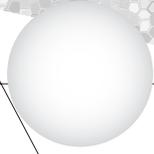
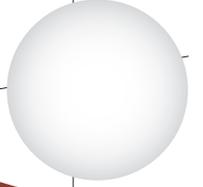
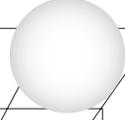
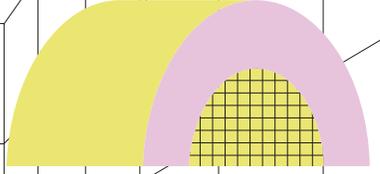
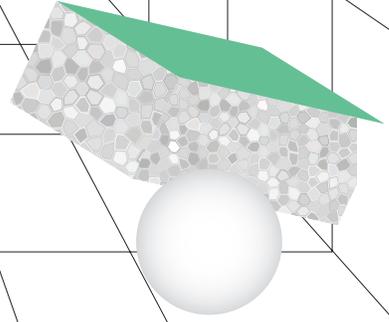


ANNIE'S

SNEAKER EXPLORATION





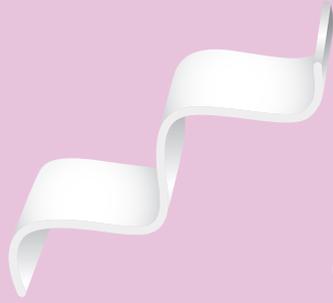
**“IF HOMEBOY IS COMING THROUGH WITH
THESE, IT’S QUIET. BUT IF HE COMES
THROUGH IN, LIKE, THESE- YOU GOT SOME
AIR MAXES OUT HERE, YOU GOT SOME
JORDANS- HOMEBOY IS GOING TO, LIKE...
GET IT”.**

**-BELLA HADID, COMPLEX SNEAKER
SHOPPING**



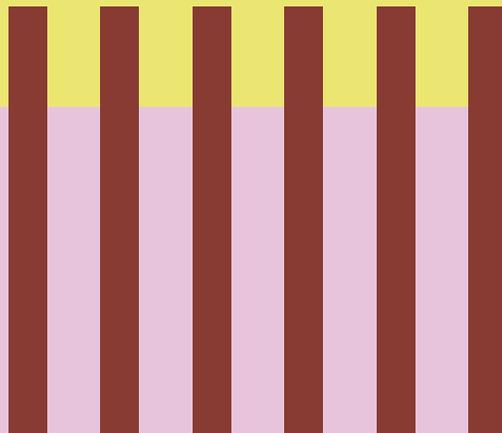
EDITOR'S NOTE

I begin this sneaker exploration from the confines of quarantine, where, to be honest, I haven't been wearing many sneakers. Without any occasion to leave the house, I can't do much more than strut from the couch to the kitchen in Jordans for my own self-indulgence. The current situation embodies the complete opposite of what sneakers were originally meant for: playing, roaming, exploration, etc. I suppose, in a way, the current situation has evolved to what sneakers have become- objects that are stored away in boxes, spared from the damage of the outside world. Often when a sneaker stays in its box, left in mint condition, it gains value. I hope that this extra time to reflect and take care brings value to my life, rather than being just a chunk of missed opportunity. I wonder whether treating sneakers as a collectible rather than honoring their original purpose to be worn either honors or disrespects them as an entity. On one hand, preserving their sanctity deifies the objects. But on the other hand, there is something inherently wrong about taking away something's purpose. If a sneaker no longer does the job of a sneaker, is it less of a sneaker than other sneakers? I think in the original sense, yes, but that also brings the object into a different class. It transcends the status of an everyday object and becomes a relic. And, oh how humans love to worship and collect little pieces of memorabilia. Personally, I am not someone who will spend my entire paycheck on a pair of sneakers to have them remain tucked in a box. Perhaps I don't have the mindset of an investor, which would be a more practical reason to undertake such a practice, or the zeal for objects of a collector. I still have a pretty expansive collection of sneakers, my lot just doesn't reach the level of a diehard collector. However, I am enough of a sneakerhead to lust after certain models, spending hours on StockX coveting rare shoes I know I can't afford. Furthermore, I'm passionate enough about sneakers to embark on this journalistic endeavor. Although I planned to roam around Europe, attending all the summer's sneaker hotspots, life happened (COVID19 happened), so I've been improvising from the comfort of my own home. To try and acquire the sneaker knowledge I would have gotten in person, I have been reaching out to members of the sneaker community over social media in hopes that this remote correspondence will illuminate the universe of sneakers.



