

Cuaderno 64

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Cuadernos del Centro de Estudios en Diseño y Comunicación [Ensayos]

Los procesos emergentes en la enseñanza y la práctica del diseño

M. Veneziani: Prólogo | **M. Veneziani:** Moda y comida: Una alianza que predice hechos económicos | **M. Buey Fernández:** Involúcrame y entenderé | **F. Bertuzzi y D. Escobar:** El espíritu emprendedor. Un acercamiento al diseño independiente de moda y las oportunidades de crecimiento comercial en el contexto actual argentino | **X. González Eliçabe:** Arte popular y diseño: los atributos de un nuevo lujo | **C. Eiriz:** Creación y operaciones de transformación. Aportes para una retórica del diseño | **P. M. Doria:** Desafío creativo cooperativo | **V. Fiorini:** Nuevos escenarios de las prácticas del diseño de indumentaria en Latinoamérica. Conceptos, metodologías e innovación productiva en el marco de la contemporaneidad | **R. Aras:** Los nuevos aprendizajes del sujeto digital | **L. Mastantuono:** Tendencias hacia un cine medioambiental. Concientización de una producción y diseño sustentable | **D. Di Bella:** El cuerpo como territorio | **V. Stefanini:** La mirada propia. El autorretrato en la fotografía contemporánea | **S. Faerm:** Introducción | **A. Fry, R. Alexander, and S. Ladhib:** Los emprendimientos en Diseño en la economía post-recesión: Parson's E Lab, la Incubadora de Negocios de Diseño | **S. Faerm:** Desarrollando un nuevo valor en diseño; del "qué" al "cómo" | **A. Kurennaya:** Moda como práctica, Moda como proceso: los principios del lenguaje como marco para entender el proceso de diseño | **L. Beltran-Rubio:** Colombia for Export: Johanna Ortiz, Pepa Pombo y la recreación de la identidad cultural para el mercado global de la moda | **A. Fry, G. Goretti, S. Ladhib, E. Cianfanelli, and C. Overby:** "Artesanías de avanzada" integradas con el saber hacer; el papel del valor intangible y el rol central del artesano en el artesanato de alta gama del siglo 21 | **T. Werner and S. Faerm:** El uso de medios comerciales para involucrar e impactar de manera positiva en las comunidades.

THE NEW SCHOOL
PARSONS

Centro de Estudios en Diseño y Comunicación.
Facultad de Diseño y Comunicación.
Universidad de Palermo. Buenos Aires.



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Cuadernos del Centro de Estudios en Diseño y Comunicación. [Ensayos], es una línea de publicación cuatrimestral del Centro de Estudios en Diseño y Comunicación de la Facultad de Diseño y Comunicación de la Universidad de Palermo. Los Cuadernos reúnen papers e informes de investigación sobre tendencias de la práctica profesional, problemáticas de los medios de comunicación, nuevas tecnologías y enfoques epistemológicos de los campos del Diseño y la Comunicación. Los ensayos son aprobados en el proceso de referato realizado por el Comité de Arbitraje de la publicación.

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“Advanced craft” integrated with the *saper fare*; the role of intangible value, and the centrality of the artisan in high-quality 21st century artisanship

Aaron Fry *, Gabriele Goretti *², Samar Ladhib *³,
Elisabetta Cianfanelli *⁴ and Carol Overby *⁵

Abstract: The authors discuss the trend toward consumption of artisanal products in developed economy markets, and query whether artisanal value lies in the “branding” of products as artisanal or in the “saper fare” or intrinsic traditional craftsmanship. Using some examples from Tuscany, we examine the added value of innovation in Global Value Chains (which coordinate disparate activities such as branding, design and making across geographies), in contrast to the elemental value of traditional, localized, and historic crafts practice. In this comparison we discuss the philosophical basis of “saper fare” (traditional Tuscan ways of knowing and doing); how craftsmanship imbues a product with intrinsic identity or “aura”; and the crucial role of “genius loci” (spirit of place) in understanding the craft artifact and process. We argue that GVC-enabled processes have relegated highly-skilled Tuscan artisans to subservient roles as suppliers of labor to global luxury designers and brand managers. Finally, the authors propose that “advanced craft” –comprising customizable and agile methods enabled through digital production techniques– can combine with the Italian *saper fare* to place skilled artisans at the center of the process of thought-in-action, empowering craftsmen and designers to share information as co-creators and designers. Advanced craft thus holds the promise of enhancing the Tuscan region (and Italy’s) share of value created.

Key words: craftsmanship - artisanal - saper fare - Global Value Chain - advanced craft.

[Abstract in spanish and portuguese at page 276]

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Introduction

Global Value Chains (GVCs) are defined by OECD as the organization of international production, trade, and investments where different stages of the production process are located across different countries. GVC produces winning and losing products and services by the degree of its participants' contribution to new value-through-knowledge. Gereffi, Humphrey et. al (2001) refer to:

...increased cost and importance of activities that deal with intangibles, such as fashion trends, brand identities, design and innovation, over activities that deal with tangibles, the transformation, manipulation, and movement of physical goods. As intangibles become more important, tangibles have become increasingly commodified, leading to new divisions of labour and new hurdles for developing country producers to overcome if they wish to enter these chains. (p. 10)

In other words, tangible activities such as production tend to be outsourced to developing countries, while the intangible activities around branding, design, and innovation remain in more-developed countries. This causes a sort of geographic and cultural split in a product's identity.

Unlike many rich-world countries whose populations have become de-skilled (from traditional craft practices) in response to the needs of the post-industrial workforce, Italy maintains robust craftsman traditions. These traditions, however, risk becoming mere links in Global Value Chains that the Italians do not control.

In the section below, we will discuss in detail the evolution of craft and its current somewhat misunderstood, existence, as reified status symbol. Through an analysis of what value means –and how it accrues– in both art and craft practices, we will propose that innovation from within the craftsman tradition is possible and often achieved. We will present examples from some Tuscan Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to demonstrate ways in which the Tuscan craftsman can retain knowledge and design leadership within the Global Value Chain.

Part 1. Labor in the 21st century: global value chain production and artisanship

At the beginning of the 21st Century, the artisan finds him/herself again at a juncture, as some consumer preferences overtly reject industrial methods developed over the last 200 years. The current situation has some echoes of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when labor movements such as the Luddites and design movements such as Arts and Crafts emerged in reaction to the devaluing of artisanship by the industrial revolution. Industrialization was the world’s first technologically-enabled production-and-distribution system, and by far its most successful, if pervasiveness and scale are measures of success.

