludes a broader and more complex understanding of an object's context and use. This, I have suggested, has led to a propensity to understand fashion more as a structuring force than a means to assert agency. In his essay *Object as Image* (1998), Hebdige uses Bourdieu to critique Barthes' reductionist approach to image analysis. He argues that by focusing on the image and the connotations it evokes for *himself* (the 'narcissistic' approach) Barthes fails to account for the multiple values and meanings which accumulate around a single object over time and the functions it serves for different users in different cultural, geographical and temporal locations. Inspired by Bourdieu, Hebdige asks how it is possible to 'talk simultaneously about objects and the practices which shape them, determine or delimit their uses, their meanings and their values without losing sight of the larger networks of relationships into which those objects and practices are inserted...' (1998: 80).

This is a dilemma faced by all material culture researchers and is of principle concern in a study about the relationship between representation and experience. Hebdige cautions us about the inherent traps of such studies, suggesting that in the quest to understand how objects acquire meaning one is tempted to either 'run together' the 'moments' of design, production and consumption, and the mediation of marketing and promotion, or to give undue prominence to one over the other.²³ To counter this tendency, he proposes that we need to find ways of combining the three instances of the lifecycle of the object (production-mediation-consumption) so that we can consider the transformations effected on the object as it passes between them' (ibid., 81). He also argues that because the network of relationships involved in the social production of meaning are non-linear (i.e. the connotations of an object do not accumulate in an orderly sequence from designer to consumer), we need to find a way to adequately represent these passages.²⁴

It is with these tasks in mind that I set out the methodology for the collection, analysis and representation of data so that I might meet my research aims effectively: to understand the role of representations in embodied processes of identification; to dissolve structure agency dichotomies often apparent in fashion theory methodologies; and to return the lived and experiencing body to studies of the meanings of fashion. In this chapter, I start by outlining the need to defamiliarise the shoe; exposure to current shoe representations from a range of media enables me to empirically account for many of the assumptions made about shoes and gender in Chapter Two, while also enabling me to look past these messages to start to understand how they are practiced in a broader range of contexts. This foregrounds the research design as it makes visible the metaphorical potential of shoes which starts to dissolve a distinction between objects, images, bodies and experience. Using this insight, I then proceed to set out the design for the remaining research with participants. Building on the previous literature research, I propose that a qualitative, interpretive and grounded approach to shoes and identity informed

²³ This, he explains, results in a '... delicately (un)balanced sequence of relationships [...] reduced to a brutal set of aphorisms, e.g., masses consume what is produced in mass (where production is regarded as determining); desire is a function of the advertising image (where mediation is regarded as the determining instance); people remain human and "authentic", untouched by the appeal of either images or objects (where consumption or the refusal of consumption is seen as determining)' (Hebdige, 1998: 80-81).

²⁴ Hebdige explains that '[i]n the production of significance, time is reversible and each stage in the sequence (production-mediation-consumption) can predominate at different times in determining meaning' (Hebdige, 1998: 82).

by the symbolic interactionism of Goffman (1990 [1959]), the pragmatism of Peirce and the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 2002) and Ingold (2000) can enable us to understand how the symbolic and material interact in embodied processes of meaning-making and identification. I propose that the biographical methods advanced through the field of material culture studies (outlined shortly) provide the model for the research, and ethnographic fieldwork provides a means for data collection where knowledge is developed through an elaborate set of observational methods in 'natural' environments. The resulting 'thick description' accounts for complex and nuanced systems of actions and their contexts (Geertz, 1973: 311-312) which help to counter the over simplified dualisms previously identified by Hebdige and in the literature review.

In the following sections, therefore, I account for the theory that has informed this methodology; the choice of the brand and shoe (the Clarks Originals Desert Boot and associated styles); the logistics of the study, for example gaining access and the day-to-day challenges and revelations of an organizational ethnography; the approach to data analysis and the ethical considerations of the study.

3.2: Foregrounding the Research Design: Defamiliarising the Shoe

In the previous two chapters I have made the case that due to the cultural visibility of shoes and a propensity to study the messages they convey, we have neglected the shoe as a thing. I have argued that while shoe myths may have some relevance in relation to the ways we experience them (as demonstrated by Webster, 2009), they have also obscured and precluded a broader understanding of the shoe's material and semiotic affordances in ongoing processes of identification. Before outlining the research design, and in order to proceed to empirically investigate participants' experiences of shoes, it was first therefore necessary to enter the field of representations to 'make strange' (Mannay, 2010) or *defamiliarise* 'shoes' as I thought I knew them (thereby avoiding the Barthesian approach) to start to understand how they can be known (and used to know) in the range of contexts and situations previously mentioned by Hebdige. 'This kind of observational work', Bell *et al.* explain, 'is part of the ethnographic tradition of unpacking and interrogating naturalizations of social practices and institutions' (2005), thereby enabling the researcher to gain an objective distance from the topic of research. While objectivity is increasingly recognised as a fallacy in sociological research, Jenkins argues that researchers should at least aim for a measure of objectivity if they are to prevent 'politics and values from getting in the way of finding out as *much* as we can, as *honestly* as we can, and as *systematically* as we can' (2008: 8-10). Therefore, while many may *speculate* we are continually surrounded by images of shoes, using empirical evidence this analysis questions the extent to which this is actually true, and, if it is true, what are these images and what can they tell us about how shoes are practiced more broadly?

During the period of a week in March 2012 I therefore conducted a rigorous media and department store survey where representations of shoes, no matter how fleeting and seemingly inconsequential, were gathered and categorised to gain a more objective and current understanding of the ways they are represented. In line with my discussion of social semiotics and Couldry's approach to media as practice in the previous chapter, a close study of these representations provided an early opportunity to start to inventorise the semiotic affordances of shoes. As will be demonstrated in Chapter Four, the use of the shoe as a visual identifier, totem, narrative aid and source of cultural capital enabled me to reveal representations less as images that shape our experience of shoes and more as the medium or *practice* that enables us to use shoes to make and know ourselves and others. In line with my observations of the representation of shoes in the existing literature, in each of these cases the propensity of the shoe to be used as *metaphor* or *metonymy* for identity, identification and transition emerged strongly. As discussed previously, the ubiquity of the shoe as something everyone can relate to makes it a useful metaphor; yet its metaphorical use renders it increasingly invisible and hence

difficult to analyse. The media survey therefore makes the shoe as metaphor *visible*, which foregrounds the subsequent fieldwork and lends greater insight to the experiences of participants in their everyday interactions with shoes, and with one another *through* shoes.

3.3: A Biographical Approach to Objects, Materials and Representations

Following the process of defamiliarisation a strategy was then needed through which to empirically analyse the experiences of those who wear and produce shoes. Here, the shoe provides a focus through which various interactions and identities can be studied. As such, it is situated within the field of material culture studies, central to which is the idea that 'materiality is an integral dimension of culture, and that there are dimensions of social existence that cannot be fully understood without it' (Tilley et al., 2006: 1). Where previously the 'material' and the 'cultural' had been theorised in opposition to one another (ibid., 1), Hicks explains that the terms 'material culture' and 'material culture studies' emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a way of considering the relationships between the two (Hicks, 2010: 25). Throughout this time, different traditions of material culture studies have developed (see Hicks, 2010: 26 for details). The UCL tradition, established by archaeologists and anthropologists such as Danny Miller, Chris Tilley and Mike Rowlands, has been particularly influential in establishing a 'material culture turn' resulting from the publication of the international *Journal of Material Culture* in 1996 and the development of the popular *Material and Visual Culture* graduate degree (Hicks, 2010: 26). It is the work of these academics, their antecedents, associates and occasionally their opponents which provides the theoretical foundations of this study due to what has been described as a 'self-consciously interdisciplinary outlook' (Hicks, 2010: 26 see also, Tilley et al., 2006: 1).

In his seminal edited text *Materiality* (2005) Miller draws on Hegel (1977 [1807]) and Bourdieu (1977) to explain that rather than being opposed or in conflict with one another, as is so often posited in Marxist approaches, subjects and objects make one another: 'there can be no fundamental separation between humanity and materiality' (2005: 8). As such, we do not exist in opposition to, or separate from material objects: we exist through them. An understanding of the reciprocal dialogue between subjects and objects provides an opportunity to depart from object-orientated or subject-centred approaches, or indeed the Cartesian mind-body dualism. Through things like shoes, mediated through practices of representation, we are therefore able to understand ourselves and others, not because the shoes reflect identity and social reality but because, like other objects, they are 'the very medium through which we make and know ourselves' (Tilley, 2006: 61). Objects therefore provide a tangible opportunity to study the way identities and social structures are practiced and this has been especially useful in studies where participants have either been absent (as in archaeological studies), or present yet unable to reflect on abstract concepts such as identity. In her study of an Indonesian Island community, for example, Hoskins (1998) used objects that mediated for the self and acted as metaphor in the construction of life narratives to access the experiences of participants usually unaccustomed to personal reflection. It is therefore the process of making and knowing ourselves through the shoes we wear, design, make, market or sell that needs to be followed if we are to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between bodies, materials and culture in processes of identification.

Here, material culture methodologies are useful. Appadurai (1986) uses Malinowski's study of the exchange of Kula valuables in the Trobriand Islands (1950 [1922]) (discussed further in Chapter Seven) to make the case that to reveal the relationship between persons and things, and to understand how objects become socially valuable, we need to follow the things themselves:

'[F]or their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human

transactions and calculations that enliven things. Thus, even though from a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context.' (Appadurai, 1986: 5)

By studying the trajectory of the shoe from the point of conception through its commodity phase, its 'singularisation' via wear and association with a particular individual (Kopytoff, 1986) and eventually to its divestment one therefore makes practical a type of 'multi-sited' ethnography or fieldwork. Indeed, Marcus argues that the traditional approach to ethnography with a single group of people in one location is rarely adequate to understand most cultures today; just as cultural production, meaning [and identity] has become multi-sited – global, even - in 'postmodern' times, so too must the ethnographic methods that study it (1998: 80). By studying the shoe as it moves from 'place' to 'place' (including both the physical and virtual – such as the media and internet) we are not only able to reveal the relationship between the shoe and its user, but also to reveal all the 'overlapping bodies' (Entwistle, 2000b) that both make the shoe and are made by it. Kopytoff therefore suggests that 'biographies of things can make salient what might otherwise remain obscure' (1986: 67). A biographical approach to the study of shoes and identity therefore starts to provide a way of exploring the intersections that happen across different places and times between production/consumption, mind/body, representation/experience and structure/agency.

Marcus also explains that 'following the thing' often entails 'following the metaphor', therefore 'when the thing traced is within the realm of discourse and modes of thought', as the shoe is, 'then the circulation of signs, symbols and metaphors guides the design of ethnography' (1998: 92). Hence my recognition of the shoe as metaphor or metonymy for identification and identity via the media survey alerted me to metaphorical practices in subsequent fieldwork sites. Prior to studying the shoes themselves, a survey of existing representations and practices of representation related to shoes proved essential to understanding the ways in which shoes and those involved with them make one another.

There are, however, some potential drawbacks to using a biographical model to study the social lives of objects and their representations. To suggest an object or image has a 'life' suggests it has a beginning and an end; and to start my analysis with the experiences of the shoes' wearers (as I do in Chapter Five) suggests objects become final or settled after the point of consumption. On the contrary, following Ingold (2010a) and Pels (1998), and as suggested by Hebdige above, I argue that the objects and their representations are never settled, they are in a constant state of 'flow' and 'transformation' (Ingold, 2010a) both for those who produce and wear them. Through this process of generation, shoes continuously 'mix and meld', while becoming 'entangled' (ibid., 2) with various bodies, objects and environments. In its assumption of a linear journey, therefore, the 'trajectory' model tends to overlook the complex 'networks' (Latour, 2005) and 'meshworks' (Ingold, 2010a) such objects afford. Furthermore, a trajectory model encourages the abductive reading of an 'object' *backwards* from its final state to rationally consider the various intentionalities that have created it, rather than forwards to consider the various material affordances that give rise to 'things' through creative and innovative processes (ibid., 10). This means that an emphasis on studying 'what people *do with things*' (Miller, 1998: 19, cited in Ingold, 2010a: 3, emphasis added) can overlook what things, through their very materiality and 'spirit' (Pels, 1998), can do to (and for) people. Rather than *having a life*, then, it can be argued that they are in a sense *alive*. Therefore, following Ingold (2010a: 2-3), instead of using the biographical model to focus on the ways people 'use' a final product, special attention needs to be paid to the creative processes through which we give form to objects, and objects (through our engagement with their materials and meanings) give form to us. Consequently, practices of representation emerge as performing a central role in the process of bringing form into being.

This point is important when considering the relevance of including consumers *and* producers in one study. Application of Latour's *Actor Network Theory* (2005, 1993), for example, which attributes human and non-human actors with the ability to affect and connect one another in ever-more complex networks of hybrid 'nature-cultures', also suggests the life of the shoe, or indeed the brand (as a "new media object": see Lury, 2004: in, Entwistle, 2016: 279), is not linear but an 'event' (Entwistle, 2016: 279). In her application of Latour's theories to the field of fashion, Entwistle draws attention to the fact that consumers are actively involved in the constitution of the objects and brands they consume, 'so much so that producers now recognise the importance of consumers and there are multiple 'feedback loops' that enable producers to learn from consumers' practice.' (2016) One might go even further to suggest the influence of consumers on those who produce fashion is unavoidable and those who produce fashion may themselves, in a sense, be considered consumers of their own brand and susceptible to the same influences as those they are targeting. Considering objects (and visual objects such as brands and images) as part of the same 'network' or 'meshwork' as subjects (Ingold, 2010a) therefore enables one to consider them as constituting the same social fabric, rather than being 'inserted' into social life, as previously suggested by Hebdige.

So Appadurai and Kopytoff (albeit tempered by Latour, Ingold and Pels) provide the means through which to devise a methodology that addresses the theoretical context and disciplinary debates previously established. While existing theoretical tools are used to interpret data; findings feed back into theory, thereby contributing to its evolution. The mediation of representations and representative practices for example in studies of the ways objects and people make one another has tended to be under-evaluated. As such, this research takes a 'grounded' approach where the use of theory goes hand in hand with its generation (Glaser and Strauss, [1967] 2006: 2). As Glaser and Strauss explain '[g]enerating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research' ([1967] 2006: 6). The theories evolved in this study are therefore suited to their use in terms of providing modes of conceptualising, describing and explaining practices of representation, while fitting with empirical situations (rather than being made to fit). The aim is that these empirical connections result in theory that is 'understandable to sociologists and layman alike [sic]' ([1967] 2006: 1-3). This grounded approach results in an iterative journey where research methods and theories are designed and developed 'creatively' and 'imaginatively' in response to the emerging data (James, 2014). This is perhaps exemplified by the addition of the media survey as a way to defamiliarise the shoe and start to identify its semiotic affordances prior to ethnographic fieldwork. The iterative approach is also demonstrated by the decision *during* fieldwork to let the shoe (which would form the focus for the biographical study) find me, rather than vice versa – a process I will elaborate below.

3.4: Envisaging the Biography of a Shoe

The decision to take a biographical approach was to prove less straightforward than one might assume. Which shoe should be chosen and why? Furthermore, should a *particular* shoe be chosen, or should I trace the biography that 'shoes', as a category of clothing, may take? Should the research be limited to one brand or should it analyse the various stages of the biography through many different brands and bodies? A question at this stage was the extent to which the study was to aim for a sense of objectivity or reproducibility. To avoid bias or accusations of positivism the sociological approach would perhaps be to inductively study the various 'lives' of a style of shoe, for example through phases of design, development, production, marketing, retail, consumption and divestment at the different market levels (e.g. low, middle and upper) which might account for socio-economic status and/or age. Yet to remain this open also raised the question whether it was to be a men's, women's or children's shoe, or perhaps all of these. Through my industry contacts it was feasible that contact could be made with the participants needed for such a study, however the scale of the endeavour far exceeded the scope of a PhD.

In their book *The Craft of Knowledge*, Smart, Hockey and James (2014) draw on the work of C. Wright Mills to remind us that the researcher is often more craftsperson than technician and doing social research can be a way of crafting knowledge that resists the kind of factory systems endorsed by some sociological methods training (Hockey et al., 2014b: 7). As such, 'bias' is less something to be avoided or denied but recognized as 'an inevitable element of all research that can be acknowledged, reflected upon and incorporated into a considered methodological approach' (Abram, 2014: 27). Research is also always an embodied practice (Hockey et al., 2014b, Abram, 2014, Woodward, 2014) and as a craftsperson/textiles designer myself, to resist taking a creative approach to the research methodology and data analysis would be a form of bias in itself (Hockey et al., 2014b: 12). Rather, as Abram argues, the embodiment of the researcher is one of the things that makes the research original (Abram, 2014: 23). Consequently, it was decided that by narrowing the research to one brand and one shoe the research objectives could be met while affording a sense of consistency and narrative throughout data collection and analysis. Ultimately, the aim of the study was to understand how practices of representation mediate the co-construction of objects and people. The choice of shoe was therefore almost irrelevant as long as it was, for whatever reason, culturally 'visible'.

3.5: Gaining Access to the Field

Here it was decided that the producers and consumers of Clarks International, the well-known Somerset-based global footwear brand, established in 1825, would provide an ideal focus for the research. Listed as the number one footwear company in the UK, Clarks has grown globally throughout North America, Western and Eastern Europe, India and China providing shoes for customers of all ages throughout 1,356 concessions and stand-alone stores worldwide (Sender, 2014). Clarks has acquired the status of fourth largest footwear company in the world (C&J Clark International, 2015), which, when one considers this includes international sports brands, seems impressive for a family company with Quaker roots based in a quaint rural town in the English countryside. Over the years, the Clarks brand has become a household name; their logo, adverts and shoe styles have achieved an iconic status and an enduring presence in the lives of millions of people. Indeed, throughout the ITSF focus groups 'Clarks' was a reoccurring point of reference for men and women of all ages and it seemed that not only was everyone aware of the brand but also had some sort of experience with it either directly or indirectly. In terms of a study of the relationship between representation and experience in embodied processes of identification, therefore, both the brand and their shoes provided a good fit for the aims of the research. In addition, according to Mintel, over the years the company has remained securely positioned at the top of the *mid-market* sector, thereby representing the antithesis of the high-end Louboutins and Blahniks studied so frequently elsewhere.²⁵ Furthermore, a focus on both consumers *and* producers of this middle market brand meant that the research was able not only to address the prioritisation of the extraordinary over the everyday/mundane but also the prioritisation of the experience of consumption over experiences of production. The mix of participants therefore offered an insight to the dialogues afforded by particular shoes, blurring perceived distinctions between the various 'bodies' that interact with the shoes throughout their lifecycle. Finally, as a brand catering to a range of consumers across the full life course, their broad offering provided enough scope for an inductive study where it was hoped that, rather than starting with a particular shoe or gender in mind, the 'right' shoe would reveal itself.

²⁵ Mintel report five market sectors ranging from 'young fashion' (the strongest market) to 'high-end', 'premium', 'midmarket' and 'lower midmarket'. Lower midmarket was the poorest performing sector which showed decline in sales for 2013. In 2014 Clarks was recorded as achieving an 8% share of an overall UK retail market worth £9.4 billion and, with an increased profit of 4.6% on the previous year, was listed as the highest of all specialist footwear retailers (Sender, 2014).

It was perhaps serendipitous therefore that I already had a contact at Clarks. Indeed as Hirsch and Gellner explain research is more a 'game of chance' than of 'skill' (Buchanan et al. [1988] in Hirsch and Gellner, 2001: 5), yet it would take months of emails and meetings for the research proposal to filter through to the relevant people and to gain the attention and trust of a brand so frequently contacted by researchers, students and the media. The research proposal was passed to the Marketing Insight Manager, Saskia, who expressed a personal interest in the study. Her history as psychology graduate and University researcher meant that her interest in the relationship between shoes and identity exceeded her day-to-day commercially-driven market-research briefs. She saw Clarks' involvement in the PhD research (as well as the broader project) as an opportunity to think more broadly about the role their shoes play in the lives of consumers.²⁶

Once convinced of the value of the study, access was granted on two conditions. First, the company would be unable to spend any money on the research. This was a not an issue since the exchange of funds would render questionable the integrity and independence of the study - in any case it was already funded by the Economic Social Research Council. Second it was stipulated that if I became privy to any sensitive information compromising the company's brand or financial interests then I would need to negotiate what I could use. Adept at dealing with media journalists, Clarks initially requested editorial rights over the research. The University ethics committee mediated this request by explaining that the work of a graduate student must be their own. They proposed a compromise where Clarks would be given the opportunity to check and comment on anything before publication. Their comments would then be incorporated into the published work along with any subsequent responses. The University also suggested that issues of confidentiality should be identified and negotiated in advance of the study in order to provide an agreeable framework during data collection and writing up. These conditions obviated the need for editorial control by Clarks and their concerns were further alleviated by explaining that they were being approached more as research collaborators than the subject of an ethnographic study. As it turned out Clarks were happy with the content of the thesis and the only changes they requested were to correct minor factual inaccuracies.

So, the research was set to commence. I was generously allocated an assistant - Sarah, the PA to the women's business unit. Sarah looked after everyone in the women's team so was well-connected and well-regarded, which was beneficial in terms of organising a broad range of participants. I was also allocated a desk where I was based for the two-month duration of the study between March and May 2012. As I settled in and got to know the participants I started arranging my own interviews with those I felt were most relevant for the direction the research was taking.

3.6: The Research Plan

When putting together the initial proposal I had very little understanding of the company, its structure and the work schedules of the staff. From the first meeting with Saskia and Sarah it therefore became clear that the research plan was going to need to be flexible. Initially I had envisaged three phases. In the first phase the media analysis and department store inventory would be conducted to identify practices of representation that would help guide observation and interviews. Phase Two would involve a period of participant observation at Clarks where nine participants would be selected from each stage of the shoes' biography. This would include design, development, buying, manufacture, marketing, retail, consumption and divestment. The aim was to work with each of these participants for a period of approximately one week in order to gain a contextual understanding of the industry, their roles, and their identities. In

²⁶ This perspective of shoes was not unique to Saskia; many participants seemed to relish the opportunity to reflect on the role shoes play in identity and identification.

Phase Three, drawing on the media analysis and observations, two interviews lasting ninety minutes would be conducted with each participant. Interviews would address firstly their professional experience of shoes in an interview to be conducted at work, and secondly their personal experience of shoes in an interview to be conducted at home. The interviews would be video recorded in order to conduct a visual analysis pertaining to home and work environments, storage, materiality of the shoes and participants' interaction with them. Although the interviews were to separate work and personal life I was aware that the two may merge through the accounts of the experiences of the embodied individual. In relation to the consumer perspectives the same interviews and observations were to be conducted with wearers of the shoe/s that had been selected.

In practice, the research and participants were far from neatly bounded. First, the Clarks designers work nearly two years in advance and so the period for data collection would be too lengthy to follow a shoe from design through to consumption and divestment – furthermore it would be impossible to know which shoe to choose or predict which would become culturally and socially significant. It was suggested therefore that the research journey started with a 'visible' shoe that had already developed a measure of cultural significance and trace the trajectory of the shoe in reverse from consumption to design. Most of the staff had been employed at Clarks for many years so it was likely I would be able to trace most of those involved with the biography of the shoe. Prior to relocating to the head office in Somerset I therefore spent two days in a Clarks store in the North of England where staff helped me to identify some best-sellers they deemed worth following. I also spent two hours in a niche footwear, clothing and accessories store in Sheffield who cater to brand enthusiasts and sell Clarks' more exclusive sub-brand 'Clarks Originals'.

The arrangement of the interviews was also quite different from the order I had envisaged. On arrival at the head office interviews were arranged in terms of who was available rather than who the individuals were and their role in the biography of the shoe. Due to Sarah's enthusiasm and fierce efficiency I had been launched straight into Phase Three, the interviews, on day two. Although embarrassingly unprepared, the impromptu start enabled me to operate in a more responsive mode, which was valuable in terms of understanding other people's priorities and agendas. Interviews with marketing managers, senior designers, trend analysts, development managers, range managers and merchandisers started to reveal the dynamics of the company, the full scale of the production process and the various characters involved in the development of the shoes. While few of the participants fitted into my original plan, all seemed relevant. As news of the research spread around the offices the recruitment of participants snowballed, each putting me in touch with someone else they felt would be relevant to the study. Chance conversations around the office, for example in the kitchen while making tea, also produced research participants - which also snowballed. By the end of the two months I had increased my initial estimate of fifteen participants to a total of thirty first interviews, followed by fourteen videoed observations at work and nine videoed interviews at home with their shoes (full list of interview itinerary in appendix B). While notes were made about all interviews, each providing valuable context about the company/brand identity and their relationships to shoes, only the interviews relating to thirteen of the particularly relevant participants were fully transcribed and these centred around the shoe that emerged as the focus for the enquiry.

The plan to conduct a period of participant observation also needed to be revisited in light of the realities of the research environment. Although participants were happy to give up an hour of their time, due to hectic schedules and continual design and production deadlines one week's participant observation was going to be unfeasible. Furthermore, now fully aware of participants' fast-paced and demanding schedules, I quickly realized I would be more of a hindrance than help during observation, which could potentially have the unintentional effect of alienating participants. The majority of data therefore came from unstructured interviews –

becoming semi-structured as data emerged.²⁷ In the absence of periods of structured observation, the research became heavily characterised by what happened in-between those interviews. Generally, I took whatever opportunity presented itself to participate in and observe the daily lives and activities of participants. In sum, I hung around, watched, listened, asked questions (through both formal and informal interviews), collected documents, artefacts, took photos and videos, and gathered whatever data was available and seemed potentially relevant to the aims and objectives of the research. Daily field notes were also written, which included general observations, inspirational moments and questions to follow up on. During my time at Clarks I also stayed at a local bed and breakfast in Street, the location of the company since its beginning in 1825. This gave me an insight to the significance of the company within its rural Somerset location. Even those not working at Clarks, including my B&B hosts and their other guests, had at some point had involvement with the company, either directly or through family members or ancestors.

The principle method of data collection during the study could therefore be described as ethnographic. Traditionally associated with anthropology, ethnographic research is increasingly understood to be conducted in many ways across numerous disciplines (Van Maanen, 2006, Marcus, 1998, Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, Gellner and Hirsch, 2001). While some of these ways may not be regarded 'true' ethnography in the traditional anthropological sense,²⁸ their motivations, methods and results are comparable - thus rendering 'ethnography' the most fitting description. Hirsch and Gellner propose that the popularity of ethnography today is due to 'a long march away from positivism' where power is increasingly democratised through an exploration of 'the client's point of view' (Hirsch and Gellner, 2001: 2). The practices observed during ethnographic fieldwork over long periods in 'natural' settings (rather than contexts set up by the researcher) provide a way to understand how we make sense of the social world (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 4). To varying degrees, ethnography is therefore exploratory and inductive, resulting in theory that tends to be grounded in observational data (Glaser and Strauss, [1967] 2006). Furthermore 'ethnography' refers both to the activities involved in *ethnographic fieldwork*, and to the product of those practices (Hirsch and Gellner, 2001: 1) – typically a monograph using 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) to represent empirical findings in an often literary style relatively free from 'technical jargon' and 'high-wire abstraction' (Van Maanen, 2006: 18). Outside anthropology the two do not necessarily accompany one another (Hirsch and Gellner, 2001: 1) and many disciplines opt for ethnographic methods for data collection, yet write up outcomes in differing ways that may include a considerable amount of theorisation. This last point perhaps best reflects the approach I have taken to the use of ethnography in this research.

In many ways, traditional ethnographic methods are suited to organisational settings (Hirsch and Gellner, 2001: 13). As Van Maanen explains, like traditional forms of ethnography '[t]aking readers to places where they presumably have never been is [...] very much a part' (Van Maanen, 2001: 235) yet instead of a remote culture we are taken inside an organisation we may be familiar with or invested in, perhaps from the outside as a consumer. We may even already work there or know people who do. Here the concept of 'inside' and 'outside' is critical. Organisational theory is often motivated by an interest in how the world outside influences the world inside organizations (and vice versa) but as Van Maanen explains a good ethnography does not choose between these poles but walks the tightrope between them, therefore 'open borders are now far more salient than closed communities' (Van Maanen, 2001: 247). The

²⁷ Given my unfamiliarity with the company, the initial interviews commenced with open questions like 'tell me about your role' or 'how did you come to work at Clarks?'. These questions enabled respondents to lead interviews according to their own experiences and perceptions. In subsequent interviews, more specific questions were then formulated in response to emerging themes, for example 'when do you find you notice other people's shoes?' or 'how has your own taste in shoes changed since working at Clarks?'.
²⁸ For example, as opposed to the ideal year or more in the field, my study constituted only two months followed by subsequent visits.

organizational ethnography at Clarks provided the opportunity not only to study how shoes and people 'make' one another but also how brands and people make one another (in this case, through shoes) - a far less distinct and bounded process than traditional dichotomous approaches may have led us to believe. Fortuitously, due to an increasing consumer demand for transparency and authenticity, the research coincided with a trend where many companies including Clarks (previously a very private family company) were opting to reveal more of their behind-the-scenes operations and people. Although not openly acknowledged it therefore seemed that my own agenda and those of the company were synchronised.

So, what are the benefits of an ethnographic approach to research in organisations? Van Maanen argues that 'studies of organisational identity and change are often – perhaps most often – ethnographic in character [b]ecause symbolic meaning and unfolding history are critical to any account of collective identity' (2001: 244). As with studies of identity outside organisational culture, emotion, custom, myth, ceremony and ritual are understood to be constituent practices despite the common view that organisational life is 'dominated by a secular, rational, matter-of-fact, means-ends logic' (Van Maanen, 2001: 245). While organisations and their members may aspire to a separation from the values and norms of non-bureaucratic life (Hirsch and Gellner, 2001: 3), indeed they may see themselves as rational and logical, trained to distance themselves from their own subjectivities, this may not be the case in practice. Creative, human practices do creep in.

An organizational ethnography therefore allows one to study both the role of shoes and representations in the formation and transition of the company/brand identity as well as the identities of those who work there. Furthermore, one can lend insight to the other. Indeed, as previously suggested, the identities of the staff, consumers and the brand were often so intricately bound up it would have been unrealistic to separate them. The research therefore afforded an understanding of how the company's identity was negotiated by and between staff and consumers, and how those who worked there, or consumed the shoes, fitted with or reconciled themselves with that identity. As Ouroussoff argues, ethnography in organisations also offers a valuable opportunity to identify the 'discrepancies that can exist between the way people conceive of the organization' as might be found in marketing literature, sales statistics and company documents 'and their actual practice'. More importantly, it helps to understand the 'subtle, imaginative, and symbolic ways people have found to deal with the inconsistencies and contradictions that arise from such discrepancies' (Ouroussoff, 2001: 37, see also Van Maanen, 2001: 241). Van Maanen refers to this as the 'informal relations' or "underside" of organizational life – those adaptive but sometimes hidden and unofficial arrangements by which things get accomplished (or ignored)' (2001: 241). As with any other company, Clarks displayed such discrepancies and unofficial arrangements – especially concerning the perceived identity of the company, which was subject to a continually reflexive dialogue between all involved with producing and consuming the brand. Here, representative practices involving particular shoes became an important medium that, while on the one hand occasionally produced identity discrepancies, also played an important role in resolving them.

3.7: Finding a Shoe that Fits

To return to the opening chapter, the aim of the study was to understand the co-constitutive relationship between representation and experience by questioning 'how things are made visible', 'which things are made visible' and 'the politics of visible objects' (Rose and Tolia-Kelly, 2012: 4). Through discussions with staff and observations of their daily routines my aim was therefore to recognise which shoes were being made visible to me, how they were being made visible and for what reasons. This was a difficult process because participants were eager to help me identify the shoes *they thought* I would be interested in – often the shoes with the best sales performance, or the shoes that had been featured in the season's marketing material – rather than talking about the shoes that interested them (although sometimes these were the

same shoes). In my first meeting with Saskia and Sarah they suggested *Clarks Originals* styles such as the *Desert Boot* (fig. 3.1) and *Wallabee* (fig. 3.2) due to their sub/cultural history. Clarks Originals is a sub-brand, which was created in the mid-nineties to give iconic styles like the Desert Boot, Wallabee and Desert Trek (fig. 3.3) – all characterized by uncomplicated construction, materials and a crepe sole - a branded identity of their own. Saskia and Sarah also suggested styles that had originated from the archive - a valuable resource at a time when market demands required a sense of authenticity and nostalgia - for example their 'Iconic' range that included shoes such as 'Funny Dream' (fig. 3.4), a quirky 'everyday classic' women's shoe with chunky eyelet lacing, asymmetric stitched seam and handcrafted details (www.clarks.co.uk) or the 'Bombay light' (fig. 3.5) a fifties-inspired elegant mid-heel (originally called 'Woodnote') with contrast stitching and a tied bow with leather tassels. At the time of research both of these shoes were a seasonal staple, constantly in demand and reproduced with minimal variations and in different colours. Sarah also suggested other popular ranges to consider were the 'innovative' or 'unstructured' shoes (discussed below) and perhaps a plain ballet-style pump like the Cocoa Crème (fig. 3.6), which women of all ages wore.

When I arrived at the store for my period of observation the assistant manager Jenny had already been thinking about which shoes might be interesting. Again, she suggested an 'unstructured' shoe such as 'Un Loop' (fig. 3.7), a very plain black leather slip-on with contrast stitching and a button, sold as the ideal shoe for those on their feet all day due to their lightweight sole and underfoot cushioning (www.clarks.co.uk). Another two were 'Henderson band', a women's flat pump with punched upper in a variety of colours (fig. 3.8) and 'Flotilla Sun' a men's brogue, again originating from the archive (fig. 3.9). Both of these shoes were featured in advertising and point-of-sale material, which she felt often increased the desirability of the shoes for consumers. Jenny also suggested I follow a men's smart shoe such as 'Bravo Man' or 'Dino Boss' (fig. 3.10) as they were both popular and versatile, appealing to a wide range of men. In the shops where I carried out fieldwork I observed and chatted to customers who were interested in the suggested styles and took down contact details should I decide to proceed with any of them. These customers would then potentially provide data for the consumer stage of the biography of the shoe.

Later, during interviews and informal chats at the head office I mentioned the shoes that had been suggested. Although many could appreciate the choice of Henderson Band, Dino Boss and Flotilla Sun, which were all popular shoes, two of the shoes, Un Loop and the Desert Boot, provoked the strongest reactions. Participants at Clarks and in the stores spoke very fondly of the Desert Boot, which seemed to be the most significant of the Originals styles, and those who had had an association with Originals were quick and proud to say so. Working on Originals seemed almost a rite of passage for the Clarks employee and those who currently worked in the team seemed to be well regarded. The men's marketing manager for the main range, Richard, who had previously worked on Originals, explained that although the sub-brand sits quite separately from the other ranges, internationally the Originals styles are synonymous with the brand – Originals *are* Clarks. Indeed in a book about Clarks (Palmer, 2013) the Desert Boot is described as being one of their best-known lines, remaining largely unchanged since its creation by Nathan Clark (fig. 3.10) in the 1940s when, during military service in Burma, he had noticed the 'crepe-soled rough suede boots' on the feet of officers who had had them made in the bazaars of Cairo (ibid., 5, 184). Since seen on the feet of musicians, celebrities and even politicians throughout the decades, the style has been described as developing a 'momentum all of its own' (ibid., 187). As such, it was nominated as one of the '50 shoes that changed the world' by the London Design Museum in 2009 and in 2012 had sold more than 100 million pairs in over 100 countries (ibid., 187).

Participants at Clarks all seemed aware of the origins of the Desert Boot and its cultural significance, many opting to talk about them without being asked. Michelle, a junior range manager for one of the women's ranges, who had also once worked for Originals, explained

This is Not a Shoe



Fig. 3.1: Desert Boot, Sand*



Fig. 3.2: Wallabee, Cola*



Fig. 3.3: Desert Trek, Beeswax*



Fig. 3.4: Funny Dream*



Fig. 3.5: Bombay Light*



Fig. 3.6: Cocoa Crème*



Fig. 3.7: Un Loop*

* Images courtesy of Clarks.



Fig. 3.8: Henderson Band shoes and associated store imagery. Sheffield, March 2012. Own photograph.



Fig. 3.9: Flotilla Sun shoes and associated store imagery. Sheffield, March, 2012. Own Photograph.



Fig. 3.10: Bravo Man and Dino Boss men's shoes. Sheffield, March 2012. Own photograph.

that many staff had at some point met Nathan Clark (fig. 3.11) before his death in 2011 and most staff owned a pair of Originals because it was deemed part of Clarks' roots and identity. These opinions were reinforced when talking to the group head for Originals, Rosie, who explained that the Originals shoes were a "cornerstone" of Clarks heritage and were perceived to be particularly precious within the company, as such they held an "emotional resonance" for many long after they had finished working on them. She explained that consumers shared this respect: many of whom were "evangelical" about the styles. Staff speculated about the reason for the popularity of the Desert Boot, which mostly came down to a cool, authentic and timeless simplicity in terms of design and materials (the boot is constructed of two pieces of leather and a crepe sole) and a respect for the authenticity of its heritage. One would often hear particular styles described as "Clarks DNA" and none more so than Originals. So, Clarks Originals and particularly the Desert Boot were clearly emerging as iconic shoes both for those inside and outside the company.

Another style described as Clarks DNA however was *Un Loop*, but this time in a very different way. When mentioning the shoe many would give a knowing smile or roll their eyes. The reaction was probably best put into context by Vicki, the women's marketing manager for the main range. She explained that eighty percent of Clarks' range was still targeted towards their core consumer who wears Un Loop and twenty percent were targeted at 'Anna', a hypothetical, more fashion-conscious, target consumer. In contrast, twenty percent of the marketing budget was spent on the core consumer and eighty percent on Anna. Anna, she explained, is about 30-45 years old, interested in fashion and loves wearing beautiful shoes but resents it when they're uncomfortable. This was a niche Clarks felt they could cater to due to their expertise at making comfortable shoes. Yet Clarks have become so well known for their comfortable shoes, a fact several participants blamed on previous marketing initiatives, that many consumers did not perceive them to be a fashionable brand and this was a point of frustration for many. Clarks were now changing perceptions by producing 'fashion-forward' shoes that customers like Anna (Sam was the male equivalent) liked, yet for many participants it seemed the constant demand for Un Loop, the archetypal plain black comfortable shoe, flew in the face of these endeavours.

Michelle the junior range manager had worked on the 'Unstructured' range (which Un Loop belongs to) and was one of the few staff that did not react when I mentioned the style. She explained that the range was introduced in 2007 to cater to increasingly unstructured lifestyles where one pair of shoes was needed to transition between people's daily activities. Despite the fact they were "not the sexiest shoe", through seeing how much other people loved them she had learnt to love them too. Indeed, online customers on the Clarks website consistently rated the shoe with five stars and comments frequently referred to them as "the most comfortable shoes ever" (www.clarks.co.uk/p/20312837).

The more I heard about Un Loop, the more apparent the dialogue between consumer and producer became, where, through practices of representation, the style was developing significance. According to Michelle, at the time of research, Un Loop was consistently one of their best-sellers and they could sell up to 1,500 pairs per week all year round. The assistant manager at the store speculated this was because they were the preferred shoe of nurses who were on their feet all day - this was reflected in the comments on the company website. Michelle explained that within the company the style was treated slightly differently to the other shoes as there was clearly a formula with Un Loop that, since sales were still increasing at the time of data collection, was still working – therefore they didn't interfere with it too much. She seemed to have developed a healthy respect for the mystery of their success and this caught my imagination. It seemed that in a consumer culture supposedly driven by fashion and aesthetics the shoe refused to conform.

So, the Desert Boot and Un Loop both seemed iconic, yet for quite different reasons. Through discussions with staff the two seemed to 'stand' for what has been described in the media as

the brand's dual identity (Dacre, 2013) on the one hand cool, yet also associated with school/work shoes and comfortable shoes for older people. Like people, brands have no final or fixed identity and it is perhaps the *range* of significant shoes one owns that gives insight and helps us to understand the complexities and contradictions in processes of identification. It seemed that both shoes were used discursively by staff in various ways to help understand who Clarks have been, who they are and who they want to be. This was particularly evident during a period of research when the company was undergoing a significant transformation involving restructuring and global expansion. The shoes – particularly the Desert Boot - enabled participants to reflect on the brand/company's identity and values, often providing a means to reconcile themselves with any (potentially disconcerting) changes. While both styles were clearly significant - and perhaps their distinction, in part, depended on the existence of the other – due to their cultural visibility inside and outside the company in the media the Desert Boot (and associated Originals styles) emerged as the shoes that would fit best with the aims of the research, particularly to understand the relationship between representation and identification.

3.8: Following the Clarks Originals Biography

The recognition that Clarks Originals would provide the focus for the enquiry occurred about halfway through my time at Clarks headquarters. Due to their visibility throughout the head office it was not difficult to find information about them. Several in-house publications had been produced over the years which either focused on or included the Originals styles, notably a 50th anniversary book about the Desert Boot, described as a 'personal memoir' (Urquhart in Chippendale, 1999).²⁹ The advantage of these in-house publications was that since they were not for general sale the images of the shoes and their wearers over the years were less restricted by copyright. The visual histories therefore were rich and varied, reinforcing their suitability as a focus for the study.

Over the last three decades Clarks Originals have attracted a range of unsolicited endorsements both in terms of the personalities who have worn them, the cultures that have adopted them and the collaborators involved in their various incarnations. Associated with the Mods of the 1950s and 1960s in the United Kingdom and seen on the feet of personalities such as the Small Faces, Bob Dylan, George Harrison, the Beastie Boys, Steve McQueen, the Gallagher Brothers and Richard Ashcroft, the classic styles such as the Desert Boot, Wallabee and Desert Trek with their 'not trying too hard aesthetic' (Waters 2013) natural materials, uncomplicated design and trademark crepe rubber sole have become synonymous in the United Kingdom with values of masculine style, authenticity, coolness and British heritage.

One story, which became quite prominent in terms of linking all these users together, was the adoption of Clarks Originals by the northern indie music scene in the 1990s. Rosie, the Group Head for Originals explained that the shoes have a 'strong hold in the north' thanks mainly to the Gallaghers and Richard Ashcroft. The connections between Originals and 'Brit-Rock', as it was known, were made even stronger when Liam Gallagher of the band *Oasis* collaborated with Clarks to produce his own version of the Desert Boot for his clothing label *Pretty Green*. Through the Gallagher connection Clarks later collaborated with Sheffield-based artist and cartoonist Pete McKee (later himself to become a research participant) who had been producing artwork for Oasis since 2007. The McKee limited edition Desert Boot and accompanying marketing imagery (fig. 3.12) featured a range of Mod characters, the subculture that originally appropriated the boots. While these representations clearly contributed towards an

²⁹ It was significant that these publications were for Clarks employees and stakeholders and not for general publication. As Lawler explains in relation to Ricoeur's theories of narrative identity (1991), we understand ourselves and make sense of our place in the world through the stories we choose to tell about our lives, both to ourselves and others (Lawler, 2008: 12). Originals clearly provided an important part of Clarks' narrative and were represented accordingly.



Fig. 3.11: Nathan Clark with the Desert Boot and the Desert Trek outside Clarks head office. Image courtesy of Clarks.



Fig. 3.12: Original artwork for the Pete McKee Desert Boot collaboration pictured in a promotional store display. Image courtesy of Clarks. See fig. 6.24 for a detailed image of the McKee Desert Boot design.

understanding of the shoes' biography and subsequent visibility, from a logistical perspective the northern connection was advantageous. The research with wearers was to take place back in Sheffield and the connections between Originals and the north of England linked the research sites together in a fortuitous way. In terms of sampling at the head office and in the stores, the focus on Clarks Originals also made it possible to narrow down the key participants to those involved directly with the biography of the Desert Boot and the Clarks Originals brand. The other staff interviewed during the process now provided the contextual background to the brand and the visibility of the Originals shoes, as would the other shoes that I had been following. The discovery of Un Loop in particular was valuable as it caused me to recognise a category of shoes (to which the Desert Boot also belongs) that, although successful, do not conform to corporate strategies or fashion trends and resist attempts to rationalise their significance. These shoes could almost be described as 'tricksters' – a theme I address directly in Chapter Eight. For better or worse these shoes develop a character so significant that they become increasingly visible and difficult to ignore.

The shoes also proved to be ideal in terms of contesting the feminine bias identified earlier in the literature research. Although the shoes were worn by both men and women, Rosie explained that "if you wanted to blow the cultural stereotype out of the water, the cliché that women are the ones that are obsessed with shoes – when it comes to Originals, it's completely the other way around." Furthermore, as I will go on to discuss in Chapter Five those women who did wear the shoes did so in a way that enabled them to negotiate dominant notions of emphasized femininity.

Now convinced that Originals were the shoes to follow, the last month of the ethnography was spent arranging interviews with the significant people involved in the shoes' biography. For the design of the shoes I interviewed senior designer Marijke at work where I also took photos of her studio and current projects. Recognising that participants' relationships with shoes extended beyond the confines of the workplace, home interviews were also necessary to gain a more complete understanding of participants' embodied perspectives. I also therefore videoed Marijke and her shoes during an interview at home. I also interviewed Rosie, the group head for Originals at work, again taking photos where necessary, and videoed her and her shoes at home. I interviewed Gemma, the marketing manager, at work then videoed her as she showed me around the marketing department. She also showed me some of the things she was working on, for example proofing a book about Clarks in Jamaica and planning the next season's visual merchandising in their 'mock shops'.³⁰ Time constraints however meant a home interview with Gemma was not possible. Due to the fact that many of the Originals designs are interpretations of archived styles I also interviewed the Clarks archivist Tim at work and videoed him as he showed me around the archive.

On returning to Sheffield I interviewed Pete, a local member of the Clarks sales staff, at his home with his shoes. Pete was also a collector of Desert Boot collaborations, which meant he occupied an interesting space between producer and consumer. During research, it became increasingly apparent that the collaborations between the Desert Boot and other brands/musicians/artists etc. were a key aspect of their appeal and increasing cultural visibility, particularly for men. I therefore also interviewed Pete McKee, the Sheffield-based artist who had collaborated with Clarks Originals in 2010. This took place in his Sheffield Gallery (surrounded by his artwork) and in the café next door. Both the interviews with Pete and Pete McKee were recorded and I took photos as we talked. While collecting data it was essential I recorded as much as I could, given that the significance of shoes is as much about the way they look, their materiality and the way participants physically interacted with them. As such I used

³⁰ The mock shops were a series of store fronts and corresponding interiors in a room at Clarks headquarters which were set out in a street-like formation. This was the location where store layout, visual merchandising and window displays were devised and trialled.

video recordings and photographs wherever permissible and relevant.

Sampling for interviews at the headquarters turned out to be relatively easy both in terms of knowing who I needed to speak to and getting them to participate. Due to heavy workloads and schedules some were difficult to organize but all were accommodating once I had done so. Sampling for the wearer phase of the biography of the shoe however was more difficult.³¹ The original proposal involved two interviews, one with a woman and one with a man (since many of the classic Originals styles are fairly unisex). Due to the limited number of Originals styles sold in Clarks stores I had not identified any Originals customers when doing the store observations. Furthermore, it was becoming clear that the significance of Clarks Originals was a distinctly social phenomenon; their meaning and significance depended on social interaction. Rather than an interview it was necessary to see this interaction - a focus group was therefore determined to be a more suitable method.

3.9: Wearer Focus Groups

To recruit focus group participants an A5-sized colour postcard was designed (see appendix D) featuring the brand logo and several cultural images of Originals for example the Pete McKee Illustration (which many Sheffield wearers would recognise), Liam Gallagher in his 'Pretty Green' Desert Boots, a Jamaican wearer from a recent book about Clarks in Jamaica, Florence Welch from the band *Florence and the Machine* wearing a pair of women's Desert Yarra's at a festival (a wedged version of the Desert Boot), and American hip-hop artists Run DMC wearing Wallabees. Cut-out images of the Pete McKee Desert Boot, a pair of Wallabees and a Desert Boot were also included. The bold caption using the Originals logo read 'Do you wear Clarks Originals, or know somebody who does?' accompanied two short paragraphs explaining the purpose of the research and contact details. Sufficient consumer knowledge had been gathered at the head office to place the postcards in many of the pubs and bars wearers were likely to frequent (for example those likely to play the genres of music associated with the shoes) and postcards were also placed around the university campus, in local shop and café windows and on counters. An email circular was sent through the University network, which reached all researchers and students throughout the University of Sheffield. Postcards were also given to anyone spotted wearing Originals.

Approximately twenty responses were received, mainly from men but several from women.³² Some had seen the postcards but most were in response to the email. Many of the participants therefore had connections with the University, either through working there or knowing someone who did. Each of the respondents was asked to complete a questionnaire by email (appendix E), which outlined the purpose of the research and gathered information about gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, occupation, income and how many pairs of Originals they owned. This was so that a range of perspectives could be maintained when narrowing down numbers. Participants were made aware there was no payment for participating in the research and it was explained that while the research was not being conducted with a commercial agenda the Originals team at Clarks may see a video recording. During research at the head office it was apparent that staff were interested in how their shoes were used or appropriated, not in a commercial sense but in terms of confirming or contradicting their own personal assumptions. This dialogue between consumer and producer – mediated through representations – seemed relevant to the enquiry therefore it was necessary to make provisions for the wearers' experiences to be viewed by the Clarks participants if the opportunity arose.

³¹ The term 'wearer' here is preferable to 'consumer', which suggests a commercially driven agenda for data collection rather than a sociological/anthropological enquiry.

³² This was in contrast to the call for participants for the main research project, which was investigating 'shoes' more broadly. It seemed perhaps men were more inclined to volunteer when the focus of the research was a brand they identified with.

The availability of the potential participants determined the final number: four women and four men. These included university lecturer Vanessa (41); outreach officer Joanne (39); researcher and doctoral student Fiona (43); university lecturer Jane (38); lecturer Kristian (33); government officer Joe (31); lecturer and craftsman Conor (also in his thirties); and salesman Tom (37). With the exception of Kristian who was Austrian and Conor who was Irish, all participants described themselves as white and British. Due to the fact participants were self-selecting, the range was not meant to represent a 'typical' Clarks Originals consumer; neither, it seemed, would this have been possible. Rosie had previously explained that it was very difficult to tie the shoes down to a specific type of person; she speculated that Clarks Originals consumers tended to be defined more by a shared 'attitude' than categories of socio-economic status, age or ethnicity. The focus groups therefore became more about exploring the role of the shoes in the constitution of these shared attitudes and identities.

Focus groups were held in a university meeting room and video recorded to consider gesture and physical interaction between participants and their shoes. Participants were asked to bring or wear their Originals. Three of the men wore theirs because they rarely wore anything else and the rest brought their shoes with them. The focus groups started with a brief explanation of the research and the purpose of the session. I explained I was interested to hear about their experiences of the shoes and that, although I would be asking occasional questions, conversation would generally be amongst themselves. As an icebreaker, they were asked to introduce themselves and talk a little bit about the shoes they had brought along. With prompts and questioning, each of the participants' introductions developed into rich group conversations. Introductions lasted for the first 30 minutes of the 90-minute focus group and by the end both groups seemed to have bonded sufficiently that the remaining discussion was dynamic and flowing.