Sneakerhead Diaries

IN LIEU OF EXPLORING THE EUROPEAN SNEAKER SCENE
STREETS BY DUCKING INTO STORES AND ROAMING AROUND
CONVENTIONS, I DECIDED TO CONNECT WITH MEMBERS
OF THE COMMUNITY OVER THE INTERNET. HOW GEN Z OF
ME. MORE SPECIFICALLY, I DECIDED TO CONTACT THEM
BY SLIDING INTO THEIR INSTAGRAM DMS. I DRAFTED A
MESSAGE, WENT DOWN THE LIST OF WHO THE BIGGEST
SNEAKER ACCOUNTS WERE FOLLOWING AND SENT EACH OF
THEM MY LITTLE SPIEL.





"HELLO! MY NAME IS ANNIE
CAVE AND I'M AN UNDERGRAD
STUDENT BASED IN SOUTHERN
CALIFORNIA. THIS SUMMER
I'M DOING A RESEARCH/
JOURNALISM PROJECT ON THE
RISE OF MODERN SNEAKER
CULTURE AND WOULD LOVE TO
ASK YOU A FEW QUESTIONS
ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE
BEING AN INFLUENTIAL
MEMBER OF THE SNEAKER
WORLD. I LOVE YOUR CONTENT
AND KNOW THAT ANY OF
YOUR INSIGHTS WOULD BE
EXTREMELY VALUABLE. THANKS
IN ADVANCE!"

SOMETIMES THEY
RESPONDED, SOMETIMES THEY DIDN'T. SOMETIMES
THEY RESPONDED
INITIALLY, AND THEN STOPPED RESPONDING.
BUT, FOR THOSE WHO STAYED IN CONTACT LONG
ENOUGH FOR ME TO ASK THEM A FEW
QUESTIONS, I COMPILED SOME OF MY FAVORITE
ANSWERS.

“I’ve been obsessed with sneakers for as long as I can remember. I think it’s because there’s a rich historical context around sneakers. Who designed it? When did it come out? I always picked up ones from my favorite NBA players (Michael Jordan, Charles Barkley, Penny Hardaway) and my parents bought me one pair a year to last me through school and the summer. I spent hours hanging out at Foot Locker and other sneaker stores just memorizing names and prices. Sneaker mail-order catalogs were fun as well. Naturally it led to part-time jobs at sneaker stores. Sneaker trading through sneaker forums and in the wanted ads section is where I myself started reselling sneakers. I maybe sold 7-10 pairs a month for a small margin - just for beer and grocery money.”

“With my love for football, I played a lot when I was younger and was fascinated by all the different types and colors of boots.”

How did your passion and how has it evolve

“My passion for sneakers is rooted in Basketball. I played through high school and fell in love with Jordans, but my favorite sneaker of all time is the Nike Dynamic Flight worn by Pippen. It was the one I played ball in when I couldn’t afford Jordans, so it’s a reminder of my roots.”

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“My earliest memory of being interested in sneakers is from my cousin from the States. She would bring back Nike Air Jordans in all the colorways you couldn't get in the UK. Seeing her shoes sparked interest in what I was wearing on my feet and it blossomed from there. I didn't have the money in my early twenties to purchase many shoes. When I got a fulltime job and a bit of disposable income I got back into them.”

for sneakers begin d over the years?

