

BUF 4900: Internship Midterm Essay Exam (worth 250 points)
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Hip hop's influence on the fashion industry has been one which can be seen very apparently. For the past fifty years, hip hop has brought a multitude of styles, new perspectives, and new character to the changing zeitgeist of the decades, filling the streets of New York and popular cities with culture like never seen before. At the *Museum at FIT*, one can find information tracing hip-hop back to its origins, with DJ Kool Herc hosting one of New York City's first back-to-school block parties with the original purpose being for his sister, whom just wanted to raise more money to curate her back-to-school wardrobe, craving individualism through style amongst the multitude of stores available in Delancey street at the time (The Guardian, 2011). Since then, hip hop has gained massive popularity, spreading internationally around the globe touching different cultures. Hip hop style can be transformative, as "style is one of the most pervasive and visible manifestations of the culture" (Fashion Institute of Technology, 2023), taking categories such as athleisure, luxury, casual everyday dresses to logoed items and intricately sewing the livelihood of hip-hop culture into the seams of these new, exciting designs.

Hip-hop transformed the culture of fashion by rebelling against what was considered the norm of "good taste" (Fashion Institute of Technology, 2023) and high class living normally seen in European culture, influences taken from Paris fashion week's haute couture and high-fashion exclusivity. Styles like baggy pants (sagging pants), oversized white T-shirts and sneakers became staples in hip hop style (Baxter, 2008), this reflected the urban culture in roots of hip hop fashion. This was a stark contrast from Paris haute couture. As hip-hop slowly began to take precedence in urban cities, luxury brands started to take notice of designers such as

Dapper Dan, a Harlem designer who took the luxurious logo designs of brand such as Louis Vuitton, MCM, Gucci and more and remixed/customized pieces that were never before seen (Elia 2021, pg. 167). He worked with luxury print logos that were commonly and normally associated with the wealthy, high class. Predominantly aiming for wealthy white prospects, these luxury brands experienced a change in market preference when their monogrammed logos were being recreated by dapper Dan in the streets of Harlem (Pham 2019), causing an uproar and popularization of his designs, ushering in a new age of luxury for the urban people.

As this popularization came about, more luxury brands began creating hip hop inspired lines, giving birth to high end streetwear, and glory to Dapper Dan as he was legitimized in the fashion industry for his notable impact. This intertwining of culture lead to an entirely new wave of fashion in high-class, luxury brands in such that they included more urban demographic interests of the time, the effect of hip hop can be seen in the modern day elevated hip hop inspired dress, which we see in brands such as Balmain, Balenciaga, Supreme & Off-White, bringing a new taste to what *luxury* means to it's runways, instead of only the urban streets. Hip hop eradicated the monotone, separated way of elevated fashion that categorizes luxury consumers based on what they can afford. Hip hop allowed the eccentricity of urban culture to be interwoven in luxury terms, and available to many more who were "*fly*" enough to partake.

Roberto Cavalli's embroidered denim ensemble for Spring of 2003 (Figure 1) was worn by Lil' Kim to the Video Game Awards as shown in Figure 2. The color, or *Hue* (name of color) (Bell, 2022) of the garment is predominantly blue as the garment is made of denim. The light *tint* of the blue brings a very airy, cool and calm feeling to the viewer as white was added to create this tone of blue (Bell 2022). The *value* or amount of lightness and darkness in a color (Bell 2022) is seen in the dominating colors of blue, *tints* of pink and *shades* of red. The majority of

the garment being light blue makes one feel comfortable and reminds one of serene lakes and gentle horizons (Bell, 2022). The base color of this garment being a *tint* of blue creates a very beautiful yet soft pastel background for the floral embroidery that adorns it. The top included in this garment is a very light nearly white ivory color, representing innocence and adorned with dashes of pink, and red. The Ivory white color takes on a bit of a yellow tone, excluding feelings of happiness and optimism while the pink flowers in the floral arrangements exhibit a sweet, and pretty feeling. This fleshy pink reminds one of raw flesh, or is usually associated with Easter and bunnies (Bell 2022). The touches of the red *shade* (darkened with black) (Bell 2022) within the flowers as well as amongst the ivory top, give a stimulating, yet contrasting powerful feeling in the small red dashes. The red is very assertive, demanding attention while exuding a loving sight amongst the floral embroidery with shades of the darker hue (Bell 2022). The mix of colors one can see in the entirety of this garment gives a very light, yet beautiful feeling with images that resemble blue skies and floral arrangements that pop with shades of red.

