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FROM COMMODITY TO COSTUME

Productive Consumption in the Making of Bollywood Film Looks

◆ **CLARE M. WILKINSON-WEBER**

Washington State University, Vancouver, USA

Abstract

As scholarly interest in consumption has risen, little attention has been paid to productive consumption, or the acquisition and use of commodities within production processes. Since the shift toward neo-liberal economic policies in India in the early 1990s, commoditized, branded clothing has multiplied in the marketplace, and is increasingly featured in films. Selecting and inserting these clothes into film costume production draws on some of the same discriminations that producers employ in their guise as consumers. Dress designers' fluency with brands and fashion solidifies their professional standing but costume production is a field of social practice that includes many actors who do not share the same dispositions toward consumption as designers. This leads to professional differentiation in the field that can be tied to proficiency in consumption practices. Commodities may be just as effective as indices of differentiation in production as they are in the more familiar domain of consumption.

Key Words ◆ cinema ◆ consumers ◆ dress ◆ fashion ◆ India ◆ material culture ◆ producers

INTRODUCTION

As the study of consumption has gained ground in anthropology, a lingering problem has been how to reunite consumption and production (Miller, 2001: 9). Some potential solutions have included examining 'chains

of provisioning' that link the production and consumption of groups of commodities (Fine and Leopold, 1993), while another attempt goes in the opposite direction by suggesting that the flowering of 'hyper-real contexts of consumption' critically depends upon making production invisible (Dilley, 2004). Rothstein (2005) further suggests that rising capacity for consumption should not obscure structural changes effected by the spread of flexible accumulation, and that production remains the most important enabler of, as well as constraint upon, consumption opportunities. As different as these approaches are, they share a fundamental conviction that the producer and the consumer are at least conceptually different actors. That producers may exercise some of the critical and constructive deliberations involved in their consumption *as* producers is almost never noted. However, Caldwell (2008) in his study of the productive practices of Hollywood media workers, points out:

> We seldom acknowledge the instrumental role that producers-as-audience play . . . Media scholarship tends to disregard the inevitability of maker-viewer overlap. Many favored binaries fall by the way when one recognizes the diverse ways that those who design sets, write scripts, direct scenes, shoot images, and edit pictures also fully participate in the economy, political landscape, and educational systems of the culture and society as a whole. (pp. 334–5)

I would add to this that we are inattentive to media workers as consumers of material goods that are the physical precursors of images that are typically regarded as the product 'proper' of the entertainment industry. I have in mind here items such as costume and props, many of them elaborate fabrications that can 'stand in' for the objects they are supposed to be, others actual commodities obtained from the marketplace and inserted directly into the mise-en-scène. These are examples of what Marx (1976[1867]) termed 'productive consumption', or the use of commodities to make other commodities, and differentiated by him from the kinds of consumption that 'reproduced the person' (p. 2). Marx's examples do appear to mark a significant difference between products so employed (the tools and machines of industrial production are hardly stalwarts of the consumer economy) and commodities that are the means and medium of personal reproduction. On the other hand, in a dramatically altered economy where commodities are more pervasive, there is reason to suggest that the processes by which material items are selected and inserted into film costume production draw on some of the same judgements and discriminations that the producer employs in their guise as a consumer. The very same practices that 'produce' the consumer may become the 'activities through which the individual's labor power manifests itself' (p. 2).

As I was researching behind-the-scenes practice in Hindi film costume production, it became impossible to ignore the extent to which the orien-

tations toward and experiences of working with commoditized clothing such as brand labels, sportswear, jeans, and so on were strikingly variable among costume personnel. Making costume involves the purchase and transformation of textile materials. There are two possibilities: building a costume, which means making it from fabric and various trimmings or decorations using the labor of tailors, embroiderers and other craftsmen (Figures 1 and 2); or shopping for finished clothes.[1] Building was essentially the only form of costume production in Hindi filmmaking prior to the 1990s and relies wholly upon skills with deep roots in Indian craft culture. The other possibility is what is more often termed 'styling' in Bollywood. The chief sources for ready-to-wear film costumes have historically been *dresswalas* (costume supply shops), each with their own tailoring staff, that keep on hand a large stock of items for rent, such as military uniforms and dance costumes. However, stars expect to be dressed with new, unworn clothes. Today, this increasingly means buying clothes off the rack to make a costume, a relatively new tactic in India for it relies upon the existence of a vast array of commoditized clothing in retail markets, something that has only arisen in India within the past 20 years (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 1 A worker at a *dresswala*'s shop, making a 'ready-wrapped' turban popular for use in historical pictures.

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The introduction of a new set of products into costume production demands practitioners whose facility with contemporary consumption acts are critical to their professional self-presentation, and whose practices are competitively articulated in terms of taste and distinction (Bourdieu, 1984: 56). Comparative research shows that in the North American industry, costume personnel come from a range of training backgrounds, whether theater, costume design or fashion design, but a precise division of labor and a well-developed consensus on 'best practices' socializes each one into the processes of both building and shopping (see also Calhoun, 2000). Additionally, a deeper and longer-established experience with commoditized clothing across class boundaries means that few designers are at a severe disadvantage in judging what is appropriate for use in costuming a contemporary film. In the Indian context, however,

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FIGURE 2 Embroidery on film costumes, done by hand in local workshops.
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the same conditions do not hold. There is the sheer newness of a florid commodity economy, for example, and a middle class that, while unified by the aspirational goals of consumerism, is divided by unequal capability for such consumption (Fernandes, 2000). Practical familiarity not just with consumption practices, but with related engagements in what Liechty (2002) terms the 'media assemblage' (p. 31) enhances the skills needed for productive consumption. Advantages in employment and opportunity accrue to those who follow global fashion trends through magazines and television, attend fashion shows and shoots, or browse the internet, particularly against the backdrop of a lack of training programs, poor worker organization and enduring exclusionary, class-based practices that are reflective of Indian society more generally. As the film industry undergoes reconfiguration within an altered economy, these personnel seek to differentiate themselves

FIGURE 3 A Levi's outlet on Linking Road in suburban Bandra, featuring a billboard with Levi's brand 'ambassador', film star Akshay Kumar.
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as producers using the cultural capital of education and global fashion knowledge.

