

This is an excerpt from an adapted text by Kavita Parmar, that was originally written as an introduction to a global gathering called *TEXTO Indumentaria* 2020 in February, in Mexico City. This event was co-founded and co-curated by Kavita Parmar. It brought together 5000 visitors from around the world, 45 heritage textile artisans from 23 different countries. They gathered to build a global heritage textile community, learn from each other, and to re-imagine the future of textile and garment production with heritage textile artisans leading a way forward.

LOOK BACK TO MOVE FORWARD

As we are hurled into a new era pushed by the fastest technological advances humanity has ever known, we are unwittingly redefining what it will mean to be human.

by Kavita Parmar

Maybe the time has come for us to create a record for our future selves. To reflect upon where we come from, who we are and what makes us human.

To move ahead we need to look back and reaffirm to ourselves that we have not lost our direction; to adjust our compass to ensure we are on the right path.

At this very crucial moment in time, while some view the future with anxiety and trepidation and most resign themselves, a few of us look upon this as a unique opportunity to reflect and dream of a more audacious outcome.

“To ask the right question is already half the solution to the problem.”

-Carl Jung

WHAT NEXT ?

It is not enough to just denounce the present system, we have to come up with alternative proposals.

My work has always intended to provoke a conversation about equity, sustainability, ethics and the very nature of humanity. I start this conversation with a fresh sheet of paper, a tabula rasa; instead of trying to change, adapt or disrupt the current state of fashion. To peacefully and lovingly paint a picture of what can be with a different starting point.

Fashion is a language. In the past humans have used it to express ourselves individually, and as tribes and groups recognizing our collective beliefs, but most importantly it reflected and celebrated our diversity. This language was completely appropriated as a result of the industrial revolution. As the late Antonio Pasquali reminded us, “the ability to communicate is inherent to the formation of society. And so, any modification or control of communications leads to a modification or control of society itself.” I propose taking back control of the language: **Recuperating the language of clothing.**

Textiles are texts and sources of information; they contain codes and signs that speak of roots, continuity and strength. They define their own cultural richness and recreate the way of seeing this world. It is through textiles that the individual reaffirms their cultural identity and assumes themselves as part of a group of people.

I believe that part of the key to a more sustainable future for humanity lies in the humble labour of heritage textile weavers - the maestros, the storytellers of our past. Our craftspeople from around the globe who have, in spite of it all, continued to practice the ancient traditions like a ritual to make sure we did not lose ancestral knowledge. They shine a light guiding us towards a new path based on ancient knowledge. Empowered by new technologies, we can amplify their reach.

Could small-scale cottage industry production become the backbone of the textile industry boosting biodiversity, supporting cultural preservation, nurturing local supply chains and thus result in a more equitable value distribution? Could this support create a completely new vision for the industry? To achieve this, what steps forward can we take?

My dream is that the actual producers will one day receive the same plaudits as designers and brands do in the current system. I want society to understand that the true protagonist of the supply chain is the artisan producer. That is why artisans, weavers, master dyers, embroiderers and tailors should be venerated.

I create projects that encourage cultural exchanges where knowledge, experience and wisdom from one artisan community can help inform other artisan communities where diversity works and strengthens through mutual sharing and cooperation. Such an exchange makes us capable of acknowledging the value of mutual differences, celebrating diversity and teaching us democratic tolerance.

The current fashion system has taken over our ways of expressing ourselves by pushing global trends on us that are controlled by a handful of major multinational companies. What we need is the huge wealth and variety of textiles created by small-scale artisanal producers that still exist and have been an important part of our cultural heritage and history.

They tell the story of who we are, where we come from and help us sculpt a unique persona in accordance with our diverse backgrounds and beliefs. Most of the production methods of these small producers are respectful of their environment and their resources because they live and work in it and have to deal directly with their impact on it, thus making them inherently conscious...

During the industrial revolution, craft was replaced by industry; the workforce moved to the city and the new production model centered mass production. Like the hand crafted wooden furniture that was thrown out to make way for stuff made with laminated plastics, beautifully unique handmade clothes were replaced by mass produced trends made mostly from fossil fuel derivatives like nylon, polyester, acetate etc.

There was no awareness of what was happening: people were so inebriated with what is shiny and new that they didn't notice the impoverishment of values. Through these changes we have discarded our myths and our NOUS...

NOUS (UK: /naʊs/, US: /nu:s/), sometimes equated to intellect or intelligence, is a term from classical philosophy for the faculty of the human mind necessary for understanding what is true or real.

NOUS results from the acquisition of a perception of the history and trajectory each thing follows. NOUS takes time, patience and humility. If I buy a cheap t-shirt and wear it without any NOUS it means I don't realize that the t-shirt was made from cotton that was grown, harvested, ginned, spun, knitted, dyed, cut, sewn, packed, shipped, sold and so on. And clearly the math doesn't add up...

“Now we are at the beginning of a new world, a world that is sometimes called a world on the run. We can no longer stop and predict what will happen the day after tomorrow, never mind the future. So it is important to have benchmarks in the past, without indulging in archeology but asking ourselves whether or not those things, that were part of a certain wisdom, are capable or not of still teaching us something in this wild dash that we can't keep up with.” - Enzo Bianchi

Many solutions that the industry is rushing to adopt as quick fix “sustainable solutions”, lack nous.

Recycling plastics creates more pollution as the industry is not able to recycle 100%. New plastic has to be added to the mix that keeps us dependent on petrochemical industries.

Renting instead of buying convinces people that what is new is exciting; that things should be used and thrown away, not taken care of, mended and cherished - to be passed on to the next generation. This feeds into the current cultural obsession and addiction with whatever is NEW and SHINY.

Both these ideas have had huge investments in just the past few years and are being touted by industry leaders as the answer to the unsustainability of the industry.

The real answers perhaps need a much deeper reflection, a real paradigm shift.