Like the interviews, focus groups were semi-structured, enabling a more inductive approach to data analysis. A list of topics was formulated prior to the focus group and plenty of time was left for participants to develop tangential discussions. The pre-determined topics included how participants had discovered the Clarks Originals brand; their perceptions of Clarks Originals and the Clarks main brand; their perceptions of other Originals wearers, endorsers and collaborations; whether or not there is a Clarks Originals 'type' of person; occasions when they would or would not wear their Originals; what features of their shoes they liked or disliked; finally, if they ever disposed of their Originals, what they did with them. Notes were written as a reminder of questions that had arisen during conversations or in order to return to participants who were interrupted before they were able to finish what they were saying. This ensured everyone was able to make their point and any awkward lapses in conversation were quickly filled to maintain momentum. Both focus groups finished by asking if there were any topics participants were expecting but that had not been addressed. They were also invited to reflect on the discussion. Four participants was a fortuitous number as it enabled detailed information about each to be gathered and there was little opportunity for participants to create factions where multiple conversations were happening at once – as can sometimes be the case with larger groups.

Although the research was about the relationship between representations and experiences of shoes, very few visual cues were used. In line with the theories about representation as practice in the previous chapter (Couldry, 2004) the aim was to see how the participants themselves employed references and practiced representations in the social context of the focus group. A touch-operated display screen was available for reference purposes should participants wish to illustrate a style or image. This proved particularly useful in the men's focus group when trying to determine which shoes were classic Originals and which of the newer styles were, as Tom described, "a whole heap of wrong". The focus group postcards had also been left on the seats and although I did not draw attention to them, participants would sometimes refer to the images when discussing their own cultural knowledge (or ignorance) of Clarks Originals. As

discussed further in Chapters Five and Seven, cultural references and endorsements were a popular topic of conversation, particularly for the men.

3.10: Data Collection

As discussed, the data gathered during ethnographic fieldwork, interviews and focus groups was extremely diverse, from traditional recordings and field notes, to photographs, videos, documents and artefacts. This was a study of the relationship between representation and experience of a material artefact in subjective and *embodied* processes of identification. It was therefore necessary to record as much as possible in terms of the linguistic, visual and material resources and contexts used by participants in their physical and mental engagement with shoes - and with one another about shoes. In her book *Doing Visual Ethnography* Pink invites researchers to 'engage with images, technologies and ways of seeing and experiencing as part of the ethnographic process' (Pink, 2013: 1). She articulates the importance of images, both for understanding how participants develop knowledge and meaning and in terms of how ethnographers represent those experiences and develop academic knowledge:

'Images are "everywhere". They permeate our academic work and everyday lives. They inhabit and inspire our imaginations, technologies, texts and conversations. As mobile media become increasingly ubiquitous images are embedded in the digital architectures of the environments we move through in our everyday routes. The visual is therefore inextricably interwoven with our personal identities, narratives, lifestyles, cultures and societies, as well as with definitions of history, time, space, place, reality and truth. Ethnographic research is likewise intertwined with visual technologies, images; metaphors and ways of seeing. When ethnographers produce photographs or video, these images, as well as the experience of producing and discussing them, become part of their ethnographic knowledge. Images are indeed part of how we experience, learn and know as well as how we communicate and represent knowledge.' (Pink, 2013: 1)

Following Bourdieu, Sweetman (2009: 494) explains that visual material, especially when used as method, can be 'particularly helpful in revealing and illuminating aspects of the mundane, the taken-for-granted', that which Bourdieu argues 'cannot even be made explicit' (Bourdieu, 1977: 94 in , Sweetman, 2009: 494). Visual methods such as photography and film can therefore help 'illuminate' the 'habitus' – the usually unconscious and deeply embedded dispositions which orientate us to and affect our way of being in the world; our ways of thinking, acting and moving in and through the social environment (Sweetman, 2009: 493). When used with participants – for example getting them to visually record their experiences or reflect on the researcher's images - these methods can also encourage forms of critical social awareness, reflection (or 'socioanalysis' in Bourdieu's terms) and even change.

Yet while endorsing their virtues, Sweetman is also critical of a recent fetishisation of visual methods which has resulted in the prioritization of a 'preferred way of looking over and above what is being looked at' (ibid., 492). Consequently, he argues that the habitus has become a concept employed 'without being defined or operationalized at all – at least explicitly' (ibid., 498). In this research, representation is therefore emphasised less as a method for illuminating the habitus (for the researcher or participant) and more as a means by which the habitus is understood to be shaped and embodied. Therefore, rather than getting participants to create new forms of knowledge through artificial practices of representation, this research excavates existing representations and observes the role they already play in practices of cultural embodiment. As such, the habitus is not assumed but studied in terms of its 'operationalization' (ibid.).

With respect to Bourdieu's theories (1984, 1993, 1986, 1977), representations and practices of representation therefore emerged as an important means through which the habitus is embodied, cultural capital is acquired, and identification or distinction is achieved. The seemingly random, often quirky, collections of artefacts and images displayed in the workspaces of designers, trends analysts and marketing executives emerged from the background to become a focus, as did the collections of pictures, textures and colours that constitute a 'mood board'; the halls lined with advertising and marketing images; or the television screens and artwork in the Clarks café. The ways in which participants thought and communicated in visual and expressive ways also became a focus. Both the men's designer and creative brand manager, for example, arrived at their interviews with a pencil and paper. For them, communication was a visual and embodied practice: even when they weren't drawing diagrams of shoes to aid descriptions they would subconsciously move the pencil expressively over the paper, creating feint scribbles and lines. Certain employees also exhibited expertise through the masterful digitization or miniaturization of particular shoes.

Touch and smell was also an important consideration in data collection: the digital development manager, who, before developing virtual and 3-D printed shoes worked in factories, explained that you could often identify someone involved in manufacturing by the way they would bend and smell a shoe to see how it was made and what it was made of. Indeed, an understanding of these aspects of the shoe was essential for his role where, through the process of rapid-prototyping (3-D printing), he was to replicate the physical feel and look of a shoe as loyally as possible to reduce the need for costly and time-consuming samples. The subjective perception of the affordances of the shoes was also made evident in the way they were dealt with by other employees: where the designer might cut-up existing shoes to experiment and mock-up new ones, the archivist would go to great extremes to carefully wrap, label and preserve shoes for future reference.

While one might argue that attention to non-linguistic features such as materials, objects, images, smells and sounds has long occupied the ethnographer's attention, the growing trend for *multimodality* attests to a need to treat these less as background details or context and more as the very medium through which meaning is made and given to a social setting and situation (Dicks et al., 2011: 230). 'Multimodality', often used interchangeably with the terms 'multimedia' or 'multisensory', is where the data generated during research are not primarily linguistic or numeric (ibid., 228) and the methods used to analyse these data more rigorously pertain to the effect the mode has on the meaning conveyed. As previously mentioned, multimodal analysis has been largely developed as a research practice in the field of social semiotics, which seeks to understand how meaning is made in context/situ, rather than as a sign system with its own internal logic (for example the Saussurian model). It is here that Dicks et al. (2011) and Kress (2011) argue for the compatibility of multimodal and ethnographic research practices, even though their epistemological aims might differ.³³ Furthermore they highlight the value of social semiotics and multimodal analysis for bringing ethnography into the 21st century. Jewitt (2011 [2009]) elaborates that society now has new requirements and access to information and knowledge that raises new possibilities for identity formation and connections across 'local/national and global/international boundaries'. She argues that the

³³ While separating and recognising modes helps reveal how something comes to be meaningful, or, in what circumstances it might mean something different, it is worth considering that multimodal analysis has been developed by linguists, particularly in relation to education studies to understand language and communication. The role of material resources and material affordances has therefore been less well understood. Similarly, the place of embodiment is neglected. The very rigorous and scientific coding required in multimodal analysis is therefore less of a concern in this research which opts instead for qualitative analysis. As Jewitt explains, although multimodality can be understood as a theory, a perspective or as a field of enquiry, it can also be used as a methodological application (Jewitt, 2011 [2009]: 12) It is in this respect that ethnography and multimodality are compatible. This research therefore uses the idea of multimodal analysis to identify the factors involved in the embodiment of cultural meaning in processes of identification, and this includes symbolic resources which are material.

terrain of communication is changing in such profound ways that speech and writing on their own are no longer adequate to understand practices of representation and communication. Consequently, multimodality is gaining pace in terms of understanding how 'image, action, sound and multimodal ensembles feature in this landscape and people's everyday lives' (Jewitt, 2011 [2009]: 3).

So, through studying existing representations, participants' uses of them, and observing the ways shoes are practiced and represented, I was able to gain an insight into the vast range of non-linguistic 'modes'³⁴ through which shoes are perceived, and expertise develops. This became particularly evident when conversing with participants whose use of an often highly specialist vocabulary revealed my own inexperience and ineptitude - further demonstrating the need for knowledge to be embodied through practice in order to be communicated. Sweetman explains that when someone (i.e. the researcher) is placed in a different field he/she becomes self-consciously aware they no longer have a 'feel for the game'. This lack of fit between habitus and field is another way that the habitus is brought to the fore, both for the researcher and the participant (2009: 494). Again, the 'illumination' of the habitus then affords reflection upon it. In relation to this, during fieldwork the emergence of the term 'shoey' became apparent – used to describe those with an exceptional level of embodied knowledge. As such the process of transformation from non-shoey to shoey became a fruitful focus for analysis to help understand how the *habitus* is embodied in and between particular fields of practice. Participants at various stages from novice to expert were therefore interviewed to investigate the processes necessary to acquire cultural capital and distinction, and to understand the role of representations in this transformation.

3.11: What to Wear

While a study of participant transitions helped to reveal processes of embodiment, a consideration of my own journey from novice to academic expert is also important for gaining an insight to my own shifting habitus. This relates to broader discussions about how the researcher reflexively situates themselves within the research, particularly in relation to what they decide to wear. While packing my suitcase for my stay in Street I was acutely aware that my choice of footwear could affect the way participants perceived and responded to me. At the time of research, I owned very few shoes and did not particularly enjoy shoe shopping. I was aware of the semiotic risk of wearing particular shoes without the cultural capital to 'pull off' a look, therefore very few of my shoes were overtly branded and many were relatively safe and plain. I had decided not to wear Clarks shoes during the research since I did not normally wear them and did not want to falsely ingratiate myself. This turned out to be a good decision given my participants extensive knowledge of the Clarks styles, for example, participants perceptions of me would certainly have been influenced if I had worn Un-Loop. In hindsight, I perhaps would have been safe with Desert Boots but opted instead for grey Converse trainers, some warm fleece-lined brown leather boots from high-street store Dune and a plain pair of grey court shoes with a low wedge heel by a niche middle-market brand. In light of my subsequent research, perhaps with the exception of the Converse trainers (which many of the design and marketing creatives wore), my shoes undoubtedly communicated a lack of knowledge and appreciation of design, construction, materials and quality. On reflection, this seemed to work in my favour as it situated my participants as the experts and me as a novice, eager to learn.

Following the first few interviews it became apparent participants were noticing my shoes. I therefore started to acknowledge this during interviews. Without exception, each confirmed that they had at some point looked at them - often in a very inconspicuous way unnoticed by

³⁴ For Jewitt a 'mode' is understood to be a socially shaped and culturally given resource for making meaning. Therefore image, writing, layout, music, gesture, speech, moving image and soundtrack are examples of modes used in representation and communication (Jewitt, 2011 [2009]: 12)

me. While most avoided providing any further insight, some responses suggested their opinions were informed by their role. One designer, for example, said that she had simply been trying to figure out how my boots were constructed. On most occasions, therefore, my footwear choice provided a useful talking point and a valuable insight to participants' various subjectivities. There were however times where my choice of shoes precluded data collection. When I approached one particular range manager - well-known for her extensive collection of luxury shoes – she looked at my tatty boots in a much more conspicuous way. Over the remaining research period, I was unable to find a date or time when she was available. In my field-notes I reflected on whether this would have been the case if I had been wearing Prada.

These sorts of experiences did however give me an insight to the diverse range of footwear tastes within the company; each informed respectively by participants' own sub-fields and specialist knowledge. By the end of the research I had started to wear black suede 'Desert Grace' shoes (a more feminine version of the Desert Boot) not because I felt I should, but because I now identified with what they stood for. I also wore these shoes during the focus groups with Clarks Originals wearers, which, on reflection, helped to blur the researcher/participant distinction leading to a particularly open discussion.

3.12: Data Analysis and Writing-up

The visual and multimodal methods of data collection resulted in a large quantity of data across various media. Nvivo, a multimedia analysis software system was therefore used to store data, and transcribe and code interviews, videos and images. Yet analysis started long before the research was consolidated and coded in Nvivo. Following Glaser and Strauss' approach to grounded theory, Hammersley and Atkinson argue that analysis is 'embodied in the ethnographer's ideas and hunches' during, if not before, the period of fieldwork (2007: 158). During data collection a reflexive approach, using field notes, enabled me to identify these hunches at the time, often manifesting in 'revelatory moments' of temporary clarity (Trigger et al., 2012). The research process therefore became iterative: theories were developed out of the ongoing data analysis and data collection was guided by these theories and revelations (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). As such, Hammersley and Atkinson explain, there is no 'formula or recipe' for data analysis, rather these hunches often become increasingly formalised through field notes, reports and subsequent writing.

The most significant moment for the consolidation of these hunches was in a response to a call for papers for a special issue of the journal *Critical Studies in Fashion and Beauty* about fashion and materiality (Sherlock, 2014). I had developed a hunch that the materiality of Clarks Originals, with their crepe soles, leather uppers and uncomplicated construction, was important for understanding their social and cultural significance. The journal article provided the impetus to explore these data and articulate these connections. During this process, broad themes emerged which seemed to connect, for example the importance of endorsements and seeing shoes on the 'right' feet; the use of shoe-related knowledge and expertise in social settings (cultural capital); and the gradual embodiment of this knowledge in the process of becoming a 'shoey'.

When returning to the thesis, these observations, along with the observations made during the media analysis, then formed the basis for coding in Nvivo. A 'thematic analysis' (Bryman, 2012: 579) was conducted which, although grounded in data, was largely informed by my own instincts and the circumstances of the call for papers. These themes later formed the basis for the thesis chapters. Hammersley and Atkinson justify this approach well in their critique of the often rigorous data coding associated with 'vulgar accounts of grounded theorising strategies'. They explain, 'it is not enough to manage and manipulate the data. Data are materials to think with' (2007: 158). The methods both for data collection and analysis therefore need to fit the research and not vice versa (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, Pink, 2013). In this sense, much of

the analysis happened during the writing process which was followed by an extensive process of editing, re-writing and refining.

3.13: Ethics and Anonymity

One of the main ethical concerns of the research was the question of anonymity. Anonymising participants and sites is generally treated as a 'desirable standard in qualitative research', principally because it is thought to 'ensure confidentiality and [...] minimize the risk of harm to participants' (Tilley and Woodthorpe, 2011: 199). Tilley and Woodthorpe argue, however, that while there will always be a need for anonymisation in certain contexts, particularly with vulnerable participants, the demands of 21st century research means that there are also times when the researcher wants or needs to identify participants, sites or organisations. In these circumstances the principle of anonymity can conflict and undermine the aims of the research. They ask therefore whether or not anonymity in many contexts is still possible or even desirable, or does it need to be 'rethought?' (ibid., 199)

In terms of the present study, while the selection of focus group participants followed a simple sampling frame (see above) and therefore the anonymization of participants was inconsequential, my choice of Clarks and the Desert Boot was *purposive*: they were selected because of their social significance and identity, therefore the company needed to be named. To dislodge the company from the geographical, cultural and historic contexts that gave it meaning would conflict with research aims related to understanding how identity is constituted. To name the company therefore meant that many of the participants, even if given pseudonyms, would be able to recognise themselves and one another (this was made clear in information sheets and on consent forms before consent was given – see appendix C). Participants' positions were often unique and, through the increased efforts to make the company more transparent, many had appeared in publicity material on the internet and in the press. The identity of some of the participants also became critical as the research progressed, for example the senior designer Marijke Bruggink was publically known, and her history, cultural background, experience and design 'hand-writing' (an industry term for the distinctive character of the brand or designer's style) had an impact on the shoes (and perhaps also vice versa), therefore these identifying factors also needed to be acknowledged.

The default agreement at the beginning of the research was therefore that participants in focus groups and at Clarks *would* be given pseudonyms. However, as research and analysis progressed I would go back to significant participants on a case-by-case basis to get permission to use real names. This was another reason for giving pseudonyms to those whose identities were not critical: to maintain contact with all participants after the period of fieldwork would have been too difficult and time consuming. Those I contacted gave consent on the condition I checked with them if I was using anything that might be construed to be contentious – this also provided an opportunity to validate the data. In the event of something proving problematic, yet still needing to be incorporated, the data would be paraphrased and the participant would not be identified.

These issues raise some broader epistemological concerns. As mentioned, one of the main reasons for anonymising participants and research sites is a need for confidentiality. It is the responsibility of the researcher not to cause harm to those participating in the research by publishing something about them which may conflict with their or others' expectations. In organisational research this applies as much to the brand as the individual participants. Anonymising therefore supposedly protects participants from harm and protects the researcher from the responsibility and repercussions of causing harm. Yet it is here that Tilley and Woodthorpe make an important distinction between anonymity and confidentiality. While anonymity refers to the removing or changing of names and other information that might lead to the identification of the participant or site (Giordano et al. [2007:264] in Tilley and

Woodthorpe, 2011: 198), confidentiality involves managing private information communicated in trust or confidence so that disclosure does not cause harm (Walford [2005] in Tilley and Woodthorpe, 2011). Confidentiality therefore 'is a complex process that involves more than merely disguising the identities of research participants or sites.' (Tilley and Woodthorpe, 2011: 198). Name-changing should not therefore release the researcher from their responsibility to use moral judgement when deciding what data is and is not appropriate to use. This is especially pertinent in an ever-evolving internet age where a few keywords typed into a search engine could reveal an identity. One can therefore maintain confidentiality without resorting to anonymity. Furthermore, one might argue that the researcher is likely to consider the relevance and consequences of their research more carefully when the protective blanket of anonymity is removed. Naming participants can therefore encourage the researcher to become more accountable.

Another advantage of naming (where appropriate) is that it reduces a perceived gap and imbalance of power between researcher and research subject. As Hockey explains:

'Anonymising data is an activity that creates distance, that separates participants from researchers and the audiences for whom they write. In the requirement that we assiduously purge interview material of proper names, however, lies a strong hint that the boundary which defines researcher and participant as distinctive populations is far from robust.' (Hockey, 2014: 100)

Naming therefore shapes the researcher more as a co-producer of meaning rather than an objective overseer of meaning-making practices. Reducing anonymity thereby fits with a more collaborative approach as it reduces the perceived (and often misleading) boundaries between researcher and subject. Yet while Tilley and Woodthorpe argue that there is often a strong case for naming individuals and organisations, they acknowledge that it may also create conflict between the autonomy of the participant and that of the researcher (Giordano et al., [2007] in Tilley and Woodthorpe, 2011: 200). As mentioned, when negotiating the research at Clarks, a marketing director requested editorial rights over the research. This was resolved through reassurances that my research questions did not involve critical examination of Clarks as a company. Yet in similar studies where the identity of the company perhaps *is* to be critically scrutinized one might appreciate how naming participants and brands might prevent or compromise valid and impartial research.

3.14: Incentivising the Research: Collaborative and Reciprocal Ethnography

One of my main concerns from the beginning of the research was how to get people to participate. During my first meeting at Clarks Saskia suggested that to gain the participation of the employees I would need to think carefully about what was in it for them. Considering their very busy schedules and deadlines she envisaged them questioning why they should participate. Feeling at this point that Sarah and Saskia were themselves enthusiastic about participating in the research, I asked why *they* wanted to take part. Saskia explained she was very interested in research that was not constrained by the commercial goals she was under pressure to meet in her own role as marketing insight manager. In contrast to Clarks' own research, which has a commercial agenda, my research would be exploratory and inductive and therefore she was interested to see what we might find out. They also both seemed excited by the prospect of adding academic weight to shoes that might lead to them being taken more seriously. Reading back over my notes I was unsure whether they meant they wanted *shoes* to be taken more seriously, or that they, as footwear specialists, wanted to be taken more seriously. I have little doubt it was the former, yet through subsequent conversations with other members of staff the image of 'shoes' and Clarks in the public imagination did seem to have a bearing on the attitudes and identities of those within the industry. While some of the men, for example, were

happy to talk about their professional relationship with shoes they were less at ease talking about their own shoes.³⁵

It seemed therefore that for Sarah and Saskia their motivation stemmed from their own personal interest, a belief that shoes were *worth* studying, their desire to be part of it and the possibility of effecting change. These motivations were far from straightforward and suggested the sorts of incentives these participants were likely to respond to were intangible. As time went on I paid particular attention to each individual's motivations so I could tacitly reciprocate for their participation. For many it was purely the fact the research offered them a rare opportunity to stop and reflect on their practices and the context of their work; many described interviews as an enjoyable change from daily routines dictated by meetings, deadlines and adherence to the corporate commercial agenda - other participants even joined the research due to the favourable reports of their colleagues about the experience and one said the interview had felt like "therapy". For others, there was a perception that because my research would be seen by higher management I might be used as a channel to effect change. As such I was often surprised by the frankness of many conversations.

Perhaps significantly, for some it was the reciprocal rewards of collaboration that seemed to appeal. From my first meeting with Saskia and Sarah there was an emerging sense they were going to be more than just research participants to be interviewed and studied, and this extended to other participants as the research progressed. Participants of course often had their own agenda and needed to keep the company's interests at the forefront of their minds, but in terms of their suggestions and passion for the project they helped shape the research process and therefore felt more like collaborators. This observation provokes reflection on what the relationship between researcher and participant can or should be. Collaborative approaches have implications for what is considered traditional ethnographic research. As Van Maanen points out '[p]reserving the apparent naturalness and everyday character of what is being studied is the stock in trade of ethnographic work on the ground (and in writing)' (Van Maanen, 2001: 240), so if the researcher is inviting participants to co-produce research they are affecting the field they are researching.

In his article 'From "reading over the shoulders of natives" to "reading alongside natives"' (2001), Lassiter argues for the emergence of a more collaborative evolution in ethnographic practice. He suggests that due to an increased consciousness of the relationship between power and the politics of representation in the anthropological 'colonial encounter' the dominant style of ethnographic writing has shifted 'from authoritative monologue to that which represents involved intersubjective exchange between ethnographer and consultant(s)' (2001: 138). Van Maanen acknowledges that we have travelled a long way since the 'so-called cultural island perspective and the one-site, one-tribe, one-scribe conceits associated with such work' (Van Maanen, 2001: 237). They both acknowledge the value of collaboration for reducing the gap between academia and society, and speculate on the benefits and scope for collaborative approaches:

'True collaboration entails a sharing of authority and a sharing of visions. This means more than just asking for consultant commentary, more than inviting contributions that deepen but don't derail, more than the kind of community tokenism that invites contributors to the opening but not to the planning sessions. Sharing authority and visions means inviting consultants to shape form, text, and intended audience. It also means directing the collaborative work toward multiple ends, ends that speak to different needs and different constituencies, ends that

³⁵ This had been the case during sampling for the main research project so it was interesting that popular discourses about shoes and femininity sometimes affected those within the industry as much as those outside it.

might be so differently defined as to have never even been considered by one or more of the collaborating parties.’ (Hinson [2000] in Lassiter, 2001)

Consequently, Van Maanen suggests the status of the participant is evolving ‘from savage to primitive to subject to native to informant to interlocutor to, ultimately, co-author’ (2006: 16). I was aware that many of my participants were university-educated, in many cases accustomed to academic research, reflection and writing. The Clarks archivist Tim, for example, was an honorary research fellow at a top UK university, who, following a PhD in economics and business history, came to Clarks to write their history. While his research had been used for a recent publication about Clarks (Palmer, 2013), due to his workload he had not published under his own name as much as he would have liked. Together, therefore, we wrote a conference paper about the use of Clarks Originals in Jamaica for the *World at Your Feet* international footwear conference in Northampton (Sherlock and Crumplin, 2013). For Tim, the incentive for participating in the research was, in part, the opportunity to re-enter academic discourse. This was equally beneficial for me as I was able to gain his historical insight and get his feedback on some of my early analysis.

Lassiter suggests a number of other benefits to collaborative approaches, for example if participants are allowed to read and respond to the research before it is published (since described as ‘member checking’ or ‘respondent validation’ (Bryman, 2012: 391)), a more accurate depiction of their experiences can be achieved. In this light, the requirement for Clarks to check and comment on the research before publication seemed more of an opportunity than a constraint. Respondent validation also meant that during the course of the research many participants became intellectually invested: they were interested in how it turned out and how it might be used. This evolved tacitly into a reciprocal exchange where, through working together, in many cases both parties felt they were gaining. Participants also started collaborating with the main research project, for example Saskia was invited to Sheffield to give a commercial perspective on some of the ITSF project’s findings and both her and Helen, a senior women’s designer for the main range, were interviewed as part of the *If the Shoe Fits* documentary. In turn, I also contributed some of my data for an exhibition about the Desert Boot held by Clarks at the *Museum of Bath at Work* in 2015.

The collaborative approach also meant the research had more impact. In the social sciences ‘impact’ is generally measured according to the capacity it has had to change public or academic perceptions. Yet impact is as important in organizational/industry research collaborations because through a sharing of ‘authority’ and ‘vision’, positive and productive outcomes both for the researcher and the collaborators can result. As previously mentioned, the Clarks Originals focus group data was made available to some of the participants at Clarks, many of whom had expressed a personal and professional interest in the qualitative accounts of their wearers, which was limited in their own market research. This seemed particularly important at a time when the company was expanding globally and the focus was on sales statistics and product performance - it seemed the individual stories reminded staff of the value of their work. Similarly, the focus group participants seemed empowered by the thought their opinions would be heard by Clarks. They occasionally addressed Clarks directly through the camera when discussing which shoes they loved and felt needed to be continued and which designs, in their (often frank) opinions, had been a mistake. Participants at Clarks had talked about the value of social media and customer feedback platforms for maintaining a dialogue with consumers and an understanding of the brand. The video footage and transcriptions of the focus groups therefore provided a valuable additional representational medium through which I was able to study the dialogue between the producer and consumer in the co-construction of the shoe and brand’s meaning.

In summary, I suggest that this democratic approach to research affords a highly productive research environment. Lassiter explains ‘while dialogue may generate the exchange of

knowledge and meaning, it also deepens commitment, friendship, and mutual moral responsibility' (2001: 144). While this principle certainly applies to the researcher/subject relationship, it also applies to the producer/consumer relationship. Here a comparison can be made with the findings of the research. After choosing a particular style of shoe to follow it became increasingly apparent that the most culturally significant and meaningful shoes tend to be the ones consumers feel they have had a stake in the biography of. This will be discussed further in Chapter Eight.

3.15: Conclusion

In this chapter I have established a research methodology for a study of the relationship between representation and experience of a material artefact in subjective and embodied processes of identification. The biographical approach of Appadurai (1986) and Kopytoff (1986), as typically used in material culture studies, was proposed as an effective method to develop a contextual understanding of how shoes and people make one another and the role representations take in mediating this process. By following the trajectory of a particular shoe I proposed that in contrast to linear and dichotomous approaches I am able to account for the multiple values and meanings which accumulate around a singular object over time, along with the functions it serves for different users at different times and in different places.

The selection of the culturally visible brand, Clarks International, was justified as the location for fieldwork because of its middle market position as supplier of shoes for men, women and children of all ages. In line with Rose and Tolia-Kelly's call to question which things are made visible, how they are made visible and for what reasons (2012), rather than pre-select a particular shoe as a focus for research, observations and interviews were conducted through which an appropriate shoe emerged. Clarks Originals, particularly the Desert Boot – a masculine/unisex style for all ages associated with the everyday rather than special occasions - were used extensively by staff and consumers in multi-modal identity discourses. The trajectories of the Clarks Originals shoes were then traced through the various bodies involved in their biographies (or social lives), from design through to consumption, to understand how the shoes were made meaningful and how these meanings were practiced in embodied processes of identification.

Chapter 4: Defamiliarising the Shoe

4.1: Introduction

As outlined in the methodology, before embarking on empirical research with participants it was necessary to enter the 'field' of representations; first, to bring some of the gendered assumptions identified in the literature review to account; and second, to defamiliarise what I felt I knew about shoes to gain a deeper understanding of how they might be *known* or used to *know* in a broader range of contexts. In this brief chapter I present the findings of this process. Taking Goffman's study of gender coding as a starting point I present a range of representations, gathered mainly from film, television and advertising, to reveal that shoes are one medium through which women continue to be 'ritually subordinated' in the media. In relation to the 'politics of visible objects', discussed by Rose and Tolia-Kelly in the introduction, this partially accounts for the ongoing assumption that shoes are a feminine topic. In contrast to Goffman, however, this analysis extends past their visual representation in advertisements to consider the ways they are talked about and used across a much broader range of media and visual contexts. These data cannot be so easily categorised and demonstrate that shoes, particularly when used as metaphor and metonymy, provide a highly creative medium through which to represent a range of experiences. I will argue that they also provide the material means through which we are able to identify and sensorially engage with representations. Furthermore, these data situate representations of shoes as a significant source of cultural capital and the material means through which it can be embodied, particularly in media directed at male audiences/readerships. These themes lend further insight to the relationship between representations and embodied experience of shoes to be extended in the following chapters in relation to the experiences of participants.

4.2: Method

During the period of a week in March 2012 representations were collected from a range of media sources where shoes were referenced, visually, linguistically or as non-verbal sound (i.e. the sound of heels), irrespective of the length of time or context in which they featured. The sources that were selected for this analysis were informed by the types of media referenced by participants in the ITSF research, as well as those discussed in edited publications such as those by Benstock and Ferriss (2001a), and Riello and McNeil (2006b). Two British men's magazines were selected (*GQ* and *FHM*), along with two women's magazines (*Marie Claire* and *Reveal*) and one broadsheet newspaper (the weekend *Guardian* containing a magazine, entertainment guide and several lifestyle supplements). All of these publications were read from cover to cover and analysed for both visual and textual references. In addition to the publications, two movies from each genre of the releases for that week were selected (family, romance, comedy, action/adventure, animation, drama and thriller) along with 48 hours of television programming on the terrestrial commercial channel *Channel 4* (24 hours mid-week and 24 hours at the weekend). The Lyrics from the top-40 chart singles for that week were also analysed due to the recognition that a significant number of songs reference shoes. In addition to the media sources consumer culture was also recognised as a fertile field for the representation of shoes. An inventory was therefore conducted of all the shoe-related products available at the mid-market department store *John Lewis* in Sheffield. This included departments such as clothing (men's women's and kid's), hosiery, jewellery, beauty, stationery, gifts, haberdashery, fabrics, furnishings, electrical devices, appliances, kitchen equipment, books and toys. The items themselves were analysed along with any packaging and visual merchandising, which sometimes depicted shoes irrelevant of the product's connection with them. Overall, the sources were chosen in order to find a broad range of references to shoes relating to fashion, consumption, news, current affairs, fiction, narrative and lifestyle. The process of categorizing significant styles of representation meant that the semiotic potential of shoes could start to be inventorized. This inventory speaks back to the literature discussed in Chapter Two and forwards to the to the subsequent research with Clarks.

While one might argue for the inclusion of these data in an appendix, the decision to include them at the beginning of the main body of the thesis has been carefully considered. Just as these examples started to change my own mind-set from a focus on the shoe as message to the shoe as medium in processes of being and becoming, so I take the reader on the same journey to unmake conventional understandings of shoes so they and their meanings might be understood afresh in accordance with the empirical research that follows.

4.3: In Goffman's Shoes: Gender Coding in Footwear Advertisements

When one considers empirical studies of media representations and identity, perhaps the most famous is Goffman's *Gender Advertisements* (1979 [1976]). Published originally in the academic journal *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication*, Goffman empirically examined numerous advertisements to reveal ritual and conventional gender displays; displays he convincingly demonstrated expressed themes of subordination and domination prevalent of society at large. In a statement reminiscent of Butler's later assertion that gender is 'constituted through a stylized repetition of acts' (1988: 519), he explained that these themes were both a reflection of social hierarchies and a means through which they were constituted; 'they are the shadow and the substance' (Goffman, 1979 [1976]: 6). He argued that by studying how those who compose and pose for pictures choreograph the bodies and materials available to them to present a meaningful scene, 'one can begin to see what we ourselves might be engaged in doing' (ibid., 27).

'The job the advertiser has of dramatizing the value of his product is not unlike the job a society has of infusing its social situations with ceremonial and with ritual signs facilitating the orientation of participants to one another. Both must use the limited "visual" resources available in social situations to tell a story; both must transform otherwise opaque goings-on into easily readable form. And both rely on the same basic devices: intention displays, microecological mapping of social structure, approved typifications, and the gestural externalization of what can be taken to be inner response.' (Goffman, 1979 [1976]: 27)

Rather than seeing the media as a force that dictates social reality, he saw it as evidence (albeit in a much more stereotypical and exaggerated form) of the ritual idioms and structural forms which pervade life generally - a term he called 'commercial realism'. Through his analysis of 'varied scenic configurations' he therefore started to identify and categorise these forms into six fairly distinct codes, each of which he 'proved' by identifying their exceptions, and each of which, he argued, served to infantilise and subordinate women. The first of these is the 'relative size' with which the subjects of an image are depicted in relation to one another. Here, Goffman suggests size is understood as analogous to social weight: while men are generally depicted to be towering over women (or other men), Goffman suggests exceptional circumstances where the woman exceeds the man in size and/or height to signify their dominance prove this rule. The second is the 'feminine touch' where women are depicted touching themselves or gently stroking or cradling things, in contrast to a prehensile masculine utilitarian 'grasp' - again, exceptions reinforce the rule. 'Function ranking' is his third code in which he identifies instances where men are seen to be taking the lead or executing a task while the woman takes a secondary role. Here, men are often depicted as doers, whereas women (with the exception of feminine tasks such as cooking) are shown watching. In his fourth example, the family is identified as a category of representations in which mother-daughter and father-son bonds are depicted differently: where mothers and daughters are pictured akin to one another in processes where girlhood 'unfolds', boys are seen to be learning to 'push their way into manhood' (ibid., 38). The fifth and perhaps most substantial of Goffman's codes is 'the ritualization of subordination' where women are depicted in inferior poses such as lying down or performing submissive gestures such as head or body canting or a bashful knee bend while often relying on male physical support. In contrast, men are generally depicted upright and in

control of their situation. Finally, Goffman identifies 'licensed withdrawal' as a characteristic apparent in many images of women when pictured with men. Here, the protection of the male (or surrogate parent) gives the female licence to withdraw from the scene around them, for example staring into the distance, twisting clothing, hiding behind objects or covering the face to conceal emotional reactions (ibid., 28-83).

Goffman's codes provide a useful starting point to consider the ways femininity and masculinity are visually associated with and constructed through shoes. If one starts with footwear adverts in the printed media, all of the images sourced during my analysis subscribed to his codes with almost no exceptions.³⁶ In the men's magazines, figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5, for example, generally show men involved in an activity in their shoes. In figure 4.1 the women are subordinated to the background in a non-functional passive role and the remaining images show the men in casual poses in control of their situations. In figure 4.6, the front cover of a shoe supplement for men's magazine GQ almost all of Goffman's codes are evident. The ritual subordination of the woman is demonstrated through her position at the man's feet; she gently cradles his shoe with her feminine touch while canting her head in a sexually submissive way and closing her eyes, thus withdrawing from the scene. In the women's magazines, women are posing in their shoes rather than being engaged in an activity, for example figures 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 4.10 and 4.11. In each of these images the women are submissively canting their bodies or heads in some way, or bashfully bending a knee. Furthermore, in figures 4.9, 4.10 and 4.11 each of the women are lying in a submissively recumbent way.

In the television and film examples some of the same themes emerge. Of the 174 footwear references recorded during the 48 hours of television programming, 106 were in relation to men and a mere 68 in relation to women – perhaps surprising given the stereotypical association between women and shoes. Less surprising however was that this was because men were generally represented as being more active than women – therefore we see more of their shoes *doing* things. Walking was a significant activity for both, but men also did a lot of running, jumping, kicking, driving, tapping (to music) and dancing – their shoes were generally (in order of frequency) sports shoes, fashion trainers and plain work shoes. Whereas, if women weren't walking they were generally dancing, standing still or posing in their shoes which were mostly heels, stilettos, ballet shoes, slippers and the occasional trainer.³⁷ In fact, the lack of representations of female shoes in a sports context was surprising at a time when Olympic publicity for the 2012 games was gaining momentum. This compares to the results of Boydell's analysis of sports shoe advertising which demonstrated that while men were represented as active competitors women were generally seen in contexts of passivity (1996). While Boydell's study was conducted in 1996 and Goffman's in 1976 it would seem little has changed. In popular culture, shoes continue to be one medium through which, in the famous words of Berger, men are seen to 'act' and women to 'appear' (2008).

³⁶ The choice of publication here is of course significant since those chosen were generally aimed at mainstream straight audiences/readerships. Niche publications and those aimed at a LGBT audience would have perhaps revealed examples that break or complicate these codes. In a classroom experiment conducted with undergraduate fashion design students, for example, they were asked to bring in a selection of magazines with which to test Goffman's codes. While most magazines reinforced these codes, the youth sub/cultural magazine *i-D* consistently broke them.

³⁷ Bare feet were also as significant as those which were shod and the absence of shoes suggested a nature/culture dichotomy in representations of women and men. While women's bare feet featured frequently (for example while mopping the floor with an environmentally friendly cleaning product), the only male bare foot was that of an out-of-control drunk festival reveller whose Croc had fallen off whilst receiving medical attention.



Fig. 4.1: Bally shoe advert in GQ, March 2012, pp 52-53.

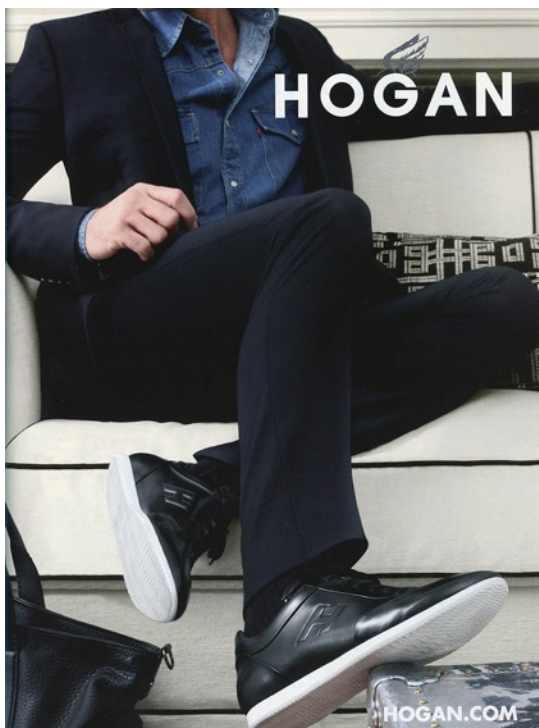


Fig. 4.2: Hogan shoe advert in GQ, March 2012, p 65.

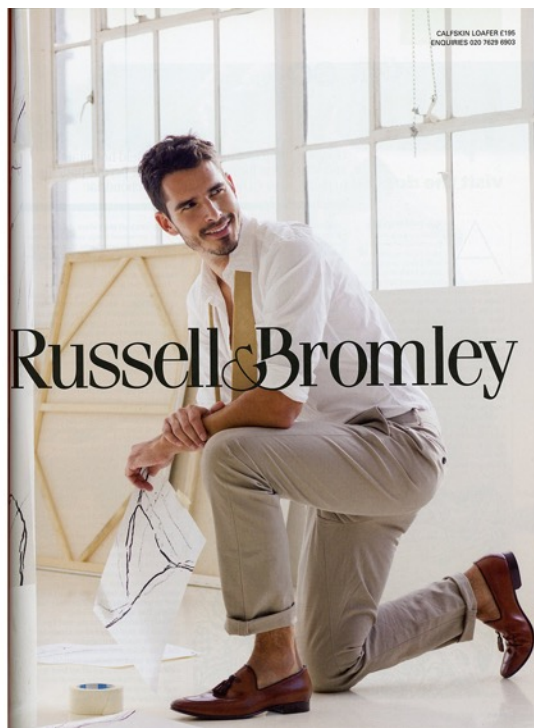


Fig. 4.3: Russel and Bromley advert in GQ, March 2012, p 115.



Fig. 4.4: Aldo shoe advert in GQ, March 2012, pp 90-91.



Fig. 4.5: Style feature in GQ, March 2012, p 230.



Fig. 4.6: Front cover of shoe supplement in GQ, March 2012.



Fig. 4.7: Fashion feature in Reveal, February 18-24, 2012, pp74-75



Fig. 4.8: Ugg advert in Marie Claire, March 2012, p 131.



Fig. 4.9: Hogan advert in Marie Claire, March 2012, pp 8-9.



Fig. 4.10: Salvatore Ferragamo advert in Marie Claire, March 2012, pp 10-11.



Fig. 4.11: Dune advert in Marie Claire, March 2012, pp 123-133.



Fig. 4.12: Contestant on cooking show *Come Dine with Me* introduced in a shoe shop. Aired on Channel 4, March 2012.



Fig. 4.13: Selena Gomez introduced with a close-up of her boots during the opening titles of the 2011 coming-of-age movie *Monte Carlo*, directed by Thomas Bezucha.

4.4: The Close-up: The Shoe as Identifier

In relation to Rose and Tolia-Kelly's comments in Chapter One, these examples therefore help us to understand which shoes are made visible and the politics of visible shoes, yet it does little to sufficiently explain *how* they are made visible. Here I suggest the techniques or practices through which shoes are shown can help us to understand how bodies and shoes merge and make one another in a broader range of contexts. The most common practice from the media examples was the tendency for women to be introduced with a close-up of their shoes - sometimes before even seeing their faces. The cooking contest *Come Dine with Me*, for example, used this technique to introduce the female contestants – who were occasionally also featured shoe-shopping or in front of a shoe collection (fig. 4.12). Similarly, in magazine interviews with female media personalities the author would start by describing the clothes and/or shoes the subject was wearing, from which the viewer/reader was encouraged to use their cultural collateral to infer something about the wearer's taste, character or mood. In the film *Monte Carlo* we are also introduced to the main character (a teenage tomboy about to embark on a journey of self-discovery) with a view of her cowboy boots (fig. 4.13). While these were not stereotypically feminine shoes, the tendency to use them throughout the film to signify the character's reluctance to subscribe to a more stereotypically feminine identity (signified by other female characters' shoes) still conflates the woman with her shoes. This was also the case in the documentary *Mothertruckers*, which followed the lives of several British female truck drivers, and where the dual identity of one character as trucker/aspiring professional ballet dancer was signalled by repeatedly focusing on either her work boots or ballet shoes. One might be unlikely to imagine the same narrative device being used in a documentary about male truckers. Generally, therefore, a focus on the shoes was a stylistic device, part of a suite of symbols, that quickly and (albeit stereotypically) identified a range of women.

While this technique might provide the 'shadow and substance' of the construction of femininity through shoes, it was also used in a range of other contexts. In some cases, the separation of the feet and shoes from the rest of the body was a necessity, for example when filming children, people who wished to be anonymised or when depicting the criminal in a storyline without fully identifying him/her. This was interesting as it suggested that shoes were considered the next best thing to the face in terms of the quick and efficient identification of a broader range of identities beyond feminine stereotypes. Furthermore, while many shoe references oversimplified gender as either masculine or feminine, there were occasional examples where shoes were used to subvert normative gender ideologies. As Kirkham and Attfield explain it can be 'the appropriation of the most binary-coded items which most disturb the established order' (1996: 4). Yet what is common to each of the examples analysed is an emerging theme in which the shoe, no matter what style, starts to stand metonymically for the wearer, in some cases actually replacing them. Consequently, as discussed in Chapters One and Two, the shoe becomes the body, thus it becomes increasingly invisible as a *thing* to be questioned.

4.5: Empty Shoes: Metonymic and Metaphoric Practices

While shoes were often depicted on the foot to metonymically stand for the identity of their wearer, it is the representations of shoes *off* the foot, when empty, that enables me to further develop an understanding of the relationship between representation and experience. Here I suggest *empty shoes* invite the viewer to fill them – thus, identifying with and imaginatively inhabiting the image. This is particularly apparent when one considers the images to be found in the greetings-card section of the department store. Here shoes were used as metonymy to stand for the recipient or the significant life stages or events they are celebrating, for example babies' shoes for the birth of a new baby (fig.4.14), small wellington boots for an infant's



Fig. 4.14: New baby card in John Lewis, Sheffield, March 2012.



Fig. 4.15: Two-year-old birthday card in John Lewis, Sheffield, March 2012.



Fig. 4.16: Football-themed birthday card in John Lewis, Sheffield, March 2012.



Fig. 4.17: Daughter birthday card in John Lewis, Sheffield, March 2012.



Fig. 4.18: Wedding-themed card in John Lewis, Sheffield, March 2012.

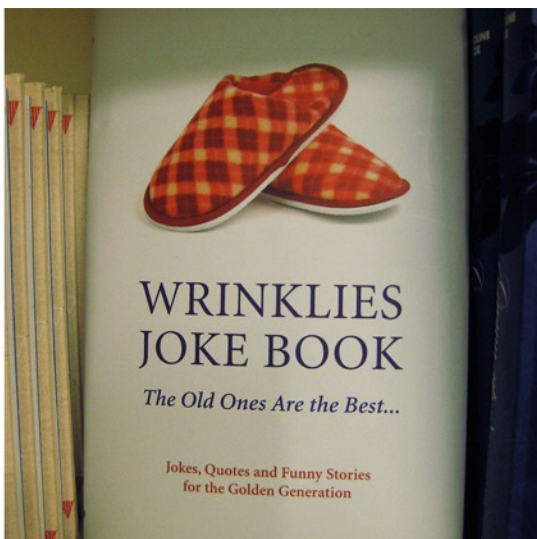


Fig. 4.19: Front cover of the 'Wrinklies Joke book' in John Lewis, Sheffield, March 2012.



Fig. 4.20: Fairy tale-themed sticker motifs in John Lewis, Sheffield, March 2012.



Fig. 4.21: Football-themed sticker motifs in John Lewis, Sheffield, March 2012.



Fig. 4.22: Shoe charm for charm bracelet in John Lewis, Sheffield, March 2012.



Fig. 4.23: Novelty glass with gift box in John Lewis, Sheffield.



Fig. 4.24 and 4.25: Examples of images from interior decoration books using shoes to suggest the identity of the room's occupant. John Lewis Sheffield, March 2012.

birthday (fig. 4.15), football boots or party shoes for adolescents (fig. 4.16 & fig. 4.17) and wedding shoes for a betrothal (fig. 4.18).³⁸ Similarly, the front cover of an 'Old Wrinklies Joke Book' simply featured a pair of slippers (fig. 4.19). Here, particular types and styles of shoes are consumed as totemic resources through which to categorise stages of the life course and classify ourselves and others. This occurs from an early age when children are encouraged to choose between, for example, stickers depicting fairy tale castles and glass slippers, or footballs and football boots (fig. 4.20 and fig. 4.21), and continues through adolescence and into adulthood, again particularly for women, with an extensive number of greetings cards, shoe charms (fig. 4.22) and other shoe-related ephemera (fig. 4.23).

The metaphorical use of empty shoes in a broader range of media further evidences their ability to engage us, often in a highly sensory way and this relates back to the phenomenological understanding of representations as identified by Sobchack in Chapter Two. In an interior decoration book in the department store, for example, the potential habitation of a room was suggested through the casual placement of particular shoes on the floor: fluffy slippers in a bathroom, Converse and Adidas trainers in a boy's bedroom and red-heeled courts in an urban-looking apartment (fig. 4.24 and 4.25). Not only do these shoes help to identify the type of person who might inhabit the space, they also help the consumer to imagine themselves in the scene, for example relaxing in the slippers or kicking off the heels after a night on the town. In television adverts shoes were also used metaphorically to encourage the viewer to identify with a product. In an advert for *Rachel's Yoghurt*, for example, we see the story of a woman returning from work, visually told at foot level: her high-heeled work shoes arrive at the front door, she kicks them off and slips into a pair of fluffy slippers (fig. 4.26). Again, the emotionally affective metaphor for the supposedly relaxing and indulgent feeling of eating the yoghurt relies on the viewer's experience of wearing slippers. Similarly, in an advert for the moisturising shower gel for men, *Dove Men Plus Care* (fig. 4.27), the black and white images with dramatic background music depict the leather of an old pair of boots, gloves and jacket as a metaphor for un-moisturised skin, with the following voiceover:

'Leather dries out, just as men's skin. [Dove Men Plus Care] fights the effects of skin dryness after every wash. [...] Dove Men Plus Care: be comfortable in your own skin.'

Here, the viewer's familiarity with the feeling of dry leather enables them to imagine the moisturising effects of the gel on the skin, furthermore the use of hard-wearing and masculine leather work boots enables the male viewer to identify with a conventionally feminine product. In one final example of the shoe as metaphor for experience, a non-gender-specific *Subaru* car advert (fig. 4.28) features a pile of shoes (men's and women's) with the caption '[b]ecause you have an occasion for every shoe'. By metonymically representing the car as shoe, the advert suggests the Subaru serves as a car for every occasion. This time the advert uses shoes to identify a common problem that many may identify with (too many shoes) to sell a car which metaphorically serves as the solution. Again, shoes provide the material means through which we are able to sensorially engage with a representation to the extent that, in some cases, we are able to inhabit it. As indicated by Lakoff and Johnson in Chapter Two, due to their grounding in experience, this therefore places *metaphoric* and *metonymic* practices as a key means to understand the relationship between representation and experience. While this remains a continuing theme in relation to the experiences of participants in the following chapters, it is addressed specifically in Chapters Seven and Eight.

³⁸ In the case of wedding cards, it was usually the bride's shoes which were depicted; a top hat was used metonymically to stand for the groom.



Fig. 4.26: Shoes used as a metaphor for relaxation in a *Rachel's Yoghurt* advert. Aired on Channel 4, March 2012.

