

Deadstock: Sneakers and the Politics of Material Culture

AMST 590

3 credit hours

Instructor: Aaron Dial, PhD.

Location:

Contact: ajdial@purdue.edu

Office Hours: By Appointment

Required Texts: All Readings will be Provided.

Course Description

- The history of sneakers is long and nebulous, shifting from being objects upholding and allowing for the performance of sports and fitness to the fickle trends of fashion and style. This course explores how sneakers exist as cultural talismans fomenting new understandings of modern material culture and the vulnerability and reliability of certain bodies therewithin. Over the course of a semester, students will interrogate the complicated and always political of sneakers as a thing which simultaneously heralds capitalism's demand for a specific brand of global pluralism while also representing more insular and regional identity formations.

Assignments

- 3 +1 Reading Assignment
 - For each week of required readings, students will be tasked with bringing **3 questions** about the readings (there are no restrictions to these questions) and **1 artifact** (website, podcast, article, shoe – the possibilities are almost endless) they have found that is related to the week's readings.
 - There are due during class each week we have readings → Please pay attention to the reading schedule because some weeks we will not have readings.
- Classroom Lab Activities
 - During weeks marked on the syllabus activity, the class will shift from lecture-based class to a lab/activity based class. In these sessions, students are required to come to class. Because of their nature, there is no way to make these classes up. Also, due to their nature, they are graded on a completion basis. If you do the activity, you get full credit; if you don't, then no credit.
- Cultural History Project
 - Students will be responsible for researching a specific silhouette or sneaker technology or institution (not a company) and developing a cultural history presentation on that thing. More details to come.
- Sneaker Panel Exhibit
 - This semester the HAT Lab and this class is putting together a sneaker panel featuring a variety of Sneaker Industry professionals. For this panel, and in partnership with the instructor, the students will develop and execute an exhibit that

will be on display of the panel that centers some aspect of sneakers and how they connect with Purdue University. More details to come.

Attendance

- This course only has two students currently enrolled, which is fine. However, that makes course absences a huge disruption. Literally, 50% of the course would be gone if just one of you were absent. Because of our peculiar classroom situation, we must have a system to incentivize your attendance while also being fair to the fact that you both have lives beyond this course. That said, here is what I have decided. **If you come to every course, you will be guaranteed at least the grade of “B” in the course.** Now, obviously, as I have already implied, things happen – sickness, doctor’s appointments, scheduling conflicts, weather, car or transportation issues, work; the list is almost endless. **Because of this, I am allowing two absences, no question asked.** Though, due to our class size, if one of you miss, I will cancel class for all of us – it doesn’t make sense to have class if 50% of the class is missing. **Here is the important bit about the attendance policy: to take advantage of the two absences, you MUST notify me at least 24 hours in advance (at or before Sunday at 2:30pm).** This is so I can notify your classmate and plan for the canceled class. I you find this a fair plan to deal with a unique situation.

Academic Honesty

Student-teacher relationships are built on trust. For example, students must trust that professors have made responsible decisions about the structure and content of the courses they teach, and professors must trust that the assignments that students turn in are theirs. Acts that violate this trust undermine the educational process.

In this class, all assignments that are turned in for a grade must represent the student's own work. In cases where help was received, or teamwork was allowed, a notation on the assignment should indicate with whom you collaborated. If you have any questions concerning this policy before submitting an assignment, please ask for clarification.

The following will be considered instances of academic dishonesty: copying a paper from another student; recycling one's own or others' papers from other courses; obtaining part or all of a paper from another source other than your own research without providing quotations and citations; direct quotation from printed, electronic or online sources without providing a citation (including rewording or "patchwork plagiarism"); and the use of specific ideas and interpretations of printed or electronic sources without citation ("theft of ideas"). Any material that you quote should be placed under quotation marks and cited with a footnote or reference immediately following the quoted portion that provides the source. Do not hide plagiarism by quoting material and then adding a vague reference at the end of the text. You may discuss homework assignments with other students, and you may prepare for papers and class with other students, but the writing assignments should be your own work. If you quote any source or even take ideas from that source, the source should be referenced completely. The penalty for plagiarism can be an “F” in the course.

Copying of class notes: you may provide class notes for friends who have been absent from class for their personal use only. Any wider distribution outside the classroom is prohibited and will result in an F in the course.

Reading and Assignment Schedule

Week 1 1/9: Course Introduction

Week 2 1/16: MLK Day

Week 3 1/23: Introduction to Material Culture (Thinking with and in Sneakers)

- Stuart Hall – Notes on Deconstructing the Popular (1981)
- Grant Bollmer – Ten Theses on Materiality (2011)
- Grant Bollmer – Objects and Affects (2011)
- Thomas Lemke – Introduction to his book The Government of Things (2021)

Week 4 1/30: Activity Day → Hits from the Streets

Week 5 2/6: Love & Hate & Stuff

- Lauren Berlant – Cruel Optimism (2011)
- Eva Illouz – The Rise of Homo Sentimentalis (2005)
- Sianne Ngai – Introduction to Ugly Feelings (2005)

Week 6 2/13: Sneaker Exhibit Workday and Strategy Session

Week 7 2/20: For the Love of (Shoe) Boxes

- Zoe Sofia – Container Technologies (2000)
- Katie Deighton – Six-sided story: the rise of creative branding in sneaker box design (2019)