This article draws on ethnographic and interview data to explore productive consumption in such contexts.[2] I shall argue that costume production may be usefully approached using Warde's (2005) argument regarding the interpretation of consumption as social practice. Although Warde, like most writers on consumption, focuses entirely upon consumption in its familiar, non-work contexts, his idea that consumption comprises a corpus of knowledge and its motivational and affective correlates on one hand, and performance on the other, can be usefully applied to the consumption of cloth and clothing in costume production.

FILM AND THE COMMODITY ECONOMY

The Indian film industry is one of the biggest and oldest in the world (Rajadhyaksha, 1996a, 1996b; Joshi, 2002; Ganti, 2004; Mazumdar, 2007: xviii). Of the various regional industries, the one based in Mumbai (still referred to in film circles and in this essay as Bombay) has the highest national profile and greatest global appeal (Dwyer and Patel, 2002: 8; Ganti, 2004: 3). Since the early 1990s, when a seismic shift took place in government economic policy to relax restrictions on private enterprise and permit the easier importation of foreign goods, rampant commoditization has dramatically changed the face and fabric of Indian urban life (see Figure 4; also Virdi, 2003: 201; Ganti, 2004: 34; Mazumdar, 2007: xxi; Vedwan, 2007: 665).

FIGURE 4 Advertising billboards and an advertisement on a passing lorry, illustrating the ubiquity of marketing images in contemporary public space.
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Simultaneously, as Mazzarella (2003) observed in his work on Indian advertising, the affluent consumer has replaced the self-denying worker as model citizen in the imaginations of the middle and upper classes (see also Kripalani, 2006: 208; Vedwan, 2007: 666). The film industry purports to mirror these changes in the themes and visual styles it adopts, but as an institution that makes goods compelling by embedding them in narratives enacted by appealing celebrities, it shapes as well as reflects the world in which it finds itself (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, 1980: 81; Dwyer and Patel, 2002: 81; Liechty, 2002: 181–2; Lury, 2004: 131; Mazumdar, 2007: 95). For decades, costume has been among the signs and forms of material luxury that Hindi films construct (Dwyer, 2000a; Dwyer and Patel, 2002: 52; Bhaumik, 2005: 90; Wilkinson-Weber, 2005: 143), making up a significant component of the pleasures engendered by watching films. However, as global commodity chains (Harvey, 1989; Gereffi and Korzeniewicz, 1994; Foster, 2005) have deposited more consumer goods into Indian cities, commodities such as clothes, cars, food, furnishings and gadgets have assumed a higher profile on screen and feature prominently in film marketing (see Figure 5; also Virdi, 2003: 201; Kaarsholm, 2007: 18). Mazumdar (2007: 95) argues persuasively that in

FIGURE 5 Publicity shot for the film *Dhoom 2*. Selected costumes for the film were adapted for a clothing range sold by Pepe Jeans.
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FIGURE 6 Publicity shot for the film *Bunty aur Babli*. The film features two con artists who make off with money and goods from dupes all over India. The poster shows the lead actors in the costumes central to their deceptions, many of which are in turn easily converted into 'wearable' clothes for Indian consumers. *© Copyright Yash Raj Productions. Reproduced with permission.*

the absence of the orderly development of the architectural and spatial landscapes of consumer capitalism, film actually *is* the shop window through which viewer–consumers can see the wares on sale.

As an apparently 'lived' commodity image, film costume invites audiences to extend their own agencies through taking on some of the sartorial elements associated with a character, or more particularly a star. As one costume designer put it:

Basically the trends for the people . . . come from the Indian movies, that's where people look at their respective actors and actresses, that's why actors and actresses are so huge in India, and nearly like demi-gods for the people, because that's what they emulate and that's what they look at all the time.

The copying of costumes is well documented with reports by dressmakers and tailors, and clients as well, of requests for garments that are copied from movie models (Dwyer and Patel, 2002: 100; Wilkinson-Weber, 2005: 142). Examples of widely copied costumes are many, including actress Madhuri Dixit's purple *lehnga* (long skirt) in the massive 1994

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box-office hit, *Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . !*, or Rani Mukherji's bellbottoms, *choli* (blouse) and scarf from the more recent *Bunty aur Babli* (2005, see Figure 6), to Sridevi's white ensembles from 1989's *Chandni*, Mithun Chakraborty's outfits from *Disco Dancer* (1982) and Shah Rukh Khan and Hrithik Roshan's *sherwanis* (Indian-style long coat) from *Kabhi Kushi Kabhie Gham* (2001).

