

Looking back for a future of fashion?

Exploring traditional skills, local production and the heritage of craft in a fashion context.

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this paper is to contribute to the debate of whether the valorization of craft in fashion has more to do with an understanding of the role of craft for symbolic artifacts in capitalist economies or craft's potential as an activity which secures a direct human presence amidst material things beyond the 'romantic fictions of traditional or authentic'.

Methodology: The research will chiefly consider Manish Arora's approach to craft in fashion through the lenses of designers, brand manager, the designed object and fashion editors before using findings to reflect upon Li Edelkoort's manifesto call for fashion's return to (European) textile crafts.

Findings: The Indian case study and the unpacking of Edelkoort's manifesto makes a strong case for the good health and prospects of a fashion industry that embraces the opportunities for collaborations with craft wherever these might be while highlighting consequences that may arise for the development of the crafts thus involved.

Originality: Unique access to Manish Arora's operations in Noida allowed for a multifaceted view on how a fashion brand might utilise craft. In the process of analysing observations, contributions were made to our understanding of the ways in which fashion might engage with craft, and the consequences this might lead to.

Keywords

Heritage of craft, traditional skills development, craft-design engagements.

Article classification

Research Paper

In 2011, Bruce Montgomery, Professor of Design Craftsmanship at the University of Northumbria declared “(l)abour intensive craftsmanship (as) the new luxury” and quipped that “(h)eritage will be revisited as craft plays its part in providing (...) missing skills to the useless generation”, all in luxury’s effort to reduce its carbon footprint and go local (Montgomery 2011, p.20-1). A couple of years prior, Li Edelkoort had predicted in her *Ode all’industria* that “inspired by the work ethics of yesteryear, fashion will roll up its sleeves and get down to construction, at once rebuilding our society, our economy and our wardrobes” (Edelkoort 2009), and in 2011 Kiem explored craft’s potential “to facilitate cultures of quality and social transformation in the interest of sustainability”. (Kiem 2011, p.1) Against the backdrop of this oft predicted return of fashion to craft, Li Edelkoort published ‘Anti_Fashion’ in 2014 as a manifesto for the next decade. In it she praises textile designers’ contribution to fashion as since “(...) emerging economies (...) (and) their mills do not yet possess the talent and skills needed to preview new trends and design inspiration guided by cultural change.” (Edelkoort 2014)

The above are amongst a chorus of authors, forecasters and designers who have recently been highlighting the value that traditional skills, local production and the heritage of craft might add to the global business of fashion. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the debate of whether this valorization of making has more to do with Baudrillard’s understanding of the role of craft for symbolic artifacts in capitalist economies (Baudrillard 1996), or Fry’s potential for craft as an activity which secures a direct human presence amidst material things (Fry 2007) beyond the ‘romantic fictions of traditional or authentic’ (Kiem 2011). In other words, it will explore whether fashion’s focus on traditional skills, local production and the heritage of craft is more about a designer’s ability to “design patterns of behaviour like rituals of care” by influencing “how the designed is perceived and valued” (Tonkinwise 2003, p.75), or just another marketing approach in desperate times for the fashion industry.

This paper considers the case of internationally acclaimed Indian fashion designer Manish Arora alongside the work of Rahul Mishra to explore relationships between contemporary fashion design and traditional crafts. It will deliberate through the lenses of designers, brand managers, the designed object and fashion editors how craft and fashion work together, and it finally uses the evidence to reflect upon Edelkoort’s manifesto call for fashion’s (or rather: clothes’) return to textile crafts.