The activities of the Luddites were quite different from those of Arts and Crafts’ Ruskin and Morris. The Luddites of Nottinghamshire had been key value producers in the British economy, employed in labor-intensive mass production of textiles. When advances in machine technologies replaced these workers with machines, their response –breaking the machines– was a direct reaction to their loss of economic livelihood. In contrast, Ruskin and his contemporaries presented a more detached and philosophical evaluation of industrialization’s *consequences*: both on humans and on the produced artifact:

And observe, you are put to stern choice in this matter. You must either make a tool of the creature, or a man of him. You cannot make both. Men were not intended to work with the accuracy of tools, to be precise and perfect in all their actions. If you will have that precision out of them, and make their fingers measure degrees like cogwheels, and their arms strike curves like compasses, you must unhumanize them. All the energy of their spirits must be given to make cogs and compasses of themselves... (Ruskin, 1851)

Ruskin defined two key problems of industrialization: its dehumanization of the industrial workers (who become subservient to the machines they operate) and the aesthetic and psychic inadequacy of the industrially-produced object. In Ruskin’s critique of the object, he notes two important qualities that we will discuss further: i. its lack of *genius* (identity, tradition, and “aura”), and ii. its lack of *genius loci* (spirit of place). These two qualities

broadly correspond with Marx’s (1844) four aspects of industrial production’s alienation of the worker/craftsman from the process of making:

- i. Alienation of the worker from the product of labor
- ii. Alienation of the worker from the act of working
- iii. Alienation of the worker from him/herself as producer
- iv. Alienation of the worker from other workers

Marx’s and Ruskin’s contemporaneous critiques of industrialization share two key tendencies: i. reflection on the individual vis-à-vis the labor process and its products, and ii. reflection on the social; industrialization’s wider political and economic implications. Guy Debord, writing over a century later, expresses the 20th Century effects of diminishing emotional returns resulting from limitless consumerism. In *The Society of the Spectacle* he describes man’s transition from being (pre-industrial), to having (industrial), to appearing (post-industrial): consumption of both products and images is a process, he argues, that ultimately results in negation of life:

The pseudo-need imposed by modern consumption clearly cannot be opposed by any genuine need or desire which is not itself shaped by society and its history. The abundant commodity stands for the total breach in the organic development of social needs. Its mechanical accumulation liberates unlimited artificiality, in the face of which living desire is helpless. The cumulative power of independent artificiality sows everywhere the falsification of social life. (Debord, 1967)

Debord’s critique of mass media and his anticipation of the rise of social media are prescient. For example, at the forefront of today’s socially-driven consumer culture, the advent and enormous popularity of product reviews uploaded by “amateurs” to channels such as YouTube has created a recursive dynamic in which commentary about the product is a product in its own right. This, in turn, is a platform (through advertising) for the selling of more products (through the embedded ads and banners). This type of meta-consumerism and the proliferation of consumer goods have contributed to the rise of a countervailing megatrend in contemporary consumer culture: a widespread embrace of the “artisanal” product and service. Artisanal products frequently promise to connect consumers (in Debordian fashion) with a [lost] “unity of life” –through their utilization of processes such as local sourcing, small batch production, and hand-crafting– in order to distinguish the artisanal product from the processes of industrial mass-production. These products generally command a price premium over their industrially-produced counterparts, and they are increasingly capturing market share.

For example, in 2011 total beer sales fell by 1.3% by volume in the US while craft beer sales rose by 13%. In response, corporate breweries such as MillerCoors and Anheuser-Busch InBev have purchased or developed craft brands to drive their own growth. Budweiser’s Anheuser-Busch has recently acquired craft labels “Goose Island”, “Elysian”, “10 Barrel”, “Golden Road”, and “Blue Point”. They also own “Shock Top,” a brand that detractors label “crafty” (as opposed to craft) in reference to its deceptive identity as a small craft brewery.

From a financial perspective, the acquisitions increased both growth and profits: in the U.S. a six-pack of regular Budweiser retails for an average of \$7.49 while a Shock Top six-pack commands an average of \$8.99.

Artisanal consumer culture is now so widespread that it is often parodied. The U.S. television comedy *Portlandia* mocks it as an uncritical manifestation of Portland’s “hipster” culture, in which the intangible values of consumers’ ill-defined ideas of craftsmanship trump the question of whether the product actually works. This is commentary on a rich-country phenomenon in which craft values are viewed romantically as more satisfying lifestyle choices amongst Millennial consumers.

As noted earlier, industrial production has been outsourced by wealthier nations to poorer ones, meanwhile internal consumer demand drives growth. In the U.S., the domestic services sector (its “consumer economy”) has always been large, but it is growing as a share of the whole, now accounting for 70% of GDP.

This effect had been predicted in 1973 by Daniel Bell as the rise of a “post-industrial society” due to a trend away from manufacturing, and toward services and a knowledge (rather than labor) theory of value. This presaged the rise of technocratic professions in the U.S. economy and a decline in the “blue collar” professions. Wealthier nations worldwide have structured their global production in ways that ensure that they retain the higher “value-add” accruing to information-based production in domains such as financial services, health, design, technology, and pharmaceutical development. Rich countries’ ability to be “post-industrial” (or more accurately, co-industrial) is enabled by Global Value Chains and the outsourcing of production to poorer countries. “Profits, value added and price mark-ups are three measures by which share and distribution can be measured along Global Value Chains” (Gereffi et al., 2001). The importance of intangibles in these measurements mirrors the rise of a post-industrial economy in richer nations.

The agility and efficiency of modern Global Value Chain-enabled production has deluged the rich world’s consumers with ever-cheaper, more-fashionable, and better-made products (Fry & Faerm, 2015). Meanwhile the countervailing trend toward local production of artisanal products holds the promise of a more authentic engagement with product or experience for commodity-satiated rich-world consumers.

To what extent does the artisanal offer authenticity, and how? Are many of today’s artisanal products (such as “crafty” beer) only offering the *promise* of authenticity while actually embracing a form of value chain innovation (purposeful articulation of elements of the chain to achieve specific, strategic ends) that is quite different from the traditions and ethos of the craftsman? What characterizes value-chain-enabled craft embrace, and how can these characteristics be defined and articulated in contrast to authentic tradition? What is authentic tradition?

