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Double “class”: on the popularization of Dr. Martens

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Citation

Crucq, A. K. C. (2021). Double “class”: on the popularization of Dr. Martens. *View. Theories And Practices Of Visual Culture*, 31, 1-43. doi:10.36854/widok/2021.31.2409

Version: Publisher's Version

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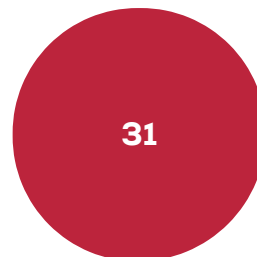
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View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture

title:

Double "Class". On the Popularization of Dr. Martens

author:

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source:

View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture 31 (2021)

URL:

<https://www.pismowidok.org/en/archive/2021/31-visibility-of-social-classes/double-class-on-the-popularization-of-dr.-martens>

publisher:

Widok. Foundation for Visual Culture

affiliation:

The Polish National Film, Television and Theatre School in Lodz

Institute of Polish Culture, University of Warsaw

The Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences

keywords:

appearance; appropriation; class; commercialization; commodification; Dr. Martens; Punk; Skinheads; semiotics; style; subcultures; working-class

abstract:

In this paper processes of appropriation and commodification are discussed from the perspective of subcultures and their relation to class. Dr. Martens boots are discussed as a specific case-study. They were appropriated in the 1960s by British Skinheads to signify their working-classness. Besides being functional, design objects are apparently endowed with meaning and these can vary depending on different modes of appearance, on different styles. Today Dr. Martens, is primarily a fashion-item. This calls into question to what extent commercialization undermines the potential of design objects to be endowed with meaning. By critically discussing recent scholarly literature on subcultures and style I will explain how in recent decades the dynamics of the neo-liberal market economy with its emphasis on consumption, facilitated a further commodification of style-objects as desirable value-objects. What will be argued successively is that appropriation and commodification in late capitalist society might obscure but not obliterate the social realities of class that lie hidden beneath the flux of images in which we are engulfed today.

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Double "Class". On the Popularization of Dr. Martens

Introduction

Even though we claimed not to care about fashion, I remember that clothes mattered when I was a member of the Dutch punk subculture in the late 1980s! The way you wore something could immediately signify musical preferences, social class, and political beliefs, to the extent that certain brands and items even became symbolic for specific subcultures. US bomber jackets and Dr. Martens boots [Fig. 1] were mainly worn by skinheads, who, in the late 1980s in the Netherlands, were associated with racial violence. As a result, wearing Dr. Martens was seen as suspicious. To avoid misunderstandings, one could wear black Dr. Martens with red laces as a reference to left-wing sympathies, as opposed to racist skinheads who mainly wore oxblood-red Dr. Martens with white laces as an expression of racial pride. Such subtle codes were hugely important within subcultures.¹

Within these subcultures in their original English forms, Dr. Martens furthermore signified rebelliousness and working-classness. These codes and subcultural references perhaps resonate only faintly for today's lovers of Dr. Martens. Therefore, from the context of

that subcultural background, the present times can be confusing. Today, Dr. Martens are worn by college students from all sorts of backgrounds, with all sorts of taste preferences and beliefs. Young children even wear them.²



Figure 1: Nick-D, A pair of well worn brown Dr Martens 1460 boots.

Source

The boots have become so popular that, despite their rebellious image, Dr. Martens had made its way onto the Stock Exchange.³

The history of Dr. Martens exemplifies a broader shift in the significance of clothes within Western cultures, particularly youth cultures.⁴ It shows how, within subcultures, consumer articles became significant objects beyond their use value when appropriated to fulfil a symbolic meaning within a subcultural style,⁵ and thereby referred to specific content. It further illustrates how the dynamics of the subsequent re-appropriation and commercialization of the symbolically charged products by their manufacturers affects what is signified.

Dr. Martens, for instance, no longer signify working-classness, as they did for the early skinheads, but now mainly signify the style within which this earlier signification was important and which has become a cultural trope; by this, I mean that the connection between Dr. Martens and working-classness should no longer be regarded literally but as a meme, and the reference to working-classness therefore rather as one of many possible memes.⁶ This development also forces us to consider the multiple meanings of the concept of class. Class can be understood as a ranking category – as a collection, to distinguish, for instance, groups of people sharing a certain socio-economic position, such as the working class as opposed to the middle class. Class can also be understood as a quality – as the very act of distinguishing, doing something with class, which within the context of fashion can be associated with elegance and style.⁷ In this article, I will therefore aim to answer the question of how and why the visual codes and references that came with wearing Dr. Martens have shifted. I will argue that, as opposed to Dr. Martens referring to the members of a particular subculture of young people as typically working class, the boots today primarily refer to this earlier reference, as a cultural trope.

Moreover, I aim to analyze whether this exemplifies a broader cultural tendency.

In arriving at an answer, the article roughly divides into two parts. In the first, I will discuss how working-classness became a concern for the subcultures of the late twentieth century in Britain, and how Dr. Martens were appropriated to signify this working-classness. It will then also become clear that working-classness was not an explicit concern for all subcultures, but that skinheads expressed the strongest concern about their working-classness. From the perspective of Dr. Martens, skinhead appropriation, combined with the skinheads' later violent and racist image, would also create a problem for the brand when it started to exploit its subcultural past for commercial purposes.

In the second part, I will analyze more recent appropriations of Dr. Martens from the context of the brand's objective to expand its popularity and sales both within and outside the United Kingdom. I will therefore draw partly from my own familiarity with the subcultural context in the Netherlands, and discuss how Dr. Martens became popular in a country which is generally considered less class conscious than the UK.⁸ I will explain recent commercial appropriations against the background of a succession of revivals of earlier subcultural styles, occurring since the 1990s and deliberately exploited by Dr. Martens in its campaigns, showing how the earlier references to class and rebelliousness turned into marketable subcultural tropes. This phenomenon connects to Western European popular culture in general, within which young people were no longer dedicated exclusively to a single style and subculture. Moreover, it will become clear that the whole process of signification through which a fashion item can become a signifier has therefore also become more complex. Though style no longer seems to be used explicitly to refer to specific class situations,

I will argue that this does not mean that class has lost its significance. Since fashion items carry a price tag, they still point to socio-economic realities.

PART ONE

Dr. Martens from the context of studies on subculture

From a cultural-historical perspective, little research has been done specifically on Dr. Martens. Most of the literature that refers to Dr. Martens is about broader trends – for instance, in journals on marketing, fashion, and advertising.⁹ Cath Davies, for example, has written an important article about how, in its marketing campaigns from the early 2010s, Dr. Martens exploited the connections between its boots and subcultural styles.¹⁰ Other important sources are the books by Martin Roach on the history of the brand, partly edited and published by Dr. Martens, as well as the brand's website and blog.¹¹

There is an extensive tradition, however, of studying youth and subcultures, which can be productive in forming the framework from which to analyze the importance of a brand like Dr. Martens from a more theoretical perspective related to class and style. With regard to youth and subculture, the relation between social class and style has been studied extensively by scholars from the Birmingham School,¹² such as John Clarke, Phil Cohen, Stuart Hall, and Dick Hebdige, who dedicated much ground-breaking research to how, within subcultures in the 1970s, young people could use their style to express contradictions and objections relating to the cultural hegemony of the period. As such, for skinheads, Dr. Martens as a workman's boot had significance in the sense that it underscored their supposed working-classness. This appropriation took form within what was termed "bricolage," a concept derived from French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, denoting spontaneous creative processes

by means of which new possible combinations can emerge that together can make up a new coherence – for instance, a new style.¹³