Copies had previously been – and still remain, to a large degree – the product of a negotiation between tailor and client as to what looks best (Wilkinson-Weber, 2005: 142). Before the arrival of fashion labels, the menswear store was closest to a named source of tailored clothing. Ready-made clothing was sparsely available in towns and cities, and even today the local street tailor remains a key sartorial institution. In the wake of economic liberalization, however, malls and boutiques have sprouted over the urban landscape and a dizzying array of branded clothes, especially sportswear and denim, is offered for sale. The existence of these retail spaces is the key to the rise of product placement and advertising campaigns that include overt references to films – known in the business as 'out-of-film marketing' (Nelson and Devanathan, 2006) – directing shoppers directly into stores where media is materialized into consumable 'things' (Lash and Lury, 2007: 8). In 2006, Pepe Jeans concluded an agreement with the makers of the film *Dhoom 2: Back in Action* that allowed them to put out a line of clothing drawn directly from the film that was marketed in their own and other fashion stores (Dias, 2007, see Figure 5). *Don* (2006), a stylish remake of a well-known 1978 film, featured watches by Tag Heuer and Louis Phillippe clothes (see Figure 7), while actress Kareena Kapoor appeared as her character in co-branded commercials for both the film and Garnier hair products (Subramanian and Bose, 2007). In 2008, clothes reflecting the 30-year time period spanned by the film *Om Shanti Om* (2007) – from designer pastiches of 1970s film fashions to contemporary styles – were offered exclusively in the department store chain Shopper's Stop, while menswear and cosmetics associated with a rival film, *Saawariya* (2007), were launched at Big Bazaar stores (Bhushan, 2007). The lavish 2008 period film *Jodhaa Akbar* featured

FIGURE 7 A Bombay billboard advertising the film *Don*.
© *Photograph by Clare M. Wilkinson-Weber.*

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FIGURE 8 DVD cover art for the film *Jodhaa Akbar*.
Aishwarya Rai wears some of the elaborate jewellery that
accompanied the film's costumes. The embroidery would
also have been made by hand.
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meticulously crafted, sumptuous period jewellery made by the jeweler
and Tata subsidary, Tanishq, which offered to the consumer a 'prêt' line
of similar (only lighter) versions (Abhyankar, 2008; see Figure 8).

These examples, taken from some of the biggest budget films of
recent years, demonstrate increasingly symbiotic relationships between
film producers, advertising agencies, retailers and fashion houses, but
they by no means exhaust the ways in which the commodity economy
is plumbed for costume elements. In order to understand these other
engagements, it is important to acknowledge the contemporary film
'dress' or costume designer, a figure that arose simultaneously with the
growth of the commodity economy.

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DESIGNERS AND OTHERS

Since the 1960s, most films have had several costume or dress designers attached to them as designers to the various stars (Wilkinson-Weber, 2004a: 8). Previously, with few exceptions, costume decisions were taken either by dressmen (costumers who maintain costumes during filming) and film company tailors under the direction of the director or art director, or were delegated summarily to film stars themselves (who in turn got their film and personal wear made by a favorite tailor). Drawn largely from tailoring ranks in film's early years, today dressmen come from varied caste and regional backgrounds. They belong to lower middle-class strata (with gradations of status depending upon whether they are heads of department or not), work on contract or as day laborers, have limited levels of education, and typically speak no English (Wilkinson-Weber, 2006). The attachment of a personal designer to an artist, specifically a female artist, had become standard by the 1970s, while male stars continued to hire their menswear suppliers for personal, as well as film wear. Recently, even male stars are shifting perceptibly toward personal designers, coinciding with a preference on and off screen for casual clothes, sportswear and the occasional 'bravura' Indian costume.

Contemporary designers belong to what Dwyer (2000b: 91) terms Bombay's 'new middle classes' – English-speaking, comfortable with Western lifestyles, university-trained in business or commercial subjects, and entirely supportive of the economic and social changes wrought by neo-liberalism. They include both women and men, and almost all are under the age of 40. Recent additions to costume personnel are costume assistants who work for the designer, and assistant directors who are part of the production team but take on special responsibilities for costume. Both costume assistants and assistant directors in charge of costume are likely to be women, solidly middle-class, well educated and under 30 years old.

Present-day dress designers are frequently as active in the field of fashion as they are in film, in keeping with the general tendency for the two fields to overlap, as the fashion and pageant worlds yield successful Bollywood stars such as Aishwarya Rai, Priyanka Chopra and Sushmita Sen, and film stars walk the ramps for their personal designer's fashion shows. Designers such as Rocky S. and Vikram Phadnis have their own shopfronts, Manish Malhotra sells his label out of several stores in the city on the foundation of his association with the Sheetal Design Studio. Neeta Lulla is a prolific dress designer for films, who also does a large amount of personal work for celebrity clients, while Anna Singh, with an even longer track record of film work, has designed numerous fashion collections over the past 15 years. The recruitment of self-styled fashion designers to work on Hindi films is not in the least uncommon, as in the recent example of Ahmedabad-based designer Anuradha Vakil being

invited to work on Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Saawariya* (Reddy, 2007). Such appointments lead to asserting the right to an above-the-line credit (appearing before the film starts instead of at the end). Designers also obtain more publicity for their work in print and visual media and finding retail opportunities that flow directly from their film associations. As a result, more and more designers are becoming celebrities in their own right (Khanna, 2008). Film, then, is a means of solidifying designer reputation, first through styling that confirms the designer's competence in the application of global fashion norms; and, second, through building that connects the designer to an elite market for Indian styles to be used in 'special occasion' wear.

All the designers I met who maintained fashion careers were reluctant to state that their film work directly fed their fashion work. However, the favored reason given for this seemed to me to indirectly burnish their credentials in the fashion world, even as it conformed to a constantly recycled rhetoric in Indian film circles about reforming and improving the industry (Prasad, 1998: 44). This was the claim to greater 'realism' in film costuming.

REALISM AND AUTHORSHIP

Every new designer interviewed was quick to express concern with the quality of film costume. Some – mostly those who identify themselves more as film than as fashion designers – shrugged their shoulders and admitted that they had gone along with demands from the director or actor for costume spectacle because it was too hard to resist:

> They want elaborate clothes, you cannot imagine the kind of clothes that they would wear, you must have seen some, heavily embroidered, and beads and stones, and work and jewellery, and shoes and boots made with diamantes and everything.