Artisanal culture-as-trend engages with Ruskin’s two qualities of traditional artisanship: i. *genius*, spirit or “aura” of the object and ii. *genius loci*, or spirit of place. We argue that artisan culture, in a “post-industrial” age, replaces *genius* (spirit or aura) with high-quality artisanship and brand narrative as value-add strategies. Similarly, authentic *genius loci* (spirit of place) is replaced by place as a fluidly-applied value-add signifier. An interplay of these substitute qualities, together with intangible-yet-describable processes (such as reification) currently define the process of branding as a GVC value-add strategy.

“Genius”: intrinsic identity, tradition and the “aura” of the crafted object

Extending Ruskin’s definition of “genius,” Walter Benjamin uses “aura” to denote the intangible spirit embodied in certain objects. In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Benjamin writes that mechanical (industrialized) mass production or reproduction diminishes aura:

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term “aura” and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. (Benjamin, 1936)

Benjamin asserts that the aura [of the work of art] is connected closely with ritual function, explaining

The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition. This tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable. An ancient statue of Venus, for example, stood in a different traditional context with the Greeks, who made it an object of veneration, than with the clerics of the Middle Ages, who viewed it as an ominous idol. Both of them, however, were equally confronted with its uniqueness, that is, its aura. Originally the contextual integration of art in tradition found its expression in the cult. We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual—first the magical, then the religious kind. (Benjamin, 1936)

If Benjamin’s identification of aura with tradition, and tradition with ritual, holds true for those artifacts that humans define as art, then what of the crafted object? When does any object become so invested with ritual significance that its value transcends art/craft designations? Benjamin contends that it is necessary for the object-work (regardless of its use-value or utility) to be *unique*. He associates its uniqueness with its aura, asserting that uniqueness—and the object’s embeddedness in tradition—are inseparable from each other. If (as he states above) traditions are dynamic, and extremely changeable, how then can one define tradition? The Merriam Webster dictionary defines it as:

- 1a*: an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (as a religious practice or a social custom) *b*: a belief or story or a body of beliefs or stories relating to the past that are commonly accepted as historical though not verifiable
- 2: the handing down of information, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction
- 3: cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs, and institutions
- 4: characteristic manner, method, or style <*in the best liberal tradition*>

The first definition refers to customary thoughts, actions, behaviors (attitudes) and/or beliefs: the same elements that form the identity of the artisan. The artisan learns and develops his craft using combinations of these elements. Similarly, Heidegger defines the orientation of the craftsman through the “*techné*,” Aristotle’s term for know-how (*saper fare*) or thought-in-action, which represents the zone between theoretical “know-why” and the purely practical.

A cabinetmaker’s apprentice, someone who is learning to build cabinets and the like, will serve as an example. His learning is not mere practice, to gain facility in the use of tools. Nor does he merely gather knowledge about the customary forms of the things he is to build. If he is to become a true cabinetmaker, he makes himself answer and respond above all to the different kinds of wood and to the shapes slumbering within wood –to wood as it enters into man’s dwelling with all the hidden riches of its nature. In fact, this relatedness to wood is what maintains the whole craft. Without that relatedness, the craft will never be anything but empty busywork, any occupation with it will be determined exclusively by business concerns (Heidegger, 1968, pp. 14-15)

For Heidegger, the craftsman’s relatedness to medium (in the example above, relatedness to wood) distinguishes mastery from apprenticeship. In Heidegger’s formulation, the basic orientation of the craftsman extends well beyond the practicalities of facility with tools, and is rooted in an understanding of custom –response to the medium– and reflection on the wider purpose of medium, labor and context. The craftsman is a powerful agent of thought-in-action: a function that Heidegger contends is true thinking. We therefore assert that thought-in-action –throughout the process of the object’s creation– is the quality that creates unique objects.

If we examine this uniqueness through the lens of GVC processes and strategies, we can see that GVC strategy will tend to substitute the aura of the object made at a specific time, in a specific way by a specific craftsman –for the hedonic pleasures of well-made products, created, to high-quality standards– with care by anonymous skilled laborers. The specific qualities of the craft process itself are intentionally shrouded in mystery; craft may be spoken of, but not in its specifics. Aura is a produced effect rather than a spirit invested through the craftsman’s authentic engagement. In the following section we examine French luxury brand Hermés’ efforts to produce aura, comparing them to practices used in contemporary photography to bestow value.

Hermés: craft as a value chain attribute; opinion-leadership and aura

Established in 1837, Hermés originally made high-quality harnesses and bridles for horse-drawn carriages as well as saddles. The company introduced handbags, jewelry, and silk scarves in the 1950s, and it now sells luggage, ready-to-wear clothing, footwear, fragrances, stationery, tableware and other products. Hermés has maintained a connection to its

saddle-making history in its high-quality leatherwear accessories business. Currently its “Birkin bag” exemplifies this lucrative line.

In 1981, actress-singer Jane Birkin encountered Hermés’ then-chairman Jean-Louis Dumas when they were seated next to each other on a plane. Birkin’s account of this meeting is as follows:

I remember it well. I’d been upgraded by Air France on a flight to London, and was sitting next to a man. I’m not quite sure what type of bag I had with me - my husband, Jacques Doillon, had reversed his car over my basket, crushed it on purpose not two days before. Little did he know that on this airplane journey, when everything fell out of whatever bag I had, the man next to me said: ‘You should have one with pockets’. I said: ‘The day Hermés makes one with pockets I will have that’, and he said: ‘But I am Hermés and I will put pockets in for you...’ I said, ‘Why don’t you make a handbag that is bigger than the Kelly but smaller than Serge’s suitcase?’. And he said, ‘Well, what would it be like?’ And I think I drew it on the sickbag - or the not-be-sick bag. And he said, ‘I’ll make it for you.’ (Jane Birkin, 2012)

The bag’s co-design, which Birkin claims resulted in a sketch on the back of an Air France air sickness bag, was roughly contemporaneous with Halston’s ill-fated collections for J.C. Penney (Fry, Faerm, Arakji, 2014): widely considered the first designer-retailer collaboration, and presaging the many configurations of artist-designer and celebrity-brand collaboration since. The Dumas-Birkin narrative presents a fortuitous meeting between an art director/CEO and his muse-to-be –but it is also important to understand Jane Birkin’s heritage as an “it” girl and style icon associated with “swinging sixties” London. As the veteran of two seminal films from this period –Antonioni’s *Blow-Up* (1966), and Massot’s *Wonderwall* (1968)– Birkin’s credentials as a style “opinion-leader” would have been well known to Hermés’ Dumas.