In the 1990s, Sarah Thornton shifted attention from class to the appropriation of "subcultural capital," a term she derived from Pierre Bourdieu's "cultural capital," denoting knowledge "accumulated through upbringing and education which confers social status."¹⁴ For Thornton, subcultural capital was a concept from which she could approach the processes she identified within the emerging club cultures of the 1980s and 1990s, which she referred to as "cultures of taste." This subcultural capital relates, for instance, to knowing certain music (or being an early adopter), wearing particular clothes and accessories, or understanding inside postures, gestures, and attitudes – but also being able to understand a certain irony or sense of humor.¹⁵

From the perspective of acknowledging that there was now a whole new dynamic between youth culture, media, and commercialization, Thornton implicitly criticized the Birmingham School for their exclusive framing of subcultures as being related to class, and the working class in particular. According to Christine Elizabeth Griffin, this critique was shared from the mid-1980s onward from within the field of British sociology that challenged the idea that people's political, social, and psychological perspectives could be read from their social class. This criticism was legitimized by the observation that many members of subcultures actually came from different class backgrounds. Moreover, many working-class youths would not identify with one of the outspoken subcultures, such as mod, skinhead, punk, or reggae; rather, they conformed to whatever was offered through mainstream media, fashion, and popular hit-parade music. Despite this, Griffin argues that Thornton and other "post-subculture" scholars nevertheless underestimated how significant class still was within cultures of taste. She argues that this comes to the fore specifically in Thornton's study, where

she had recognized how young people active on the club scene attempted to obscure their class, which Griffin interprets as perhaps even the "*heightened significance of class.*"¹⁶

This shows that, hidden behind the ostensibly more egalitarian cultures of taste, there are still certain social realities. It therefore calls into question the extent to which a fashion item like Dr. Martens boots, as part of a style, can still be a means for young people to express a certain consciousness about these realities in the sense of class awareness, or whether the boots are merely a form through which to acquire the cultural capital by means of which one can endow oneself with class as an expression of personal differentiation.

From working class to working-classness

Before discussing the abovementioned question in more detail, it is necessary to understand how Dr. Martens became a style icon signifying social class for white British subcultures in the first place. In the early 1960s, Dr. Martens began as typical workman's boots, originally named after the German war doctor Klaus Märtens, who was injured in the Alps and experienced the discomfort of the traditional military boot. Märtens invented a more comfortable boot, based on the principle of an air-cushioned sole which would absorb shocks and improve comfort. Märtens further developed the concept with Dr. Herbert Funck, and started to produce the boots in 1947 in Germany. In the following years they became popular among German housewives, but toward the end of the decade Märtens and Funck also advertised their invention in overseas magazines. This attracted the attention of British shoe manufacturer Bill Griggs, whose company Griggs and Co. acquired the patent for the air-cushioned sole after promising not to compete with Märtens and Funck, who from that time onward focused on the orthopedic market. The German name Märtens was Anglicized to Martens, and in 1959 production started in

Northamptonshire. The air-cushioned sole and the boot leather were re-designed to make a typical comfortable workman's boot: the classic Dr. Martens 1460, which saw the light of day on April 1, 1960. Indeed, during the first half of the 1960s, the boots were mainly sold to workers such as postmen, factory workers, medics, and so on.¹⁷

At the end of the decade, the subculture which would become known as skinheads was the first to appropriate Dr. Martens within youth culture [Fig. 2]. Skinheads expressed overt concern with working-classness; they cut their hair very short, and wore jeans with cut-off legs or starched trousers held up by braces, along with shirts from the English brand Ben Sherman. On their feet, skinheads wore carefully polished Dr. Martens boots, which, as a typical workman's boot, could now signify and emphasize the implicit working-classness of the subculture.¹⁸

The skinheads' subculture emerged from that of the mods, but their other main source of inspiration was the presence of West Indian immigrants in working-class English neighborhoods, who had imported ska and rocksteady music, and with them the "rude boy" style.¹⁹ In retrospect, it might appear paradoxical that the early skinheads were inspired by an essentially black youth culture such as ska, especially as, during the 1970s, many skinheads would develop racist and nationalist sympathies. That the fundamentally multicultural phenomenon of the "alliance" between working-class skinheads and West Indian rude boys could be reversed can be explained by the fact that the presence of migrant youth cultures in England, apart from providing a source of inspiration, was also the clearest visible evidence of changing British society, and as



Figure 2: Herradordezapatos, London Skinheads.
Source

such this would threaten the ideologized heterogeneous white working-class community.²⁰

Responses became increasingly violent, and the attack on migrants by white residents in the Toxteth area of Liverpool in 1972, in which skinheads played a significant role, was a turning point in skinhead history.²¹ The subculture was now no longer associated only with working-classness but also with racism, nationalism, and right-wing extremism.²² The radicalization of the subculture brought with it a radicalization of its style. The millimeter-length hair transformed into the iconic bald shaven head; the clothing, stripped of the remnants of mod style, was reduced to a uniform of jeans, polo shirts, bomber jackets, and Dr. Martens boots.²³ Tattoos became more important and visible, and often signified Nazi and fascist sympathies.²⁴ As one of the hallmarks of the skinhead style, Dr. Martens boots, besides signifying working-classness, could now also signify racial violence.²⁵

This negative connotation of Dr. Martens perhaps became even stronger on the European continent, where essentially British subcultures like skinhead and punk were adopted by the young and developed local variations. Besides skinheads, many other subcultures in England had also appropriated Dr. Martens boots, such as punks in the late 1970s.²⁶ Furthermore, it should be noted that certainly not all skinheads became racist. In response to the radicalism of the late 1970s, some began to consciously express left-wing sympathies and propagated an anti-racist image.²⁷ What mattered in this case was *how* you wore your Dr. Martens. Right-wing skinheads would, for instance, increasingly reject black Dr. Martens in favor of oxblood-red ones, as they noted how black Dr. Martens were increasingly worn by English policemen.²⁸ Dr. Martens boots with a metal toe cap were also favored, and added to the skinheads' violent image. Right-wing skinheads would use white laces in their oxblood-red boots as a marker of white nationalism.²⁹ As argued

in my introduction, such subtle visual codes were immediately recognizable among members of different subcultures and showed in an instant which side someone was on.³⁰

Even though the boots had once been appropriated to signify working-classness, in the realm of youth and subcultures in England from the 1970s onward, Dr. Martens were embraced by different subcultures whose members, even though holding an anti-Conservative Party, anti-Thatcher attitude which sympathized with the working class, did not always have a working-class background. In England, contradictions between the different subcultures could be overcome, perhaps due to shared preferences for certain clothing items. In an ironic song from a 1982 episode of the British comedy *The Young Ones*, British comedian Alexei Sayle sings: "It's not class or ideology, color, creed, or roots, the one thing that unites us, is Dr. Martens boots," and perhaps Sayle can even be credited with foresight, given the following line: "[...] they're classless, matchless, ageless, and waterproof, and retail for only 19 pounds and 99p."³¹

Besides, since the 1950s and 1960s, increasing number of working-class children had found their way into higher education. With their nostalgia for the illusion of a white working-class community, the skinheads were still suspicious of this upward social move. However, many working-class youths with higher-education degrees were able to leave their "parent culture" behind.³² Simultaneously, under the influence of popular culture, middle-class youths appropriated elements and taste preferences that had traditionally been associated with working-class culture.³³ Toward the end of the 1980s, the presence of music videoclips on television brought cultural elements from the street into family living rooms. Middle-class youths became familiar with the music, fashion, and dance styles that had often emerged literally from the streets.³⁴ These developments

contributed to a youth culture in which young people could manifest themselves as not necessarily bound to class.³⁵

Being appropriated by successive subcultures, wearing Dr. Martens was also a means of subverting the whims of commercial fashion. In addition, the notion that Dr. Martens were regarded as durable and therefore relatively economical may explain why they were favored by many young people in England who, regardless of their background, generally had limited economic resources compared to adults.