Figure 1 Manish Arora in conversation with Collette Paterson at Heriot-Watt University, Scotland, March 2016

In conversation with a “fashion artiste”

Researchers from the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore prefaced their 2008 interview with Manish Arora by writing that his brand “uses colours and embroidery to ‘define’ his garments” and that he is especially adept at communicating symbolic value thereby embedded into his fashion products to shape and influence consumer preferences. (Ramachandran and Patvardhan 2008, p.144) Interestingly, they credited Arora’s international appeal however to his label’s ability to escape both *country of origin bias* and *liability of origin* by registering as a UK business and by collaborating with “deep pocketed multinationals such as Reebok, Mac and Swatch” in a bid to gain “access to resources, markets and building reputational capital.” (Ramachandran and Patvardhan 2008, p.145) This potential contradiction makes Manish Arora’s fashion business a very interesting case study for an investigation into the cultural intentions and connotations behind the use of crafts in luxury fashion, but the two observations are not as incongruous as at first they might seem:

Calling Manish Arora a ‘fashion artiste’ and titling the subsequent interview with his commercial director ‘Fashioning a business’, the two researchers from the International Institute of Management in Bangalore highlight the clear division of roles between the label’s eponymous designer and its long term business partner Deepak Bhagwani. In his interview, the latter stresses the freedom from one another in which creative and business aspects of the brand operate, echoing that Arora had earlier described their roles as ‘clearly bifurcated’. (Ramachandran and Patvardhan 2008, pp. 152 and 146)

The interview reveals that Bhagwani saw registering the business in the UK as a way to ensure that Indian-ness is not becoming a promotional disadvantage to the brand, especially in nascent markets such as Australia and South America that do not (yet) associate the subcontinent with

fashion (Ramachandran and Patvardhan 2008, p.153), Arora, meanwhile, confidently named his first London collection “Made in India”, and cited Indian-ness as defining his style (Ramachandran and Patvardhan 2008, p.149). Both creative and commercial director agreed however on the importance of being perceived as an international brand with its origin in India, and Bhagwani’s statement that the brand’s identity is in ‘innovative embroideries’ is refined by Arora’s explanation that he uses Indian techniques in ‘very very contemporary and unusual’ ways. (Ramachandran and Patvardhan 2008, p.149)

Flexible traditions

Considering the company’s attitude towards its Indian origins, techniques and makers as presented in these 2008 interviews, it might seem that the brand’s concern with Indian crafts and craftsmanship would principally lie in economic opportunities of manufacture (Ramachandran and Patvardhan 2008, p.152) and the symbolic value of traditional craft. The label’s somewhat serendipitous arrival on the international fashion circuit does indeed suggest a very relaxed relationship with questions of cultural authenticity and integrity of craft heritage:



Figure 2 Collection of Indian Fashion Awards at Manish Arora, Noida (India), May 2016

In the interview with Ramachandran and Patvardhan Arora recounts that in his fifth successful year at Indian Fashion week in 2004, he invented a story around an Indian Princess who had travelled to Thailand with Red Indians (sic); he iterates how the story was important to convey meaning -to him- and how this cross-cultural inspiration allowed him to ‘go beserk with colour (...) in a naïve way’, that went well beyond the colours seen at that time in Indian fashion. In contrast to his idiosyncratic approach to the collection’s inspiration, he seems amused when “(t)hat’s (...) when I got to hear that it was very ‘Indian’! People told me what I was!”

(Ramachandran and Patvardhan 2008, p.146) Whatever cultural phenomenon we were witnessing, it caught the attention of the British Fashion Council who invited Arora to show in London which was his entry to the international fashion scene that would eventually see him settle in Paris.

Having left the 'basic silhouettes' of the Indian market and its focus on saleability rather than design geographically behind (Ramachandran and Patvardhan 2008, p.146-7), Manish Arora interestingly regained a sense of local focus: "My work may look international, but it is very India centric-the techniques, the fabric, and the embroideries (...) are much sought after." In attributing his current international success to these local ties, he asserts that the lack of a foreign design education helped him retain such a national flavour, before claiming that "(t)he advantage I have as an Indian designer is that the technique belongs to me so I can experiment." (Ramachandran and Patvardhan 2008, p.148) This latter point is of particular interest for our exploration of how Arora employs crafts in his brand, and in his own words, it enables him to take a technique, and rather than duplicating Indian designs apply it to 'exceptional ideas'. (Ramachandran and Patvardhan 2008, p.149) His approach thus links with Pickering and Edensor's approach to traditions as requiring flexibility as they are continually reinvented in a range of different context (Edensor 2002, p.6) and being always in the process of being recreated subject to evaluation in terms of what they bring to a contemporary situation. (Pickering 2001, p. 105)