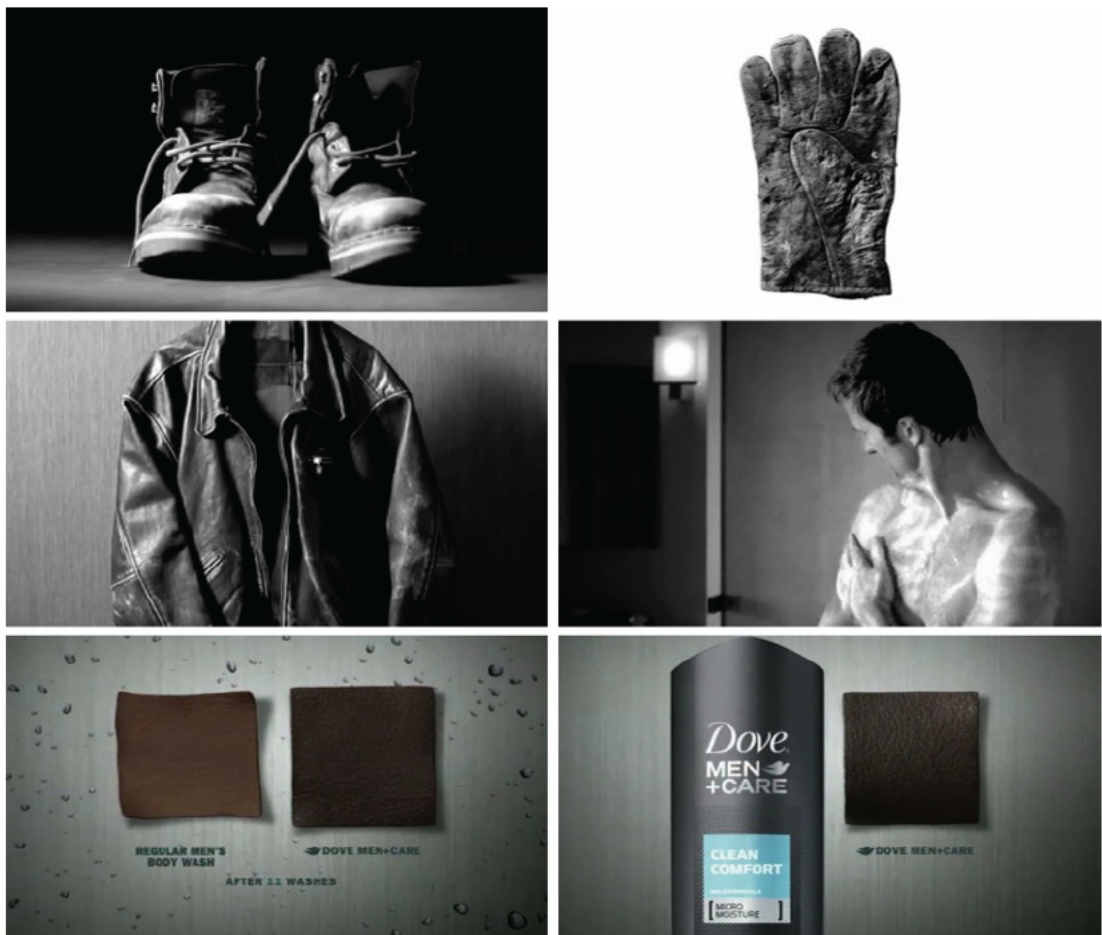


Fig. 4.27: Advert for *Dove Men + Care* using leather work boots as a metaphor for the skin and the hydrating effects of the shower gel. Aired on Channel 4, March 2012.

BECAUSE YOU HAVE AN OCCASION FOR EVERY SHOE.

THE NEW XV CROSSOVER *are you subaru?*

The new XV inspires you to live an even more varied and interesting life, because it's the crossover that actually crosses over, just like you. Every XV features class-leading emissions*, fuel economy* and ground clearance*, as well as Subaru ETC, our groundbreaking aftercare programme. Call 08446 626420 or visit subaru.co.uk


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SUBARU ETC.
EVERYONE TAKES CARE OF AFTERCARE



Subaru XV fuel consumption in mpg (l/100km): Urban from 32.1 (8.8) to 41.5 (6.8), Extra Urban from 47.9 (5.9) to 54.5 (5.0), Combined from 46.9 (6.1) to 50.4 (5.4), CO₂ emissions from 140 to 144 g/km. *XV class consists of four wheel drive, 2.0 diesel equivalent (greater than 130hp) of BMW X1 (140hp), Ford Kuga (140hp), Hyundai ix25 (130hp), Kia Sportage (130hp), Mitsubishi ASX (150hp), Nissan Qashqai (150hp), Skoda Yeti (140hp) and VW Tiguan (140hp). Figures correct at time of going to press and have been based on our competitors published figures. Other version/competitor models with different power outputs, fuel economy and CO₂ figures may be available. In its 2011 Euro NCAP test, the Subaru XV scored 84% for adult protection, 90% for child protection, 64% for pedestrian protection and 86% for safety assistance generating a combined score of 32%. Euro AP data taken from www.euroncap.com - 13th December 2011. Subaru ETC applies to all new Subaru vehicles sold in the UK from 1st February 2012. Retail sales only. Terms and conditions apply.

Fig. 4.28: Subaru advert using shoes as a metaphor to represent the versatility of the car. Featured in the Guardian Weekend Magazine, 11.02.12, p.29.

4.6: Shoes as a Narrative Aid

While the metaphoric examples previously discussed use shoes to lend symbolic insight to an unrelated domain of experience, their connection with their wearers also made them useful resource with which to narrate identities. In the film *Monte Carlo*, for example, the protagonist's cowboy boots frequently reoccurred throughout the film to indicate the character's commitment to her tomboy identity and reluctance to subscribe to a more emphasised femininity. Despite all her adventures the continual presence of the boots showed that she remained unchanged. The significance of the boots to the film's narrative was further reinforced in the publicity poster where they feature prominently (fig. 4.29). In contrast, identity *transitions* were also recounted visually through shoes. In the film *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*, for example, the 2005 story of an underprivileged young black boy growing up in the ganglands of New York City is visually traced through his aspiration and subsequent acquisition of expensive footwear (fig. 4.30). The use of shoes in tales of transformation is well documented and relates back to the greetings cards previously discussed in which different shoes mark life course transitions and events. This will be analysed further in Chapters Five and Six in which participants can be understood to use shoes to map their past, present and future selves.

4.7: Worn Shoes: Endorsement and Shoes as a Source of Cultural Capital

While Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight extend the media analysis to address the metaphoric and metonymic practices of participants in their own processes of being and becoming, Chapters Five and Six also specifically address another theme which the media analysis first alerted me to: shoes as a means to acquire and embody cultural capital. Here, a distinction can be made between the media aimed at women and those aimed at men. While each of the magazines, for example, published features about footwear, they did so in different ways. Where the women's magazines would occasionally feature an image of a celebrity with suggestions of how the reader can find her shoes, generally shoes were shown on their own with details of brand/store and price (fig. 4.31). In contrast, the shoes in the men's magazines were predominantly shown on, or in relation to particular men, or accompanied by a considerable amount of contextual information. In a Footwear supplement for GQ, for example, one page was devoted to each archetypal style of shoe in fashion at the time of publication and in the centre of each page was a character or personality who had worn the style/brand. On the page devoted to trainers, for example, an old black and white image of tennis player Bjorn Borg dominates, with the caption 'One love: Bjorn Borg's Diadoras take him a step closer to his fourth consecutive Wimbledon title, July 1979' (fig. 4.32). Here it is suggested the shoes are linked with Borg's sporting success and a cultural narrative is provided to contextualise the shoes. Similarly, in a feature in FHM about blue sneakers, we learn this about Diadora trainers:

'Diadora. The classic Italian heritage brand is back and it's looking fresher than ever. Although Diadora were founded by apprentice shoemaker Marcello Danieli in 1948, it didn't dip a toe into the sports market until the late '60s when it started making ski boots. Since then, it's been involved with the likes of Ayrton Senna, Seb Coe and legendary footballer Roberto Bettega. The Queen 70 was originally made for hurdler Edwin Moses, and powered him to two Olympic titles. Fact. Diadora Queen 70, £90 from footpatrol.co.uk'

Indeed, *so much* information was featured about the products in the men's magazines that they took at least twice as long to read as the women's. Here, it would seem, an encyclopaedic amount of information was provided with which men could qualify their footwear choices, thus mitigating the risk of getting it wrong.³⁹

³⁹ Indeed, while surveying the men's shoe department of the store the sales assistant remarked on the different ways in which men and women shop. In her experience, while women were often happy to browse by

This is Not a Shoe



Fig. 4.29:

Poster for the 2012 movie *Monte Carlo* clearly depicting the lead character's cowboy boots.



Fig. 4.30: Protagonist Marcus aspiring to own branded sneakers in the 2005 movie *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*, directed by Jim Sheridan. Aired on Channel 4, March 2012.

themselves and were concerned more with style, colour and price, she often found that men were more interested in the history of the brand, where they were made, the materials the shoes were made of and the technical aspects of their construction.



Fig. 4.31: Double page shoe feature in Marie Claire, March 2012, pp 68-69.



Fig. 4.32: Trainers feature in GQ's Shoe supplement, March 2012, p 49.

The tendency to use shoes to identify someone and the risks inherent to this practice was something which was acknowledged and discussed widely in the men's magazines in relation to impression management. In a feature in FHM entitled 'Will your bag get you a job?', for example, readers are informed that '[p]eople judge everything these days. Haircut. Shoes. Flippant comments about Europe's crumbling economy.' In television and film clips, and also anecdotes in the men's magazines, there was a sense that shoes had the potential to reveal a masquerade, for example when their condition or style undermined or contradicted the perceived identity of the wearer.⁴⁰ A plethora of advice and examples were therefore given about how to convey the 'right' or intended image. In the feature about bags, for example, readers are informed that the 'holdall should be carried with Desert Boots, Jeans and a shirt' and the rucksack with 'jeans, T-shirt, trainers and sweatshirt'. Furthermore, in several features brogues and boat shoes emerged as staple components of a man's wardrobe and a safe choice to make a good impression. Media and sports personalities were also presented as exemplars who use shoes well to manage others' impressions of them. Historical figures such as Elvis and Lucien Freud were praised for their shoe choices, and in GQ's '50 Best-Dressed Men of 2012', actor Benedict Cumberbatch is identified for his 'beautiful suede brogues' and Rolling Stones Drummer, Charlie Watts, for his 'tailored suits and bespoke shoes'. Furthermore, the effortless style with which individuals carried off a look was held in high regard. Danny Wallace, the contributing editor for GQ, for example, makes this comment about lead singer of the Stone Roses Ian Brown:

'It's not what Ian Brown wears – it's the way Ian Brown wears it. It's the take-it-or-leave-it. It's the haggard swagger. It's beyond confidence and into something else. He could wear a pair of plimsolls as earrings and part of you would wonder if you should, too.'

Held in equally high regard were lesser known individuals with an expert knowledge of fashion and shoes. Indeed, possessing a lot of knowledge about brands, clothes and shoes was presented as something to aspire to. 'Skate brand guru' Tom Henshaw, for example, appeared in FHM to give his own style advice and when asked what keeps his ideas fresh he endorsed others with an extensive fashion knowledge:

'One of my favourite blogs is my friend Gary Warnett's – garywarnett.wordpress.com. His encyclopaedic knowledge is phenomenal, whatever he's into he has to know all about, whether it's music, films, clothes, footwear, sub-cultures, etc. Always an insightful and educational read.'

In the media analysis shoes were therefore depicted as a means through which to acquire and display cultural capital. This relates back to sociological research already conducted on masculine experiences of trainers (eg. Kawamura, 2016), yet highlights the role a *range* of shoes play in achieving a sense of distinction. As Kawamura explains in relation to sneakers, practices of endorsement cater to a desire to '[chase] the ideal image of a socially successful and a physically powerful male' (ibid.). Where Cumberbatch and his 'beautiful suede brogues' are concerned, we might also add the *intellectual* male to this list of aspirational characters. The analysis therefore starts to show the ways representations of shoes, particularly when pictured on the feet of significant people, provide a key means through which cultural capital is acquired, and the shoes provide the means through which to materially embody and display it. Again this provides further insight to the relationship between representations and embodied experiences of shoes which will be further analysed in Chapters Five and Six in relation to participants'

⁴⁰ In a GQ article about American music mogul Quincy Jones, for example, musician Bono recounted the time he and Quincy had visited the Vatican to meet the Pope, who, to their delight, was wearing burgundy wingtip "pimp shoes" with light, tan-ribbed socks.

experiences of endorsement and the embodiment of cultural capital through practices of representation.

4.8: Conclusion

In summary, the media and department store analysis provided the opportunity to start to recognise some of the significant practices of representation that enable us to know and understand ourselves and others through shoes. While media representations are often understood to structure experience, as Goffman argues they are both its 'shadow' and 'substance' (1979 [1976]: 6). Following Goffman therefore I proposed that by analysing these images we can start to understand what 'we ourselves might be engaged in doing' (Goffman, 1979 [1976]). As will be further investigated throughout the thesis in relation to the everyday experiences of participants, when represented as metaphor and metonymy shoes help us to understand identity, particularly in relation to gender and the life course. Subsequently, their material connections with all ages and occasions afford the construction of identity narratives. Shoes and their representations also present an opportunity for the acquisition, embodiment and display of cultural capital – an important part of the process of social identification. Furthermore, when presented on the feet of particular media or sports personalities we can start to see the way, through practices of representation, shoes can be understood to symbolically 'make' their wearers and vice versa – further complicating distinctions between objects, images and bodies. Finally, while the media survey did identify dominant gender discourses, it is not until we consider the experiences of participants that we are able to understand how these discourses are embodied, negotiated and challenged through shoe choice, design and practices of representation.

In the thesis introduction I argued that, like Magritte's pipe, the extensive symbolic use of shoes in these contexts served to conflate image and object. Furthermore, their metonymic use also made it increasingly difficult to distinguish the image and the object from the bodies they were used to represent. In line with Miller's observation of the 'humility of things' I suggested this has rendered the shoe increasingly invisible as a *thing* to be questioned. A main aim of this chapter was also therefore to expose myself to so many representations of shoes that I could start to look past the messages they convey, first to really 'see' them, and second to understand them as *medium* in processes of being and becoming. After completing the media and department store analysis it became evident that representations of shoes were far more prevalent than I had first expected. I started to see them everywhere. The Macmillan cancer advertisement on my way to work, for example, featured an illustration of a pair of adult's shoes pointing towards a pair of children's shoes as metonymy and metaphor for a parent telling a child they had been diagnosed with Cancer (fig. 4.33); the recruitment advert for the Army at my local bus stop used a battered pair of army boots to narrate the adventures experienced during military service (fig. 4.34); a street advertisement for Hardy's wine, established in 1854, visual and linguistic metaphors were combined with a dusty old pair of boots and the caption 'The next generation has more than just barrels to fill', signifying the heritage and prestige of the brand, now in its fifth generation (fig. 4.35); and an advertisement for St. Luke's Hospice uses a pair of fluffy pig slippers to represent a place where patients are able to relax and be themselves (fig. 4.36). When used as symbolic metonymies, shoes, it would seem, offer a particularly useful way to explore the 'critical links between everyday experience and the coherent metaphorical systems that characterise [...] cultures' (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 40). The following chapters therefore seek to extend an understanding of these practices beyond the media in relation to the experiences of both the producers and consumers of shoes, both of whom can be understood to make themselves and others through shoes.

**Chapter 5:
The Material and Semiotic Affordances
of Clarks Originals Shoes**

This is Not a Shoe

5.1: Introduction

'[No object] changes us more significantly than shoes.' ... '[Footwear] changes not only our contact with the world but our perception of it. And through the meanings which have been assigned to it, it affects how we relate to others socially.' (Tenner, 2004: 51)

In his book *Our Own Devices* (2004) Tenner uses shoes to help us understand the co-constitutive dialogue between people and things (or technologies). He argues that while we design and create shoes as commodities, ascribe them with meaning and continue to shape and mould them as artefacts through everyday use, shoes also create us: they change and mediate our physical encounters with the landscape, and, through their meanings, our social encounters with those around us (ibid., 51). Therefore, as both cultural signifier and material artefact, shoes provide the '*existential ground of culture and self*' that Csordas explores in *Embodiment and Experience* (2003). In contrast to the dualistic approaches discussed in the literature review, while Tenner therefore importantly acknowledges the materiality of the shoes, the bodies and the environments in which they are used, he also acknowledges their social and cultural meanings.

Using data gathered with male and female Clarks Originals wearers this chapter starts to explore the relationship between the materials and meanings of shoes – or the 'materiality of signification' (Keane, 2005: 186) - in everyday practices of identity, identification and transition. Building on the research discussed in the literature review, notably Gibson's ecological psychology (Gibson, 1979: as advanced by, Ingold, 2011a, Windsor, 2004, Michael, 2000) the chapter considers 'situated bodily practice' (Entwistle, 2000b) to advance the semiotic understandings of shoes to include materiality, the body and the subjective perception of their wearers in social contexts. This approach starts to demonstrate the nuanced ways in which wearers narrate an authentic sense of self and negotiate dominant structures or discourses *through* shoes - particularly in relation to gender, consumer culture, the environment and the supposedly homogenising effects of globalisation. The chapter starts with the wearer because it was during focus groups that the relationships between the meanings and materials of the shoes in embodied processes of identification became most clearly apparent. The perspectives of those featured in this chapter, in conjunction with the practices and discourses revealed in the media survey, therefore set the scene for the remaining study where the experiences of those associated with other aspects of the shoes' biographies are explored. The subsequent chapters therefore develop a deeper analysis of the various ways shoes and users can be understood to make one another, and how this process is mediated through representations.

5.2: A Material Approach to Semiotics

In the literature review I established that while semiotic studies are useful to help us understand signifying practices and visual communication - one may even identify a 'language of footwear' (Brydon, 1998: 5) – they do not tell us the whole story of footwear choice (why people choose particular shoes and reject others). How, for example, do the cultural meanings of shoes or items of clothing impact the consumer? While a consumer might be visually literate, fully understanding the cultural connotations of a pair of shoes, and may indeed desire the identity the shoes promise; this certainly does not mean that they themselves would feel 'right' or convincing wearing them. As previously mentioned, many of the *ITSF* research participants, for example, spoke of an inability or unrequited longing to wear a particular brand or style of shoe.⁴¹ So what has to happen and where do people need to be (in terms of time and place) to

⁴¹ Many of the reasons for these unsuccessful transformations were attributed to the materiality of the shoes, the bodies attempting to wear them and the lifestyles or landscapes in which they were worn. Ageing bodies, for example, could no longer wear the shoes of their youth; an active mother may no longer be able to wear

make the decision to buy and feel physically and socially comfortable wearing a particular pair of shoes?

In the literature review I also identified the value of Mauss' *Techniques of the Body* (1973 [1935]) to understand the way cultural representations are embodied and reproduced through bodily practices like walking. Yet I suggested that his neglect of the materiality of the shoes that enable a style of walking, and the bodies and environments in which it was performed (or not) might lead one to assume that through popular representations the media and capitalist culture dictates while society passively follows. Drawing on Bourdieu (1977) and Gibson (1979), I explained how Ingold used the concept of 'affordances' to return materiality to embodied experience, where the knowledge obtained through perception is practical; we will only pick up or see what we need to help us function on our own journeys and in our own environments (Ingold, 2000). Windsor then helped to extend this principle to the study of cultural meaning, which, when applied to footwear, suggests that rather than asking what shoes mean we should ask what their meanings afford a particular individual or 'niche' group: 'Hence, interpreting a sign becomes not a matter of decoding, but a matter of perceiving an affordance' (Windsor, 2004: 183).

Here, I turn to the present data to ask what are the material and semiotic affordances of Clarks Originals shoes from the perspective of their wearers, and what role do they play in processes of identification? Furthermore, what sorts of dialogues happen between objects, representations and bodies that cause particular shoes to become 'visible' (or fashionable) and transformative for certain people or groups? In other words, what do the shoes, their meanings and materials, *do* for their users? As one of my participants insightfully reflected:

"[I]t's kind of where the shoe gets you to I suppose, and I don't mean that in terms of walking, in a sense, I mean image-wise and psychologically where it puts you."
(Joe)

5.3: Embodying Cultural Representations: 'Madchester' and Looking Authentically 'Normal'

As previously discussed, to analyse the semiotic and material relationship between shoes and wearers in the construction or maintenance of particular identities it was necessary to find a culturally meaningful shoe or brand to focus on. During research at Clarks their Originals sub-brand emerged as a case study due to the shoes' cultural visibility and their tendency to be used by staff to explain aspects of the brand's identity. Following my research at Clarks I conducted two focus groups with Clarks Originals wearers - one with men and one with women - all self-selecting and currently residing in or near Sheffield in the north of England. The men's focus group consisted of four men in their 30s and it is data from this group that provides the principle focus for the first part of this chapter. As mentioned, participants had been asked to bring or wear a pair of their Originals, which they were asked to speak about in an ice-breaking exercise. Two of them, Joe (fig. 5.1), a local government officer originally from Lancashire, and Tom (fig.5.2) a sales rep originally from York, wore brown leather Desert Treks. Conor, a craftsman and university lecturer from Ireland, wore a russet leather Desert Boot (fig. 5.3), and Kristian, a university lecturer from Austria, wore black suede Wallabees (fig. 5.4) – all classic designs.⁴²

impractical shoes; and the hilly or cobbled Sheffield terrain (where the research was conducted) and northern climate may compromise the desired style. But this still does not fully account for comments like 'they just don't feel right' or 'they're not me'.

⁴² Each participant sent me photographs of their shoes after the focus groups. The differences in the way each of them had situated the shoes and the details they had chosen to highlight were relevant in themselves for understanding their own embodied subjectivities.



Fig. 5.1: Joe's Desert Treks.



Fig. 5.2: Tom's Desert Treks.



Fig. 5.3: Conor’s Desert Boots.



Fig. 5.4: Kristian’s Wallabees.

During introductions it quickly became apparent that they had all been attracted to the shoes through the Manchester Indie music scene, which originated in the North of England in the 1980s–1990s.⁴³ Although they were all strangers, it was this connection that very quickly enabled a sense of cohesion within the group, often manifesting in amusing anecdotes and banter.⁴⁴ Named ‘Madchester’ the alternative music genre rebelled against previously ostentatious and fantastical styles such as glam rock in the Seventies, new romanticism of the eighties and the placeless manufactured pop of the Nineties. Breaking with convention, many of the Madchester characters whose music and narratives were locally rooted in a particular time and place portrayed an authentic sense of coolness associated with ‘otherness’ and non-conformity (Wiseman-Trowse, 2008). Author and Madchester aficionado Richard Luck paints an evocative picture of an ideology materialized through mobility, music and clothing:

‘It was about growing your hair really long and then cutting it with the aid of a bowl. It was about bugging up your posture, hunching up your shoulders, scuffing your feet on the floor when you walked and swinging your arms like you were Galen from *Planet of the Apes*. It was about dancing like a monkey.[...] What’s more it was about owning albums such as Happy Mondays’ *Bummed and Pills ‘N’ Thrills & Bellyaches*, Inspiral Carpets’ *Life*, James’ *Gold Mother* and the Stone Roses’ er... *The Stone Roses*. [...] It was about wearing outsized T-shirts, huge hooded tops and bog-awful beanie hats. It was about sporting labels like Reebok, Kangol and Joe Bloggs. It was about wearing a pair of jeans with 19 inch bottoms that threatened to trip you up every time you took a step. It was about learning to like a city despite its shite weather, hideous 1960’s architecture and absence of certainties. [...] And it was about realising the whole world was against you and then saying: “OK, let’s have it!” (Luck, 2002: 10)

According to the participants the Clarks Originals classic styles were part of this picture. They talked about glimpsing the shoes on bands at gigs, on television, in music magazines and on album covers (fig: 5.5), seeing them on friends and subsequently recognizing them in the shops or actively seeking them out. As a precursor to what might now be termed ‘normcore’, Joe, 31, explained how the genre made it fashionable to look ‘normal’ again, and Clarks Originals with their simple classic style and natural materials epitomized this normality – the shoes became special for the very reason that they weren’t very special, yet they were distinctive enough to be identifiable to those in the know:

“I’ve never really had much of an identity [but] my flares with a pair of Desert Treks meant I knew that somebody could look at me and go ‘there’s a man that listens to the Stone Roses and the Charlatans” [laughter]. (Tom)

There was a sense amongst participants that these bands wore what they wanted, what was practical and what fitted with the music and the sometimes bleak northern climate and terrain. There was a perceived sense of authenticity here that they all identified with. Tom, 37, explained that no one had ever sat him down and told him that Desert Treks were synonymous with the Indie scene. It seemed to be the fact they were not intentionally marketed in association with the music genre that appealed so much to these wearers. Furthermore, the shoes were actually quite difficult to get hold of.

⁴³ This was represented on the postcards with images of *Oasis* singer Liam Gallagher wearing a pair of Desert Boots (in collaboration with his clothing brand Pretty Green), and Richard Ashcroft of *The Verve* wearing Clarks Wallabees on the front cover of their 1997 album ‘Urban Hymns’.

⁴⁴ While there was a sense that the shoes provided a bond between participants, as they learned about one another’s experiences, taste in music and motivations for wearing the shoes a hierarchy of expertise seemed to emerge. Tom and Joe’s continued commitment to the shoes and their knowledge of the cultural ideologies they represented seemed to afford them a cultural capital that meant they dominated much of the discussion. The role of shoes in intersubjective power relations will be discussed further in Chapter Six.



Fig. 5.5: Richard Ashcroft wearing Clarks Wallabees on the front cover of The Verve's 1997 album *Urban Hymns*. Image courtesy of Virgin EMI.

Because the Originals styles are not widely sold in Clarks stores, Tom and Joe had at times gone to quite extreme lengths, in terms of distance and effort, to find a store that sold the exact style they coveted. Although inconvenient, they deemed this preferable to knowing everyone would be wearing them. There was a sense of satisfaction and pride that, rather than being sold them, they had recognized these connections themselves and the shoes seemed to become more valuable the more hard-won they were.

Kristian, 33, described a kind of epiphany, a sudden awareness that he knew he had perceived something significant that he identified with; the shoes had a resonance that made them feel 'right' and that added to the way he wanted to represent himself.

"You make that connection yourself, that again has to do with that [you make] the effort, [you have] the realization: what's the picture here? Like there's the shoes, and what's the picture around it? [...] So, when I saw them in Manchester it was completely clear like, so many parts all of a sudden came together it was like [...] there is a resonance there that I find inherently attractive right? I like the music that they're associated with, you know. Settled in the North of England, so there's

that, you know. There's a lot of different things that come together and you think well that adds to how I'd like to represent myself."

It seems he needed to see the bigger picture in order to ascertain how the shoes could contribute to his own identity in what might feel like an authentic and convincing way. Indeed, Windsor cites Chimero (2001) and Heft (1990) to propose that the perception of a sign is not just the result of a singular object or event, but a complex of different sources of 'stimulus information' – information that is intermodal and that extends beyond the visible sign (Davidson, 1993, in Windsor, 2004: 184).⁴⁵

An awareness of the cultural connotations and connections therefore was not enough for Kristian to buy and wear the shoes himself. Originally from Austria he moved to Manchester in the 1990s and although he had always admired the shoes he had never before worn them, partly because the suede style he coveted simply didn't make 'sense' in the snowy Alps. It was this transition between *places* that provided the impetus for him to wear the shoes. The shoes afforded this cultural transition, but paradoxically, were it not for the move he wouldn't have felt right wearing the shoes. He explained it in the following way:

"I don't know, like it's ok to wear, I don't know, flip-flops on the beach, but it's not ok to wear flip-flops in church, right? So, wearing Clarks in the Austrian Alps seemed to me a bit like wearing flip-flops in church, whereas once you get to the beach it makes sense: you think of flip-flops, it makes complete sense. Once I got to Northern England and I walked past them: 'ah that makes complete sense, now that I'm here – probably will be here for a while - that makes sense, with the music and everything else on top of it...' [...] so this is a very English thing to do 'I'm in Manchester, you know, I almost have a swagger, I need to buy some Originals' [laughs][...]" (Kristian)

But while all the male participants spoke evocatively about the shoes 'making sense' or feeling 'right' and the importance of perceiving the bigger picture to understand where they and the shoes fitted,⁴⁶ it is not until we consider the shoes in *movement* that we are able to understand how these values are embodied. Hockey *et al.* cite Warnier (2001) to argue that 'it is in movement – or through motricity – that embodied subjectivities come into being' (Hockey *et al.*, 2013: 4.10) and like Luck's earlier description of the feet-scuffing and arm-swinging, Kristian's use of the word 'swagger' is a clue to how this happens.

While reminiscing about times spent dancing to his favourite bands in pubs, Tom eloquently expressed the interconnectedness of all these influences through movement and mobility. The following quote seemed to clinch this notion of cultural embodiment. Recognizing the connections between the music and the shoes I asked if he needed to wear his Desert Treks when listening to his favourite music:

"I could listen to it, but if I wanted... proper dancing to [Joe agrees] like particularly if it's like the Stone Roses, the Charlatans, like proper Indie, you can't dance like I used to – a, I've given up smoking, but the best dancing ever was cigarette in hand, pair of flares on, pair of Desert Treks and then you'd just kind of shuffle around the dance floor in the vague hope that some woman goes 'ah yeah' [laughter] It never happens cos you always think that you're cooler than you are but... [laughter]. But

⁴⁵ While music might lend the shoes authenticity, the shoes also contribute to what Wiseman-Trowse describes as a 'network of meaning' that enables an authentic experience of the musical performance (Wiseman-Trowse, 2008: 52).

⁴⁶ Other factors included the location, the music, the heritage and reputation of the brand, seeing or remembering the shoes on friends or family members and the ways the shoes fitted with the clothes they liked to wear.

there was something about when we were younger and you could smoke inside, about a pair of these, and a pair of flares and a cigarette on the go, and the Stone Roses or anything like that bangin' out – or Shaun Ryder singing *It's Gotta be a Loose Fit*, or whatever, that was just absolutely mint. You know? There was not much better really. And you could get away with it if you were wearing like Adidas originals, like a pair of Sambas or something like that, but other than that it just wouldn't be right." (fig.5.6)

Both participants talked about the shoes affording a 'shuffle' or a 'swagger' that might be associated with the 'baggy' Madchester movement and characters such as the Gallaghers and Ian Brown.⁴⁷ In this way the shoes with their flat bottomed, slightly sticky crepe soles allowed them to embody the cultural references by effecting a mobility associated with the geographical location, cultural heritage and music that would have been out of place elsewhere and that – aside from the Adidas Sambas – would presumably also be difficult with other, differently designed shoes and soles. Consequently, through representation and wear, within a cultural and geographical context, the shoes reified the Madchester ideology; simultaneously, their place in the Madchester story has made them culturally significant. Brydon explains that '[n]arratives invent significant objects, and those objects in turn solidify experience and translate desire into material form, thus making possible history and memory'. She goes on: '[n]arrating shoes can be another way of narrating the self by means of shoes' (Brydon, 1998). So how do these significant shoes narrate the self and make history and memory, and how significant is the materiality of the shoes in this process?

5.4: Sticky Soles, Narrative Identity and Materialising Memory

In his critique of material culture studies Ingold suggests that studies of materiality are often missing the materials: 'You would think [...] that as anthropologists we would want to learn about the material composition of the inhabited world by engaging directly with the stuff we want to understand' (2011b: 20, see also 2007a). It is therefore necessary to turn to the materials themselves and the affordances they offer narrative identity and memory, while being careful to maintain the connection with their cultural meaning. While talking about the parts of his Desert Treks he particularly liked, Tom identified two significant features: the seam down the middle of the upper, which you'd "want to see" poking out from beneath a pair of flairs, and the "faint haze of hair that gathers around the sole". This 'faint haze' provoked an interesting conversation about the stickiness of the crepe rubber sole, a unique feature of the Clarks Originals range:

"[S]ince I've had these for a while I'm intrigued by the stickiness of the sole and how they get all fluffy and how impossible it is to clean all the shit off. I found some old girlfriend's hair on these when I put them on today [participants laugh]. She's been out of my life for a while but her hair is still stuck on my shoe, so it's like... [shakes head disapprovingly]." (Conor)

Participants joked that it sounded like he had buried his girlfriend under the patio and the shoes would provide the perfect DNA traces. Again, they returned to this joke towards the end of the focus group when Conor commented he would prefer it if they weren't so sticky. This provoked strong disagreement from the other participants. One argued that he wouldn't have had that "fond memory of the one that got away", he responded that the police must think it's their

⁴⁷ As Tom explains, there were other brands that afforded this swagger, notably Adidas – frequently seen on the feet of musicians. A comparative study of the various 'Madchester' styles (beyond the scope of this thesis) would give a greater insight to the specific affordances that enable these types of sub/cultural embodiment.



Fig. 5.6: Tom's Desert Treks as they appear on the pub floor.



Fig. 5.7: Traces of Heaton Park on the crepe soles of Joe's Desert Treks.

lucky day when a suspect arrives in Originals: “they’re probably like ‘yeah, he’s got six years-worth of data on his shoes on his feet’”. While participants Conor and Tom joked about the potential of the shoes to be used as evidence in a criminal prosecution, Joe sat quietly, studying the soles of his Desert Treks before announcing:

- Joe: “I’m pretty sure that’s mud from Heaton Park, I’m pretty sure it is.”
Tom: “Is it? So that’s actually Stone Roses touched...”
Joe: “Stone Roses mud”
Tom: “*Audio-touched* Stone Roses mud”

Disbanded in 1996, Manchester’s Heaton Park was the homecoming location for the Stone Roses legendary 2012 reunion world tour. Joe had been lucky enough to get tickets for the concert and the tone of the revelation about the traces on his shoes – matched with participant Tom’s appreciation of this fact – highlighted the significance of this event. They joked that this could be something Clarks could capitalize on by offering a limited-edition Stone Roses shoe complete with mud and a printed lemon on the sole (the Stone Roses’ emblem). Although the participants treated this observation with amusement it was clear that for Joe the traces that had accumulated on the soles of the shoes (fig. 5.7) provided a connection with one of his favourite bands. Much as a pilgrim might save a trace of a sacred location or religious icon, the shoes provided a similar function for this Stone Roses fan.

This conversation put other references to the visible wear of the shoes into context. They had earlier all been in agreement that the Desert Treks and Desert boots looked better when they had been around for a while, with a “few creases and scuffs round the edge”. The Desert Treks worn by participants Joe and Tom had clearly not been polished and there was a sense it would have spoiled them if they had. Tom had worn his Desert Treks to his own wedding and had felt the need to keep them as a result. Having worn Desert Treks continuously since his early twenties he had worn out quite a few pairs and the process of divestment seemed difficult for him: “it’s always a bit of a wrench to get rid of them when you’ve worn them in and gone through so much with a pair”. It would seem that while the traces of the environment adhered to the soles of the shoes, so did the memories associated with those places and times. The materiality of the shoes afforded remembering, storying and recollection.

But why were the shoes present for all these significant events in the first place? Certainly, the cultural meaning of the Desert Trek and its associations with the music would imply they were a socially appropriate thing to wear for the concert. In addition to this though, three of the four participants talked about the versatility of the shoes. Joe explained that because they were comfortable to walk or stand in for long periods of time they had been good for sightseeing or watching bands. So, as well as accompanying him to music events he had kept photos of himself wearing them in New York, Amsterdam and other holiday locations. The versatility and comfort of the shoes seemed to ensure their continued presence at significant events, while the materials, including the leather uppers and the sticky soles, showed the wear and attracted the traces of the environment essential for the memories to be materialised.

5.5: Materiality, Authenticity and Aura

In this way, the narratives of the shoes, their materials, the social interaction they afforded and the mental/physical effort involved in acquiring and feeling ‘right’ wearing them all contributed to a perceived sense of authenticity which was embodied by these male wearers and appreciated by others ‘in the know’. Through history and association, visible through the materials and patina of the shoes, they became more valuable to their wearers over time. Yet this value didn’t just apply to the patina generated by the wearers themselves, but also to the history and biography of the materials before they were even worn.

The significance of the materials in this process of value creation became even more apparent during a subsequent interview with a Desert Boot collector called Pete (fig. 4.8). Pete was thirty-three and originally from Sheffield although had grown up in a little village in Lincolnshire that “no one would have heard of”. He was well-travelled and had lived in many different locations but having previously studied at a local University felt drawn back to Sheffield where he met and settled with his wife. Pete came from a family of “very successful scientists”, a profession that despite family expectations he had no interest in pursuing. Instead, he studied food sciences and embarked on a career as a chef. After living and working abroad for a few years he came back to the UK and moved into retail for a high-street menswear label before then getting a job at the local Clarks store where he was promoted to a full-time team leader. After a few years, he shifted to a part-time position so he could start a law degree. However, the prohibitive cost meant he was unable to continue with the course and he consequently returned to his original position. He enjoyed working at Clarks because he had built a good relationship with his colleagues and felt the company and his area manager nurtured the development of the employees and listened to their ideas.

Pete had worked at the store for six years when I met him which was the longest he had stayed with a company. While Pete’s path to Clarks was perhaps not the career choice he was planning, there was a sense the role fitted him well. He was introduced to me by the manager as the Desert Boot ‘expert’, not because he was responsible for selling the range (to his disappointment the store was one of the ones that didn’t stock Originals), but because he collected them. He took pleasure in discussing the shoes with customers and while he didn’t consider himself a salesman (he disliked hard sales techniques) he felt he had a genuine enthusiasm and knowledge of the shoes, which people picked up on. Consequently, many of his casual conversations about Originals would often result in online sales, made through the store.

In many ways Pete exemplified Simmel’s theories of fashion and identification: while he liked to think of himself as different (for example proudly recounting the time he lived in New York, wore brogues and dressed like ‘landed gentry’ *before* it was fashionable) he had developed an extensive awareness of classic masculine sartorial rules, particularly associated with formalwear, and enjoyed identifying with others who shared similar specialist knowledge. This knowledge had built up over a long period of time and came from a range of places including Bernhardt Roetzel’s book *Gentlemen: A Timeless Guide to Fashion* (2009) (fig. 5.9), which included detailed instructions about the correct way to wear one’s clothes (fig. 5.10), as well as various other magazines and blogs. He explained that he found it “smugly empowering” to know what shape of collar, jacket, lapel and tie looked “right”; where the buttons should sit and which buttons should be undone, adding, “maybe it’s a male thing, it’s just... lists and inside knowledge are just really important.” On reflection, he was embarrassed to admit what had become a bit of an obsession, adding that when his wife started buying him *Chap* magazine (fig. 5.11) – written by people “who really know their stuff” but in an ironic “British tongue-in-cheek way” - he cringed and thought he could probably “back off a bit”.

For Pete, Desert Boots were a part of this knowledge. They were *the Original*. To wear the Clarks Desert Boot suggested you understood their significance because, he explained, “[it’s] the quintessential Original to me, you know that’s the ‘Chuck Taylor’, so if I’m going to buy into that range, I’m going to buy into it fully and get the original one.” This appeal was something Clarks were well aware of. When asked to describe the Originals customer, Rosie, the group head, explained it was less about an identity and more about a shared attitude: “[...] it’s about somebody who kind of values authenticity, they value credibility, they value creativity and they want things to be simple” adding that is wasn’t possible to pinpoint the Clarks Originals consumer as a specific age, gender or region because the shoes sold so broadly. She speculated that what perhaps attracted these wearers to the shoes was the recognition that Clarks had been an ‘innovator’ - the first to do things - and this ‘struck a chord’ with those who were striving to do the same themselves. For this reason, she felt the shoes formed part of a

repertoire including other specialist items from specialist brands. Originals connoisseurs, she explained, would often also choose a jacket from the best jacket brand, or jeans from the best denim brand. As such, she speculated Originals would never be able to produce clothing because it was their history as a specialist footwear manufacturer they were respected for. This resonated with Pete's thoughts about the appeal of the shoes:

"[T]he odd thing about them is that it can be a lot of different things. For me it's that heritage, it's that being able to... the knowledge that I possess that has that direct link back to whatever it is, be it the link to the Second World War and the origins of the whole thing, cos I like to know where everything... and I'm interested enough to know where it came from. And I like the fact that I possess a thing that has a direct link back to the very, very beginning of it all. And I think for other people it's the style, it doesn't necessarily matter what it is, it's the fact that it is the 'right' thing. So, you can get a lot of boots that look like Desert Boots, you get a lot of things that are similar that would fit in with the pea coat and the skinny jeans and the... but the knowledge that it's the right thing, and it's the knowledge that it's the one that everything else is taking off, I think that's important."

For Pete, this originality or authenticity was compounded through the collaborations Clarks did with other heritage brands. The first pair he had bought after he had started working at Clarks were made of stripy *Southsea Deckchair* canvas (fig. 5.12) with a 'Southsea Deckchairs' label inside the upper (5.13). He recalled at that point he didn't fully appreciate the significance of the boots in the same way he does now, but as he understood it they were the first company to make the "quintessential stripy deckchair". He associated them with the "seaside image of the stripy deckchairs laid out in a row". He also pointed out a pair of small Desert Boots, belonging to his wife, made of Hainsworth fabric - the fabric used to make the uniforms for the Queen's guards (fig. 5.14). He had wanted to buy them for himself but didn't want to be 'that couple' who wore matching shoes. He also owned two pairs of boots, not Originals but both collaborations between Clarks, Norton motorcycles and Harris Tweed, remarking of the Tweed boots "there was no question as to whether I was going to get them or not, but I had to. Absolutely no question." In contrast to the wearers in the men's focus group, then, Pete was attracted less by the shoes' specific connections with the music industry⁴⁸ and more by their heritage, a heritage objectified through the various collaborations he had collected.

This was perhaps best exemplified by the cream pair of Desert Boots he had chosen to wear for the interview (fig. 5.15). The boots were a collaboration with Gloverall, the company that produced military-influenced duffle coats for mainstream consumption after the Second World War. The boots featured a felted back section and a large wooden toggle. In a similar way to the focus group participants' views on the crepe soles, the meaning of the materials outweighed their practicality:

"These are the ones that don't go outside because they're quite delicate [laughs]. Well for me something that I like very much about the Desert Boots is the connection back to where they were originally discovered and the connection to the Second World War and to Montgomery. And these are a pair that are made from... the fabric that makes the back piece is made by the company Gloverall I think, [...] they bought the rights and then after that they made the fabric and made the coats to duffle coats that Montgomery wore in the desert in Africa where the Desert Boot's Originally from, so it's a kind of lovely sort of circular link

⁴⁸ James tended to listen to jazz and classical music and although Originals had connections with these genres he was attracted more by their general connections with history and cultural heritage.



Fig. 5.11: Pete’s collection of the satirical men’s magazine *Chap*.



Fig. 5.12: Pete’s Southsea Deckchair Desert Boots.



Fig. 5.13: Authentic label detail inside the Southsea Deckchair Desert Boots.



Fig. 5.14: Pete’s wife’s Hainsworth Desert Boots.



Fig. 5.15: Pete’s Gloverall Desert Boots.

back to... yeah. Yeah these are the only ones that I actually don't wear out because I don't want that... I can't get [them] anymore, I'll never be able to get them again."

Field Marshal Bernhard L. Montgomery, or 'Monty' as he preferred to be called by his troops was the popular and motivational commander of the Eighth Army during the Second World war (Bielecki, 2006: 266). Montgomery was made world famous for defeating Rommel at the second battle of Al Alamein in Egypt, a major turning point in the Western Desert Campaign (Baxter, 1996: 5). His iconic status had become objectified by his moustache and famous duffle coat, a coat developed originally for the Navy to protect them against freezing conditions. As previously discussed the inspiration for the Desert Boot came from the footwear worn by the same officers of the Eighth Army who had acquired them in the bazaars of Cairo as a comfortable casual shoe suited to the desert terrain to wear when off duty. During his time in Burma serving as an officer in the Royal Army Service Corps Nathan Clark had noticed the shoes and sent the pattern back to Clarks headquarters to be put into mainstream production (Palmer, 2013: 184). For Pete, the collaboration between the Originals Desert Boot and the Gloverall Duffle coat was a perfect match. Furthermore, his ability to understand and recognize the significance of the collaboration was clearly empowering. The value of the shoes was further increased for Pete during a conversation with a customer - an elderly chamber musician who Pete had built a relationship with due to regular trips into the shop to buy the same pair of black Wallabees – when, in an off-hand way he referred to the boots as "oh you know, the ones that Montgomery wore in the Desert". The musician looked at him and said, "well he wasn't when I met him". Pete mimicked his look of astonishment: "I said 'you're joking?' and he says 'no, no, I met him in El Alamein.'" Pete was clearly astonished and humbled by the revelation that one of his customers had actually met Montgomery, adding he had "nothing more to say!" and had clearly been outdone.

For Pete, then, the shoes were indexical of these significant people, places and events, and this provided a sense of authenticity, or 'aura', as cultural critic Walter Benjamin might call it (Benjamin, 1999 [1936]). Although the materials and the boots were not the exact same ones present during these significant events, as far as Pete was concerned they may as well have been. Furthermore, for him, it seemed the innovative and knowledgeable combination of the felt, the toggle and the boot had created something new and even more authentic; the subsequent interactions afforded by the boots made them even more valuable and significant to the extent he felt he needed to preserve them.

Returning to Peirce, Keane explains that 'bundling', in this case of the duffle felt and Desert Boot, is one of the 'conditions of possibility' for the biography of objects (Keane, 2005: 188). In this context, the boots afforded Pete the ability to connect with and embody their historical associations, and to connect with others who shared these knowledges and values. The *internal-external dialectic* (Jenkins, 2008) occurring between him and these other connoisseurs further reinforced a fit between him and the shoes. The significance of the materials in this context helps us to understand what Keane describes as the 'historicity *inherent to signs in their very materiality*' (Keane, 2005: 183). This 'materiality of signification' is perhaps best explained in relation to another example given by Pete, this time in relation to a collaboration between the Horween Tannery and the Desert Boot (fig. 5.16), which, while further evidencing the 'aura' and authenticity of the materials, also highlighted the materials' significance in processes of identification and intersubjectivity. He referred to a page in the Roetzel book specifically about Horween leather (fig. 5.17) and explained:

"Horween is one of the most respected tanneries in the world, it's like, it's famous for being a leather tannery and the leather that they produce is used for some of the most prestigious shoes in the world, shoes that I probably won't ever even see, let alone get the chance to wear, but through the link... yeah, it's not a handmade



Fig. 5.16.: Desert Boots made from Horween leather.



Fig. 5.17: Page about Horween leather in Roetzel's book.

pair of Alden or Cleverly shoes but it's got a link to it and it's that same kind of... you feel like it's, insider knowledge or something like that? I don't know. Rather than just being a pair of shoes or even more than just 'oh this is my Desert Boots, the brown ones that I like', you know 'aha, these came from...'"

He speculated that to the untrained eye the leather would go unnoticed, but for him it enabled him to identify someone with a similar taste for authentic and original things. He explained his thought processes on such an occasion:

"and you think well they're not, it could just be coincidence, that they happened to buy that particular one, but you paid extra for that collaborative name, and in this case you paid extra for the Horween leather and I don't know why anybody would do that unless they wanted to pay more for the leather. Cos you could buy a pair that are almost identical, if you know what you're looking for you can spot the difference, but I don't know why anyone would pay more if they weren't interested in it being specifically Horween leather, or these ones [gestures to the Gloverall boots], if you see somebody wearing those, there's a very specific connection with these and I don't know why anybody would choose them if they weren't at least interested in that connection."

The uncertainty about whether a wearer was wearing the shoes for the same reason as Pete was disconcerting for him. There was no way of knowing for sure without talking to the individual. Pete recounted one occasion when an encounter ended disappointingly - not with Desert Boots but with a very rare wristwatch – another of Pete's interests. A man had walked into the shop wearing a watch that Pete knew a lot about. There had only been twenty-five made and he had never thought he would get to see one. He approached the customer and asked if the watch was made by this particular maker. The customer responded that it was, but in a very nonchalant way. Pete explained:

"I really wanted to talk to him about it and I really wanted that sort of connection and for him to say 'oh someone else that knows' but instead: 'oh, yeah'. And I asked him more about it and he was like 'oh I don't know', and I didn't even really get the chance to ask him how on earth he didn't know that he had this thing that was so amazingly rare and cost as much as a house and he just 'huh? oh, no, I don't know, whatever'"

Pete was exasperated by the response, which, one might suggest, undermined the investment he had made in learning about these objects and acquiring such extensive knowledge of them. As Keane explains, the materiality of signification cannot be understood separately from the intersubjective processes that make and validate an objects' value. This was particularly interesting in relation to the experiences of the male wearers who, through interactions with me, and with one another, seemed to know much more about the sub-brand, the history of the shoes and their cultural associations than the women. For Pete and some of the other male focus group participants the shoes therefore provided the means through which to acquire and embody cultural capital. In a brief discussion pre-empting Chapter Six (devoted entirely to investigating the processes through which cultural capital is embodied amongst a broader range of participants), the next section of this chapter speaks to discussions about the negotiation of 'authentic' masculinities through the use of objectified forms of cultural capital. While shoes as a form of sub/cultural capital in relation to masculinity has been investigated in relation to sneakers, particularly amongst young men (Nayak, 2006, Brace-Govan and de Burgh-Woodman, 2008, Kawamura, 2016), a focus on Clarks Originals extends these principles to a broader range of masculinities. Furthermore, I also demonstrate the affordances of the shoes in relation to female wearers' negotiations with notions of femininity.