PART TWO

Polishing the image

Although widely adopted in England, outside the United Kingdom the boots were accepted as a fashion item to a far lesser extent. This would change during the early 1990s, when the musical style of grunge somewhat ironically fostered a breakthrough for so-called "alternative" or independent music to a larger audience. Suddenly, the clothing style of subcultures entered the mainstream fashion circuit. In the shoe stores of the main shopping streets in the Netherlands, Dr. Martens would now appear as the slightly more elegant version of the military boot, which Dutch punks had worn in the 1980s. As a brand, Dr. Martens also increasingly exploited the subcultural image of the boot; however, this was in order to arrive at a more playful and acceptable image because, despite its sudden popularity due to grunge, Dr. Martens in the Netherlands still suffered from the negative image of racist skinheads. A 1993 Dutch news article reports how Dr. Martens' recent marketing campaign was aimed at endowing the boot with the image of a fashion classic. For that purpose, histories were sometimes even created.³⁶ This would have been the case with the introduction of a "new classic" in 1993, the so-called "McMarten," which was said to have been designed by a certain "Stuart MacRaddish," whose design went

back to the seventeenth century. Although the story was completely fictional, many journalists and fashion reporters apparently fell for it.³⁷ Furthermore, Dr. Martens connected an image of the boots as a classic to the image of a workman's boot. In the early 1990s, Dr. Martens even expanded its collection beyond boots and shoes, with jackets and tweeds that were designed to create the image of an English working-class person expressing his or her class. At the same time, references to subcultures were embraced, but in ways that would provide the brand with a friendlier image.³⁸

The above shows how Dr. Martens responded both to the raw, darker side of grunge and to the more ironic and playful attitude of young people in the early 1990s. According to anthropologist Ted Polhemus, one of the most important developments within the youth culture of the 1990s was that the young took adherence to a specific subcultural style less seriously than their counterparts in previous decades had done. He subsequently explained why and how the strict divisions between different styles would increasingly blur.³⁹ Young people started to sample bits and pieces from all kinds of different youth styles in order to create something unique and individual, or would move easily from one style to another.⁴⁰ With regard to fashion, Polhemus referred to this phenomenon as "style surfing." Punk elements were combined with hip-hop ones, the latest techno styles, sporty clothing, and items from the 1960s and 1970s. Someone could be a bit more punk one day and then dress more in the fashion of hip-hop or a combination of styles the next. According to Polhemus, young people in the 1990s no longer wanted to be "[...] categorized – to become just a stereotype. [...] Because [they have] increasingly found that only personal appearance is capable of expressing where we as individuals are at in a kaleidoscopic and enigmatic world."⁴¹

As one of the leading anthropologists studying subcultures, Polhemus was also involved in the catalog of the major exhibition

Street Style: From Sidewalk to Catwalk at London's Victoria and Albert Museum in 1994.⁴² As the century of pop culture drew to a close, the museum took the opportunity to organize a large retrospective on the youth cultures of the late twentieth century. Taking into account the important role that England and in particular London had played in youth culture and fashion in Western Europe and North America, the museum was the ideal place for such an exhibition to be curated.⁴³ It had already acquired fashion items from designers such as Vivienne Westwood, who, along with her husband Malcolm McLaren,⁴⁴ epitomized punk style.

The retrospective featured many pairs of Dr. Martens as part of outfits that represented different subcultures within which the boots were significant, but even prior to the exhibition, Dr. Martens had already found their way into the museum's permanent collection.⁴⁵ As museum objects, they underscored the exhibition's subtitle and exemplified how the styles that had emerged from the street had gradually found their way onto the catwalks of the main fashion designers. The exhibition offered a display that neatly put street fashion into context, with visuals such as graffiti walls and mannequins combined with displays providing textual and visual context in the form of photos from popular culture such as movies and videoclips.

With subcultural styles now penetrating the mainstream, their sharper edges gradually softened. Moreover, young people in the 1990s became increasingly receptive to commercialization. Thornton's study made clear that the speed with which technological developments boosted musical ones in the emerging club cultures of the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the increased speed with which tropes circulated in the mass media, caused aspects of the underground to be absorbed more quickly and more regularly by the mainstream. Equally dynamic, new styles and crossovers within club culture followed more rapidly on from one another. The interrelatedness between the styles

that young people produced in music, fashion, visual expression, and performance – as well as the commercialization of those styles – thus also became increasingly complex.⁴⁶ This occurred to a far lesser extent with clubbers, who were recognizable as a homogenous group with one distinctive style. Their appropriation of clothing items did not so much lead to a mishmash of style elements but rather to what seemed an almost infinite number of possible patchwork styles. Moreover, clubbers were also less prone to encapsulation by mass media and mainstream fashion industries, as they were already more aware of how the media works and how it is used to manipulate.⁴⁷ Constant interaction with processes of commercialization and its relentless incentive to renew and progress had become the condition of the 1990s in Western Europe under the increased influence of the neoliberal market paradigm that, since the end of the Cold War, had begun to permeate all aspects of society. In this dynamic, any homologous style and its signification of groupness, whether working class or otherwise, seemed to make less sense.⁴⁸

Therefore, a young Western European person in the 1990s could walk into a fashion store and choose clothes, shoes, and accessories from any style or brand, and mix them until the person in the dressing room mirror was satisfied, apparently ignorant of what specific style the fashion industry dictated. A person could pick a pair of Dr. Martens and combine the boots with long hair, flares, and a t-shirt with a seventies disco-style print. Within this changed cultural climate, Dr. Martens could fully exploit the ties to its subcultural past without necessarily confining itself within the realm of subculture alone. It could now also avoid a too-restrictive and exclusive connection to a single subculture such as the skinheads. Without such a limited connection, the brand could, however, gratefully embrace the subcultural tropes of authenticity, individual expression, non-

conformity, and the breaking of boundaries – aspects of subcultures that had slowly become commonplace and attractive to a mainstream audience, only now functioning within the brand's selling strategy, which at the same time carefully avoided the negative association with far-right skinheads and violence.⁴⁹ This was still necessary as, despite its growing popularity in the Netherlands, those negative connotations did not disappear overnight. In the early 2000s, Dr. Martens became part of a discussion in the Netherlands on banning certain fashion brands in schools because they allegedly referred to the racist sympathies of their wearers. This discussion took place in the heated political climate that had arisen in the aftermath of the politically motivated murder of Dutch populist politician Pim Fortuyn. Under pressure from the Ministry of Education, school administrations struggled with brands such as Lonsdale and Dr. Martens, which were associated with radical-right youth cultures such as skinheads and parts of the gabber and hardcore culture whose members were attracted to right-wing extremism. Many school administrations in the Netherlands felt that banning clothing items because of political connotations contravened freedom of speech and expression.⁵⁰