The Birkin bag itself currently ranges in price from \$12,000 to \$233,000. Birkins are not offered to Hermés’s regular retail customers (in store or through its website). Consequently, customers who want a bag immediately must buy on the secondary market, paying more than double the retail price. The exceptions are those customers who have displayed sufficient “brand loyalty” (lucrative repeat business at Hermés across product categories) to be offered an opportunity to purchase a Birkin.

It can be argued that the Birkin bag is a ‘craft-centric’ product, as it is exceptionally well-made, repairable for life, and at the upper end –sourced from hard-to-obtain rare animal skins. However, the construction qualities of the bag are not the biggest determinants of its price, nor can the price be fully justified by the labor-intensity of the making process. The Birkin sells for multiples above the cost of craft labor, while average construction time is 18 hours at the lower end and possibly double at the higher end.

Aura and strategy in the age of mass (mechanical) reproduction

What aura does the Birkin bag project, as a craft object, that justifies its price range? Benjamin asserts that the aura of the work of art withers in an age of mechanical reproduction. The Birkin is a handcrafted product made to standard specifications: it is not unique. Therefore, according to Benjamin it is not a work of art. However, some photographs—created by a medium designed for reproduction and with tools for limitless reproducibility—are recognized as works of art and can command price-values much higher than the most expensive Birkin bag. Andreas Gursky’s *Rhein II* (1999) sold for \$4,338,500: the highest price to date paid for a photograph by a living photographer. Despite being the product of technologies of reproduction, photographs can easily be made unique through aspects of the production process. For example, the labor of the hand can be manifested through the photographic process as in the case of artists such as Doug and Mike Starn who deploy collage and esoteric chemical developing techniques. Photographs can also be made unique through use of the proper name (i.e., the signed print by a respected artist), or through the artificial limitation of prints possible (e.g., limited edition “artist’s proof (AP) prints command higher prices).

Finally, value can be established through a complex marketing strategy to foster opinion leadership. It is common practice for a photographer, for example, to produce a small edition. His/her dealer may then seek to place the first image(s) with museum(s) and/or respected collector(s). The early edition numbers are usually sold to these important buyers at a discount although they ultimately command a premium in resale. The dealer may then offer later number(s) to a wider circle of buyers, who will consider the image more valuable because of its “endorsement” by the early buyer(s). Viewed from a business perspective, the dealer has thus added value to the higher-numbered prints, and also to the edition as a whole. The dealer is able to charge a premium for the higher numbered prints based on the cultural capital created by the primary buyers. In conventional business practice, the lower initial prices would be considered to be marketing cost for the product. If the actions of the dealer in this case contribute to creating aura and uniqueness, we can consider whether the aura created by thought-in-action can be a manifestation, not only of the labors of the artist or craftsman, but also those of other actors such as agents, managers, business strategists, dealers, and brokers.

Aura, opinion leadership, cultural power and exchange value

The philosophers of the Frankfurt School, principally Adorno (referencing Lukács), developed a theory of *reification* (1923)—whereby the exchange value of a given object is not inherent; rather, it is a product of social relations. Applying the concept of reification to the (mechanically-produced) photograph. Rather than investing his work with aura through the touch of the artist, the photographic work of Richard Prince relies on an established art-world practice called appropriation. For his 2014 exhibition “New Portraits,” the artist took screen shots of user-uploaded *Instagram* photographs, including commentary from Instagram’s user community. Ultimately the subject of his appropriation work is cultural

power, reification –and, in this case– his dominant relationship (as a producer of culture) over the subjects in his photographs, from whom he does not ask permission nor give credit. The recognition of Prince’s work as unique art points toward the power hierarchies inherent in all social relations: a domain which also essentially defines social media. In Prince’s 2015 “New Portraits” Instagram portraits of celebrities such as Kate Moss, whose career is based on her role as photographic subject. In these the artist brings his social power as opinion leader and author into dynamic play with the subjects’ social power as media celebrities. In so doing, Prince echoes the Dumas-Birkin collaboration: the auras of maker and celebrity comingle in the artifact.

Importantly, Prince’s power-as-author accrues from his already-established reputation as an appropriator of the works of others; a practice he has pursued since 1973. As Prince’s art presents multiple chapters in the narrative of Prince’s use of appropriation, this approach can be seen as very similar to the establishment of a “brand story,” in which a dominant feature is persistent reiteration of a single idea or theme (e.g., “Established in 1837, Hermés originally made high-quality harnesses and bridles for horse-drawn carriages as well as saddles”).

Hermes’ cultural power enables it to add value to its products in certain ways that echo, though do not match, Prince’s successful employment of social relations in the art world and art market. Both examples suggest that reproduced products can achieve “aura” (and therefore higher value) not through absolute uniqueness but through reification, but also through scarcity: an economic concept of supply and demand as well as through Benjamin’s societal-historical concept of aura.

Aura and the scarce commodity

“The Hermés Birkin bag is one of the most primo examples of the scarcity principle at work,” says Constance Dunn, marketing and branding extension instructor, University of California, Santa Barbara. “It’s a sociological principle that exploits an evolutionary tic that causes us to equate those items in limited supply –particularly comely, high-visibility items that are widely recognized as signifiers of wealth and glamour– as items of great value that we must acquire as soon as possible” (Dunn, 2015).

Hermés’s special-order line exemplifies its scarcity strategy. The firm maintains a made-to-order label (*petite h*) for bespoke items such as leather interiors for a Bentley, or a Hermés leather basketball. Hermés recently made a leather boxing weight bag, and have entered a partnership with yacht designer Martin Francis to create a branded line of luxury motorcraft. These items do not have set prices which makes special order items aspirational for most consumers –even very wealthy ones– reinforcing the brand’s aura as a producer of unique artifacts.

Josh Weltman, a former advertising executive and author of *Seducing Strangers: How to Get People to Buy What You’re Selling (The Little Black Book of Advertising Secrets)*, contends that the Birkin’s scarcity has nothing to do with the supply of skilled craftsmen to meet demand (despite the company’s official claim). Rather, Hermés employs a “velvet rope effect” strategy: occasionally banishing people from waitlists, discouraging them from joining

these, and intentionally not having bags available in stores or on websites. “Hermes [also] famously refuses to give out its products free to bag-hungry celebrities... Even Jane Birkin, namesake for the brand’s most famous bag, claims to have paid for Hermes bags in the past” (Mull, 2013). Weltman claims that, rather than discouraging consumers, this strategy creates a bond: “once you are in, it makes you feel worthy. It gives you identity” (Smith, 2015). Moving from produced aura to aura imbued through spirit of place is to revisit Benjamin’s premise about the relationship between tradition and the unique.