5.6: Materialising and Authenticating Gender

During the men's focus group a 'brand community' (Elliott and Davies, 2006: 138) emerged where a shared consciousness of the rituals, traditions, meanings and morals associated with the shoes afforded wearers a sense of legitimacy or authenticity in their expressions of style. In the data gathered from Clarks Originals wearers it seemed that this style was developed and learned through embodied practices of identification where the materiality of the body, the shoes and the environment were critical. In their own ethnographic study of brand communities Elliott and Davies note the knowledge and performance of a style repertoire increases subcultural capital and a perceived sense of authenticity (2006: 141). Wiseman-Trowse explains that authenticity is also established through a 'judgment, made relationally to the inauthentic' (2008: 33). In the case of the male focus group participants this emerged through a gradual and subtle separation between the connoisseurs and those members who were perhaps less committed or knowledgeable about the brand. It was also established through discussions of 'other' wearers who might buy the brand for the 'wrong' reasons (Elliott and Davies, 2006: 138). For Tom, for example, there was a clear set of criteria, which, for him, determined the authenticity of a wearer, for example if they were listening to the right kind of music.⁴⁹

In terms of the authentic performance of Clarks Originals the musical associations were key for the focus group participants. The currency of bands such as the Stone Roses, the Charlatans, The Happy Mondays and Oasis depended on their commitment to a masculine working class authenticity. While Wiseman-Trowse identifies this as nothing more than a romantic myth (a point he argues is emphasized by the ironic middle class upbringing of Brit Rock *Pulp* icon Jarvis Cocker), these types of representation can be understood as important 'sites for the individual to explore notions of authenticity' which has become 'a necessary effect of the nexus between commercial culture as a profit-making enterprise, and art as an expressive form' (Wiseman-Trowse, 2008: 57). Indeed, Stewart highlights the importance of objects in this context:

'Within the development of culture under an exchange economy, the search for authentic experience and, correlatively, the search for the authentic object become critical. As experience is increasingly mediated and abstracted, the lived relation of the body to the phenomenological world is replaced by a nostalgic myth of contact and presence.' (Stewart, 1993: 133)

The motivation to identify or experience something as authentic therefore serves an important function as it affords an 'examination and affirmation of the insecurities that the subject may feel as a consumer, individual, social particle and national subject' (Wiseman-Trowse, 2008: 56). This is particularly interesting when considered in the context of these male participants and aligns with current academic and popular discussions about masculinities in 'crisis' where men are supposedly 'responding in negative and destructive ways to insecurity about their "role" in society' (Scourfield and Drakeford [2002] in Robinson et al., 2011: 32). Robinson et. al. argue that rather than considering masculinity in crisis we should instead be turning our attention to the ways in which "'doing" masculinity is always a negotiated process' (Robinson et al., 2011: 34). Indeed, Clarks Originals would appear to provide one site for such negotiations. As Rosie, the group head for Originals, had previously explained the 'obsession' many men had with Clarks Originals contrasted sharply with the cultural stereotype that shoes were a feminine concern. For Tom and Kristian, the knowledge of the history and heritage of the shoes, paired with their uncomplicated construction and authentic materials seemed to mitigate the risk of displaying behaviour which might otherwise be aligned with stereotypically feminine practices of consumption and 'fashion'. Alternatively, for Pete, the sub-cultural capital objectified through his collection of Originals and other items resulted in a sense of expertise and respect

⁴⁹ The embodiment of cultural capital will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

which perhaps compensated for unrealized career aspirations and expectations.⁵⁰ In alignment with Robinson's evaluation of the young men's experiences in the *ITSF* project it would seem therefore that for these participants the material and semiotic affordances of the shoes mitigated the risk of '[getting] masculinity wrong' whilst also allowing them to 'express creativity through their choice of shoes and the sensory pleasures associated with that agency.' (Robinson, 2014: 152)

During the focus group with female wearers the embodiment of an authentic sense of *femininity* could also be understood to be mediated through the use of Clarks Originals. While the women were less interested in media endorsements and the acquisition of cultural capital, referring more to the influence of positive or negative peer endorsement, it was the affordances the shoes offered them in relation to engaging with fashion and style while negotiating dominant gender expectations that emerged strongly. For this group of wearers, the particularly simple yet distinctive style and materials of the Clarks Originals shoes allowed them to portray an image somewhere between the rational shoe-wearing academic previously mentioned by Brydon and the emphasized femininity afforded by, for example, Louboutins and Blahniks. Fiona, for example, who owned a pair of black wedge-heeled Yarra Desert shoes (fig. 5.18), reflected on her tendency over the last twenty-five years to wear brands like Clarks Originals. She was wearing a red pair of Converse All Stars during the interview and had also owned Dr Martens, all of which she felt had set her apart from 'those other girls':

"I remember I had a pair of Dr Martens when I was sixteen or seventeen and, you know, they meant I wasn't like those other girls that were wearing their court shoes and high heels or whatever, and I was into alternative things to them I suppose, and I think it's very much that sort of, you know... it is interesting, the politics of it. Because I suppose that is when I was becoming politicized and beginning to think of myself [...] as a feminist and I was involved in political action and stuff, and I suppose Dr Martens have that sense of being 'other', you know, that they set you apart. So it was quite a political choice, and for years I didn't wear high heels, and then I did start wanting to wear [them] or sometimes to have some heel, and so actually I went through a transition of wanting to have shoes that... [pauses] so I could still be alternative, I suppose, having alternative politics and not wanting to be gen... put into certain boxes, for me, I think. Interestingly, just thinking about the fact that those same brands have appeared throughout my life. But actually, I haven't bought Dr Martens for a long time and I bought them last year and I'm very happy with them [laughs] they've been wonderfully comfortable and also you can wear them with dresses and jeans [...]"

Vanessa, another participant identifying as feminist who owned a heeled pair of blue suede Mary-Jane-style Originals (fig. 5.19) articulated similar views to Fiona, this time in relation to the style and materials of the shoes, which afforded a sense of femininity without coming at the expense of mobility and comfort:

"I mean I do think it's important for me that they're not pointed and that they don't have a heel that's, you know, half a centimetre in diameter at the base. And I can move in them, I mean I can run in them. I can actually run in these heels! [laughs] Um, and comfortably. And I've danced a whole night in Salsa in them and not sat down, and, you know, my feet haven't hurt at the end, and I think that's really important for me, yeah."

⁵⁰ Indeed, Kawamura makes a similar point in relation to sense of achievement, expertise and purpose involved in sneaker collecting amongst young men in America (2016)



Fig. 5.18: Fiona’s black suede Yarra Desert shoes.



Fig. 5.19: Vanessa’s blue suede Originals.

The Originals range was perceived to be fairly 'consistent', always delivering this particular type of simple and utilitarian, yet classic and stylish aesthetic. Once again, the crepe soles emerged as a significant material feature of the shoes. Just as the men had identified the swagger or shuffle associated with the flat soles, the women identified a 'bounce' or weighty momentum effected by the crepe, which they felt also attributed to their comfort.

For the women, there was also an important sustainable angle to the shoes. Participants identified the styles as 'classic' in their ability to transcend fashions. In addition, the quality of the manufacture (Clarks was deemed to be a trustworthy and reputable manufacturer across both focus groups) meant participants considered them an 'investment', likely to be kept for a number of years. In both focus groups Clarks were also deemed to be a 'friendly' and understated brand, which enabled wearers to feel they were participating with fashion while also resisting fast-fashion and the fashion system.

5.7: Other Niche Affordances

So, for both the men and the women the shoes enabled them to negotiate their way through dominant discourses concerned with consumer culture and gender to achieve a sense of authenticity and distinction. Consequently, the shoes had developed an alternative and niche image. Yet it is important to recognise the specific location of the research (the North of England) and not to overlook the shoes' affordances for other dramatically different niches. While this group of focus group participants were middle class, white, between 31-43, with political/social motivations and an interest in Northern Indie music, during interviews at Clarks head office it was apparent that there are many other 'key stakeholders', or committed Originals wearers located around the world: from Jamaican 'rude' boys in the Caribbean and Japanese or Korean 'cool hunters' (often young women in their late teens or early twenties), to the traditional Italian gent. Each of these groups similarly considered themselves to be authentic wearers – even though they might not think the same of one another. In e-mail communication, a particularly committed Jamaican Originals wearer explained to me that “yes, they were made in England, but built for Jamaicans and no one is brave or stupid enough to claim otherwise!” adding that “if the Wallabee could talk then it would speak patois and not English”. In this way, they are regarded as *authentically* Jamaican despite their British roots.⁵¹

The Jamaican example offers a particularly interesting opportunity to further explore the material and semiotic affordances of the shoes. It has recently received considerable media attention as a result of the incorporation of Clarks Originals styles in the lyrics of several hip hop rappers, most recently Ghostface Killah and Vybz Kartel (Sky News, 2010, Serwer, 2010). The Desert Boot was the first of the Originals styles to be introduced to the West Indian Market via a wholesale business after it had been picked-up by an American agent at the Chicago shoe fair in 1949. Jamaican independence in 1962 resulted in a period of economic growth but greater racial class divides. The Clarks brand and the Desert Boot - stylish, expensive and made in England - was a semiotic fit for a disenfranchised male youth or 'rude boy' who quickly and defiantly established the shoes as a staple item (King, 2002: 30-32 in, Sherlock and Crumplin, 2013). One need go no further than Newman's book *Clarks in Jamaica* (2012) (fig. 5.20) to find references to the materials which afforded their adoption: in Jamaica the breathability of the natural materials suit the climate while the so-called 'cheese bottom' sole affords the disaffected Jamaican youth and would-be thief a silent approach (Newman, 2012: 44). The shoes afford a mobility befitting a reggae 'shuffle' (as opposed to the Madchester 'swagger'), materializing and embodying the 'rude boy' ideology through mobility. Finally, the symbol of the trekker on the Desert Trek has also been interpreted as a bank robber carrying a swag bag – hence their colloquial name 'the bank robber' (fig. 5.21).

⁵¹ Although it is of course important to note that the Desert Boot originated in the bazaars of Cairo and the Wallabee was originally a German shoe.



Fig. 5.20: Cover image for Al Newman's 2012 book *Clarks in Jamaica*. Image by Mark Read.



Fig. 5.21: The trekker symbol on the back of the Desert Trek shoe (Newman, 2012). Image by Al Fingers and Jessie Simmons.

When considered in relation to other groups of wearers, then, the materials emerge strongly as the means through which cultural associations and meanings are formed through embodied processes of identification. Throughout this process one particular feature emerged as important in terms of the shoes' iconic status: the crepe sole. Participants in both focus groups identified it as the recognizable feature of the shoe differentiating them from other similar versions and copies. This was important because these wearers had made a conscious decision to buy the *Clarks Originals* brand and not their copies. The soles enabled participants to recognize others who identified with values of style over fashion, quality, comfort and foot health, the perceived integrity and friendliness of the company and, for the men, to display their cultural capital. While the sole will be analysed further in Chapter Eight in relation to its 'trickster' characteristics, it emerges here as an important material feature affording social interaction.

5.8: A Social Shoe

So it would seem that Clarks Originals shoes have become a particularly social shoe where their materials and cultural meanings can be seen to inform one another through practice and social interaction - the shoes becoming increasingly visible or fashionable in the process. So, what does this analysis contribute to current understandings of the 'materiality of signification'? Here we return to Ingold's studies of materiality, affordances and embodied perception, and a divide which exists between phenomenological approaches to the study of the relationships between objects and people, and between people and people via objects. In an exchange in *Archaeological Dialogues* provoked by Ingold's accusation that material culture studies excludes materials (Ingold, 2007a), Miller criticises Ingold for what he describes as a 'primitive' approach to material culture:

‘[T]he problem is that Ingold seems to want to escape from the contemporary world and reimagine us back into some kind of stone age, when human beings interacted with the world largely in terms of its given material processes and qualities, as if we actually spent our time transforming nature, which for Ingold I suspect is the essence of authenticity.’ (Miller, 2007: 26)

Miller claims that Ingold’s focus on natural materials like stone and wood ignores plastic artifacts like washing machines and mobile phones – rendering them in some way ‘inauthentic’ and denying consumables their cultural signification. In return, Ingold accuses Miller of denying mobile phones their material properties (Ingold, 2007b) and responds to Miller’s attack using sunglasses as his example. He explains that when a holiday-maker buys a pair of sunglasses she does so to protect her eyes from intense radiation, adding: ‘is it primitivist to acknowledge that we inhabit a world of [...] wind and weather, in which the sun shines[?] [...] Life as we know it depends all these things’ (ibid., 33). What Ingold fails to consider, however, is that in the contemporary consumer society in which we now live, the holiday-maker does indeed use objects to experience and mediate their environment but in doing so they must choose between hundreds of different *brands* of sunglasses, each with a different meaning. How does the holiday-maker make this choice, and, through use, how do the meanings of the chosen pair contribute to the ‘meshwork’ of entangled meanings and contexts he so brilliantly theorises elsewhere? (Ingold, 2010a).

Miller also claims that Ingold regards modern materials to be ‘sullied’ – a claim Ingold contests. Yet frequent references to shoes in Ingold’s other essays would appear to support Miller’s observation. In his essay ‘Culture on the ground: The world perceived through the feet’ (2004), for example, Ingold states the value of a more grounded approach to perception: ‘[f]or it is through our feet, in contact with the ground (*albeit mediated by footwear*), that we are most fundamentally and continually “in touch” with our surroundings’ (Ingold, 2011a: 45 emphasis added). While Ingold acknowledges that shoes alter, even functionally enhance, the effectiveness of our feet (2004), he generally interprets shoes as a negative disruption to the perception of our environment, as part of a ‘suite of changes’ that accompanied the onset of modernity that led to an imagined separation between mind and body, and between social and cultural life and ‘the ground upon which that life is materially enacted’ (2004: 321).

While Ingold may argue that with all their cultural complexities shoes have separated us from our environment, others may simply say they have complicated our experience of our environment and studies of perception need to evolve to take account of these complexities (Michael, 2000). Michael explains that Ingold’s very physical perception becomes problematic when considering the influence of other ‘impurities’ (like representations) that intervene from ‘beyond’ (ibid., 112): we are of course not only navigating a natural environment in our shoes but also a cultural and social one and the meanings of our shoes are an important consideration when thinking about the way we go about our daily lives. Shoes are therefore *both* material and semiotic resources for the body that mediate between nature and culture (ibid., 108).

5.9: Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to use empirical data to analyse the relationship between shoes and wearers in the construction or maintenance of particular identities. In so doing I wanted to readdress semiotic theory by showing the way cultural meaning mediates, rather than dictates, this process. The data also supports a move in material culture studies that seeks to develop our understanding of the relationship between materials and meaning. The Clarks Originals brand and the wearers of the shoes gave a valuable account of their subjective and embodied perception of the shoes and the conditions through which they were able to feel socially comfortable and ‘authentic’ wearing them. By paying attention to the material and semiotic affordances of the shoes I illustrated how Miller’s call for a study of the humility of things (see

Chapter Two) allows us to really 'see' shoes in terms of the role they and their meanings play in a process of identity and identification.

The chapter also enabled me to further articulate some of the themes originally touched upon in the media survey, for example the role shoes play in the embodiment and performance of cultural capital; and the importance of processes of endorsement in the construction and embodiment of meaning. Through a study of the materiality and meaning of the shoes in situated bodily practices I have also demonstrated the tendency shoes have to disrupt expected uses and afford unexpected appropriations – a process, which, as will become evident throughout the remaining chapters, is further mediated through practices of representation. These themes therefore form the basis for the remaining three chapters which together provide a deeper understanding of the role of representations and practices of representation in identity and identification.

**Chapter 6:
'The Shoey':
Embodying Sub/Cultural Capital**

This is Not a Shoe

6.1: Introduction

In the previous chapter I evidenced some of the circumstances in which cultural representations are subjectively embodied through practice/wear in processes of identification. Through the accounts of Clarks Originals wearers, the semiotic and material affordances of the shoes were revealed and a brand community emerged where a shared consciousness of the rituals, traditions, meanings and morals associated with the shoes afforded wearers a sense of legitimacy or authenticity in their expressions of style. Within this brand community, particularly in the men's focus group, distinctions started to emerge between those practiced in wearing Clarks Originals and who knew a lot about them, and those relative novices who knew something about the shoes but perhaps did not quite demonstrate the same loyalty and commitment. Tom and Pete, for example, demonstrated an extensive knowledge of the shoes, which, their accounts suggested, they found empowering.

Throughout the *ITSF* project and the research for this thesis the extent to which people *knew* about the shoes and brands they were wearing or working with emerged as an important factor in how they legitimated their choices and identified themselves in relation to one another. This knowledge was not acquired easily and many wearers only really became conscious of it when asked to reflect on their experiences. In this chapter, Bourdieu's theories of *cultural capital* and the *habitus* are employed to consider the ways knowledge is embodied and practiced to achieve a sense of *distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984). While Bourdieu's concepts are 'good to think with' (Jenkins, 2002 [1992]: x), as discussed in the literature review his emphasis on class as the means and motivation to acquire cultural capital does not sufficiently account for contemporary processes of identification in Westernised cultures (Adams, 2006, Bottero, 2010, Sweetman, 2003). I therefore use Thornton's concept of *subcultural capital* (2013) and Florida's notion of the *creative class* (2002) to develop Bourdieu's theories, particularly in relation to the increasingly reflexive, intersubjective and creative practices of identification that have evolved in what can now be described as a global consumer culture.

In this chapter, Bourdieu's theories are updated and expanded through a series of interviews and observations, this time with highly experienced participants working within the field of footwear, each of whom offer a particular opportunity to understand how cultural capital is successfully acquired and embodied through practice. Following on from the previous chapter the embodiment of cultural representations is demonstrated, yet here it is advanced by analysing the practices of representation that enable this embodiment, for example the collection and organization of images, materials or shoes, and practices of drawing and making. In contrast to Bourdieu's approach, which tends to see the habitus and cultural capital as more of a predetermined set of structuring dispositions than the means to assert agency, this chapter pairs his thinking with theories of *creativity* to consider how innovation and change are born out of these habitual practices. Throughout these accounts important dialogues emerge between materials and bodies, and between those inside and outside the company which serve to further establish practices of representation as a key medium through which structure is negotiated and the value of the shoes is created and embodied in intersubjective processes of being and becoming.

6.2: The 'Shoey': Habitus, Cultural Capital and Fields of Practice

"[Y]ou can watch the transition of people from a non-shoey to a shoey, and depending on what role you do it takes different amounts of time. But for anybody it's no more than a couple of years, and you just get sucked into this world of shoemaking that [...] is very difficult to escape from" (Fred, Digital Development Manager, Clarks International, March 2012)

The first interview conducted at Clarks headquarters in March 2012 was with Fred, a longstanding member of staff, who, throughout his 21-year career, had progressed from making Desert Boots in one of Clarks' factories to his current position as Digital Development Manager. Having worked predominantly in the production of men's women's and kids' shoes Fred was well placed to provide an early overview of the company and the various roles and people within it. It was during this conversation the term 'shoey' first became apparent, a term used subsequently by a number of other staff to represent those possessing an intuitive understanding of shoes, particularly in terms of their materiality and construction.

The term 'shoey' also seemed applicable to those with an intuitive understanding of the cultural *meanings* of the shoes and nowhere was this more apparent, or essential, than within Clarks Originals. The sub-brand was felt by many throughout the company to be very precious. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, their credibility depended on a back-story of subcultural connections and it was essential that marketing/production decisions enhanced rather than undermined this credibility. The team (at the time of research) seemed able to do this as a result of an intuitive sense they had built up for the shoes. Rosie, the Group Head for Originals explained:

"[W]e have a kind of core Originals team, there's myself, there's the designer Marijke, er, Gemma who represents us in marketing, um, and we've got Hannah and Rachel who work for me who we've recruited more recently, um, and all those people without kind of necessarily having to write anything down have an innate understanding of what Originals is all about. And I think a lot of that does come from the fact that it exists in its own kind of right, that we haven't had to kind of... it's not contrived, it hasn't had to be created, it's evolved and happened over a period of time and so you can quite easily sense check if something feels kind of like the right thing to do because the brand has that existing personality, [...] the strategy reflects that rather than affects that, and I think it's our job to kind of... we can make it as big or as small as we want it to be, but the personality is absolutely kind of... it predates any of us. And that's nice, I like that aspect of it." (Rosie, Group Head for Clarks Originals, Clarks International, March 2012)

Yet while Rosie described the process of 'sense checking' their decisions as 'easy', in their communications with those in other domains within and outside the company it became apparent that those without this embodied knowledge found these distinctions much more difficult to discern. The knowledge had been accumulated by these employees gradually through practice. As Gemma, the marketing manager, explained there were 'no rules', it was "very subjective" which made the knowledge very difficult to transfer to others - this presented an ongoing challenge in a global corporation with a shifting workforce:

"Sometimes I sort-of feel a bit, I do feel concerned about it because, you-know, [...] as and when people move on in their careers and stuff is like you don't... and I'm sure, there are, there are millions of other people that could do the job I'm doing, it's not that I'm indispensable at all, but it's just that the thing I worry about is the lack of understanding of the, sort-of, nuances that I think are the difference between someone writing on a blog 'this is the shittiest thing I've ever seen' or someone writing on a blog 'this is actually quite a cool thing'" (Gemma, Originals Marketing Manager, Clarks International, April 2012)

The intuition the team had acquired was extremely valuable in terms of the continued credibility of the brand and the success of the company, yet because it had become second nature, it was difficult for others to 'see' and therefore appreciate or understand. Sponsorships and collaborations, for example, were an important part of their marketing strategy and Gemma used the Glastonbury music festival as an example of the wrong kind of marketing

decision. She explained it was important they were never going to a place they didn't feel they had a right to be, "for example a big music festival or a massive pop act would never feel right but something that is more, slightly more credible and more up-and-coming [would]." Yet, she explained that "in some ways I don't think [some other staff] would think it was wrong if I did try and sponsor Glastonbury, whereas we, like the team that work on it, would think that was wrong".⁵² So how can this knowledge be revealed; how and in what circumstances is it acquired and what are the consequences of its use? Here, Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus* is helpful. Defined as a 'socialised subjectivity' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996: 192), Johnson explains that the habitus constitutes:

'a "feel for the game," a "practical sense" (sens pratique) that inclines agents to act and react in specific situations in a manner that is not always calculated and that is not simply a question of conscious obedience to rules. Rather it is a set of dispositions which generates practices and perceptions. The habitus is the result of a long process of inculcation, [...] which becomes a "second sense" or a second nature.' (Johnson in Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993: 5)

Sweetman elaborates that the habitus refers to an 'orientation to or way of being in the world; our predisposed ways of thinking, acting and moving in and through the social environment [...]' (Sweetman, 2009: 493). Similarly, McRobbie explains that the habitus 'precedes the individual, giving to him or her a sense of the past, a memory of the distinctiveness of that specific milieu which is particular to that habitus.' She draws on Butler to explain that in the habitus the body therefore becomes a 'site of incorporated history' (McRobbie, 2005). As such, the habitus is materialised through *bodily hexis* or *embodiment* (as explained previously by Mauss in his *Techniques of the Body*), something physically expressed or played-out in various fields of practice (Cregan, 2006: 67). The possession of expertise in any field of practice is described as *cultural capital*: '[t]he more 'expert' one is in a field of practice, the greater one's cultural capital in that field, and the more cultural capital one has, the greater one's room to manoeuvre within or to manipulate that field' (ibid.). In Bourdieu's work *Distinction* (1984), the expertise or cultural capital within a given field is then understood to result in a judgement of taste and social status. For Fred and others within the company, therefore, the status of 'shoey' was deemed a measure of expertise and distinction.

The 'shoey' was determined partly by his/her ability to accumulate and embody cultural capital. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital exists in two main forms, the *embodied* state, for example dispositions of the mind and body, and in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods for example images and objects (i.e., shoes) which he describes as the trace or realization of embodied capital - in other words, the means through which cultural capital and expertise is embodied and evidenced.

'The accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of what is called culture, cultivation, *Bildung*, presupposes a process of embodiment, incorporation, which, insofar as it implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor. Like the acquisition of a muscular physique or a suntan, it cannot be done at second hand (so that all effects of delegation are ruled out)' (Bourdieu, 1986: 283).

He goes on to explain that the work of acquisition is a work of self-improvement driven by a desire or wilfulness, which must come at personal cost, for example the investment of time,

⁵² Glastonbury is a large music festival held in the neighbouring town to Clarks headquarters. From what Gemma was saying there was a sense that in the past, when the festival was still very niche, it would have made sense to be associated with it, yet now the festival had become very big and mainstream, which didn't fit with the identity of the shoes.

renunciation or sacrifice. The more hard won this knowledge is, therefore, the more valuable it is: 'any given competence (e.g., being able to read in a world of illiterates) derives a scarcity value from its position in the distribution of cultural capital and yields profits of distinction for its owner.' (ibid., 284).

Embodied and objectified cultural capital, however, only holds value within and between particular fields of cultural production. Drawing on Bourdieu's own definition, Rocamora describes a field as 'a 'structured space of positions' (Bourdieu, 1993 [1984]-b: 33, Bourdieu, 2004 [2001]) and forces. It is a 'social microcosm' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996: 97) informed by specific rules of functioning which shape the trajectories and practices of the agents that belong to it' (2016: 234). The term 'field' is therefore important for understanding the frame within which participants subjectively understand and experience fashion and shoes. In Rocamora's studies of Bourdieu's *field theory* she proposes that the field of fashion production is paradigmatic of the processes at play in *all* fields of cultural practice and therefore offers valuable insights to the acquisition and embodiment of cultural capital and the habitus (Rocamora, 2016: 247). Indeed, she points out that Bourdieu himself explicitly recognised the value of high fashion for understanding the consumption and production of culture, devoting two articles specifically to the subject; *Le Couturier et sa Griffes* (Bourdieu and Delsaut, 1975) and *Haute Couture and Haute Culture* (1993 [1984]-a) and further discussing it in *Distinction* (1984).

Bourdieu's ideas about fields are helpful for understanding the fields within which Clarks Originals are 'consecrated' as cultural capital. Rocamora explains that in their essay Bourdieu and Delsaut make a distinction between Haute Couture; a more autonomous subfield of fashion defined as a field of 'restricted production', and mass fashion; a 'field of large scale production' more dependent on the pressures of commerce and the media. Couture is given a higher status and legitimacy than mass fashion due to its ability to resist commerce and the 'ability to set their own criteria for functioning' (Rocamora, 2016). As such, she explains 'the more autonomous a field, the more able it is to establish its own rules' (ibid., 237). In the context of this study, the field of footwear therefore can be understood as a subfield of fashion; Clarks constitutes a subfield of footwear comparable to Bourdieu's field of large scale production, and Clarks Originals constitutes a subfield of Clarks characterised more by restricted production. Because other departments didn't have the same intuition for the sub-brand as the Clarks Originals team, the team was left to operate in a fairly autonomous way. The general consensus amongst staff was that the main purpose of Clarks Originals was not volume and profit, for this would undermine their symbolic value as exclusive and alternative form of cultural capital, rather they performed the function of helping to legitimate Clarks as an authentic, albeit mainstream, heritage brand. Clarks Originals were therefore considered prestigious; those who had worked with the shoes were quick and proud to say so and jobs within the Clarks Originals team were highly sought after.

While in principle Bourdieu's theories of the habitus, cultural capital and fields of practice fit well with the Clarks Originals case study, his emphasis on elite culture and class mean that the full dynamics of these principles, particularly in relation to contemporary popular culture and other fields of fashion are 'constrained' (McRobbie, 2005). Indeed, Rocamora points out that in his studies of fashion Bourdieu makes a direct correlation between Haute Couture and 'Haute Culture' (2016: 237), whereas Clarks Originals, far from being high culture, have more in common with subculture. Thornton agrees that in Bourdieu's work, cultural capital refers to the inherited 'aesthetic values, hierarchies and canons' necessary to achieve distinction amongst the elite while the consumption of popular culture, although understood as discerning, is left comparatively 'flat' (Thornton, 2013: 21). Little has been done, she argues, to understand the stratification and hierarchies within contemporary culture more broadly and the manner in which 'people seek out and accumulate cultural goods and experiences for strategic use within their own social worlds' (ibid., 21).

In Bourdieu's defence, as Prieur and Savage point out, the cultural capital theorised by him between 1963 and 1973 was different to that practiced today: television was relatively new and the concept of the computer was unimaginable. Furthermore the youth culture which had only just started to develop was a recent phenomenon not yet reflected upon (Prieur and Savage, 2013: 249). Even so, McRobbie argues that in Bourdieu's later work he did little to address this imbalance. Drawing on Butler she proposes that the great disappointment with Bourdieu's account of the habitus and cultural capital is the sense that everything is already 'inclined towards conformity to the social order' leaving little space for ambivalence, social change (McRobbie, 2005) or indeed creativity (Dalton, 2004). As such, Prieur and Savage identify a need to elaborate on the concept of cultural capital in a way that resists fixing it to elite cultural life, returning to Bourdieu's often neglected elements of *Distinction* which understand it as dynamic, mobile and energetic (Prieur and Savage, 2013: 250). Consequently, Crossley argues that the habitus needs to be located within a broader conception of agency: '[t]he flux of both fields and the material conditions of life demand innovation and creation from social agents.' The habitus, he suggests, should therefore be studied as a constantly evolving and creative process where actions and interaction give rise to 'new forms and repertoires, often to the surprise of their 'creator' (Crossley, 2001: 95-96).

6.3: Subcultural Capital and the Creative Class

As discussed in the literature review, Thornton starts to balance this emphasis on class in her study of youth club cultures in which she coined the term *subcultural capital*. While she uses this term to understand capital beyond the elite, she also distances it from the experiences of the disenfranchised working-class youth studied by the CCCS in the Seventies, for whom fashion provided a symbolic form of resistance against a dominant and elite parent culture (Thornton, 2013: 22). She defines subcultural capital as part of taste cultures which are underground or alternative to the mainstream – a status system Belk *et al.* argue has more to do with 'cool' than class (2010: 184). She explains:

'Subcultural capital can be *objectified* or *embodied*. Just as books and paintings display cultural capital in the family home, so subcultural capital is objectified in the form of fashionable haircuts and well-assembled record collections (full of well-chosen, limited edition 'white label' twelve inches and the like). Just as cultural capital is personified in 'good' manners and urbane conversation, so subcultural capital is embodied in the form of being 'in the know', using (but not over-using) current slang and looking as if you were born to perform the latest dance styles. Both cultural capital and subcultural capital put a premium on the 'second nature' of their knowledges. Nothing depletes capital more than the sight of someone trying too hard.' (Leigh and Gabel, 1992: 30)

Thornton suggests that one consequence of liberating the word 'subculture' and its cool associations from its working class roots is that rather than seeing business and the media as in 'opposition' and 'after the fact' of subculture (Hall and Jefferson, 1976: in , Thornton, 2013: 23), or responsible for 'swallowing them up and effectively dismantling them' (Hebdige, 1979: 23 in , Thornton, 2013), we are able to see them as integral to the authentication of cultural practices. Here, Belk suggests, we are able to see the ways cool has shifted from being 'disdainful of consumption to celebrating consumption' (Belk et al., 2010). I will further elaborate on the concept of cool as a value system in the following chapter in relation to practices of endorsement.

A number of Bourdieu's critics therefore ask us to reconsider the notion of class when considering the habitus and the motivations for acquiring sub/cultural capital in a new cultural

economy.⁵³ While Bourdieu does account for the establishment of a new class - the 'new petite bourgeoisie' consisting of 'ambiguously positioned' 'cultural intermediaries' who 'sympathize with the discourses aimed at challenging the cultural order' (Bourdieu, 1984: 366) - he undervalues their experiences by reducing them to a group of 'intellectual lackeys' 'condemned' to the ambiguity arising from the discrepancy between their 'messianic aspirations and the reality of their practice' (ibid.). In contrast, Florida's concept of a 'creative class' is perhaps a more helpful way to understand the experiences of a new group, powered by human creativity and emerging through a post-industrial 'information' or 'knowledge' based economy (2002: 5). He describes this group's core members as those in the fields of science, engineering, architecture, design, education, arts, music and entertainment 'whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or new creative content' and whose shared ethos values creativity, individuality, difference and merit (Florida, 2002: 8). A considerable number of the population now work in professions where creativity is pervasive – it is not switched on and off when entering or leaving the workplace. He explains that while in the past people may have defined themselves by their occupation, employer or family status, people now define themselves in relation to a 'tangle of connections to myriad creative activities' (ibid., 13). '[S]purred by the creative ethos,' he argues, 'we blend work and lifestyle to construct our identities as creative people' (ibid.). Consequently, he proposes the concept of class may be more usefully broadened to 'a cluster of people who have common interests and tend to think, feel and behave similarly [...] these similarities are fundamentally determined by economic function – by the kind of work they do for a living' (ibid., 8).

The concept of a creative class therefore encourages us to think more about the shared attitudes and corresponding forms of subcultural capital that link and distinguish people rather than their socio-demographic status, or even the identification of the individual as producer or consumer. Indeed, today it is perhaps more relevant to talk of 'prosumers', a term insightfully coined by Toffler (1980) which has received considerable recent attention due to the exponential development of Web 2.0 to describe individuals who are both producers and consumers (Ritzer et al., 2012). Clarks Originals therefore emerge as an objectified form of capital for a creative class of prosumers.⁵⁴ The shoes as subcultural capital provide the means to communicate a commitment and appreciation of innovation and creativity. Furthermore, they provide a mode through which to innovate and create. The notion of the prosumer and the creative class therefore encourages us to think carefully about the definition of the field to consider it as constitutive of all those involved in 'making' the shoes. As Rocamora explains in relation to Bourdieu's concept, a consideration of the field forces us to understand the interrelated and collective dimensions of practice that help to consecrate or define the work of art (or shoe):

'[I]t is not just one institution or just one critique which makes the work of art, but the field of production itself, that is the system of relations which exist between all the agents and institutions of consecration which compete for 'the monopoly of the power to consecrate' (Bourdieu, 1993: 78). Thus the artwork, Bourdieu points out, is made 'a hundred times, by all those who are interested in it, who find a material or symbolic profit in reading it, classifying it, deciphering it, commenting on it, combating it, knowing it, possessing it' (Bourdieu 1993: 111)' (Rocamora, 2016: 235)

The remaining sections of this chapter, therefore, apply Bourdieu's theories while addressing their shortcomings. A series of accounts explore the 'making' of Clarks Originals by all those at

⁵³ This is not to say of course that Thornton's subcultural capital asks us to totally discount traditional notions of class.

⁵⁴ While the term 'prosumer' is usually used to describe consumers who help to produce, here I use the term equally to refer to producers who also consume - thus further blurring the boundaries between consumption and production.

Clarks with a professional or personal interest in the shoes. As such, it investigates the way cultural capital is acquired through interaction and practice, and how it is *creatively* used in processes of identification and transformation. Again, while we are able to see how these individuals 'make' the shoes, we are also able to see how the shoes 'make' the individuals.

6.4: Embodying Clarks: The Materiality of Space and Place

As suggested at the beginning of the chapter, Clarks Originals are an objectified form of subcultural capital which inform the habitus. As indicated by Rosie, the staff were able to intuitively sense what they could and couldn't do with the shoes. To understand more about this habitus we must first consider the *field* or the physical and sociological context in which it manifests. Just as Bourdieu studied the 'Kabyle House' to understand generative schemes and dispositions that form the habitus (Tilley, 2006: 64), I propose it is therefore necessary to consider Clarks headquarters (fig. 6.1). Drawing on the experiences of two staff, Rosie, the Group Head for Clarks Originals and Saskia, the Marketing Insight Manager, a consideration of the materiality and embodiment of *place and space* accounts, in part, for the identity of the brand and the shoes. Drawing on interpretations of Henri Lefebvre's theories of the *Social Production of Space* (1991 [1974]), I argue that everyday spatial practices 'produce people' (Alvesson and Willmott [1992] in Dale and Burrell, 2008: np): spaces and places construct us just as we construct them (Dale and Burrell, 2008) and the products emerging from these spaces can be understood as the material and symbolic outcomes of these relations. Such outcomes, for example, include the image of the brand (as perceived by the wearers in the previous chapter) as friendly and trustworthy. Consequently, I argue that the countryside location of Clarks and the architecture of its headquarters, although often regarded by staff as inconvenient, are far more important to the identities of the brand, the staff and the shoes than might at first seem apparent. As Dale and Burrell suggest this, taken-for-grantedness of space and place and their role in processes of identity and identification (of the individual or the brand/organisation and their shoes) relates closely to Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology and Bourdieu's habitus, and can be used to understand the materiality of meaning, its embodiment and reproduction.

During my first interview with Rosie (fig.6.2), she gave an account of her entry to the company which starts to build a picture of how one might assimilate to the Clarks culture in a way that informs a particular habitus. After only eight years in the company, Rosie's skill at acquiring and embodying knowledge pertaining to the industry, the company and the shoes (particularly their cultural significance) had ensured her progression to one of the most sought-after positions within the company, the Group Head for Clarks Originals - a type of range manager and point of intersection between all those working on the brand. As with many others at Clarks, however, Rosie came from an unrelated field, her knowledge and expertise was acquired through practice, on-the-job.⁵⁵ She originally started work at Clarks in a part-time role as a sales assistant while doing a degree in English literature and film theory at university. She planned to continue her studies with a PhD in film theory and post-colonial identity but felt she needed a job first. She applied for the Clarks graduate scheme in 2004, not because she had any particular desire for a career in footwear or fashion but because she felt it would be a "good company to work for". She relocated to Somerset where, despite a year-long relocation to the Clarks offices in Boston (U.S.), she remains today.

When asked what attracted her to the company, her first response was that it was a private family-owned business rather than a large blue-chip organization. She explained that despite Clarks' global expansion there was still the sense that it was very much connected with the local community. Indeed, over the period of almost 200 years the Somerset village of Street grew

⁵⁵ With only three undergraduate degrees in footwear design/production in the UK and no postgraduate courses, those with 'institutional capital', or a formal education in shoemaking or footwear design, are in the minority, with most others at Clarks arriving from either fashion or textiles, or totally unrelated fields.

This is not a Shoe



Fig. 6.1: Public entrance to Clarks headquarters and the Clarks Museum, 2012, Street, Somerset. Own photograph.



Fig. 6.2:
Rosie: Group Head for Clarks Originals. 2012, own photograph.

into a thriving town almost entirely because of Clarks (Palmer, 2013: 1). Along the way, the Quaker family founded a local school, theatre, library, open-air swimming pool, town hall, playing fields and low-cost housing (Palmer, 2013: 3) the legacy of which could still be appreciated today. Certainly, C&J Clark *was* Street (Palmer, 2013: 3) yet as Rosie explained the 'tendrils' of the company continued to spread throughout and beyond the county. When she relocated to a village in Somerset, half an hour away from Street, for example, she found that her neighbour's father had worked in the Clarks factory in Shepton Mallet.⁵⁶

To this sense of community Rosie attached a value associated with the company's strong corporate social responsibility policy, which, when looking for a job was an attitude she didn't find embodied by many other large organisations. Since working at Clarks she had learnt that it wasn't a "shouty kind of company" (an observation made frequently by other staff, sometimes to their frustration), tending to do things because they felt it was right rather than because they should. She also highlighted the eccentricity of the company, which she felt appealed to her "British sensibility for things which are a little bit unusual and not very straightforward". She contrasted Clarks with other large apparel companies, which, through her own experience and the accounts of people she knew, she felt were more hierarchical and controlling. With regards to range reviews for example she explained:

"[W]e do show everything to Lance Clark, but he's also the kind of er... like he has his own side project and, he's interested in seeing what it's doing: it's his kind of heritage, but he's also the kind of guy who arrives at Castle Carey station [the nearest to the head office] and there isn't a taxi to pick him up so he cycles all the way here, you know, you can't imagine Philip Green doing that kind of thing so... for me there's a kind of eccentricity embodied by people like Lance and Nathan Clark, but also... even the building, the layout is not sensible in any way, like it's an old factory and they've kind of made some concessions to the fact it's not a factory anymore but it's still a kind of bizarre layout and it takes you ages to find your way around, and even directing anybody to the nearest toilet is a nightmare" (Rosie, March 2012)

Here Rosie used family figureheads, Lance and Nathan Clark, with their down-to-earth, no-nonsense attitudes, as metonymies for the company. Similarly, the layout of the building served as a metaphor for what she perceived as the company's endearingly eccentric character. Indeed, the building – which, over the years had been continually extended and adapted - provided a frequent point of amusement throughout the research amongst all participants; between interviews I relied heavily on participants showing me back to where I had come from. There existed a strong sense that the ability to have mastered the layout of the building was a measure of one's proficiency at embracing and mastering this eccentricity, an important part of becoming a 'shoey' for those who had come to inhabit this identity.

The building and the location of the headquarters was referenced by other members of staff who felt it was an important factor in Clarks' identity and the way they conducted their business. Saskia, the Global Insight Manager for example reflected on a conversation with a colleague about Clarks' "gentle culture" explaining that:

"it is profit driven but not in the sense that you get sacked on a Monday if you haven't made the figure, so it's, it's an interesting balance. I was just talking to my colleague [...] this morning about it, [...] she was [...] talking about some other company that was really *hard* and she said you can't be like that at Clarks because you drive into work through the country lanes, weaving through... you know, you

⁵⁶ Indeed, while staying in a bed and breakfast in Street, I too found that those without a connection to the company, past or present, were in a minority.

can't get here unless you drive through some country lanes with the radio on singing along. You can't get in the office and then go 'RIGHT! [shouts], killer!' [laughs] But if you go to work on the tube and everybody's annoying you, you've already built up this aggression for the day and you work in a culture that's, you know, quite full-on and hard-nosed, it's very difficult to replicate that sitting on a rooftop at Clarks in the sun [interview location], having a chat." (Saskia, Global Insight Manager, Clarks International, March 2012)

While some expressed a preference for the fastness and centrality of London, to imagine Clarks in London was to imagine a very different company. Saskia suggested the Clarks attitude stemmed from the company's Quaker roots. While the family are now mainly shareholders, with only a few descendants actually working there, the Quaker heritage was something participants seemed to want to continue, irrespective of their own religious beliefs. Saskia, for example, explained that there was a sense of pride that Clarks did honest business and treated people well. She explained that while this occasionally conflicted with a more commercial agenda "the culture of the business is to [...] respect and remain that kind of business".

Keeping this tradition alive was therefore important for many of those at Clarks. In keeping with the Quaker practice of record-keeping, significant resources had been invested over the years in documenting and communicating, both internally and externally, the company's heritage and values. This investment escalated when in 2002 the family founded the *Alfred Gillett Trust* to formally care for the heritage collections of C&J Clarks Ltd. and the Clark family. Although the trust is separate from the company itself, thanks to the archivist Tim's endeavours to make the archive more accessible to the designers at Clarks this had become a particularly useful resource as it enabled them to capitalise on their heritage and afforded individuals the further acquisition of cultural capital related to the brand and its history. The importance of this asset was subsequently confirmed and objectified through the renovation by the Trust of *The Grange*, a heritage listed building on the Clarks site, which had been converted into a dedicated location for the safe storage of the collection. The building also includes a reading room, a shoe consultation area, seminar and conference rooms, cataloguing areas, a photographic studio and staff offices. The Grange therefore represents a significant commitment to the company's heritage. Just as the 'space of an organisation' therefore affords a particular habitus, so too does the 'organisation of space'. As Dale and Burrell explain:

'[O]ur experience of organisations, of work or leisure, for example, is built up not only through our own individual habituated ways of engaging our bodies with a certain materiality, our 'knowing without knowing' of the spatial relations within a particular place; but also the historical embodiment of a 'workplace' [...] and how it is constructed spatially in certain ways so as to produce the meaning of that particular sort of social space.' (Dale and Burrell, 2008)

This was also seen in the visual references to the heritage of the company made throughout the offices. Large items of shoemaking machinery were present throughout the reception area (fig. 6.3); archival images of old advertisements lined the corridor walls (many of which depicted Clarks Originals); in the contemporary-styled café the tops of the seating benches were decorated with beautifully crafted wooden lasts, and in the large open-plan office, where I was first situated, someone had pinned up a black and white photograph of the factory previously occupying the space (fig. 6.4 and 6.5). All of these things, and more, served to remind the Clarks employee they were part of a long history, a history to be cherished and respected. This is not to say of course that Clarks were stuck in the past. Renovations saw stylish modern additions, sensitively adapted to their historic surroundings. Indeed, the company's continual adaptation to the space they had seemed to metaphorically represent the flexible and adaptive approach



Fig. 6.3:
Old shoemaking machinery displayed in Clarks' head office reception.

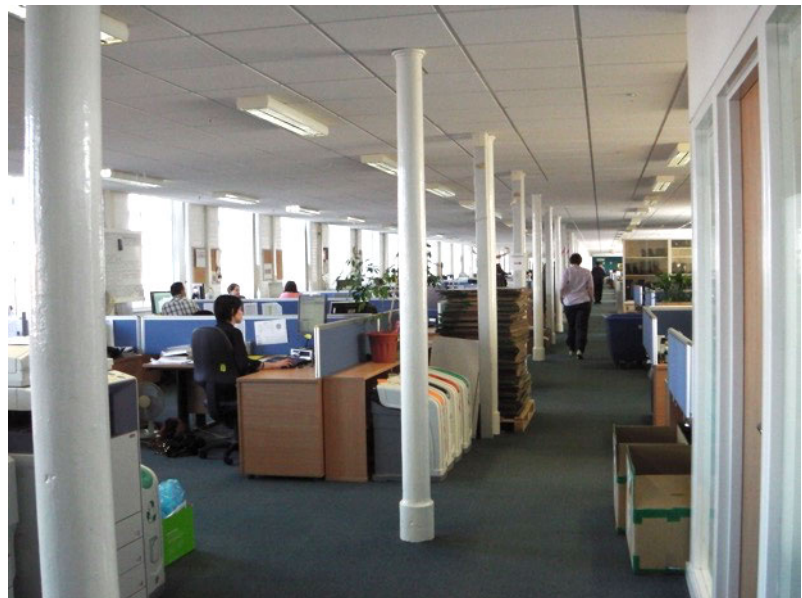


Fig. 6.4:
The open plan office in which I was based (March 2012)



Fig. 6.5:
A photograph of the same office when it was a factory. Date unknown.

they took to business and design more broadly, certainly where Clarks Originals were concerned. For Rosie, Clarks Originals seemed to embody this British eccentricity and heritage. Throughout the interviews there emerged a sense that to understand Originals was to understand Clarks. For many, the Originals styles represented what Clarks was all about and continued to aspire to. In my first interview with Rosie she articulated the impact the brand had on those who had worked on it.

‘If you work on Originals you tend to have, it tends to have an emotional resonance for you long after you’ve left’ [...] ‘People do have very strong opinions on it, myself included, I mean the more you get involved in it, cos it is, like it’s a kind of a cornerstone of Clarks’ heritage.’ (Rosie, March 2012)

Throughout interviews at Clarks those with experience of Clarks Originals would often bring it into conversation. The Originals shoes therefore emerged as a form of objectified capital which enabled staff to embody a Clarks habitus and become a shoeey. Indeed, many of those with a seemingly innate understanding of the brand as a whole had at some point, or in some capacity, worked with the Originals styles. Marijke, the senior designer for Originals, for example, had been invited to work with the branding team to produce a ‘design ethos’ for Clarks, taking the form of three booklets and a poster. As the company were expanding globally it was important to try and communicate a coherent set of values. Marijke explained:

“I tried to analyse what Clarks is all about, it’s about people, number one: the people that work here, the people in the factories, but also of course the customer that we work for, we’re a real people’s brand. And secondly, it’s the heritage, the shoemaking and the story of the Quakers and the Clarks’ and then there’s the innovation because Clarks has always been, from the beginning, been trying to do other things and that’s why I like so much about it. I hate the politics and the over processing, but the idea of the fact that they will always try to come up with a good solution is great.” (Marijke, Senior Designer for Originals, Clarks International, May 2012)

6.5: Reflexivity, Intersubjectivity and the Habitus

So a focus on the embodiment of Clarks’ culture and identity through a study of place and space supports Bourdieu’s notion that identity is ‘located within the pre-reflective, embodied nature of practical activity’ (Bottero, 2010: 4). Yet while Bourdieu claims social practice is generated by ‘deeply buried corporeal dispositions, outside the channels of consciousness and calculation’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 4 in Bottero, 2010), participant accounts suggest that for individuals belonging to the creative class the habitus is informed by a continual and highly calculated process of assessment and ‘reflexivity’.⁵⁷ Indeed, as Marijke’s design ethos demonstrates reflexive practices were *required* in order to understand and internally communicate the identity of the brand and rationalise design, production or marketing decisions. Adams explains, while Bourdieu does partially account for reflexivity - suggesting that the reflexive process can itself be a form of habitus required by particular fields – this is still a procedural requirement within the field. In Bourdieu’s analysis reflexivity is therefore as determining as pre-reflexive dispositions (Adams, 2006: 515). In contrast, Adams uses the work of McNay and Sweetman to highlight the potential of Bourdieu’s idea that reflection emerges as a consequence of ‘crisis’, particularly when a mis-match between habitus and field occurs.⁵⁸ While this was the exception rather than the rule for Bourdieu, it is argued that ‘contemporary society is in fact much more

⁵⁷ Reflexivity is described by Jenkins as the method of observation and retrospection which enables us to determine what we and others are about (Jenkins, 2014: 56).

⁵⁸ Indeed, at times of global expansion reflexive projects are particularly necessary to evaluate the identity of the company and strategise ways to move forward.

routinely marked by the 'crises' emanating from movement between fields than Bourdieu allows' (McNay [1999] in Adams, 2006: 518). Sweetman agrees that as movement between fields increases, crisis becomes ubiquitous and normalized; as such, the boundaries between fields becomes blurred and fields themselves become subject to 'rapid, pervasive and ongoing changes' (Sweetman [2003: 541] in Adams, 2006: 520). Subsequently it is argued that distinction today depends less on class and more on one's access to 'information and communication structures' where 'winners' are 'marked by self-monitoring and the reformulation of rules and regulations in the service of innovation which "entail self reflexivity"' (Lash [1994: 119] in Adams, 2006: 523).⁵⁹

The intersubjective and reflexive practices of Gemma, the marketing manager for Clarks Originals and Rosie, the group head, provide an opportunity to address a common criticism of Bourdieu's work – that his emphasis on embodied dispositions neglects the reflexive and mobilized aspects of contemporary forms of identity, thereby casting doubt on the extent to which the concept of the habitus deals effectively with the nature of reflexivity and agency in social life (Bottero, 2010: 5, Jenkins, 1992: 77). In short, Bourdieu's approach is more about identity than identification. Consequently, Bottero suggests that 'dispositional practice is better explored as a question of the intersubjective nature of practice, and that different aspects of 'identity' can be related to the features of situated intersubjectivity' (Bottero, 2010).

It is therefore the intersubjective practices of identity and identification in and between fields of practice that form the focus of this next section of the chapter. Returning to Jenkins' symbolic interactionist concept of the internal-external-dialectic of identification (Jenkins, 2008), relating to Goffman's *Presentation of Self* (Goffman, 1990 [1959]), it is argued that reflexivity and habitus can be 'hybridized' (Adams, 2006) to understand how identity, the habitus and cultural capital are embodied through an iterative process where information is fed back and forth between agents through representative practices. Furthermore, a focus on those involved in the design, production and marketing of Clarks Originals shoes demonstrates the way participants' own subjective perception of the brand (and shoes in general) shifts through reflexive practice. The identities of the shoes and those involved with them can therefore be understood as continually shifting in relation to one another. As Bottero proposes:

'[a] greater emphasis on the intersubjective negotiation and coordination of practices (and on the concrete interpersonal networks of interdependency, obligation and constraint through which intersubjective negotiation and accountability flow) can help locate and connect the different aspects of "identity".' (Bottero, 2010: : 5)

6.6: The Habitus of a Marketing Manager: The 'Internal-External-Dialectic of (Brand) Identification'

In his book *Social Identity*, Jenkins makes two important observations about the process of identification, which, as Bottero has argued, are not given due credence by Bourdieu: first that 'the individual and the collective are routinely entangled with each other, and second, that 'individual and collective identification only comes into being within interaction' (Jenkins, 2014: 39-40). To return to the literature review, Jenkins uses the term *internal-external-dialectic of identification* to describe a process whereby identity is negotiated in response to the perception other have of us (Jenkins, 2008: 44). This process is as relevant for understanding collective identities, such as brands, as it is those of individuals, and, as his original comment indicates, the identity of the brand and the individual happen through interaction with one another. While Jenkins argues this reflexive process of observation and retrospection has always existed to a

⁵⁹ Of course, access to the 'information and communication structures' (Lash & Urry [1994] in Adams, 2006: 523) that afford this reflexivity may also be affected by socio-economic status.

certain extent, this is particularly the case in creative fields where ‘the identity of the post-industrial worker’, as McRobbie describes him/her, can be understood to be ‘increasingly forged *through* their work’ (McRobbie, 1998: 148) – or, in this case, the brand.