Revival of the revival

The above developments also clearly come to the fore when looking at how Dr. Martens has become popular during recent times in the Netherlands, where, since the end of the 2000s, it has become part of several revivals of earlier fashion trends.⁵¹ To a certain extent, the phenomenon of the revival characterized the 1990s in Western Europe, but the decade would also become subject to a revival itself. In a Dutch news article about fashion from the 2000s, Dr. Martens boots were explicitly mentioned as a reference to the grunge era, while during the grunge era they could, for example, signify the earlier subculture of punk.⁵² When punk was noted by trendwatchers as the subject of a revival in

2008, Dr. Martens were again mentioned as signifying punk in the sense that, from the context of the revival, the boots were described as characteristic of punk.⁵³ The interesting dynamics of what becomes a revival of a revival came to the fore when, in 2012, grunge in turn was again signaled as a revival and subsequently Dr. Martens once again signified the era of the early 1990s.⁵⁴

This constant coming and going of fashion revivals perhaps exemplifies the cultural context against which the subcultural past became a grab-bag of tropes from which Dr. Martens could draw in its campaigns. However, despite the revivals of subcultural styles, and despite the fact that Dr. Martens became part of the mainstream fashion circuit and media, for many young people the brand has retained some of its image as an anti-fashion and anti-establishment symbol, and wearing its boots can still be regarded as a statement. This is exactly what Dr. Martens wants to highlight in its campaigns.⁵⁵

This becomes clear in several recent campaigns. For instance, in a Dr. Martens advertisement in which we see a mechanic working in a garage on a classic car while wearing Dr. Martens [Fig. 3]. The mechanic has a sturdy physique, and besides Dr. Martens wears jeans and a simple shirt. The garage context can be interpreted as a reference to workmanship, while the car can be seen as a preference for classic products. The boots are presented as both tough and comfortable – hence perfect for a physically demanding job. In short, Dr. Martens are presented here as a typical workman's boot, stripped of the connection with skinheads and violence. Rather, we see a firm but friendly guy reminiscent of the Bruce Springsteen type of working-class hero from the 1985 videoclip for his "I'm On Fire."⁵⁶ In that sense, the advertisement also presents us with a rather nostalgic image of the post-war working class.

In a revival, a reference is primarily a referral to an earlier style and a particular attitude associated with it. That is what these kinds of advertisements show. In other Dr. Martens ads, certain characteristics of earlier subcultures, such as rebelliousness and social awareness, are connected with the boots, now however in the context of present-day activism. This comes to the fore, for instance, in the slogan and hashtag #standforsomething, which Dr. Martens has used in its campaigns since 2014 [Fig. 4]. The hashtag is used on the website and in blog posts on topics such as the special tours in which Dr. Martens – in line with the tradition of the boots in youth culture – deliberately connects music, style, and awareness with its brand.⁵⁷ The commercial use of the connection between social engagement and subculture is further expressed in visual advertisements that express concern for individuality, for being different, and by the fact Dr. Martens explicitly sympathizes with LGBTQ+ rights.⁵⁸

Therefore, it can be argued that, on the one hand, the brand targets people who already regard themselves as socially concerned, free individuals and who want to express that, but on the other, these campaigns also seem to suggest that anyone who wears Dr. Martens can endow themselves with the image of a free individual and socially concerned thinker. Herein lies the essential difference to the appropriation of Dr. Martens by the skinheads. At the time, Dr. Martens were a brand of workmen's boots which did not explicitly target young people, but, as a solid and durable work boot – both tough and comfortable – allowed

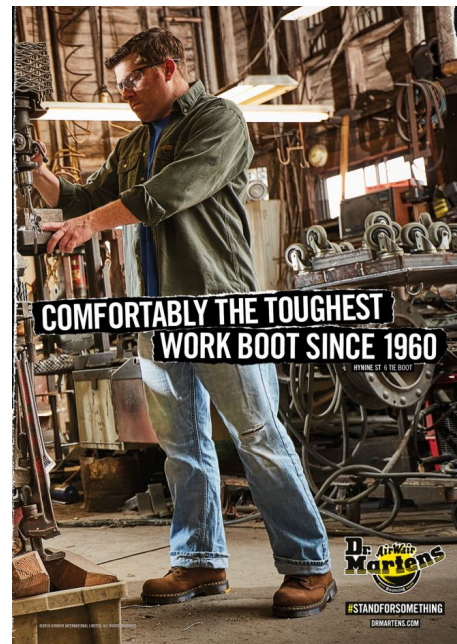


Figure 3: Dr. Martens, Workwear campaign. No changes made.
Source

some young people within English subcultures to express their explicit connection to the working class. Since Dr. Martens deliberately began to target young people from the 1970s onward, it is the brand itself that consciously and explicitly connects Dr. Martens to the characterizations of subcultures. Yet, instead of referring to the social class of the person wearing Dr. Martens, the boots now started to refer to that person's class indirectly, through reference to the boots as a style icon in the first place. This allows Dr. Martens to be appropriated by young people regardless of their social class; it also allows the boots to become mainstream while still retaining some of their rebellious image, as can be seen in recent campaigns.

This shift can be further clarified using Igor Kopytoff's notion of the "cultural biography of things." Dr. Martens are specific things – they are boots to walk in, and therefore they obviously have use value. Being things with use value, they can be exchanged for money, and hence they are commodities.⁵⁹

This also allows for the argument that the references connected to Dr. Martens as a commodity, such as working-classness, individuality, skinhead, punk, or LGBTQ+, which stand for something, can commoditize too. Regardless of the buyer's social position, taste preferences, sex, or gender, the reference to working-classness or to a specific subculture or attitude becomes exchangeable. It can even be argued that such references, aside from having an intrinsic value, now also have a use value as a commodity to the extent that, through acquiring Dr. Martens, a person can also literally buy an image that they



Figure 4: ODD London, #standforsomething campaign, 2014. Source

can use in social situations. The advertisements respond to that by suggesting that by buying Dr. Martens you are also acquiring a sense of working-classness, individuality, rebelliousness, or "standing for something." But really belonging to the working-class, however, comes down to being confined to or occupying a specific socio-economic and cultural position determined by one's education, work, and geography – in other words, by how many years you spent at school, the job you do, and where you live.⁶⁰

The important and meaningful initial reference to working-classness for the skinheads became obscured when Dr. Martens re-presented its boot as an intrinsic part of the subcultural styles of the past, which now breathes a kind of coolness and autonomy. Dr. Martens subsequently promoted the boot as a symbol of and a reference to subcultural styles, but rather for the sake of style and appearance, as opposed to what a style initially signified – namely a certain socio-economic, cultural, and political position of a group of young people. That is unless, of course, working-classness itself becomes a cultural trope among others that can be made trendy and marketable in a similar way to the advert discussed above. The dedicated follower of fashion can now endow him- or herself with working-classness without having to face the adverse consequences of actually belonging to that class.⁶¹ Against the background of the revivals of subcultural styles to which Dr. Martens has responded in its campaigns of recent decades, a shift can thus be recognized in which the value of commodities people acquire lies not so much in their references to actual situations, conditions, ideas, or identities, but to these references as cultural tropes. With this also comes something that could be regarded as the liberation of Dr. Martens from being confined to specific subcultures. As a commodity, Dr. Martens are, in principle, for sale to anyone who sees enough use value in them, and the same holds for the

references to attributes such as individuality and rebelliousness, which today are also no longer confined to youth culture and its subcultures.⁶²

From "anything goes," back to class

Taking this shift into account, it has become possible to shed light on where the use value of the cultural trope as a commodity lies. Whether Dr. Martens are worn as an explicit reference to social class or as a fashion item, as a reference to a previous reference, to a style, or a taste preference, the significance of the boots can be analyzed from Sarah Thornton's framework of subcultural capital and taste. The purchase of the boots, then, is a matter of having access to economic capital, but understanding the subtle codes by means of which the brand and the boots as a designed style object can refer to lifestyle, taste, and even today political and social attitudes is a matter of subcultural capital. The latter can thus be acquired by purchasing a commodity such as Dr. Martens.

