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Boots-and-me: an ethno-sensual account of love, dedication and smelly old boots

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Abstract

Boots-and-me is an ethno-sensual narrative of my life with some rock-climbing boots and more specifically, my feet within them. It explores my physical, sensual engagement with these items of sports equipment, spanning a period of twenty-eight years. The story is a stylised form of writing with frequent, colourful use of analogies for a more vivid interpretation. From this sense-laden and textured narrative, a deeper story is revealed about aspects of my personality and character. Establishing that my feet are connected to my head(!) leads to critical consideration of some ideas emerging from the tale; shared experiences in research. A short prologue introduces the main story; *Boots-and-me*, followed by an epilogue of theoretical analysis and discussion from respondents to the story. It is concluded that physically and emotionally rich auto-accounts about how people come to rely on items of equipment may be a window to some of their life-management strategies.

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Prologue: Introduction to Boots-and-me

Boots-and-me is an attempt to explore in rich detail, a minutia of my overall being of the world – an expansion of detail on a relatively low priority issue for me now, seemingly just for the sake of it. It started out as a writing exercise with no higher motives other than to enjoy exploring a concept; that of the forming and the deforming of my feet and my climbing boots reciprocally, this being one aspect of my sporting experience as a rock climber. The account was initially prompted as a something that might help a colleague's research, thus I felt I was writing genuinely and openly about my experiences, providing them with ideas through my dialogue. A generous act perhaps, I was pleased to be asked. Consequently, there seemed little reason to hide anything about this ostensibly innocuous and harmless subject, the guards were down, there was no apparent ethical crisis, I was just explaining stuff



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about my smelly feet in my smelly boots, a subject I already knew a lot about. All I had to do was articulate it. This paper is structured following the chronological order of my actions - I wrote the story, shared it, tentatively, and I got some responses. These responses caused me to think more deeply about what I had created, discussed in the epilogue to this article, as they added new detail to a tapestry of my social existence, given the limitations of what may be reported in text. Reciprocally, Boots-and-me had caused those respondents to reflect profoundly on their accounts of being too, and therefore seems to be a tale worth sharing publically...

NB: The term climbing boots refers to slim fitting, leather climbing shoes with a smooth rubber sole used for friction to climb rock faces, they are not large, heavy mountaineering boots.

Boots-and-me

Personal note:

As I write my climbing boots are right in front of me on the desk, under my nose, ever present. They are smelly and dirty but in good repair. The black rubber sole is cold and hard, the blue leather upper that once had the velvet touch of suede is now faded, creased and shiny-smooth. The long, bright green laces show signs of being tied constantly in the same position. I am writing about them in the present tense, but they have a long history... my Boots-and-me.

From hands to feet – a message through my body about how to move efficiently

Over a period of applied training and development in rock climbing, a number of weeks to months perhaps, my physical competency to become a climber improves. This improved competency signals an important shift in the balance of effort made between my upper and lower body when a critical relationship between my feet and my climbing shoes emerges. In my climbing life I have had many phases of improvement and decline, going up and down the difficulty grades as other factors in life limit the degree of time and effort that can be made to sustain practice and improvement. Houses, degrees, marriages, work, children etc. can all divert the climber from his mission to 'feed the rat'; getting hooked on the climbing drug (Alvarez, 1988). When fully 'drugged-up' life can become the collateral damage of climbing, and my feet along with it, all sacrificed for some higher level of existence. These fluctuations in climbing competency mirror the varying relationship struggles between my feet and my boots. Rather like having old arguments with a loved one which you thought were behind you in better times, forgotten, the same sensations keep reoccurring when the climbing pressures are back onto my feet. The interest in climbing has always been there for me, if at times latent whilst I have been distracted. Good climbers use their feet efficiently and effectively. Often, when emerging from a period of decline or climbing-staleness and moving into a phase of improvement, there is a shift of wear and tear from the

upper body; hands and arms, towards the lower body; legs and feet, there being a logical advantage to letting the bigger limbs take the strain in rock climbing. In my climbing history I have felt several times this gravitational shift or downward transference of growing efficiency from my (inefficient) arms and hands through my body towards my (more efficient) legs and feet. However, when climbing in the zone the Geiger-counter of collateral damage begins to tick as my feet are sacrificed for the greater good, along with other aspects of daily life, as the fix, the thrill of the climb, provides momentary relief and permanent hunger. The rat is feeding.

When I am out of practice I climb with poor technique, grunting and groaning with the exertion, there is something manly, but stupid, about the upper body workout. But I tire quickly and this is not a good sign for endurance in rock climbing. My background in gymnastics permits a reasonable attempt at some ostensibly difficult moves but they are a short cut, a cheat, and no substitute for regular practice on a wall or crag. Upper body strength once again bailing me out but it is short-lived; my arms are like logs, muscles clogged with lactic acid after just twenty minutes.

Good climbers exert about eighty percent effort through their feet, maybe more depending on the verticality of the climb. When I am climbing badly, eighty percent is on my arms, my shoes are there just to stop the skin on my feet getting scraped and possibly to make me look like I know what I am doing. They are quality shoes, or at least they were in their day – ‘all the gear but no idea’. As my climbing improves I know I have had a good session because my quads are aching, a realisation, ‘Ah, I am using my legs, good’. As my legs exert more pressure through my feet a renewed relationship with my boots emerges – new uses; twists and jams for friction, new positions to crush my toes and stretch my ligaments, new demands and expectations to cope in the vertical realm. Until then my legs were not tuned for climbing, they were fairly useless appendages of weighty flesh and bone that were of marginal use on a climb for anything other than remedial balance. Off the climbs and whilst not climbing well, my legs and feet feel clumsy in my rock-shoes requiring me to walk in a tortured style around the climbing area. If I did more walking than climbing it was again a sign of my flagging ability and being in a period of decline climbing-wise. I should put my walking shoes on for that bit, much more comfortable but no suggested kudos about my potential to onlookers, as might be indicated by the donning of my climbing boots for a possible engagement with the vertical.

Climbing well, ‘let’s get engaged’...

the start of a relationship between my *Boots-and-me*

The start of the Boots-and-me epoch was rather like going to an online dating agency and selecting a partner who you think might be compatible with you, subject to trials. Thus, I went to a climbing shop and invested in some good quality climbing

boots that I thought would work well for me. I was in it for the long term, I wanted commitment. I had had two pairs of boots previously to this, a flirtatious couple of relationships which helped me to discover the pros and cons of the rock boot-and-me. They helped me to decide what I wanted in a long term relationship. Essentially these desirable qualities in boots were:

- Trustworthiness (a concept worth exploring/questioning further),
- Longevity,
- Having good grip on a variety of rock types in various conditions,
- Give protection to my ankles from loose stones,
- Attractiveness for ‘street credibility’ - a sign of competence perhaps,
- To be robust, well-made and hold their shape insofar as they should not go all floppy and completely out of shape in old age.