Another designer who had done more work in the parallel cinema suggested that when watching Bollywood films: 'You just treat it as a fantasy, and in a fantasy you can create anything. [The costumes] aren't meant to be realistic, though now realism is coming in, a kind of realism.' What this realism consists of is summed up by another designer with strong fashion credentials:

> Nowadays at least the stars are very fashionable, they are very young at heart, and they know what is fashionable all around the world. So at least they relate to the clothes we are giving them, and they are the same age level. So for me it is getting easier to do costumes in movies, because it is young fashion.

Arguing that in order to reform costume design means that: 'You can't just create something out of your head, it has to be rooted in reality, that's

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why it is a costume', connects a discourse about clothes to wider ones in and around the industry about how to 'improve' films in which the achievement of greater realism is regarded as a desirable ideal. Realism, in this broader sense, includes expectations about how film characters and narratives are structured (see Prasad, 1998: 62–3), how costumes and character should match, how accurate a costume is relative to a fashion ideal, as well as the professional standards and practices that must exist in order to achieve such goals, as in this description given by designer Manish Malhotra about his breakout designing for the film *Rangeela* (1995):

> I said, why don't I get style into it? Why don't I start asking what is the role? Or why don't we give a look. So a girl, who has a passion for a certain kind of clothing, she wears that kind of clothing, and that kind of hair, whereas the earlier tendency was that in one shot the girl's hair was short, and in the other shot her hair long. And so I introduced styling.

Contemporary designers draw no clear distinction between ensuring the verisimilitude of the costumed character and being able to construct costumes, specifically Western ones, that conform to, rather than deviate from, global fashion standards. To them, characters are globally situated, part of a commodity-rich fashion world that has tangible existence outside Bollywood's environs. It is eminently logical, then, that the achievement of 'real' costumes must rely to a large degree upon 'shopping' for costumes in the 'real' world of commoditized clothing. It is not that the producers of a film look have never had to deal with commodities before; what is new is the sheer quantity of commodities and, with that, the possibility of choice. The loop is closed upon noting that if films can 'realistically depict use of current brands and products' then they are naturally 'ideal for product placement' (Kripalani, 2006: 206). Unsurprisingly, as Ganti (2004: 64) remarks, those that demand cinematic realism, and find realism enhanced by the inclusion of brands, come from the educated upper-middle and upper classes that make up the biggest market for branded goods and label clothing (Liechty, 2002: 180–1; Nelson and Devanathan, 2006: 217).[3]

Paradoxically, the resilience of non-realistic elements in film, such as music and dance, pose no particular problem for this view of film realism and assessments of the reality (or otherwise) of costume. Vasudevan (1995) and others (e.g. Gopalan, 2002: 18; Mazumdar, 2007: xxxv) have argued that Hindi cinema has its own distinct conventions, in which songs, dances, multiple subplots and an apparent blend of genres serve to maximize viewer pleasure. It has been, and remains, a cinema whose appeal to its audience is constituted by the range of visual 'attractions' it offers. Songs and dances provide the most intense and focused opportunities for consumptive display. Indeed, realism for contemporary Bollywood filmmakers, far from repudiating excess, willingly embraces it, but

it is excess that they argue is plausible within lifestyles in which such consumption now habitually finds a place. A continued commitment to spectacle may be particularly well suited to producing consumer desire because of the ability to combine, in the same film, realistic urban vistas in which ready-to-wear clothes and labels are used, and set pieces that display more rarified instances of evening wear or elaborate Indian clothing (for which the new designers must draw on tailoring and embroidery skills that have been part of Hindi film costuming for generations) (Wilkinson-Weber, 2004a). These are ripe for appropriation by wealthy clients for weddings and other special occasions, and marketed via the 'trousseaux' and 'special occasion' sections of designer websites.

The dress designer's fluency with brands and global fashion is a critical part of his or her claims to authorship of those costumes. While film costume has always enjoyed a unique connection to a beloved star, it has only rarely been associated with its designer. In recent years, though, new designers with parallel commercial and film careers are much more concerned to imprint their agency upon the costumes they design. Some are quite sensitive to the advantages of developing their own identity as fashion brands, recognizing the value to be added to their creations of a 'tradition of artistic authorship' (Tungate, 2005: 59). The unapologetic use of brand language surrounding the rise of commodities and brands in post-liberalization India can be attributed to the ascendancy of business models that are 'saturated with business-world jargon, involving brand image, brand equity and such' (Vedwan, 2007: 665). More critically, it is evidence of the workings of the 'global culture industry' for which brands are the engine, 'instantiat[ing] themselves in a range of products' (Lash and Lury, 2007: 6). It is hard to imagine an American or British actor referring openly to him or herself as a brand as Hindi film star Shah Rukh Khan does, exemplifying, in the Indian context, Klein's (2000) point about 'artists racing to meet the corporations halfway in the branding game . . . developing and leveraging their own brand potential' (p. 30):

> Who is the real SRK? The brand who endorses many products, the actor who essays different characters, or just the family man who enjoys tinkering around in his palatial home? . . . If you are looking at the brand Shah Rukh, obviously it's a myth and it's created. And one has to constantly feed the myth to keep it going. (Shah Rukh Khan, quoted in Ahmad, 2006)

Khan's comments clearly speak to the importance of film stars for bridging commerce and film, the two major fields where their 'brand' is actualized, as Lash and Lury (2007: 6) put it (see Figure 9). Indian actors are quite open, even profligate in their endorsements, cropping up for example on advertisements for phone service on the sides of buses (married film stars Ajay Devgan and Kajol) or being pictured on potato crisp packets (Saif Ali Khan). The attachment of stars to both brands and