This relationship between subcultural capital and taste can be recognized in how young people today express themselves culturally about brands and clothing on social media, for example in a song from 2018 by a young artist named Myylo, titled "Doc Martens." Here, the boots signify the clothing of what appears to be a young gay guy in love, apparently without explicit reference to subcultural styles.⁶³ In another song, from 2020, there *is* still a reference to subculture. In "Doc Martens" by 1nonly, the boot is portrayed as a precious item for a goth girl, who is addressed by the rapper, bragging about his Maison Margiela shoes and Gucci bag.⁶⁴ Despite the subcultural reference to goth, Dr. Martens are mainly presented as a brand among other brands. This shows that, in a consumer culture, the name of the brand itself can be more significant than the actual product, let alone what that product might signify. As such, brand names have also commoditized and acquired their own use values, and can be

regarded as cultural or subcultural capital, which the mentioning of brands in the 1nonly track illustrates.

The self-referentiality of brands does not mean that references to content have become completely meaningless. Brands can still refer to social positions in the sense that they can be associated with a person's position in society or within peer groups, as the 1nonly lyrics also show, and as such they can still refer to a certain style, in this case goth, that informs peers about a person's position with regard to taste preferences but also attitudes.⁶⁵ But unlike in the 1970s, the diversity of young people who today wear Dr. Martens shows that style seems to be much less an instrument for specific groups (such as the skinheads) to manifest themselves visually as explicitly distinctive in terms of social class and in opposition to cultural hegemony. This, of course, does not mean that style or aspects of a style such as a brand like Dr. Martens can no longer function as an emancipatory vehicle with regard to aspects other than class. Those who closely observed street fashion in the late 2010s might have noticed that Dr. Martens were mainly worn by girls and young women.⁶⁶ The appropriation of Dr. Martens by girls began during the punk period.⁶⁷ In the course of the 1980s, more female rock singers would adopt the boots, causing a rise in demand for them among young women, for whom the boot would also become a symbol of empowerment.⁶⁸ Influential examples range from PJ Harvey and 4 Non Blondes in the 1990s, to more recent major stars such as Lady Gaga and Miley Cyrus, who wore Dr. Martens in the controversial videoclip for her song "Wrecking Ball" in 2013.⁶⁹

It has therefore not become impossible or meaningless – but certainly more difficult – to "discern the hidden messages inscribed in the glossy surfaces of style," as Dick Hebdige once put it.⁷⁰ As I have argued, such messages themselves have become more complex, subtle, and layered. By 2020, Dr. Martens were a fashion item, and they were worn by young people who

probably wore them simply because they were fashionable, but they were also worn by young people for whom the boot possibly still signifies a distinctive style such as goth, for instance, and perhaps even worn by some for whom they are comfortable footwear that helps you through the working day in a physically demanding job.

At the same time, in the form of cultural tropes, Dr. Martens can refer to the subcultural past that the parents of these younger generations might have been part of.⁷¹ This points to another crucial difference between the present day and the late 1970s. The subcultures that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s resulted partly from dissatisfaction with the cultural hegemony that was maintained by older generations. This generational conflict was fought on the battlegrounds of taste, music, and morals, but is long past.⁷² This does not mean that there are no generational conflicts today, but these rage on different battlefields, no longer on that of style.⁷³

The appraisal of Dr. Martens illustrates this. The brand has successfully striven to become a brand for everyone, but also wants to produce boots through which the buyer can express their individual identity. For this reason, the range has expanded significantly over recent decades, resulting in Dr. Martens in different models, sizes, colors, and patterns. But those who really want to distinguish themselves need to have deep pockets. Since the late 1980s, Dr. Martens has explored a new market, of specially designed boots which sell to customers worldwide for up to \$1,200.⁷⁴ Paradoxically, this arises from the success of Dr. Martens as a commodity, which can be illustrated by quoting Kopytoff, who argues that:

[...] as one makes them [commodities, in this case Dr. Martens] more singular and worthy of being collected, one makes them valuable; and if they are valuable, they acquire a price and become a commodity and their singularity is to that extent

undermined. This interpenetration within the same object of commodity principles and singularization principles is played upon by firms specializing in manufacturing what might be called "future collectibles" [...]⁷⁵

Less expensive but still exclusive are the special editions in which the connection between subcultures and creativity mainly emphasizes the latter. In editions featuring designs by Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, the reference to both art (graffiti) and subculture (hip-hop) is obviously present, but over the years Dr. Martens would also increasingly work with more established fashion designers such as Jean-Paul Gaultier, Raf Simons, and Yohji Yamamoto.⁷⁶ There are, of course, still socio-economic realities lurking behind the seemingly superficial successive re-appropriations of styles and tropes. By purchasing Dr. Martens, one can also acquire cultural and subcultural capital, but, at the end of the day, every product has a price tag. Perhaps even to a larger extent than styles, price tags signify such realities. For many people, €160 for a pair of boots is still a lot of money. Those who are "lucky" enough to have more economic capital can also more easily afford to acquire the cultural and subcultural capital with which to distinguish themselves as being "classy" by appropriating the commodities that were once appropriated within subcultures to signify the supposed reality of the social class of the less fortunate.

Conclusion

I have tried to make clear that the history of Dr. Martens within subcultures can be regarded as an example of an interesting interplay between two meanings of "class" – in the sense of class as a certain socio-economic position and class as a quality, a means to distinguish oneself; this history at the same time exemplifies the development of subcultural styles in past decades. This became clear in the discussion of the English

skinheads, for whom Dr. Martens emphasized working-classness, and as part of the skinhead style also made it possible to distinguish themselves from other subcultures. Skinheads used Dr. Martens to communicate their (sub-)cultural capital, which signified both meanings of "class."

However, not all English subcultures that appropriated the boots were necessarily working class, but the close connection between Dr. Martens and youth subcultures endowed the boots with an image of rebelliousness and individuality that was gratefully embraced by the company and incorporated into its marketing strategy when the values of subcultural resistance were adopted as cultural tropes within mainstream culture. Within this context, working-classness became such a trope.

References to subcultures no longer seem to be references to domains from which to resist cultural hegemony, but rather confirm that subcultures became part of that hegemony. The appropriation of commodities in order to incorporate them into a style with which to implicitly question the existing hegemony has in itself been undermined, since commercial brands have appropriated the very process of appropriation and the subversive re-use of commodities. Cultural tropes such as "rebelliousness" or "individuality" have become part of a marketing strategy used to sell what might be regarded as an image of those characterizations. Subversiveness is therefore no longer exclusively a characteristic of subcultures, but to an extent has begun to characterize today's mainstream popular culture. This is the result partly of the changed dynamics in youth culture since the mid-1980s, in which young people are increasingly exposed to commercialization, technological change, and the rapidity with which cultural tropes circulate in the mass media. The styles young people had invented were susceptible to commercialization and became part of mainstream culture, within which they were increasingly revived.

Style, then, is perhaps to a far lesser extent a successful means of expressing a person's socio-economic position, let alone challenging the existing cultural hegemony. However, it can also be concluded that style and its attributes can still be significant with regard to other social realities which, for instance, relate to aspects of gender and sexuality in which socio-economic origin seems to play a lesser role but which relate to how personal identities are constructed. Further research from a cultural perspective can therefore shed light on the extent to which recent fashion histories, such as that of Dr. Martens, exemplify how in recent decades the framing of socio-economic, political, and cultural concerns has shifted from the context of class to that of identity.