As Rosie previously explained, the Clarks Originals team (at the time of research) comprised a small number of staff, who, between one another, had developed an intuitive and coherent feel for the shoes which had resulted in a coherent brand identity. Marijke, the senior designer, identified *teamwork* as the key to producing successful shoes:

“[I]t’s not you as a designer who can make a good selling shoe, it’s teamwork, I can never make the shoes without the technical people and without the sales team around it. That’s really nice, if you have these three areas working together closely, it’s beautiful, you get the best things.” (Marijke, Senior Designer for Clarks Originals, May 2012)

Each member of the team brought a slightly different perspective to the production of the shoes, which would collectively reinforce an overall sense for the brand’s identity. This process of interaction also involved dealing with people *outside* the team, for example those within the Clarks main range, accounts (or stockists), consumers and collaborators. In the Clarks context therefore the Originals brand was a collective identity shared and negotiated in different ways between individuals with varying agendas. The possession of varying degrees of subcultural capital both reinforced and disrupted the brand’s sense of coherence and this became most apparent in accounts of collaborative projects with third parties. The Originals habitus therefore emerged as an ongoing process of negotiation.

Here, Gemma, the Marketing Manager for Originals, provides a useful focus to understand the development of the habitus and the embodiment of subcultural capital through the internal-external-dialectic of *brand* identification. As ‘cultural intermediary’ (mediator between the production of cultural goods and consumer tastes (Bourdieu, 1984: 365)) Gemma was instrumental to the process of brand identification. Involved with each season’s range from its inception, she was charged with the task of creating credible advertising and marketing content which would engage consumers in store and online. In other words she was responsible for the ‘face-work’ of the brand (Goffman, 1972 [1955]). As previously explained, a priority for Gemma was to make sure whatever they did felt right for the brand as a whole and didn’t undermine their identity or credibility. As such, Gemma’s role consisted of a considerable amount of checking and monitoring, particularly in relation to others’ perceptions of the brand, and, where appropriate, she would adjust their responses accordingly.

When I met Gemma for her first interview she was at her desk in the corner of the large open-plan marketing office (fig. 6.6). The visually engaging space reflected the visual nature of her role, and the surrounding images seemed to relate to the Originals ethos. We relocated to a meeting room where she explained her role and the pathway that had led her to Clarks. Originally studying marketing at university, she described herself as coming from a creative marketing background. She had worked on Originals for two years and although this was her first fashion job she felt her previous experience at a record label and her own personal interest in music had made her fairly well placed to do the job. Gemma identified herself as an Originals consumer and while she acknowledged that you were “supposed to be able to market anything to anyone”, she felt her intuition seemed to match up with what people wanted. Consequently, while she had previously worked for the women’s range, it was for Originals she felt she had done her “best work”. Since moving to the sub-brand, Originals were almost the only shoes she wore (indeed she was wearing a pair of suede *Desert Grace* shoes during the interview), yet at the end of the interview she recalled that although she had been aware of the shoes before



Fig. 6.6: Gemma: Marketing manager for Clarks Originals. May 2012.



Fig. 6.7: A plinth featuring *Toddla T* one of the DJ collaborators for the *Originals Remixed* campaign for A/W 2012. Photograph taken at the London Press launch.



Fig. 6.8: Proposed store imagery for the *Originals Remixed* campaign featuring Los Angeles DJ collaborator *Tokimonsta*. Photograph taken in the 'mock shop' (simulations of Clarks stores used for the development of visual merchandising).

working for the company she had not actually worn them, remarking: “I hadn’t thought about it until you asked, until you mentioned it, I was like “I’ve actually... like that’s... my behaviour has been changed”. She reflected that perhaps, through working with the shoes, she had ended up influencing her own perception of the product.

Gemma’s account of two recent collaborative campaigns can help to gain an insight to the sorts of practices which informed her changing habitus. The first of these was the *Originals Remixed* campaign for autumn/winter 2012 (fig. 6.7 and 6.8).⁶⁰ This was the year the Desert Trek celebrated its fortieth anniversary which coincided with the release of a book by DJ and Reggae aficionado Al ‘Fingers’ Newman called *Clarks in Jamaica* (2012). The book publicised the link between Originals (including the Desert Trek), Jamaica and Reggae music. In view of these links, the Originals team decided to collaborate with the Reggae label *Trojan Records* to commission four DJs/producers to remix the classic Reggae track ‘*Let Your Yeah Be Yeah*’ by *The Pioneers*. The remixes would receive a staggered release through Clarks website to accompany the release of the shoes. Just as with the *Gloverall* collaboration (discussed by Pete in the previous chapter) several aspects came together to form a credible and authentic story.

Gemma recalled the process of a marketing initiative such as the *Originals Remix* campaign, a process perhaps best described in terms of Goffman’s ‘face-work’, or, ‘the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face’ (the image one has of oneself). According to Goffman, ‘face-work serves to counteract “incidents”, that is, events whose symbolic implications threaten face’ (Goffman, 1972 [1955]), such as, for example, the negative blog reviews mentioned by Gemma earlier. As such, collaborative projects would start with a briefing during which the Originals team would explain their idea to their agency. The idea would need to resonate with their four main communications markets: the UK, Japan, Italy and America. The agency would therefore work with a music industry consultant who would suggest names of potential collaborators. She explained she would then “[find] a way to make sure [the names were] right” for example she would use her social capital (the various music contacts she had accrued during her career, including her brother who owned his own label) to check and validate the suggestions, explaining:

“I don’t profess to know what the coolest thing is ever, all the time, so it’s good to just get some opinions and think about knowing the consumer, knowing the products, and then making decisions based on that really.” (Gemma)

She would then take these names out to the marketing teams of the respective territories who would then (hopefully) test the idea within their own networks. This could be a tricky process because many of these individuals were working across the full Clarks brand and had different levels of engagement with Originals. She used Japan as an example of a team who understood the shoes and would take this checking process further. In the case of the Remix campaign, for example, the Japanese team took the suggestions to MTV to get feedback on the potential collaborators. Once endorsed, the team would then work with these collaborators, whose participation would also reinforce the authenticity of the story. For example, each of the *Originals Remix* collaborators featured in a ‘day of the life of...’ documentary in their own city, Gemma explained:

“We had a set of questions about, you know, what inspires you to make music, like these kind-of questions, and one was a kind-of ‘what do you think about the remix campaign?’ or ‘how are you going to approach the remix?’ And all of them kind-of, without even being asked to, talked about Clarks’ history in music and, cos they knew it, they understood it, they knew that Ghostface Killer had named an album

⁶⁰ For more information about the ‘Remixed’ campaign visit <http://clarksoriginals.com/editorial/originals-remixed/>

after the Wallabees, you know, like they know stuff like that because that's their world." (Gemma)

Through an established consensus between all those inside and outside Clarks she explained the campaign felt 'right'. For each campaign the social commentary on various blogs and in the press would also go on to reinforce this sense; as would seeing the shoes on other people "out in the world". She described the joy she would feel when getting off the train at Liverpool Street Station in London: "the amount of girls you see wearing, looking amazing wearing like *Yarra Desert*, that heeled Desert boot, and I just want to take photos of all of them cos I just think like 'come on' and I just want people here to know that that's real, that's actually, it's not just a few pictures we've nicked off blogs it's, that's actually people do wear it." Each of these interactions would affirm the decisions they had made for the season. Consequently, she would reflect on what made it right and take those lessons on to the next season.

At the time of research their next project involved the further reinforcement of the connections between music and Originals, this time in terms of a metaphorical association between the vinyl record and the Desert Boot:

"the teams have developed some Desert Boots that are sort of paying tribute to vinyl records as a format I guess, and the idea is that, you know, the Desert Boots are this enduring format, as is vinyl which is having a big resurgence and so what we'll do is create these special edition products that tribute vinyl and then we'll also, we're thinking we might hook up with *Record Store Day* and then we'll be the sort-of proud sponsors of Record Store Day, and then do events around that."

Following my period of fieldwork this initiative came to fruition. Clarks sponsored the 2012 Record Store Day and amongst other outcomes a limited edition picture disc was released, dye-cut in the shape of a Desert Boot (fig. 6.9). The record, produced by the reggae and dancehall record label *Greensleeves* featured artist Little John's song *Clarks Booty* (1985) and Scorcher's song *Put on me Clarks* (1980). Throughout this marketing process one is again able to see in practice the bundling of qualities, or qualisigns (discussed in Chapters Two and Five, particularly in relation to Pete's collection of Desert Boots), i.e. collaborators, other brands and objects, which can subsequently be seen to shift the shoes in their 'relative salience, value, utility, and relevance across contexts' (Keane, 2005: 188). Yet one is also able to see the social conditions and subcultural capital necessary to afford the creation of such convincing, almost *natural*, associations.

In relation to Bourdieu and Goffman's theories, the acquisition through practice of the relevant subcultural capital was therefore a part of the face-work necessary for a successful and convincing campaign where a 'mutual acceptance' was achieved between all those involved in producing and consuming the collaboration. In such a situation, 'the line taken by each participant is [...] allowed to prevail, and each participant is allowed to carry off the role he appears to have chosen for himself' (Goffman, 1972 [1955]). Goffman explains that when the response to one's face doesn't differ from the impression one has of oneself the status quo is maintained. When the response exceeds the impression one has (as was the case with this collaboration) one 'feels good', yet if his expectations are not fulfilled then he/she will 'feel bad' or 'lose face'.

An essential part of what informed this process, therefore, were lessons learned from less successful projects. Here we can see the way Bourdieu's *crisis* can effect reflection. At some point prior to the *Originals Remix* collaboration the team had worked on another collaboration with a group of well-known individuals, yet this time Gemma felt the team had perhaps strayed a little too far from their "core genre". During initial conversations, the collaborators had said

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Fig. 6.9: 2012 limited edition vinyl release of Little John's *Clarks Booty* and Scorchers' *Put on me Clarks*. Produced by Greensleeves in conjunction with Record Store Day. Record dye-cut in the shape of a Desert boot. Own photograph.

they loved Originals, yet as the campaign progressed it seemed they were becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the idea of endorsement. She explained:

“[T]he whole reason we’d used them was for them to express their kind-of [pauses] not admiration for the brand but at least their... their kind-of, um, that they approve of the brand and that it’s a good brand than the shoes are good and all the rest of it, and we’d never sort-of asked them to do like ‘say that you like Clarks Originals’, that wasn’t part of it, but they were almost so paranoid about it that they ended up, it ended up feeling like they were actually rejecting the project [...] whereas other artists that understand the history that Clarks have got in music don’t care about talking about it because the fact they know it makes them cool.”

While she did not think that their disengagement would have been noticeable by the consumer, it clearly made *her* feel uncomfortable. Here Goffman explains the inherent danger involved in relationships (such as collaborations or endorsements) where ‘members come to share a face’ in the presence of a third party – i.e. the consumer. In such a relationship Goffman explains an ‘improper act’ by one member can potentially become a source of embarrassment for the other members; ‘[a] social relationship, then, can be seen as a way in which the person is more than ordinarily forced to trust his self-image and face to the tact and good conduct of others’ (Goffman, 1972 [1955]). The strategy in this instance seemed to be to maintain a ‘tactful blindness’ (ibid.) to the disparity, which allowed both parties to save face. On reflection, she explained:

“[I]t’s a learning process so I wouldn’t do that again [...]. You just, you need to get the right feel for the people and that they, that they get it, that they get the brand, and then that way you never, you’re never in that conflict point of view because we’re never going to ask them to do something that feels weirdly like a sponsorship thing, cos that doesn’t do what we want it to do either.”

These conflicting, or, in Bourdieu’s terms, crisis situations appeared frequently throughout interviews with other staff. Just as with Pete, in the previous chapter, whose knowledge and appreciation for his customer’s watch was not matched or acknowledged by the customer himself, the discrediting of the face one presents by another can be disconcerting, potentially resulting in alienation from the product, their work, or even themselves (Seeman, 1959). ‘Face-saving’ practices were therefore required to deal with such conflicts. For Gemma, this involved either avoiding situations where the outcome could not be predicted or acquiring enough subcultural capital to confidently innovate and make the right decisions without undermining the credibility of the brand, or herself by extension.

Another member of the team who embodied this subcultural capital through close interaction with the consumer was Rosie. As mentioned, in her role as Group Head for Clarks Originals Rosie served as a type of range manager - a point of intersection between all those inside and outside the company with a stake in the shoes. During her interview, she explained she enjoyed talking to accounts (suppliers of Clarks Originals), particularly in the UK and Japan, as they would often know more about the shoes than she did, referring to past catalogues and asking for particular styles to be remade. One example was when the iconic Manchester menswear store *Oi Polloi* (a retailer with a long history of connections with Originals) requested a Desert Trek without the centre seam. On further investigation Clarks found the exact ‘Portobello’ style in the archive, which was then reintroduced as part of the Desert Trek’s fortieth anniversary (fig. 6.10). Another occasion was when they reintroduced a style called ‘Rambler’, a Polyveldt construction “championed” by Clarks in the Seventies. She explained the shoes were well received: “those slightly geeky Originals guys were totally bowled over that it had been brought back” (Rosie). When Clarks did occasionally redevelop these styles, the connoisseurs would be



Fig. 6.10: 'Pembridge', the updated version of the seamless Desert Trek archive style 'Portobello' for autumn/winter 2012. Image courtesy of Clarks.



Fig. 6.11: A pin board in the Clarks Originals office featuring 'unlikely style icons'. Image courtesy of Rosie.

quick to point out which details were different from the ones they remembered. Although this was challenging at times, she explained that it was important to listen to them because they would often have the good ideas and would push the team to continually move forward.

So, both Rosie and Gemma had acquired a sense for the brand and the shoes through practice, and this involved a complex process of interaction with consumers and collaborators with various levels of subcultural capital outside the brand. The knowledge both these participants had acquired meant they had developed an intuitive sense for the shoes which alerted them to when they might be straying away from their comfort zone. As King explains:

'These players do not apply *a priori* principles to their play – only beginners do that – but rather, having an intimate understanding of the object of the game and the kinds of situations it can throw up, they have the practical flexibility to know when and how they should run to the net or into space [...]. Crucially, the "sense of the game" refers ultimately to a sense of one's relations with other individuals and what those individuals will regard as tolerable, given certain broadly shared but not definitive understandings.' (King, 2000: 419)

Communication with those within the company both within the team and the main range then enabled them to articulate and reinforce this knowledge. While Gemma explained there are no rules to this 'game', Bourdieu explains that practices are needed to describe and establish these shared understandings - in this case, of what Originals are, what they are not, and what can and can't be done with them:

'To eliminate the need to resort to "rules", it would be necessary to establish in each case a complete description (which invocation of rules allows one to dispense with) of the relation between the habitus, as a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures, and the socially structured situation in which the agents' interests are defined, and with them the objective functions and subjective motivations of their practices.' (Bourdieu, 1977)

These 'descriptions' occurred mostly informally and through them one is able to see subcultural capital, habitus and distinction in play. This became apparent during my last interview with Rosie in the office she shared with other members of the Clarks Originals team. As we were concluding the interview I noticed a cork board on the wall with a collection of seemingly random images of people and things pinned to it, including an image of the actor Zack Efron (fig. 5.11). Intrigued, I emailed Rosie afterwards to ask about its significance:

"Ah yes, Mr Efron. Well, that board came about as a bit of a joke. Someone from the Marketing team emailed us a picture of David Beckham wearing a jacket we'd included in a styling brief. In the email he suggested that David Beckham would be a great ambassador for Originals. We (the Originals team) laughed about it because David Beckham really wouldn't resonate for our target consumer, in fact, if he were explicitly endorsing the brand potentially it would do more harm than good. We jokingly started referring to David as a 'style icon' and put his photo up on the board. From there we started adding other unlikely style icons (Ian McShane, a pigeon (Hannah hates pigeons)) and people and pictures we found during our research – Professor Tytonius who tests ballistic nylon (amazing name), JFK (based in Boston), postcards from the US team, an amazing guy featured in the Clarks Jamaica book, etc etc. We recently added a quote from a colleague that was absurd and then finally, Zac Efron because [someone] suggested he was a great Originals style icon... Goes to show how subjective taste is!" (Rosie: email correspondence 21/05/2012)

To those without the relevant subcultural capital (i.e. me and others outside the team) the images were difficult to decipher, but for the team the board was a shared space to visually articulate their understanding. In establishing a sense for the shoes, those people considered to be the antithesis of the brand were as important as the people who fitted. So, while conflict between the habitus of each of those involved with the shoes, both inside and outside the team, could pose problems, it provoked constant re-evaluation, while providing the opportunity to reinforce a sense for the brand and gain the confidence to create and innovate. Furthermore, this embodied expertise enabled them to intuitively adapt to unexpected situations. While unexpected appropriations (for example by rapper Vybz Kartel, in his song *Clarks*, which was making headlines at the time of research), might at first have seemed to conflict with the established consensus of the brand within the company, the team's ability to implement 'face-saving practices', adapt and be flexible with their response (for example with the Trojan Records collaboration) demonstrated the intersubjective way in which the shoes' cultural value manifests and evolves between various agents. Through these successes and challenges Gemma, Rosie and their colleagues had developed such an extensive knowledge of what Bourdieu describes as the 'script' that they were able to successfully improvise with and elaborate on the shoes' meanings.

6.7: Embodying Subcultural Capital and Becoming Clarks Originals

So, Goffman's theories show the habitus to be something informed by interaction and reflexivity. Rosie explained that as a result of spending the better part of ten years constantly thinking about the meanings of the shoes, of what other people wanted and what they were looking for, she found herself increasingly questioning what she wanted and what they meant to her. As such, she felt she had developed a much more emotional involvement with footwear. She also explained you can't "un-know" things, and once exposed to these cultural references and endorsements she was aware that her subjectivity had changed.⁶¹ Indeed, it had done for Gemma and Marijke too, each of whom had sufficiently embodied the subcultural capital necessary to feel comfortable wearing the Originals styles themselves. To some extent they were therefore living the same 'world' as those they were targeting, and this affected how others identified them. Subsequently, Rosie explained how, through everyday interactions, this identity had become a part of her own 'face':

"[W]hen I met my partner I remember he said 'what do you do?' and I said 'oh I work for Clarks Originals', he went: 'Oh my god Clarks Originals, I've got a pair of *Chip Butty*, they're this colour and they're...' you know it's quite funny that you kind of er, that you kind of, the brand and the footwear becomes a currency, and people kind of come to you. I had an email from a friend last night, she's pregnant at the moment and she's like 'oh my god I bought a pair of Clarks Originals wedges last night and they're so comfortable' and er she said 'I just wanted to say thanks' [laughter]. That's really sweet; okay she's my friend but, er, yeah, suddenly people talk to you more about shoes because they know that's what you do."

Rosie's partner, a furniture maker, was passionate about trainers and she joked she was sure that part of her appeal to him was her job. Indeed, his subcultural capital and appreciation for the shoes may also have affected her impression of him. These connections were something she had continued to nurture. While interviewing her at home I noticed a pair of small children's Desert Boots on a top shelf. She explained she had bought them for her young daughter. Although they didn't fit yet she was looking forward to the day she could wear them.

⁶¹ Indeed, this was the case for many other participants who explained that an acquired taste for quality materials and production processes (inherent to the Clarks ethos) had made them very fussy shoe-shoppers. Fred and Marijke had both suggested you could spot a shoey in a shoe shop because they'd often be the ones smelling or bending a shoe.

Consequently the Originals shoes had taken on a very personal meaning for Rosie, they had been removed from their commodity context and 'singularised' (Kopytoff, 1986) through their use as a symbolic resource with which to weave 'a narrative of self-identity' (Thompson [1995] in Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998: 132).

As a result of her job, shoes had therefore become a resource through which Rosie identified herself and others identified her. The tendency people had to want to talk to her about shoes interested her. She speculated that this perhaps happens with some professions more than others, and particularly in the creative industries or public services (like doctors) where there is less of a distinction between work and people's everyday lives and interests. Shoes, for example, are something everyone feels they can relate to in one way or another. Often, when asked what she did, Rosie's response would be met with comments like "'oh that must be a dream job' or 'my wife would love to do that' and those kind of things, all those clichés about women and shoes." She explained she had also lost count of the number of "shoe calendars, shoe cards, shoe notebooks, mugs that people buy you that say something about shoes on it". While these perceptions were not consistent with her own perceptions or experiences of shoes, her job provided a way for people to identify with her, and, as a very friendly and sociable person she spoke fondly of these interactions. Again, in Goffman's terms a consideration and respect for her own *face*, and the face of others meant that during these interactions discrepancies would be overlooked and the status-quo would be maintained (Goffman, 1972 [1955]).

6.8: Habitus, Creativity and Innovation

While the experiences of Rosie and Gemma demonstrate the intersubjective nature of the habitus where subcultural capital is embodied through practice, particularly through interaction and reflection; practice, of course, also means the creative process of making. It is here that Marijke, the senior designer for Originals, provides an interesting focus. Throughout the research, Marijke emerged as perhaps the most experienced *shoey*, both in terms of and embodied understanding of the meanings *and* materiality of the shoes. In contrast to Bourdieu's more *objective* approach to the habitus (King, 2000), which has tended to understand it as a set of dispositions that restrict creativity, and which have left him open to criticisms of 'social reductionism' (Jenkins, 2002 [1992]: xiv), Marijke's experience demonstrated how creative practice serves to shape the habitus. As such, she affords a sociological interpretation of creativity, which sees it more as something cultivated through, and situated in, interpersonal relationships, and social and material environments. As Dalton explains, while creativity has been considered to be an exceptional and agentic response to habit (its dualism), creativity should actually be understood as habitual or situated in habit (Dalton, 2004: 609-610). In his thinking, which combines Hans Joas' work on the *Creativity of Action* with Bourdieu's concept of the habitus, Dalton explains:

'Creativity becomes a residual category for those elements of action that cannot be accounted for by the problematically over-socialized [and rational] view of the actor that the habitual and embodied perspectives on action tend toward...'
(Dalton, 2004)

So what is creativity and how can Bourdieu's notions of cultural capital and the habitus help us to understand it? Furthermore, how can a consideration of creativity help us to advance Bourdieu's theories of practice and embodiment? In her book *Dimensions of Creativity*, Boden proposes that creativity is a 'puzzle', a 'paradox' and a 'mystery' (Boden, 1994: 75). Since Plato the rationalization of creativity has been considered by some to be impossible (ibid., 1), a myth compounded by the notion of the 'creative genius' (Favaro and Falcone, 2015: 14). Even dictionary definitions describe the act of creation as 'to bring into being or form out of nothing' (Boden, 1994: 75). Boden asks whether it is possible to explain how creativity comes about and

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if anything systematic can be said about it (ibid., 1). As we know from Bourdieu's concept of the habitus, those behaviours which at first may appear intuitive are often learned and practiced to the extent they become second nature. As such, they are taken-for-granted and avoid interrogation. This is not to suggest creative ability is completely learned, but it may have more to do with interaction, environment and practice than the wealth of psychological accounts would credit.

In their article *The Creative Essence of Cultural Innovation*, Favaro and Falcone suggest that dispensing with the notion that the new can be created from nothing 'in a kind of spontaneous generation' allows us to consider the true 'essence' of creativity as the 'new combination of pre-existing cultural artefacts' (Favaro and Falcone, 2015: 15), or indeed sub/cultural capital. Florida agrees, summarising creativity as follows:

'Creativity involves the ability to synthesise. Einstein captured it nicely when he called his own work "combinatory play." It is a matter of sifting through data, perceptions and materials to come up with combinations that are *new and useful*. A creative synthesis is useful in such varied ways as producing a practical device, or theory, or insight that can be applied to solve a problem, or a work of art that can be appreciated.' (Florida, 2002: 31)

These interpretations fit well with the experiences of the Clarks Originals team. Rosie for example had described her role as a type of 'synthesis', constantly bringing together influences from different people, places, times and situations. Marijke was also well aware of this synthesizing process; in her first interview she cited Picasso's famous quote that 'good artists copy; great artists steal' to explain "[o]f course you're influenced, you have to know what's happening and you have to be inspired by that and also at the same time as other people you have the same ideas, it's a sign of the times." In fact, the quote cited by Marijke has been originally attributed to T. S. Elliott, whose own words are perhaps more pertinent to the Clarks Originals case study. He observes that:

'Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different.' (Elliott, [1920] 1999: 59)

So, creativity for the Clarks Originals team depended on the skilled and impassioned acquisition of subcultural capital which enabled them to innovate with confidence and *develop* rather than *deface* the brand and the shoes. One can see, therefore, the relevance of the *Remix* campaign discussed earlier, which serves almost as a metaphor for the history and evolution of Clarks Originals as a synthesis rather than creation - the idea for the Desert Boot, of course, originally came from the boots worn by troops in Africa.

It is important however not to lose sight of the fact that this creativity is only possible given the right conditions and environment. Florida explains that '[c]reativity requires self-assurance and the ability to take risks' (2002: 31) and while some environments or organisations nurture creativity, others can kill it (ibid., 40). At the time of research, Clarks, with its countryside location and 'gentle culture', and the Clarks Originals sub brand with their comparatively small production numbers, seemed to afford an environment where risks could be taken and avenues could be (cautiously) explored. Marijke explained that one of the things she liked most about Clarks and the reason she felt so loyal to them was that they let you make mistakes, therefore employees were able to learn and develop. Indeed, Tim the archivist explained that innovation and the confidence to do things differently was part of Clarks' DNA, partly, he speculated, on account of their remote location which for earlier generations of Clarks had conditioned a sense of self-sufficiency and a need to 'get out', travel and find new

ideas.⁶² While the global expansion and increasing production numbers somewhat constrained risk-taking creative behaviour, this attitude was clearly still alive amongst staff – evidenced in obscure places such as my own temporary desk, above which someone had pinned a quote by Sir Ken Robinson stating that 'If you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything Original' (fig. 6.12).⁶³

6.9: The Habitus of the Senior Designer: Embodiment Through Collecting, Organising, Making and Miniaturising

As discussed, the confidence to synthesise or 'remix' is gained through practice. In his study of the creative practice of contemporary Western songwriters, McIntyre (2008) explains that to create, identify or develop something new the practitioner must go through a long process of 'inculcation and immersion' of a particular domain (in this case fashion and footwear) to acquire the specific sets of knowledges, conventions, codes, rules, ideas pertinent to their cultural practice – the subcultural capital. Drawing on Schon, McIntyre explains that the acquisition of this knowledge involves learning to adjust their action through reflection both *on* their action and *in* action (Schon [1983] in McIntyre, 2008: 42) i.e. through practice. A study of the 'inculcation and immersion' of the *designer* therefore provides an opportunity to understand how the habitus shapes, and is shaped by, creative practice.

Marijke Bruggink (fig. 6.13) is a Dutch footwear designer from Amsterdam, who, in 2007, after owning her own label *Lola Pagola* with fellow designer Marlie Witteveen, was invited by Clarks to work on the Originals brand. Marijke's design ethos already fitted with Originals, and this was perhaps part of the reason she was approached for the position. Yet it was also clear that through working on Originals her style had shifted. She explained for example that if someone looked at her shoes "they could easily say 'Oh yeah, that's typical Marijke', but that's because I just work on this range now, I've adapted to that style, but my shoes before were high-heeled sexy lady shoes." Consequently, one could see that while Marijke made her mark on Originals, they also made their mark on her. In our first interview, she started by reflecting on her design ethos, explaining she liked "simple classic beautiful designs" and was interested in classic archetypal shoes – hence her interest in the Desert Boot. Her subsequent accounts of her creative process started to give an insight to the way she embodied an understanding of the shoes and their wearers, and the dynamic way in which her habitus shifted through practice and interaction.

"I'm interested in new things, linked to traditional things but that's why I like Originals so much, I love the simplicity and the beauty of the construction but I'm always interested in new things, working with new designers, and I don't really appreciate Manolo Blahnik or Christian Louboutin or those kind of shoes; it's easy, all you need is a nice last shape, a nice material and you make a sexy shoe, but to make something new it's a really different ball game, and to make something that is commercial, commercial in a good way, I mean good design, affordable prices..."

⁶² Tim explained that prior to his eight years studying Clarks' business history he had assumed the company was fairly 'staid'. On the contrary, his research had shown them to be a highly progressive organization, for example, in a move that pre-empted globalization, they had been trading with the colonies since the 1840s and 1850s; they were one of the first companies to adopt a computer in Britain (an interest in technology more recently culminating in an investment in several rapid prototyping machines and 3-D scanners); and they had also appointed women to senior management positions since as early as 1903 when Alice Clark became Company Director. True to the Quakers tendency to 'quietly get on with things' (Tim) these innovative practices had gone relatively unheralded.

⁶³ Sir Ken Robinson is Emeritus Professor of Arts Education at the University of Warwick. His specialist areas of research are creativity and innovation.

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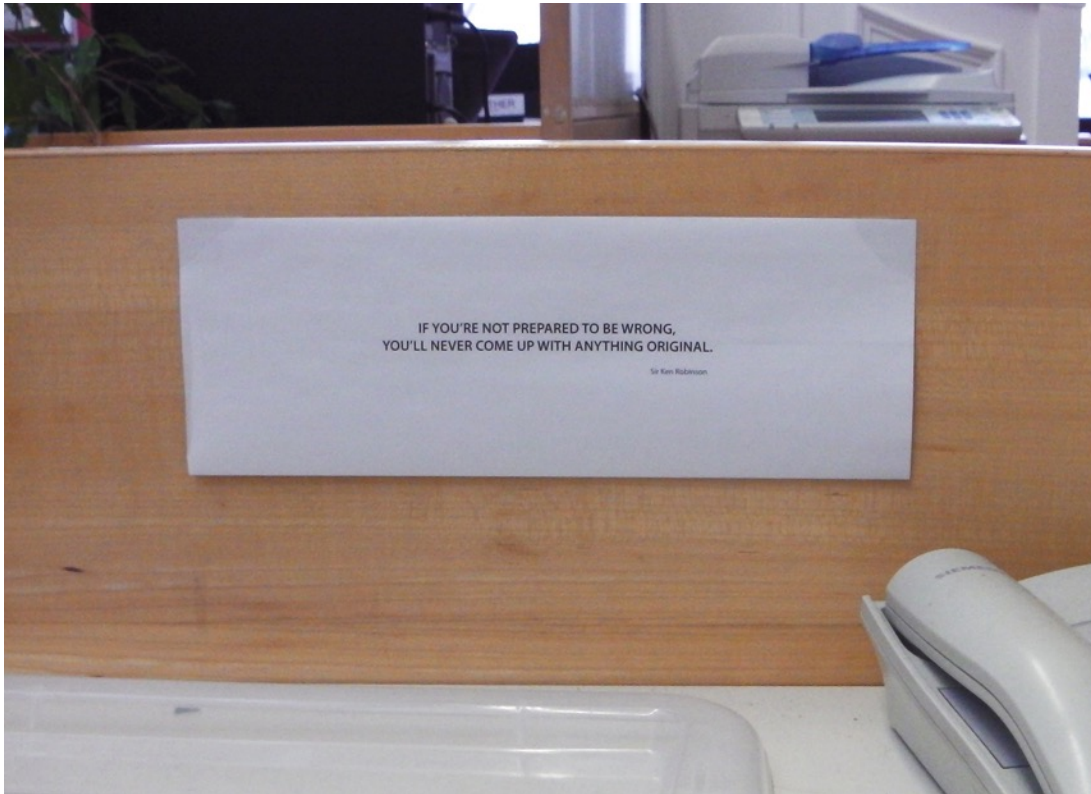


Fig. 6.12: Quote by Sir Ken Robinson, stuck to the partition of a desk in one of the open plan offices.



Fig. 6.13:

Marijke: Senior designer for Clarks Originals in her studio at Clarks' head office. May 2012, own photograph.

Louboutin and Blahnik were used metonymically several more times throughout the interviews to represent a subfield of footwear Marijke felt opposed to – an exclusive and hierarchical system that design stereotypically sexy shoes, selling them for high prices. She described herself as having a 'Bauhaus' background and clearly valued authenticity, simplicity and quality, aligning herself with others in the company with the same values. As such, she saw herself less as a 'fashion fashion person', taking her influence instead from street style and cultural references – in this way she 'absorbed' and 'filtered' or synthesized influences from everywhere. "Real people" were a large part of her inspiration, which she felt was also part of Clarks identity. She would therefore enjoy looking at what fashion innovators were wearing on the streets of London or in the second-hand market in Amsterdam. She was adamant that designers should go out and look at people rather than purely staying inside and designing, explaining: "that's where it all starts – what people pick up themselves." To add further context to her observations she would also read blogs and the reports from WGSN (trend agency *Worth Global Style Network*), as well as a number of newspapers such as the *Guardian*, *The Times* and various style magazines. She had developed a good working relationship with the archive and so was also to be regularly found with Tim, examining past Clarks styles. Consequently, she described herself as a 'professional scanner', adept at quickly identifying anything which might inform her design process:

"[laughs] I can go to a shoe shop and [mimics a scanner that identifies something] 'boing', but that's the profession, it's kind of, yeah, you become like that, and of course I'm interested in that, I'm just interested in culture, that's it, I'm just completely obsessed with culture, whether it's music or art or, not necessarily fashion from the fashion point of view, like the shows or anything, I'm interested in people, real people."

Marijke explained "it's not rocket science; you just have to keep your eyes open", yet her comment 'you become like that' belies the complex process through which this happens. Perhaps one of the most significant practices informing her habitus was collecting and organizing images, materials and shoes. This first became apparent in her studio where she showed me some of her past mood boards. As a visual/practical way of consolidating, organizing, testing and communicating one's observations, mood boards were still commonly practiced throughout the business to communicate ideas, or even compiled privately to articulate or think through a concept for oneself. Marijke explained that she would analyse current social trends and combine these with images from a range of other sources to represent a story. This would link to a material board where she would "try little things". The function of the boards was therefore to analyse things, work through ideas, and test them.

From her early days in footwear design she had also collected an extensive amount of research about the history of shoes and their place in folklore. One outcome of this research included a short "clip" or film she had made. She had also done extensive research into archetypal shoes, which formed the starting point for her design process and also informed her personal shoe choices. This was one of the reasons she felt her design ethos fitted well with Originals; she understood what made them original and unique:

"[T]hat's where I'm coming from, that's what I like, so I have my Doc Martens, I have my Desert Boots, um, I have my ballerinas, I have my Clogs, and in those areas I look for the best ones, so ballerinas I would go for Repetto, um, because it also has a heritage behind it, ah? It's also a real ballet shoe-making factory, Doc Martens I would have the real ones not the copy ones, cos you see with all these archetypes there are people who use them in other contexts, make them slightly different, I don't like that, I want the real ones. And then I'm really interested in hybrids as well, not the hybrids that sports are doing but hybrids in the sense of mixing two different styles together. Again, if you look at Lola Pagola [her own

website] you'll see a lot of that, we did... so we took a sports shoe and we took a high heel and we mixed the two together, and we took a clog and we took a outdoor shoe and we mixed it together, so trying to make new products by doing that, so..."

When asked why she was so interested in classic archetypal shoes, she responded that it was all about "balance": "it's like the design and the fit and the material used, it all comes together and it's like a perfect balance of everything." For Marijke, these classic, timeless archetypes seemed almost to be the holy grail of shoe-making; to understand the archetype was to understand what made shoes great (or, what made great shoes). Acquiring this knowledge had taken a considerable investment of time and effort. She explained that in the beginning when she first started designing shoes she was "obsessed" with them. She would buy second hand shoes often for a detail which interested her or for their folkloric value or the story behind them. Gradually she accumulated a collection of "thousands" of shoes which she kept at her home in Amsterdam. She described this as her own "archive".

Here, Stewart's theories about collecting are useful to understand the process of embodiment and identification through representation. In this case, the collection is understood as an intentional and curated accumulation of items relating to a theme (as opposed to the unintentional practice of hoarding). Like Bourdieu and his notion of embodied capital, Stewart explains the collection cannot be purchased 'in toto', instead it must be serially acquired over a period of time. Consequently '[t]his seriality provides a means for defining or classifying the collection and the collector's life history [...] "Earning" the collection simply involves waiting, creating the pauses that articulate the biography of the collector' (Stewart, 1993: 166). As such, Brydon explains, the 'act of collecting manifests the maturing of the individual's self-identity', in this case, of the footwear designer, where: '[c]ollecting not only expresses who they are, it participates in the process of locating their sense of self in the flux of experience' (Brydon, 1998: 16). Furthermore, Stewart suggests the practice of organizing and classifying the collection is as important as the items themselves in this process of locating a sense of self. Although I was not able to view Mirijke's full collection, she kept many pairs of her own shoes at her house near Street where her second interview was conducted. On arrival, the shoes were laid out on the floor. She explained that they weren't categorized, although as we were discussing them she started classifying them according to their type and function (fig. 6.14) – once again her ethos and commitment to simplicity and quality emerged where her professional and personal shoe practices could be seen to be co-constitutive.



Fig. 6.14: Part of Marijke's personal shoe collection at her home in Somerset. Still from interview video.

For Stewart, the collection also provides a means to understand the dialogue between culture and the individual: through shoes, culture is made but also embodied and the collection demonstrates this in a particularly significant way:

‘When objects are defined in terms of their use value, they serve as extensions of the body into the environment, but when objects are defined by the collection, such an extension is inverted, serving to subsume the environment to a scenario of the personal. The ultimate term in the series that marks the collection is the “self,” the articulation of the collector’s own “identity.”’ (Stewart, 1993: 162)

The maturing of Marijke’s identity as ‘shoey’ was perhaps conveyed when she indicated that she had now stopped adding to her archive. If the practice of collecting serves as a means for identification, embodiment and transformation, then does *ceasing to collect* suggest this transformation is nearing completion? Indeed, Marijke had imagined moving away from footwear and speculated about what she might do next.

So, through exploring practices of collecting I was able to understand the processes through which sub/cultural capital is embodied and the habitus is formed in the ongoing process of identification and transformation. As practice, the collection becomes the means to embody capital, and as representation it becomes a metaphor for the individual’s expertise and a metonymy for the collector themselves.

One other way in which this became evident was through the practice of miniaturization. During a previous interview with Paul, the shoemaker at Clarks headquarters and a friend of Marijke’s, he showed me some miniature wooden lasts he had meticulously crafted for his wife Helen (fig. 6.15) - one of the designers for the women’s range. Marijke explained this was also something that people used to enjoy doing when she was training. She explained that to master the shoemaking process at a miniature level demonstrated the ultimate skill and mastery of their craft. Following this discussion many other miniatures became apparent. The Clarks museum displayed a cabinet of miniature shoes, including a selection of miniaturized Clarks shoes made by a past employee (fig. 6.16). Clarks had produced miniature Desert Boots as souvenir keyrings to accompany previous limited edition collaborations, which Marijke had collected and now hung from a beam in her kitchen (fig. 6.17). Furthermore, Fred, the digital development manager, enjoyed producing miniature Desert Boots on the 3-D printer, which were to be found in various places around the offices (fig. 6.18).

For Lévi-Strauss and Stewart – both theorists with a particular interest in miniatures and miniaturization – this practice serves several functions, all of which are particularly interesting when considered in the Clarks context. Like Marijke, both theorists suggest the practice depends on and demonstrates expertise. Lévi-Strauss explains: ‘the miniature demands an intimate knowledge of [the object’s] morphology and technique of manufacture [...] it is not just a diagram or blueprint. It manages to synthesize these intrinsic properties with properties which depend on a spatial and temporal context’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1966 [1962]: 25). For both Levi-Strass and Stewart the miniature therefore belongs to the metonymical order where it represents the expertise, skill and knowledge of the artist/craftsperson. Stewart takes this one stage further by drawing attention to the significance of hand-production. She explains that ‘while the materiality of the product is diminished, the labor involved multiplies, and so does the significance of the total object’ (Stewart, 1993: 38). ‘The labor was labor of the hand, of the body, and the product, in its uniqueness, was a stay against repetition and inauthenticity’ (ibid., 39). Consequently, she explains ‘[t]hey are no longer models; rather, they are souvenirs of a mode of consumption which is now extinct’ (ibid., 144). Paul’s miniature wooden carved lasts were significant in this context given the company’s move to digitization and the digital/mechanical production of plastic lasts. Indeed, throughout interviews, it became clear that many members of staff maintained an often ambivalent

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Fig. 6.15:

Paul the shoemaker's miniature lasts. A handcrafted gift for his wife, senior women's designer Helen. Still from interview video.



Fig. 6.16:

Miniature shoes in the Clarks museum



Fig. 6.17:

Marijke's Desert boot keyrings

relationship with the concept of mass production.⁶⁴ Miniaturising therefore represented one of a number of observed practices where 'values [were] expressed beyond value' (Skeggs, 2014: 16); where a sense of re-enchantment was restored to the often disenchanting economic practices of 'value' as a form of exchange and capital. Skeggs argues that in accordance with neo-liberalism it is often assumed that individuals' subjectivities change to fit capital's logic; 'we become the living embodiment of capital' (ibid., 2). Rather, these empirical examples demonstrate the 'moments of connection, of enchantment, of affective force' that enable individuals to momentarily resist and operate outside the logic of capital (ibid., 16-17) enabling them to orientate themselves, and restore a sense of meaning, fulfilment and authenticity to processes of identification.

So, if the hand-made miniature was a 'stay against repetition and inauthenticity' then one might assume the masses of miniature rapid-prototyped Desert Boots were a contradiction in terms. Indeed, Gemma mentioned no one had ever given her one, speculating they knew she would hate them. For Fred, however, they were a way to demonstrate and celebrate the digital and technological expertise of the brand (fig. 6.19), and for other staff, the miniatures acted as a souvenir or memento of Clarks heritage, identity and biography. Stewart explains that '[b]ecause of its connection to biography and its place in constituting the notion of the individual life, the memento becomes emblematic of the worth of that life and of the self's capacity to generate worthiness' (Stewart, 1993: 139). The Desert Boot was a legacy all staff were proud of. For many, the rapid-prototyped miniature served the purpose of totem or emblem, keeping them in touch with the brand's worth, biography and their place within that biography – again particularly important during a period of global expansion and transition. The bundling of the traditional Desert Boot with the process of 3-D printing therefore symbolised the company's progression while enabling them to stay in touch with the key values associated with their past.

Perhaps the most interesting interpretation of the miniature in the context of the Desert Boot is Lévi-Strauss' contention that miniaturizing or reducing the object in some other way (i.e. 'by volume in painting, colour, smell, tactile impressions in sculpture and the temporal dimension in both cases since the whole work represented is apprehended at a single moment in time (Lévi-Strauss, 1966 [1962]: 21)) allows the practitioner or perceiver to apprehend the object. He asks:

'What is the virtue of reduction either of scale or in the number of properties? It seems to result from a sort of reversal in the process of understanding. To understand a real object in its totality we always tend to work from its parts. The resistance it offers us is overcome by dividing it. Reduction in scale reverses this situation. Being smaller, the object as a whole seems less formidable. By being quantitatively diminished, it seems to us quantitatively simplified. More exactly, this quantitative transposition extends and diversifies our power over a homologue of the thing, and by means of it the latter can be grasped, assessed and apprehended at a glance.' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966 [1962]: 22)

This suggests the miniaturizing of the Desert Boot evidences a desire to demystify it as a mythical and powerful symbol. Indeed, miniature shoes are a phenomenon that extend far beyond Clarks, as demonstrated during the consumer culture analysis in the fourth chapter. Shoes as a category of object assert an agency which can be both empowering and dangerous. Drawing on anthropological observations of the mimetic figurines produced for tribal curing

⁶⁴ For Marijke, originally an independent designer, mass production had both positive and negative outcomes. She relished the opportunity to democratize good design, yet was concerned about the 'over-processing' inherent to mass production processes where the essence and vitality of the original design could sometimes be lost. For her, Originals provided a haven where the shoes were allowed to be simple and made of good quality materials.

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Fig. 6.18:

Miniature 3-D printed Desert Boots balanced between partitions in the digital development office.



Fig. 6.19:

A miniature 3-D printed Desert Boot signed by CEO Melissa Potter congratulating staff on their innovative work in digital development.



Fig. 6.20:

Marijke explaining the simple construction and minimal components of the Desert Boot. Still from interview video.

ceremonies Taussig theorises this process as the 'magic of mimesis' where "in some way or another" the making and existence of the artifact that portrays something gives one power over that which is portrayed' (Taussig, 1993: 13). Miniaturising is therefore an outcome of what Taussig describes as the 'mimetic faculty' which, drawing on the work of Benjamin and Adorno, comprises 'both copying *and* sensuous materiality' (Taussig, 1991: 150). Furthermore, using Benjamin, he suggests the mimetic faculty is the 'compulsion to become the Other' (Taussig, 1993: xviii), thereby effecting a transformation. Stewart describes this process in relation to the relationship between the exterior and interior. She uses the souvenir postcard, itself a miniature representation of an exterior place to describe this process of embodiment:

'[W]hat is being effected here is the transformation of exterior into interior. Spatially, as any postcard can tell us, this works most often through a reduction of dimensions. The souvenir reduces the public, the monumental, and the three-dimensional into the miniature, that which can be enveloped by the body, or into the two-dimensional representation, that which can be appropriated within the privatized view of the individual subject.' (Stewart, 1993: 137-138)

This process of reducing the shoe, either by scale or by the sum of its parts was also evident on a board Marijke had constructed in her studio which literally deconstructed the Desert Boot and mapped out each of its components (fig. 6.20). The purpose was to demonstrate the simplicity of the construction and the materials which, Marijke hoped, would help others understand what made the shoes special. Similarly, Fred, the digital development manager, would often be inclined to 'reverse-engineer' shoes he found intriguing so he could fully understand their appeal. Following Lévi-Strauss one might suggest therefore that through the process of deconstruction one is able to demystify or de-fetishise the shoe, subsequently making it more comprehensible so that it may be embodied.

6.10: The Habitus of the Artist: Embodiment Through Two-Dimensional Representation

So far, I have investigated the ways subcultural capital is embodied through intersubjective practices of collaboration, collecting, miniaturizing and making (or unmaking). One participant who linked all these themes together was Desert Boot collaborator and Sheffield-based artist Pete McKee. The subcultural capital Pete embodies through his artistic practice has ensured his place as one of Clarks most successful and renowned collaborations to date – his boots depicting his iconic Mod characters had since become collector's items (fig. 6.24 and 6.25). A final focus on the 'other side' of the collaborative process therefore adds a further dimension to both the intersubjective and creative nature of the habitus while also developing our understanding of the role representative practices play in embodiment. In contrast to the three-dimensional practice of making and miniaturising, therefore, the reductive two-dimensional practices of drawing and painting are explored. As Ingold explains, drawing is an embodied and gestural form of observation which is never 'finished' but instead contributes to a continual process of becoming (Ingold, 2010b).

Born in 1966 Pete grew up on a council estate in Sheffield. His father was a steelworker and his mother worked in a bakery. He worked in factories until 2004 when, after a period of drawing cartoons for a *Sheffield Wednesday* fanzine (his local football club) and the *Sheffield Telegraph*, he started producing artwork using emulsion paint on MDF boards – everyday mundane materials he felt fitted his subject matter. His nostalgic and evocative cartoon style is located in a particular time and place, depicting memories of life in Sheffield, music and football – all themes which resonate with fans of his work. Pete's work has attracted a diverse fan base which has led to various collaborations. In 2007, for example, Noel Gallagher of the band Oasis commissioned Pete to design tour posters for the band, along with work for his own solo shows. It was this connection which led to the collaboration with Clarks Originals.

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Fig. 6.21: Artist Pete McKee in his gallery *A Month of Sundays* in Sheffield. December 2014, own photograph.



Fig. 6.22: A Lambretta Scooter in Pete's Sheffield gallery featuring his iconic characters. Photograph by Steve Pellegrino.



Fig. 6.23: Pete McKee's cabinet of curiosities featuring his limited edition Clarks Desert Boot collaboration. October 2014, photograph by Steve Pellegrino.

I met Pete in his Gallery, *A Month of Sundays*, in Sheffield (fig. 6.21). The small two-story gallery was packed full of Pete's paintings, limited edition prints, merchandise and associated ephemera including a Lambretta Scooter decorated with Pete's cartoon-style characters and scenes (fig. 6.22). On the ground floor of the gallery, against the wall, was a cabinet of curiosities – a collection of nostalgic items Pete had collected and been given over the years. Amongst these items was a pair of his limited-edition Desert Boots (fig. 6.23). We relocated to a café next door where he recalled how the collaboration came about. A friend of his who lived in Sheffield and collected Pete's work also worked for Clarks. During a meeting this friend suggested Clarks took a look at his work. He received a call and subsequently met up halfway between Street and Sheffield in London to discuss a possible collaboration:

“Well, it was a very tempting thing straight away, you know, it was intriguing enough for me to go straight down to London just for a twenty-minute chat, you know [laughs] But with Clarks, I mean the one thing I do sort of um, I'm very very careful of is being associated with the right product or right brand. Cos I'm never going to put any work or attach any work to *anything*. It's got to be of the right quality. And obviously, Clarks Originals are one of the few brands in the UK that, you know, you can put your name to and know you're not going to be selling yourself short, you know, It's a very trusted fashion brand. I mean, not just like a standard fashion... I mean a culturally aware fashion brand, so it felt like a good fit straight away.” (Pete McKee, Artist, December 2014)

Pete was already aware of the shoes, having worn Desert Boots since his mid-teens “when the second birth of Mod came out in the [...] late 70s.” He explained that as a boy “you twigged that Desert Boots were worn by Mods so it was one the first purchases you made were a pair of Desert Boots.” Just as previously demonstrated by Rosie and Pete (the Desert Boot collector), he explained that if you wanted to wear a suede boot, the Clarks Desert Boot was the ‘Original’, the ‘starting point’. Although Gemma wasn't working on the brand during Pete's collaboration his existing subcultural capital and appreciation of the shoes would certainly categorise him as one of the authentic endorsers she spoke of. Indeed, at Clarks headquarters the Pete McKee collaboration was a success story still fondly recalled by staff. The artwork for the campaign was still displayed around the offices (fig. 6.26) and Richard, the men's marketing manager, who was working with the Desert Boot at the time, spoke enthusiastically about the initiative:

“It just, I think it just fitted, at the time, you know because the Desert Boot I guess synonymous with Mod culture, you know, and a lot of Pete McKee's art is very much based around that era, and you know, it just kind of felt like the right thing to do.”

Another reason the collaboration fitted so perfectly was Pete's unparalleled knowledge of various subcultural sartorial styles and codes, which were meticulously referenced in his paintings - a significant reason his paintings were regarded as so authentic and credible. Clothing, fashion and music were an essential feature of his work. For Pete, music and fashion were “tied together”, “you couldn't separate them”. He explained that “fashion had to come with the music” and he speculated this was perhaps more the case in the past than today. In a similar way to the male focus group participants, Pete recalled seeing fashion styles on bands such as *The Specials* or *Madness* on LP sleeves, on *Top of the Pops* or in magazines such as *Smash Hits* or *The Face* and then striving to emulate the style for himself. He used the example of the *Baggy* movement and the *Stone Roses* to explain the lifecycle of a style at this time, invariably starting with one band, filtering through other bands with a similar style of music (for example *Inspiral Carpets*) and then into the mainstream where you'd be able to buy the associated clothing, for example *Joe Bloggs*, fairly easily. At this point, he explained, the style “dies. Always dies [laughs]”.