Clive Palmer

Proposes his feet in marriage to a pair of:

Boreal Classics at £59.99

In the year of

1988 (AD)

For as long as the rock gods may permit the union

Amen.

In 2016 I can report that my boots have performed well on all these counts and I love my old boots after our long marriage. Although, I have to admit there have been the wilderness years where my attentions to my boots and rock climbing in general have not been all they could be. However, I would like to declare that I have been faithful throughout, never placing my foot in another climbing shoe since we first met in Oxford in the 1980s. Whilst manufacturers may claim on the box or in an advert that their products will provide some of these things or qualities above, it is an unknown at the time of purchase as to whether they will actually deliver on all their promises. I have kept my vow of caring for my boots into their old age and they have certainly not failed me yet. NB: Their longevity may also be due to my long periods as an armchair-rock climber combined with phases of very poor climbing technique where my hands and arms bore the brunt of wear and tear, not my legs and feet. The actual amount of time when I have climbed well enough to exert some destructive forces on the boots is probably minimal and has not been sufficient to wear them out and be replaced, although they were resoled in 2011 – good for another 20 years or so now?

At the time of purchase in 1988 it was a risky business, I had to judge carefully, as, unlike a partner sourced from the dating agency I could not return my boots after the first trial outing, they would be soiled! It was at best an educated guess that the boots might work for me, I knew we would have to work at our relationship from the outset. My virginal boots would need a period of breaking in! (sexual innuendo stops here). If things did not work out there would be no trial separation, the best I might hope for by way of salvage for my outlay would be to sell them on as used seconds, hoping they might be faithful to someone else.

My boots-and-me, we get along, well, like ‘hand-in-glove’.

My boots shape my feet and my feet shape my boots...

My feet shape my boots - it is a reciprocal arrangement, with give-and-take on both sides, a compromise to accommodate my wishes to climb on them. The leather uppers have shaped to my feet over the years causing them to crease in a way that is unique to my feet. The boots have grown with me and around me. For example, where my heels sit, the rubber backs bulge out like distended tummies of malnourished children at refugee camp. The leather is worn, particularly on the insteps and the ankles, giving signs of their protective duties for my feet whilst descending steep, gravelly footpaths down crag sides. The boot has a thin leather inner sole which has become as hard as wood but is perfectly shaped to cup the sole of my foot. When I put the boots on they feel like worn-in, well-fitting gloves (if you get my meaning?). I get a feeling that my foot is being held by a firm and friendly hand-grip which is reassuring.

My feet shape my boots - In the early days of Boots-and-me, the late 1980s, I was still in the Royal Air Force and spent most free weekends driving around the country to crags. I did a lot of climbing. Part of my tender loving care for the boots in the following week was to wash them in hot water and scrub them clean with washing-up liquid. This not only cleaned them but also made the rubber softer, they seemed to grip better and ‘smear’ (a deliberate foot-placement for friction) more effectively after such care, as well as shape and hug my feet more closely. But too much of the wrong kind of love can be damaging in a relationship, however well intentioned. The rubber was becoming so soft that I was leaving more and more of it on the rock face. They were wasting away, so I treated my boots and therefore my feet, to this kind of tenderness more judiciously in the future.

My boots shape my feet and my feet shape my boots; reciprocal exertions and damage - I have long thin feet, size 11 now although size 10 at the time of purchase. My feet are a strange pair of shapes which I generally have difficulty in housing footwear-wise. Long shoes are usually wide shoes and I invariably need lace ups to suck in all the excess material of the shoe, hoping there is enough room left for my

foot inside. Another tactic of mine to fill up cavernous shoes is to wear two insoles in each shoe but this is not possible, or even desirable, in my Boreal Classics. Given the speciality of these climbing boots the concept of ‘fitting’ is a critical point fuelling tension between the opposing demands of bearable comfort and fostering courage and confidence to ascend. The rock boots lace up from my toenails to above the ankles, a corset for my feet. There is no new-fangled Velcro on these, that fitting style did not exist as a design feature at the time of purchase and would be too flappy on my slender feet anyway. Poorly fitting boots can be a danger, most disconcerting when a climber’s life can depend on the working relationship between his feet and his boots.

My boots shape my feet – my feet show signs of wear after every climbing session, be it indoors or outdoors. Over the past 28 years of my boot’s life with me I have learned that my big toe nail on my left foot will be compressed (crushed) and my left foot little toe and middle toe will need taping up as they rub on the space where the first eyelet is deformed from pulling the laces tight.



‘Only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches’ (Gilbert Ryle, 1949:195)

So predictable yet strangely reassuring, I know what my boots have in store for my feet. PAIN! Without taping, these toes will be rubbed raw within one hour of wearing the boots even to this day. Once this has occurred I am reduced to a pathetic hobble looking like I have just stepped on a drawing pin. COMMITMENT! After a multi-day climbing trip to Fontainebleau near Paris in 2010 my toes were so painfully rubbished I nearly lost my big toe nail (left foot). It took about 8 months for that toe nail to recover. I went to Font again in April 2011 and the same thing happened. Throughout the following year and as a constant reminder of my mission to France, about half of my left big toe nail seemed attached only by a wish and a prayer, but it is recovering, slowly. I may go again in the Spring. However, this foot-damage is not sufficient grounds for me to divorce my boots, there is still time for them to improve on this count, especially in the hot climate of France. I have resolved to be patient and to give them another chance, ... and to give them as many

chances as they feel they need, if they want to keep trying for me. Ultimately I trust them and they help me to climb quite well when I need them to perform. They are dependable. I have come to rely on them with certain compromises to comfort.

My boots shape my feet and my feet shape my boots – My boots have character now and their character may be indicative of me. My boots are reshaped and deformed to suit me alone. The shape of my feet and my body-weight and my clumsiness of foot placement and my smells as well as the grubby marks and detritus as evidence of where I may have been climbing all add to their character. The leather upper is constructed with a canvas inner-lining which prevents the boot from stretching too much, helping to hold its shape. At this late stage in our long relationship I would not mind if the boots did stretch a little more but there is not much I can do about that, another compromise for the sake of getting on.

