Figurations in Indian Film

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Metafiguring Bollywood: Brecht after *Om Shanti Om*

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How do we make sense of a situation in which a film industry turns its own workings into one of its primary narrative ingredients and begins to represent itself obsessively? Is this simply a matter of modernist self-realization, now cast in a mythic frame that springs from commercial cinema's penchant for the grandiose, the spectacular, and the hyperbolic? Or is something more at stake in a particular industry's on-screen and off-screen self-projections at this conjuncture, in its mediatized articulation of the mythic and the reflexive, and in its willful blurring of the so-called "presentational" and "representational" modes[1] in the service of metafiguration?

"Without reflexivity, we are nothing"

The formation of the modern subject entails the reflexive production of self- knowledge: this, by now, is something of an axiom. Perhaps less acknowledged is an equally habitual flight to the realm of myth. A Hegelian imperative of self-actualization, in accordance with this or that transcendental principle, translates the conscious management of one's becoming into a reflexive performance of some pre-ordained, idealized Self; even when more speculative approaches threaten to scuttle teleology, it is difficult to rein in romantic-utopian impulses. One's sense of self is always on the verge of getting mired in the mythic, such entanglements spawning their own instrumentalities. This grafting of reflexive self-making to compulsive mythologizing—a linkage that becomes more explicit with collective selves (the people, community, nation)—has become something of a contemporary necessity: without self-reflection and self-aggrandizement, one barely exists.[2]

Expanding on prevalent structuralist thought around the middle of the last century, Roland Barthes pointed out that "myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal."[3] Barthes' contribution here was twofold. First, he underscored all myth was historically contingent signification, so that meaning or action could no longer be attributed to natural, timeless essences. Second,

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he expanded the scope of semiological analysis to include popular culture's crass, plastic mythologies, all the more efficacious for their sensuous-affective resonances. His privileged artifacts, at once material and yet alluringly ethereal, included the ubiquitous icons of modern consumerist culture: from the *de rigueur* curls on the foreheads of Hollywood's filmy Romans to the gleaming Citroen car. Together, these "research objects" registered the uncertain socio-political valence of myths, grounding them in the utterly reified and banal everyday, thereby undercutting lofty utopian ideals and avant garde agendas of revolutionary transformation.[4] The early Barthes of *Mythologies* remains particularly useful for his appreciative yet critically nuanced approach to plastic-popular cultures, which paved the way for subsequent conceptualizations such as the quotidian "national symbolic."[5]

This paper will explore the self-conscious projections and transmutations of one such "national" cultural formation: specifically, contemporary Bombay cinema's self-reinvention as a global culture industry, its refiguration as "Bollywood." What sense do we make of the anxious self-absorption of this "new industrial narcissus"—to borrow John Caldwell's description of a fixatedly reflexive Hollywood?[6] What kind of a subject, object, figure, or myth is Bollywood? What, we might ask in a neo-Barthesian vein, are its "historical intentions," and how do these objectives relate to its pretenses in the register of the essential, even the "eternal"?

Bollywood's "narcissism" is, without doubt, indexical of a global turn toward cinematic reflexivity—a trend Caldwell locates in contemporary media's fascination with production cultures, and that has been intensified by celebrations surrounding the centenary of cinema and simultaneous lamentations regarding the "death" of the medium in the wake of digital forms and platforms.[7] It seems equally plausible to argue that Bollywood's recent reflexive flourishes are symptomatic of a global "postmodern style" with polyvocality, pastiche, simulacrum, and parody as some of its defining constituents. But what might we say about the specificity of Bollywood's current drive toward self-production, beyond pointing out that Indian cultural traditions, which have long thrived on stylistic tendencies such as epic dispersion, cyclicality, artifice, and irony, pose both conceptual and historiographic problems for claims of a postmodern turn with its implications of rupture and innovation? Even as it remains acutely aware of the non-synchronicities and non-linearities that set it apart from an imputed global narrative of aesthetic-epistemological evolution, today's Bombay cinema has to constantly recalibrate its position with respect to that very narrative. If we read the industry's vaunted transformations and refurbished figurations—along with its abrupt oscillations between self-celebration and self-doubt—as a set of communicative gestures, what concerns, ambitions, and designs come into focus? As I argue next, Bollywood is currently engaged in the consolidation of a "Bollywood model" at the heart of global cinema. The thrust of this paper, then, is the analysis of the film industry's

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performative strategies of catapulting the self to world-historical significance and the enumeration of its preoccupations and apprehensions that complicate that process. It also interrogates a particular purchase of reflexivity (or self-reflexivity) within standard film theory as a critical trope. Since this critical genealogy is intimately rooted in the writings of Bertolt Brecht, the current essay seeks to resituate Brecht, and reflexivity in general, in the light of a popular-commercial formation such as Bollywood.

Industrial reflexivity

Bollywood's institutional/industrial reorganizations offer the most obvious signposts of its globalizing aspirations: the corporatization and standardization of a notoriously informal industry; forays of production companies such as UTV and Reliance into transnational coproductions and offshore acquisitions (with the latter entering a coproduction arrangement with DreamWorks in 2009 and the former, in turn, bought out by Disney in early 2012); setting up world-class studios and post-production facilities; collaboration with offshore technicians and FX experts; the staging of annual film award ceremonies in different offshore locations (from Amsterdam to Macao, Bangkok to Johannesburg) in a bid to capture transnational public interest; the nurturing of diasporic—and now crossover—markets; press junkets and the Internet (including "viral") marketing; production of promos like behind-the scene documentaries, "the making of …" vignettes, DVD bonus materials; show-biz reports and trade fairs; world tours by Bollywood celebrities; increased presence at international film festivals and media expos; globalized themes and settings; expanding the sphere of activities to broadcasting, videogames, and other interactive media. Clearly, "Bollywood" now conveniently encapsulates a range of entities and activities intent on producing, consolidating and promoting a remarkably plastic—at once flexible and resilient, dynamic and distinctive, specific and universal—brand into a planetary force.