Engaging crafts in fashion

Arora explains how he reinvented traditional crafts for the context of international fashion by for example creating optical illusion out of traditional Indian mirror work, or by updating the use of material and motif to embroider 1500 glow in the dark butterflies for the 2008 runway. He describes his formula for utilising traditional craft skills in global fashion as challenging himself to new techniques every season before pairing these with novel themes, as was the case when he persuaded the 'genius master weavers' of Banarasi to allow Japanese warrior motifs onto their looms. The fashion designer's success in engaging such venerated and enduring craft traditions in a contemporary and global fashion context might be helped by the existence of his *Indian by Manish Arora* label which is aimed at an Indian market and retains closer links to the silhouettes and fabrics of traditional Indian dress.



Figure 3 Indian by Manish Arora alongside Manish Arora Paris garments on a rail in his Noida premises

In the interview, he explains how he ‘cultivated’ Banaras weavers by showing them new ideas, to get them excited about new challenges. We learn that they now come to his Indian shows where they enjoy a perspective to beyond their traditional sphere of experience, and where they see immediate and continuous business through engagement with contemporary design (Ramachandran and Patvardhan 2008, p.149). From Edensor’s point of view, these weavers are showing flexibility towards their traditions as they are open to a degree of reinvention for a contemporary context. It will be of interest to later compare how Manish Arora shifts the balance of power somewhat further when relocating embroiderers and tailors away from their traditional workshops and homes to work and live in his Noida premises.¹

Collaborations such as the one between the Banaras weavers and Manish Arora are by no means rare where strong existing craft traditions are paired with a political will to support them in situ. NGO’s, national and international designers as well as many thousands of design students are involved in craft engagement activity all across India at any one time. The author of his present paper has elsewhere published some findings on the contrasting experiences possible for designers and makers in different such craft-design engagement scenarios. Ethnographic observation of communities and projects in India, Sri Lanka and Scotland revealed that some craft practices could thrive and develop on such an exchange of knowledge while others would

¹ See [Locality vs centralisation of craft](#) for more analysis on this point.

experience the replacement of an embodied craft tradition by division of labour and jealous guarding of design skills more akin to behaviour in the industrial revolution. (Greru and Kalkreuter 2015)

The chaos of too many ideas

In the interview with Ramachandran and Patvardhan, Arora initially dismisses criticism of his collections as containing “just too many ideas” as a Western point of view that disregards the chaotic nature of Indian sensibilities, but he later acknowledges the important role that professional bodies like the British Fashion Council and the press played in helping him gain recognition in the global fashion scene. (Ramachandran and Patvardhan 2008, p. 146-148)



Figure 4 Swatches and materials in Manish Arora, Noida

Manish Arora has indeed received a fair share of attention from international fashion journalists, and studying Suzy Menkes' online commentaries for vogue on two recent Manish Paris shows affords a glimpse of how generally positive his take on craft is received in the current world of mainstream fashion editorials:

Rather quietly critical of the 'complexity of pattern, decoration and vibrant colour' in Arora's s/s 2016 Romany Rave collection, Menkes seeks the collection's meaning instead in a franchise project with the company Vog that saw it espousing an environmental cause through a collaboration on pollution busting face masks. Unusually perhaps for a fashion editor, and quite possibly not without a dose of sarcasm, Menkes declares that the fashion makeover for these masks "seemed more worthwhile than a multitude of embroidery, floral and butterfly decoration." (Menkes 2015) She later referred to the s/s collection as "a Bollywood parody of Indian clothing trying to look western" but detected a return to integrity in his a/w 2016 'Prairie goes pop' show and its "mix of bright colours and patterns (...) still out of India, with all that county's (sic) sizzling shades, but the clothes (...) comprehensible and the patterns controlled."