My whole climbing life in these boots has been barefooted. That is, I have never worn socks with them in 28 years. My friend Paul always climbs with socks on his feet and I envy him sometimes, especially when we have been climbing during New Year at Lands End (Cornwall) and it has been absolutely freezing, but there's no room for such comforts in my boots. Once again I resolve to compromise, tape up my toes and get on with it knowing I can trust them when I really need them. Socks may be neither here nor there when the 'heat is on', edging upwards in a precarious balance, yearning for the safety of a ledge half way up a sea cliff. Arriving at a perch decorated with bird poo I feel like an alien visitor, sweating, gripped, constantly in and out of danger, seeking asylum on the level ground much higher above. For brief respite at a mid-climb ledge whilst I control the ropes for Paul to climb upwards, I stand on my heels, dorsiflexing, like the child's game of balancing with legs locked solid like stilts, raising the balls of my feet to ease the pressure on my toes. But it is no game. There is only fractional movement but stretching the heels of the boots relieves my toes from their immediate tour of duty. It is not long before they are back in action on the front line again. The only way is up.

No socks just skin. Over the years, I have been climbing in these boots on high mountain crags in UK and abroad, sport climbing and bouldering, sea cliff climbing - becoming totally soaked in rain, completely immersed in mud and bog, stuffed full of fine grit, sand and powdery dust from messy descents, all in bare skin. These earthy elements have then become engrained into the leather innersole under the pads of my feet, and also into the canvas lining of the boots. This filthy mess is then combined with the sweat from my feet every time I wear them which produces a kind of hardened slime around my heel, in the instep of the boot and under my toes. Over the years I have scraped this slime out with my fingernails when it builds up and becomes noticeable. In hot climates, 25-30 degrees or so, this scraping becomes a regular task when the hardened slime turns to a kind of black glue or tar. When in

hot-rock mode my feet languish in high temperatures that are exacerbated by the sun's rays being absorbed through the black rubber rand of the boot and also by conduction directly from the hot rock. Under these extreme conditions my feet are anaerobic, like hot sausage meat has been injected into my boots under pressure, filling every crevice around my toes, which felt weird at first but strangely familiar now, it is anticipated and not entirely unpleasant. Again compromise comes to the fore because tolerating the hot-foot-slurry means the boots stretch a little more, becoming more forgiving on the rock, shaping to my feet better and gripping more effectively for smears and other small foot placements. This is a particularly important compromise in these hot conditions as a difficult route may not tolerate poor climbing technique from me i.e. climbing through my arms and hands. Poor climbing technique means that the skin of my hands; the pads on my fingers will be worn to sensitive, pink, raw, sweaty stumps very quickly on rough, dry rock. So trusting my feet is all the more important at such times. They have not failed me yet.

Smell: the thick-stale-foot-stinky-guffy-whiff of me. The boots are in front of me as I write. The smell prompts the memories recalled above, of the journeys that Boots-and-me have enjoyed and endured and also of the routes, times, and challenges I have shared with other people over the years. Like smelling your own farts it is a pungent assault that is probably totally offensive to others, but in my boot's case it signals adventures and climbing deeds accomplished. I have infected my boots with a smell that is me, of my feet engaging with the old and dirty materials that constitute my momentary world, and now, as I write, my boots infect me again. They are now able to impart a sensual message that they could not do from new, other than that of fresh leather typical of new shoes. They are inanimate objects but seem to communicate with me, they can't speak but they do smell of me, only I know the 'language' and only I can interpret it. Whilst my boots can never intend to send a message I have given them the ability to 'say' these things to me. It is a private exchange that perhaps no-one else cares for, like lovers whispering in their own shared language, their messages are constant and consistent, always reliable between them, and totally personal. My boots are privately stimulating but may be abhorrent to others. An interloper who might perchance to get a whiff of my boots will not be equipped to appreciate their expression as anything else but repulsive.

Stepping out, going public, my Boots-and-me

'Getting it on' with boots-and-me

When I go climbing there will always be the ritual of preparing my feet for their old partners – my boots. Setting the boots on a rock close to my side I will reach for a reel of Micropore tape to wrap around my problematic toes. The act of taping is a phase of physical care and mental preparation for the discomfort I will experience

during the session. Pulling the boots on is a signal that something is going to happen to my feet, like a pupil awaiting punishment they are prepared and committed for the trial and pains ahead. Usually when I put the boots on I may wear them for up to four hours straight through, especially if climbing on crags outside. Like tightening a belt around my waist, putting boots on braces me, it prepares me. The foot is compressed and will be locked in, ready for business. The act of placing the boots on my feet is memorable. As my foot slides into the boot my toes grip down on the inner sole and help to pull and creep my foot further into the boot, seating it down, finding its ridges of hardened slime to rest on. The cold sensation of the boot is welcoming to my warm skin. If I have sat with bare feet for a while, whilst taping up, my skin is cool and there is no resistance to my foot as it enters the boot. Nice. There is a whiff of pungency as the air is pushed out of the boot by its rightful occupant. Nice. Then comes the lacing up. I pull the laces as tight as is comfortable and it pulls my heel back into the bulbs of rubber that I have formed over the years of wearing. This relieves my toes initially. ‘I’m in’, no problems, and no grit in the shoes, yet. As my feet are so skinny there are almost no gaps in the lacing on the front of my foot resulting in masses of lace to tie up in a knot. I always tie up in double bows to reduce the chance of tripping.

‘Climbing around’ with Boots-and-me

In cold weather it takes longer for my feet to swell which is okay sometimes but only delays the inevitable when my feet do warm up and the increased blood flow expands them to fill the boot cavity completely. Then, pain, pinching and rubbing can be irritable during the climbing but is made worse by grit or stones entering the boot flicked up from paths or ledges. The soles of the boots are ‘sticky’ and grit clings to them just long enough to drop off the sole as one foot is raised to take a step. The airborne grit then often finds its way straight into the opening of the other boot which is placed on the ground. To prevent this I have evolved a strange walking action which I have observed many climbers do also. It is not normal walking. It is a hopping from stone to stone, teetering on pinnacles and edges, taking big steps and little steps, jumps slow and fast, balancing, avoiding pools of grit or water or wet grass wherever possible. Passages of dry, smooth rock of varying angles become stepping stones and just getting along a normal path can be like an assault course to get off a climb and back to my gear. This strategy to negotiate the lie of the land (which is not a rock climb) is performed from as soon as the boots are placed on my feet and trying to get to the base of the climb – and then down from it. To just walk normally would result in huge discomfort for me, my feet would be screaming to get out, a level of discomfort which is avoidable to some degree through the ‘footpath-tango’. The aim of all this is to limit the discomfort for my feet during approach in order to cope and perform on the rock climbs to come.