At the heart of this plasticity is an intently purposive reflexivity that animates recent Indian films. In an essay provocatively titled "Surviving Bollywood"—suggesting an exploration of the possibility of *moving beyond* the fetishized term, or of conceptualizing Hindi/Bombay/Indian cinema *in spite of* the term—Madhava Prasad asks whether "Bollywood" is Indian cinema's (contingent) strategy of marking its (essential, eternal) difference, or is it simply a dexterous appellation via which journalists and scholars "re-inscrib[e] the difference that Indian cinema represents within an articulated model of global hegemony and resistance?"[8] While Prasad is invoking two distinct realms of (industrial) *practice* and (commentators') *perception* in his exegesis, his essay makes clear that there is no easy separation between the two. Nevertheless, when he goes on to argue that "the desire for Bollywood" indexes "a desire for the reproduction of the difference that it represents on the world platform" and

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that "the industry, in its current reflexive moment, is responding to" this "demand," this evocative language of demand-response suggests a causality that might induce a misreading of the situation.[9] I want to stress a more immanent model of cinematic reflexivity: industrial reflexivity (not only practice, but also self-knowledge) is *not the result* ("response") of a broader, primary reflexivity (not only perception, but also a practice of framing) about the place of Indian cinema within world cinema (and, by extension, of India in the world); rather, the two are coeval. Reflexivity is the overarching contemporary mode of being and becoming across all fields—cinema and cricket, economic performance and geopolitical clout (to take India's current obsessions).

Instead of focusing primarily on Bombay cinema's industrial restructuring (that is, adopting an "industrial/institutional studies" approach that has, of late, become dominant in media studies and that informs my analysis here), I will take as my point of departure this heightened reflexivity about Indian commercial cinema's industrial practices and aesthetic modalities. While this mode of self-reflection is not altogether new (landmark films such as *Kagaaz ke Phool* [1959], *Guddi* [1971], *Bhumika* [1977] and *Hero Hiralal* [1988] rule out any pat presentism), the industry's behind-the-scene mechanisms and its relations to broader publics has emerged as one of the most salient and popular plot ingredients in recent years. Ram Gopal Varma's "Factory," whose products provide a reliable index of dominant trends in Bombay, seems to have been consciously consolidating a reflexive "Bollywood genre" with films such as *Rangeela* (1995), *Mast* (1999), *Main Madhuri Dixit Banna Chahti Hoon!* (2003), and *Naach* (2004)—not to mention works that routinely feature sequences on a movie set (including *Company* [2002], *Darna Zaroori Hai* [2006] and *Agyaat* [2009]).[10] But Varma and his associates are not the only Bollywood players exploring the hermeneutic and spectacular possibilities of the movie industry on film: superstar Shah Rukh Khan's Red Chillies Entertainments Pvt. Ltd., mega-director Karan Johar's Dharma Productions, director-turned-actor Farhan Akhtar's Excel Entertainment, and UTV Motion Pictures have all joined the fray of "picturizing" and selling Bollywood. The results range from innovative song sequences in *Dil Chahta Hai* (2001) and *Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi* (2008) to entire films revolving around tongue-in-cheek takes on the industry: *Om Shanti Om* (2007), *Billu* (2009), *Luck by Chance* (2009), *I Hate Luv Storys* (2010) are only the most salient instances.

Just as "Bollywood" is a phenomenon larger than Bombay cinema, the current reflexivity also encompasses other media sectors: from rival television news channels fighting over target rating points in *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* (2000), to entertainment and society events journalism in *Page 3* (1995), to the predatory and sensationalized coverage of social problems in *Peepli (Live)* (2010). The explosion of Indian media—print, audiovisual, digital—has also facilitated a greater consciousness of media's role in society, its relations to the state and non-state institutions, and its potentialities for

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political mobilization and change. This multi-faceted reflexivity, that is rendering the media world as a genre unto itself, is linked to several other emergences, including: a new yuppie class with substantial disposable income and access to consumer credit, and with greater mobility than ever before, obsessing over its identity; an increasingly tolerant disposition toward marginalized social groups and non-conformist lifestyles (the incipient LGBT movement being one of the primary beneficiaries of such a "liberal" dispensation); an equally vocal and more brawny social conservatism bemoaning the loss of cultural roots and moral values (whose policing of cultural mores targets, Valentine's Day celebrations, dress codes of college-age women, and urban nightlife); a bullish, unapologetic urbanism finally ready to move on with scant regard for the rural hinterland (a Bollywood variant of this is the "city film," which brackets the Indian moral universe of the erstwhile "All India Film" model to produce "sophisticated" products catering to more cosmopolitan multiplex audiences); and a chasm in the very sense of the nation, spectacularly articulated in the figures of two separate national communities—one a globalized, Anglophone, shining India, the other a parochial, vernacular, poverty-stricken *Bharat*.

Two media-specific discourses that cut across these developments, and are of particular interest to a consideration of media reflexivity, pertain to: (1) "fresh" narratives, seen in an obsessive search for new content and form in films and television shows, and (2) an interventionist role for media in political debates and policy deliberations—an update of mid-20th century cinema's social reformist zeal. The necessity to break away from tired old formulas and to create "something different" is not simply a matter of generic evolution; turned into a neurotic mantra by industry insiders, media commentators, and middle-class audiences alike, this widely perceived need also reflects Bollywood's deep-rooted anxieties about its place in the global hierarchy of film cultures. After the early commercial experimentations of Mani Ratnam and Ram Gopal Varma in the 1990s, a whole new breed of filmmakers came on the scene in the last decade: along with the scions of established industry families (Aditya Chopra, Karan Johar, Farhan Akhtar, Zoya Akhtar), upstart talents such as Vishal Bhardwaj, Anurag Kashyap, Dibakar Banerjee, and Kiran Rao have managed to break into the Bollywood firmament. Even large media companies have launched subsidiaries (e.g., UTV Spotboy) for fresh risky, low-budget "indie" fare. But the "new" Indian indie constellation—whose promises dazzle in the occasional *Gulaal* (2009), *Rocket Singh, Salesman* (2009) or *LSD* (2010)—appears to be congealing rapidly into utterly reified, Korean New Wave—inflected cine-contortions or imploding on account of its close, if vexed, relationship to Bollywood.[11] For the most part, this self-conscious penchant for novelty has amounted to mere generic modulations with great formalist flourish (as in Aditya Chopra and Farhan Akhtar productions) or outright salaciousness in the name of a more open and honest approach to love, desire, and relationships (case in

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point: *Jism* [2003], whose very title—"body" in Urdu—mobilizes a jejeune bilingual pun). Other attempts at achieving a fresh sensibility, which generate films such as *Jaane Tu … Ya Jaane Na* (2008) and *Ajab Prem Ki Ghazab Kahani* (2009) targeting a young demographic, push a palpably consumerist agenda via the blatant placement of "hip" products.[12] Meanwhile, proliferating mise-en-abyme narratives like *Om Shanti Om* and *Luck by Chance* constitute another attempt at novelty, structural formalism now helping to serve up postmodern spritz. These highly reflexive narratives, which not only call attention to the conditions of commercial film production, but often also produce enchanting histories of the Indian industry and its cine-cosmologies, are the primary focus of this paper.