(Menkes 2016) What Menkes is describing here has again much to do with Pickering's and Edensor's reinvention of tradition for a different context: Menkes enthuses that "Manish has come out of India to the international world" with his Prairie goes pop show (Menkes 2016) while she declared that "the sporty, international side had melted away in this summer 2016 (Romany Rave) collection". (Menkes 2015)

Contemporary crafts

What she seems to comment on here then is the replacement of some of the traditionally and exuberantly embroidered pattern so evident in s/s 2016 with digitally printed versions by a/w 2016. Other commentators on these shows explicitly remind us though that Arora's latest (a/w) collection still "frenetically (...) let(...)s us travel back and forth from the Far East to the Far West, at times making it even possible to be in more than one place at the same time" (Cafaro 2016). So while a/w 2016 is in no way compromising on Arora's 'chaos of too many ideas', it might be seeking more contemporary ways of expressing them here by being more restrained on craft techniques.

The above editorials of course only consider Arora's ready to wear collections for the Paris runway, which might not be considered by most to be part of core luxury fashion in its truest sense, and which are also not his only or most craft oriented ones, as earlier mentioned. Both ready-to-wear collections of Indian by Manish and Manish Arora do, however, display strong links to craft, they command premium prizes and both use traditional skills, patterns and fabrics to distinguish a product as luxurious, and increasingly so as Arora himself has recently commented on his brand's exuberance as a trajectory to 'a new level of lux'. (Verner 2015) Critical observers might further interject that much of Arora's work uses the modern and highly mechanized technology of digital print as much as it uses hand embroidery, sometimes as alternate versions of the same motif, and/ or combined in one outfit. The same is increasingly true even for his Indian by Manish Arora line, and also for fellow designers from the subcontinent entering the global fashion stage:

Timeless traditions

Menkes contrasts Arora's exuberance with the less obviously Indian aesthetics of Rahul Mishra "whose approach to building his burgeoning brand is rooted in his respect for the provenance of his materials, the sustainability of his production lines and the necessary preservation of India's traditional craftsmanship and its craftsmen and women." (BoF 2016)

His award winning fashion label lists amongst its trademarks 'the intricacies of centuries old craft and the deep ocean of wealth in handcraft' but also concedes that 'the journey brings on

board diverse, influenced and timeless traditions.’² Menkes reports how Mishra questions the motivations behind the use of traditional craftsmanship in today’s world of technology and quotes him as saying “a lot of technology is required with the hand workmanship (...) so it matches to perfection”. (Menkes 2016) Bandana Tewari, fashion features editor of Vogue India adds that "Rahul [Mishra] won the Woolmark Prize (...) not just for his creative and technical skills, but for the conviction with which he believed that fashion can be a powerful catalyst for social change, especially in his own country.” (BoF 2016)

Menkes and Tewari both separate out Mishra’s technical skills from his commitment to traditional Indian handwork, as the level of precision expected of luxury fashion requires a coming together of hand work and technology to mitigate against the former’s idiosyncratic imperfections, when, for example matching hand embroidered samples to the seams of sharply tailored coats. Much of Rahul Mishra’s current work is in that respect another excellent example of how flexibility in traditional craft can be achieved to successfully integrate it into a contemporary context. (Pickering 2011 and Edensor 2002) The role of the designer here undoubtedly is key to explain the demands of global fashion to the gatekeepers of local tradition.