I trust my shoes on the rock. When I am climbing well I feel I can trust my feet in these boots. On the rock face things are generally good. However, extra awareness is needed before and after the climbs during descents or abseils or at the top of sea cliffs. Standing on sloping ground covered in grit which is like ball bearings, or on thick waxy grass at the top of a sea cliff which can be as slippery as ice when wet or dry, can be lethal when combined with a 250 foot drop. My boots were not bred for this kind of activity but I force them through it. They don't cope well and crouching down lowers my centre of gravity for safety but can increase the chance of my feet slipping out of grip, out of control. Again compromise is needed to cope with these rugged underfoot conditions and a workable understanding is often achieved between my Boots-and-me. They seem to forgive my unreasonable demands which are tough episodes to get through. Silently, they seem to put up with it. My foot placements are deliberate and careful at all times in approach to a route, during the climb and after the climb. This takes its toll on my feet with their muscles in tension and bones creaking all compressed by the boot casing. As a normal mode of existence my feet expect to be forced into awkward positions under great forces of weight and movement, however, from slipping unexpectedly there is an added danger that my feet or toes can be bashed accidentally. Like occupants in a calamitous car crash, BAM! there are no airbags to soften the collision. In a slip new levels of pain are experienced that was perhaps avoidable had concentration not lapsed, a costly mistake with immediate symptoms of short-breathed wincing but also frustration at my error. During a climb my feet; toes, balls of my feet, heels and instep all expect to become part of my climbing gear and are sacrificed as such. They become crushed or torqued into a slot for grip, jamming and compressing to the point where they want to explode almost, which can bring extreme discomfort and sometimes damage to my boots and or feet. Apologies to my Boots-and-me, but it had to be done. Do or die.

I have done a little soloing in my time but not that much to be honest (climbing without ropes). It focuses the mind and magnifies the cerebral connection with my feet. Realisation of my height above the ground and the envisaged consequences of a fall are the clouds of doubt that blur my thinking and halt my progress as a soloing climber. However, what soloing I have done has enhanced the relationship between Boots-and-me. As a soloing climber my feet become extremely positive, well placed and delicately positioned. There is a sense of weight transfer and propulsion - entering into a foot placement, weighting it, committing my body over it, and then extending away from the placement. A bit like stepping in to and away from an Arabesque, an elegant balance performed on one leg in gymnastics. The entry and exit is careful and deliberate. The boots are the only piece of equipment in soloing, there is nothing else to 'fall back' on, my awareness of feet is vital for my safety, my enjoyment. A positive experience may mean the rat is well-fed from this adrenaline-

rich supplement. The advent of bouldering mats (small crash mats) came after my early forays into soloing.

On my recent trips to Fontainebleau in France I have had a mat but the same relationships and realisations occur between Boots-and-me when a committing move is called for. I hate falling. Also, I hated walking in the hot, deep, sand around the outcrops there. It was an uncomfortable experience with my boots constantly filled with sweat, mud-grime from the forest and sand which grated between my toes in their claustrophobic, oven-like compartments. There were some stretches of sand maybe 200 meters wide that we had to walk across. Every stride squished a hump of soft, dry sand into my instep which for the moment of my weight passing over it went solid, stretching my boot and foot to curve abnormally over the temporary obstacle, rasping my toes against the sewn canvas inside my rock boots. Every heel strike and push-off was an exemplar of inefficient walking. With each stride my heel would sink and skid, stretching my Achilles tendon whilst the ball of foot would just push backwards in loose sand. Pointless. Was I moving at all? I was leaning forward and moving my legs, swinging my arms in an encouraging way, hobbling, but not finding any grip. So annoying, I nearly fell flat on my face. My toes were pointing down into grains of sand with the determination of a sprinter bursting out of the blocks, but getting no purchase from the material that was collapsing at the same rate I wished to move away from it. Without propulsion I was stranded in a dehydrated quagmire. The amount of pain I endured for the lack of forward progress was frustrating, especially when the car park and stable ground was in sight. ‘Souffrir le martyre’ as the French say, ‘to suffer like a martyr’.

‘Getting it off’ with boots-and-me

Deciding to finish the day (typically decisions like this may be made at the top of a last climb and I am still garbed up in case there is a possibility of doing another route), can bring about an immediate hobble-response from my feet in their boots. They give up too early, or they dip for the line too soon, shoot their bolt and scream for escape. My feet are trapped, like Tokyo commuters squashed into trains all eager to discover the freedom and comfort of their homes. My feet are yelling for air and space to be free, ‘let me out, I want to be normal’. My feet are now being held in dreadful conditions. I have to act quickly as the contractual arrangements for their detention have changed. In the light of a decision they are free, lest this might now be interpreted as torture. ‘Come on man, where is your humanity, this is not ethical, let us out’. The release of my feet signals the end of the climbing day, sending messages to my stomach for what may follow in a pub.

Extracting my feet from their boots is also a ritual but carried out with nonchalant fuss. It is quick and executed as if it is of no consequence. But it is hugely important. Clearly there is relief but it is accepted amongst climbers that we

experience some pain or discomfort from our rock boots, that's the deal if you want to stand up on vertical rock faces. But to whinge about the pain too much is asking for pity, could be a sign of weakness, or even discourteous in the face of such glorious achievements on the rock. Actually removing the boots can take about 30 seconds. This is my exit routine... the laces are untied and loosened generously with dirty, fatigued fingers, which brings initial relief and a sense of escape for my toes. Then the heel is cupped in the palm of the opposite hand to whatever foot I am removing the boot from and pulled downwards. Sometimes ragged hands and pumped arms may affect the grip and smoothness of this action. The boot will not fall off of its own accord as a normal shoe might do. As my hand pulls down I bend the sole backwards whilst pointing my foot, plantarflexing, this breaks the vacuum that my foot in the boot has created. As fresh air runs in, the air pressure equalises allowing me to move my hand towards my toes to slip the boot off. All very scientific. Often, but not always there may be the gasp of 'ahhh' from me, it depends who this 'verbalisation' may be shared with. My climbing partner or others within earshot may interpret the foot-release-reaction as attention seeking behaviour for valiant deeds of climbing or enduring such discomfort in the feet for so long. Might it be a call for their sympathy? Do I really want their sympathy and if they gave it to me what would it mean?