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Fig. 6.24 & 6.25:

Original design for the Pete McKee Desert Boot collaboration. The design has been painted onto the boot. Photograph taken in the Clarks archive.



Fig. 6.26:

Pete McKee's artwork on Clarks' office walls nearly three years after his Desert Boot collaboration.

I asked if he could identify the links between clothing and particular bands or music genres. Here, the extent of his subcultural capital became apparent:

“Yeah definitely, you can do it at its most extreme which is like kind of Mod or early skinhead movement where everything had a code, not in a sinister way but in a - how high your turn ups had to be - and stuff like that, which is like kind of extremism. Even if you take it down to its most basic, so like kind of Seattle grunge, you had to have a plaid shirt and a certain kind of ripped jean. So even the most industrial music had a fashion to it, do you know what I mean? So everything had its, has its codes. And so for me growing up, my first music that I got into would have been um Ska music and so therefore the items you had to wear were linked to Ska, like a pair of sta-prest trousers, white - funnily enough - white sports socks, and err, you know, they're laughed at now you know terry-toweling socks, but white sport socks, a pair of loafers of some kind, or brogue shoes, or even the ubiquitous Doc Martin but that tended not to be so much really cos the Doc Martin went into the skinhead kind of thing. But they had a Doc Martin shoe rather than a boot and that would have been a bit more acceptable in the Ska movement. And then Fred Perrys and a pair of braces... at its most basic.” (Pete McKee)

With this knowledge, Pete produced authentic representations where every detail down to the exact cut of jean, or the exact amount of turn-up and sock were the difference between - in a very Goffmanian sense - convincing his audience or not. On rare occasions he would represent a fashion or music style that he hadn't personally engaged with, in which case it was important he was passionate about it, understood it and got it right so he didn't come across as a 'phoney'. He explained:

“I'm not trying to be some guy who's not really into music but I'll do a Mod painting cos people like Mods and I'll make some money out of it. It's got to be more important, it's got to be more genuine than that [...] Getting everything right is important, cos the people who will eventually buy your work they live that life and they know exactly the whole ins and outs, and if you get it wrong they'll spot it like a big red beacon.” (Pete McKee)

Here, shoes were important. Not only the details of the design, but also what the subject of the painting was doing with/in them. In this way, Pete often used shoes to nostalgically and emotionally connect with the viewer:

“I absolutely have to research what shoes they wore, it's incredibly important, cos it's your starting point for your wardrobe, it's the ending point, it's the one that you step out in the street in, is the shoes, so you've got to get them right more than anything else really. So it's important for me when I do paintings that are culturally specific to a music genre that I get the shoe right, and to celebrate it as well, you know, like with the painting that I've got which is *Booty and the Beat*, [fig. 6.27] [...] it's about a kid polishing his Chelsea boots prior to going out, and whether it's down to a night club or, you know, a coffee bar or something, you don't know where he's going, but the one thing that leads you to that is him polishing his boots. And again, it's a ritual before going out is getting yourself as smart as possible. It's getting your Kiwi black shoe polish and spending twenty minutes polishing it up to a bright shine, it's taking pride. And the Chelsea boot had two kinds of styles as well, there's the one where there's a seam right down the middle and that was kind of, the Beatles sort of started wearing that, and then you've got the kind of Cuban heel style version of it as well. So that's one type of



Fig. 6.27: *Booty and the Beat*, 2010, limited edition screen print by Pete McKee. Image courtesy of Pete McKee.

Chelsea boot, and then the other type it's just black, it's pointed but it's just black, there's no seam, so you could even go as far as to identify yourself by the type of Chelsea boot you wore, for instance." (Pete McKee)

His knowledge of these details meant he was able to manipulate them for narrative effect. Much of his work subtly represented the brands that a particular character might have worn. He explained that as a boy, for example, "if you didn't get a Clarks Desert Boot you got another brand like Timpsons Shoes desert boot, [...] you'd failed miserably. And instead of getting Doc Martins you got monkey boots, and monkey boots were just like the worst of the worst when it came to the skinhead. I think the monkey boot was more of a female boot than a man boot so if you were a bloke and wore a monkey boot... it were wrong." Consequently, the material details were a useful way to tell this story, particularly if the affluence of the character was a feature:

"if I want to make the kid particularly poor, I'll make him wear, I'll put him in a pair of trainers that have got four stripes rather than three stripes - or two stripes. They're not Adidas; they couldn't afford them. So that's what you do, you give that kid a code already, you put him in the jacket or something. So equally it shows, and I guess that goes back to trying to dress richer than you actually are." (Pete McKee)

These subtle devices would resonate with others with a similar subcultural capital and who had memories of such experiences. Researching and representing these details, and telling these stories was something Pete loved doing. He explained: "it's a wonderful thing in some respects cos it's such an innocent and harmless love to have is a love of clothes, in a sense. And to get dressed right, you know, to be sartorial is a wonderful thing". He was well aware of the power of clothing and shoes to undermine their wearers, and just as Pete (the Desert Boot collector) had previously explained, his acquired knowledge about what was 'right' was empowering. With Pete McKee, however, it seemed this knowledge evolved through the practice of painting and drawing. Berger poignantly describes the significance of drawing in processes of becoming:

It is a platitude in the teaching of drawing that the heart of the matter lies in the specific process of looking. A line, an area of tone, is not really important because it records what you have seen, but because of what it will lead you on to see. Following up its logic in order to check its accuracy, you find confirmation or denial in the object itself or in your memory of it. Each confirmation or denial brings you closer to the object, until finally you are, as it were, inside it: the contours you have drawn no longer marking the edge of what you have seen but the edge of what you have become. (Berger, 2013)

Returning to Lévi-Strauss, Pete apprehends and embodies fashion partly through representing it. His cartoon style required him to reduce each shoe to its absolute essence, the thing that made it recognizable for what it was - a similar process to Marijke and her investigations of archetypal shoes. Understanding and painting the shoes in different contexts, on different types of people and having these paintings confirmed by his consumers provided a sense of satisfaction, both for Pete, who got it right, and for the observer who was able to employ his/her own subcultural capital to understand the image. Lévi-Strauss explains the process as follows:

'The painter is always mid-way between design and anecdote, and his genius consists in uniting internal and external knowledge, a 'being' and a 'becoming', in producing with his brush an object which does not exist as such and which he is nevertheless able to create on his canvas. This is a nicely balanced synthesis of one or more artificial and natural structures and one or more natural and social events. The aesthetic emotion is the result of this union between the structural order and the order of events, which is brought about within a thing created by man and also in effect by the observer who discovers the possibility of such a union through the work of art.'(Lévi-Strauss, 1966 [1962]: 24)

This creation, he explains, is part myth or illusion, yet 'even if this is an illusion, the point of the procedure is to create or sustain the illusion, which gratifies the intelligence and gives rise to a sense of pleasure' (ibid., 24). Pete's nostalgic and mythical, yet expertly informed images gratified both his own and his customers' intelligence and he was particularly impassioned when his experiences and knowledge were reciprocated. These dialogues would then feed back into his work – further mythologizing the clothing and the shoes. For example, until he saw Jamaican singer Fantan Mojah wearing his limited-edition collaboration in Al Newman's book *Clarks in Jamaica* (fig. 6.28), Pete had been previously unaware of the Jamaican love for Clarks Originals. He explained that it 'blew his mind' "that there's like this reggae artist with like, his prize possession would be a pair of my Desert Boots." Subsequently he produced a painting called *Grand Master Dub* (fig. 6.29) depicting "this old kind of Dub Reggae guy, I did him in a battered pair of Clarks Desert Boots just as that reference point" (Pete McKee).

These data resonate with Lévi-Strauss' belief that art 'lies half-way between scientific knowledge and mythical or magical thought.' He explains that the artist is both scientist and bricoleur: '[b]y his craftsmanship he constructs a material object which is also an object of



Fig. 6.28:
Jamaican singer
Fantan Mojah
wearing limited
edition Desert boots
(in Newman, 2012).
Photograph by Mark
Read, 2011.



Fig. 6.29:
Grand Master Dub,
2011, household
emulsion and ink on
board by Pete McKee.
Image courtesy of Pete
McKee.

knowledge' (ibid., 22). Ingold explains this well by citing the artist Paul Klee who observed that '[a]rt does not reproduce the visible but makes visible' (Klee [1961:76] in Ingold, 2010a: 2), 'It does not, in other words, seek to replicate finished forms that are already settled, whether as images in the mind or as objects in the world. It seeks, rather, to join with those very forces that bring form into being' (Ingold, 2010a: 2). Returning to Bourdieu, then, Pete joins with all those involved in consecrating the Desert Boot, 'who find a material or symbolic profit in reading it, classifying it, deciphering it, commenting on it, combating it, knowing it, possessing it' (Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993: 111 in , Rocamora, 2016: 235), not to simply represent the shoes, but to continually remake them; remaking themselves and each other in the process. These 'bricoleurs', as Levi-Strass calls them, are therefore not striving towards an end point of execution or completion, rather, they 'speak' 'with things' and 'through things' in a continual and creative process of becoming (Lévi-Strauss, 1966 [1962]: 21).

Ingold describes this process as a creative entanglement; each of those involved in making the shoes through, for example, collaborating, collecting, miniaturizing, making, drawing and painting⁶⁵ are tied together by the shoes:

'If we think of every participant as following a particular way of life, threading a line through the world, then perhaps we could define the thing, as I have suggested elsewhere, as a 'parliament of lines' (Ingold 2007a: 5). Thus conceived, the thing has the character not of an externally bounded entity, set over and against the world, but of a knot whose constituent threads, far from being contained within it, trail beyond, only to become caught with other threads in other knots. Or in a word, things leak, forever discharging through the surfaces that form temporarily around them.' (Ingold, 2010a: 4)

6.11: Conclusion

Returning to the critiques of Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital and the habitus, when empirically studied, the process of embodiment is understood as an intersubjective, highly creative and material practice played out through the internal-external-dialectic of identification. I have used the experiences of various 'shoey's at Clarks to demonstrate that this process happens through practices of representation which both shape and are shaped by the *habitus* - a perpetually unfinished and dynamic project where, as Ingold explains, '[h]umanity cannot be taken as a given; it is something we have continually to work at. What we are, or what we can be, does not come ready-made in any kind of program, genetic or cultural' (Ingold, 2010b: 300). Particular objects such as the Desert Boot, therefore, provide an ongoing focus for reflection and means of transformation. As such, I have demonstrated how a consideration of representation as practice can help to dissolve the distinction between image and experience: the image is inextricably caught up in experience. This gives greater context to both Keane's concept of 'the materiality of signification' (Keane, 2005: 183) and Rose and Tolia-Kelly's quote in the introduction to this thesis: that to investigate the object in relation to its representation (in the broadest sense of the word) one is able to 'remember that the politics of *doing* the visual are as material as matter is visual and that both are engaged beyond the ocular' (2012: 3). Therefore, by understanding the visual and material in conjunction, shoes provide us with an opportunity to 'reconceptualise' or 're-materialise' the visual as an embodied and material realm (ibid., 4).

⁶⁵ These practices are only a small selection of those observed during fieldwork. Others include Newman's photographic documentation of the Desert Boot and their wearers for his book *Clarks in Jamaica*; the digital sampling process where individuals would use Photoshop to represent the shoes as loyally as possible to aid design decisions; rapid prototyping which would aim to do the same with 3-D models of the shoes; visual merchandising, both in store and at press days, where the shoes would be staged to tell a story or represent a theme. Each of these practices would inform a particular subjective understanding and embodiment of the shoes.

This is not a Shoe

Chapter 7:
'Getting the Shoes on the Right Feet':
Affective Bodies and Endorsement

7.1: Introduction

In the previous chapter I established some of the ways in which the Clarks Originals team acquired an intuition for the shoes and the brand, and I analysed the ways the habitus of the 'shoey' manifested and shifted through practices of interaction and representation. In this context, Clarks Originals shoes served both as an objectified form of subcultural capital and the means through which subcultural capital could be embodied to achieve a sense of distinction. While in Chapter Five I revealed some of the material affordances that have helped the shoes achieve their status as a form of subcultural capital, the last two chapters have also demonstrated the influence of the people and collaborative partners who have worn and become associated with the shoes in visible contexts – broadly described here as 'endorsers'. For the wearers in Chapter Five, seeing the shoes on the feet of their favourite band members or buying a limited-edition collaboration was an important part of the appeal of the shoes and participants' relationship with them. Similarly, in Chapter Six, those at Clarks spoke of the exhilarating feeling of seeing their shoes on particular consumers, celebrities and musicians. Returning to the literature review, in a process which closely resembles Peirce's 'bundling' of 'qualisigns', we are thus able to see the Desert Boot, its wearers and partner brands as open and polysemic – their qualities bundled together in endorsement situations cause each to 'shift in their relative salience, value, utility, and relevance across contexts' (Keane, 2005: 188). This meaning transfer is extensively theorized in marketing and branding literature, particularly in relation to the (dichotomous) ways in which brands can be understood to develop an 'identity' (the 'essence' of the brand as desired and strategized by the company (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998: 420)), an 'image' (the meaning of the brand as perceived by consumers (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998: 421)), or a 'personality' (the set of human characteristics associated with a brand – i.e. cool, hip, intellectual etc. (Aaker, 1997: 347)) which, when successful, can lead to the development of a loyal 'relationship' or bond between the consumer and the brand (Aaker, 1997).

This chapter argues that while existing literature successfully identifies endorsement as a key aspect of a continually shifting *consumer* experience, it does little to understand the 'affective' (Featherstone, 2010) emotional and material nuances of how this process works in terms of embodied experience, perception and identification more broadly. While endorsements are discussed as 'encounters' (mediated or face-to-face) where a transference of identity is said to occur between endorser and product (reinforcing or changing consumer perceptions in positive or negative ways), commercially orientated psycho-social approaches have been inadequate in identifying how and why this transference occurs or its reciprocal effects on the endorsers themselves. I argue this is because existing studies overlook the importance of the bodies that endorse and the materiality of the objects that are endorsed. This chapter therefore takes a social and anthropological approach to understand endorsement as a process whereby value is established through exchange and reciprocity; the endorser and shoes co-construct one another through representative mediums in social contexts. Furthermore, when considered in a mass-media context, the shoe can be understood to act as a medium through which bodies affect one another. Once again, the chapter addresses the first of the thesis aims, to understand the relationship between representations and embodied experience. In doing so, it also addresses the second of my aims to demonstrate how a highly subjective, embodied and emotional response to these images can be understood to complicate the structure agency dichotomies so often present in research concerned with the influence of mass media and fashion.

The chapter starts with an overview of current approaches to the analysis of celebrity endorsement, a central aspect of the marketing mix aimed at 'humanising' the brand; giving it an identity or 'personality' (Aaker, 1997) with which consumers are able to emotionally engage or form a 'relationship' (Fournier, 1998). In the context of Clarks Originals this personality was referred to by both consumers and producers as 'cool'. Here, I argue *cool* is a highly affective

characteristic or 'attitude' (Pountain and Robins, 2000), which, through practices of representation, mobilises meaning transfer between particular shoes and bodies. Using Featherstone's interpretations of affect (2010) the bodies that made participants take notice of the shoes are therefore theorized as 'cool bodies'. Using Malinowski's theories of value transformation (1950 [1922]) and Weiner's theories of inalienable possessions (1992) – both based on studies of the Kula Exchange – it is then argued that through practices of representation objects, brands and endorsers become almost indistinguishable – the values of cool are transferred between them. In extreme cases these associations can lead to the object continuing to metonymically stand for the endorser or vice versa. This leads us to consider studies of animism and anthropomorphism in consumer culture where participants metaphorically spoke of shoes and behaved in ways which attributed them with 'life', a practice hinting at what Belk describes as the 'ritual substratum of consumer behavior' or the 'sacred aspects of consumption' (Belk et al., 1989: 2). Consequently, the chapter combines data previously discussed with new data to lay the foundations for the penultimate chapter which addresses the highly-debated topic of the 'agency' of objects.

7.2: 'Cool' Shoes: Endorsement and Affect

An early insight to the transfer of meaning between bodies and shoes came from a revelatory moment during my initial two days observing interactions between staff and consumers in a large busy Clarks store. I was struck by how my opinions of the shoes changed after seeing them on the feet of the customers. At the beginning of day one I spotted a pair that I thought I might like, yet I was unconvinced. After seeing a couple of young women try them on found myself considering them.⁶⁶ During a lull in customer footfall at the store I spoke to one young female sales assistant who expressed a similar experience. When I asked if she owned many Clarks shoes she explained she would try to resist buying the shoes when they came into the store, but once she saw someone trying them on it would make her think they looked really nice and she would end up buying them. Consequently, she had accumulated lots of Clarks shoes. This surprised me. I had expected the customers to be influenced by the staff but had not expected the staff to be influenced by the customers. Furthermore, customers could be seen to influence other customers – often requesting styles they had seen someone else try. This drew my attention to the way in which the meaning and value of the shoes, both for staff and consumers, depended heavily on who they observed wearing them. Through wear, the shoe was transformed from mundane, mass-produced object to something more meaningful. The shoes were enlivened by their wearers and this bore a considerable impact on the way they were perceived. Indeed, as one designer later explained to me "shoes don't really come alive until someone puts them on their feet" (Katie: 05.04.12).

Clarks were aware of the influence particular wearers had on others' perceptions of the brand and this was a central feature of their marketing strategy. Marketing managers would frequently refer to the need to get the shoes 'on the right feet'. Strategies were necessary to try to change perceptions, particularly of British consumers, due to an association many maintained between Clarks and shoes for older people, school or work. Campaigns for the main range targeted the 'Sam's' and 'Anna's' – hypothetical representations of the 'early adopters' (Rogers, 2003 [1962]) whose decision to wear Clarks would influence their peers to do the same. Celebrity endorsements were influential in the same way (albeit to a much broader audience), and, unsolicited celebrity endorsements (those where the endorser had chosen to wear the shoes themselves and been pictured doing so) were considered to be the gold standard in terms of changing perceptions of the brand amongst increasingly savvy consumers,

⁶⁶ Later, during my time at Clarks head office, I noticed one of the girls on an adjacent desk wearing the shoes. Consequently, I bought them shortly after my fieldwork had finished and continue to wear them today.

adept at spotting contrived or 'false' marketing campaigns.⁶⁷ To a certain extent this process could indeed be strategised and nurtured by the brand, yet the inherent unpredictability of the peer and celebrity endorsement process in an age characterized by digital, highly visual and emotionally affective forms of communication sheds light on an increasingly dynamic consumer culture in which brand identities are starting to be understood as co-produced by consumers rather than determined and controlled by brand managers (da Silveira et al., 2013).

Once again, those working at Clarks were as prone to the influence of endorsed shoes as their consumers. Marijke, for example, explained that "I saw an old photo of the Beastie Boys wearing our shoes and I was like 'Yeeeeeah!'" Consumer and celebrity endorsements were very important to those at Clarks and were collected and kept. During my second interview with Gemma, the Marketing Manager for Originals, she showed me 'The Originals Book', a beautifully bound suede book with embossed logo and canvas spine encased in a slip-cover (fig. 7.1). The purpose of the book was to visually articulate the identity of the shoes to those outside the immediate team such as the sales teams and senior management. It identified what mattered most to those at Clarks about Originals; not in terms of what they want to say to the consumer, but what they want to remind themselves. Following chapters about the history and heritage of the brand (fig. 7.2), and the materiality and construction of the shoes (fig. 7.3 & 7.4), Gemma showed me a large section depicting images and articles about those 'real people' (consumers) who had worn the shoes (fig. 7.5) and celebrities such as the Arctic Monkeys (fig. 7.6), Jay-Z, Pharrell, the Gallaghers, Kanye West and Florence Welch (fig. 7.7 & 7.8), lead singer of the band *Florence and the Machine*. The appearance of these wearers in this significant book (the quality of which suggested it was to be kept and cherished – a metaphor perhaps for the enduring identity of the shoes and the desire to protect it) indicated that these endorsements were not fleeting associations; they were important events which had helped to make the brand what it was.

The book was part of a campaign to establish a consistent brand identity for the Originals range. Following her appointment as marketing manager, Gemma was keen to respond to and nurture the shoes connections with musicians to develop more of an emotional connection between the shoes and the consumer. She explained:

"About three or four seasons ago we had a big project where we looked into how we could communicate Clarks Originals to a consumer in a more emotional way and with more associated values which were going to work with that consumer. So for example previously, before I started working on it, we did very much focus on the product so [...] so all of our marketing materials would be shoes - not even on people - so it's shoes based on all of our archive and our catalogue. But it sort of left us short as far as having any sort of emotional attachment to a brand, so we did a project whereby we created a new brand identity for Originals, we kept the same logo that we'd had for the previous few years, and we came up with something that we started to talk about as the 'spirit of Originals', and that has developed over the last three or four seasons, that's been my main focus is about, um, working with this new brand identity but also a massive part of that brand identity is about being more overt with our connection with the world of music and with ambassadors in that space. So what we've been doing is trying to create new sort-of initiatives every season that connect us with a relevant artist."

⁶⁷ While the Originals wearers in the men's focus group acknowledged their decisions to wear the shoes were influenced by seeing them on various personalities and musicians, they were unanimous in their dislike of proactive endorsements, preferring to feel they'd noticed the shoes on these people and made the connections themselves. Tom, for example, explained: "...even if they were on the right people, you don't... I don't want to wear something that's obviously endorsed."

This is Not a Shoe



Fig. 7.1: The Originals book. Stills from interview video.

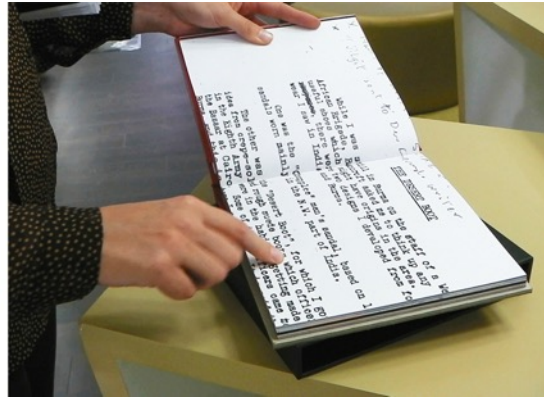


Fig. 7.2: A copy of the original fax sent by Nathan Clark recounting his discovery of the Desert Boot.



Fig. 7.3: A page explaining the importance of the orange thread used in Clarks Originals.



Fig. 7.4: A page emphasising the significance of the crepe sole.



Fig. 7.5: A page featuring the 'real people' who wear Clarks Originals shoes.

So the shoes pictured *on* rather than *off* particular feet was a focus of this new initiative to define the brand's 'spirit'. As Aaker explains, associating a brand with a particular individual that consumers might identify with or aspire to is one strategy to effectively imbue the brand with personality traits or characteristics (Aaker, 1997: 347). These people include brand users, the company's employees or CEO and the brand's product endorsers (ibid., 348).⁶⁸ The endorsers of the Originals styles, or 'ambassadors', as Gemma described them, therefore played an important role in reinforcing and adding meaning to the shoes.⁶⁹ Gemma explained that Florence's Welch's decision to wear the *Desert Yarra* boots (a more feminine version of the Desert Boot with a wedge heel) at a festival had received a 'crazy' amount of coverage in magazines. Consequently, it had a huge influence on the adoption of Originals by women who wanted to 'get Florence's look'. Her adoption of the shoes was particularly fortuitous because, as Gemma explained, her personality traits as a successful yet non-mainstream musician with her own individual sense of style fitted with the identity of the brand. She was cool. The 'right' feet for Clarks Originals therefore seemed to be 'cool' feet.

So, what is cool? The concept of cool has been widely debated. At the turn of the twenty-first century Pountain and Robins' book *Cool Rules: Anatomy of an Attitude* (2000), sought to combine its many different interpretations into a more holistic understanding of a cultural (or subcultural) category of its own; a historically pervasive, non-culturally specific 'attitude' (Pountain and Robins, 2000: 11). They suggest that due to the term's connections with rebellious youth subcultures between the 1950s and the present day it is perceived as a relatively recent phenomenon, yet the cool attitude can be traced much further back (ibid., 12). Drawing on Barbey (2002 [1845]), Brown, for example, defines the characteristics of the Regency dandy of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as cool. Broadly understood as 'someone (usually a man) who follows fashion to the point of ridiculous extreme' the dandies got away with their look due to a 'studied detachment', 'unshakable emotional calm' and 'the utter self-assurance' they wore it with. She explains that Barbey (a dandy himself) understood this 'cool indifference' as a means for distinction, 'demonstrating a superior relationship not only to those people immediately around him but to the modern world more generally': 'a super-calm response to the "agitations of modernity"' (Brown, 2015: 11). These agitations Brown equates to Simmel's observations in *Metropolis and Mental Life* (2004 [1903]), notably the blasé attitude to people and events which enabled the 'individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces' (Simmel, 2004 [1903]: 349). Cool, Brown argues, might therefore be summarized as an 'idealized adaption to modernity' (Brown, 2015: 62).

Cool, then, is associated with non-conforming and rebellious outsiders or marginal groups (Belk et al., 2010: 189) who express a 'belief that the mainstream mores of society have no legitimacy and do not apply to them' (Pountain and Robins, 2000: 23). As endorsers, these people become 'messengers of cool' – the extremely influential 'successors of Bourdieu's cultural intermediaries' (Nancarrow and Nancarrow, 2011: 137). But why do we need them? McCracken explains that since the 'relative collapse of institutions that once supplied the self with meaning and definition (e.g., the family, the church, the community)[,] individualism and alienation have conspired to give individuals new freedom to define matters of gender, class, age, personality, and lifestyle.' This has meant that consumers are not only able but obliged to create a sense of self (McCracken, 1989: 318). As innovators or style-leaders celebrities are therefore often identified as exemplars of this process: they are 'super consumers' who 'build selves well' in an

⁶⁸ Indeed, a long and well publicized association with Nathan Clark and the Clarks family, 'bundled' together with the material qualities of the shoes had led to the boots and the Originals brand being referred to as trustworthy, innovative, authentic and uncomplicated.

⁶⁹ 'Ambassadors' was the preferred term for these celebrity wearers who had opted to wear the shoes, perhaps because the term 'endorser' has such strong associations with a transactional process whereby the wearer is paid to wear the shoes.



Fig. 7.6: Sheffield band the Arctic Monkeys wearing Clarks Originals in a magazine article. Featured in the Clarks Originals book.



Fig. 7.7: Florence Welch of British band Florence and the Machine wearing Desert Yarra boots at a festival. Featured in the Clarks Originals book.



Fig. 7.8: Original image of Florence. Retna Pictures.

accomplished and inspiring way out of the meanings contained in the objects, people and events around them. Through endorsements they provide the suggestions and means for others involved in similar processes of invention, or indeed transformation (ibid.).⁷⁰

Paradoxically, because cool depends on a perceived lack of effort and the ability to appear unemotional and indifferent (Nancarrow and Nancarrow, 2011: 136), the endorsement process can compromise a cool 'face' (Goffman, 1972 [1955]) both for the brand and the endorser.⁷¹ Understanding the similarities and differences between cool and glamour can help to explain how a sense of coolness is retained in these situations. Wilson explains:

'Today "glamour and celebrity" are routinely yoked together, as though they meant the same thing. Yet, actually, they are polar opposites. Celebrity is all about touch; glamour is untouchable.' (Wilson, 2007: 101)

In contrast to the 'celebrity', who in Wilson's view is purely about attracting attention by any means necessary, the glamorous are perhaps best understood in terms of the cool personality trait of 'ironic detachment' (Pountain and Robins, 2000: 26). Glamour, Gundle argues, is a specifically modern aesthetic in fashion born of the need to simultaneously attract and deflect (Gundle, 2008: in , Brown, 2015: 20). Rojek makes a further distinction between 'achieved celebrities': those known for their talents or accomplishments, and 'celetoids': an amalgamation of 'celebrity' and 'tabloid' (Rojek, 2015), referring to those 'well-known for their well-knownness' (Boorstin, 1961: 57). In many ways, the Clarks Originals ambassadors can be categorised as achieved celebrities (due to their talents in the field of music) who are both glamorous and cool (although perhaps less so now for Kanye West, since his marriage to reality TV star Kim Kardashian in 2014).

Furthermore, the way that these achieved celebrities have become associated with the brand is key to maintaining a cool authenticity. The majority of the endorsements Clarks Originals receive are 'co-present' (in which the celebrity merely appears with the product) rather than 'explicit' ("I endorse this product"), implicit ("I use this product") or imperative ("You should use this product") (McCracken, 1989: 310). They were also often unsolicited; Gemma explained, for example, that while one might try their best to manufacture a situation whereby a celebrity like Florence will wear the shoes (for example by sending her a free pair), "there's so many factors that have to go into making that happen: the photographer being there at the right time, her deciding whether to wear that pair or that pair, and when it all comes together it's obviously amazing but it's just so rare." It was also important for Gemma that the brand didn't spoil these authentic associations by trying to capitalize too much on them.⁷² Ultimately therefore it was Florence who decided to wear the shoes, as such, the endorsement was perceived as authentic.

This tendency to let people notice the shoes, rather than telling them to notice them, was acknowledged as very British by wearers. In the men's focus group, for example, Kristian (originally from Austria) explained that for him Clarks embodied the understated and subtle values that made Britain 'cool', particularly in the nineties during the 'Cool Britannia' phenomenon, where previously Britain had been perceived as 'the sick man of Europe':

⁷⁰ McCracken suggests those particularly receptive to endorsements are therefore those going through a period of transition, for example in terms of role, status or culture and who are looking for assistance. This is perhaps the reason media personalities were more commonly mentioned in the ITSF focus groups amongst younger people.

⁷¹ This perhaps accounts for the alienation the individuals in the previous chapter experienced when involved with an explicit endorsement campaign.

⁷² In the Originals book Gemma pointed out a page depicting a feature in the Guardian newspaper about Vybzs Cartel's song 'Clarks'. She explained "we got some coverage on the back of that and just tried to control it and make it feel like, you know, "we didn't ask him to write the song, honestly", which we didn't, we never would." Similarly, when approached by Al Newman to do a book about Clarks in Jamaica, they offered their support yet to preserve the authenticity of the endorsement they decided not to put their logo on it.



Fig. 7.9: Stills from the video for *The Verve's* 1997 single 'Bitterweet Symphony', directed by Walter A. Stern. Close-ups of Ashcroft's black suede Wallabees feature a total of six times as he purposely strides down a London street refusing to change direction. Images courtesy of Virgin EMI.



Fig. 7.10: QR code for proposed in-store visual merchandising for the Originals Remixed campaign. Still from interview video.

"Clarks were totally part of that, but what they never did was they never went shiney, they never went in your face, they were always very subtle, and that was always associated with Britain right? Britain is in a sense, was seen by the outside world as kind of more subtle, more quiet kind of thing, er, culture right? and the Clarks in a sense, the Clarks were very British in that respect, you know they were like 'so what,' you know, 'so what; shoes, yeah right, if you want some you can have some, I'm not going to tell you what to do, I'm not going to shout about it' you know, be cool, you know, Like Richard Ashcroft, you know, going down in that video, it's that kind of thing right? It's that, I don't know it's a sort of tunnel vision, not shouting about it, and I think that's done them the world of good." (Kristian)

For Kristian, it seemed the brand was as nonchalant as its endorsers. Richard Ashcroft, a rebellious musician, iconic for 'singing his own tune', was of course not the type to be told what shoes to wear – indeed none of those associated with Originals seemed to be. Kristian was referring to the iconic video for 'Bittersweet Symphony' (1997), the lead track of their third album *Urban Hymns* in which his black suede Wallabees (the same as Kristian's) featured heavily (fig. 7.9). The song had become an anthem for the disengaged and disenchanting youth of the nineties. Consequently, the shoes had become bundled with the identity of Ashcroft and the meaning of the lyrics to imply a non-conforming cool attitude.⁷³

Nancarrow, Nancarrow, and Thornton describe cool as an embodied form of subcultural capital (2011: 135 and, 2013) which is less about what you wear and more about how you wear it. It is of course both, but this view suggests the centrality of particular bodies and types of mobility in the manifestation of cool. If one considers Ashcroft's video, for example; before we even see his face, we see his shoes strolling along the street. They stop at the pavement's edge, waiting to cross the road, which they do just as the introduction finishes and the track begins. The shoes are repeatedly shown as he coolly and unemotionally swaggers down the street, knocking into whomever gets in his way. Kristian's impassioned reference to the video paired with his own decision to wear the same shoes indicates that for him the image resonated in a very powerful and emotional way.

Featherstone's (2010) analysis of images, bodies and affect helps to reconnect theories of endorsement with theories of the body. He explains that body image can be considered a 'visual sense of the image others have of oneself, based on a person's appearance' as is perhaps seen in a mirror. Since the invention of photography 'the recording of the face and the body by the camera [has become] the dominant mode for representing the body image, and also of imagining one's body image' (Featherstone, 2010: 194). Yet he draws our attention to another dimension of body image – the 'body schema' or non-visual sense of the body; its feelings and senses which are not as easily seen in the frozen photographic image. These are the feelings which connect us in a much more embodied way with media images. In a discussion relating closely to Sobchack's phenomenological approach to film (Chapter Two), he makes the point that we do not see movies or television in an 'ocularcentric way', we relate to them using other bodily senses. As such, he explains that 'the senses involved in movement can be seen as closely related to affect':

'Other bodies and the images of other bodies in the media and consumer culture may literally move us, make us feel moved, by affecting our bodies in inchoate ways that cannot easily be articulated or assimilated to conceptual thought. Here we think of a shiver down the spine or the gut feeling. Affect points to the experiences of intensities, to the way in which media images are felt through bodies. This applies especially to bodies in motion, or imbued with the possibility

⁷³ The cover of the album also depicts him wearing the shoes, which all the men's focus group participants seemed to be aware of.

of movement, as opposed to the type of ocular narcissistic identification we get with the mirror-image of a static unified body-and-face.' (Featherstone, 2010: 195)

He explains that Massumi (2002) – a key contributor to a recent 'affective turn' in social theory – understands affect as 'the body without image, the body which experiences or gives off intensities which refuse to cohere into a distinctive image' (Featherstone, 2010: 195). Massumi uses U.S. President Ronald Reagan as an example, explaining that while he might have been considered a 'communicative jerk', his gaffs and faux pas were compensated by 'the seductive fluency of his body image', 'beautiful vibratory voice' and an excessive sense of confidence – the 'apotheosis of affective capture' (Massumi, 2002: 40 in, Featherstone, 2010: 210) Featherstone elaborates:

'It is not the content of the image, what Reagan says, which is important, but the way he says it. The intensity of the affect he produces affects us in ways which undercut the sovereignty of the perceiving eye and the content of the spoken words.' (2010: 210)

The way in which Massumi describes Reagan echoes the earlier definitions of cool. One might argue therefore that cool bodies are affective bodies. These bodies, he explains have the capacity to make people stop and look: 'to make them want to verify, note and even record the persona which has instigated the shock of beauty. This is a body whose movement and sensory range communicates a positive affective charge' (Featherstone, 2010: 196).⁷⁴ This affective charge, he explains, is known more commonly as 'charisma'.

The important point here is that the affective body is a body in movement and charisma cannot solely be communicated through the 'body image' or static photograph. Featherstone notes that new media and information technologies such as digitization and video 'have created new possibilities for the visualization of affect' (ibid., 194), thereby providing an 'opportunity to re-theorize the role of affect and the body in relation to the image' (ibid., 213). Massumi argues that the affective is central to analyses of image-based capitalist societies, emphasizing that 'belief may have waned for many, but not affect. If anything, our condition is characterized by a surfeit of it' (Massumi, 2002: 27 in, Featherstone, 2010: 210).

This evolution could be seen clearly at Clarks in relation to contemporary endorsement practices. As noted in the previous chapter, their collaborations with musicians would involve videos where the musicians would perform, while also wearing the shoes. QR codes were included on instore visual merchandising where the consumer could use their phone to access these moving images and background stories (fig. 7.10). Vicki, the women's marketing manager, had explained that these technologies were also being trialled in the main range using software called 'Aurasma', a type of augmented reality. Consumers with the Aurasma app could scan an image which would "come to life" in a "much more engaging" way than a conventional advertisement. She explained "it gives you a story and makes you start to sort of feel something for the brand, rather than just a flat picture."⁷⁵ She articulated the need for this type of technology by using a recent photo shoot as an example. During consumer research a mismatch occurred between consumer perceptions of the static images and those of the marketing team:

"[W]e did one shot for Autumn '11 and it was a girl in a sort-of pencil skirt, and it was supposed to be a fifties inspired little red pointed shoe with a big bow on it and she was walking along with two ponies and it was just supposed to be a bit of

⁷⁴ This need not be beauty in the conventional sense – a point which will be further discussed in Chapter Seven.

⁷⁵ While the 'Aurasma' website makes no reference to Walter Benjamin, it is difficult not to link the technology with his theories about aura and photographic/video reproduction (Benjamin, 1999 [1936]). In his argument, the moving image stripped the work of art of its authenticity, yet this technology seems to suggest that an aura of authenticity can be communicated through the moving image through bodily affect.

a quirky fun shot, um, and it really didn't go down very well at all in consumer research, they were like 'just don't get why she's got those ponies' and I was like 'What!?' I didn't get it because I saw it all happen and it was so much fun when she was walking with the ponies it was supposed to be fun, it wasn't supposed to be serious. *Of course* she's not going to be walking along with ponies, but it's just supposed to sort-of push the shoe into a slightly different... But our consumer wasn't getting that necessarily [...] so then as soon as you layer over that image and you start putting a video behind it you start actually seeing her [...] walking round and having a laugh, it might start, I don't know, it might start working."

While the technology was in the early trial stages and depended heavily on consumers having the application on their phones, and, one might also interpret it as a passing fad or spectacle (in the sense used by Debord (2004 [1967])), Featherstone and Massumi's theories would suggest it to be a highly effective way of engaging consumers in an increasingly digital, dynamic and emotionally affective consumer culture.

We must be careful, however, not to suggest that the coolness of the shoes depends entirely on the bodies that wear them as this denies the complexity and reciprocity of the value transfer process. In his article about celebrity endorsement, for example, McCracken focuses on the transfer of meaning from the brand to consumer. Although he describes this process as a 'circulation' of meaning (McCracken, 1989: 313), he communicates it as a one-way process where '[m]eaning begins as something resident in the culturally constituted world'; through advertising and the fashion system it then 'moves to consumer goods and finally to the life of the consumer' (ibid., 313). Furthermore, he understands the meanings of the celebrity as relatively fixed and objective; describing celebrities as 'containers of meaning' which provide advertisers with a 'pallet' with which to paint products (ibid., 312).⁷⁶ As da Silveira *et al.* argue this unilateral interpretation is increasingly irrelevant in a dynamic digital age where consumers are understood to co-produce brand meaning. The era in which his analysis was conducted (before Web 2.0) would of course account for this omission, yet it is surprising how few have used his interpretation without updating it.

So while McCracken and many subsequent brand and endorsement analysts consider *consumer* identity to be constantly under construction, a process through which brands are employed as resources to 'redefine the self' (Ambrose et al., 2014: 277), the brands and endorsers themselves are rarely considered subject to the same processes of social transition and transformation. Yet as Gemma explained in the previous chapter, many of the Originals collaborators/endorsers wanted to work with the shoes, not for the money, but because the shoes made *them* cool. For example, in my interview with Pete McKee, artist and Desert Boot collaborator, he explained how careful he was to associate himself with things that would enhance rather than undermine his identity as an authentic connoisseur of subcultural style. Here I propose that what is missing from McCracken's 'anthropological account' of brand identity and endorsement, indeed most accounts (eg. Miller and Allen, 2012, Park and John, 2010, Carroll, 2008), are the materials that mediate the transfer of meaning between brand and body. A focus on the shoes therefore gives a greater insight to the process of meaning transfer.

7.3: Inalienable shoes: Extended Personhood and Metonymy

'However ugly, useless, and - according to current standards - valueless an object may be, if it has figured in historical scenes and passed through the hands of historic persons, and is therefore an unfailing vehicle of important sentimental associations, it cannot *but* be precious to us.' (Malinowski, 1950 [1922]: 89)

⁷⁶ He provides an extensive and nuanced list of celebrities whose identities objectively 'mean' certain things and goes as far as to call for greater empirical investigation of these meaning categories.

Since the early work of anthropologists such as Malinowski (1950 [1922]) and Mauss (1990 [1954]) the distinction between people and objects has been increasingly cast into doubt. In certain contexts 'persons can seem to take on the attributes of things and things can seem to act almost as persons' (Hoskins, 2006). Through social exchange and use, objects can be given a gender, name, history and ritual function and in some cases they can become so closely associated with people they become inalienable (ibid.). Malinowski's study of the Kula exchange system of the Trobriand Islands (1950 [1922]) - later to be revisited by Mauss (1990 [1954]), Munn (1986), Strathern (1988), Weiner (1992) and Gell (1998) - is perhaps the most important and influential study in understanding the ways people and objects make one another socially valuable. Here, I propose it can be used as a model to understand the transference of value and meaning during practices of endorsement.

Malinowski's study showed how 'players' (Trobriand islanders) acquired fame and prestige by exchanging shell necklaces (Soulava) and arm shells (Mwali) with individuals on other islands along closed circuit Kula rings or paths (Keda) (Malinowski, 1950 [1922]: 81). Inclusion in a Kula ring was difficult to achieve, but once active those who exchanged the oldest, largest and most prestigious shells would gain social prominence. Equally, the importance of the players transferred to the shells, which in turn increased in prestige and 'fame' (Weiner, 1992: 140-141, Munn, 1986). Through processes of social interaction and exchange, both the object and the person therefore gained value and meaning, socially 'making' one another. Through exchange these unique valuables acquired a patina which visually showed their history. This history was also transmitted by word-of-mouth through myth: each shell was named and the names of their owners were passed on during exchange rituals.

One might suggest that due to the uniqueness of these shell valuables the process could not apply to mass-produced consumables like shoes, yet here I argue the principle remains the same, albeit on a larger scale. As Gell argues (1998: 223), and as demonstrated with Pete's' experience of his 'Montgomery', Gloverall Desert Boots in Chapter Five, an object does not have to have been physically owned and touched by a person to be indexical of them. In capitalist consumer economies, therefore, the fame of the shoes and their association with significant people is communicated less through patina and word-of mouth, than visually, through representations in magazines, newspapers, film, on television and on the Internet.⁷⁷

In her own study of the Kula exchange – conducted about sixty years after Malinowski's - Weiner studied this process in further detail. She describes these objects as *inalienable* and the process of exchange as a paradox of 'keeping while giving' (Weiner, 1992: 5). This paradox can be understood in two ways: first, to literally keep a precious object out of circulation (for example an heirloom) can be an empowering act that resists dominant cultural expectations; second, even when an object associated with one person passes to another, the prestige associated with the object remains with the original owner. Furthermore, their ownership persists in symbolic form – they are henceforth symbolically attached to that object. Other anthropologists such as Strathern and Gell have also theorized this process. For Strathern the 'partible person' is used to describe the body as composed of relations beyond as well as within itself (Strathern, 1988: 208). Similarly, Gell used the term 'distributed personhood' to describe 'personhood distributed in the milieu, beyond the body-boundary' (Gell, 1998: 104). He explains:

'[A] person and a person's mind are not confined to particular spacio-temporal coordinates, but consist of a spread of biographical events and memories of events, and a dispersed category of material objects, traces, and leavings, which

⁷⁷ While one might argue the aura of authenticity is absent from photographic and video representations, I have used Barthes and Gell elsewhere to argue an authentic connection can be perceived between a prototype (subject) and its index (representation) (Sherlock, 2013).

can be attributed to a person and which, in aggregate, testify to agency and patienthood during a biographical career which may, indeed, prolong itself long after biological death. The person is thus understood as the sum total of the indexes which testify, in life and subsequently, to the biographical existence of this or that individual.' (Gell, 1998: 222-223)

Gell's theories are perhaps best exemplified by Tom's experience of his father's shoes, as explained during the men's focus group:

- Tom: "... my dad died two years ago, so I walked my sister down the aisle and I wore a pair of my dad's shoes when I walked my sister down the aisle and then as soon as I'd done that I went upstairs and put a pair of these on [laughs and gestures to his Desert Treks]. So I kind of wore them, so it was kind of my dad's footsteps going down the aisle [...] my dad kind of walked her down the aisle and I wore his watch, so he kind of walked her down the aisle through me but then afterwards I needed these on [gestures to his own shoes] cos there was some shuffling-stroke-dancing to be done later on [laughter]"
- Alex: "And that wouldn't have been your dad?"
- Tom: "No my dad wouldn't have been dancing [laughs] although I probably look quite similar when I do dance [laughter]"

Through his shoes, Tom's dad was felt to be present. His personhood had been distributed throughout these objects which outlasted his own physical existence and stood for him in his absence. By literally walking in his shoes Tom was able to effect a transformation into his dad, a process reversed after the ceremony when he put on his own shoes.

This process of transference and transformation could also be understood in relation to participants' experiences of the endorsed shoe, which through representations in popular consumer culture had also become metonymies for their wearers. Here we return to my discussion in Chapter Two of the relationship between metaphorical and metonymical representations and embodied experience. To recap, Lakoff and Johnson describe metonymy as when one entity is used to refer to another related to it; the part stands for the whole (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 36-37). Metonymy, even more obviously than metaphor, they argue, is grounded in experience because 'it usually involves direct physical or causal associations.' As such, metonymic concepts structure our thoughts, attitudes and actions (ibid., 40). This became particularly apparent in both my own data and the ITSF data set when participants would describe their shoes in terms of the celebrity, personality, cartoon or fairytale character who had become associated with them; for example, 'Lady Gaga shoes', Kelly Rowlands, Ussain Bolt, Kurt Cobain, Carrie Bradshaw, Mohamed Ali, Minnie Mouse or Cinderella; or the imagined character that might wear them, for example, 'my Cowboy boots', 'biker boots', 'nurses shoes', 'femme fatale shoes' or 'gangster shoes'; or the brand who made them: 'my Doc Martens', Clarks or Converse.

These metonymic associations effected a transformation for the wearer. Eva, for example, a woman in her thirties who enjoyed collecting shoes and participating in fancy dress events, referred to a particular pair of her shoes as helping her achieve 'a kind of nineteen-forties Joan Crawford-style look'. When wearing them, she explained, she felt 'a million dollars' (Eva). Similarly, a man recalled buying trainers in the nineties which were endorsed by his favourite skateboarder – Eric Koston. He explained that they made him feel more confident because the skater was one of the best at the time and they helped him associate with this kind of skateboarding. Significantly, instead of saying he wore 'Eric Koston's shoes' he explained he 'wore Eric Koston', suggesting the metonymic status of the shoe was important in assuming the identity or, in this case, the expertise the shoes represented.

In contrast, these metonymic associations could also *discourage* participants from wearing particular shoes. In the men's Originals focus group for example Tom used the "geography teacher" to distinguish Clarks Originals from the main range, which he didn't wear. He explained:

"[Y]ou go into town and you go into the Clarks shop and you're like 'where's your Originals?', 'well, we don't sell them, all we stock is our Geography teacher range' [laughter], so that's the kind of section of the shop that you're only allowed into if you wear leather patches [laughs]"

Later it emerged that his description of the shoes was grounded in his experience of an old school teacher of his. He described the shoes as "the ones with those little puffy Clarks logos on them", explaining: "my geography teacher did wear a pair, so did my history teacher actually, and they were just kind of comfy... just all about comfort really [...]." For Tom then, to wear these shoes would be to identify with his geography teacher, which he clearly had no desire to do.

Here, I argue that part of the motivation for wearers to wear (or not wear) particular shoes is tied to the shoe's role as a 'prosthetic of the self' (Gonzalez, 1995, in Lupton, 1998: 144). In terms of media representation, if the shoes are depicted as a contributing part of the identity of the actor, musician or sports star, the two become inseparable. Hockey *et al.* explain this in relation to sports personalities: while the wearer 'makes' the trainer, the trainers are also depicted as 'making' the wearer – the skill of the wearer is partly attributed to the shoes he/she wears (2015: 23). Consequently, when detached from the original wearer the shoes promise (or threaten) the same transformation for the consumer – which for Eva was positive, and for Tom, if he were to wear the 'geography teacher shoes', would have been negative.

Sobchack makes a similar argument in her analysis of the metaphoric and metonymic use of *actual* prosthetics (i.e. prosthetic limbs). She explains that the use of the prosthetic as metonym transfers agency from human actors to human artefacts. In contrast to synecdoche where the prosthetic refers to a particular body, 'an effect of the prosthetic's metonymical amputation and displacement from its mundane context, [is that] the animate and volitional human beings who use prosthetic technology disappear into the background – passive, if not completely invisible- and the prosthetic is seen to have a will and a life of its own' (Sobchack, 2004: 211). So when separated from the bodies that animate them - as so often shoes are, and as Tom's 'geography teacher shoes' attest - they become powerful, even potentially dangerous, as Sobchack recalls of Anderson's Red Shoes which dance their wearer to death (*ibid.*, 212). At its most extreme, therefore, this can lead to a sense of the *uncanny*, the disconcerting feeling that occurs when something we know to be dead or inanimate seems to be alive; and the *unheimlich* or unhomely, when something familiar becomes strange when perceived out of place (Freud, 1955 [1917-1919]).

