

Professor Philip Crang
Fashioning Diaspora Space: Textiles, Pattern and Cultural Exchange
Between Britain and South Asia
End of year Report for 2007

At this comparatively early stage, highlights of the research concern emergent conceptualisations, substantive discoveries, and engagement activities beyond those we initially envisaged. The first two of these are discussed below, but some of the developments in the first research strand (on the V&A's C19 acquisitions) are indicative. Here, an initial framing of the acquisitions in relation to a history of British colonial concerns (involving a placement of Indian textiles in relation to British cultures of design, trade and consumer spectacle) has been reconfigured into a more biographical framing of textiles' collection, circulation and consumption. More specifically, we have identified substantive materials that will let us explore such biographies. For example, work in the Archive of Art and Design at Blythe House has discovered apparently previously unrecognised information about the circulation of Indian textiles and objects from the South Kensington Museum to other museums and Art Schools as part of its educational activities in the mid-nineteenth century.

With regard to engagement activities those associated with the practice-led visual arts research strand indicate some highlights. For instance, the work has developed engagements with drawing research more quickly than we expected. In particular, we have been delighted by the interest shown in our research by the Centre for Drawing at Wimbledon College of Art, enacted through two periods of residency by Helen Scalway (the RA working on this part of the project) in the Centre for Drawing Project Space (the first in November 2007, the second to be in May 2008). We have also benefited greatly from Helen's involvement in 'The British Sari Story'. Organised by Bridging Arts and Sari UK Ltd, with Heritage Lottery funding, this art project was stimulated by Helen's drawings produced during 'A Patois of Pattern', an AHRC small grant in the creative and performing arts that initiated the research she is developing further in the 'Fashioning Diaspora Space' project. Her drawings feature in the project's exhibition of sari designs (at Brent Museum 28.09.07 until 30.01.08 and then touring to Northampton, Loughborough and Derbyshire). The process developed contacts with British-Asian designers and visual artists working on questions of pattern and South Asian clothing textiles. In consultation with the AHRC press office, a press release on Helen's role was made in November 2007, referencing the Fashioning Diaspora Space project and the DMI programme.

Progress of the Project

The first year of the project has seen the successful appointment of new team members (1 RA and 1 PhD student) and the establishment of research management structures and practices (e.g. the quarterly full team meetings at which research progress reports and publication plans are discussed and updated). More specific progress is perhaps best addressed in relation to the four research foci / strands identified in the full application and the aims and methods section above.

With respect to the first strand -- concerned with *the cultures of South Asian textiles in 'the heart of empire'* through an examination of the collections of Indian textiles made for the South Kensington (later Victoria and Albert) Museum from the 1850s to the 1880s – Dr Sonia Ashmore was appointed as a Research Fellow based in the Research Department of the V&A. The project requires navigation within and across a range of archives and collections, and therefore it was vital at the outset that Dr Ashmore gained familiarity with this complex terrain. Since that initial mapping, work has developed around a biographical framing of textiles' collection, circulation and consumption, and the development of plans for written outputs are reflecting this. More specifically, we have identified substantive materials that are letting us explore such biographies. With respect to 'collection', Purdon-Clarke's expedition, explored through acquisition archives and the textile collections and in relation to his other collecting and exhibitionary practices, is proving particularly interesting terrain. With regard to 'circulation', initial concern about the difficulties of evidentially tracing movements of textiles has been assuaged by archives and material collections research in the V&A, Macclesfield and Manchester that has produced new evidence linking documents and objects across and beyond these sites. A couple of examples of such evidence are mentioned as highlights above. Work on 'consumption', in the sense of South Asian textiles' presence in consumer cultures in this period, will come more to the fore next year, but suggestive foci – such as the use of boteh / paisley pattern and / or the comparison of men's and women's fashions – are emergent. Otherwise, an important curatorial contribution to this work has emerged, in the (on-going) work done on the selective visual recording and public access descriptions of items from the V&A's C19 Indian textile collections (these were rarely apparent prior to the project). The production of these in cd-rom format will be an additional output from the project directed at curatorial audiences.

The second research strand -- on *the cultures of South Asian clothing textiles in post-colonial Britain* – is primarily timetabled for substantive research in 2008. As planned, an overview analysis of the presence of South Asian textiles in the British fashion press has commenced, and the list of designers / practitioners to be interviewed in 2008 is being developed. The doctoral research project attached to the project is part of this second research strand. Here, an appointment was made (of Ms. Shivani Derrington), and student induction, literature reviewing, research training and research proposal development have all proceeded to schedule during the first year. Intellectually, a developed interest in 'dress' and 'wardrobe ethnography' has emerged within the doctoral project, a focus that promises a distinctive contribution to the project as a whole. Empirical research will be the focus in 2008.

This year, work on the third research strand – focused on relating *the imperial archive and post-colonial cultures of South Asian clothing textiles* – has been primarily concerned with advance planning. First, we have been undertaking development work on the V&A On-Line Exhibition. This exhibition will now come on-line progressively from early 2008 onwards, rather than being launched in late 2009 as originally planned, not least to enable uploaded materials from 'users' to be more central to it. We have also revised our plans for one single 'micro-site', in response to V&A On-Line advice about

how best to access / engage the diverse audiences we envisage, and we have gained agreement for the on-line exhibition of the project's artwork on the V&A website, rather than on a separate site, a change that will increase its visibility greatly. We have also been planning the format for 'user engagement' events with practitioners and consumers. Here, we have looked to improve on the application in getting both greater public 'impact' and a tighter meshing between this work and our research with designers and consumers in the second research strand. Our aim has been to ensure that the project not only enacts outreach with regard to engagement with the existing V&A collections, but also enables the broadening of the British South Asian presence in the V&A, particularly on-line. On that basis, our interview work with designers and practitioners will be represented on-line; and we are currently working on the logistics of a day event in 2008 at which themed group discussions by consumers of South Asian clothing textiles will be staged, again for representation in our on-line exhibition.

The fourth research strand is practice-led research on *drawing the visual cultures of South Asian clothing textiles in Britain*. Here the appointment of the RA named in the application, Dr Helen Scalway, was confirmed. Up to now work has been focused on three tasks. First, visual / photographic encounter with sites in London, in particular the V&A in South Kensington and fabric / fashion shops in Green St., Newham. Second, the further development of drawing practice, both through the planning of the 2009 exhibition (here the installation form and materials have been planned and costed, and negotiations are in process with the intended venue) and through the display / discussion of materials and work in progress via a residency at the Centre for Drawing, Wimbledon College of Art (November 2007 and May 2008). The latter will be developed into a publication in the Drawing Project Space Notes series, allowing work in progress to be circulated and discussed (e.g. via the Drawing Research Network). Third, there has been development of networks with other artists and designers engaged with questions of South Asian textiles and pattern, and with public dissemination, through involvement in 'The British Sari Story' activities and exhibition.