“*Genius Loci*”: spirit of place and the tuscan artisan network

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. (Benjamin, 1936)

The second and third definitions of the word tradition (from Merriam Webster) are: “the handing down of information, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction,” and “cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs, and institutions.” If Benjamin’s aura (or spirit) is conferred on the work through its presence in time and space (or place), the temporal and spatial definitions of tradition point toward continuity—rather than disruption or fragmentation—spatially (through place), and temporally (through transmission of information between generations). In contemporary usage, “genius loci” refers to the specific atmosphere of a place, and to the way in which the forms and objects produced in a specific place are adapted to it.

GVC-enabled brands are acutely aware of the paradox of operating globally yet acting local. Hermés, for example, claims that:

The vast majority of [its] products are manufactured at our production sites in France. Our bags, luggage and small leather goods are produced by our artisans at approximately 12 French leather goods manufacturing facilities. All of our silk items (notably, ties and scarves) are woven and printed at our factories in the region of Lyon, the birthplace of silk. (General questions, Hermés, Official Website, n.p.)

This statement serves to affirm Hermés’ identity as French, yet (as any GVC-enabled company can), Hermés also makes use of “specific expertise such as watch-making from Switzerland, cashmere from Mongolia, lacquer from Vietnam, and wool from Scotland” (General questions, Hermés, n.p.). The articulation of hybridized origins is not limited to luxury goods; it extends to more everyday products multi-origin products, such as Noosa yoghurt, a U.S. brand which combines Australian culture with Colorado milk. Noosa’s overarching message is that “we love local culture,” no irony intended.

The Latin term *genius loci* identifies the “spirit” or intrinsic identity of a place or a community. Richard Florida claims that *genius loci* “maintains a proper balance between the natural elements and culture, multiple representations of the intangible values referred to this place” (Florida 2003). Hand-crafted production expresses the phenomenology of intrinsic place identity through such factors as local materials and regional know-how. For example, the leather industry in Tuscany, Italy, where the culture of tanning and leather processing has developed –since the Middle Ages– on the banks of the Arno river. Today, as in ancient times, these districts produce high-end leather goods. French luxury brand Céline references two locations in gold lettering on its Trapeze bag, the design/marketing (intangible activities) in Paris and the manufacturing (tangible activities) in Italy. Céline’s labeling visually manifests the brand/design and craft producer duality.

In 2013, the global consumer electronics giant Apple aired a TV ad with a closing shot that displayed the motto, “Designed by Apple in California”. A glance at any iPhone will show the multi-origin information printed on the back, “Designed by Apple in California. Assembled in China”. In its ad Apple clearly highlights the “*genius loci*” that identifies California as a center for innovation and the home of Silicon Valley. In doing this, the company also counters public criticism about the “offshoring” of its production to China. However, Apple’s message of “designed in California” also draws attention to its “assembled in China” counterpart. The referencing of California encourages consumers to identify place (California) as a signifier, to position the company strategically. Rather than using California to manifest a spirit of place, Apple declares that they take the best from here and there and put it together for you. But if China is amongst the best (in technology manufacturing) then why would Apple omit this in its TV spot? Perhaps California has greater hierarchical status, as a place, in the consumer imagination and a more powerful place message. This power relationship between brand and producer is also implied in Céline’s labeling of leather products, with local Italian artisan networks in Florence downplayed by the more-general identification of “Italy”, in contrast to the dominant and more-specific identification of the Paris locale of intangible (design, branding) activities.

Mulberry, place as business strategy

In England, we find an example of place identification (Somerset) of both the intangible and tangible activities of design and manufacturing, respectively. Mulberry was founded in 1971 by young entrepreneur Roger Saul, whose father had run the local Clarks shoe factory, a renowned leatherworks in Somerset. Saul was inspired by the contrasting place identification of English life: the fast-paced energy of London, and the practical traditions and style of the countryside. Mulberry’s early collections were known for their interpretation of a place-based aspect of Britishness: the English country lifestyle. Saul used locally-sourced saddlery leather, and gathered samples of quilted fishing bags, leather-trimmed waistcoats, and poacher jackets as inspiration for his designs: place-based intangible activities.

Mulberry declares that it remains “dedicated to supporting British manufacturing in Somerset”. Mulberry’s Somerset facilities for stitchers and sewers represent the largest

single investment in UK fashion manufacturing in recent years, and it is now one of the biggest handbag manufacturers in Europe. In 2014 the company opened a second factory in Bridgwater, Somerset. This allowed Mulberry to increase their British-made production from 20 percent to 50 percent of all their products made in Britain. Although British manufacture has driven prices higher, Mulberry maintains that the price increase is amply offset by enhanced consumer perception of a responsible company, whose decision to manufacture locally has brought jobs and training to an economically-depressed region.

Bridgwater has high levels of unemployment and deprivation. Mr. Scott said that more than 1,300 people turned up at an open day held by Mulberry with the local college and over 3,000 applied for the 300 jobs available. Of the current employees at the Willows, 20 per cent were previously unemployed for more than six months. (Chesters, 2014)

Although Mulberry invests in its community of origin, and seeks to create a local craft base, its most important value-adding activity is the building of brand equity through a social sustainability strategy. This is a place-based strategy, but not one that precisely maps onto the genius loci of an established craft network.

We will next consider how craft-as-marketing-strategy (or the discourse of craft in a global brand context) relates to the Tuscan craft network of artisans who practice and embody “saper fare” or high-level thought-in-action and how craft networks and design brands may begin to bridge a conceptual divide based on unequal perceptions of the roles, contributions, and their relative value.

Part 2. Saper fare and advanced craft: the artisan as innovator

Simply stated, craftsmanship is knowing how to do things; this knowing encompasses both the skills of making and knowledge of the materials and processes of transformation. “Saper fare” (in French “savoir-faire” and, in English, “know-how”) is now only partially integrated into current “Made in Italy” manufacturing processes: it is mostly regarded as practices of working with surviving (traditional) shapes and processes.

We can define saper fare by distinguishing between (semi-skilled) factory labor and (highly-skilled) artisan work. The former is mechanistic, while the latter focuses on craftsmen’s combination of making and designing. Saper fare engenders autonomy for the artisan, allowing him/her to engage with complex problems and find original solutions. In contrast with the assembly-line worker, the craftsman populates (or dominates) the entire creation-and-production process, through his/her know-how, personality and by employing a vast range of tools and materials.

