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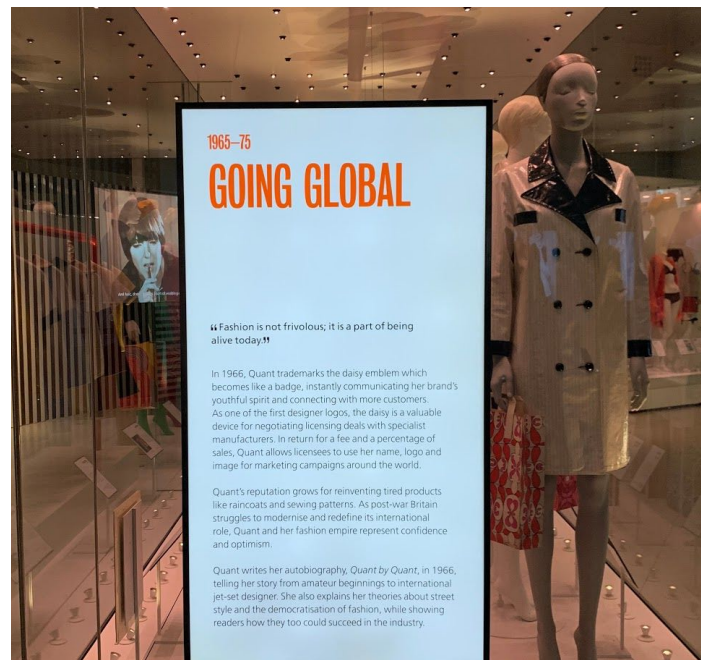
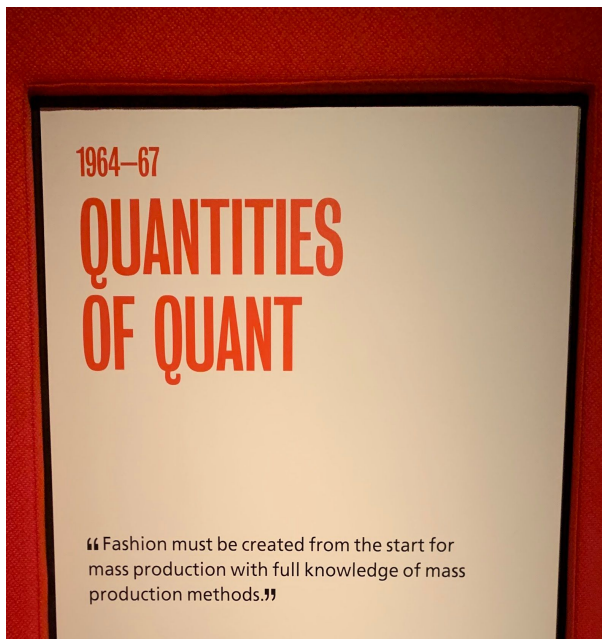
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Visual Analysis Assignment

Fashion has become one of the top types of exhibitions in museums around the world, as a range of curatorial approaches construct a certain theme or idea to attract the masses. From chronological exhibitions like the Rapid Response Gallery at London's Victoria and Albert Museum, to single object displays like the National Silk Museum in Hangzhou, China, it becomes clear that fashion in the museum has gained popularity and relevance. However, initial controversies often questioned whether fashion should be given the same respect as museum collections associated with fine arts. Valerie Steele's article, *Museum Quality: The Rise of the Fashion Exhibition*, gives insight into the history of fashion exhibits through surveys and how these debates and past examples equate to a deeper understanding of the Mary Quant exhibit and its significance today.

The collection of clothing from museum curators has a lengthy history of over a hundred years. However, museum officials in the past often disregarded dress as a minor role, commonly perceived as "unworthy" in these spaces and inferior compared to tapestry, furniture, or ceramics (Steele, 2008: 9). She cites a quote by Lou Taylor, who found "In the eyes of male museum staff, fashionable dress still only evoked notions of vulgar commerciality and valueless, ephemeral, feminine style" (Taylor, 1998: 341). These initial notions of fashion as an inferior part of a museum eventually changed, as Steele notes that the rise in popular "fashion history" later dominated the early and middle nineteenth century. Early opinions on the validity of fashion

from individuals in Taylor's quote, who likely held respected positions as curators, contrasts significantly from the entire aesthetic of Mary Quant's exhibition. Quant's collection catered to the narrative of commerciality through labels like "Quantities of Quant" and "Going Global." Furthermore, the depiction of feminine style as "valueless" and "ephemeral" differs from the associations of Quant's signature style, most notably through popularizing garments like miniskirts and tights, as the introductory text panel attempts to define their significance as items "women take for granted today" - highlighting the notion that fashion is something we engage in on a daily basis.