Verbrugge proposes that metaphors work by transforming the target (i.e. the body) into the source (the shoe), thereby making the target similar to the source (Verbrugge, 1980, in Indurkha, 1992: 4). Similarly, Indurkha uses Black to explain that some metaphors demonstrate a symmetry in the interaction between the source and the target, for example while calling a man a wolf may make the man more wolf-like, it also makes the wolf seem more human (Black, 1962: 40, in Indurkha, 1992: 4). Indurkha calls this 'metaphoric transference' (1992: 1), a process eloquently articulated by Claudel in his 'Mediation on a Pair of Shoes':

Ordinary objects which have long been used by one master take on a sort of personality, their own face, I could almost say a soul, and the folklore of all nations is full of these beings more human than humans, because they owe their existence to people and, awakened by their contact, take on their own life and

autonomous activities, a sort of latent and fantastic wilfulness. (Paul Claudel, 1965, *Meditation on a Pair of Shoes*, *Prose Works*, p. 1243 in Hoskins, 1998)

Here we see how the boundaries between shoe and body, and bodies and other bodies become blurred through practices of representation. These observations raise an interesting question: if through the biographical association between body and shoe, the shoe comes to stand for the wearer/endorser, to what extent is this a metonymic representation or does it represent a transubstantiation in a more sacred way? Is the shoe literally understood to *be* the body and to assert agency? Here, I argue that in some circumstances metonymy gives way to the tendency to personify, anthropomorphise and animate shoes and this speaks to what Belk *et al.* describe as the more 'sacred aspects of consumption.' (Belk *et al.*, 1989: 2)

7.4: Animistic and Anthropomorphic Shoes

'Perhaps the most obvious ontological metaphors are those where the physical object is further specified as being a person. This allows us to comprehend a wide variety of experiences with nonhuman entities in terms of human motivations, characteristics, and activities.' (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 32)

To make sense of our experience of the world we use metaphors, the most common of which, Lakoff and Johnson argue, is to personify or anthropomorphise objects and situations. Throughout the research for this thesis and the ITSF project, evidence of this was extensive. Participants would talk about their shoes as being 'at the end of their life' or as having 'plenty of life left in them yet'. This life would be alluded to during discussions of the divestment of shoes which often extended the biography of the shoe: when participants no longer had any use for their shoes they would rarely be thrown in the bin, instead they were retired to the back of a cupboard or stored under the bed, passed on to a friend or family member, given away to a charity or recycled. One might argue that through wear the participants enlivened their shoes, subsequently, the shoes became part of their 'extended self' (Belk, 1988, Belk *et al.*, 1989) or 'personhood' (Gell, 1998). Indeed, special shoes, such as first shoes or wedding shoes (those associated with particular rites of passage) were cherished because they served as biographical mnemonic devices. To destroy an object of such value would risk destroying or forgetting part of oneself (Belk *et al.*, 1989: 30). The personification of shoes however was not restricted to those which had been worn: shoes that had not yet been worn were 'waiting' for the right occasion, or for their owner to grow into them (physically or psychologically). And shoes that were still in the process of being designed and developed were referred to as 'he' or 'she' – as metonymy for their future imagined wearer.

The question of whether objects and brands are considered metaphorically alive or literally alive has troubled academics. Avis, for example, takes issue with the fuzziness of academic interpretations which fail to make this distinction (2012, 2012). He cites Fournier (1998) and Aaker (1997) as two of the first to acknowledge animism in empirical interpretations of brands, neither of whom are explicit about whether they or their participants' interpretations of brands as living agents are literal or metaphorical. In his frustration with theories of animism, however, Avis seems to overlook the notion that academics perhaps struggle to make this distinction because, in reality, it is not perceived to exist. Here, we return to Magritte's painting where through the practice of representation the image, object and subject conflate. I argue that when considering the experiences of wearers and producers, rather than attempting to rationally separate the representation from reality, theories of sacralisation and religious belief can help to understand practices of metaphoric and metonymic representation as grounded in and inseparable from experience. Once again, reiterating Tilley's important point; metaphor conflates one thing with another, for example something that is cultural is elided with something that is natural, consequently this collapses the nature/culture divide (Tilley, 1999:

37). The representation is considered real because it serves as the basis through which people are able to relate to the world socially.

Guthrie explains that animism (the practice of 'attributing life to the nonliving') and anthropomorphism ('attributing human characteristics to the nonhuman') (Guthrie, 1993: 62) are attempts to interpret the world and make sense of it. As such, they form a central feature of religious life. Even if proven wrong, to believe things, places and situations are humanlike, Guthrie argues, is a 'safe bet' because the potential rewards outweigh any loss (ibid., 40). In many ways shoes can be considered confounding objects in need of this sort of interpretation. As I have argued elsewhere in relation to other aspects of material and visual culture, while rationally we may know these objects are not alive, and we will say so when asked, we often talk and behave as though they are (Sherlock, 2013: 171).⁷⁸ In his studies of the perceived sacredness of the photograph, for example (another inanimate index of its referent), Mitchell illustrates this point effectively by recounting a pedagogical exercise performed by an art history colleague.

'When students scoff at the idea of a magical relation between a picture and what it represents, ask them to take a photograph of their mother and cut out the eyes.'
(Mitchell, 2005: 9)

One might easily imagine the same exercise working as effectively if asked to cut up a pair of shoes - particularly a pair as significant as Tom's father's.

In their study of the 'ritual substratum of consumer behaviour' Belk *et al.* empirically investigate the sacred practices associated with contemporary consumer culture. In contrast to Weber who saw modernity and its undermining effect on religious thought as disenchanting, Belk *et al.* draw on Eliade (1957) and Durkheim (2001 [1912]) to suggest that forms of enchantment continue to exist in modern secular societies. Using empirical research they argue that the 'secularization of religion and the sacralization of the secular' in contemporary Western society has meant the sacred/profane distinction has become applicable to consumer culture (Belk *et al.*, 1989: 9) and consumption has 'become a primary means of transcendent experience' (ibid., 13). Central to the observations made by Belk *et al.* is the distinction Durkheim makes between religious thought and organized religion. He explains that '[i]f religion generated everything that is essential in society, this is because the idea of society is the soul of religion' (2001 [1912]: 314). Therefore religion, far from being the essence of society is first and foremost the product of a human need and capacity to relate socially. Subsequently, Eliade observes that no matter how hard one might try, 'profane life never succeeds in completely doing away with religious behavior [...] even the most desacralized existence still preserves traces of a religious valorization of the world.' (1957: 23)

Belk *et al.* explain that the kind of extraordinary meaning previously experienced through religion is therefore now to be found in certain objects and experiences which come to be regarded as 'more significant, powerful, and extraordinary than the self' (1989: 13). In contrast, the profane is more ordinary and everyday and 'lacks the ability to induce ecstatic, self-transcending, extraordinary experiences' (ibid.). Of course, these are not discrete categories: the profane can be sacralised and the sacred can be profaned - a point I return to below.

Using empirical research, Belk *et al.* therefore set about analysing the processes through which this happens (ibid.). Sacralisation, they understand, occurs in relation to domains such as places, times, tangible things, intangibles, persons and experiences (ibid., 9) which are sacralised through processes of ritual, pilgrimage, quintessence, gift-giving, collecting, inheritance and

⁷⁸ Participants did not acknowledge shoes as sacred items, and they did not consciously consider their experiences religious in any way.

external sanction (ibid., 13). They explain that in some societies this involves magic, shamanism, animism and totemism. Such societies, they argue, 'accord sacred status to components of the natural environment that are revered, feared, worshipped, and treated with the utmost respect' (ibid., 2). As demonstrated by the experiences of Clarks Originals wearers in Chapter Five, many types of sacralisation can be observed in the way consumers experience shoes, but what can the experiences of those who produce the shoes tell us about the sacralisation of consumer culture?

To varying degrees, those involved in the design and production of shoes were less inclined to sacralise and animate shoes. One designer explained that before designing shoes she was enchanted by them, accumulating a vast collection. Yet since designing she was 'cured' because she had "pulled back the curtain" (Philippa: 24.05.12). Indeed, Belk explains that '[w]hen something loses [its] mystery, it loses its sacredness and becomes ordinary and profane.' (Belk et al., 1989: 7). Other participants had explained that when they look at shoes they perceived them in terms of their construction. For example, during my interview with Helen, one of the senior women's designers, she took an interest in the boots I was wearing, not necessarily because she liked them, but because she was interested to know how the leather strap was attached. Similarly, when looking at shoes, Paul the shoemaker would "see them made". The shoes these designers and makers tended to notice therefore were those they didn't (yet) fully understand, which for the more experienced were few and far between. Due to this in-depth knowledge, when buying shoes for themselves many would struggle to spend money when the quality of construction and materials did not equate with the price. So in many ways, for those involved with their production, shoes had been demystified. An indication of this was perhaps the tendency many designers and developers had to cut-up shoes, either to understand their construction or to experiment with different shapes. For me, the decimation of the shoe was quite shocking, a reaction several employees found amusing.

This demystification however didn't mean the shoes weren't sacralised and animated in other ways. The personhood of the designer, for example, could be seen to extend through the design of the product. Designers were understood to have their own 'handwriting' and particular shoes could often be identified as 'theirs'. Indeed, long after a designer had left, their shoe would still be referred to by their name, for example 'Sophie's shoe'. As Belk *et al.* argue sacralization is often the result of 'imposing one's own identity on possessions through transformations' (Belk et al., 1989: 14). Throughout discussions with designers some described the creative process metaphorically in terms of a 'birth', and, while others would consider this a cliché it was difficult to deny the significance of the metaphor. The period of gestation from the page/computer to the finished product could be an emotional time for the designer. Braithwaite describes this in her ethnographic study of luxury shoe designers when she identifies the point they have to 'let go of their ideas and [become] a spectator in the creative process they have initiated' (2012: 178). Consequently, compromises were required of the designer (or were made on their behalf) in relation to commercial requirements, such as a change in the look or feel of the shoe due to fitting, cost and quality requirements, and these compromises would distance the designer from their shoes (2012: 178). As such, the shoe was gradually profaned, to be re-sacralised by the consumer later through wear. Indeed, as previously mentioned the shoes were considered by some to 'come alive' once on the feet. The same designer who claimed to have 'pulled back the curtain', for example, was re-enchanted when she would read reviews of the shoes on the Clarks website or when she encountered returned shoes, explaining: "sometimes you'd get worn returns back, or wear tests, and they're covered in mud and I really like to see them like that because they've got a life of their own..." (Philippa: 24.05.12).

Marijke was one designer who didn't identify with the metaphor of the birth of the shoe and, perhaps through experience, had reconciled herself with the prospect of letting go of her designs. For her, the 'spirit' of particular shoes (which only a few shoes possessed) came more

from their materials and the process of production. Originals were one such type of shoe that demonstrated this spirit, she explained:

“Originals shoes [...] have that spirit because it’s a different way of making, you can’t really over-process them because they’re so simple, so they still have that authenticity [...]”

Her choice of words here was interesting. Where the term ‘essence’ might have also been an appropriate way to describe the fundamental attributes of the shoes which constitute their identity, ‘spirit’ suggests something more animate. For Marijke, this was connected with their materials which could be killed through over-processing. This started at the point of design with the decision as to whether to use the computer, sketch free-hand or design through making. Marijke described herself as quite ‘old-school’ in terms of her design approach, explaining that she got her best ideas from making things or working with the shoemaker and trying things out. While she did draw, most of her new concepts came from engaging with the materials directly. She felt designing on the computer was part of the process which could deny the shoe its spirit:

“[S]ometimes you have a perfect drawing on the computer and you get the shoe back – it’s exactly like that, but it’s like, [...] do you know what I mean if I say that – then the life is taken out?”

Another designer explained she preferred to draw by hand rather than on the computer using Adobe Illustrator, for example, because the software was more about ‘pointing’ than expressive free-hand mark-making, therefore she felt it could strip the design of its personality and the designer’s handwriting (or personhood).⁷⁹ Furthermore it would seem that with hand sketches a certain amount of interpretation was needed by the manufacturer to translate the shoe into physical form. This meant that the range review days (when the sample shoes arrived from the factory) could be both exciting and terrifying because it was difficult to be completely sure what they were going to get and this unpredictability could add character to the shoes. With the computer illustration however, Marijke seemed to be suggesting there were less surprises – the shoe often looked exactly like the illustration.

The simplicity and character of the shoes had a lot to do with the leather used. The materials manager explained that while many other ranges and markets required a certain amount of uniformity in the appearance of the shoes, the leather used for the classic Originals styles required less processing because part of their appeal were the “natural characteristics” and variations that showed it was a “real, natural product” (Simon: 25.04.12). Referring to other shoes which showed the same sort of character, Marijke explained “it’s really about the leather that almost looks as if it’s been worn already, it’s a little bit like crumbled and a bit like oiled and stuff.” Indeed, one might argue it *had* already been worn – by the animal. The materials manager referred to the multiple large swathes of pre-processed leather from the tannery as ‘skins’ and pointed out the imperfections which had been caused by, for example, the cow catching itself on a fence in the field. In contrast to Poly Urethane (or ‘PU’ - a synthetic leather), the leather already showed a biography, and this biography would continue to develop through wear. These signs of life seemed to provoke a respect for the material and although the materials manager was required to select a range of leathers to cater to various markets and tastes, his personal preference was for the less processed kind - demonstrated by his own decision to wear suede Desert Boots.

⁷⁹ This was not the case with all software. ‘Alias’ for example was an illustration programme which would allow the designer to draw free-hand on the screen, yet even with these designs they would need to be translated into line drawing on illustrator for the specification sheets which would go to the manufacturer.

Not all consumers, of course, could afford real leather shoes and others prefer not to wear animal products, therefore P.U. is necessary. However, when asked, all designers expressed a preference for working with leather because there was a sense it was co-operative, moulding to the shape of the last rather than springing back into shape (as with PU). Leather would also take on the marks of the maker. Here, Marijke used Italian manufacturing as an example explaining, "that's the beauty of Italian shoes, they're made in small factories and they have, still have, you almost can see the hands of the people who made it." When I asked whether she thought consumers could discern this difference she acknowledged that although she was particularly attuned to it she was sure consumers could see, because when Clarks stocked Italian shoes they sold well: "you could just see it, you see that these shoes have this kind of Italian handle." While Clarks Originals were not made in Italy, their simple design and natural materials required a similarly uncomplicated process.

So there was a sense that for the staff at Clarks, the classic Originals styles were examples of shoes that were already sacred prior to consumption: they had a 'spirit', whereas some of the other shoes were perhaps considered more profane, later to be singularized and sacralised by the consumer through use (as analysed in relation to other consumables by authors such as Belk (1989) and Lupton (1998)). This sacralisation, I argue, was due to their long visible association with cool bodies, or 'secular gods' (Rojek, 2015: 53, 74, see also Giles, 2000, Popora, 1996), the biography of the materials which remained 'alive' due to an uncomplicated production process, and modest marketing initiatives which generally let the shoes do the talking.

7.5: Shoes are 'Good to Think'

As a result of this 'aura' of authenticity, Clarks Originals and the Desert Boot had been identified by staff as 'precious' and the totemic use of the Desert Boot and the Clarks Originals range to symbolize the identity of the company emerged as a significant way in which they were represented. The classic Originals styles were unspoiled and quintessential – a quality Belk argues lends itself to sacred use. Drawing on Kopytoff he explains that objects don't have to be singularized to be sacred (as with many other studies of the sacralisation of consumer goods through use); particular mass-produced branded goods deemed to be 'quintessential' or archetypal, such as Levi 501 jeans, Ray-Ban sunglasses, the Volkswagen Beetle and Coca-Cola are often sacralised (Belk et al., 1989: 16). Belk defines the 'quest for quintessence [as] a quest for authenticity – "The Real Thing" in Coca-Cola's well-chosen vocabulary' (ibid.) - or the 'Originals', in Clarks'. Consequently, their quintessence makes them effective totemic resources.

The shoe as totem emerged in a number of places during my time at Clarks. I have already mentioned the miniature rapid-prototyped Desert Boots and the artworks depicting the shoes placed around the offices. The extensive visual use of the Desert Boot was a topic which arose during a discussion with Gemma. While looking through the *Originals Book* I noticed a double-page-spread featuring rows of small identical pictures of Desert Boots each depicting the design of a national flag (fig. 7.11). I asked Gemma if these were real, she explained it was just something they had done in the studio to symbolise the shoes' global appeal. This caused her to reflect on the visual use of the style:

"The Desert Boot is so overused in terms of graphically representing Clarks, like everyone just defaults to it. So internally if there's ever like, for example, [...] I remember there once being a thing where it was trying to, it was an internal communications thing and it was about, um, making sure you were secure about



Fig. 7.11: The Desert Boot used graphically in the Originals book to symbolise the brand's global appeal.

I.T. [information technology] so you didn't give anyone your password and stuff, so obviously a brief goes into the studio saying like 'right we need some posters, we need some stuff about it', so what the studio end up coming up with is a Desert Boot silhouette with like a lock on it, you know like, it's like the icon of Clarks, so it's pretty used and abused here." (Gemma)

The style was therefore used to reinforce a coherent sense of the identity of the company, in this case as metonymy for the company and metaphor for potential identity theft. Durkheim's study of totemism in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* can help to explain how and why the Desert Boot was so readily represented at Clarks in such a broad range of contexts. Durkheim proposes that as the most primitive known religion (Cladis in Durkheim, 2001 [1912]: xviii) totemism provides an opportunity to understand the fundamental principles of sacralisation and religious thought. Belk *et al.* explain that Durkheim saw the sacred as something that emerges collectively 'when society removes certain things from ordinary human use. Something is defined as being sacred through a social process that brings a system of meaning to individuals (heirophany), resulting in societal cohesion' (Belk et al., 1989: 6) In his legendary study *The Savage Mind* Lévi-Strauss, also identified the totemic use of plants and animals, as a key feature of social life explaining that not only were they 'good to eat' but also 'good to think' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966 [1962]) – particularly about identity. While shoes are good to wear, I suggest they can be equally good to think.

So what is a totem and how might we understand it in relation to Western consumer culture? According to Durkheim, tribal or clan totems are usually animals and plants, however other inanimate things could be used such as water, clouds, fire or lightening. Totems are also normally entire species or types, for example a kangaroo rather than a type of kangaroo (Durkheim, 2001 [1912]: 89). Belk *et al.* therefore identify 'quintessential' or archetypal branded items as performing a similar totemic function due to their originality. They refer to informants whose belief in particular brands would lead them to categorise themselves in those terms, for example one man described himself as coming from a family of 'Chevy People,' while another described himself as a 'Ford man' (1989: 15-16). As the project data (previously mentioned)

might suggest, similar practices could be understood with shoes, for example the Desert Boot 'type'.⁸⁰ For the Clarks employees who had a specific knowledge of the quintessential styles within their ranges, particular styles also became a way to identify consumers. For example, when one designer noticed the mother of a friend of her daughter's wearing Un Loop shoes (as discussed in Chapter Three, considered to be the quintessential comfortable work shoe) - she expressed her surprise because she hadn't considered her to be an 'Un Loop lady'. So even when wearers would contradict the 'type' represented by the shoe, these types remained a useful way to categorise people.

So, the shoe serves as a symbolic emblem through which to identify and understand a type, 'clan', or in this case the company. Durkheim explains that the totem is not worshipped as one would a god, it is not spiritual. Rather, the clan and the totem are considered equals that assume the characteristics of one another:

'Relations between a man and his totem are rather those of two beings who are clearly on the same level of equal value. [...] This is why it is sometimes called the father or grandfather of the men in the clan, which seems to indicate they feel morally dependent on it. Yet often, perhaps most often, the expressions used denote a feeling of equality. The totemic animal is called the friend, the elder brother of his human kin. In short, the ties between them and him more closely resemble those that unite members of the same family: as the Buondik say, animals and men are made of the same flesh.' (Durkheim, 2001 [1912]: 107)

This passage relates closely to the frequent interpretation of the Desert Boot as part of the company's 'DNA'. In his introduction to the new translation of Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Cladis cites Durkheim (2001 [1912]: 154) to summarise his profound yet simple central thesis:

'Totemism, which features most clearly the elementary form of religious life, reveals that the totem - or what one might describe as divinity - is in fact society itself conceived symbolically. "If the totem is both the symbol of god and of society, are these not one and the same? ... The god of the clan ... must therefore be the clan itself, but transfigured and imagined in the physical form of the plant or animal species that serve as totems."' (Cladis in Durkheim, 2001 [1912]: xviii)

The Desert Boot therefore is Clarks and Clarks is the Desert Boot. The totem is the 'collective represented in symbolic form', a 'concrete tangible symbol of [a group's] unity' (Cladis in Durkheim, 2001 [1912]: xix), Consequently, the totem becomes an emblem (Durkheim, 2001 [1912]: 94), which, through ritual use becomes sacred to the group.

If the totemic status of the Desert Boot is in any further doubt, the times when it was considered to be at risk further emphasised its sacredness. In Durkheim's analysis, he explains that the sacred and the profane must be kept separate. He describes the sacred as 'extraordinarily contagious': '[f]ar from remaining attached to the things marked as its own, the sacred is endowed with a kind of fluidity. Even the most superficial and indirect contact is enough to extend sacredness from one object to the other' (ibid., 237). Similarly, Weiner explains that the 'aura' of the object extends to one's other possessions, which subsequently has the capacity to legitimate one's social identity rank or status (Weiner, 1992: 10), a process Malinowski refers to as a 'halo of romance'. But if the sacred can transfer to the profane, then the profane can equally 'contaminate' the sacred (Belk et al., 1989: 6).

⁸⁰ This practice is reflected in popular culture. In her book *Shoes Never Lie* (1985: 74-77), for example, Pond comically illustrates the propensity to categorise men by quintessential types of shoes such as the loafer (for '[a]ny would-be prepster'), sneaker (for the 'Bruce Springsteen type'), Oxfords (for men who can read) and the Desert Boot (for the 'seedier intellectual type').

This process was evident in the relationship between the main range, which generally seemed to be considered by consumers as fairly everyday and profane, and the Originals range. Clarks' own consumer research had found that many consumers saw Clarks Originals and the Clarks main range as quite separate. Clarks wanted to be more overt about the connection between the brands so that the Originals styles would have what they described as a 'halo effect' on the main range. This was something the Originals team were nervous about because too much of an association could blur the distinction between the shoes and confuse the consumer. Indeed, at the time of the research I observed some styles in the proposed main range that looked similar to some of the Originals styles. Marijke explained however that strategies were maintained to keep the two separate, for example the main range did not use the crepe sole (considered part of the spirit of Originals) and the Originals styles continued to be sold in boutiques or niche chain stores separate from the main range. Even so, the risk of profaning the Originals styles, either by too close an association with the main range or, as discussed in the previous chapter, by over-producing, over-marketing or associating them with the wrong bodies was clearly a concern to those with more of a conscious understanding of the significance of the shoes. As such there was a sense the team were guardians whose responsibility it was to protect the brand from actions which might undermine the shoes' totemic status and 'spirit'.

The importance of these quintessential styles for the identification of a brand - not only from the perspective of the consumer, but also for the employees themselves - cannot be underestimated. When one considers other heritage brands, each have their totem; the Burberry trench coat, the Ray Ban Wayfarer, Levi 501s, the Converse Chuck Taylor (another shoe metonymically representing its endorser by being literally named after him). Each of these totems enable their brands to maintain a consistent and authentic sense of themselves – a necessity in a fast-paced consumer culture characterised by continual change. The inalienability of these items, which extend the personhood of their wearers, makers and endorsers, is therefore, as Weiner explains, at the 'root of all attempts to defeat loss' (Weiner, 1992: 10). Consequently, '[t]hese possessions [...] are the most potent force in the effort to subvert change, while at the same time [standing] as the corpus of change' (ibid., 10).

7.6: Conclusion

In this chapter I have used the practice of endorsement to reveal the relationship between representations and embodied experience. I argued that Clarks' aim to 'get the shoes on the right feet' (feet identified as 'cool') highlighted the powerful way in which particular bodies could transform the meaning of the shoe. This would subsequently 'humanize' the shoes and nurture a more emotional engagement with them – both for the consumer and the producer. Theories of endorsement and meaning transfer were identified as insufficient to fully understand this process. In a discussion linking back to theories of embodied perception I therefore combined Featherstone's interpretation of 'affect', and the notion of 'cool' to argue that, in the case of Originals, affective bodies were cool bodies and 'cool' was the characteristic that mobilised the transfer of meaning between subject and object. Anthropological theories concerned with exchange were then employed to further consider the reciprocal transfer of value between object and subject. In the context of consumer culture, representations were identified as the key medium through which the shoe made the wearer and the wearer made the shoe. The co-construction of the shoe and wearer could be understood to lead to a tendency to consider the shoe as index and metonym for the wearer, a process where (returning to Magritte) the shoe, image and body conflate. Furthermore, producer perspectives helped to understand other ways in which shoes are enlivened, particularly when considering their materials and production processes. While some had tried to identify a distinction between the perception of objects and brands as metaphorically alive or literally alive (i.e. Avis et al., 2012), I identified the futility of such an endeavour. Rather, the theories of Eliade and Durkheim were employed to argue that the motivations to animate the shoe speak to a more sacred and religious experience of consumer culture where, as metonymy or *totem*,

quintessential shoes are 'good to think' about who we are – thereby rendering them inseparable from the bodies that engage with them.

Ultimately the chapter sought to identify how and why particular shoes become visible or special. Consequently, the classic Clarks Originals styles such as the Desert Boot, Desert Trek and Wallabee emerged as a category of quintessential archetypes which, through practices of representation, develop a social life and autonomy of their own. In the next chapter, therefore, I consider what these shoes offer academic understandings of the agency of objects.

Chapter 8: Trickster Shoes



8.1: Introduction

In the previous chapter I showed how the association between shoes and affective bodies in visible contexts (i.e. the media) endowed shoes with character and established them as metonymic representations of their 'makers'.⁸¹ The metonymic status of these shoes, where personhood is extended through the object, afforded the use of the shoe as metaphor. Drawing on Gonzales (1995) and Sobchack (2004), I argued that as 'prosthetic' of the self the shoe is attributed with agency, and, through metaphorical use this agency becomes separated from the body leading to a sense of the shoes as autonomous and wilful in their ability to effect positive or negative transformations. Consequently, I argued that this resulted in a tendency to anthropomorphise and personify the shoe, endowing it with a sense of vitality. It is this vitality that now forms the focus of my enquiry.

While the previous chapters may have been sufficient to understand the relationship between representation and embodied experience in processes of being and becoming, they place an emphasis on the intentionalities of the makers and wearers of the shoes in terms of their own endeavours to use them to develop a sense of themselves in the world. Here I argue that Appadurai's (1986) biographical model - used thus far to understand the social value and significance of the shoes - only gives us half the picture. While it demonstrates the trajectories and social interactions that 'enliven' shoes and fetishise them with meaning or spirit, Pels suggests that this 'derivative' model of the agency of objects is insufficient to understand the way 'the thing's materiality itself is supposed to speak and act', a phenomenon he argues suggests 'its spirit is *of matter*' rather than residing '*in matter*' (Pels, 1998: 94).

In this final chapter therefore the shoe returns to centre stage as the 'knot' or the 'parliament of lines', 'whose constituent threads, far from being contained within it, trail beyond, only to become caught with other threads in other knots' (Ingold, 2010a: 4). Drawing on Pollard, Ingold explains that, '[m]aterial things, like people, are processes, and [...] their real agency lies precisely in the fact that 'they cannot always be captured and contained' (Pollard 2004: 60).' He suggests 'it is in the opposite of capture and containment, namely discharge and leakage, that we discover the life of things' (ibid.). It is the ways in which Clarks Originals evade capture and 'leak' - the ways they provide perpetual material and semiotic resources for reinvention - that tells us that just as we think we have understood them, they surprise us. Here, I suggest, Clarks Originals represent a particular type of shoe that has a tendency to be implicitly personified as a *trickster*.

The chapter starts with an analysis of the mythological trickster as theorized in academic literature. Data gathered with wearers and producers of the Clarks Originals styles is then analysed, which identifies them as *translators* or *in-between* shoes, mediating between binaries such as fashion/style; masculinity/femininity; extraordinary/mundane; smart/casual; beautiful/ugly. The in-between-ness of the shoes, particularly in relation to their *ordinariness* and *ugliness* (by which I mean aesthetics that do not conform to dominant and conventional notions of beauty), disrupts, complicates and confounds expected or conventional narratives and structures. I then employ Miller and Woodward's study of Blue Jeans and *The Art of the Ordinary* (2012), Rosenkranz's seminal yet under-utilised reconceptualization of *ugliness* (2015 [1853]) and Kristeva's concept of *abjection* (1982) to understand the appeal of these unconventional styles - an appeal relating back to the concept of cool. Consequently, the shoes emerge as 'quasi-objects' (Serres, [1980] 2007) which disturb the distinction between subject and object, and their materials are understood to act and intervene in processes of identification and interpretation. The chapter finishes the thesis by demonstrating the value of studying *ugly*, mundane or ordinary shoes, in contrast to conventionally beautiful shoes, to

⁸¹ In the broadest sense.

understand the relationship between shoes and representations in embodied experience, and how these experiences can serve to confound structure agency dichotomies.

8.2: Hermes the Trickster

Throughout my research at Clarks, and with Clarks Originals wearers, the notion the shoes were somewhat unconventional became a consistent theme. Participants described them as “a little bit weird”, “quirky” and as though they had a will of their own. This was demonstrated particularly clearly during an informal discussion with a junior member of the Originals team when I returned to the offices a couple of years after my initial research. A recent graduate in her twenties, Karina used the “quirky rebellious auntie” – a personification she had previously heard a colleague use - to convey the character of Clarks Originals. In an email I asked her to explain what she meant:

“So, for the year I've been here, Clarks as a whole feels to me like it's your quirky rebellious auntie but it feels so because of Originals as it's the essence of the company's quirkiness [sic] and rebelliousness. My personal interpretation is that Clarks is the whole character of the auntie while Originals is like the times when through her stories you see your auntie in her rebellious times when she was young, and she's so cool then that you want to be like her. :) You can imagine this auntie living in Somerset, in a respectable house; she has lived, so she's mindful and doesn't rush, doesn't get overexcited [sic] about fast modern stuff because she's seen it all already. However, she keeps being curious and open to the world and if you get to know her and listen some stories, you understand how cool she is exactly because of this and because of her quirkyness - keep being superprecise [sic] in shoemaking, refusing to push branding, being in love with quirky styles like the Wallabee etc.” (Karina, email correspondence: 09.01.2015)

The figure of the rebellious auntie bears a close resemblance to the mythological trickster, embodied in Greek mythology as Hermes, the god of the countryside; god of boundaries; god of the market-place; guide of wayfarers and god of roads; symbol of fertility; and the spirit who led the souls of the dead down to Hades (Guthrie, 1950: 89).⁸² Of all his identities, though, Hermes is most famous for his role as inventor of language and speech, and messenger to the gods; universally depicted with his winged sandals (Talaria), staff and traveller's hat he has gained a currency in visual culture as a symbol of communication, transportation, translation and transaction (DeBlois, 2010). He has lent his iconic image to such things as postage stamps; his sandals have inspired shoe designs (notably Jeremy Scott's winged Adidas collaboration); and his name has been adopted by a body of theory dealing with the science of interpretation - hermeneutics. In his study of hermeneutics, Couzins explains why Hermes provided such a good eponym. While he was messenger to the gods, the messages he conveyed (through translation or by his mere presence) were not always explicit and as such his dual character as *crafty* trickster is revealed, as is the tricky nature of communication and interpretation more broadly. In the *Cratylus*, while Socrates identified Hermes as the god who invented language and speech, he also identified him as thief, liar and contriver. Couzins explains, therefore, that while words reveal, they also conceal and confuse. Hermes played with this conflict 'hence the gods' messages were often oracular and ambiguous' (Couzens Hoy, 1982: 1).

Like Hermes, shoes in general are represented as messengers – as metaphors they translate concepts into comprehensible form, and, when worn, they *say* something about their wearer. Yet as I have shown these messages are often less than straightforward. In a discussion about identifying people by their shoes, Marijke articulated their ambiguity. She explained that when

⁸² Any and all of these distinctions bear a relevance to the interpretation of shoes, rendering Hermes an apt metaphor for footwear.

she first started designing shoes, sartorial codes were much more “stereotypical”, for example, “that guy’s wearing brogues, he’s some kind of like posh blah blah blah”, yet today it was much more complicated. Consumption was linked less to status and income therefore one might find the same pair of shoes on very different people. Clarks Originals were widely recognized as having a particularly broad appeal and the ability to transition between people. In an internet article about Wallabees, for example, GQ’s ‘most stylish man of the week’, musician *Dave One* from the band *Chromeo*, explained that Clarks Wallabee’s were “the coolest shoes in the world” because:

“they are the only thing in common between the Wu-Tang Clan and my grandfather. [...] If the Wu-Tang Clan showed up at my grandfather’s house, he’d probably be scared. But then he’d think, ‘Hey, I’ve got those shoes’” (Dave One in Olsen, 2011)⁸³

While the notion of the trickster can be problematic especially in social situations when it disrupts our ability to categorise and identify people (or in industry where the ability to predict the success or failure of products is assumed to be the best way to ensure success), as the quote suggests, it can also be perceived as a positive thing. In his book, *Trickster Makes This World*, Hyde describes the trickster as the thing that, through its ability to confound expectations, ‘gets life going again’:

‘We constantly distinguish – right and wrong, sacred and profane, clean and dirty, male and female, young and old, living and dead – and in every case trickster will cross the line and confuse the distinction. Trickster is the creative idiot, therefore, the wise fool, the grey-haired baby, the cross-dresser, the speaker of sacred profanities. Where someone’s sense of honorable behavior has left him unable to act, trickster will appear to suggest an amoral action, something right/wrong that will get life going again. Trickster is the mythic embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox.’ (Hyde, [1998] 2008: 7)

This became most apparent in accounts of those working at Clarks, who, while at times finding themselves disenfranchised by sales targets, quantitative market research, merchandising statistics and the thought of the sheer quantity of mass-produced shoes, would fondly recall times they had seen their shoes on unexpected feet, in unexpected places. While these encounters could be confounding at times, they would often cause staff to rethink what they thought they knew, subsequently re-invigorating the creative process. I asked Marijke, for example if she thought much about her shoes after they’d been bought and if she ever saw people wearing them. She responded:

“Yes, oh it’s lovely to see them, yesterday even I was sitting having a coffee in Wells and I saw quite an older lady but she was very funky, she looked really cool, and she was wearing some of our shoes and I was like ‘great’ to see that, you almost wanna go there and say ‘I made that!’” (Marijke)

8.3: ‘Betwixt and Between’ Shoes

So, the Clarks Originals shoes were identified by staff and consumers as having a particular ability to transgress boundaries between different identities and cultures. In 2000, the head of Clarks’ American Operations stated that the Desert Boot ‘could almost be seen as a “World

⁸³ To further emphasise the point, shortly after conducting the focus group in which Kristian was wearing Black suede Wallabees, I noticed the same pair of shoes (this time in a sandy colour) on a lady in her eighties at my local veterinary surgery.

Shoe". It sort-of goes between or beyond cultures. [...] It goes with almost every culture' (Infantino in Chippendale, 1999: 15). Indeed, participants in both focus groups frequently spoke of, or alluded to, the shoes' between-ness describing them as "neither boring nor totally mainstream" (Jane), "bridging the gap" between fashion, style and comfort (Fiona), between masculine and feminine, day and evening, smart and casual or mundane and extraordinary. In Turner's terms therefore they might be considered a *liminal shoe*; 'betwixt and between' political systems and occupying a 'gap between ordered worlds [where] almost anything can happen' (1975: 13).

While Clarks Originals afford many different cultural associations, and fit many different niche groups, as focus group participant Fiona suggested in Chapter Five they are, of course, not the only type or brand of shoe to do so. Marijke described these shoes, which also include the Dr. Marten, Converse All Star and Timberland boot as "archetypes" due to their ability to transcend fashion trends and appeal to so many cultures, generations, genders and ages. So, what makes Originals and these other archetypes so special or cool? In the words of Engelke in his essay *Sticky Subjects, Sticky Objects*: '[t]o put it simply, [perhaps it's] the fact that they are not special' (Engelke, 2005: 131). One might similarly describe the Desert Boot, for example, as an ambivalent and innocuous object. Certainly, the company's decision to avoid obvious external branding can be seen to aid this innocuous appeal: the shoes remain blank, perhaps even more blank than their counterparts, for example the Dr. Marten that has strong political associations in many cultures. Although this may make them prone to being copied (there are many desert boots on the market at present) it also makes them appealing to both those consuming for their practical affordances, as well as those who are in on the 'secret' and that fetishize the brand for what it stands for, for example its connections with music genres, subcultures and British heritage. Engelke categorizes these objects as 'sticky': their neutrality and practicality attracts use. They become a malleable resource through which social life is conducted. The Clarks Originals Desert Boot, for example, is distinctive, but not too much so; they seem to attract identities but not so much that the shoes become permanently *stuck* on one particular type of wearer. Furthermore, in terms of the collaborations, they act almost as a canvas: their simplicity affords an often-seamless hybridization with other significant materials, aesthetics and collaborators.⁸⁴

Keane describes objects like this as being particularly 'open' to varied appropriation and through their openness they have an ability to challenge existing semiotic ideologies (Keane, 2005: 189-191). This openness has been considered in relation to other garments such as jeans. In his chapter 'The Jeaning of America', for example, Fiske asked his students (almost all of whom were wearing jeans) what their jeans meant to them, to which their most common answer was 'free' (as in 'free to be myself'), and 'natural' (as opposed to cultural) (Fiske, 1989: 3). While at the time of his question (the late 1980's) jeans still maintained a strong association with Americanness, more recently Miller and Woodward argue that through their ubiquitous use across ages, genders, classes and cultures jeans have lost these historical associations, becoming 'genuinely post-semiotic'. While conducting their research, they observed that when encountering a person wearing "'just jeans" one learns nothing at all about that person' (ibid., 91). Even when 'marked' (i.e. branded), they argue, one is as likely to see a maid wearing designer jeans as her mistress (2012: 90).

While the idea of something being 'post-semiotic' might be an over simplification, it certainly causes one to consider these particular archetypal garments/shoes as polysemic and often contradictory. Fiske proposes it is the contradictory status of jeans as being neither masculine or feminine, communal or individual, upper class or working class, consumer culture or counter culture that gives them a 'semiotic richness' – a term similar to the 'semiotic resources' described in Chapters Two and Five:

⁸⁴ For McKee, the boots literally served as a canvas for his paintings.

‘[C]ontradiction entails semiotic richness and polysemy. It enables the readers of a text, or the wearers of jeans, to partake of both its forces simultaneously and devolves to them the power to situate themselves within this play of forces at a point that meets their particular cultural interests. [...] The semiotic richness of jeans means that they cannot have a single defined meaning, but they are a resource bank of potential meanings.’ (Fiske, 1989: 5)

While some Clarks Originals wearers (for example some of the male focus group participants) still chose the shoes for their cultural associations, and could identify one another through them, there was a sense that many others would buy the shoes because they occupied, in a sense, a semiotic no-man’s-land. Indeed, Conor, one of the male Clarks Originals wearers, described Clarks shoes and the Desert Boot as “safe”: there seemed to be less semiotic risk involved in wearing them than other more distinctive brands, yet they had sufficient history and heritage to make them cool and credible. This was echoed by Rosie who described the shoes as “very wearable” because “they’re not making a statement, [...] there’s something understated about the products that allows people to wear them in a different way.” Consequently, she explained Clarks Originals were a good shoe to wear around the office:

“I mean you can walk around our building [and] people are happy to wear Originals because they know there’s a bit of credibility associated with it, but at the same time they can wear a black suede Desert Boot and nobody’s going to be like ‘what are you wearing!?’ , like it doesn’t make a statement, but at the same time people are like ‘oh yeah, that’s cool’. And that’s the nice part of it, and that’s why it’s had such a kind of longevity I think: that’s why it strikes a chord with so many people.”

The ordinariness of the shoe can therefore be understood in some circumstances to be empowering, particularly when one considers its ability to negate dominant ideals of beauty and the extraordinary. While this certainly applies to the Originals styles (recall Joe’s observation in Chapter Five that Clarks Originals made it fashionable to look normal again), this principle is perhaps best exemplified by the *Un Loop* shoe mentioned in Chapter Three and some of the other functional and plain shoes in the main range. These shoes can be identified as tricksters due to being both popular yet plain – their popularity confounded many of the staff who were continually briefed to design beautiful shoes. The German philosopher Rosenkranz (whose theories I discuss further below) suggests that it is the ‘frequency of repetition, the broadness of a mass existence [that] allows [the ordinary] to become indifferent, because another exemplar as sheer tautology lacks any charm of newness’ (2015 [1853]: 202). Paul, the shoemaker, disparagingly described these indifferent shoes as “no-choice shoes” – the shoes the customer settles on when they can’t make a decision - yet in a consumer culture where choice abounds in often overwhelming and oppressive ways, the possibility that a shoe can relinquish one of the requirements to make a choice is perhaps an important means for liberation.⁸⁵

Rosenkranz also suggests ‘the ordinary can turn into the comical if handled with irony about itself’ (2015 [1853]: 209). Again, in certain circumstances, the ordinariness of the shoes can be what transforms them into something extraordinary. In Gladwell’s book *The Tipping Point* (2000), for example, he uses the exponential rise in popularity of Hush Puppies (another plain, suede shoe) amongst the Hipsters of New York in the mid-nineties as an example of the supposedly chance and random nature of trend epidemics. While he gives little attention to the

⁸⁵ Furthermore, one might suggest that in some circumstances it is not appropriate to make too much of a statement with one’s shoes, for example, online customer reviews for Un Loop suggested that many wearers were nurses, and the lack of style enabled them to transition between diverse roles and situations. Therefore, these ordinary shoes perform an important social function.

materiality of the shoes, in the context of the present research it would seem the post-semiotic status of these ordinary and unfashionable shoes (which at the time the manufacturer was actually considering phasing out) was what made them appealing to fashion innovators wishing to creatively express their resistance to a consumer culture characterised at the time by beauty and excess. In line with the discussion in Chapter Two about everyday forms of consumption and the work of theorists such as De Certeau (1984), ordinary shoes such as the Desert Boot and Un Loop therefore become important in terms of providing a material means to understand a 'meso-level' (in contrast to macro or micro approaches often favoured in studies of identity) where structure and agency can be understood to be negotiated through mundane practices, which, as Robinson suggests (and as the Desert Boot and Hush Puppy examples attest), can themselves turn out to be extraordinary and transformative (Robinson, 2015: 908). To return to Paterson's study of the *Consumption and Everyday Life* (2006: 7), while banal and routine activities help us to understand the complex dialogues concerned with identity, status, aspirations, cultural capital, and position within a social group, they also demonstrate 'reflexive consideration of ethical, creative, and environmental concerns' where consumers place their 'conscious experiences of acts of consumption into larger processes of globalisation'. Indeed, citing De Certeau (1984), Paterson suggests that the 'spontaneous and imaginative energies of the people' and their creative forms of appropriation respond to consumer capitalism in a way which creates new cultural meaning. (Paterson, 2006: 7)

8.4: 'Ugly' and Abject Shoes

The Clarks Originals styles, particularly the Desert Boot might therefore be described as extraordinary for their ordinariness and this affords their role as trickster, disrupting boundaries, confounding interpretation and providing a resource for creative innovation. Yet this is not the case for all the Clarks Originals styles, many of which are quite distinctive, almost *ugly* in their appearance. Following Ingold, I suggest that to fully appreciate the agency of these shoes they should be treated more as 'things' or 'gatherings', rather than as 'objects' standing as a '*fait accompli*' over and against their setting (Ingold, 2010a: 4). Following the thing, rather than following the object, Ingold argues, entails following materials or 'matter in flux'. So to lend greater insight to the way these shoes become culturally visible and significant, special attention must be given, not to the shoe as a finished and whole object, but as a 'going on' or a 'place where several goings on become entwined' (ibid.). Here, I argue ugliness is a way to understand these particular shoes as 'things' whose materials and features afford their role as trickster.

Prior to my research at Clarks, while observing in a niche chain store that sold Clarks Originals and other branded shoes, a man in his late thirties came in looking for a pair of Luggers (fig. 7.1) to replace the worn-out pair he was wearing. To his disappointment the store, which was the latest of a number he had tried, didn't stock them. He tried some alternative pairs of vintage-style trainers but explained nothing quite did the same job. The shoes were similar to the Wallabee, with a prominent seam around the top, yet unlike the Wallabee the seam did not extend around the whole shoe, instead, it tapered off at the toe to meet the crepe sole. This gave the shoes an asymmetric appearance emphasized by the placement of the laces on the outer-side of the foot, instead of in the middle. When I recalled the story to Gemma, the marketing manager she explained that although the Lugger was popular in some of the Asian markets it wasn't currently available in the UK. When I asked her why, she explained:

"I think it's kind of, from a sort of fashion point of view it's way on the end of an acquired taste I'd say, as opposed to like, I think a Wallabee and Desert Boot you can recognise them as classics and understand what they are, whereas Lugger's just like pretty... I dunno, it's, it is kind of a bit more specialist I'd say, a bit more of an acquired taste so I think it's kind of fallen off" (Gemma)



Fig. 8.1: The Clarks Originals Lugger.

The experience of this customer was reinforced later during the men’s focus group when Tom recalled a similar problem trying to find a replacement style for his trusty Desert Treks (the shoe with the prominent seam down the middle of the upper):

“I’ve got some Red or Dead things at the moment which aren’t too bad – closest I’ve come compared to these but they still haven’t got the seam down the middle, and that’s important. [...] I don’t know if people know you’re wearing Clarks Originals but they recognise the shoe, and I do get mocked an awful lot for wearing Cornish Pasties, that’s what everyone says [laughter].”

The thing both of these men seemed to like about the shoes was their unusual, almost controversial, construction and proportions. Tom, for example, also identified the unusually wide width of the Treks as part of their aesthetic appeal; something that looked good with his flares. Indeed, while looking at the shelves of past styles in Marijke’s studio she explained that this was an important part of the character of the shoes: “If you see the shoes here lots of them are really really simple and almost a little bit *weird* and that’s what we wanna keep into it, that idea of quirkiness and craftsmanship [...]”. An important part of her role therefore was to understand and respect this “weirdness” so that it could be maintained – a challenge in an industry where beauty is generally considered to ensure commercial success.

Rosenkranz’s theories on ugliness can help to understand the significance of the materiality of these shoes in social processes of identification. In his seminal text *The Aesthetics of Ugliness* (2015 [1853]) he criticises traditional approaches to aesthetics for focussing too much on beauty and for considering ugliness as its negative. Beauty was often aligned with the good and pure, and ugly with the evil and mean. In contrast he argues that while the beautiful and the ugly depend on one another, they play different roles in aesthetics; when considered on its own ‘negative beauty’ or ugliness can become positive – a point his translators argue pre-empted the triumphs of much modern art today (Pop in Rosenkranz, 2015 [1853]: 1).

According to Rosenkranz, ugliness is both natural and cultural, and exists on a continuum between beauty and the comical, or the caricature. Beauty, he explains, can be traced to the ‘eurythmis, symmetry, and harmony of form in nature where “the curve triumphs”’. In contrast,

ugliness diverts the eye with its 'jagged lines' and comically 'bizarre and grotesque digressions' (Rosenkranz, 2015 [1853]: 18). So while beauty depends on 'general proportions of unity, symmetry and harmony', 'ugliness begins with the formless, which prevents unity from achieving closure, or dissolves it into the shapeless, giving rise to a muddle of non-shapes in disharmonious contradiction' (ibid., 431). Yet beauty and ugliness are also cultural in that beauty is measured against conventional notions of taste, correctness and normality – 'the negation of this normality is the incorrect' which he argues 'is to be found especially in the individual arts and historical [read unfashionable] styles' (ibid., 431). Indeed, Rosenkranz uses *fashion* to explain the cultural and temporal relevance of ugliness and beauty which can overcome their 'natural' features:

'The province of the conventionally beautiful, fashion, is full of phenomena that, judged according to the *idea* of the beautiful, could only be called ugly, and yet are allowed to pass temporarily for beautiful, not as if they were beautiful in and of themselves, but rather because the spirit of the time finds precisely in these forms the most fitting expression of its specificity, and grows accustomed to them. Through fashion, spirit seeks particularly things that correspond to its mood, which ugliness can also serve as a means to adequate representation. Past fashions, particularly those that have recently gone out of style, are thus as a rule judged ugly or comical, since the change in mood can only develop through opposites.'

(Rosenkranz, 2015 [1853]: 34)

So while 'what makes objects themselves ugly is the recognition of the subject that they fail to conform to some ideal' (ibid., 436), like the ordinary, the fact that they do not conform makes them a creative resource for outsiders and the disenfranchised, who Belk *et al.* describe as fashion innovators and the originators of cool (2010: 189). In this sense, Rosenkranz's theories of the *ugly* relate to Kristeva's theories of the *abject* (1982). In many ways, the abject is considered to be the repulsive, wretched or contemptible, yet Kristeva explains its general cause is 'not lack of cleanliness or health [...] but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (Kristeva, 1982: 4). As Belk suggests 'the sense of contradicting order and rejecting societal normalcy suggests a trickster figure who introduces the chaos of clever new ideas' (2010: 188). The weirdness of the Clarks Originals styles therefore would seem to fit with this rule and this would also account for their 'coolness'.

For both Rosenkranz and Kristeva humour is also an important way in which the trickster disrupts system and order and this relates back to the exaggerated features of the distinctive classic Wallabee, Desert Trek and Lugger styles. Here Rosenkranz argues the *caricature* is the stage beyond the ugly which consists of the 'exaggeration of one moment of a form into formlessness': an 'overloading'. This change, he argues, must be connected to the essence of the quality of the object/person and must be incongruous with the totality of the form. For example, to enlarge or shrink the entire form would render its character unchanged, 'but should one part come out of the unity in a way that cancels out the normal proportion, which persists unchanged in the remaining parts, displacement and slanting of the whole emerges which is ugly' (2015 [1853]: 387-389). Here, the exaggerated broadness of the Desert Trek, the bold and prominent *pastie-like* seams of each of the styles and the slightly too-thick crepe sole emerge as features which afford a slightly comical and caricaturesque quality to the shoes. This became further apparent with other Clarks styles from the main range such as a style named 'Funny Dream', a perpetually popular archival style with unusually thick laces, emphasised lace holes and thick, disproportionate soles (fig. 3.4). The bold colours and patterns in which they were made also suggested the shoes weren't taking themselves too seriously. Rosenkranz explains that through humour the caricature therefore neutralises its own ugliness:

‘Beauty excludes ugliness from itself, while the comical fraternizes with it; but in doing so neutralizes its disgust through the fact that, in comparison with beauty, it recognizes its relativity, its nullity.’ (Rosenkranz, 2015 [1853]: 9-10)

Similarly, Kristeva explains that ‘laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection’ (Kristeva, 1982: 8).⁸⁶ The exaggerated features of these ‘funny’ shoes may almost therefore be described as the punchline in the joke. Koestler explains that laughter (or any humorous reaction, from overt laughter to a wry smile) is a reflex and unlike many other bodily functions ‘its only utilitarian function as far as one can see is, is to provide temporary relief from utilitarian pressures’ (Koestler, 1989 [1964]: 31). He uses the example of a joke to explain this disruption:

‘The narrative [of the joke] acted as a channel directing the flow of emotion: when the channel is punctured the emotion gushes out like a liquid through a burst pipe: the tension is suddenly relieved and exploded in laughter.’ (Koestler, 1989 [1964]: 33)

It is these ironic diversions of narrative, or subversions of the expected outcomes of conventional situations that surprise us and provoke an unexpected reaction. Tom’s story of the “cornish pastie” shoes, suggests he enjoyed these reactions. Indeed, there were other times when his use of fashion emerged as a way for him to consciously reject convention and expectation. In a discussion with Kristian about the Gallagher brothers, for example, Kristian expressed his admiration that they were obtuse rather than “glitzy”, yet he felt that the emergence of Liam Gallagher’s fashion label somewhat undermined his rebellious credentials. On the contrary Tom took the opportunity to explain that one can reject the system while also being interested in fashion: “...just cos you’re not smart, doesn’t mean you’re not bothered about the fashion [...] I’ve styled myself on not being smart for years and succeeded brilliantly [laughs]”. In this way, Tom emerged as Kristeva’s ‘deject’ for whom the abject affords the ability to disrupt order:

‘The one by whom the abject exists is thus a deject who places (himself), separates (himself), situates (himself), and therefore strays instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing. Situationist in a sense, and not without laughter since laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection. Necessarily dichotomous, somewhat Manichaeian, he divides, excludes, and without, properly speaking, wishing to know his abjections is not at all unaware of them. Often, moreover, he includes himself among them, thus casting within himself the scalpel that carries out his separations.’ (Kristeva, 1982: 8)

Indeed, this would also account for the shoes use as a material resource for other more famous ‘dejects’ such as Richard Ashcroft, discussed previously. It also demonstrates the ways that the materials afford symbolic meaning, for example to signify the ‘deject’ or trickster in popular culture contexts. It is perhaps no coincidence for example that the costume designer for the popular American series *Breaking Bad*, chose Clarks Wallabees as the shoes worn by protagonist Walt, a mild-mannered high school chemistry teacher leading a double life as a murderous meth-amphetamine manufacturer (fig. 7.2).