The saper fare of the artisan incorporates socially recognizable and transferable practices: not only acts, but also attitudes and dispositions. According to Richard Sennett, the artisan’s know-how concerns first and foremost the idea of a job well done. The craftsman loves the job done in a workmanlike manner, is committed to high-level realization and

is proud of his/her work. Saper fare is closely related to technê, which Sennett defines as “ability to master a dialogue between abstract knowledge and practice” (Sennett, 2009).

In Italy, craftsmanship has traditionally been associated with Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs); these demonstrate distinctive examples of excellence, but also great weaknesses. “A small company structure enables the maintenance of traditional production and close-range quality control, yet it does not have the consistency to attract young distinguished researchers and to develop meritocratic processes” (Micelli 2012). The “craftsman-spirit” however doesn’t necessarily imply that craftsmen can only work in SMEs; their ways of working can be integrated into larger, more-structured business systems. Artisanal skills often enable large-scale producers to understand how to create items of clothing and fashion accessories for international markets –artisans interpret the ideas of fashion designers (and contemporary fashion trends) to provide the essential bridge: figuring out “how-to...” by working with and through samples.

Large companies have begun to feature the roles of artisans in their marketing strategies, for example in 2013, Louis Vuitton launched an advertising campaign centered on the craftsman. The shop windows of Dolce & Gabbana’s boutiques displayed photos of both seamstresses and celebrities, working together to create clothes through various fittings and adjustments. Gucci has proposed the *Artisan Corner*: a network of events in their flagship store in Florence, bringing into the store the finest craftsmen, and presenting them within their production network.

Internationally, consumers’ demand and desire for crafted objects suggests that respect and admiration exists for artisanal know-how. What does this relationship look like from the perspective of the Tuscan artisan networks that supply fine leatherwear for top global luxury brands? Luxury collections presented by these brands are often tested, reiterated, prototyped and built by the artisan-based SMEs of Tuscany, whose artisans are sometimes the subject of marketing and communication developed by the global brands. The ads tend to present a romantic view of artisanal saper fare as a fashionable form of “magic knowledge” (Goretti, 2013). This picturesque view of craftsmanship never presents the artisan as immersed in intangible activities, or as a design leader in his/her own right. The “magic knowledge” approach obscures the essence of craftsmanship, and expresses the chic and romanticized sides of craft practice, rather than encouraging the global consumer to understand the technical and cultural heritage of saper fare.

Theorists as well as journalists and public intellectuals have recognized the value of saper fare, and artisanal ways of thinking-and-making are growing in popularity. Thomas L. Friedman has proposed that Americans will no longer work in standardized ways. He asserts that, to be competitive, people must give something more of themselves, stating that “American workers have to rethink themselves as artisans, those who before the industrial revolution were committed in the production of goods and supply of services, expressing their personal pride” (Friedman, 2012).

Richard Sennett is convinced that society needs to rediscover the virtues of the craftsman –without looking to the past– but with a contemporary spirit. Sennett underscores craft’s engagement with social and cultural values:

The Pandora’s box has been opened, and we have to realize it. Consequently, we don’t have to look at the artisanal masteries of the past with a retro-perspective (many of these are gone forever), but we have to focus the profile and human factor of the craftsman: his passion for the quality of work, his desire for deeper understanding of the techniques in the exercise, its rootedness in communities of socially recognized expertise. (Sennett, 2009)

In this latest iteration of artisan culture, there is a growing attention to the rituals of artisan knowledge, and the desire to emphasize the centrality of the craftsman as a societal force. On the other hand we also note a simplification and a somewhat romantic view of craft processes. The new craftsman paradigm has many compelling features, and it promises to transform business in profound ways; however, it would be a mistake to confuse traditional saper fare with emerging forms of craft such as the *maker* phenomenon and other bottom-up, do-it-yourself (DIY) models. To be clearly understood, artisan know-how must be analyzed in the cultural and in the experiential; in discovering the places and socio-cultural contexts in which artisanship grows and develops.

The Tuscan context

In the Tuscan system, subcontracting companies provide traditional craftsmanship know-how to global fashion brands. This concentration of saper fare draws many of the main players in the fashion business to Tuscany, where artisans develop the products that enable these brands to improve and differentiate their value chain.

As previously mentioned, the subcontractor (craftsman) often operates as a “problem solver”, actualizing the “dreams” of designers and producing high-end artifacts. In the development of products for large companies, the SME and its artisans become indispensable to the designer’s ability to realize the sample or collection. However, no empirical evidence exists to validate our assertion of the artisan’s saper fare in making an intangible concept –imagined by a fashion designer– into a tangible artifact. The craftsman is seldom considered to be part of the design process; only a performer a (often much) higher-level version of the factory laborer. As actor and agent, the craftsman plays a hierarchically subservient role to that of designer.

In many cases, the broader process of subjection (of the artifact to the famous global brand) has had certain positive effects. For example, SMEs may create in-house “product development centers” able to host high-profile designers and managers, creating a sort of “temporary design think-tank” within the production company. The craftsmen or product manager(s) of the host SME works with the design team from a major fashion brand (e.g., designer Tom Ford frequently visited suppliers in the Florence area). These craftsmanship-based design centers combine the Tuscan manufacturing tradition with the technologies of CAD CAM processes, rapid prototyping systems, and/or ICT processes. Typically, when craftsmanship knowledge meets contemporary technologies, the “saper fare” *absorbs* the technology –within the tangible and intangible thought-in-action of the craftsman. The combination of newer technologies with traditional processes can be termed “advanced

craftsmanship”. This synergy between traditional practices and contemporary research facilitates the transfer of “know-how” to contemporary technological platforms without a reduction or [to use Benjamin’s term] *withering*, of the excellence (aura) of craftsmanship values.

In the domain of mechanical engineering for fashion accessories (e.g., buckles, metallic ring hardware for bags, etc.), the relationship between the supplier and fashion house is particularly significant. The brand manager and the design manager customarily meet directly with the craftsman/manufacturing company (usually an SME) to define and implement how the collection will be made, and whether designs need to be modified to facilitate crafting/manufacturing. In the manufacturing regions of Florence and Arezzo, a network of SMEs supplies many international fashion brands. For example, the “Sphere Bag”, from Louis Vuitton (Spring/Summer 2011), was created using high-end mechanical engineering completely developed in the laboratories of one of the main suppliers of the brand in the Florence vicinity. This is an example of a product co-designed with the technical and creative expertise of “advanced craftsmen”: individuals able to incorporate tradition and innovation. This “evolved artisan” interprets –through the technê– a design concept that may have been only generally expressed by the drawings and mood-boards of the fashion design “professional”. In this case the craftsman is not only executor but also initiator and co-designer (Goretti, 2013).