The second broad concern has to do with media's role in the modern public sphere: as an institution of civil society negotiations, it has spawned its own platforms, from undercover expose journalism of the *Tehelka* sting operation variety (revealing corruption in the Defense Ministry and match-fixing in cricket), to hour-long topical debates on the television news channels (e.g., on *Aaj Tak* and *NDTV*). No doubt, most of the political impetus is folded into highly mediated forms of participation, with "agency" reduced to viewers calling in with their responses to asinine binary questions of the yes/no variety. And no doubt, the concentration of media ownership—not to mention media's own imbrication in the hegemonic power bloc—ensures a certain uniformity of coverage. Still, even the most skeptical of observers has to concede at least the possibility of a more piqued political consciousness because of the sheer presence of scores of news channels in various Indian languages, not to mention the proliferating Internet sites and print newspapers, which unlike their western counterparts, continue to flourish. Bollywood films of the past decade—*Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani, Rang de Basanti* (2006) and *Peepli (Live)*—have often thematized the political role of media.[13] Underlying all these narratives is a keen, if poignantly tenuous, populist belief in mass media's potential to foster democratic values and promote social justice.[14]

It is tempting to see Bollywood's current attempts at consciousness-raising as a mutation of the earlier social-reformism that marked mid-20th century Indian cinema's search for legitimacy. This mutation, which pointedly expands cinema's political horizon from the national to the global, now delivers the industry to the folds of neoliberal civil society discourse. And in keeping with civil society ideals, the shift comes couched in a series of reflexive gestures that turn autocritical, as neoliberalism's own modalities and practices—unfettered greed and graft in all aspects of life, expropriation of land and privatization of natural resources in the name of development, media's opportunistic capitalization of social injustice—are subjected to scrutiny. Most strikingly, critique itself is turned into an engine of narration: a dual strategy that brings together the penchant for novelty with the need for social engagement. This is quite consonant with what, following Luc

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Boltanski and Nigel Thrift among others, might be described as "reflexive capitalism," but that, following Jon Beasley Murray, might be seen as yet another instance of civil society discourse surreptitiously serving the interests of neoliberal media capital.[15]

Such political economic considerations are crucially interlaced with Bollywood's sense of itself in the world. Even as Bollywood aspires to world-class filmmaking, it evinces tremendous anxiety regarding its place in world cinema, especially its relation to Hollywood: celebratory hoopla surrounding "indigenous" forms and stylistics frequently gives way to insecure angst about remaining a flawed mutation of "universal" standards. In particular, the industry has internalized a global optic in relation to itself; consequently, in the last two decades, a tremendous self-consciousness about its image, its idiolect, its very singularity has come to inflect its products. Thus Bollywood's current makeover has zeroed in on modes of figuration and industrial mores that remain "Indian at heart" even as they keep getting reinvented in conversation with global trends. Various syntagmatic and paradigmatic features—narrative structure, length, motivation, moral universe, sets and costumes, acting style, editing principles, sound design, special effects—are constantly getting reworked in a self-conscious vein. Studios and production agencies now routinely vet submitted scripts, with most necessary doctoring completed before a film can go into production. Keeping in mind the conditions of cineplex exhibition, the market in telecast rights, global audience tastes, and the industry's own crossover aspirations, the length of the average film has been brought down to under two hours, obviating the need for an intermission (and thus threatening the business practices of the concession stands). The milieux of contemporary Indian films have undergone equally striking transformations: urban lifestyle is now a maelstrom unfolding in muted-tone luxury condos and lofts, flashy malls, and steamy nightclubs; the rural milieu is grit and color, poverty and violence in equal measure; women protagonists, a far cry from the classical self-sacrificing mother-wife-daughter, now freely express libidinal desire, and scheming, cussing, and wielding guns, stand up to patriarchal oppression.

It is the song and dance number—widely considered the quirky "seasoning" that essentially defines Bollywood—that has emerged as the locus of the most self-conscious and intense negotiations. Take, for example, the "*Woh Ladki Hai Kahan*" song sequence from *Dil Chahta Hai*: Sameer goes to the movies with his girlfriend Pooja, and watches themselves turn up magically on the screen, singing and dancing like they did in 1960s, 1970s and 1980s Hindi films. This conceit of protagonists watching themselves is a patent signpost of the industry's self-consciousness: Bollywood now has to *watch itself being watched* by publics at home and abroad, and incorporate such self-reflexive "musical" numbers as an ironic gesture that begin to resemble the "air quotes" of common parlance.[16] While playing with and recalibrating the form, the song sequence also achieves "something fresh"

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in terms of an oedipal in-joke: in the 1960s vignette, actress Sonali Kulkarni as Pooja dresses and moves very much like the legendary Sharmila Tagore, mother of the actor Saif Ali Khan who portrays Sameer. A more recent example of an insider joke drives not only one song sequence, but the entire storyline of *I Hate Luv Storys*. The protagonist Jay, a production assistant, looks down upon the romantic mush served up by his wildly successful filmmaker boss. This tongue-in-cheek reference to the formulaic blockbuster works of Karan Johar, the producer of *IHLS*, by its director Punit Malhotra, Johar's erstwhile assistant and now protégé, gets its generic comeuppance when Jay himself falls helplessly in love in the grand tradition of schmaltzy romcoms. Bollywood continues to work its *masala* charms and "idiosyncratic" plots, albeit with a dollop of self-parody and irony befitting a modern global cultural complex.

Phenomenologizing Bollywood

I will argue that in a fundamental sense, the "phenomenon" of Bollywood is increasingly being *materialized* both on-screen and off-screen: it is being potentiated, performed, and rendered palpable all around us.[17] But how exactly is this achieved: how is Bollywood phenomenologized, how is it made incarnate? While crucially dependent on the star body, figuring Bollywood must encompass something larger—something like a metaphysical register, a cosmological substrate—involving its peoples and spaces, institutions and circuits, norms and practices. The balance of this essay will track this move toward meta-figuration in terms of a close reading of Farah Khan's blockbuster opus *Om Shanti Om*, supplemented by its production history and discussions among reviewers and fans.

Apparently, the idea for *OSO* came to Farah Khan, one of the preeminent dance choreographers of Bombay, while working on Andrew Lloyd-Webber's musical *Bombay Dreams* (2002). Khan found the rags to riches story, in which a slum dweller's aspirations of stardom come true, too far-fetched: after all, it is not that easy, even for the talented and industrious, to break into the industry. To render the storyline more credible for Indian audiences, Khan mined the familiar tropes of Indian cinema: she decided that the poor protagonist would have to die and be reborn as a movie star's son. From the vantage of Indian cine-cosmologies, his ascension to stardom seems more logical—even if the plot involves reincarnation—when he has the appropriate pedigree.[18] Of course, this tongue-in-cheek play on what counts as "realistic" packs a bigger punch from the conscious casting of Shah Rukh Khan in the double role of Om Makhija/Om Kapoor: in real life, the superstar *is* the brilliant, hard-working everyman who has made it to the top without the benefit of a filmy lineage.