Figure 5 Junior designer Swati Chopra with feather fabric sample on display for machine embroiderers in Noida

Safeguarding local production

Mishra is a graduate of the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, which since its foundation in 1960 has been at the forefront of education at the craft-design interface. Its Vision statement lists ‘Education to create design professionals of excellence to help meet India’s diverse design needs’ alongside ‘Design intervention for craft (...) for capability and institution

² The description is from Rahul Mishra’s a/w 2016 pfw show notes as quoted in Menkes 2016.

building and sustainable livelihood, employment opportunities and economic growth.’ (NID 2015)

Mishra was one of tens of thousands of signatories³ who successfully stopped the repeal-the-handloom-reservation-act in India in 2015 in a petition which proclaimed that

“each weave has a cultural tradition and a story(...) If we remove the protection and incentives for handloom weavers to continue weaving their traditional products and saris, we would suddenly be bereft of both our past and our future.” (Change.org 2015)

True to NID’s mission of design intervention for sustainable livelihoods, he travels to the local facilities of skilled artisans across the country to source craft for his contemporary design. In addition to the petition aims, though, Rahul Mishra, like Manish Arora, affords handloom weavers economic perspectives beyond their traditional products.

Locality vs centralisation of craft

Manish Arora works a different set up to Rahul Mishra when it comes to integrating craft production into his designs, and yet another perspective on craft and fashion can be gained when observing his face to face persona and the actual operations of his business:

On a visit to Heriot-Watt University’s School of Textiles and Design in March 2016, Manish Arora explained how his business had managed to harness Indian textile craft for a global fashion audience by retaining total control over the craftsmanship shown by the traditional embroiderers, pattern cutters and sewing staff working for his brand.



Figure 6 Master tailor wearing brand T-shirt at Manish Arora, Noida

Physically bringing together designers and makers, and organizing them in a system of crafts foremen and supervising design staff allowed Arora’s operation to exercise a level of quality

³ See Rahul Mishra’s facebook page for details <https://www.facebook.com/rahul.mishra7>

control which he regards as essential for the inclusion of traditional crafts into global fashion. He stressed that he considered outsourcing of production to existing localities of traditional craftsmanship a considerable risk to ensuring the uniformity and timeliness of production required on the global fashion circuit. His business partner Deepak Bhagwani, in his 2008 interview, had explained that this model of centralized production was adopted also to increase productivity by aiming towards a work around a clock schedule, but had conceded that important elements of handcrafting might be lost in a system that entirely favoured industrial production schedules over individual craftsmanship. (Ramchandran and Patvardhan 2008, p. 152)

Communicating design to craft

At Arora's invitation, the author was able to witness the reality of such a controlled and collaborative scenario some two months later on a visit to the heart of a commercial Noida neighbourhood, a hot 30 minute taxi ride east of Delhi's Tibetan market.⁴



Figure 7 Machine embroidery section at Manish Arora, Noida

With Manish Arora himself smoothing the waves for the arrival of his latest collection in a flood ravaged Paris in late May 2016, almost a dozen recent graduate designers, international and almost exclusively female were using props and persuasion to get several dozen craftsmen (and 3 women) to make the master's latest fashion vision a reality in a maze of production rooms, storage areas and roof terraces some 6500 km to the southeast. Motifs for his latest

⁴ An altogether more clichéd (and affordable) brand of Indian crafts is sold to rushing tourists at the Tibetan market in southern Delhi, while controlled prices and adjacent showrooms for a dizzying array of crafts from different Indian states allows for calmer consideration of purchases at the emporia around Connaught Place and Janpath. Yet more expressions of Indian making skills, often post design interventions find national and international buyers alike at design outlets in Khan market and beyond.

collection, showcased on the Paris runway some months prior, were clearly drawn from international sources, and the craftsmen at work were being guided and advised by the global designers in Arora's studio to work towards achieving one of the most eclectic collections yet. Feathers were being applied onto a wide range of fabrics, machine embroidery was used to cover large areas of fabric with intricate flower arrangements, and hand embroiderers were hard at work filling the outlines of digitally printed fabric with thousands of stitches and sequins.