FIGURE 9 A giant poster of film star Saif Ali Khan, advertising Provogue clothing outside a mall in a suburb of Malad.
© *Photograph by Clare M. Wilkinson-Weber.*

designers who act as their stylists on and off screen facilitates their management as brand properties. The free use of star endorsers seems tied, at least in part, to the need to effect a rapid education in brand sophistication among consumers who have only recently been presented with the commodity choices that now exist. The use of film star endorsers, like other celebrity spokespersons, relies upon the 'transference' of qualities between the pitcher's persona and the brand to make it desirable (McCracken, 1989: 312; Danesi, 2006: 93). Given that actors are brands too, with film careers in which their character portfolios are the equivalent of a brand family (Lury, 2004: 1), Indian film stars are strikingly appropriate for brand advertising because, first, the relative inflexibility of film roles happily produces a high level of brand 'stability' (p. 9) and, second, their special personas permit movement between a character who uses or wears a product in a film, to the same character using it in an advertisement, to the actor endorsing the product apart from a film context, with relatively little cognitive disruption. The publicly celebrated association of star with designer may be a form of co-branding, particularly in those cases where the lucrative commercial outlets allow designers to be social equals with stars, moving in the same circles, and consuming on comparable levels.

PRACTICES AND PRODUCERS

As crucial as it is to the designer to stress the uniqueness of their artistic 'vision', costume production is, as in any other art world, a field of social practice whose collaborative and sometimes conflicted practices represent the dispersed agency of many actors (Becker, 1982, 2006; Ingold and Hallam, 2007: 4). As we turn to the actual work of obtaining costumes, differences in practice emerge as key areas of divergence among designers, their assistants, assistant directors and dressmen.

In film industries around the world, sourcing costume for films gives costumers the opportunity to consume in ways they normally cannot,

extending their personal tastes into domains otherwise unfamiliar, spending money they typically do not have, buying in quantities that are unprecedented, for goals that are subtly different from buying for themselves. At all stages, whoever is buying the materials – to whatever degree of finish – must imaginatively project the costume's meaning or indexicality upon other wearers than themselves. To be able to argue that one can effectively carry out 'costume consumption' depends upon claims to knowledge, first and foremost, but also to performance. Following Schatzki (1996), Warde (2005: 134) argues for a more expansive and precise definition of knowledge in consumption practices. Practices are made up of understandings (of what to say and do), procedures and engagements (or the affective orientations that motivate practices), while performance sets practices in motion, and is essential for their reproduction. Warde also points out (p. 139) that internal differentiation of practices (different understandings, procedures and dispositions, in other words) are the raw material of discriminations based on taste. Turning back to costume design, it is clear that the understandings, procedures and engagements involved in film costuming do vary in significant ways between designers, their assistants and dressmen, specifically with regard to how marketplace consumption feeds into production processes.

At one extreme of costume production is product placement, when brands are inserted into filmmaking processes overtly. More often, though, designers assume independent responsibility for composing 'looks' from a combination of styled and built costumes. Designers are nominally in charge of shopping for items to style and, depending upon the cachet of their star client, do most of the work of going to a store and selecting outfits themselves. This is especially true when clothes are bought abroad, because location shooting typically requires a much reduced production team and the designer has few assistants on hand to help. The designer's claims to a unique understanding of global fashion are critical here, as are their familiarity with global brand names and the ability to go about the actual job of buying the clothes. It is not enough to merely know labels, but to have the right 'eye' to pick out the right thing at the moment one sees it. This is, in effect, the performance that issues from and actualizes the practice, and the element of spontaneity in such performances is the essence of designer creativity. The work of shopping is a series of improvisations that, as Ingold and Hallam (2007) write, is essential to close the gap between cultural guidelines and 'the specific conditions of a world that is never the same from one moment to the next' (p. 2).

Evidence of this capacity for fashion consumption is embodied not just in film costume production, but in designers' own personal dress. Young dress designers, especially males, wore extremely fashionable Western clothes, while female designers wore casual 'fusion' ensembles

such as *chappals* (sandals), jeans, tee-shirts or embroidered *kurtas* (collar-less shirts). Photographs from the gossip sections of newspapers and film magazines showed them wearing more glamorous evening wear or expensive Indian wear on special occasions. Clothing by itself is not the only source of designer identification with fashion; there is also the embodied knowledge of how to feel at ease with these clothes, and to know when and where to use them. As Liechty (2002) remarks, fashion inheres in both things and in the way they are used – in 'demeanor, comportment and manners' (p. 143). Plausibility as a stylist, as a co-branded entity, depends upon mastery of a wide range of appropriate consumption practices that go with the new commodity economy. This includes designers' comfort within places whose existence is a direct result of the introduction of new capitalist forces. In the course of my fieldwork, I was sometimes invited to meet dress designers in their homes, but more often in their offices or boutiques, or at an espresso bar, reflecting their comfort with the commercial and public spaces of post-1990s Bombay.

At home, designers delegate at least some of the physical work of going out and sourcing costumes to their assistants, which involves scouring everywhere from the street stalls to exclusive designer outlets. In ways comparable to designers, the assistants may find in these forays that they are retreading shopping circuits that they navigate in their personal lives for their personal needs. On the other hand, they may need to make expenditures in exclusive stores that are beyond their capacity as individuals to patronize.