At the center of this life-death-rebirth saga is Shah Rukh Khan's body. When the working class Om Makhija, a hapless extra who nurtures big dreams

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while struggling for two-bit screen appearances, is reborn as the matinee idol Om Kapoor or OK, the plot unveils SRK's brand new chiseled body in the song sequence "*Dard-e-disco*." While SRK goes through several costume changes in the course of the song (against the backdrop of sets ranging from the gothic to the industrial), his unbuttoned shirt flutters continually in the (studio blower induced) wind to reveal his newly sculpted six-pack abs. The star, already in his forties at the time of the film's production, is refitted, indeed reborn, for a new era requiring a ripped physicality of the type flaunted by younger actors such as John Abraham, Hrithik Roshan, and Shahid Kapoor.[19] The evidence of such plastic renewal, while marking the star's commitment to his roles (here, it involved three months of dieting and rigorous weight training, ending in minimal fluid intake around the sequence shoot), also draws attention to his aging body and the many injuries suffered in the course of his demanding career.[20] It is a measure of the film's slyness that even as it implicitly addresses SRK's physical problems, it turns them into the precondition for his continuing success and his longevity at the top. The title of the song, "poignancy of disco," already captures the schizophrenic tone of the enterprise: it conveys a corny gravitas. How does one rationalize a salacious "item number"—one of those gratuitous sequences in which usually a female star, otherwise superfluous to the narrative, makes a special appearance—at this point in the plot, when the two leads have already lost their lives? By making one of them be reborn as a star and dance as the "item boy" in a film shoot, all the while troubled by arcane phobias and yearnings.

Pulling a gender flip on the "item girl" concept, Farah Khan composes the scene in terms of "very heroine shots" [21]: midway through the song, a shirtless

Figure 10.1 A chiseled SRK emerges out of the water in *Om Shanti Om*

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SRK comes out of the water, water drops gliding off his smooth glistening chest and abs, postproduction speed modulation milking the sensuality of the image (Figure 10.1). We have come a long way, the scene suggests, from traditional gendered understandings of voyeurism and exhibitionism: the hero now has to give "very heroine shots." When SRK dispenses with his shirt, at long last giving in to the current ritual of male stars baring their torsos for varied publics channeling a spectrum of desires, one is reminded of Jean Baudrillard's characterization of contemporary communication as "ecstatic": where all the repressed or hidden scenes wither away in a barrage of expressions, when the "traditional obscenity of what is hidden, repressed, forbidden or obscure" gives way to "the obscenity of the visible, of the all-too-visible, of the more-visible-than-the-visible."[22]

But what, precisely, does this obscenity communicate so ecstatically, with such abandon? What is it that is rendered so thoroughly legible, that it seems "more-visible-than-the- visible?" Baudrillard argues that the obscenity of such all-revealing representation implodes representation itself and leads to a form of pornography extending well beyond the sexual to involve "information and communication, … circuits and networks, … functions and objects …"[23] Here we begin to see how current reflexive modes, intent on revealing, staging, performing every aspect of representation, might lead to pornography in an expansive sense (a point I return to later). In such situations we move from "reflexive transcendence" (possible due to the separation of "mirror and scene") to a kind of embedded, immanent reflexivity: figural representation, along with its "circuits and networks, … functions and objects"—indeed, its conditions of possibility—is turned into obscene spectacle and put on display. I want to hold on to this scene of SRK's physical exhibitionism, this *abscene*, as a reflexive gesture that displays *not only* his made over body—sculpted muscles, hairless torso, slicked back hair—*but also* an entire social complex of bodybuilding and male grooming that has taken roots in post-liberalization India. If a street-smart, charming but unsophisticated person like Om Makhija were to transform into a confident, supercilious, worldly celebrity like OK, he would probably have to subject himself to various grooming products and regimens (gyms, modeling and acting schools, facials, fairness creams, hair gels), to literally re*incarnate* himself. While underscoring the importance of family connections, *OSO* still keeps doors open for the average youth, mobilizing a potent fantasy of social mobility around SRK's fantastic body.

There is, of course, another lead body in *OSO*: newcomer Deepika Padukone in the double role of Shantipriya/Sandy. When Shantipriya dies in the fire ignited by her producer-husband Mukesh, she does not get to be reborn: Sandy is the doppelganger that OK finds to pose as Shanti in order to force a confession from Mukesh. Transforming the spunky, bubble gum-popping Sandy into Shanti, the more demure, orthodox beauty, takes much effort: Om's overly dramatic mother, a failed actress, teaches her the comportment

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of the 1970s "dreamy girl" with great difficulty. The makeover forces Sandy to conform to rather conventional fantasies of the ideal Indian woman, central to which is the role of a dutiful wife (brilliantly captured in the recurring modulations of Shantipriya's filmi dialogue involving the phrase "*ek chutki sindoor*"—a pinch of vermillion). Indeed, OK's hunt for a new Shanti echoes Raj's obsessive search for his lost love Nimmi in the classic *Aag* (1948)—a search that was framed by bazaar art-refracted notions of classical beauty.[24] If a global "metrosexual" remolding of the male protagonist—complete with queer undertones that come cynically yoked to a flagrant consumerism—is necessary to boost an incipient male grooming market in India, no such radical reincarnation is necessary for the female protagonist who is presumed to be an always, already primed constituent of the now-globalized beauty industry. When Shanti's ghost upstages Sandy in the end, this brief return not only wreaks a personal revenge, but also underscores "authentic" Indian paradigms of beauty, grace, and undying love. *OSO* celebrates civilizational notions of femininity and romance even as it points to their growing remoteness: in these times, such exemplars seem like spectral apparitions.