The catalyst moment of controversy in Diana Vreeland's career occurred in 1983, when her biographical approach focused on the living French designer Yves Saint Laurent, and she forever changed perceptions of fashion in the museum. This example will essentially lay the foundation for the in-depth analysis of the Mary Quant exhibition, as it is one of the most recent

examples of a collection dedicated to a living designer. Harold Koda, a past assistant to Vreeland, discussed the flexibility and freedom of Vreeland's work with fashion history that led to her success. In the interview, he explains "she made clothes 'come alive' - by their association with powerful personalities" (Steele, 2008:13). Consequently, a person at the Mary Quant Exhibition can sense the concept put forth by Vreeland and acknowledged by Koda: a collection that is able to bridge the gap between the public and the past. The story of Mary Quant as a revolutionary female designer in the 1960s, who innovated fashion for women in London and beyond, sparks a location-oriented spectacle, and Quant's personality becomes an interest for mass appeal. Just as Vivian Westwood became an icon for punk style in the mid to late 1970s, Mary Quant's appeal as a "beloved British institution" ultimately secures her status as a well-respected designer (Steele, 2008: 16).

In the exhibition, there was an entire installation under the title "The British Fashion Invasion" from 1960-67. Capitalizing on the US chainstore, JCPenney, this portion of the exhibit gives extensive information on Quant's ability to appeal to wide ranges of audiences through the British subculture of mod-style. The origin of the mods began in Britain's working-class youth cultures, with a range of influences, from American jazz to European influence visible in films and cafes. According to Dick Hebride in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* mods were "more subtle and subdued in appearance, they wore apparently conservative suits in respectable colours, they were fastidiously neat and tidy." However, Hebride's in-depth analysis focuses only on a male perspective, perhaps signifying the notion of women's lesser-acknowledgement in subculture history.



*The British Fashion Invasion - Full Display*

Thus, the integral idea of mod-subculture as a “secret identity” for menswear bubbles up for women’s fashion as Mary Quant’s mod-style marketing rises to popular culture. Quant’s mod-style is all about using futuristic designs, bright colors, with a focus on particular suits and accessories. The three outfits to the right of the display all adhere to these conventions, using bold cut outs, patterns, and complementary colors. This installation in the exhibition constructs Quant as the face of mod-style, but instills a dependency on mainstream media. JCPenney mail

order catalogues, "Youthquake " marketing adverts, and multiple magazines are included in the display case along with the clothing.



Image 1: JC Penny catalogue and magazine adverts



Image 2: "Youthquake" marketing and Quant as a poster girl

The use of media outlets in the construction of Quant's "London Look " is not actually subculture, but an example of subculture medication. In *Streetstyle, From Sidewalk to Catwalk*, Ted Polhemus states "street style depends on the media to make isolated pockets of stylistic and



ideological innovation accessible to those who live beyond the geography of ‘Where Its’ At.’”

This quote illustrates the extent in which mainstream media uses subculture for mass production and mass consumption. In the Mary Quant exhibition, the ready-to-wear pieces in the JC Penny catalogs showcase the newfound accessibility teenage American girls had when choosing to partake in this mod-style, which extends far beyond its’ British roots.

The consequence of commodifying what began as a resistance to mainstream fashion? Some believe “mod culture lost its vitality when it became commercialized” (Helbridge, 1994). But this shift to wide consumer appeal in Quant’s street style also provides earlier examples and garments of Quant’s earliest creations. The Mary Quant exhibition showcases the evolution of mass-produced items, as it grew from a small business defined by exclusivity for women in Chelsea, London, to a global phenomenon of London street style known by the slogan “The whole point of fashion is to make fashionable clothes available to everyone.”

Quant’s exhibition therefore distinguishes itself as a biographical approach that breaks away from other designer-based collections like Christian Dior or Alexander Wang. Many of the earlier portions of the collection were donated by women who owned original Mary Quant pieces, often supplemented by a photograph of the person wearing the dress, and why they purchased the dress. The prices associated with earlier styles also tell the audience that the mass production of ready-to-wear collections comes with a loss of exclusivity, as garments retail for cheaper prices in comparison to her early work. And yet, the discussion of consumerism in the exhibition itself, which charges £12 per person, is widely untouched in articles about the collection. (Hutchings, 2019).