ACTUALLY GOT INTO SNEAKERS PRETTY LATE (CA. 2014).
WE HAVE BEEN DOING IT SINCE
EARLY 2000'S, BUT DURING THAT PERIOD I DIDN'T
THE MONEY NOR EXPOSURE TO GET INVOLVED. IT
ENDED OFF WITH JORDAN'S BUT SLOWLY EXPERIMENTED
OTHER THINGS. MY HIGH VALUE SNEAKER PURCHASES
DUNKS NOW BECAUSE THEY ARE THE MOST DURABLE.”

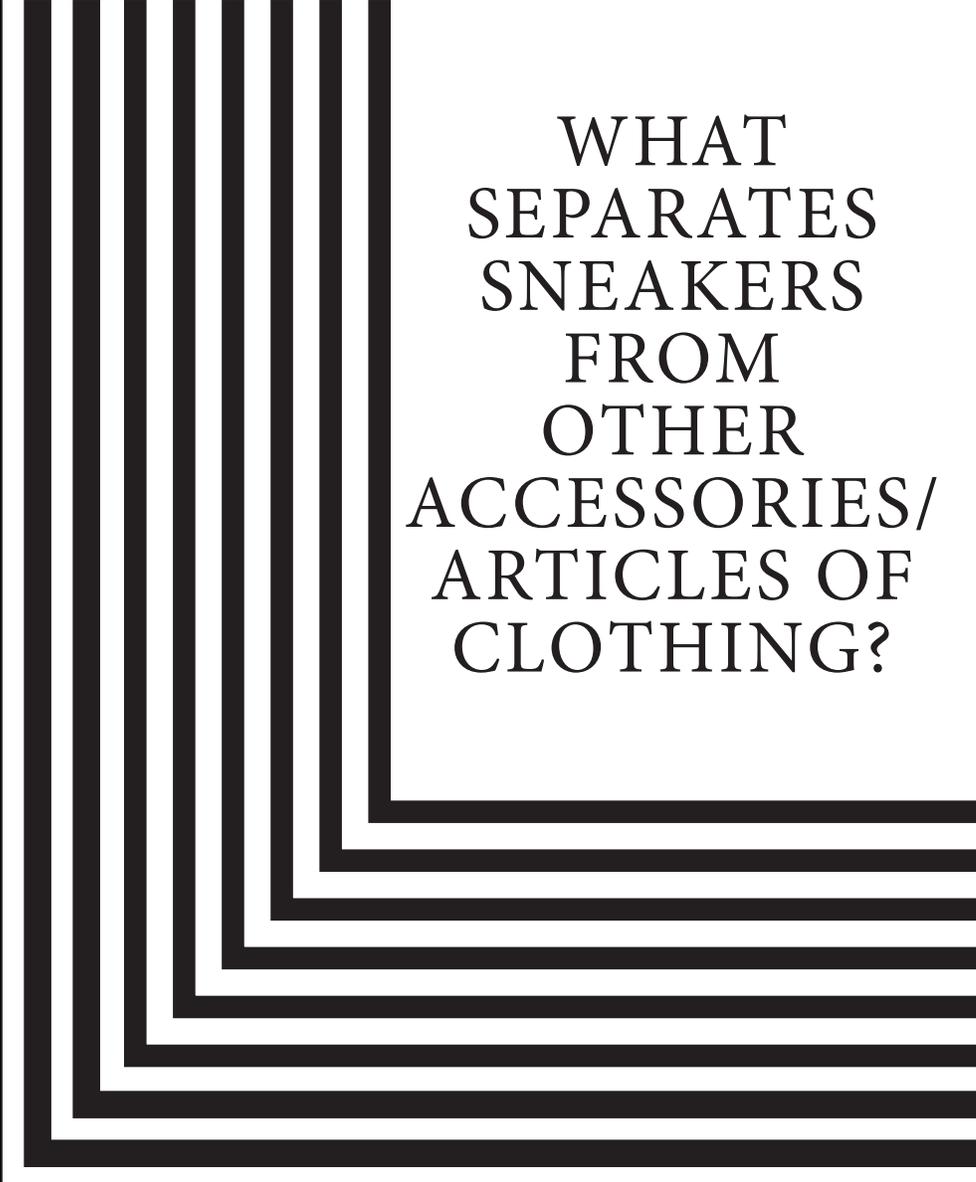
“I guess my passion for sneakers or footwear originated while my mother was working for adidas when I was a child. I would always care about what I had on my feet, it was very important in school as well - you just had to be fresh. What really started my passion and me collecting sneakers was when I was around 14 and started writing graffiti.”