In a product sector such as apparel, the producers (craftsmen) often contribute creative and technical suggestions to realize the themes for the fashion collections. In the 1980s, the fabric manufacturers of Prato in Tuscany encouraged major brands such as Benetton to develop prints on knitwear and to optimize the aesthetic appearance of this specific treatment.

Other important contributors to the apparel design sector are research centers on craft processes, fashion craftsmanship archives, and historic or innovation foundations, which provide historical memories of craft and high-end production practices. In the case of the Fondazione Lisio of Florence the company acts as a cultural institution, with a vast historical archive of the production of fabrics in silk and other materials –from the Renaissance to the present– produced on wooden-framed looms. Fondazione Lisio provides consulting services for brands such as Fendi, proposing new creative drawings for the fabrics and customizing items from the archive for re-purposing into specific collections (Trotto, Hummels, Overbeeke, Cianfanelli, Frens, 2009).

Specialized finishes or treatments of materials can strongly enhance or add value to brands, so specific aspects of fabric production are important for boosting competitiveness, brand recognition, and differentiation in the global market. A case in point is the “matelassé” work on Chanel bags, or certain treatments made by Gommatex of Prato: this company produces very high quality “spalmature” (special plastic coatings) for major fashion brands, including Louis Vuitton suitcases, Gucci bags, and Gherardini “softy” bags.

A final example of an advanced craft technique is a decorating process on vegetable-tanned leather, by Ermanno Scervino, in the Florence area; they use computerized laser-cutting systems in combination with traditional leather craft techniques. Laser cutting is used as a modern method for a traditional embellishment. The “advanced craftsman” is able to use the laser-cutting machine with the same creativity and attention to finish as he or she traditionally achieved with tools such as needles and knives.

The artisan’s role of initiator and co-designer is seldom recognized by major brands, and many big companies actively conceal the contributions made by production excellence within SMEs. Maintaining this non-recognition –within the fashion community, between brand and producer– keeps consumers focused on the intangible value of the brand, rather than the tangible value contributed by traditions and innovations within production. As with the “romantic craftsman” narrative of Louis Vuitton’s campaign, the brand’s storytelling is an assertion of power over the artisan but it ignores the true “saper fare”: the evolving practices of traditional and advanced craftsmanship.

The demand for high-quality craftsmanship is growing, even as craft traditions struggle to survive. The Craft Council, supported by the UK Government, is currently trying to prevent craft skills and traditions from disappearing in Britain. Their aim is to find the best way in which to support tools for crafts development, and to promote design and innovation in craftsmanship.

A significantly innovative advanced craftsmanship practice is the integration of CAD CAM processes and use of reverse-engineering processes. These methods work with “historical” manufacturing archives and then repurpose the historic imagery, designs and treatments through such processes as 3D scanning and 3D re-modeling. The reverse engineering process –accomplished through scanning operations and related digital optimizations– is creating both the physical product and its finishing and material characteristics. The resultant digital 3D files, with detailed information attached, preserve technical information of saper fare, and also advance many aspects of the production process.

DIDA design department at the University of Florence has developed innovation-oriented Joint Labs in partnership with craftsmanship-based companies such as Savio Firmino SNC (high range classic furniture) and with Mami SpA (metal components for fashion accessories). Through the Joint Lab approach, crafts are made accessible to researchers and students. The onus is on the researchers and students to expand their skills by taking a step back from digital technologies into physical objects, and engaging with traditional creative processes (Kular, 2014). The research between SMEs and the university does not focus on a single artifact, but rather on a production system that defines a knowledge domain and range of innovation practices. These create archival files, which aim to preserve and expand advanced craftsmanship know-how and the range of services offered.

A focus on an innovative framework for craftsmanship archives (of design and production methods) not only codifies the artifact’s technical aspects and morphological implementation, but also collects information about less tangible assets (e.g. prior knowledge arising from cultural contexts in which the craftsmanship originated, and specific activities of “knowledge sharing” that the company has managed to develop over the years). Each product and work practice is described in a separate sheet of the archive, incorporating all technical details of the product (e.g. assembling, finishing, materials, innovation implementations, variants) and the intangible values connected to special modes of work and tool usage (e.g., special sheets explain different origins and effects of chisel tools that create different historical shapes). (See Figure 1)

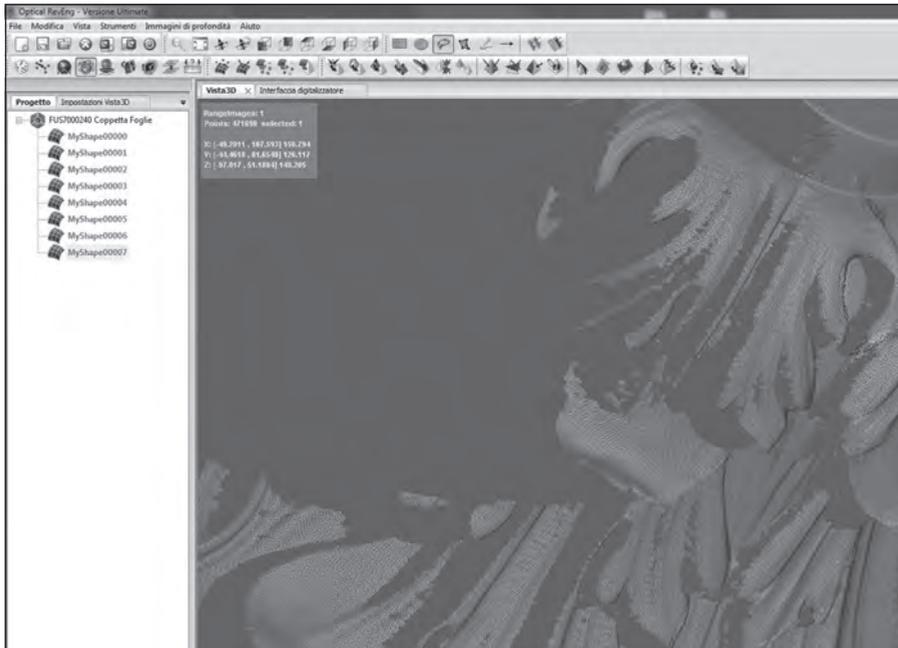


Figure 1. Screen shot of the reverse engineering process for home furnishings manufacturing, Florence area.