- 1 In this article I limit myself to a Western European context (the UK and the Netherlands in particular) unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 Dr. Martens, "Kids Boots, Shoe and Sandals," https://www.drmartens.com/eu/en_eu/kids/c/03000000 (accessed June 27, 2021).
- 3 Vincent Kroft, "Beursgang Dr. Martens levert 1,3 miljard pond op," *ANP*, January 29, 2021; Cath Davies, "Smells like teen spirit: Channelling subcultural traditions in contemporary Dr Martens branding," *Journal of Consumer Culture* vol. 16, no. 1 (2016), 192–208: 194–199.
- 4 My definitions of youth culture and subculture are based on Raymond Williams, who distinguishes four ways in which the broader concept of culture is used. Culture can be defined as "the general process of intellectual and artistic creativity," as "the works and practices of intellectual and artistic creativity," but also as "a particular way of life: of a people, of a group, in a period." Raymond Williams quoted in: Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London–New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 11; See further: Raymond Williams, "The analysis of culture," in: idem, *The Long Revolution* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 41–42. But most importantly for the context of this article, Williams also defines culture as "a signifying system through which a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored." Raymond Williams quoted in: Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 11. See also: Raymond Williams, *Culture* (Glasgow: Fontana Paperbacks, 1981), 82. Youth culture can thus be defined as the particular way of life of young

people, which implies a signifying system through which their social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored – for instance through clothes, music, language, etc. I define subculture as any kind of way of life and signifying system of a "distinguishable smaller group" within general culture, who appropriate in new ways those objects used to communicate culture, such as music and clothes, and endow them with new meaning in order to, consciously or unconsciously, criticize, question, or subvert general culture.

- 5 In this article I define style with regard to subculture as the intentional form of appearance and/or manner by means of which a specific group of people manifest themselves through clothes, behavior, language, music, visual expression, etc., as coherent, distinguishable, and based more or less on underlying principles. When aspects of style, for instance in the form of a specific way of wearing particular clothes, become endowed with meaning, style becomes the signifier within culture defined as a signifying system (see footnote 3). See: Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London–New York, NY: Routledge, 1988), 113–127; "style, n.," OED Online, Oxford University Press, June 2021.
- 6 "trope, n.," OED Online, Oxford University Press, June 2021; "meme, n.," OED Online, Oxford University Press, June 2021.
- 7 "class, n. and adj.," OED Online, Oxford University Press, December 2020. It should be noted that class as a ranking category to some extent implies class as a quality, in the sense that belonging to the working class and thus to working-class culture has traditionally also been valued as being lower in quality. This is perhaps reminiscent of Max Weber's distinction between "class" and "status." According to Weber, class refers to all people who find themselves in the same "class situation." The latter can be understood as the extent to which someone has the means to acquire certain goods, to occupy a social position, and from that derive a certain satisfaction. This depends on the extent to which one is able to make one's own competences and skills productive within a given economic system. The class situation thus depends on the extent to which education and skills provide the financial means to consume goods. As such, class mainly refers to someone's economic position, while status has more to do with how one's intangible competences, such as one's lifestyle or knowledge level, are valued in society. Although the two can be distinguished, in practice they are often closely intertwined. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*, translated and edited by Guenther Roth, Claus Wittich et al. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 302–306.

- 8 Gerbert Kraaykamp, Koen van Eijck, and Wout Ultee, "Status, class and culture in the Netherlands," in: *Social Status and Cultural Consumption*, ed. Tak Wing Chan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 173.
- 9 When searching for Dr. Martens on JSTOR, articles on broader topics appear in which Dr. Martens are discussed by implication, for instance in articles on female subjectivities in Hong Kong, copyright issues in Jordan, fashion and gender in the 1970s, and even in an article on Scottish unionism. But these articles do not aim to analyze Dr. Martens boots as a specific significant cultural object in their own right. Search entry: "Dr. Martens," JSTOR, June 2021, <https://bit.ly/3l2AbyM> (accessed June 29, 2021).
- 10 Davies, "Smells like teen spirit," 192–208.
- 11 Martin Roach, *Dr. Martens: A History of Rebellious Self-Expression* (Wollaston: AirWair Limited, 2015); Martin Roach, *Dr. Martens: The Story of an Icon* (London: Chrysalis Books, 2003); "Home." Dr. Martens, June 2021, https://www.drmartens.com/uk/en_gb/ (accessed June 27, 2021); "Home," Dr. Martens Blog, June 2021, <https://blog.drmartens.com> (accessed June 27, 2021).
- 12 The term refers to the group of scholars from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, a research institute at the University of Birmingham between 1964 and 2002.
- 13 Ken Gelder, *Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practice* (London–New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 90; John Clarke, "Style," in: *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, eds. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (London: Hutchinson in association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1976), 177–179. "Bricolage" refers to the creative process of designing without a predetermined plan; a form of designing based on using whatever kind of source one can find to make whatever kind of possible combination – almost like a kind of trial-and-error practice of design, where the best results stem from serendipity. See: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1966), 18–21.
- 14 Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 25; Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in: *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. G. Richardson (New York, NY: Greenwood Press, 1986), 243–248. Bourdieu explained how people distinguish themselves through cultural capital. Cultural hierarchies can be recognized in society, and relate to the social class one belongs to. Thornton argues that, in this sense, taste preferences can be seen as an indicator of someone's class. She explains that in England, for instance, speaking with an accent was such an indicator, as, for a long

- time, was whether or not someone had a university degree. She further explains that cultural capital often corresponds to economic capital but not by definition. Those with more economic capital, for instance, have easier access to cultural capital through being able to buy expensive opera tickets, designer clothes, or private education, etc. At the same time, artists have a lot of cultural capital in the sense of knowledge and taste but often not a lot of economic capital. Thornton, *Club Cultures*, 27–30.
- 15 Ibid., 15, 26–30. Within subcultures or "cultures of taste," such taste preferences are not only indicators of class but also a means to subvert it. The 1960s mods were mainly working class, but deliberately appropriated style elements from the middle class in order to endow themselves with class on the one hand and subvert traditional class hierarchies on the other (see: Phil Cohen, "Subcultural conflict and working-class community," in: *The Subcultures Reader*, eds. Ken Golder and Sarah Thornton [London–New York, NY: Routledge, 1997], 95). Hebdige also argued that, for the mods, this appropriation expressed the belief that even though, as a working-class youth, one could not really move up the social ladder, this could at least be achieved on the level of style. See: Hebdige, *Subculture*, 55.
 - 16 Thornton, *Club Cultures*, 154–164; Christine Elizabeth Griffin, "The trouble with class: Researching youth, class and culture beyond the 'Birmingham School'," *Journal of Youth Studies* vol. 14, no. 3 (2011), 249–250. Another objection to the Birmingham School was methodological, concerning criticism of the fact that their study on subcultures relied heavily on theory which was seldom tested against the actual experiences of young people.
 - 17 Roach, *A History of Rebellious Self-Expression*, 6–19.
 - 18 Hebdige, *Subculture*, 55. See also: Mike Brake. "The skinheads: An English working class subculture." *Youth & Society* vol. 6, no. 2 (1974), 188. Skinheads were the first subculture to wear Dr. Martens on a larger scale. Pete Townshend from The Who was the first rock star to wear Dr. Martens. See: Roach, *A History of Rebellious Self-Expression*, 34.
 - 19 Clarke, cited in Hebdige, *Subculture*, 56. Clarke argues that because the black culture of the West Indians in Britain was excluded from social mobility, as a result of what today would be regarded as institutional racism, it was also shielded from so-called "contamination" by the dominant culture, and could therefore remain authentic. As such, its style became a model for white youths in particular, who, according to Clarke, were alienated from their "parent culture" as a result of post-war ideologies on the supposed possibility of social mobility. The tension between the daily reality of living in a working-class neighborhood, which people from the 1950s onward shared with

migrants, and the imagined past of the all-white working-class neighborhood, would have been resolved in the sense that, in dialogue with one another at least in terms of style, the skinheads and the young West Indians recognized and accepted each other in their otherness.