Figure 8 Embroiderers adding sequins to a digitally printed fabric at Manish Arora, Noida

The Americana theme of this Prairie goes pop collection was exemplified by a jewel studded denim jacket with pistols alongside the ubiquitous hearts. Its young creator Gauri Malhotra exemplified the quiet confidence of designers working amongst the almost always male, often older and frequently Muslim craftsmen, by combining the casual dress sense of global youth with a determined management style as office manager of the entire Noida operation. She was keen also to point out that her design for this jacket was 'not in her own taste but right for the Manish Arora brand', clearly understanding the demands of the global fashion business.



Figure 9 Designer and office manager Gauri Malhotra with Prairie goes pop jacket in Noida

The scene of three traditionally clad craftswomen sitting behind a pile of half embroidered denim fabric ready to be turned into more such jackets perfectly demonstrated that those realising the designers' creations in Arora's studio through craft could be equally removed from the intended meanings of the designed objects.



Figure 10 Women finishing traditional Indian garments alongside denim jacket in Noida

Notwithstanding the relative serenity of the scene and the vibrancy of designs on show, any ‘romantic fictions of traditional or authentic production of craft’ heritage for the global market (see introduction and Kiem 2011) was not in evidence in Noida that day.

Instead, the realities of being able to produce fashionable and highly crafted garments, in considerable volume and within the price range of its intended global market, could be witnessed in this three story building hidden within the maze of Noida’s commercial district.



Figure 11 Streetview from Manish Arora studio in Noida just before Friday prayer

Across the pieces being manufactured for Manish Arora that day in May, the colours betrayed the vibrancy of the collections’ Indian roots while less of the cream tones of the collection’s Americana theme were on show; equally, few digitally printed fabrics were being worked on as their more highly mechanized manufacture happens elsewhere; any digitally printed fabrics in the building were given a hand crafted finish in techniques belonging to the Indian craft traditions, such as appliqué, but executed with unusual materials such as vinyl. It was poignant to observe how a young female European designer lowered herself onto the floor to offer a young male Indian embroiderer this unusual choice of material for him to stitch onto fabric in the traditional way that re-evaluated, in Pickering’s and Edensor’s sense, the skills heritage of his craft community for a new global context.



Figure 12 Junior designer from Scandinavia communicating design idea to embroiderer in Noida

Next to them, embroiderers kneeled over floor frames that contained pre-printed fabrics onto which they added sequins, threads and beads at an impressive speed; the skill once more traditional, the motif of kitchen paraphernalia within a geometric border even further away from their local traditions than the location of their embroidery frame was from their Gujarati home.



Figure 13 Hand embroidery room at Manish Arora, Noida

The resulting fabrics are in Arora's words, 'traditional but never ethnic'⁵, and this deliberate avoidance of keeping the creations of the craftsmen 'authentic' to their roots was ensured in Arora's Noida studio in several ways:

Verbal explanation of design goals was facilitated by using as translators the crafts foremen, who were skilled in the tradition as well as having the benefit of long years of service for the brand, and thus spoke the languages of designer and craftsman in more than the strict linguistic sense.



Figure 14 Embroidery foreman assessing work of a craftsman in Noida

The conversations witnessed that day all seemed to go in the direction of the craftsmen, as designers were eager to convey their visions for the final piece, and the negotiation centred around how it could be realised within the skillset of the craftsmen. The stylistic markers of the brand thus took precedence once more over the idiom of the craft, in a sense illustrating David Pye's words that "design imaginatively prefigures and represents the future existence of a thing (...), workmanship involves the material realization of an imagined design." (Pye 1968/2015 p.17)

Paper sketches were used elsewhere in Arora's production and design studio to guide the creation of hand embroidered fabrics, and what craft contributed to fashion here again seemed somewhat divorced from the ontological powers that scholars have attributed to the creation through the embodied practice of making, as craftsmen were very clearly not facilitating "the

⁵ On his visit to SBC in March

redirection of their own practice (...)” as they followed strict instructions from the design department. (Fry 2009)

We are witnessing at Manish Arora’s Noida studio a version of modernising craft for a contemporary and global context (Maldini 2014, Makovsky 2009, Liebl and Roy 2004), and a common feature in this process of commodification is that new values are added while old ones diminish or get lost (Ajani 2012). Irene Maldini has argued that “local objects going through the process of contemporary design may transcend in the new global reality, by being adapted or ‘hybridized’ (...)” (Maldini 2014, pp 113-114). Because of Arora’s particular *modus operandi*, his brand and its resident craftsmen would be of great interest to investigate further from a heritage point of view, to assess the influence of embroiderers returning from their production unit in Noida to their local community, both in terms of widening global awareness within local markets and material development of the craft.