My feet undressed, the rock boots are happily disregarded for a while, probably tossed irreverently to one side, but never left behind. My feet are free but feeling crushed, contorted, taped-up, skin rubbed raw and filthy. These are the battle scars of hopefully successful campaigns on rock. For my Boots-and-me we have had enough of each other's company for now and I am quite happy not to see them again for the day. Like sharing a small space for too long with close family we need a break from each other. The discomfort in my feet signals that I need some time to consider what the boots mean to me in terms of what they have permitted on the rock face in comparison to the pain they have caused. The boots are stuffed in to a bag, stifled, like being shut in a dark room but their smell clawing at me as I pull the draw-chord on my rucksack tight like a noose. Closure. Shut off. I win. Good riddance and goodbye... temporarily.

A new level of comfort beckons for my ravaged feet. Socks are pulled on over all the muck and damage and taped-up toes to hide it all away quickly and pretend it's not there for a while. The socks bring immediate warmth and cushioning which is appreciated as a first level of care. Then my trainers are pulled on but they feel like flippers. My feet splay out in the trainers in a way that they have not been able to for some time. If the rucksack is heavy this can be an awkward feeling for walking normally but it soon settles as my feet grow accustomed to their new plush surroundings. In the meantime, my rock boots live to smell another day.

At home – the aftermath of *Boots-and-me*

With my boots isolated in a rucksack, and when I am quiet and in solitude I attend to my deformed toes and broken skin. All this damage is a result of my foot's ability, or inability, to fit in and get on with my boots. As mentioned before it's a reciprocal working arrangement for boots-and-me which ultimately allows me to climb. At home, the boots are silenced, hidden away, but they have the last word for my feet. The removal of the tape from my toes reminds me of my boot's constant demands if I am to have a climbing existence. The Micropore tape has been rubbed in and broken in places. The torn end of the tape is nigh on impossible to find, like searching for the start of the Selotape on a reel but you just can't see it. With growing frustration, I scrape away with my forefinger to grip an end, except the mangled tape is wrapped around a mangled toe, rather than a neat plastic cylinder. The tape has been stretched and compressed whilst doing its job and the adhesive seems to have passed through several layers of wrapping around one digit. I have usually taped up about four toes from the range of possible candidates on both feet. The sweat from my toes congeals the glue to the hairs on my toes and my broken skin. It is all very painful. Removing the tape is something between a surgical operation and just ripping and tearing. Sometimes my toes give way to force and look like they may be dislocated as the tape is pulled up and down or to one side and the other. The skin is attached firmly to the tape around each toe. The skin stretches alarmingly, reminding me how a thin plastic bag can be forced by hand, going beyond the point of its natural elasticity when a finger or thumb can just break through the material. This may be the point when the skin would give way, but I am careful not to go this far although it feels at times that I am close to that point. I am a wimp at heart. I often give up and return to it later in the hope that more obsessive picking might yield a more productive removal of tape.

A night's sleep has restorative effects for my feet and in the morning everything is physically pretty much back to normal. My feet have rediscovered their natural forms, give or take the odd sore toe. After this, the physical engagement for that climbing session between Boots-and-me is lost, my selective memory edits out the painful bits as discomfort fades in my feet. But my boots can still 'speak out' and they do when I next open my climbing rucksack. The smell of the boots calls me before I touch them, I can sense them before I touch them, even with my eyes closed. My touching them is a wilful action, I have to pick them up, handle them, stroke them like a pet and examine them closely as a chef might do for the quality of key ingredients. This tactile assessment is a routine inspection but also an outpouring of care. Whilst my boots cannot move or express themselves there is an imparting of sensual information. My faithful Boreal Classics beckon me should I wish to climb again, they wait patiently for me. I have shaped them and they shape me. The relationship is strong, they are always ready, willing and able to take my

feet back, given that certain compromises will always be made for us both to carry on. That is the story of Boots-and-me.

Clive Palmer

Stimulating responses to Boots-and-me: notes from critical friends

Response one: *'it has helped me learn and understand'*

Clive, I feel privileged that you would want my comments. It sounds like you're looking for approval to continue writing? Whatever your motive I wish you to know that what you sent me has affected me deeply, sparking off so many lines of thought and inquiry. You must carry it on.

Firstly, after a quick read on Tuesday, just skimming over the text you sent; I had to drive 60 miles home, and then on to Bristol for a meeting (four hours driving time in total). I must have spent 3 hours of this thinking about what I read into your connections, both explicit and implied. In my life, my climbing boots, my other footwear and all the other bits of equipment I connect to in my life, either through work or play, seem so vivid to me now. In a way, I feel guilty for overlooking them, using them and discarding them. Even as I type this I am thinking about the keyboard and screens in front of me...it's getting compulsive (a bit like when I first read George Cockcroft's Dice Man).

I then had to go to the north of the country and back home, another 450 miles over a few days, so lots of thinking time, time where I have been able to explore this abstract ethnography approach to examining my own life (the key word here for me is abstract). This has allowed me to reflect in and on my life which at first was not apparent, as I focused on the sport and its meaning to me. This process evolved as it did within your text and it gave me the authority to explore different connections. It has shined light on ways of reflective thinking and other ways to learn. So as it stands its worth publishing for others like myself, it has helped me learn and understand, I cannot give you a bigger compliment as a teacher. I will read it again next week.

In terms of climbing shoes I do feel like Casanova, I have gone through boots like he did lovers. Not a monogamist like you.

All the best,

Response two: *'old farts wear old kit'*

Dear Clive,

A two-minute window into my thoughts whilst out coaching one day:

You've seen them, old climbers or kayakers wearing their 1970's get up. They're still wearing the kit that was hip and hop in those days. Why? How come? Well I have to be honest at a mere forty-two I have noticed myself edging towards this behaviour. I didn't realise I had the 'Old Fart' tendencies at my tender young age.

Into perspective...

I sit here pondering my existence and how I fit into this world, sitting at popular rock climbing crag high up on a hillside, introducing a newbie to the art of leading [placing safety equipment in the rock to safeguard the climber]. There are lots of young people up here. These questions unfold as the hailstones bounced off my climbing helmet... noisy.

Why have all these young kids got the most expensive kit?

Did that girl know that those leggings made her legs look 'bandy'?

That rucksack wouldn't carry much, so why have it?

Ok, so the questions aren't on a Steven Hawkins level but for me, equally important.