When museum visitors first enter the Mary Quant exhibition, they are greeted with an enormous gift shop, filled with books, prints, totes, leggings, and other accessories associated with Mary Quant. Steele included a vital quote, given by Fiona Anderson, that touches on this subject. Her statement, “It is undeniable that the motivations of designers to cooperate with curators in having their work displayed in museums are largely about prestige, self-promotion, and profit,” is supported by the paradoxical nature of a gift shop about a living designer outside

Mary Quant gift shop outside the exhibition entrance



an exhibition a person must pay for before entering. Magazine publications who covered the collection for its high visitor numbers, often disregard the fact that Mary Quant themed items are sold at the V&A, despite the designer’s resignation from the company in 2000.



A Harper's Bazaar article from February 2020 supports this notion of Quant as a popular designer, as the title “Mary Quant exhibition hits 400,000 visitors as designer celebrates 90th birthday” highlights the popularity as an accomplishment, comparing the showcase to a sort of tourist attraction. The publication talks about the wide numbers of visitors, the exhibition in relation to other V&A fashion exhibits like *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion* and how the visitor numbers stacked up, and the amount of items in the showcase (which was 120), but never mentions the gift shop or the entry ticket fees. This parallels the prevalent relationship between contemporary fashion and consumerism in the museum, and the limited discourses that address this fact.

Fashion designers reside within the same space as fine art pieces now more than ever before. This is because fashion as a subject is something all individuals partake in, each and every day. People make choices each morning about what clothing they choose to wear, the impression they want their clothing to instill, and why they support or oppose certain fashion brands. The Mary Quant exhibition uses a biographical approach to detail the evolution of a female designer, and her influence as a revolutionary artist in the context of 1960s London. This narrative must be acknowledged alongside the fact that exhibitions thrive from constructing an identity through a designer's story in a biographical approach, and how the image may exclude deeper histories surrounding subcultural fashion movements like mod-style. Lastly, fashion as ‘capitalism's favorite child’ must be included into the discussion on modern museum exhibitions, as the appeal of fashion draws more visitors than most other subjects and has grown rapidly in the past thirty years (Steele, 1998).

Word Count: 1,539

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Material Culture Assignment

“The fabrics of a people unlock their social history. They speak a language which is silent, but yet more eloquent than the written page.” - Lewis Henry Morgan, in *The League of the Iroquois*, 1951.

Material culture is essentially the study of “things.” Objects that are created and used within societies become a translation of meaning, and material items often evoke a representation of society itself. The relationship between the object and the person who created the object, therefore, becomes a prominent aspect in understanding why the object exists in the world. The study of material culture cannot be separated from this societal approach, as “the things that humankind makes and uses at any particular time and place are probably the truest representation we have of values and meanings with a society” (Kingery, 1996). The study of a material item involves two different aspects: the empirical evidence in defining how an object is constructed, and the subjective evidence that wrestles with defining the signs, signals and symbols associated with the object. Thus, a true understanding of a material item includes a range of interdisciplinary information, drawing from the fields of anthropology, archeology, art and design, cultural geography, philosophy, and so on.

The structural lens of material culture can be applied to a garment, or an item of clothing used to dress the body. The garments that were created and worn by Caroline G. Parker in 1849, a member of the Tonawanda-Seneca Nation, demonstrated how articles of clothing are studied as a form of material culture. The ethnographic work of American anthropologist, Lewis H. Morgan, in his published work *League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee, or Iroquois* (1851), as well as five *Annual Reports of the New York State Museum* from 1847 to 1850, provides insight into the

empirical processes and subjective meanings of Parker's clothing as a piece of material culture in the Iroquois Confederacy.

2. Red overdress made by Caroline G. Parker, 1849.  
Courtesy of the New York State Museum, Albany.  
Cat. No. 36615.

The cultural distinctions of female costume in Lewis H. Morgan's descriptions signify the relationship between dress and human cultures. In Joanne Entwistle's *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress & Modern Social Theory*, she defines the contextual significance of dress. She



states, "The ubiquitous nature of dress would seem to point to the fact that dress or adornment is one of the means by which bodies are made social and given meaning and identity." It should then be noted that the Haudenosaunee style of dress upon Caroline Parker's body, associated a cultural significance that differed from the Euro-American lens of the mid-nineteenth century.