“They can be an extension of self expression from a good outfit. I feel like it’s the finisher to make it complete.”

“The fit. Once you know your size, most feet generally fit into a pair of shoes”

“When you walk by a stranger on the street who has unique sneakers, there’s some of that unspoken bond.”

“Sneakers are a hugely important factor when it comes to comfort. If you’re on your feet all day, you will want comfortable shoes.”



WHAT
SEPARATES
SNEAKERS
FROM
OTHER
ACCESSORIES/
ARTICLES OF
CLOTHING?

“Sneakers are the base to any outfit. It’s sneakers that can elevate a clean and “boring” outfit to something that looks more like a statement. For example, imagine a grey sweater, some classic Dickies workwear pants and a pair of super clean Nike Dunks. The Dunks do all the magic here.”

“Unlike most accessories, sneakers are strongly tied to a rich heritage.”

What do you think of the marketing techniques and limitations in sneaker quantities by different companies?

“Back in the day it felt more natural. It felt like the brands weren’t really sure about the culture and what was going on, so they gave everyone a limitation when it came to collaborations. It was almost like they didn’t really trust the community, but they also wanted to appreciate it, so they let us play a little bit, have fun in our small bubble that the mainstream did not understand. Today everyone tries to seem cool by limiting their products. That’s just not really how it works. You can’t just throw a shitty product on the market and make it desirable by limiting it. It might work for the moment, but it doesn’t really have any substance - people will have forgotten about that release in a week. All of this artificial hype that’s generated through influencers and big marketing schemes, turned the market and the ‘culture’ (if there still is one) into this huge resell machinery.”

“On the one hand its people (mainly kids) showing off their entrepreneurial spirit. On the other hand, it makes getting a limited or coveted pair of sneakers that much harder for those that actually want to wear them (and substantially more expensive).”

“Exclusivity marketing has always been an effective tool. Sneakerheads tend to be drawn to what’s less available, and some make nearly all their purchasing decisions based on how limited something is. This gotta-have-it behavior is a reason why the resale market exists.”

“Feeling unique drives resale culture. You’re either into it, or you’re not- Type Hype or Team general release. I have friends who enter raffles for a shoe. They beg people to get shoes. It’s very very hard to get all these hype releases unless you have a good contact in the industry. I can’t imagine if I was a teenager again, or in my twenties, how frustrating it would be to not be able to get my hands on the latest releases. There is so much pressure on people to flex their newest pair of kicks on instagram. You know, one upmanship amongst friends. So, I’m quite glad I’m of an age where I’m not too bothered by the hype sort of stuff.”

“I think creating limited sneakers is similar to any products where the supply does not equal the demand. For sneakers, it’s a double edge sword as the demand can be so extreme for something so limited the consumer stops consuming.”

Has resale culture become too extreme?

“At the end of the day sneakers are best enjoyed when worn but it does not make sense wearing a pair worth \$15,000, knowing that every step you take sees a tremendous depreciation of its value. The worst part is that it invites people who are not welcome to the sneaker culture, those that ask “I have never resold before, how do I do it?”