Despite their fiscal inability as individuals to consume the way they buy clothes as film professionals, costume assistants and assistant directors with special responsibility for costume are nevertheless able to make a persuasive claim that their knowledge and tastes authorize them to do this job. They are able to convince employers, in other words, that their grasp of practice is sufficient to ensure that their consumption performances will be successful. Like the designers, they know that to sharpen their consumption practices involves intense engagement with advertisements in all their forms, films (especially foreign, ideally American films), or fashion magazines. Even if they cannot afford to buy for themselves the clothes they collect for an actor, they know exactly where to go to get them. They are able, in other words, to demonstrate that they share the disposition toward costume that the designer possesses, that they are familiar with what global fashion is, and the procedures for getting it. Once again, these are corporeal as well as cerebral claims, because assistants not only exhibit their competence on their own bodies through what they wear, but through their easy movement amidst the public and semi-public spaces of fashion display and transaction. Simple knowledge about brands, for example, facilitates the navigation of plentiful worlds of goods (Pavitt, 2000: 85). All the assistant directors were far more interested

FIGURE 10 A stretch of the market in suburban Lokhandwala, a popular shopping destination for designers' and directors' assistants searching for affordable costumes.
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than were designers in talking about costuming as a function that serves the film, sharing experiences of chasing costumes to re-use from production house *godowns* (warehouses), or of making some kind of plan for costumes over the course of the film. In their articulation and replication of at least some of the practices of costume production outside Bollywood, assistants – whether attached to the designer or the director – represent a new kind of figure in contemporary film costume production. It is also in regard to the purchase of clothes from local commercial outlets that the conventions regarding the incorporation of commoditized clothing into film are likely to be tested in ways that further complicate and illuminate claims to authorship.

The short history of commoditized clothing in India, in a market where outright copying and fakery have flourished unchecked, means that the rules for giving credit for clothes made outside the film system proper have taken time to develop. In one interview in 2002, towards the beginning of my work, a designer referenced the Armani suits that were worn by the lead characters in the American film *Men in Black* (1997), but openly admitted to not knowing how such a use would have

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been negotiated, if at all, with the Armani company. In 2008, however, conversations with designers and assistants quickly revealed a ready familiarity with conventions such as those in the North American industry, where uses of brand and label clothing are carefully managed and negotiated, with the full knowledge and collaboration of apparel companies and fashion houses. Having and knowing rules does not mean that they have to be followed to the letter, either in Bombay or Hollywood. It does mean, though, that infractions can either be completely avoided, or, on the contrary, accomplished more effectively, since costume personnel come to know how to create the impression of conformity.

Still, in the Bombay setting, with fashion designers becoming increasingly proprietary about their creations, clashes between them and the dress designers, who are just as eager to nurture creative reputations and assert their authorship of costume designs, have probably been inevitable. The evolving situation in Bombay was strikingly illustrated by a dispute that erupted in 2005 over the alleged theft of a costume design by Aki Narula, a fashion and film designer employed by Yash Raj Productions for the hit film, *Bunty aur Babli*. Suneet Varma, a Delhi designer, accused Narula of having stolen a poncho and pants design that was part of a recent couture collection (*Times of India*, 2005). Narula's riposte had two components: first, asserting that, when styling a film, it was unnecessary to establish and acknowledge the original designer of clothes bought in stores; and, second, that having bought the costume in question from a local store (for which he still had the receipt), the 'theft' in question happened prior to his use of the outfit, and that action against him was unwarranted. My conversations with Indian designers suggest that they see North American practice as the authoritative guide to practice. By those standards, Narula is correct, but only to the extent that retail garments are believed to be lawful items – a risky assumption in the freewheeling world of contemporary Indian fashion. While shopping for a film means gathering large quantities of clothing from retail stores, using clothes that come directly from couture collections is strictly 'off limits', precisely because the authorship of a ramp show is unquestioned. The *Bunty aur Babli* dispute directed a spotlight onto areas of considerable confusion in the new India, where rights of ownership and control of a design, and the limits to those rights, are still relatively untested. It was also instructive that Varma targeted Rani Mukherjee equally in his accusations, recognizing both the centrality of actors to the promulgation of fashion, and detracting from any claims of film costume authorship that Narula might make. At the time of writing, no resolution has been reached.

Not all costumes demand the knowledge and acumen associated with fashion consumption to acquire them. Simple requirements need only be spelled out in color and size terms, and then the dressman is considered able to fulfill them. The dressman remains an important figure for medi-

ating between the designer, tailor and the set when picking up built costumes. In fact, most of their own descriptions of their activities revolve around 'getting clothes made' at short notice. The dressman is also the main go-between of the production and the *dresswala*. With regard to other clothes bought in the marketplace, his range and qualifications are considered by designers, their assistants and assistant directors to be limited. In order to shop for fashion items, as one assistant director told me: 'there's a certain amount of education that is sensible', and dressmen do not have it. Asked to elaborate further on why, even with their extensive experience in caring for costumes or getting them made, dressmen fell short in this regard, assistants who worked closely with dressmen were unable to say more than that dressmen simply did not 'know'. Their deficiency was not simply lack of 'understandings' or procedural knowledge of fashion consumption, to my mind. It was their affective approach to fashion, and the inescapable evidence of failures of performance that showed in their own clothes consumption. Older males dressed in the crisp bush shirts and trousers of a former era, while younger ones either wore down-market synthetic trousers or jeans and shirts. There was, to be sure, an unmistakable generational shift toward more fashionable Western styles, yet also far more variation in the adherence to contemporary styles than could be found among designers or their assistants. One dressman said quite explicitly that 'we [dressmen] don't know brands', recognizing this as a significant point of differentiation between dressmen and the designers and assistants who now drive costume decisions. In sum, just as the ability to discriminate and select high-quality brands for their own enjoyment lends distinction to the élite consumer, so the same ability, but transposed into film production, sets the costume designer apart from the dressman.

The introduction of new costume commodities also marks a discontinuity with the conventions and tastes of the past, and in particular a difference in the kind of person and practices the dress designer used to represent. One need only compare a description by a designer active in the 1960s to 1980s of having all elements of a costume, Western or Indian, made by the tailor, to that of a contemporary designer who says that:

> Sometimes when you make things they don't look good. When I pick up clothes, it does look natural. Like a pair of jeans, if I make it, it's not going to be as good as picking it up at a store.

> I pick up stuff, readymade stuff . . . I'm not going to make a pair of denim jeans. I pick up readymade jeans and work on the look of it.