3D modeling and reverse engineering processes incorporate the archiving practice of the “historic” product into the contemporary product, developing specific applications within the design and production processes. More specifically, technological implementations are aimed toward several objectives:

- Optimization of time-to-market and improved global market competitiveness.
- Improving the services offered from the SMEs to their main clients through using the digital archive and the 3D models as a way to share information, suggestions and technical improvements in real time.
- Combating counterfeiting and enhancing intangible values of craftsmanship; including genius loci information, and know-how as a warranty of quality and added value of product (i.e. Brunello Cucinelli or similar brands could share, between designer and producer information about place: where the product was made), and also relevant cultural references related to the shapes and finishing.
- Improved product traceability through the inclusion of identification technologies (i.e. Radio Frequency Identification Technologies RFID or NFC) within the components of the assembly of the product. The digital archive of manufacturing could give a complete perspective on the components’ assembly and technical aspects of the artifacts.

In addition, the processes described above would generate product drawings (both 2D and 3D) as well as related descriptions in specific technical files. This information is connected to the design and the production sides of the process, making more fluid the interaction between concept and drawings with production processes, techniques, mind-orientations, and materials.

This modeling system focusing on single product components and their assembly aims toward tracing the complete internal process of production from conception to final realization of a product. Aggregated information about the product and related digital visualizations could then be inserted into specific Product Lifecycle Management (PLM) processes: a product management model able to define phases and timing of production, and to digitalize and capture the tangible and intangible know-how of a company works. Finally, these strategies may help to revitalize locally-situated cooperatives of artisans who—through the global value chains of multi-national luxury brands—have been coopted into the role of executor, implementer, facilitator rather than co-creator. In this cooption, artisans have lost agency and, equally importantly, pride through wide acknowledgement of their labors: a complaint made by Marx toward the end of the Industrial Revolution.

Conclusion

It is necessary to understand the key drivers of value for high-craft in the Global Value Chain, especially the dominating role of branding strategy. In counterpoint to the strong narratives developed by global luxury brands, we have identified dynamic and innovative ways in which the saper fare is alive and evolving: integrating new processes, materials and mind-sets into traditional knowledge. The real potential for these practices is speculative, especially given those agents with a vested interest in the status-quo of high-craft production. However, there is no doubt that a new “Made in Italy” innovation-driven design praxis would revitalize a craft tradition that may be in danger of ossification and, worse, relegation to the supplier side of the GVC. This situation undervalues the craft skills and intellectual capacities of Italy’s skilled craftsmen.

Should Italy, in much the same way as France has, invest in identifying design and fashion trends and creating brand equity through sophisticated GVC innovations, or can it forge a different path while still increasing its share of value generated? We suggest that Italy’s craftsman-intensive SMEs could utilize advanced craftsmanship as an innovation platform for cross-fertilization of ideas and capacities. Digital technologies could support this network of the saper fare in the same way that they currently support craftsmen’s processes as GVC production labor. The role and expertise of highly-skilled producers needs to be more respected by their principal clients, but this shift may only occur if, and when SMEs codify, aggregate, and share knowledge. The craftsmanship-based SME could then be considered a small research center evidencing, experimenting with, and extending existing knowledge and developing new expertise. A technologically-enabled “Made in Italy” saper fare could then begin to evolve into a “high-tech craftsmanship network”: an entity that we assert will eventually emerge as technology, fashion, and traditional craft

continue to develop synergies. Why should the beneficiaries of advanced craft not be the craftsmen of Tuscany and Italy?

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Resumen: Los autores discuten la tendencia hacia el consumo de productos artesanales en los mercados de las economías desarrolladas y se preguntan si el valor artesanal radica en la “marca” de los productos artesanales o en el “saper fare” (saber hacer) como valor intrínseco de la artesanía tradicional. A partir de algunos ejemplos de la Toscana, se analiza el valor agregado de la innovación en las cadenas de valor globales (que conjugan actividades dispares como la marca, el diseño y la fabricación en distintas regiones), en contraste con el valor elemental de la práctica artesanal tradicional, localizada e histórica. En esta comparación se discute la base filosófica del “saber hacer”; cómo la artesanía impregna un producto con identidad intrínseca o “aura”; y el papel crucial del “genius loci” (espíritu del lugar) en la comprensión del producto artesanal y su proceso. Se argumenta que los procesos habilitados para GVC (cadenas de valor globales) han relegado a artesanos toscanos altamente calificados a ser proveedores de mano de obra de los diseñadores de lujo globales y de los gerentes de marca. Por último, los autores sostienen que “la artesanía de avanzada”—que comprende métodos ágiles y adaptables que permiten las técnicas de producción digital—se puede combinar con el “saper fare” italiano para colocar a los artesanos expertos en el centro del proceso estratégico, promoviendo que artesanos y diseñadores compartan información como co-creadores y diseñadores. Por lo tanto, este concepto de “artesanía de avanzada” promete mejorar la participación de la Toscana en la creación de valor de la región y de Italia.

Palabras clave: artesanato - artesanal - saber hacer - Cadena de valor global - artesanía de avanzada.

Resumo: Os autores discutem a tendência até o consumo de produtos artesanais nos mercados das economias desenvolvidas e se perguntam si o valor artesanal radica na marca dos produtos artesanais ou em o “saper fare” (saber fazer) como valor intrínseco do artesanato tradicional. A partir de exemplos da Toscana, se analisa o valor agregado da inovação nas cadeias de valor globais (que conjugam atividades dispares como a marca, o design e a fabricação em diferentes regiões), em contraste com o valor elementar da prática artesanal tradicional, localizada e histórica. Nesta comparação discute-se a base filosófica do saber fazer; como o artesanato impregna um produto com identidade intrínseca ou “aura” y o papel crucial do “genius loci” (espírito do lugar) na compreensão do produto artesanal e seu processo. Argumenta-se que os processos habilitados para GVC (cadeias de valor globais) relegaram a artesãos toscanos expertos no centro do processo estratégico, promovendo que artesãos e designers compartilhem informação como co-criadores e designers. Por tanto, este conceito de “artesanato de avançada” promete melhorar a participação da Toscana na criação de valor da região e de Itália.

Palavras chave: artesanato - artesanal - saber fazer - Cadeia de valor global - artesanato de avançada.