- 20 Clarke and Cohen cited in Hebdige, *Subculture*, 58; John Clarke, "The Skinheads and the Magical Recovery of Community," in: *Resistance Through Rituals*, op. cit., 100–102.
- 21 Hebdige, *Subculture*, 58–59.
- 22 In the 1970s, many skinheads aligned themselves with the National Front, an extreme right-wing party which, in the turmoil of social tensions resulting from economic decline, manifested itself more publicly toward the end of the decade. Not all skinheads supported the far right – many referred to themselves as "red skins" or "S.H.A.R.P." (Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice) and embraced a socialist-inspired working-class image. See: Kevin Borgeson and Robin Maria Valeri, *Skinhead History, Identity, and Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 7–8.
- 23 Timothy S. Brown, "Subcultures, pop music and politics: Skinheads and 'Nazi Rock' in England and Germany," *Journal of Social History* vol. 38, no. 1 (2004), 158–159.
- 24 John Pollard, "Skinhead culture: the ideologies, mythologies, religions and conspiracy theories of racist skinheads," *Patterns of Prejudice* vol. 50, no. 4–5 (2016), 399.
- 25 Brown, "Subcultures, pop music and politics," 166–167. Brown refers to the song lyrics of the German band Endstufe to show how Dr. Martens are identified as skinhead and, in this song, even as racist and Aryan. Brown quoting Endstufe: "Dr. Martens, short hair, that's Aryan, no doubt about it! Down with mixed blood, because that doesn't do the fatherland any good!" (trans.: Brown) ["*Dr. Martens, kurze Haare, das ist arisch, keine Frage! Nieder mit dem Misch-Masch-Blut, denn das tut dem Vaterland nicht gut!*"]. Skinheads in the 21st century still refer to Dr. Martens as the boot exclusively belonging to their style, as becomes clear from the lyrics of the song "Dr Martens" by the German band Bombecks from 2005: "When I look in my shoe cupboard, I think: this is where an army lives. I wear these shoes all my life, yes, I feel special affinity for them. And if they are a bit uncomfortable, you can wear them with pride, you can see that" (trans.: author) ["*Wenn ich hier in meinen Schuhschrank seh', denke ich hier, wohnt eine Armee. Diese Schuhe trage ich ein Leben lang, ja zu ihnen hab ich einen besonderen Hang. Und sind sie auch mal etwas unbequem, man trägt sie mit Stolz, das kann man sehen (...)*"]. See: "Bombecks – Auge um Auge," Oi! The Lyrics, <https://bit.ly/3kWCfsd> (accessed December 3, 2020).

- 26 Davies, "Smells like teen spirit," 193.
- 27 Brown, "Subcultures, pop music and politics," 170.
- 28 Roach, *A History of Rebellious Self-Expression*, 29.
- 29 Pollard, "Skinhead culture," 399, 406.
- 30 Hebdige emphasized the importance of analyzing and understanding how such visual codes worked. "Our task becomes, [...] to discern the hidden messages inscribed in code on the glossy surfaces of style, to trace them as 'maps of meaning' which obscurely represent the very contradictions they are designed to resolve or conceal." Hebdige, *Subculture*, 18.
- 31 See: "Oil," *The Young Ones*, episode 2, featuring Alexei Sayle singing "Dr. Martens Boots," produced by Paul Jackson, BBC, 1982.
- 32 Although the participation of lower socio-economic groups in higher education in Britain increased, the class ratio in higher education was still in favor of the higher socio-economic groups in terms of absolute incremental growth. See: Alistair Ross, "Access to higher education: Inclusion for the masses?," in: *Higher Education and Social Class: Issues of Exclusion and Inclusion*, eds. Louise Archer, Merryn Hutchings, and Alistair Ross (London–New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 52.
- 33 Thornton, *Club Cultures*, 28, 143.
- 34 Roy Shuker, *Understanding Popular Music Culture* (London–New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), 156–159.
- 35 Griffin, "The trouble with class," 249; Thornton, *Club Cultures*, 28.
- 36 Ivo Weyel, "Dik doen op trendy schoenen," *Het Parool*, December 29, 1993, 16.
- 37 Roger Tredre, "Tartan up the clan McMarten: Many clothes manufacturers also weave extravagant promotional fictions. Roger Tredre puts the boot into a few myths," *The Independent*, August 27, 1993. <https://www.independent.co.uk/money/tartan-up-the-clan-mcmarten-many-clothes-manufacturers-also-weave-extravagant-promotional-fictions-roger-tredre-puts-the-boot-into-a-few-myths-1463915.html>.

- 38 Weyel, "Dik doen op trendy schoenen," 16. Moreover, Dr. Martens also started to target children with its junior boots, making the brand accessible and acceptable for an increasingly large group of people. See: Jetty Ferwerda, "Voorbeelden uit de collectie Junior Docs: Docs voor kinderen." *De Gelderlander*, March 10, 1995, 1.
- 39 Ted Polhemus, *Style Surfing: What to Wear in the 3rd Millennium* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996), 7–17.
- 40 Eduardo Navas, *Remix Theory: The Aesthetics of Sampling* (Vienna: Springer Verlag, 2012), 6. Grunge and the quintessentially Dutch gabber style could perhaps be regarded as belonging to the last distinctive subcultures of the 20th century.
- 41 Polhemus, *Style Surfing*, 7–17. Considering the subtitle of his book, Polhemus foresaw that no longer being bound to a single style would become the norm in the youth fashion of the 21st century. A similar picture emerges from a study of the fashion experience of a group of French girls from 2011. In this, the girls claim that rather than following fashion they dress according to mood. One week someone could dress very neatly; the other, more casually or tougher. See: Gilles Marion and Agnes Nairn, "'We make the shoes, you make the story': Teenage girls' experiences of fashion: Bricolage, tactics and narrative identity," *Consumption, Markets and Culture* vol. 14, no. 1 (2011), 46.
- 42 Ted Polhemus, *Street Style: From Sidewalk to Catwalk* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1994).
- 43 "Exhibiting fashion: The Victoria and Albert Museum," Google Arts and Culture, <https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/exhibiting-fashion/5wKyuCOYoCgBIA> (accessed February 22, 2021).
- 44 "Vivienne Westwood," The Victoria and Albert Museum, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/vivienne-westwood> (accessed February 22, 2021).
- 45 "Search." Query is Dr. Martens, The Victoria and Albert Museum, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/search/?q=dr%20martens> (accessed February 22, 2021). The museum currently holds twenty-one pairs of Dr. Martens boots in its collection.
- 46 Griffin, "The trouble with class," 249.
- 47 Ibid.; Thornton, *Club Cultures*, 79; Brian Wilson, *Fight, Flight, or Chill: Subcultures, Youth, and Rave into the Twenty-First Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 138.