Then it hits me, I'm old! Not in years but in these games of outdoor adventures. I may not have climbed Everest but I've experienced lots, and I mean lots, of adventures. My knackered knees and worn out shoulders can testify to this. Have I got that attitude of 'been there, done that'? DAMN! I swore I wouldn't get like this. It crept up on me like a thief in the night and stole my coolness. I look down at my feet and watch the hale stones gather on my Sportiva boots and realize that the rubber rand is perishing, not from over use but from old age. Once upon a time I would wear a pair of boots out in a few seasons, these days I seem to have everlasting kit. Have I found the fountain of youth where kit is concerned? The phrase 'use it or lose it' pops into my head and I question the validity of those words.

'I have had these for years and they are still going strong ...ish'. Ok, I have a new Rab jacket, but I would have preferred to wear my old Low Alpine that I purchased in ninety-two, but it leaks a bit and it fits a little 'snug' around the mid riff now. So why haven't I replaced this old kit? I have more money now than I ever did, I could easily afford the new kit all the young'ens are touting. Is it because I want to look like I have USED kit? I don't think it's just that.

Ok it's time to rationalise this, and quickly before my mood sinks with this low pressure.

I don't need new kit because I look after it better now! I could imagine Clive laughing when I say this. 'Just because it's new- doesn't mean its better!' he would say.

I don't follow trends I set them!

Rationalising over, do I feel better? No! I'm missing the right questions and hence the truth is as misty as the view is on this hillside. For a brief minute I am distracted as I move the belays and my joints creek and protest with my staccato movements after being sat in this position in the cold. DAMN, another clue. Ok, let's get analytical and try to solve this mystery. I have obviously kept up my activity but nowhere near as much as I used to. I'm teaching nearly as much but not playing out as much, so my kit will last longer... that's it! Mystery solved.

Be honest with yourself [self-talk]... That niggling feeling is still here. Ideas at the back of my mind fight to be heard. Maybe I keep the kit which reminds me of my 'good times' when it was 'my time'? The [kayak] paddles that I used on my first grade four river descent and the waterproofs from my first alpine trip.

Kit has become my photo album. A tactile connection to the experiences I had, the sound, the feel, rips and cracks in the kit even the smell; helping me to solidify my memories and remind me of my achievements. I am stuck in the 'Disco Stu' stereotype of the adventure world. Like a fashion-frozen character outside Tesco's wearing his 80s style jumper and trousers, still living his 'it time'.

DAMN... I laugh; the newbie thinks I'm laughing at her, well in a way I am because it's dawned on me that she will act like this one day. Does this mean that I'm in the sunset and reflective stages of my adventure life now?

Am I just getting old?

Maybe.

But I can still show that newbie how to tie super quick knots.

Rock-on, thanks for making me think.

Best regards, ...

Self-declared Guru of bull.

Response three: *'when they start becoming attached to you then I think is time for a change'*

Hi Clive,

Loved the 'my boots and me' narrative, giggled all the way through, although I do think it's maybe time for you to buy some new ones [boots]. To go through that amount of pain at your time of life seems a little foolish. I know how attached you can get to a pair of boots but when they start becoming attached to you then I think is time for a change. I prefer a little more comfort these days and have started to regret the many hours of hobbling around mountain crags in my rock shoes, as my toenails have fallen off years ago. There was one part that I thought a little out of sorts with the rest of the piece. Perhaps an analogy about Tokyo commuters on trains may have fitted better. Great stuff though Clive and I shall be thinking of your sentiments when I next cram my feet in my boots. Off to the Pyrenees for half term for ice and rock climbing and hopefully some cross country skiing, if my feet can stand it!

All the best ...

Epilogue: Some thoughts about *Boots-and-me*

Sharing the tale of *Boots-and-me* has demonstrated that this innocent motive to write may be an effective means of exploring the human condition; both in the stylistic freedom to tell a personal story and then, in stimulating responses from others through 'narrative autoethnography' (Leavy, 2009:38). This notion of eliciting response may be a development from writing a story that is just out there

for others to relate to in their own way, as in Gilbourne, Jones and Jordan's (2011) exploration into auto-ethnographical social critique combined with creative writing. The reader of their story, called the Travel Writer, is simply invited to 'view' and 'ponder' or even 'discuss' the use of story telling in social research (2011:12), whereas my readers seemed to get stuck straight in to the story and wanted to respond to it with their own narratives. Respondent 1 was particularly vocal about this commenting 'what you have sent me has affected me deeply... it has helped me learn and understand, I cannot give you a bigger compliment as a teacher'. Consequently, in structuring this article priority was given to the story itself with theoretical discussion saved for the epilogue section.

An ethnographic exchange similar to my respondents above was practiced by anthropologists Rapport and Vaisman (2005). Their shared dialogue was about the embodiment of learning concerning a number of ethnographies which emphasised a corporeal, sensorial engagement with the world. A series of excerpts reveals the relationship between Nigel Rapport (the supervisor) and Noa Vaisman (the student) who reciprocally stimulate deeper questioning of experience, knowledge and sense-making. As things transpired my Boots-and-me story did prompt others to write openly, and seemingly caused them to question otherwise taken for granted aspects of their world and explore what meanings they might hold for them. Eliciting their responses was not a pre-determined strategy at the time of writing Boots-and-me but all the same, a pleasing by-product stemming from my honest ramblings. However, since they are given, they do seem to contribute some vital jigsaw pieces towards a more detailed picture of life-experience, even if some of the bits are still missing - the search goes on.

Clearly, a tactic to engage someone intentionally in this kind of research would require careful ethical judgment on issues of data ownership, revelation of sensitive topics and respondent confidentiality. As Sugden (2011) has discussed about his investigative journalism, it is rarely a problem to uncover sensitive data, a much greater one is what to do with it in terms of publishing and reporting. In writing this account so openly, facets of my character seem to emerge plainly for others to see which was not intentional but on reflection may be inevitable from this kind of exercise. I did not set out to write about relationships. If a researcher asked me to write about how I manage relationships I would not have written Boots-and-me. I would have given a much more coy and self-protective explanation which had nothing to do with my climbing boots and smelly feet. Therefore, as a corollary of a more conventional approach to researching about people, the direct asking of questions in a staged interview may be a limiting alternative, especially about things such as relationships, loyalty, beliefs, actions, duty and care. Interviews might yield a decontextualized, manufactured rationalisation of experience (Silverman, 2007)

which, as a researcher in this context, could leave me further from my subject, not closer to it or them. Worse, an impoverished version of *Boots-and-me* (a detailed account of experience) could be reduced to a transcript funnelled by a restrictive schedule of questions from a third-party researcher, my utterances possibly destined for the digital mincer of NVivo, only to be artificially reconstructed and played back to me... for my approval? And even then, would the story still be mine? (Palmer and Hughes, 2011).