The production of Parker's outfit began as a project proposal. The *Regents Reports of New York State* were a series of government commissioned studies

that Lewis Henry Morgan undertook in 1847. Morgan's purpose of collecting Iroquois material culture then, was to supply the cabinet with a "memento of the red race...(which would be)... enabled to speak for itself through these silent memorials" (Tooker, 1994). Morgan's *Second Regents Report* in 1848, he wrote, "It would be an easy matter to obtain full Iroquois costumes, male and female, together with the implements,





weapons and utensils in common use among them. When collected, they would richly repay the cost and trouble” (Tooker, 1994:62). Once the project received validation from the state, Morgan’s attainment of “full Iroquois costumes” for a female relied predominantly on Caroline Parker's beadwork and sewing skills.

The full regalia of Caroline Parker includes various pieces, with Morgan’s ethnological study of each item described in extensive detail. This portion of the material culture analysis will focus on the dress and skirt, specifically. First, the red overdress is noted with calico fabric material, embroidered with silk ribbon, glass beads and an arrangement of silver brooches.

3. Unknown Photographer (American). Clark Sisters - grandmother and aunts of photographer Frances Benjamin Johnston, Late 1840s. Daguerrotype. Washington: Library of Congress, DAG no. 1122. Source: Costume Cocktail



In Morgan’s *Third Regents Report* in 1849, he defines the look of fabric over the body, explaining “It is loosely adjusted to the person, and falls below the waist” (Tooker, 1994:201). In comparison to the Victorian womenswear of the mid-nineteenth century, the ambiguity of Parker’s fit draws a stark contrast.

Valerie Steele gives insight into the controversies around the corset in the nineteenth century, as many historians inaccurately accredited “the dress reform and women’s rights movement for the disappearance of corsetry,” when in reality, these changes occurred over a much longer period of time (Steele, 2001:77). Nevertheless, the dress reform era alongside the women’s right movement in the United States began in geographic regions directly tied to Haudenosaunee territories. “The Reform Dress” associates a liberated style of clothing for women, worn at womens’ rights conventions in Syracuse and Seneca Falls, New York. Popularized by Amelia Bloomer in the 1850s, a women’s outfit that consisted of a short dress and trousers was often referenced as a “Bloomer Costume.” Historians frequently cite the



inspiration of the outfit structure derived from Middle Eastern and Central Asian women (Lippi and Donati, *Dress Reform*). However, side by side illustrations of Parker’s dress and the attempted dress of movement for female activists implies a Haudenosaunee resemblance, reasoned by the geographical locations of the movement and Iroquois territories.

Though uncommonly referenced, critiques of the reform dress drew on the resemblance between Indigenous dress with negative connotations, perceived as an “uncivilized” garment with the

associations of aboriginal dress as culturally inferior (Mass, 2017:44). Much like the trousers in the Bloomer costume were constructed to signify change in functionality, the red leggings and



loose dress of Haudenosaunee wear signifies similar characteristics of a prolonged history. The political structure of Haudenosaunee women compared to Euro-American women should be brought to the forefront when discussing dress and the Women's Suffrage Movement.

The 1914 political cartoon titled "Savagery to 'Civilization'" drawn by Joseph Keppler, directly associated the difference in dress while highlighting the paradoxical nature of the Women's Suffrage Movement. The Haudenosaunee's political structure, where women appointed leaders and owned land, lacks an acknowledgement or direct association in the lens of US history with their influence on female suffragist leaders. Thus, Keppler's cartoon aims to



show how the notion of a “savage” woman in Haudenosaunee society actually included an early structure of equality, one with rights of striking similarity to those of US women suffragists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The outfit also includes a skirt that drops below the knee and before the ankle. Made out of navy blue broadcloth, the skirt is detailed with a border of silk ribbon and glass beads. Morgan explains the use of modernized material versus “ancient” times in his description. He states: “The porcupine quill has given place to the bead, and the skins of animals to the cotton fabric and the broadcloth” (Morgan, 1851). The designs Parker uses is another material sign of symbolism, associated with agriculture and origin stories. In *Iroquois Women: An Anthology*,



W.G. Spittal also references proficiency of Iroquois women in design, characterizing their work “by the prevalence of motifs from the vegetable kingdom: branches, leaves and flowers of different stages were the most frequent patterns” (Spittal, 1990:82). The half-circle structure of

blue beadwork with white embroidery is commonly known as a “sky dome.” This design represents the origin story of the Haudenosaunee, believed that a woman’s emergence from the sky world became the catalyst for human life on earth. The horizontal lines below the curved domes represent earth, as well as the designs within the half circle. Thus, the “two-curve” pattern above the sky domes are employed as symbols of celestial trees, and the skirt design tells a story through decorative art (Parker, 1914:614).