Beyond these star bodies, there is the overarching "body" of the industry. Auditions and casting couches; gossip mills and backstage shenanigans; shooting, song-recording, and dubbing sessions; *muharats*, award shows, and parties; producers' offices and stars' vanity greenrooms; frenetic technical crew and patient extras; long rehearsals and endless takes: these are the spaces, customs, and communities in terms of which recent films materialize Bollywood on-screen for us. *OSO* pushes the showing-telling to an extreme—proudly showcasing Bollywood's "idiosyncratic" styles and mores, while lovingly lampooning them. Several sequences stand out: the film's beginning in the late 1970s on the floors of Subhas Ghai's blockbuster *Karz* (1980) during the shoot of a much-loved musical number; the premiere of Shantipriya's film *Dreamy Girl*, and the paparazzi-engulfed red carpet where Om has his first close encounter with the gorgeous star; Om's attempt to impress Shanti by staging a "shoot" for a "southern" action film involving the reincarnated cowboy Quick Gun Murugan and a large stuffed tiger; [25] the Filmfare Awards ceremony, in which contemporary stars such as Abhisek Bachchan and Akshay Kumar gamely make fun of themselves; the post-awards party in honor of OK, which turns into a veritable parade of over thirty Bombay stars; the audition to find an actress who can impersonate the long-dead Shanti; and the various "shooting" sequences when the star OK drives his hapless directors crazy with his demands and his endless script doctoring. The sequences derive their oomph from the steady stream of insider jokes involving industry trivia, iconic appearances, intertextual allusions, or details of costumes, sets, and mannerisms. Subhas Ghai, the real-life director of *Karz*, makes a cameo in the early "shooting sequence": the song being "picturized" has the catchy refrain "Om Shanti Om." Shantipriya's new release is an obvious play on *Dream Girl* [1977], starring the 1970s "dream girl" Hema

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Malini. The Quick Gun Murugan sequence draws on a popular character from television channel promos of the 1990s to send up Tamil and Telegu action genres. The awards ceremony and the party are fond spoofs of Bombay's celebrity culture (glamorous designer-chic events, power cliques, and "Page 3"-style gossip mills) and the industry's endless self-mythologization (e.g., the proliferation of awards shows beamed via satellite television). OK evinces superstar megalomania, inserting the fantasy item number "*Dard-e-disco*" to spice up a hackneyed melodrama featuring a blind and deaf character, and churlishly carping about his uncomfortable superhero costume for *Mohabbat Man* (Love-man). And in a pivotal moment of the film's second half, OK talks to Pappu in front of a giant billboard—once adorned with the star Shantipriya's face, but now with an advertisement for Tag Heuer watches featuring himself: an inspired bit of product placement doubles as a wry comment on SRK's ubiquitous iconicity as the pusher of umpteen consumer brands. (Figure 10.2) Farah Khan does not spare herself either: there are multiple digs at the previous Farah-Shah Rukh collaboration, *Main Hoon Na* (2004); certain signature moves which she choreographed for the global hit "Chhaia Chhaia" from the film *Dil Se* (1997), are reprised tongue-in-cheek in "Dard-e-disco," while Malaika Aurora, the "item girl" from that earlier number, makes a hilarious appearance as Mohabbat Man's love interest. Of course, not everyone took such irreverent references so sportingly: Manoj Kumar, the veteran filmmaker-thespian, was livid with his caricature in the film, and succeeded in getting a legal injunction on these scenes before the film was televised in 2008.[26] Nevertheless, a deep understanding of and affection for the industry are palpable in *OSO*: as Phlip Lutgendorf observes, "the film's insider parody … stands in stark contrast to the cheap-shot satire of … Deepa Mehta's *Hollywood/Bollywood* (2002), which panders to every Western journalistic cliché about the alleged 'mindless dream factories' of Bombay."[27]

Figure 10.2 OK talks to Pappu in front of the Tag Heuer billboard featuring himself

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Nowhere is this empathy more evident than in the film's approach to the struggles of the extras, the industry's junior artists, stratified in terms of their physique, complexion, and comportment.[28] The film's heart belongs to people like Om and his friend Pappu, luckless junior artists who desperately try to emulate the latest fashion trends and rehearse stirring speeches in expectation of future stardom and accolade; Om's father, who never quite made it as an actor and died struggling to make ends meet; and his mother, whose closest brush with greatness was a call for a screen test to play Anarkali in the epic *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960). In *OSO's* opening sequence on the sets of *Karz,* we see 1970s star Rishi Kapoor performing the song "Om Shanti Om" on a revolving stage, with Om rocking along in an audience made up of extras. When Kapoor throws his sequined jacket into the crowd, it lands right on Om: the ecstatic look on his face, as if he is the chosen one, is downright touching. But a female extra/fan—none other than Farah Khan—thinks the jacket is hers to keep: a comical tussle breaks out, setting a dual tone of irony and poignancy for the rest of the film. At least one 1970s aspirant has made it big, we surmise, as choreographer and director. (A subsequent scene shows the nineties' superstar Govinda, a darling of the masses, amidst the waiting hordes of junior artists.) Farah will make another significant appearance during the end credits of the film, when all the crew members take their bow on the red carpet of an imputed premiere show: not only the actors, but also the producer, music directors and arrangers, art directors and costume designers, cameramen and editors, sound designers and scriptwriters, lighting, FX and make up folks, publicity, accounts and finance, spotboys and gaffers—people who are crucial to the creation of film magic, but who always remain out of sight. (Some of these folks have small speaking parts in *OSO*: for instance, dialogue writer Mayur Puri gets to be the hapless director who has to deal with OK Kapoor's off-screen histrionics.) As it renders visible the invisible labor behind film production, the film calls attention to the strange status of extras: in general, they are valued for enacting a form of disappearance in front of the camera. Even as they endow the cinematic image with much of its pulsating materiality—its texture and tone, volume and dynamics—they remain a collective, innocuous mass shorn of individuality or voice.

It is not only the current Bollywood phenomenon that is being materialized in *OSO*: digital manipulations also revivify Bombay cinema's past and make it intrinsic to the fabric of the present. There is a thrill in being thrown on the sets of *Karz* with the revolving stage in the shape of a turntable, in becoming a part of movie history; there is added delight in witnessing the anachronistic proximity of multiple generations of stars—a dashing young Rishi Kapoor and the current King of Bollywood—in the same, contiguous space; the pleasure is compounded when we see our superstar as just one of the extras, a star-struck fan like ourselves. A deep archiving impulse is at work in such scenes, one that seeks to take stock of Bombay cinema's past in

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all its aesthetic, technical, and social complexities, to pay loving homage to that archive and make it a vital repository of ideas and inspirations.

Archiving Bollywood

The impossible reality concocted in terms of this metaleptic seepage, like the recurring mise-en-abyme structure, is a hallmark of postmodern cultures. And surely the song sequence with the refrain "*Dhoom ta na tatum na nana nana*," with its stunning jumps between recycled musical sequences from films of the 1960s and 1970s—not to mention layers of cinematic allusions involving sets, costumes, and acting styles—qualifies for inclusion in the domain of the postmodern?[29] But beyond such categorizing imperatives, we still need to ask: what does this fecund pastiche—the subject of so much discussion on fan blogs and media watch sites—achieve on behalf of the narrative, and what insights might be gleaned from it? Let us dwell a bit longer on this song sequence for possible answers.