My story is a product similar to research espoused by McAdams (1993:5) in his psycho-therapeutic work, in that identity is a 'life-story that a individual begins work on as a young adult to provide his or her life with unity or purpose and that articulates a meaningful niche in the psycho-social world'. In retrospect, unwittingly, I think I may have done this, with the aid of my ever-present boots as a cue for reflection over such a long period. *Boots-and-me* also draws parallels with accounts elicited by Feld and Basso (1996:8) who took seriously the challenge to 'ground ethnography in the dialogue that animated it in the first place' asking for essays which described how 'specific expressive practices imbued acts, events and objects with significance'. For them, this illuminated different ways in which a sense of 'place' is voiced and experienced; that place is sensed and sense makes place (Feld and Basso, 1996). Consequently, from describing the sense of place for my feet in my boots, an ostensibly harmless prompt for analysis, a potential means to collect meaningful data from others in the form of short story responses has emerged from this innocent act of writing, using *Boots-and-me* as contextual stimulus.

As a further theoretical backdrop, a range of anthropological writing and ethnographies have informed my thinking for *Boots-and-me*. For example, Wacquant's (2006) 'deep immersion' as an apprentice boxer in Chicago guides the reader through the gritty, sweaty, dingy realities of fighting for social status, and there is also Downey's (2005) cultural adventure into Capoeira, which is an Afro-Brazilian form of acrobatic fighting set to music. Both studies involved rich, first-hand story telling of arduous and sometimes painful experiences which appealed as a mode of research writing. Also Denison's (1999) story-based account of a father-son relationship within a sporting context exposes how the interplay of relationships may be influential for constructing personal identity, rugby in New Zealand in that case. And then Klein's (1993) confessional tale of body builders in training-gym environments emphasises that there is a close-to-home confessional element to social story writing. As Bleakley (2010) has eloquently observed in his article *Writing with invisible ink: narrative, confessionalism and reflective practice*, in composing *Boots-and-me* I have attempted the first-hand telling of a seemingly disconnected experience with the result that relationships are discussed and

confessions emerge through the lyrical waxing about my feet and my boots as they may affect each other, and me in my life.

Curiosity about the quadruped action of the rock climber signalled two significant anthropologies that urged their readers not to overlook the socio-cultural importance our extremities; hands and feet. These were Alpenfels' (1955) study of the human hand and Ingold's (2004) paper on a world perceived through our feet. Alpenfels (1955) work was prompted by her research into prosthetics for people without a hand or two, exploring the biological evolution of hands but also their practical utility as tools and their social importance for symbolic gesture, or creating art and religious or cultural meanings for humans. Feet, similarly in Ingold's (2004) research, are anthropologically traced through Darwinian evolution for their importance in physically sensing and exploring the environment. He discusses the physical state of being pedestrian and the varying social status for the act of walking; the poor have to walk, the rich can choose to walk or not. Interestingly, other walking inferences of freedom; walking free and dancing, skipping and tapping, highlight how feet may be vital to a notion of the social human, but so often feet are 'overlooked', used and abused, clad, constricted, distanced and hidden away. On this point Ingold (2004:332) discusses how feet are increasingly 'regulated and disciplined' in the history of Western society by the 'hand-made technology of boots and shoes'. However, whilst *Boots-and-me* is a story of Western foot trappings and entrapment within the modern climbing shoe, this ostensibly negative inference of foot cladding has allowed me to experience a level of adrenaline rush that no other pair of ordinary shoes have done. That is, they permit a degree of freedom in a vertical realm where by definition I cannot walk, but I can climb.

Researchers and Ethnographers such as Stoller (1989, 1997), Minogue and Jones (2006), Merchant (2011), Classen (2012), Palmer et al (2014), and Allen-Collinson and Hockey (2011) all discuss the senses and Haptics [touch] which are all relevant to a 'sensorium of sport'. These in turn have been influential towards the formation of *Boots-and-me*, insofar as the story of this particular sense journey was already within me, it just had to be drafted. I have attempted to follow the advice of these authors who were able to impart a vivid sensuality in their writing about sporting experiences e.g. concerning running and scuba diving; being 'under pressure' and being in the sensory microcosm that is 'the heat of the moment'. These are what resonated with some of my experiences as a climber. However, a more adventurous spirit for honest celebration of the senses is Howes' (2005:1) acknowledgement that 'the limits of my language are not the limits of my world' giving me confidence me to explore a level of textual richness in *Boots-and-me* that I had not attempted before. Whilst the limitation of reporting sensorial engagement in text is ever-present, it was further 'softened' by Miller's (2005:347) chapter

Darwin's Disgust which articulated candidly how, amongst other things, the smell of a person's own excreta is repulsive to everyone except the owner. A shared parallel with this is how the smell of another person's rock climbing shoes is probably just as repulsive to all except the owner of said shoes. This kind of honesty and acknowledgement in text gave me confidence to write about the olfactory elements of Boots-and-me as they are genuinely experienced.

Another significant avenue of research emerging from Boots-and-me is the embodiment of the climbing shoe itself as an extension of me, it becoming 'my skin', indicating that our materiality may not end with the skin but is manifested in an extended body as well. Respondent 3 hinted strongly at the potential for this saying 'I know how attached you can get to a pair of boots but when they start becoming attached to you then I think is time for a change'. Interestingly, Respondent 2 chose to write about outdoor clothing; what may constitute his 'outer skin' that the world perceives and judges him by in terms of projected colours, textures and even, out of date shabbiness. As James (1950:293) writes, 'we all have a blind impulse to watch over our body, to deck it with clothing of an ornamental sort ... to find for ourselves a home of our own which we may live in and improve'. For Respondent 2, notions of identity seemed interwoven in the haptic sensation of worn garments not only for being a climber, but the outward messages in textiles of looking like a climber. For all the respondents, who are all climbers, my climbing boots are the common factor where there seemed to be a 'shared knowledge of artefacts' (Classen, 2012:138), that were impressed on the skin through the use of textiles [climbing boots]. Between them there was a kind of embodied, haptic sense of knowing concerning the reported details of my feet in my boots and how they might be associated with their own experiences, albeit interpreted in their own way.