Figure 15 Design studio at Manish Arora, Noida

With regards to the focus of our present paper, Arora’s way of using traditional craft confirms Montgomery’s prediction of luxury’s return to ‘labour intensive craftsmanship’ as a way to bridge a gap between the intricate visions of market savvy designers and commercial manufacturing capabilities; it can be of little surprise that those skills are often found in economies where craft practices as a broad societal phenomenon have not yet been (fully) replaced by means of industrial production. The fact that the markets for such highly crafted fashion creations are often, though not always, as Indian by Manish Arora evidences, far away from the centres of production, does however call into question the same author’s assessment that such practice might serve a greater role in luxury’s endeavour to reduce its carbon footprint and go local (Montgomery 2011, p.20-1). The reputational, economic and marketing argument for inclusion of crafts into Arora’s fashion seems certainly as strong as its desire to support local production, The case might be subtly different, as we have glimpsed, in the case of other

designers such as Rahul Mishra; the links between turnover and different practices for the inclusion of craft into fashion here deserves a further investigation.

Our study of how Manish Arora's studio works with craftsmen does resonate with findings of a study into the roles of design and craft-based industries for regional pockets of creative industries: here, the interplay between the "craftsmanship or industrial techniques for the production of physical objects (...)" was found to be complemented by "design processes and innovation (...)[as] vital ingredients for the intangible and culture-laden qualities of such physical goods." (Bertacchini and Borriore 2013, p.141) Edensor and Pickering would agree, and so does Arora when he says that "(j)ust using all the embroidery techniques we have in India or duplicating Indian designs won't do. The idea should be exceptional." (Ramachandran and Patvardhan 2008, p. 149)

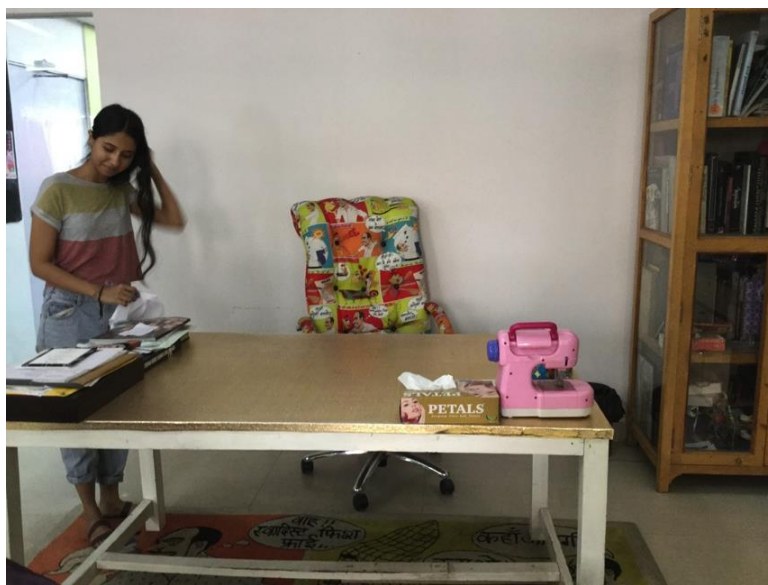


Figure 16 Manish Arora's desk in the Noida studio

What Manish Arora's set up evidences then is that luxury brands can benefit greatly from the inclusion of traditional skills into their contemporary creations, in the economic sense as well as by way of differentiating a product from the main stream, but that craftsmen trade a degree of their cultural agency to designers in order to gain fast track access to a contemporary and distant culture that values their productions.