Line is the direction of the arranged garment, as *composition* is the organization or grouping of elements for the achieved unified whole look of the garment, including traits of *balance*, which indicate the symmetric relationship of the garment (Bell 2022). This is important to the garments' overall *composition* as it guides and directs the eyes when experiencing the first look. Cavalli's denim ensemble is vertically symmetrical, guiding the eyes down the *middle* of the garment, perfectly *balanced* on either side with the exact same embroidery reflected over the vertical line. These thin vertical lines bring feelings of strength, accentuate the height and pride of this majestic creation. It gives a direct, forceful and rigid feeling to the design (Bell 2002, one that seems preplanned and prepared.

A stark *contrast* or difference (Bell 2022) is seen in the colors used for the ensemble. Although the white shirt was technically a *tint* of yellow (ivory) and the skirt and jacket were *tints* of blue (light denim wash), the blue color still *dominated* the composition, making the ivory skirt one third of the ensemble, which one can perceive as a balanced *proportion* or proportionate relationship to size, scale and weight (Bell 2022). The white shirt was proportionately a smaller piece in comparison to the blue skirt and jacket. Lastly, adding to the composition is *repetition*, seen in the intricately embellished floral embroidery among the denim fabric. The rough, *textured* embroidery of the floral designs stand out and definitely *juxtapose* the soft, tint of blue denim. The embellishments are repeated across the jacket, and skirt of the garment, vertically symmetrical. Another repeated characteristic is the ruffles belonging to the ivory top. The repeated ruffles give a sense of dimension, sitting atop one another in a soft, satin-like *texture*.

Hip hop style influences life in general and the high-fashion sales model. The juxtaposition of the cultural designs that were seen in these urban cities, magnificently popularized amongst the people as well, were entirely *different*, brand new, and filled with *urban* culture; something that high fashion was not attuned to in the past. The ongoings of the middle and lower class were not important to the high-sale luxury brand, who sought out wealthy patrons specifically as their customer base. Once the marginalized people and cultural influences of Harlem, New York were seen popularized through some of the most populated urban cities in New York, high end brands began to take notice and incorporate the urban culture into their high-end designs, giving birth to an entirely new way and look of fashion of the times. Hip hop artists should be celebrated as trendsetters, bringing attention to small designers in this urban field and new ideas, such as brands like Telfar, who advocates for activism in the name of social justice as well as luxury accessibility, which his brand stands for (Bhandarkar 2022) bringing

luxury to everyone, not just the select few. Hip hop artists have a very special platform in which they can bring attention to brands and movements that deserved the attention, and can quite literally impact and change culture and society as we knew it through fashion.



Figure 1

Roberto Cavalli Denim Skirt 2003 for Lil' Kim

Lil' Kim has been known for her adventurous, designer-driven style since the mid-1990s. Working with stylist Misa Hylton, Kim pioneered a sexy, feminine style and acted as an ambassador between hip hop and high fashion brands like Roberto Cavalli, Versace, and Marc Jacobs. She wore a version of this 18th-century-inspired denim mini skirt ensemble to the Spike Video Game Awards in 2003

Roberto Cavalli embroidered denim ensemble, spring 2003
The Museum at FIT, 2003.45.2
Gift of Roberto Cavalli

Figure 2

Roberto Cavalli Denim Skirt 2003: Plaque



Figure 3

Shana Cromwell-Ramnarain at the Museum at FIT.

References

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- Figure 1. (2023, March 29) Roberto Cavalli Denim Skirt 2003. *Museum at FIT: Fresh Fly & Fabulous: Fifty Years of Hip Hop Style*.
- Figure 2. (2023, March 29) Informational Plaque. Roberto Cavalli Denim Skirt 2003. *Museum at FIT: Fresh Fly & Fabulous: Fifty Years of Hip Hop Style*.
- Figure 3. (2023, March 29) Student Shana Ramnarain. *Museum at FIT: Fresh Fly & Fabulous: Fifty Years of Hip Hop Style*.
- Pham, J. (2019). *The Socioeconomic and Cultural Significance of Luxury Goods in the USA*.