Produced by the special effects division of Red Chillies Entertainment, Shah Rukh Khan's in-house multimedia entertainment company, the sequence incorporates musical excerpts from the hit films *Amrapali* (1966), *Sachcha Jhutha* (1970), and *Jai Vijay* (1977): in each instance, Deepika Padukone in the role of Shantipriya is digitally inserted into the old footage, replacing the beloved original actresses Vyjayanthimala, Mumtaz and Jayashree T. In the final composited version, Shanti gets to romance and dance with the legendary actors Sunil Dutt, Rajesh Khanna, and Jeetendra—eliciting nostalgia-infused goose bumps in knowing viewers. To achieve an effect of seamlessness, Padukone's shoots with an actor in a green body suit had to be coordinated to

Figure 10.3 Deepika as Shantipriya "dances" with Rajesh Khanna in a sequence from *Sachcha Jhutha* (1970)

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the movements and interactions of the original filmy couples, with much attention to "the eye contact between the actors, physical touch, lighting continuity, perspective matching, skin tones matching, color matching, etc."[30] (Figure 10.3). At some point in each of these instances, Shah Rukh Khan replaces the male lead: once again, we are focalized into the junior artist's fantasies about Shanti and his own listless career. Then there are the segments that pay homage to popular musical vignettes—most explicitly, Jeetendra and Leena Chandravarkar's memorable badminton dance from *Humjoli* (1970), or the opulent drum dance from *Chandralekha* (1948), and invoke costumes (including Gene Kelley's in *The Pirate* [1948], and the Hindi film *Dharam Veer* (1977]) and acting styles (Kishore Kumar in fifties' comedies) from film history.[31] A spectrum of styles—classical temple dance, courtesan dance, cabaret, rock and roll, gypsy folk dance—comprises the dance pastiche. Finally, the affective modulation is extended at the level of the song's orchestration: the person in charge of the musical arrangement for *Dhoom ta na* was none other than Pyarelal Ramprasad Sharma, one half of the revered Laxmikant-Pyarelal team that put its indelible impression on the sonic landscape of the sixties' and seventies' Bombay cinema.

Like the broadcast of popular film music on radio and television, the use of film song fragments in everyday parlance, and their expert recall during *antakshari* games all over the South Asian diaspora (cultural practices that films like *Hum Aapke Hain Koun!* [1994] and *Rangeela* [1995] creatively incorporate); these recycled and repurposed invocations are living embodiments of cinematic memory. In the current hyper-reflexive phase of Bombay cinema, these recurrent citations constitute ludic contributions to a steadily burgeoning archive. Significantly, this is a living, breathing archive, whose aim is not only nostalgic retrospection but also expressive projection with an eye to the future. Such an archive-in-motion is what Diana Taylor calls a *repertoire*, a repository of embodied performances that reinscribe collective memory, as opposed to the more set archive of relatively stable texts and documents ensconced within an institutional infrastructure. For our purposes, Taylor's privileged modes of embodied performance—including spoken words, gestures, song, dance and rituals—have to be expanded to include contemporary cinematic ploys such as non-linear editing and manipulation of temporal duration, color correction and sound processing, not to mention more standard spatial or locational "enactments" involving sets and décor.

It is easy to overstate the contrast between the stability of the archive and the fluidity and ephemerality of the performative, since performance itself has become increasingly mediated with the technologies and forms of knowledge production, storage and transmission, while the archive has turned into a performative site. Taylor offers us a way of thinking about the shifting relationship between the archive and the repertoire: the category of the DNA of cultural memory—its relatively unchanging core—that remains

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the basis for recalibration and elaboration in embodied expressions. Om's mother's penchant for high drama (even in life, she is always performing in an accented register, as if to make up for her failed career) draws on a composite archetype of the mother—a cultural DNA of motherhood, if you will—that bears the trace of various models and performances of motherhood across multiple media, including the screen turns of revered actresses such as Durga Khote, Nirupa Roy, and Rakhee. But in rebooting this collective memory of filmy motherhood in *OSO*, Kiron Kher introduces a self-conscious key in her performance, making the role her own and intensifying the film's overarching ironic tone.

Likewise, Farah Khan and art director Sabu Cyril collected period furniture and props (including gramophone records, cameras, and film posters) from the *chor bazaars* or flea markets and went to great lengths to research the "working model" of seventies Bombay cinema ("production techniques, equipment, Old Mitchell Cameras, hard lighting, camera angles, choreography," and practical details such as how the crew was coordinated before hand held radio sets came into vogue).[32] However, the overall "period look and feel" they achieved was less a direct, mimetic reproduction than their reimagination of the seventies. Thus designers Manish Malhotra and Sanjeev took the basic elements of the seventies—loud colors and patterns including "floral and polka prints," "6 inch shirt collars" and pants hitched up really "high and so bellbottomed"—and lovingly put together over 500 gorgeous pieces of clothing, keeping in mind the unsubtle subtleties of class status and gender: Mukesh's stylish, cosmopolitan wardrobe; Om and Pappu's "very Bollywood loud" attires; and Shantipriya's *ghagra cholis* showing "a lot of cleavage." The costumes, paired with the "Elvis hair," the bouffant, and heavy makeup, helped evoke the joyous brassiness of Bombay cinema of that era without falling into an easy caricature mode. The RC Studio set, which was built over several months using a thousand workers in a remote part of Bombay's huge Film City complex, and was going to be the site of many an important scene before and after the fatal fire, was inspired by a range of architectural and decorative elements: floor plans of the Mehboob Studios, the Dasa Prakash hotel in Chennai, the ornate railings of Casanova Theater. The resulting edifice, a vertiginous assemblage of classical Indian grandeur, modern art deco, and "Punjabi baroque,"[33] would probably shock most earnest archivists of aesthetic styles; but for cinephiles, this performative bedlam—as other multisensorial cues in the film—would ring in an even broader incestuous repertoire (the mid-20th century gothic sets in Raj Kapoor and Orson Wilde films, the "Rosebud" glass globe from *Citizen Kane* [1939], the sets of *Singing in the Rain* and *An American in Paris*, one could go on).