“Absolutely. Reselling has existed as long as eBay has been in business (the mid-late 1990s), but it was never really done on a large scale. Sneakerheads used to sell what they had in their own collections. Now, people are just trying to buy in bulk, even if it means making a paltry \$10 profit per sneaker. There are platforms such as GOAT and StockX that dictate the “value” of a shoe based on what consumers are willing to pay. These values come out before the shoe is even officially released. If it resells for near or less the MSRP, resellers understandably don’t see it as a worthy investment and don’t buy them. At the same time, consumers see the low “value” of the shoe and are deterred from buying them as well; they see the low value and interpret that as the shoe being unattractive or whatnot. In those cases, the sneaker is absolutely doomed when it finally releases in stores. Resellers don’t want it, the average joe thinks it’s an uncool shoe, so it ends up sitting on shelves and going on clearance. This, however, has been valuable marketing information to the brands and it has influenced everything from their pricing models to their quantities. There are opportunists who use bots to buy shoes online. The short definition of a “bot” is an automated program that instantly checks out when buying a pair of shoes online. Since it’s a computer program, it’s faster than any human hands - even if you have your credit card and shipping info saved. Sneaker resellers often use bots to buy shoes when they release, leaving nothing available to real consumers. Brands and retailers have battled bots by adding security questions and captchas, or doing raffle-style releases. In many ways sneakerheads were one of the pioneers of extreme consumerism in the 21st century. 20 years ago you were an absolute bonehead for having 10 pairs of sneakers. Today, you won’t find the average joe with less than that amount. And as sneakers get “cooler”, more and more people are buying.”

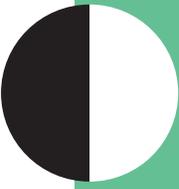
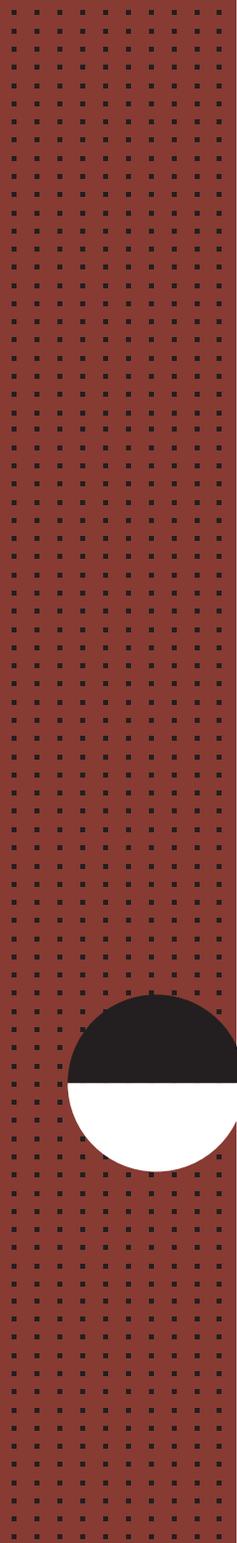
“Resale has been extreme for sure, coupled with the ability for those who can game the system for max gain. Seeing users purchase 50 pairs from cheating the system, meanwhile the average consumer cannot buy at retail takes the fun and the chase out of the culture.”

Does this represent an over-emphasis on consumerism within the sneaker community?

“We have many segments that can focus on and still enjoy aspects of sneakers without even worrying about the latest drops. Finding comfortable sneakers is an example, some brands have cult followings because of this.”

“I would never think any less of anyone if they were buying shoes just to flex. I don't have a problem with that and I never have. Who am I to judge someone for the reason why they buy a pair of sneakers? Yeah I would love to spread the word about New Balance and educate people about the process of making a shoe but I'm not about to hate on the 15 year-old kid buying the new Off White-Jordan just to impress his friends. Definitely not. People are free to treat sneakers as they wish. To be honest they are just things that we put on our feet. We're not doing brain surgery. They're just sneakers at the end of the day.”