Future studies might want to focus on how the construction of new heritage through such craft-design-encounters forges lasting new paths for making culture.⁶

To conclude, our paper returns to Edelkoort's assertion that fashion's future can only be in crafts:

⁶ Kalkreuter and Greru are planning a major research project for 2017-19 that seeks to investigate in case studies in post war Sri Lanka how endogenous and authorised versions of craft heritage might differ from one another.

Catching up with Europe and re-inventing our past?

In the foreword to Heike Jenss' recent Fashion Studies publication, Christopher Breward rightly assigns Li Edelkoort a degree of complicity in the state of the fashion industry bemoaned in her *Anti_Fashion: a manifesto*. To hear the call for a rejection of the corporate face of fashion from 'the most celebrated proponent of trend forecasting' who asserts that "(...) saturation is slowly turning travelling global consumers away from too much sameness" (Edelkoort 2014), might seem ironic to some, and "engineered maximum exposure for her own brand" to others. (Breward 2016, xvii)

Whatever balance of earnestness and calculated move might be behind publication of the manifesto, two aspects of the many perennial worries about fashion that Edelkoort here revisits are of key interest in the light of our consideration of Manish Arora's relationship with crafts. They shall be discussed here briefly in turn:

First, the manifesto's concern over the emerging industries' alleged lack of "talent and skills needed to preview new trends and design inspiration guided by cultural change". (Edelkoort 2014) Edelkoort's suggestion of this inability to innovate fashion through textiles elsewhere but in the ever narrowing confines of the European design houses is surprising at a time when "academic (fashion) focus has turned to the world at large" and "(t)he dominance of Western fashion has been questioned by fashion practices in the manufacturing countries outside the West, who were historically renowned for feeding exotic impulses into the fashions of Europe and North America". (Skov and Riegels Melchior 2011, p.133)⁷ Edelkoort's assessment does seem especially partisan when considering this paper's observations on Arora or Mishra's ability to innovate. The real cause for her preference of European textiles craft is revealed, perhaps, when she bemoans the significant unemployment figures in erstwhile manufacturing industries in Europe now lying deserted as large corporations follow ever cheaper manufacturing bases maximise profits in main stream and luxury fashion. The devastating effect of corporate greed on fashion has been eloquently stated by Naomi Klein and many others, but is unlikely to be easily countered by a return to traditional European manufacture or aesthetics.

Which leads as secondly to Edelkoort's praise of "textile fashion designers' (...) amazing pictures based on rekindled jacquards, remodeled folklore and restored fabric fragments of the past" (Edelkoort 2014) which are probably best understood in a similar context: The European textiles industry has a limited living heritage of textiles to turn to when trying to revive fashion with (traditional) skills. Archives and museums have arguably taken the role here of providing a link to heritage and (nearly) forgotten skills, often leading to creations with a distinctly and

⁷ The entire issue of Fashion Theory Vol 15 (2) is dedicated to the study of European fashion outside the traditional fashion centres.

deliberate retro appeal; Manish Arora seemed intrigued on learning that fashion and textiles students in the School of Textiles and Design at Heriot-Watt continue to find major inspiration from white gloved visits to the precious holdings of its textiles archive.



Figure 17 Manish Arora viewing Paisley shawls in HWU archive

On the other side of the world, emerging economies such as India, with its craft-based industries in textiles still intact at a considerable level and variety, can work more easily towards developing craft heritage endogenously, from within a living and developing tradition, albeit with different and at times complicated power relationships as shown.

In many ways, both of Edelkoort's assertions, once unpacked in this way, can be seen as making a very strong case for the good health and prospects of a fashion industry that embraces the opportunities for collaborations with craft wherever these might be. But much more research is needed on evaluating what this means for people, traditions and developing heritages involved in the many different scenarios in which fashion now meets craft.

As Breward (2016) seemed to hint: it is hard to entirely disagree with a forecaster of Edelkoort's standing, even if you think you did.

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