Taylor's notion of the DNA, predicated on the volatile performativity of expressive cultures, allows for a conceptualization of cultural memory in which we can hold on to a set of defining features without having to fall

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into the trap of essentialism. I will argue that *Om Shanti Om* achieves this fine balance—indeed, makes this its *modus operandi*: it performs the singularity of Bollywood within global cinema, while celebrating the industry's links to other cinematic traditions. For instance, the final song sequence, memorable for its "plot twist" involving the surprising appearance of Shanti's ghost, restages various elements from earlier films: most notably the retributive female ghost from *Madhumati* (1958) and a return to the scene of the original crime (e.g., the Kali temple in *Karz*). Meanwhile SRK's costumes in the sequence are a flurry of references, according to Farah Khan's account, to Heathcliff's in *Wuthering Heights* (she does not specify any particular film adaptation), to American Civil War outfits, and to the costumes in the musical *The Phantom of the Opera*.

The *Madhumati* factor is particularly fascinating: directed by Bimal Roy and based on a script by Ritwik Ghatak, the film remains in its own class. Unlike other mid-century popular Hindi crime thrillers with paranormal settings, like *Mahal* (1949) and *Bees Saal Baad* (1962), it features a real vengeful ghost instead of human murderers. One might be tempted, therefore, to claim that *Madhumati*, in marking the spectral return of premodern forces, is somehow more in tune with Indian cosmologies. But as our discussion of *OSO* shows, "Indian cosmologies" is a fraught concept; moreover, Ghatak's repeated invocations of such premodern "traditions" and fantastic "archetypes" in the course of his career constitute less a return to some civilizational essence than an avant gardist critique of the modern. Besides, the history of global cinema is replete with films about paranormal phenomena—including ghosts and reincarnations.[34] Indeed, if *OSO* pays homage to *Karz*, the latter, by its director's own admission, is inspired by the Hollywood psychological thriller *The Reincarnation of Peter Proud* (1975);[35] but as Wendy Doniger points out, both *Karz* and *Peter Proud* probably owe a pretty significant debt to *Madhumati*.[36]

A strange weave—this DNA of cultural memory. In staging and riffing off these folds of inspiration/distinction, pastiche/innovation—the source of many a Bollywood enticement and vexation—*Om Shanti Om* displays a remarkably nuanced understanding of the *global popular*. Let us take stock of the implications of this ludic performativity for our initial questions of reflexivity, self-mythologization, and metafiguration.

Gestures

OSO plays with precisely the derivativeness/difference tension that Prasad locates so astutely in the term "Bollywood." While the soubriquet has caught on globally (and is probably going to stick for a while), it has its fair share of detractors in the industry. Superstar Salman Khan tweeted in February 2011: "Hate this bloody name … it makes us look like *chamchas* [sidekicks]." Reporting on Sallubhai's tweeter outburst, *Hindustan Times* quoted filmmaker

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Imtiaz Ali, "We are not a cheap imitation of some other 'wood,'" and the legendary Amitabh Bachchan, "It is very demeaning to our industry."[37] Clearly, questions of creative autonomy/reliance are at the heart of such complaints, questions that generate endless discourse about Bombay's copy culture and announcements about an imminent copyright regime bolstered by inter-industry cooperation.[38] The other side of this tension congeals around Bombay cinema's creative difference: Bollywood's self-mythologies project a dynamic globality even as they foreground the cultural specificities and indigenous roots of its screen ideolects. As I have observed above (and elsewhere[39]), these claims of distinction focus on narrative structure and fulfillment, the insertion of songs in the plot, spectral traces of premodern (classical, islamicate, folk) forms, and local social and aesthetic logics.

We have explored how, in the course of the "Dhoom ta na" pastiche or the "Dard-e-disco" item number, *OSO* effectively presents a self-conscious commentary on the place of song sequences in film narratives. We have also noted how certain paranormal phenomena—reincarnation, spectral return—drive the storyline and restore a sense of justice. Rather than flout or bend "logic," the film self-consciously mobilizes a diverse bundle of logics—one that is an integral, unsurprising part of Indian cosmologies, premodern *and* modern. At certain decisive moments in the film, Om/OK declares at the camera: "*Picture abhi baki hai mere dost*"—"There is more of the film to come, my friend!" This recurring line about the deferral of narrative denouement is most resonant in two scenes: when an inebriated Om delivers his poignant "acceptance speech" to his friend Pappu and a bunch of street urchins, in anticipation of future acting honors; and later, when the egotistical and blasé Om Kapoor, having just won the Filmfare award for best actor, surprises himself and the audience with a heartfelt acceptance speech—channeling his previous incarnation, the sweet, ingenuous, and incorrigibly romantic Om. (Figure 10.4) On both occasions, the quip about the prolongation of narrative fulfillment is preceded by a quaint assertion of cosmic synergy: "*Agar kisi cheez ko dil se chaho … to saari kaaynaat tumhein ussey milaaney ki koshish mein lag jati hai*"[40]—If you really wish for something from the heart, then the entire universe comes together in the endeavor to secure it for you. Besides conveying an obvious and inexhaustible optimism about life itself, the adage underlines the collaborative nature of cinematic signification and recites a fundamental, if commonplace, belief about the medium's place in quotidian life: films teach us to dream, and to have faith in "happy endings." If things do not work out as expected, there is no reason to give up: it just means that the story is still unfolding. This fortune cookie-style homily, articulating the *Krama* (gradual development and revelation) structure of classical Sanskrit hermeneutics with the unabashed populism of commercial cinemas, is remarkable in its positive spin on destiny, that premier Indian preoccupation. The fluid and open arc of the narrative recasts fate or destiny as the eventual overcoming of disappointments and

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Figure 10.4 The callous OK discovers his inner Om at the Filmfare awards

adversities: in this schema, success—or, more to the point, a more resonant experience of *jouissance*—emerges as a historical inevitability, even if one has to die and be reincarnated to achieve it.

But what is "success" for people seeking to break into the industry, or for Bombay cinema as it tries to consolidate its global clout? In fact, what constitutes success for Indians at this moment of globalization? Such timely and pressing questions around the shifting registers of aspiration and accomplishment animate *OSO*. Indeed, it is quite possible to adopt an allegorical reading strategy and find both direct and implicit credence for such a line of thinking about the film's broader concerns. But I want to make a larger claim: that beyond recognizably allegorical *representation*, *OSO* mobilizes far more inchoate *resonances*, so that if we want to speak in terms of allegory, we have to have a more capacious conception of that mode, involving a diffuse field of affective modulations.