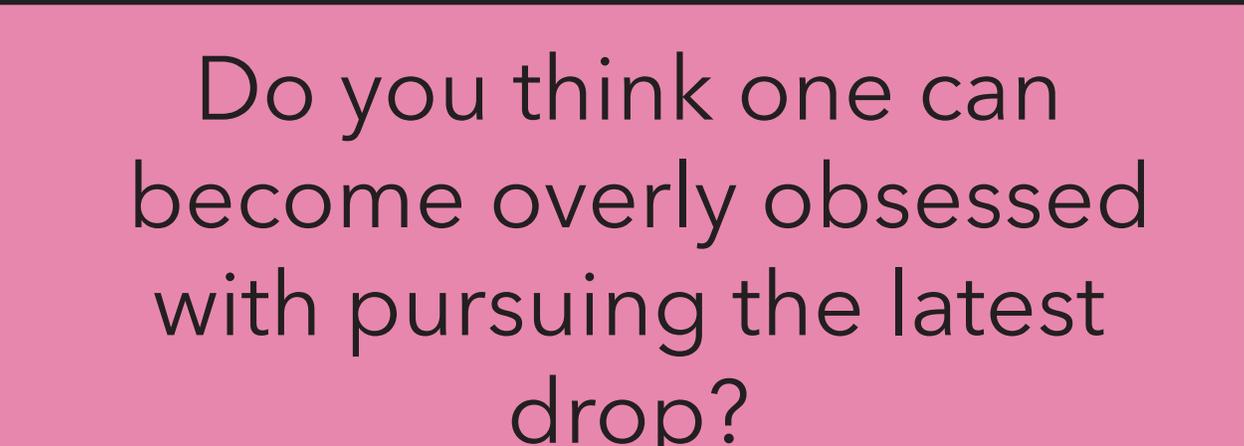
“Although sneakers are essentially a product sold by large corporations, the collectibility aspect to it helped mask the negativity of consumerism. But with this new level of reselling, all of that is gone.”



“We have seen time and time again how riots have started because of sneaker drops. It’s obsessive but it’s nothing new.”

“The kids don’t really care about a story behind the shoe anymore, it’s just about the resale value. And brands are more encouraged to drop collab after collab after collab, which also leads to the shoe not having any story at all. Or a shitty one, that’s made up for the accompanying press release. So to answer that question; I don’t think one can be overly obsessed with the next release; that would be like one being overly obsessed about every music that comes out, regardless the genre. People are overly obsessed about the fast money one can make reselling. It’s not about the shoe, it’s about the bread. Simple as that.”

“Being overly obsessed is the only way you can even participate in sneaker culture without having to pay resale prices.”



Do you think one can become overly obsessed with pursuing the latest drop?

What are your predictions for the future?

“It’s always hard to predict the future. I think it’s going to die down at some point in the next few years. The bubble is going to burst, which is fine with me. I’d love to be able to walk into my local shop again, weeks after the release of a sneaker and still be able to get my size. People can go back to wearing Chucks and boat shoes again. You know when you’re passionate about something, like really passionate about something, you want people to see the same things in and care about them as much as you do. Nowadays it’s just ‘oh yeah I bought them because they look ‘cool’ or following the mainstream Instagram hype; i.e. Yeezy”

“I think sneaker culture will continue to grow as long as the sneaker industry grows, which looks highly likely. As the culture continues to enter the mainstream, we’ll see new subcultures, taste makers, and trends emerge as a counter movement.”