- 48 Rupa Huq, *Beyond Subculture: Pop, Youth and Identity in a Postcolonial World* (London–New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 29–33.
- 49 Davies, "Smells like teen spirit," 193, 198.
- 50 See: Marsha Correlje, "Hoofddoek," *De Dordtenaar*, June 21, 2003, 21; Mark Duursma, "De jacht op codes: Het problematische verbod op Lonsdale en andere 'extreem rechtse' merken," *NRC Handelsblad*, September 27, 2003, 29. The commercialization of Dr. Martens would eventually have an effect on its connection with the skinhead subculture, which was already being felt in the 1990s. Some skinheads would still recognize the significance of brands like Dr. Martens, but would at the same time claim that they saw little sense in them. See: Vendula Prokúpková, "The role of fanzines in the (re)production of subcultural capital: The authenticity, taste and performance of 'coolness' in the zines of the subculture of Czech white power skinheads in the 1990s," *Forum Historiae* vol. 14, no. 1 (2020), 113. In recent years in Germany, a tendency has emerged among right-wing youths to dress as acceptably as possible, thus increasingly rejecting the recognizable dress codes associated with right-wing extremism in favor of the so-called "hipster" look. See: Annemart van Rhee, "Extreemrechts zet 'vriendelijk' gezicht op," *Dagblad van het Noorden*, July 1, 2014, 10.
- 51 In the Netherlands, the first Dr. Martens flagship store opened in Amsterdam in 2014. By 2017, the sales volume in the Netherlands had increased by twenty-five per cent and a further six flagship stores had opened. See: RetailNews.nl, "Dr. Martens blinkt uit op Nederlandse markt," *Retailnews.nl*, October 25, 2017, <https://retailtrends.nl/news/50473/dr-martens-blinkt-uit-op-nederlandse-markt>.
- 52 Hester Carvalho, "Dr. Martens kunnen weer uit de kast: Stijlicoon Ladyhawke," *NRC Next*, November 12, 2008, 30.
- 53 Metro, "Jongerentrend 09: Twitteren en punk," *Metro*, December 18, 2008, 5.
- 54 Loes Reijmer, "De jaren 501 smaak: Trend de jaren negentig zijn terug," *De Volkskrant*, April 12, 2012, 14. Fashion journalist Stefanie Bottelier noticed that within this flux of revivals, even a style period which is relatively young, such as the bling-bling style from the early 2000s, could already be subject to a revival. See: Stefanie Bottelier, "Komt altijd terug, verveelt nooit," *De Volkskrant*, March 10, 2018, 40–42.
- 55 Ingrid van der Chijs, "Niet met de massa mee," *Elsevier Weekblad*, September 4, 2010, 81.

- 56 John Sayles, director, Bruce Springsteen, composer/performer, "I'm On Fire," video recorded March 1985, <https://youtu.be/lrpXArn3hII>.
- 57 Dr. Martens Blog, "Stand-for-something," <https://blog.drmartens.com/tag/stand-for-something/> (accessed June 27, 2021).
- 58 Dr. Martens Blog, "How Dr. Martens celebrates pride," <https://blog.drmartens.com/dr-martens-pride-is/> (accessed June 27, 2021).
- 59 According to Kopytoff: "A commodity is a thing that has use value and that can be exchanged in a discrete transaction for a counterpart, the very fact of exchange indicating that the counterpart has, in the immediate context, an equivalent value. The counterpart is by the same token also a commodity at the time of exchange. The exchange can be direct or it can be achieved indirectly by way of money, one of whose functions is as a means of exchange. Hence, anything that can be bought for money is at that point a commodity, [...]." Igor Kopytoff, "The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process," in: *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 68–69. The use value and exchangeability of things are not predefined and fixed, but come into being within both a socio-cultural context and the personal cognitive context of the individual possessing the item. According to Kopytoff, the commoditization of things runs along two paths: "(a) with respect to each thing, by making it exchangeable for more and more other things, and (b) with respect to the systems as a whole, by making more and more different things more widely exchangeable." Ibid., 72–73. The immediate context or the point of exchange indicates a situation that is in principle applicable to any kind of thing. Arjun Appadurai defines this commodity situation as follows: "I propose that *the commodity situation in the social life of any 'thing' be defined as the situation in which its exchangeability (past, present, or future) for some other thing is its socially relevant feature.*" Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: commodities and the politics of value," in: *The Social Life of Things*, op. cit., 6, 13.
- 60 "class, n. and adj.," OED Online, Oxford University Press, December 2020; Weber, *Economy and Society*, 302–306.
- 61 See for instance: Machteld Leistra, "De arbeider als modetrend," *Rotterdams Dagblad*, September 21, 2002, 602; Alie Veenhuizen, "De werkman als trend," *Leeuwarder Courant*, September 10, 2002.

- 62 This also shows how the perspectives, values, and contexts connected to things change over time and can mean something slightly different to people in different periods. It is from this context that Kopytoff discusses the cultural biography of things. Kopytoff, "The cultural biography of things," 79.
- 63 "Doc Martins and cotton Ts / Blessed to death with his daddy's genes / Skinny body by creatine / I think I'll make him fall in love with me." From "Doc Martens" by Myylo. See: Genius, "Myylo Doc Martens," <https://genius.com/Myylo-doc-martens-lyrics> (accessed December 3, 2020).
- 64 Genius, "1nonly Doc Martens," <https://genius.com/1nonly-doc-martens-lyrics> (accessed December 3, 2020).
- 65 In the 1990s, sportswear brand Australian, for instance, became iconic for the style of Dutch gabber culture – a subculture that was also mainly popular amongst young people from the working class with relatively low education and low social status. gabber was initially known as "hardcore," and started as a genre within electronic dance music characterized by fast beats, loud samples, and minimal variation in melody and rhythm. See: Stijn Verhagen et al., "Fast on 200 beats per minute: The youth culture of gabbers in the Netherlands," *Youth & Society* vol. 32, no. 2 (2000), 150.
- 66 Jesse Brouns, "Een pak braver," *Knack Magazine*, March 4, 2020, 42.
- 67 Roach, *A History of Rebellious Self-Expression*, 57. Martin Roach identifies Viv Albertine of British punk group The Slits as one of the early female punks wearing Dr. Martens and as the first to combine Dr. Martens with a dress.
- 68 Ibid., 120–124.
- 69 Terry Richardson, director, Miley Cyrus, performer, "Wrecking Ball," 2013, <https://youtu.be/My2FRPA3Gf8>.
- 70 Hebdige, *Subculture*, 18.
- 71 Andy Bennett and Paul Hodkinson, "Introduction," in: *Ageing and Youth Cultures: Music, Style and Identity*, eds. Andy Bennett and Paul Hodkinson (London–New York, NY: Berg, 2012), 1–6.
- 72 Huq, *Beyond Subculture*, 157.

- 73 Julia M. Puaschunder, "Introduction," in: *Intergenerational Responsibility in the 21st Century*, ed. Julia M. Puaschunder (Malaga–Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2019), xv–xx.
- 74 Metro, "De schoen waar de hele wereld op loopt," *Metro*, May 28, 2015, 14.
- 75 Kopytoff, "The cultural biography of things," 81.
- 76 Noteworthy is a special edition from 2014 that refers explicitly to art history and features a print of fragments from Hieronymus Bosch's famous painting *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. This can be regarded as lucrative business since Bosch's images are copyright-free and the boots retailed for \$140 per pair. See: Anouk Vleugels, "media – heel hip, leggings van Bosch: met Bosch kan je best wat verdienen," *NRC. Next*, December 24, 2014, 13.

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