8.5: Quasi-Objects and Material Parasites

So, a study of the shoe as a gathering of materials, features, bodies, experiences and representations gives a greater insight to their role as an objectified form of subcultural capital. Through their materials, they afforded participants the ability to disrupt ideals and differentiate themselves. Serres’ concept of the ‘quasi-object’ is useful to understand this phenomenon in

⁸⁶ Hutcheon explores these ideas at length in her research on humour and irony in art and consumer culture.

Image removed due to copyright

Fig. 8.2: Season 1 publicity poster for the HBO series *Breaking Bad* (2008). While protagonist Walt transformed from high school chemistry teacher to murderous meth-amphetamine dealer, his shoes remained the same throughout the full five seasons.

more detail. For Serres, the quasi-object is an object that is particular in its ability to facilitate, mediate and reify social relations ([1980] 2007: 225). He uses a ball as an example, which, when left alone means nothing yet when in play had the ability to mark the subject (as ball-player) and construct intersubjectivity amongst the players – a concept Latour has taken further with his notion of actor networks where human and non-human ‘actors’ connect and merge with one another to achieve outcomes (2005, 1993). Serres explains:

‘This quasi-object is not an object, but it is one nevertheless, since it is not a subject, since it is in the world; it is also a quasi-subject, since it marks or designates a subject who, without it, would not be a subject’ (Serres, [1980] 2007: 225)

Quasi-objects are therefore important because they disrupt the distinction between subject and object; neither Tom or his Desert Treks would exist and function as they do without one another, furthermore, they enable and mediate the collective Madchester ideology with which he associated himself and identified others. Reading this process backwards however suggests the adoption of the shoes in the process of identification is intentional, yet the shoes through their very materiality contribute to these meanings:

[They] are not simply intermediaries, going about their business as innocent conduits, pristine channels. They too contribute to this process of communication – this exchange of meanings – by introducing their own heterogeneous messages. Or rather they can act as interference. (Michael, 2000: 114)

Michael explains that this ‘interference’ can be described in terms of Serres’s concept of the ‘parasite’: a word which in French has several meanings, but the one most relevant to the quasi-object is ‘a disrupter of a signal between communicator and receiver’. If one might consider for a moment the ‘communicator’ to be the producers of Clarks Originals (although it could also be the wearer) then one might regard the sticky or quiet sole, the ‘bank robber’ motif, or the seam down the middle of the Trek as a semiotic or material parasites – interrupting intended meanings by offering themselves to any number of alternative interpretations and uses.

The soles of the shoes are particularly relevant here. In the men’s focus group, Kristian, Joe and Tom seemed fond of the sticky soles, yet Conor wasn’t so sure, explaining: “...they’re treacherous in the wet weather though, they’re not sticky when they’re wet”. The other participants seemed to want to defend the shoes, Tom responded that they were sticky in the pub, which was where it really mattered. It seemed that for the rest of the participants the semiotic and adhesive benefits of the soles outweighed their slipperiness and perhaps this was also the case for Conor, since he still chose to wear them. After the focus group Conor suggested I look up “Clarks slippery soles” on the Internet as he had found lots of other people who supported his view. In an article written by a loyal Desert Boot wearer for *The Telegraph* entitled ‘The Slippery Subject of Clarks Desert Boots’ the dilemma of style and authenticity versus practicality is examined:

‘Now, for all that I love these boots and continue to wear them to death, they do have one fundamental flaw - namely, the crêpe sole, which has a tendency to aquaplane when it’s wet. I can’t imagine aquaplaning has ever been much of an issue in the desert, so it might seem churlish to protest too much, but it most certainly is an issue on a wet pavement...’ (Wyn Davies, 2011)

And yet the shoes are still worn. While the slipperiness of the soles might be considered by some to be a negative feature, for many they are an unintended *interruption* or *parasitic* idiosyncrasy that has given them character and authenticity. If Clarks were to change the soles many of their loyal wearers would undoubtedly be outraged, and while they may interrupt the

intended function of the shoe (grip and stability) the soles have afforded a social significance that for many wearers wins-out over practicality.

What the example of the crepe soles and the shoes' other ordinary, ugly or abject features demonstrates is that by paying close attention to the materials of the shoes in social and environmental contexts, one is able to better understand their *agency*. Ingold suggests that due to a common tendency in material culture studies to 'arrest the flow of materials' and reduce things to objects, analysts compensate by attributing objects with 'agency'. Rather, he suggests that by following the materials one is able to consider things as continual processes and to 'enter into a world that is, so to speak, continually on the boil.' He compares the study of things not as a museum but as a well-stocked kitchen where 'stuff is mixed together in various combinations, generating new materials in the process which will in turn become mixed with other ingredients in an endless process of transformation' (2010a: 8). He also uses the analogy of the alchemist's laboratory where substances are known by what they look and feel like and by following what happens to them – or 'the old science of struggling with materials, and not quite understanding what is happening' (Elkins, 2000 in Ingold, 2010a: 9). For my participants - those who design, make, market and wear the shoes - the process of struggling with the materials and adapting to their parasitic interventions is how they come to establish a sense of themselves in the world and how the shoes acquire social and cultural meaning.

8.6: The Trickster Trademark

Thus far I have demonstrated the value of conceptualising the shoe as a *thing* rather than a finished object so that it may be understood as a process 'vulnerable to causation and contingency' (Keane, 2005). In line with Ingold's suggestions, I have followed the materials to understand how these things, through practice, disrupt system and order. Here I suggest the brand or trademark – traditionally understood as a *representation* of a company's identity and values - may equally be conceptualised as a 'thing' or process. Indeed, Moore argues that brands are 'composite entities'; part thing and part language they are 'unstable conjunctions of tangible, material things [...] with 'immaterial' forms of value' (2003: 334). Furthermore, he suggests brand names, as a legally protected form of intellectual property 'represent language being used in a way that heightens its own 'thingness' (Silverstein, 1984 in Moore, 2003: 334). To consider brand names 'things', therefore, lends further insight to the blurred distinction between the material and the visual, where, as suggested by Rose and Tolia-Kelly in Chapter One, the visual can be considered material and vice-versa. Furthermore, by following the social life of the trademark as it is practiced in everyday life one is able to recognise similar trickster characteristics which confound structure-agency dichotomies.

The study of brands and trademarks as processes and practices is part of an anthropological turn in brand theory that understands branding as a 'particular kind of system of classification or way of organizing experience and knowing the world' (Matsunaga, 2016: 299). Brands are a means through which communities and relationships can be formed and bound through shared rituals, symbols, stories and myths. Drawing on Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity (1992, 1984) Elliott and Wattanasuwan explain that we make sense of ourselves and our lives by the stories we tell; we situate ourselves in time and place by constructing narratives that suggest a coherent sequence and causality in life. They argue that while Ricoeur uses literature as a model through which we learn to do this, advertising and brands similarly provide both the model and *resources* for an equally 'powerful representation of narrative sequence'. The memories of these brands also provide the medium for social interaction and shared narratives (1998: 133). Consequently, through these stories 'consumers are actively involved in the creation of brands as social objects' (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001: 427 in Matsunaga, 2016: 233) and just as the use of the shoes themselves may not correspond with the intentions of the producer, similarly, the trademark may take on a life of its own.

This became particularly apparent in focus groups for the ITSF project where Clarks was frequently referenced by participants.⁸⁷ In a similar way to the observations made in the media survey in Chapter Four, the Clarks brand was used as a narrative resource to recall memories of past identities and experiences, many of which resonated with other participants. Examples of these were the yearly ritual of going to Clarks with parents to buy school shoes, or the envy felt towards children with parents rich enough to buy Clarks; the feeling of their feet being measured, or the sensational experience amongst older participants of seeing x-rays of their feet in foot-measuring devices. Clarks shoes also provided the basis for adolescent rebellion due to the fact they were usually the approved brand of schools and parents. For some, the recollection of choosing one's own shoes was therefore marked as one of their first memorable experiences of asserting a sense of individuality and agency. Throughout these stories, despite the occasional acknowledgement that Clarks now produced more fashionable shoes, the brand had become strongly associated with school and work shoes. This became further evident when the name *Clarks* was used as an adjective - "sort of Clarks", "Clarks style" or "like Clarks" - to describe a particular type of ordinary, plain, 'normal', clumpy or chunky shoe, irrespective of whether or not they were actually made by the company. In a conversation about changing footwear fashions, for example, one of the younger male focus group participants explained that although he now owned a pair of Chelsea boots, he wouldn't have done so five years ago because they would have been associated with 'old lecturers': instead he wore "fairly plain black pointed shoes", elaborating "I probably would have bought very sort of, you know, I don't know what you call them just, just fairly normal like shoes [...] you know, just standard sort of Clarks style".

According to Valentine *et al.*, the transition of well-known brand names into language as words in their own right is identified in the industry as 'genericide' (for example Hoover, Kleenex, Xerox, Aspirin, Thermos etc.) to suggest the brand has been "murdered" by becoming a generic name' (1996: 8). They argue this negative view is paradoxical since it is an 'unambiguous sign of success'. Legally however it has potentially serious consequences because if a brand is deemed to have become properly generic it can be declared public property and therefore outside the control of those who created it. Consequently, large corporations spend large quantities of money to prevent the misuse of their brand names (*ibid.*). French fashion label *Chanel*, for example, famously published an advert in the 21st September issue of *Women's Wear Daily* (Chanel Inc., 2009) banning the media (under threat of legal action) from using adjectives such as 'Chanel-ed', 'Chanel-ized' and 'Chanel's' to describe other designers' work. One might suggest however that to attempt to control or deny the social life of the brand name is to alienate those who have made the brand meaningful. Here, Moore cites Hodder to argue that '[b]rands that thrive are no longer simply trying to publicise themselves in a monolithic way, they are inviting consumers to join them in creating meaning and being a part of the process' (Hodder, 2002: 16 in Moore, 2003: 350).

When one considers the successful synergies between brands in danger of genericide and their consumers, one might recall Volkswagen's marketing campaign in 2009 featuring the successful and now iconic 'It's like a Golf' advert. The advert aimed to position the car as the best hatchback in its class by highlighting its ubiquitous tendency to be used a descriptor for other hatchbacks not belonging to the brand (Campaignlive.co.uk, 2009). Just like the 'Hoover', the Golf, they were suggesting, had become the archetypal or quintessential hatchback car, setting the standard all others aspired to. Indeed, the advert helped to reify it as such. The company reclaimed the name by acknowledging and celebrating (rather than ignoring) people's real experiences and uses of the brand. In the Clarks Originals women's focus group Joanne referenced the Golf advert to argue Clarks maintained a similar archetypal status, suggesting if you wanted a shoe like Clarks, you may as well just buy Clarks: "[Y]ou know, it's like a Golf – well

⁸⁷ These were unsolicited references. At this stage in the research I was as yet unaware that Clarks would provide the focus for my own research.

it's Clarks [laughter]." While Clarks may not have gone to such extreme or comical lengths to capitalise on their generic status they did acknowledge it, particularly in terms of nurturing the ritual of first-shoe or school shoe-shopping. Consequently, they marketed the purchase of their children's shoes on their website as an experience to remember:

'When they're young, every new experience is a milestone – including their first pair of shoes. That's why we capture the special moment with a gorgeous keepsake photo that you can cherish forever. Taken in store and complete with a picture perfect frame, it's our gift to you.' (www.clarks.co.uk/kids/first-shoes-experience, accessed 28. 03.15)

8.7: Strategy-less Shoes

Returning to my discussion in Chapter Five, it would seem therefore that the material and semiotic affordances of the shoes and brand name are key to their trickster status and while it is tempting to credit the designers and brand with intentionally creating this universal and highly adaptable appeal, as Fisher asserts, 'affordances cannot simply be 'built into' or 'read out of' artifacts, but are discovered by users through interaction with them'. Furthermore these interactions may not necessarily correspond with their intended use (Fisher, 2004: 26). The generic use of the trademark to identify a class of plain work or school shoes, or the unexpected appropriation of Clarks Originals by the Jamaican rude boy, creates a sense of authenticity around the shoes – the company itself has had very little to do with these, sometimes baffling, adoptions, yet have absorbed and continue to adapt to them. In this sense, the shoes add to an interesting current debate about the authenticity of mass consumer culture in a global economy. Appadurai explains, for example, that different societies (or indeed niches/subcultures) appropriate the materials of modernity differently (Appadurai, 1996: 17) and as Miller shows in his research on the consumption of Coca Cola in Trinidad (2002), far from homogenizing culture, global brands can become enmeshed with the lives of local people, politics and consumption, creating a hybrid product that mixes the global with the local and the individual.

So, for both the producers and wearers of the shoes, any initial intention or strategy for their use often became irrelevant. Rather, strategies emerged through the shoes in practice. Chia and Holt use this organic approach to the understanding of consumer culture in their book *Strategy Without Design* (2009). They suggest that strategy often emerges 'non-deliberately through the exercise of local coping actions', and that 'actions that are inconspicuous and may appear peripheral or tangential to the primary concerns of a strategic situation can often turn out to be more efficacious in bringing about desirable and sustainable outcomes.' (2009: 24) They use the example of Dr. Marten shoes to illustrate the commercial dangers of losing sight of the processes involved in the production of social value. Following their development as a durable and utilitarian work shoe with air-cushioned soles and steel toe-caps in the 1960s the shoe enjoyed widespread popularity amongst groups as diverse as Mods, Punks, students and the grunge movement, to politicians and even the Pope. This unexpected popularity was capitalized upon in the 1990s when the company explicitly commodified the brand; over-producing and marketing the shoes, which led to the loss of their 'uniqueness as an expression of defiance to social categorization' (Chia and Holt, 2009: 8). Chia and Holt suggest that through their 'ambitious strategic plans' a focus on the big picture caused Dr. Martens to overlook the 'fine details of everyday happenings at "ground zero" level' (ibid., 18). Consequently, they argue that:

'there may be greater wisdom in approaching a strategic situation more modestly and elliptically and allowing strategic priorities to emerge spontaneously through local ingenuity and adaptive actions taken in situ. Here, strategy, instead of being something explicitly and boldly stated upfront, emerges organically, takes shape

and infuses itself into the everyday actions of individuals and institutions.’ (Chia and Holt, 2009: xi)⁸⁸

What was perhaps special about those working with the Clarks Originals range at the time of my research was they maintained a close relationship with the Clarks Originals consumer - in the same way an ethnographer might during periods of participant observation. They knew what was happening to their shoes ‘on the ground’, how they were being worn and who was wearing them – they lived the Clarks Originals world and understood the material idiosyncrasies that made them special. As such they had developed a nuanced understanding of the spirit of the shoes which they were able to nurture and protect and this reinforced the shoes’ cultural significance.

Sometime after my fieldwork at Clarks, however, my participants in the Originals team gradually started moving to other positions: Marijke had moved back to Amsterdam, becoming a freelance consultant for Clarks; Rosie and her family had moved to Clarks’ Boston office, returning a year later to a senior position in a different range; and while Gemma was still the marketing manager for Originals, two terms of maternity leave had caused her to temporarily step away from the range. During an email exchange with Marijke in 2015 I expressed a concern about whether another team would have the same synchronous understanding of the spirit of the shoes; their simplicity and quirkiness. Her response, based on her extensive experience of the peaks and troughs of such quintessential styles (a cycle she had also previously compared to the Dr. Marten) reassured me. During her time at Clarks the team had been left relatively alone to go back to the essentials of what Originals was truly about. Through this process, they came to a point where they “totally ‘got’ it”. Yet when something becomes successful, she explained, everyone wants a piece of it: “when it becomes too successful it will go down, and after a few years it will come up again, that is the beauty of these kind of arche types [sic]...” (Marijke, 03/05/15, email correspondence).

So it would seem that due to their timeless simplicity, materials and heritage, whatever happened to the Originals styles didn’t really matter because their affordances would continue to be rediscovered in new times and places. The shoes maintained a sense of autonomy or a social life of their own and as such their relevance was maintained. There was a sense they could look after themselves. Furthermore, due to their *parasitic* crepe soles the shoes were less prone to the dramatic peaks and troughs of other shoes. The ability, for example, of the soles to pick up parts of the environment including that feint ‘haze of hair’ (Conor), was regarded as somewhat abject and perhaps one of the reasons the shoes, even at the peak of their success, remain niche and never fully assimilate to mainstream fashion. Indeed, while discussing the shoes Marijke explained:

“not everybody likes crepe soles so that’s why it can never become enormously huge, like for example Doc Martens has a bigger appeal when it’s back in fashion because it’s easier to wear with that kind of rubber sole, crepe is quite specific. Lots of people don’t like crepe, it’s really strange.” (Marijke)

8.8 Conclusion

Returning to my Hermes metaphor and the hermeneutic study of communication and interpretation, I have argued that as objects shoes can be understood as messengers, but when

⁸⁸ This is something that Dr. Martens have perhaps reconnected with more recently with their successful social media campaign #standforsomething, which asks wearers ‘what do you stand for?’ (ODD London, 2016), while encouraging them to re-establish and once again take ownership of the shoes as a creative and empowering resource in subjective processes of identification.

one follows their materials they are also revealed as tricksters. Through practice I have identified some of the material and semiotic affordances that enable the creative process of making, subverting and re-appropriating meaning. As such, this chapter attributes shoes and their users with an agency often neglected in approaches to footwear, fashion or clothing as communication. From an industry perspective I have also demonstrated the value of acknowledging and *working with* the trickster (in shoe or trademark form), rather than ignoring or trying to control it, to evolve a more authentic product that responds to people's real experiences and leads to the creation of 'new user experiences more attuned to real user needs and behaviors' (Moore, 2003: 341).

Chapter 9: Conclusion

9.1: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have addressed the relationship between representations and embodied experiences of shoes with the aim of understanding what role shoes and their meanings play in processes of identification. In doing so I have demystified and reconstituted the shoe in order that fashion theory may be better able 'to attend to its own business' (McRobbie, 1998). As Walford states, despite its primary function to protect us from the elements, 'footwear, in the Western world is under the influence of fashion' (2007: 9), yet according to Entwistle, too much emphasis has been placed on the influence of fashion as a determining force on dress and identity (Entwistle, 2000b). In contrast to the treatment of fashion as an *a priori* category of clothing, determined by some and consumed by others, this study of the 'situated bodily practice' (ibid.) of those who both produce and consume shoes has demonstrated the social processes and the interconnecting bodies through which certain objects and brands make the transition from the mundane to the extraordinary and *become* fashionable. In doing so I followed Rose and Tolia-Kelly's methodology (2012) to question *how* shoes become visible, *which* shoes become visible and the *politics* of visible shoes. By employing material culture theory and paying particular attention to the material affordances of the shoes I was able to demonstrate how, through processes of identification, materials and bodies *afford* meaning, a concept Keane describes as the 'materiality of signification' (2005: 186). Keane's use of Peircean rather than Saussurian semiotics was central to this endeavour because it situated meaning in a 'material world of consequences' and demonstrated processes of signification as 'inherently vulnerable to causation and contingency' (ibid.). This approach distributed the agency, often considered to lie with the producers and marketers of products, not only to all those involved with the shoes, but also to the shoes and their materials themselves. This revealed the experiences of producers and consumers (so often studied separately) as both structured and structuring.

One significant outcome of the research is its illustration of Ingold's 'creative entanglements' and 'meshworks', where the shoe can be understood to serve as a 'knot' or 'parliament of lines' connecting bodies, objects and environments in ongoing processes of *becoming* (2010a: 4). In contrast to linear approaches to production and consumption that start with design and end with the consumption and 'singularisation' (Kopytoff, 1986) of objects, the shoes can be understood to be produced and singularised at various points by all those involved in their biography. As demonstrated in the final chapter, Ingold makes a distinction between *objects* as final and settled artifacts and *things*, which, like people, are processes in a constant state of 'flow' and 'transformation' (2010a). Throughout this research I have shown the way shoes and their materials 'mix and meld' (Ingold, 2010a: 2) and become entangled with various other 'things', resulting in an extraordinarily complex and ever-evolving meshwork. Rather than demonstrating the way people 'use' a final and settled product, therefore, the emerging Clarks Originals meshwork showed the creative processes through which we give form to objects, and objects give form to us.

What Ingold has been criticized for overlooking, however, is the role representations and cultural meaning play in this process (Michael, 2000). Here I propose that Ingold's 'things' can be extended to include representations such as media images, photographs, trademarks and brands. Thus, to consider representations *and* objects as 'things' dissolves a perceived distinction between the two: in different circumstances a representation can be an object and an object can be a representation. Just as objects are not finished or settled, neither are representations which can also be considered resources to be practiced in continual processes of identification. Therefore, if 'practice is what people do with *things*' (Rose and Tolia-Kelly, 2012: emphasis added) then the way representations of Clarks Originals (for example the front cover of The Verve's album and their music video for Bittersweet Symphony, the image of Florence Welch, the appearance of the shoes in Reggae music or the brand name itself) were *practiced* reveals a huge amount about the ongoing processes of identification of the company,

those who worked there and those who wore the shoes. In addition, by dissolving the distinction between the representation and the object, the shoe *itself* can be considered a representation in relation to its ability to index its wearer or maker; for example, the totemic use of the Desert Boot to represent the company, or the metonymical use of the shoe to represent various celebrities and wearers. Perhaps even more importantly, when considered as *practice*, representation can be understood as a means through which we are able to make and know ourselves and one another *through* shoes. As I have shown in Chapter Six, for example, practices of collaborating, collecting, miniaturising, drawing, making and un-making emerge as performing a central role in the process of embodiment. Through these practices the shoe as sign could be seen to become 'bundled' or entangled with other signs (people, materials, places and events) which 'give[s] rise to new signs in an unending process of signification' (Keane, 2005: 186). Here, practices of representation can therefore be understood to enable Ingold's meshwork.

This brings us a long way from the notion that shoes are a language or message to be interpreted, as has so often been the case in studies of fashion as communication. As previously proposed, it reveals shoes as *medium*, which provides a valuable means to understand how the body and culture construct one another in social processes of identification. To illustrate this point, I briefly return to the frequent appearance shoes make in the hermeneutic philosophy of understanding and interpretation, particularly in relation to Heidegger. As mentioned in Chapter Two, in his study of the *Origin of the Work of Art* (2002 [1935-36]) Heidegger used Van Gogh's painting of an old pair of shoes (represented as metonymy for an imagined wearer) to try to demonstrate that through interpretation 'the painting spoke. It let us know the truth (aletheia) of the shoes'. This truth he determined to be that they belonged to a peasant woman (Franklin, 1991: 103). Schapiro, an expert on Van Gogh's work, critiqued Heidegger's interpretation by explaining the shoes were actually Van Gogh's and thus Heidegger projected his 'own social outlook with its heavy pathos of the primordial and earthy' into the picture (Schapiro in Kocklemans in Franklin, 1991: 141). Derrida later contributed to the debate by pointing out the irrelevance of both interpretations because both authors overlooked the fact the shoes belong to nobody but the painting (Franklin, 1991: 143). Here Franklin explains that as Derrida tried to 'disentangle the feet of the two Western philosophers, he gets his own into the shoes' to perform a restitution. By this time, she explains, the shoes are 'thoroughly personified':

'detached as they are, [...]; they had spoken to Heidegger in "the Origin," and now "they are looking at us," and even begin to laugh. Walking, talking, laughing shoes looking at their beholders, three Western professors, each of whom views them with his own projector.' (ibid.)

So, the message each philosopher claims that the shoes convey is almost irrelevant; the point is that each of them have used Van Gogh's shoes (as a thing) in different ways as a medium and metaphor to formulate their own theories of interpretation and ways of knowing. As originally established Chapter Four, metaphorical shoes are invariably *empty shoes* which invite us to fill them with our own subjectivities. Furthermore, as evidenced in Chapter Seven it is this practice of the shoe as metaphor that helps to enliven and attribute it with agency, rendering it thus powerful. As Franklin (1991) suggests, Van Gogh's shoes have the last word, refusing to be defined and provoking new debates and ways of knowing for each who engages with them - including me.

Indeed, throughout this thesis, from the media survey to the data collected with producers and consumers, the practice of the shoe as metaphor has emerged particularly strongly and this enables further insight into the relationship between the body, experience and representation. In his theories of metaphor, Ricoeur critiques traditional Hermeneutics for focusing too heavily on the interpretation of a text as situated in and orientated by history, and as an interaction

between author and reader, rather than the ‘text’ (or object/representation) itself as creatively affording new meaning. He argues that the ‘romantic’ understanding of the ‘hermeneutic circle’⁸⁹ ‘submits interpretation to the finite capacities of understanding of a given reader’ and puts the meaning of the text ‘under the power of the subject who interprets’ (1974: 107). Metaphor, he argues, disrupts this understanding of interpretation. Metaphor, as so often used in poetry, is a creative form of language which discloses ‘new modes of being’ or ‘new forms of life’ and gives ‘the subject a new capacity for knowing himself’ (1974: 107). He proposes that the principle feature or character of metaphor, that which gives it its ‘power’, ‘is related to the function of poetry as a creative imitation of reality’ (Ricoeur, 1974: 109). Metaphor therefore enables us to consider the imagination and creativity involved in processes of understanding and interpretation.⁹⁰

In the case of shoes and the data presented in this thesis, I demonstrate that it is *metaphor* that reveals the relationship between representation and embodied experience, providing an opportunity to ‘reconceptualise’ or ‘re-materialise’ the visual as an embodied and material realm (2012: 4) and to ‘remember that the politics of *doing* the visual are as material as matter is visual and that both are engaged beyond the ocular’ (Rose and Tolia-Kelly, 2012: 3). Furthermore, not only do shoes as metaphors help us to understand identity and experience, but, as I have shown, we also use bodies as metaphors to understand shoes. By finishing the thesis with an explanation of the shoe as trickster, the study therefore comes full circle to embody its own philosophy. Here, the trickster metaphor has afforded a new approach to the understanding and interpretation of shoes that, while including the intentions of their producers and consumers in the development of their meanings, also attributes the shoes and their materials as agentic. Just as Karina, at the beginning of the Chapter Eight, and participants in Chapters Five, Six and Seven used metaphors to understand shoes in relation to other things (for example the ‘rebellious Auntie’, various musicians, the Vinyl record, Southsea Deckchair or Gloverall duffle coat) and to reimagine the Clarks Originals styles, I have put into practice my key findings to lend greater insight to the central role metaphor plays in understanding the materiality of signification.

9.2: Implications of the Research

At the beginning of the thesis I argued that the research had implications for design pedagogy and industry. One of the most interesting findings in this respect was the unpredictability of these trickster shoes – shoes that resist our attempts to control them, or predict and rationalize their meanings. As discussed in Chapter Seven, the democratization of the ability to represent products and brands, for example through social media, has led some products to develop a social life of their own. This means that for industry, the production of meaning has become more of a negotiation to be managed, than a process to be controlled or determined. As discussed in Chapter Eight, while some companies do go to extreme lengths to try to control the meaning of their products and brands, others adapt to the social processes of meaning-making that occur through practice. This, I suggest, is what has maintained the authenticity of Clarks Originals shoes for both those who produced and consumed them.

The unpredictability of the shoes and the social life of the brand, while sometimes disconcerting for those charged with determining production quantities or managing brand image, for others was liberating. While showing me a merchandising spreadsheet full of sales statistics, one

⁸⁹ The hermeneutic circle is a process through which it is proposed the subject can only understand him/herself in relation to the broader context in which s/he exists, and can only understand the broader context by understanding him/herself

⁹⁰ In his analysis of the significance of Ricoeur’s philosophy of imagination, Geniusas explains that imagination, somewhat paradoxically, enables us to both ‘flee the world’ and to ‘shape it’ (2015: 226): ‘imagination puts into question what presently exists, it provides the incentive to (re)constitute the subject’s socio-historical reality.’ (ibid., 225)

designer for the main range exclaimed “we may as well be making paperclips!” to suggest the tendency for the shoes to be shorn of their vitality through bureaucratic procedures. It was the observations and stories of the shoes in *use* that enlivened them and re-enchanted the staff. This highlights the importance, particularly in times of globalization and mass-manufacture of taking the time to pay close attention to the social lives of the products and brands we are producing and how they are actually being practiced at ‘ground level’. At the time of research, the Clarks Originals staff were given this latitude and as such were able to fully understand and embody the product to the extent they could intuitively and creatively *develop* rather than *deface* the brand. Furthermore, they did so in careful collaboration with those others who had a stake in the meaning of the shoes - as Rosie, the group head for Originals explained, it was these people that often gave the team the best ideas and pushed them to move forward. Consequently, the shoes maintained their authentic status and credibility and those who produced them maintained a passion for the shoes and loyalty to the company that motivated them to continually progress and innovate.

While consumers enlivened the shoes for the staff, the shoes were equally enlivened for consumers through their visible associations with those who made them. Characters such as Nathan Clark and the various ambassadors and collaborators who had become visibly connected with the shoes increased their social value and authenticity for wearers. This could be seen to extend to those staff who produce the shoes. Indeed, companies including Clarks are now being much more public about their workforce; for example, Paul the shoemaker and Tim the archivist have since appeared in online videos and articles about Clarks shoes (Clarks Originals, 2015a, Clarks International, 2013, Clarks Originals, 2015b). This transparency could, I suggest, be extended even further. In an interview with the Clarks Originals senior designer Marijke, she expressed a concern that consumers valued their shoes less because they believed mass-manufacture meant someone pressed a button on a machine and out popped a shoe. On the contrary, she explained that even when produced overseas, for example in factories in China, the number of hands that work on a pair of shoes was amazing, and thus something to be acknowledged and appreciated.

In each of these cases, representation plays (and can potentially play) a key role in developing and making visible the meshwork of bodies, materials, environments and events that make the shoes socially and culturally valuable. This process speaks to broader concerns about fashion and sustainability. In Chapter Five I identified Ingold’s belief that shoes, with all their cultural complexities, were part of a ‘suite of changes’ accompanying the onset of modernity that caused a separation between mind and body, and between the body and its environment (Ingold, 2004: 321). While the Ingold school-of-thought might suggest that because of consumer culture and commodity fetishism we value our objects less, and thereby find it easier to dispose of them, the present study shows that where particular objects are concerned this is absolutely not the case. The data presented here suggests that some objects, through use, provide a bond between wearer or producer and their social and physical environment. As a result of their semiotic and material affordances, Clarks Originals therefore provide an excellent example of what Chapman calls ‘emotional durability’ – ‘the complex and manifold factors that determine endurance of “value” and “meaning” in a given object.’ (2015: xiii) . While their emotional durability may not have been the original aim of the design, it is nonetheless a quality we can learn a lot from. Through their versatility and openness, the material affordances of the shoes have attracted diverse semiotic meanings across a range of cultures for nearly sixty years. Furthermore, the shoes with their ‘parasitic’ idiosyncrasies have developed an ‘agentive’ (Gell, 1998, Latour, 2005, Serres, [1980] 2007) or emotionally ‘affective’ (Massumi, 2002, Navaro-Yashin, 2009) character: they evolve with the wearer and the resulting emotional bond between shoe and wearer (or indeed producer) discourages disposal. I suggest therefore that the study of the material and semiotic affordances of cherished and ‘authentic’ objects can provide a way for producers to encourage longer lasting relationships with products, making way, as Chapman

proposes, for an industry that makes its money increasingly from service, repair and upgrade than replacement.

9.3: Further Avenues for Research

The aims at the beginning of this thesis were threefold: first, to reveal the relationship between representations and embodied experience to develop understandings of identity as an embodied process; second, to show how a study of shoes can contribute to fashion theory methodologies in a way that confounds existing structure agency dichotomies; and third, to foreground materiality in order to return the lived and experiencing body to an existing corpus of post-structural and postmodern studies of shoes. Through the discussions above these aims have been met, yet throughout this process new avenues for research have emerged. In my current role as a lecturer in fashion design, foremost of these is a consideration of the ways the outcomes of the research may affect the ways design is taught. I propose that the deconstruction of dichotomies such as those between production and consumption, mind and body, and the visual and material can help designers to practice in a more critical, reflexive and ethical way. Further practice-based research with student participants and other lecturers would therefore help to explore the ways this might be done. Second, in Chapter Two I identified the important role shoes play in rites of passage. While my own data did not present a substantial opportunity to analyse the relationship between particular shoes and significant life transitions, participants in the ITSF research did refer to their transformative potential at particular times throughout the life course. While this has been addressed in ITSF publications (for example Hockey et al., 2014a), a literature search shows that the relationship between the rites of passage discussed by Van Gennep (1977 [1909]) and Turner (1987 [1967]) and fashion to be a neglected area of study. Despite advances in the anthropology of consumption this speaks to a continuing anthropological neglect of fashion (as opposed to clothing and dress), which, as this thesis has demonstrated, provides valuable insights to the ways structure and discourse are negotiated in late-capitalist cultures. Finally, as also identified in Chapter Two, a study of the literature reveals a heavy bias towards psychological approaches to the sexual fetishism of shoes. The field of sociology has been accused of ignoring eroticism and sexual fetishism (Shilling and Mellor, 2010) and I suggest this is, in part, what has caused a prevailing academic neglect of shoes. I therefore suggest that shoes present sociologists with, as Shilling and Mellor suggest, an opportunity to consider the consequences of sexual fetishism and eroticism for social order and meaning. While there are undoubtedly many other avenues of research to be pursued in relation to shoes, these, I suggest, are the most pressing in terms of challenging methodological inadequacies in the fields of design pedagogy, sociology, anthropology and fashion theory.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Consent



Department
Of Sociological
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Alexandra Sherlock
Department of Sociological Studies

Department Ethics Co-ordinator
Dr Jo Britton

The University of Sheffield
Department of Sociological Studies
Elmfield, Northumberland Road
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Telephone: +44 (0) 114 222 6431
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Email: n.j.britton@sheffield.ac.uk

7 March 2012

Dear Alexandra

PROJECT TITLE: "This is not a shoe! An exploration of the co-constitutive relationship between popular representations and embodied experiences of shoes"

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 7 March 2012 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documents that you submitted for ethics review:

- A completed research ethics application form (dated 31 January 2012) which included a participant information sheet, an informed consent form for interview participants and an informed consent form for photographing customers
- A research proposal (dated 7 November 2011)

However, the ethics reviewers have suggested that you consider the following amendments, which you can choose to follow or to ignore:

- Would it be a good idea to host photographs on a password protected webpage and offer participants the option to review photos of themselves and 'approve them' before they are used in any published materials, websites or presentations? This may be difficult to achieve in practice, therefore it is only a suggestion.

This is Not a Shoe

If during the course of the project you need to deviate from the above-approved documents please inform me. Written approval will be required for significant deviations from or significant changes to the above-approved documents. Please also inform me should you decide to terminate the project prematurely.

Yours sincerely



Dr Jo Britton
Department Ethics Co-ordinator

Appendix B: Research Schedule 2012 – 2014

Sheffield store observations		
Name	Position and company	Observation date
Jenny	Clarks Assistant Manager	13/03/12 (9.30-15.00), 14/03/12 (15.00-19.00)
Jan	Clarks Manager	13/03/12 (9.30-15.00), 14/03/12 (15.00-19.00)
Abby	Clarks Men's Team Leader	13/03/12 (9.30-15.00), 14/03/12 (15.00-19.00)
Mandy	Clarks Sales Assistant	13/03/12 (9.30-15.00), 14/03/12 (15.00-19.00)
Alice	Clarks Sales Assistant	13/03/12 (9.30-15.00), 14/03/12 (15.00-19.00)
Erica	Clarks Sales Assistant	14/03/12 (15.00-19.00)
Justin	Women's Team Leader	14/03/12 (15.00-19.00)
Ellie	Clarks Sales Assistant	14/03/12 (15.00-19.00)
Natalie	Clarks Sales Assistant	14/03/12 (15.00-19.00)
Anne	Clarks Area Manager	14/03/12 (15.00-19.00)
Ben	Store Manager	15/03/12 (9.30 – 12.30)
Greg	Sales Assistant	15/03/12 (9.30 – 12.30)

Clarks headquarters				
Name	Position	Interview	Observation	Home interview
Fred	Digital Development Manager	19/03/12	04/04/12	24/04/12
Sarah	PA to women's global product dept.	20/03/12	n/a	n/a
Richard	Men's Marketing Manager	20/03/12	05/04/12	n/a
Michelle	Women's Junior Range Manager	20/03/12	16/04/12	n/a
John	Global Lab Services Manager	21/03/12	n/a	n/a
Sally	Women's Merchandise Controller	21/03/12	n/a	n/a
Vicki	Women's Marketing Manager	21/03/12	12/04/12	n/a
Rosie *	VP/Head of Category Originals (Senior Range Manager)	22/03/12	n/a	18/05/12
Ben	IT	26/03/12	n/a	n/a
David	Men's Range Manager	27/03/12	n/a	n/a
Saskia *	Global Insight and Market Research Manager	29/03/12	n/a	23/04/12
Ray	Fitting Manager	30/03/12	n/a	n/a
Katie	Women's Designer	05/04/12	16/04/12	15/05/12
Tim *	Archivist	10/04/12	18/04/12	n/a
Pete	Customer Services Manager	12/04/12	n/a	23/04/12
Nicola	Women's Trends Analyst	12/04/12	n/a	18/05/12
Jeremy	Men's Designer	12/04/12	n/a	n/a
Andrea	Human Resources	12/04/12	n/a	n/a
Nicole	Customer Services	12/04/12	n/a	n/a
Gemma *	Originals Marketing Manager	17/04/12	17/04/12	n/a
Ian	Creative Brand Manager	17/04/12	n/a	n/a
Matt	Men's Trends Analyst	18/04/12	24/04/12	13/05/12
Helen *	Senior Women's Footwear Designer	23/04/12	10/05/12	13/05/12
Paul *	Shoemaker	n/a	24/05/12	13/05/12

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Philippa *	Women's Designer	24/05/12	n/a	10/05/12
Simon	Materials Manager	25/04/12	n/a	n/a
Graeme	Photoshop	25/04/12	25/04/12	n/a
Angela	Women's designer	n/a	11/05/12	n/a
Mark	Fitting Manager	n/a	11/05/12	n/a
Martin	Fitting	n/a	11/05/12	n/a
Joe	Last Maker	n/a	11/05/12	n/a
Marijke *	Originals Designer	14/05/12	14/05/12	19/05/12
Louise	Marketing Executive	15/05/12	n/a	n/a

Sheffield focus groups with Clarks Originals wearers

Name	Job	Focus group date
Kristian	University Lecturer	28/08/2013
Joe	Local Government Officer	28/08/2013
Conor	University Lecturer, Craftsman	28/08/2013
Tom	Salesman	28/08/2013
Vanessa	University Lecturer	30/08/2013
Joanne	Outreach Officer	30/08/2013
Fiona	Researcher, Doctoral student	30/08/2013
Jane	University Lecturer	30/08/2013

Sheffield interviews

Name	Job	Interview date
Pete *	Clarks store Team Leader	02/12/14
Pete McKee *	Artist and Clarks Originals collaborator	10/12/14

Clarks follow-up visit and discussion

Name	Job	Date
Karina	Originals Junior	
Luke	Originals	
Tim *	Archivist	

* Real names

Appendix C: Informed consent form for Clarks' participants.

Research Information Sheet

Shoes and Identity – an academic study

Between the beginning of March and the beginning of May I will be conducting research at C&J Clark's head office. I am a postgraduate researcher studying towards a PhD in sociological studies at the University of Sheffield and my area of investigation is shoes in relation to identity. My PhD research is part of a wider project at the University entitled *If the Shoe Fits: Footwear, Identity and Transition* which is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. Funding for this type of research, especially in such economically difficult times, is rare and so this project provides an exciting and unique opportunity to explore the social and cultural importance of shoes in everyday life.



Clarks have recognised the importance of the study and have agreed to participate with the research. This information sheet explains the purpose of the research and how you, as employees at Clarks can get involved.

1. What is the purpose of this study?

Between September 2010 and 2013 the *If the Shoe Fits* project – including my own PhD research - is exploring people's relationships with shoes. In this respect the data that emerges will hopefully be of interest to you professionally. Our focus is on how shoes make people feel and move, what memories they attach to them and what they mean to them. We are interested in the shoes that both men and women of all ages wear in their day-to-day life, to go to work, for a walk in the park, to wear to the pub or for a night out, as well as shoes that are worn for special and significant occasions, like weddings, christenings and funerals. We are talking to many different people, whether they love, hate or are indifferent to shoes.

The purpose of the research is to gain a greater insight into what Identity is, and how we construct and change it. We believe shoes can help us to do this.

As the PhD researcher on the project I am particularly interested in the influence of popular culture on identity. I have been looking at various types of media, for example TV, movies, music, newspapers and magazines, to see how people represent, use and talk about shoes. I want to find out how these images and representations effect how we think about and use shoes in everyday life.

2. How will Clarks feature?

The researchers in the main project are conducting a number of focus groups with male and female consumers of various ages and ethnicities in the north of England. We already have the views and experiences of consumers, but we feel it is also important to get a different perspective on shoes. This is the reason for approaching Clarks.



I would like to find out what shoes mean - professionally and personally - to those working

within the shoe industry.

Over the period of five weeks, from the 5th March to the 9th April 2012, I will be observing various departments within the company. I will follow the life of a particular shoe from design to consumption, and will observe and talk to those involved with the various stages of the *biography* of the shoe. During this time I will be taking photographs, so if you do not want to be in any of them you can opt out by either emailing me directly or simply making yourself known to me when I am in your department.

3. Taking part in the research

During or after the five-week observation period I will ask some of you to take part in the next phase of the research. This will involve two, one-to-one video-recorded interviews. I am as interested in your own personal shoes as your professional views of shoes so one interview will be at work and one will be at your home. I will show you a selection of images and quotes taken from television, film, newspapers, magazines and music to discuss during the interviews. Interviews usually take approximately one hour.

What are the benefits of taking part?

There is little direct benefit to taking part and you will not receive any payment for your time. However participation in the research will give you a greater insight into people's relationships with shoes, and the influence of popular culture on the ways people use and think about shoes.

At the end of the project we will be able to offer an alternative view of shoes to the mass of information that portrays them as nothing more than frivolous, irrational and feminine. Your contribution will contribute to a body of work and publications that will enable a much greater understanding of the social and cultural importance of shoes in everyday life.

Participant Consent Form

Dear Participant,

Many thanks for your interest in my research. This is a consent form for you to read, sign and return to me should you wish to participate in the research. Please first read the 'Research Information Sheet' before completing this form.

This research is part of a PhD which is being conducted as part of a larger project called 'If the Shoe Fits' at the University of Sheffield, all funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The focus of the project is to develop a better understanding of the role shoes play in identity and identity transition.

What the research will involve:

I will conduct two interviews, one at your place of work and one at your home. Both interviews will involve questions about your own professional and personal experiences and thoughts in relation to footwear. I will ask you to speak about your own shoe collection and we will also discuss a selection of shoe related images and quotes gathered from television, film, newspapers, magazines and music. Interviews normally last approximately one hour and will be video recorded. Recordings will be for my own reference when I come to analyse the research and will not be shown to anyone outside the project. It is possible that the recordings may be used in a documentary at a later date but if you would prefer not to be included in this please tick the appropriate box on the form to the right.

Confidentiality and anonymity:

Any information gathered during the interviews will be treated in the strictest confidence. Any notes that I make, your personal contact details and video recordings will all be kept either under lock and key or in password protected files. The only people that will be able to view this information will be myself and the other researchers on the project (Prof Jenny Hockey, Dr Victoria Robinson and Dr Rachel Dilley). If at any time you wish to withdraw from the project you are entirely free to do so and without explanation. You can also request for some or all of the information I have collected in relation to you to be destroyed and not used in the project prior to its use in any research outputs or publications.

Consent:

If you would like to participate I would like to ask for your consent to include your experiences and views in my research outputs. While your identity will be anonymised, Clarks the company will be named in my research so it may be possible for those who know you to identify you. Also if you consent to the use of audio-visual information in research outputs then it may also be possible to identify you. Please tick either the 'yes' or 'no' box for each option and sign and date. You can change your mind about any of the options at any stage before publication, just let me know and I will amend my records.

I give my consent for information collected about me during the research, and quotes from my interviews to be reproduced for educational purposes in:

	Yes	No
PhD thesis	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reports, presentations & publications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Websites	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exhibitions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Documentary film	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I understand that my real name will not be used

Name

Signed

Date

Continued...



The University of Sheffield
Department of Sociological Studies
Elmfield, Northumberland Road,
Sheffield, S10 2TU

Website: www.sheffield.ac.uk/iftheshoefits
Blog: www.iftheshoefits.group.shef.ac.uk
Email: a.sherlock@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix D – Focus group recruitment postcard

Do you wear

Clarks ORIGINALS ?

...or know somebody that does?

We are looking for men and women of all ages and ethnicities in South Yorkshire to participate in focus groups about this popular brand of shoe.

The research will inform a PhD study that is investigating footwear and identity at the University of Sheffield.

The data gathered is not intended for commercial use, although the results will be available for Clarks to see. The focus groups will be held at the University of Sheffield in July/August 2013 (date TBC). We will ask you to complete a short questionnaire beforehand.

If you would like to participate please contact Alex Sherlock by email: a.sherlock@sheffield.ac.uk or call 07703 282418

For more information visit www.iftheshoefits.group.shef.ac.uk

Appendix E: Focus group participant questionnaire.

Focus Group Participant Questionnaire

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in a focus group about Clarks Originals shoes. The research will contribute to a PhD investigation into the relationship between shoes and identity. It is part of a broader research project at the University of Sheffield called 'If the Shoe Fits: Footwear, Identity and Transition' which has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. For more information about the project and our aims and objectives please visit our website: www.sheffield.ac.uk/iftheshoefits.

Details:

The focus group will be held at the University of Sheffield in July/August and will be an informal chat where you will be encouraged to share your experiences of your shoes. The discussion will be video recorded for analysis but will not be broadcast. Images from the focus group, either of you or your shoes may be reproduced in the PhD thesis or resulting publications. There will be no payment for participating but there will be refreshments and I hope that the experience will be interesting and enjoyable.

Clarks:

This research is not being conducted with a commercial agenda, but as part of the research the video recordings of the focus groups will be shown to the Originals team at Clarks. The reason for this is to see if the experiences of you, the consumer, are the same or different to their expectations and if this might affect their own views or experiences of the shoes. Your name and any other information that might identify you will be edited from the recording before it is shown to Clarks.

If you are happy to proceed then please fill in this brief questionnaire, which will help me to select a broad spectrum of participants. By filling in this questionnaire you are not committed to participate. Should you be selected you will be contacted and a date will be arranged.

Confidentiality and anonymity:

Your details will be kept strictly confidential and if you are quoted in any publications resulting from the research then you will be anonymised. This research has been approved by the University of Sheffield ethics committee.

Name	
Email	
Phone number	
Gender	
Age	
Marital status	
Ethnicity	
Nationality	
Occupation	
Income (optional)	
Do you have any disabilities? (optional)	
Do you have any health problems? (optional)	

Roughly how many pairs of shoes do you own?	
Roughly how many pairs are Clarks Originals?	

Please return the questionnaire by email to a.sherlock@sheffield.ac.uk or by post for the attention of Alex Sherlock to the following address: Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield, S10 2TU

Please feel free to email or call if you have any questions about the focus groups or the research:

07703 282418

Appendix F: Focus group informed consent form.

Focus Group Informed Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group about Clarks Originals shoes. This form will explain what the data will be used for. After reading it please sign and date the appropriate sections.

This research is part of a broader research project at the University of Sheffield called 'If the Shoe Fits: Footwear, Identity and Transition' which has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. For more information about the project and our aims and objectives please visit our website: www.sheffield.ac.uk/iftheshoefits. I am the postgraduate researcher on the project and the data derived from this focus group will contribute towards my PhD. If you have any questions or concerns about the research at any point then please feel free to contact me by email or phone (details below). You have the right to withdraw from the research at any point prior to publication and you do not have to give a reason for this.

Details:

This focus group will be an informal chat that will allow participants to share experiences of their Clarks Originals shoes. The discussion will be video recorded and transcribed for analysis. I will also be taking photographs of participants with their shoes. Images from the focus group, either of you or your shoes may be reproduced in the PhD thesis or resulting publications, however the video recording will not be broadcast to a public audience.

Sharing data with Clarks International:

This research is not being conducted with a commercial agenda, but as part of the research the video recordings of the focus groups will be shown to the Originals team at Clarks. The reason for this is to see if the experiences of you, the consumer, are the same or different to their expectations and if this might affect their own views or experiences of the shoes. Your name and any other information that might identify you will be edited from the recording before it is shown to Clarks. With your permission Clarks have also asked to use quotes and images in a 'Clarks Originals' static display at their museum in Street, Somerset, which is open to the public.

The Qualidata Archive:

I would also like to ask for your consent to put the transcripts of the interviews in the Qualidata archive. This is managed by the Economic and Social Data Service based at The University of Essex. It would allow other researchers, now and in the future, to access the data and they may re-use it in their own projects. Other researchers would only have access to your data if they agree to preserve confidentiality. They would have to comply with the same terms you specify on this form for the use of the data in relation to my project. Please indicate below whether you give your consent for these to be archived with Qualidata by signing the relevant box.

Payment:

There will be no payment for participating in this focus group but there will be refreshments and I hope that the experience will be interesting and enjoyable.

Confidentiality and anonymity:

Your details will be kept strictly confidential and if you are quoted in any publications resulting from the research then you will be anonymised. This research has been approved by the University of Sheffield ethics committee. If you are happy to proceed then please sign the appropriate sections below.

 I give permission for the data collected about me during this focus group to be used in the following ways. I understand that my name will not be used, that my contact details will be kept confidential, and that I am free to withdraw from the research at any point prior to the publication of the data.

Description of data use	Signature	Date
Images and quotes to be used in PhD Thesis and associated publications/presentations on and offline		
Images and transcriptions to be kept in the Qualidata Archive.		
Anonymised video recordings, images and transcriptions to be shown to Clarks.		
Anonymised images and quotes to be used by Clarks Museum in a 'Clarks Originals' static display.		

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for participating in this research and, should you wish to follow the progress of my research, I will keep you updated with news of any subsequent publications.

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