The stress on the 'naturalness' of readymade clothes is, at first sight, a curious attribution since all clothes – readymade or otherwise – are the product of tailoring processes. What seems critical is, first, the fact that these are items personally selected and bought by the designer (employing the improvisational skills referred to earlier) and, second, the implicit

conviction that there are limits to even the film tailor's ability to impersonate the brand article, corresponding to the view that the 'real' costumes of the new designer mirror 'real' consumption acts in private life. Wrapped up in these brief remarks is a focused critique of the community of practice that was the sole environment in which the old designers worked.

These old designers, active from the 1950s until the beginning of the 1990s, are more likely to come from what Dwyer (2000b) terms 'old middle classes' (p. 91). They are English-speaking, but educated in the humanities or arts, and heavily influenced by post-Independence ideals of a distinct Indian identity rooted in self-reliance and an autonomous artistic tradition (Wilkinson-Weber, 2005). All of them are women, with one exception. This is Xerxes Baithena, whose brash (and almost entirely built) costumes appeared on female stars such as Parveen Babi and Sridevi throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Only Baithena moved on to other fashion ventures, while the others modeled their relationships with stars on kinship or patronage, not commerce. Their engagements in the new commodity economy are partial. Most are reasonably affluent by Indian standards, they live in flats in well-heeled neighborhoods, employ servants, enjoy the use of electrical appliances and drive cars. In keeping with other women of their age, though, they dress in Indian styles, whether saris or *salwar-kameez* (tunic and loose trousers). I never saw even one of them making any concession to contemporary fashion in personal style, reinforcing Liechty's (2002) observation that some of the most visual aspects of consumer culture in South Asia (as elsewhere) are uniquely associated with youth (p. 37).

Not only are they distanced from personal participation in commodity clothes markets, but the context for their professional work was a theatrical, craft-heavy production and retail environment in which commodities were relatively scarce. The attentiveness to local and personal solutions to dress requirements was stressed in their interviews, as when a retired designer described how she would buy three necklaces, break them apart and reassemble them into three completely new ones, or another talked of buying a *dupatta* (scarf) and then ironing it over stones to create a rippling effect. Still others talked of daily trips to the boot maker in south Bombay (at some distance from the sets, which are all located in the city's northern suburbs), or of commissioning custom-made bras, or of scouring the chicken markets for the feathers to make a boa (see also Wilkinson-Weber, 2005: 154). The points of intersection with the market were either with relatively unfinished products – fabric, for example – or commodities that underwent significant modification before use as costumes or accessories. In the case of the feather boa, waste products were redirected from the end of a particular commodity path into completely new uses. While the bulk of costumes were made according to well-established procedures linking cloth retailer, designer, tailor and, finally, dressman, there was also room for generating new,

perhaps unique, procedures where what was actually done was less a prescriptive model for imitation than a simple example of what *might* be done. All of these improvisations were made in unrelentingly exigent circumstances, where costumes were demanded at the very last minute and had to be crafted using limited resources. Practices were grounded in an intimate knowledge of the availability of local craft and market-place resources. For old designers, this manipulation and transformation of meagre resources was the source of their professional satisfaction in the industry.

There is a striking agreement among these designers that a poverty of imagination afflicts contemporary film costume:

> Today nobody creates, they flip from these books, foreign magazines, and that's *adaptation*, they are not creating as such. (emphasis added)

> Today's costumes? You know what happens today is they all go abroad for shooting and buy their own clothes from there. Then they use them in the picture, so there is nothing like designing in there. You notice that? Everyone is wearing mod costumes or Western costumes. So there is nothing to design in that.

In these statements, the correspondence between personal consumption practices and film costume, as well as the influence of the images of global fashion, are construed as essentially hostile to the 'creative' job of costume design. Old designers regard the invocation of Western styles as what is widely termed in India 'aping the West'. This phrasing not only attacks the credibility of contemporary film costume by suggesting that it is emulative, not constitutive, of global fashion, but undercuts claims to greater costume 'reality'. If one is merely 'aping the West', then all that is achieved is a substitute, certainly nothing that can compare to the 'real', yet 'alien' thing that is Western dress. This critique effectively ignores the interpellation of Indian designers into global fashion networks and asserts the fundamental inadequacy of costumes that stray far from identifiably Indian norms. This view does not necessarily challenge the superior value of what is foreign; indeed, in rejecting the possibility that using label clothing in film costume can bear comparison with foreign uses, it can be said to support such a view, thus undercutting efforts to promote Indian brands (and new designers among them) in either the national or global economy. Instead, such a view advocates a continued separation of two imagined and idealized regimes – the Indian and the Western – in a restatement of resilient anxieties about how to clothe the nation (Tarlo, 1996).

Even though the word 'authenticity' was never used in any of my interviews, it seemed to me that the same concerns that theorists have argued animate a desire for authenticity were in evidence (e.g. Handler, 1986). From the point of view of the old practitioners, mass-produced

label clothes and brand items sit in stark contrast with the entirely unique products of a bygone era. For them, a film character represented a unique position within a cinematic context, for which singular costumes had to be prepared using the accustomed local labor of embroiderer, tailor, laundryman and so on. Styling, in contrast, entails no singular authorship but instead co-opts the agency of unknown, alien others. Old designers in essence articulate a critique of the brand, for far from accepting that mass-manufactured goods can be 'original' because they are created under the auspices of the label, they focus only on their status as undifferentiated copies. To the new designers, this is a kind of brand illiteracy, but to old designers, it is resistance to brand persuasions.