The material items of Caroline Parker’s outfit includes a range of social uses for the Haudenosaunee, utilizing dress for events like religious ceremonies, weddings, funerals, to name a few. If the functionality of Parker’s dress is taken out of its social use, and placed into a museum, it no longer dresses a body as a symbol of national identity. When Lewis H. Morgan explains the significance of the female “Indian costume,” the cultural uses of these garments are often overpowered by the notions of a vanishing Indian trope, as settlers often associated the acculturation of US materials and tools as their loss of “authenticity.” Take the conclusion of his *Third Regents Report*, for example. “The red races are passing away before the silent, but irresistible spread of civilization.” He explains that the eventual acceptance and trust of the Indian race into American society, can only occur through the process of assimilation. He then states that “When this change is effected, they will cease to be Indians” (Tooker, 1994:207). In a plethora of Natural History Museums in the United States surfaces the discussion of ownership over material items belonging to Indigenous communities. It raises the question: is it ethical for museums to display items of living cultures as an excerpt of the past? Or do they supply care and curation of items that might otherwise lose their significance without their placement in museums? In the context of Caroline Parker’s regalia, the survival of the items described above



seem to draw attention to past examples of the Haudenosaunee reclaiming items from the New York State Museum. In 1989, New York State agreed to return a number of wampum belts to the Onondaga Nation, a territory located in central New York. The belts, made out of white and purple wampum beads and strung on deer sinews, act in the same way as a written book, with the design, symbolism, and production of these belts reflecting their ceremonial use and historical significance of treaties, often between the US government and the Haudenosaunee. *The New York Times* covered the return of wampum belts from the state through the community leader's perspective, one that is often left out of the anthropological work of the nineteenth century. Garments like a belt, used commonly to secure articles of clothing upon the body, were also used as a record of Haudenosaunee policies, to keep titles and their government structures alive. Thus, a loss of these items equates to a loss of knowledge, one that many Indigenous communities work to restore in modern society.

The restoration process goes beyond reclaiming wampum belts from institutional settings. For some contemporary Haudenosaunee artists, continuing the tradition of beadwork both as an art form and as a garment with functional use has been another prominent example of revival. In 2018, Mohawk seamstress and beadwork artist, Emma Shenandoah, directly referenced the work of Caroline Parker in the fall production of *Fashion After Dark*, a fashion show hosted by the Mohawk community in Cornwall, Ontario. Using similar color schemes and beadwork patterns as inspiration while designing each piece with modern fabric and beads,



Left photograph: a model showcases Shenandoah's piece in the 2018 *Fashion After Dark* show  
Right photograph: another example of Shenandoah's beadwork, mixing new colors and materials into her designs

Shenandoah's work represents a "new vintage" style of national identity. The historical lineage depicted in these clothes can be noted from the artist's use of skydomes, celestial trees, and fit of the outfit. The clear historic reference point is the actual photograph used as the background of set design in the production. The 2018 show featured 10 items for sale, with each item sold within the next day through an online auction on Facebook. Even in the 21st-century, the use of these garments for traditional uses, like weddings and ceremonies, depicts a certain aspect of obtaining cultural capital in native communities. People who are able to understand the meanings behind beadwork designs, and utilize garments for their appropriate uses, shows a specialized knowledge that relates to their national background and education in Haudenosaunee dress and culture.

The information associated with the dress and skirt worn by Caroline Parker is multifaceted. Her work in the design of the outfit, and her physical presentation wearing the outfit, now presents a certain deurgototype for the context of mid-19th century clothing for a specific group of native people. Furthermore, the significance of Caroline Parker's garments stretches beyond merely an item in the field of Lewis H. Morgan's anthropological study. Commonly referenced as an example of a "traditional costume" for Haudenosaunee women, Parker's items are placed out of context and within museum exhibits. Societal differences between Haudenosaunee women in comparison to Euro-American women through dress represents the use of clothes as a signifier for race and class distinction. The savagery to "civilization" concept juxtaposes against the political structures of Haudenosaunee women, where the "uncivilized" women in Westernized notions actually held more power and

resemblance to men's clothing. Lastly, the iconography of Parker's garments as a source of inspiration for modern Haudenosaunee designers, display how clothing for native american societies work as a signifier for national identity. It distinguishes twenty-first century replicas of Parker's nineteenth-century outfit as a symbol of "new vintage," with a person's understanding of the garment essential in their use of the garment and respect within their community. Even more importantly, the revitalization of beadwork and dressmaking disproves Lewis H. Morgan's statement that "red races are passing away before the silent, but irresistible spread of civilization." The fabrics of Haudenosaunee dress speak a language that has yet to be silenced.

Word count: 2,162

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