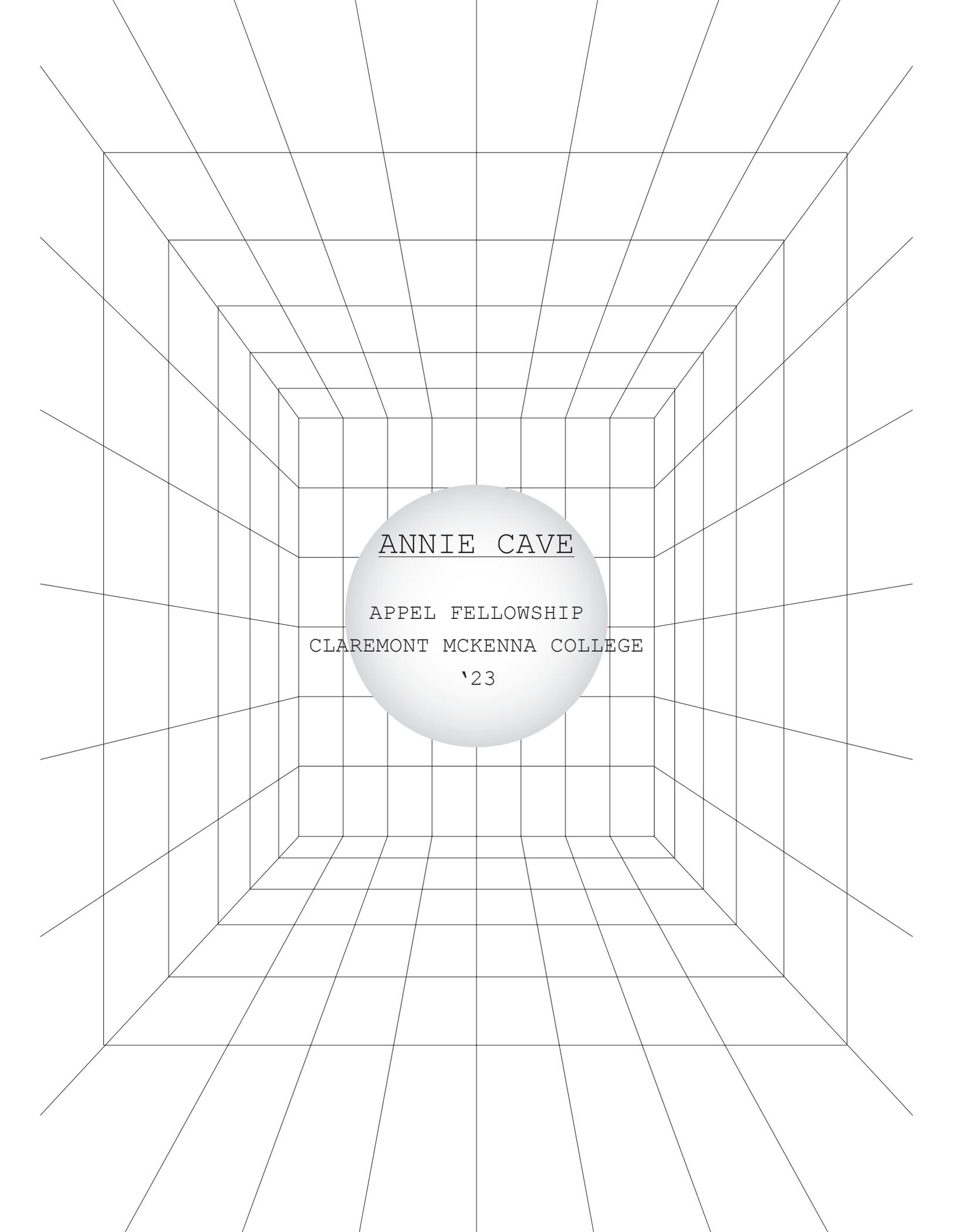
“It may well peak at some point, but if there is a lack of shoes, where that is not enough to keep everybody happy, then there will be a resale market. It suits Adidas and it suits Nike. If they make 10,00 shoes and 10,00 people want them and get them, then there is no hype. They love that their shoes sell out. Adidas and Nike will always make too few shoes to go around so people will continue to pine after them.”

“All the kids want to be seen in the newest, most expensive shoes, and I can’t see it getting any less any time soon.”

“The market for hype and resale will only grow from here. There will always be that supply and demand. I do see daily revolts against websites like StockX. I do see things like that. But, I don’t see it coming to an end any time soon- as long as Nike is doing collaborations with these big designers.”

“It would be great if people just bought what they liked, not what gets the most “Likes”. As long as social media is around, sneakers will continue to be popular and reselling culture will continue to grow. People just love showing off their sneakers on Instagram. Sneaker “culture” will only die off if Instagram ceases to exist Nike decides to stop making shoes.”

“I think resale culture will continue to grow to mainstream masses until there is a drastic change in supply and demand. Certain companies are eating off of the limited nature and it spawns lots of additional revenue for open market transactions but also for replica companies making all the extra money. I would love to see a REAL authentication process introduced so we can have legit proof of authenticity. “



ANNIE CAVE

APPEL FELLOWSHIP
CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE

'23

THANK YOU

@glasgorob

@timsuen

@johnbeejkim

@numberoneproject

@maisaipek

@juanma_jmse

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