Stylistically, the story is phrased as I wished it to be read, describing in rich detail episodes of climbing engagement between my feet and my boots. A story of ritual told through my skin. However, in telling this tale there is close resemblance to Baker's (1998) *The Mezzanine*. His detailed 130 page exposition of observations and reflections during a single lunch hour at work was like discovering a kindred spirit in text. It was as if *Boots-and-me* and *The Mezzanine* were related in some way (coincidentally, *The Mezzanine* was first published in the USA in the same year I purchased my climbing boots - 1988). For example, Baker's (1998) preoccupation with wear and tear of shoe laces is reflected in my story and his attention to detail in minutia for routines, patterns and designs in everyday things is something I attempted to accord also. There is further stylistic resemblance in textual description to William Golding's (1956) novel *Pincher Martin*, a story of a drowning man. Golding expertly achieves complex and rich description in a brevity of text and accuracy in language that I can only aspire to. He paints with words. Both Golding

(1956) and Baker (1998) offer such clear communication in text there is a palpable sense of 'being there' for the reader but also, that they enjoyed writing these stories. Enjoyment of writing may be key for success in honest narrative research. I enjoyed reading their stories for their directness and down-to-earth reflections of the human condition. I also enjoyed writing Boots-and-me which may have led me to write so openly and honestly. As the first respondent began to explain, I hope the Boots-and-me story may prompt in a reader reflections on overlooked detail in their lives and inspire them to share their thoughts.

The use of analogy was a tactic to impart colour and richness in Boots-and-me with the intention of communicating a wider likeness or more pointed association on certain topics. Within the context of the original purpose for writing, contributing to a colleague's research, the use of analogy permitted considerable freedom to explain things with satisfying amplification and emphasis. Whilst it was fun to compose using analogies I realised how powerful but also limiting they may be so they were used carefully. Horton's (1967:165) anthropology of African Traditional Thought and Western Science exposes some interesting cultural differences about the use of analogy in research writing. That in Africa, language is abound with the use metaphor 'to allude obliquely to things which cannot be said directly', whilst Western scientific discourse, a purist stance in positivistic reporting, abhors the flagrant colour of association and regards the use of analogy as being 'extremely misleading for serious scientific thought' (1967:165). As Horton (1967:165) points out, a consequence of the purist paradigm is that it 'condemns the scientist to an eternity of triteness and circularity' which may be a chronic disease of 'acceptability' in Westernised research writing. The analogies and metaphor in Boots-and-me are like stereotypes of situations, they contain a grain of truth but if taken literally or extended too far, can go wildly off course, that is, they have 'limited resemblance' (Horton, 1967:165). However, two facets of using analogy yielded positive outcomes from this story. First, that new associations and relationships between phenomena could be ventured which seemed to promote some enjoyable exploration of new ways to think about data; ethically, sensually, socially and culturally. This seemed a natural disposition to me whilst pondering about my smelly boots, as Douglas Hofstadter in his foreword to Gödel's Proof (2001:ii) recognised when he wrote, 'we now understand that the human mind is fundamentally not a logic engine but an analogy engine, a guessing engine, an aesthetics-driven engine, a self-correcting engine'. And secondly, that the inherent inaccuracies of the analogy elicited responses from other readers to offer their views on a topic, or to 'put me right' on an issue or to clarify my analogy in light of their own experiences. Respondent 3 even suggesting a more appropriate analogy to protect me should the Boots-and-me story evolve further in to the public domain. His suggestion of likeness to crowding on a Tokyo commuter train communicated

much the same effect as my original offering and the change was corroborated by others, thank you, as the tangents of my original analogy were pejorative on a number of fronts. However, probing for new understandings or possibilities in data whilst simultaneously inviting third-party contributions has proved to be a productive outcome of using analogies, but with the obvious health warning that emphasis and exaggeration has to be used carefully. Like the singer who resorts to shouting their song, somehow they can become less convincing to communicate their message.

Conclusion

It was commented to me that the story itself may be an analogy for how I manage relationships, scarily, which seemed to bring home to me the power of what I had actually written in *Boots-and-me*. Whilst I had waxed lyrically about my feet, my boots, my pain, ripped skin, grime and crushed toenails, I had not set out to explore my personal relationships or expose how I handle them. But on reflection that is exactly what I have done. My emergent story of relationships sits between the lines and is as true as it can be, protected from the distorting analogies by virtue of its implicitness. Am I brave enough to analyse myself further here? No, I think I have probably revealed enough for the reader to make their own analysis. However, if a person I was working with wrote a tale of this detail for me, I would probably learn a lot about them, much more than they might divulge in an interview.

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JQRSS Author Profile

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Clive's sporting and academic interests include gymnastics, athletics, canoeing and climbing, ethnography and philosophy of sport. These have been applied through his teaching in HE across Physical Education, sport's pedagogy and Outdoor Education. A former engineer in the RAF, Clive competed nationally in gymnastics, athletics and canoeing, and then, equipped with a range of sport's coaching qualifications, entered Initial Teacher Training in Outdoor Education and Science (a B.Ed. honours degree with QTS [qualified teacher status] at Liverpool Polytechnic, now called Liverpool John Moores University). Currently working at UCLan Clive is an experienced teacher from the secondary school sector with a Master's degree in Physical Education and a PhD on the Aesthetic Evaluation of Men's Artistic Gymnastics (2003). Having also taught in FE and other HE institutions he has written widely in socio-cultural areas of sport crossing philosophy, education, the arts in sport and sports history. He is a strong advocate of Research Informed Teaching and actively promotes opportunities to showcase student writing which communicates experiences through the study of sport. He is Editor of The Sporting Image Series (2009 to date) and Editor in Chief of the Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies (2007 to date) which both represent a combination of applied qualitative social research in sport with arts-based research in sports culture. With a growing portfolio of Post Graduate supervision, Clive is now examining Ph.Ds, M.Phils, MRes, Professional Doctorates and Education Doctorates, and contributing to collaborative research projects in the UK and overseas.

Reviewer Comments

I am very interested in the cultural and social aspects of footwear - in the way shoes are part of human lives and actually form both feet and lives. I enjoyed reflecting upon the text and was particularly inspired by the second friend's comment, which touches upon identity issues and the way we inhabit clothes and footwear. They become part of our repertoire and capacities, for good and for bad, and should not therefore be neglected. The subject and approach are highly original, the writing very accomplished and the whole project pulled off with panache. There is even a kind of poetic recursiveness to the content. This is an article I would like to have written myself.