Attending to the speech and acts of both new and old designers suggests the core values at stake in their consumption of materials on the path to becoming costume are verisimilitude versus uniqueness. New designers are unconcerned with the authenticity of their costumes (unless they happen to be historical) because, immersed as they are in the fashion culture from which these costumes come, and to which they refer, they have no need to 'copy' something they feel intrinsically part of. Assembling costume from label clothing is not, to them, abandonment of original design, but fulfills the brief of the dress designer to embed the character in the midst of a very real, global commodity economy. Old designers are more committed to the ideal of an authentic Indian culture, expressed not simply in a rejection of styled Western looks, but of the entire consumption process that leads to their construction. This is critical, I feel, to understanding why old designers can talk of 'aping the West' even as they themselves designed Western costumes that came to epitomize the kind of Bollywood 'kitsch' that contemporary designers mock. What may have been most important about these costumes was not the goodness of fit with contemporaneous fashion in Western Europe or America, but their known provenance as products of an identifiable, singular imagination and a local community of practice.

CONCLUSION

Bourdieu (1984) famously argued that taste, more than simply expressing class differences, constituted them, since tastes and the acts they inspire exist within a society-wide complex of other tastes and consumption acts that stand with respect to each other as dominant and dominated. Consumers can thus be separated not just along lines of means but along lines of discernment and quality. Hindi film-costume production exhibits precisely this kind of differentiation among its practitioners, only now the consumption dispositions that Bourdieu refers to are being applied to productive activities and productive identities. These processes are constitutive of a realignment of the field of film production that is glossed as 'professionalization', meaning in practice the marginalization of older

workers, the gradual diminution of skill of lower-level workers and the transformation of the practices involved in costume production.

Dress designers have always asserted superior claims to knowledge about, and taste for, film costumes, particularly in contrast to tailors and dressmen (Wilkinson-Weber, 2004a). In fact, the emergence of dress designers in the mid-20th century was founded on class-based appeals to unique sensibilities that could be brought to the job on behalf of the star and director. Now, though, the old designers find those assertions rejected and disparaged by a younger generation of designers who, along with their own assistants and assistant directors, distinguish themselves from other designers as well as tailors and dressmen with arguments about their knowledge of, and immersion in, a transformed economy. This effort requires the relentless characterization of past costume production as 'tasteless' and chaotic, effectively construing complex transformations in both filmmaking and economic life over the past 20 years as straightforward advances in aesthetic judgment.[4] We might say that contemporary designers are employing what Fine (2008: 79), in reference to the construction of reputation, terms a 'politics of memory' to set themselves apart from both predecessors and subordinates. With the use of costume pastiche in, for example, the film *Om Shanti Om*, whose first half is given over to a recreation of 1970s film fashions, we see a new means to express this distinction, in which erstwhile 'Bollywood excess' is simultaneously stressed and recuperated by masterful designers (see Wilkinson-Weber, forthcoming).

There is no danger that building costume will come to an end, since its uses – for making duplicate costumes, crafting elaborate embroidered and tailored garments, or for making period dress – are far too critical to film practice. At the same time, though, the intrusions of commoditized clothing seem impossible to prevent. In essence, we see the theater-derived imaginative and construction skills that dominated up to the 1980s being challenged by greater mastery of the new local and global categories of fashion and trade brands, as well as a wholly different engagement with the consumption geography of Bombay. The well-trod circuits of filmmaking before the 1990s included the tailor's shop, the designers' and stars' homes, and the sets; now they encompass new public spaces such as the designer's boutique, beauty salons, photographic studios and ramp shows. Where the limited resources of a more insulated, parochial Bombay used to be manipulated to populate and define the fantastic spaces of film, now the seemingly boundless resources of global space are redirected, via film's new cultural producers, into film visuals that attempt to capture the 'reality' of affluent, localized lifestyles (Tinic, 2005: 13).

When Pavitt (2000) writes that the 'inability to participate in consumer economy can result in an exclusion from the practices of everyday life' (p. 175), she could as well be referring to Hindi film costume production.

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Consumption practices marked as 'superior' not only define the aspirational limits in the new economy for participants who have not all become rich as a result of it; in costume design, acquiring commodities as factors of production is as effective an index of social differentiation as it is in the more familiar domain of consumption by consumer-citizens.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. The term 'building' is used in the North American film industry but not in India, where the English phrase 'get [something] stitched', corresponding grammatically to what one would say in Hindi, is preferred. I use 'building' here primarily to draw a contrast with 'styling' – a word that is in general usage in English-speaking costume circles.
2. Research for this article was carried out over approximately seven months in 2002, 2005 and 2006 in Mumbai, and supported by the American Institute of Indian Studies and Washington State University. The goal of the study was to map the dispersed agencies of personnel involved in costume design and execution. A more detailed study of consumption practices is pending.
3. This segment is, in fact, colloquially termed 'classes' in Indian English to set it apart from the 'masses' on grounds of education and sophistication.
4. Staking one's reformist credentials on claims to have finally overcome inefficiency and incompetence is not restricted to dress designers. Ganti (2004) argues that by asserting their 'difference . . . from a fictitious norm', popular Hindi filmmakers have always striven to differentiate themselves from competitors (p. 66). This pattern of 'forgetting' past assertions of reform in order to make one's own may well be widespread; certainly previous research on *chikan* embroidery made in Lucknow, India, suggests it may be so, where 'in each generation, the struggle to salvage *chikan* from its condition of decline is invented anew, with previous efforts apparently forgotten' (Wilkinson-Weber, 2004b: 290).

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◆ CLARE M. WILKINSON-WEBER is Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Washington State University, Vancouver. Her research interests revolve around textile and film production in India, with particular focus on the culture and economics of artistic practice, the anthropology of dress, clothes and performance, and fashion. *Address*: Department of Anthropology, Washington State University Vancouver, 14204 NE Salmon Creek Avenue, Vancouver, WA 98686, USA. [email: cmweber@vancouver.wsu.edu]