Consider the ambivalent digs at Hollywood in the film, indexing the anxious mutuality of the two industries. Mukesh, the villainous Bombay producer, murders his wife Shanti so he can marry a powerful studio owner's daughter: he then moves to Hollywood, achieves greater success and, along with upgrading his suits to more cosmopolitan cuts, changes his name to Mike. On his first encounter with Om Kapoor, he insists on being called by his Hollywood name, leading the latter to quip that he too is known as OK in Bollywood. In an earlier sequence, while shooting for *Mohabbat Man*, OK scoffs at the strange practice of superheroes wearing undergarments outside and over their body-fitting costumes—but agrees to it when reminded that is what Superman and Spiderman do. These tongue-in-cheek moments function as gestures, intimating something like Bollywood's geocultural

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unconscious: they not only call attention to the complex relations, circuits, and transactions in the realm of global media capital but also translate its nodes and hierarchies into a partisan moral economy. The gestures, in their indexicality, focalize us, making us intensely aware of not only what we already know but also what we sense, and even what we wish for.

It is in such obsessive gestures toward multiple scales and horizons, actualities and potentialities, that contemporary Bollywood appears to follow Bertolt Brecht's "nicht … sondern" (not … but) dictum for acting: the actor must *not only* act out the character's actions that move the plot along, *but also* gesture, via his performance, toward broader social situations.[41] For Brecht, dramatic *gestus* consists of (i) the gist or point of a particular scene and (ii) gesture, understood as embodied attitude or comportment, reflecting one's relation to one's surroundings. Gestic signification not only communicates the work's plotline but also demonstrates its conditions of possibility. Supplementing the script with extensive stage directions, Brecht asked actors to move away from the narrow sense of character motivation typical of a bourgeois psychologism and to get audiences to acknowledge and actively reflect on concrete structural conditions.[42] Gestus is a core element of Brecht's "epic theater" whose charge is nothing short of "a solid, practical rearrangement of our age's way of life."[43] The point, as Walter Benjamin explains "is not so much to develop actions as to represent conditions. But 'represent' does not here signify 'reproduce' in the sense used by the theoreticians of Naturalism. Rather, the first point at issue is to *uncover* those conditions."[44] This obsession with "laying bare" or, as Benjamin puts it, "uncovering" the underlying conditions—with "showing the showing," as it were—has prompted Rey Chow to speculate recently on a pornographic impulse at the heart of modernist thought. Baudrillard's "obscenity of the visible" is generally understood to be a postmodern trait; but for Rey Chow, the "close affinity" that "the logic of mediatized reflexivity" has with "pornography's denuding conventions" can be traced as far back as the 1910s and 1920s, the acme of esthetic modernism, to the Russian formalists (in particular, Viktor Shklovsky) and to Brecht.[45]

No doubt, Bollywood and Brecht make strange bedfellows: while an uncompromising commitment to social transformation is at the core of the German playwright's imprint on esthetic modernism, box office receipts continue to be the entertainment industry's *sine qua non*, all its reflexive acrobatics folding into more sumptuous and stylized spectacle. Yet I want to wager that placing Brecht next to Bollywood is a productive exercise: not only for a critical interrogation of the industry's current reflexive phase, but also for a reappraisal of Brecht's usefulness in understanding the unruly and compromised domain of the popular. A good place to begin is Brecht's 1930 essay "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre" which, in spite of its strident conclusions against Aristotelian mimetism on behalf of a transformative cultural politics, conveys nuances that are surprisingly equivocal.

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Antinomies of the culinary

The charge of the piece derives from the category "culinary," which Brecht presents as an intrinsic characteristic of the operatic form but which remains intensely pejorative in his hierarchy of esthetic values. The culinary approach, intent on serving up reality as mere sensory experience, is utterly "hedonistic" in its elicitation of pleasure; it furthers the reproduction of social structures by producing art for the "apparatus" according to a "fodder principle."[46] Brecht begins by describing *Mahagonny*, his 1927 opera with Kurt Weill, as "a piece of fun." Opera in general is characterized as follows: "The irrationality of the opera lies in the fact that rational elements are employed, solid reality is aimed at, but at the same time it is all washed out by the music … The more unreal and unclear the music can make the reality … the more pleasurable the whole process becomes: the pleasure grows in proportion to the degree of unreality."[47] Leaving aside our contemporary unease with such categorical invocations of "reality" and the "rational," what is striking about these observations is that they may well be about mainstream Bombay cinema. And when he declares, "Enjoyment here appears in its current historical role: as merchandise," he is evoking the culture industry at large.[48]

But then, Brecht begins to nuance his characterization of *Mahagonny*: notwithstanding its culinary nature it also happens to be an experimental work, in that it parlays "the unreality, irrationality and lack of seriousness" of the genre into a locus of analysis by "strik[ing] with a double meaning."[49] While fulfilling the role of opera "as a means of pleasure," it also has "provocative effects,"[50] thereby bringing "the culinary principle under discussion."[51] Now all these features—double meanings and provocations, calling attention to the irrationality, and inducing an awareness and interrogation of the culinary principle—also characterize *Om Shanti Om*: could one argue plausibly that this reflexive film is innovative in the Brechtian sense? It goes without saying that Brecht would be stunned by such a claim: he would probably place the film's narrative and formal refurbishments in the same league as *fin de siècle* opera's "desperate attempts" to provide itself "with a posthumous sense, a 'new' sense, by which the sense comes ultimately to lie in the music itself," so that formalist features "from being a means are promoted to become an end."[52] After all, he had dismissed Wagnerites as philosophical posers, whose "hackneyed ruminations" could readily "be disposed of as a means of sensual satisfaction."[53] Championing genuine innovations against "mere renovations," Brecht had declared that "[r]eal innovations attack the roots."[54] In spite of all its beguiling innovativeness, *OSO* is more intent on fortifying the Bollywood firmament than taking it apart: instead of alienating us from Bombay cinema, the film's relentless satires augment and multiply its attractions. Whereas Brecht had wanted to transform "the means of pleasure into object of instruction,"[55] *OSO* turns

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all manners of self-conscious and analytic gestures—about junior artists, the star system, narrative fulfillment—into more fodder for sheer enjoyment. If there is any pedagogical imperative in the film, it cannot be decoupled from entertainment.

But was *Mahagonny* truly revolutionary in its innovations? Brecht wavered on this question, suggesting a greater openness to gradual deliberation and transformation than what is usually credited to him. From the assertion of its representativeness as opera—"*Mahagonny* is nothing more or less than an opera"[56]—Brecht goes on to ask whether the form itself has not arrived at a crossroads, so that "further innovations, instead of leading to the renovation of this whole form, will bring about its destruction."[57] Then we get a powerful thought-image of *Mahagonny's* subversive potential: "it still perches happily on the old bough, perhaps, but at least it has started (out of absent-mindedness or bad conscience) to saw it through … ."[58] If the Brecht-Weill work is "truly revolutionary" and its intent is "innovation, not renovation," how does it still remain "nothing more or less than opera"? Here, the playwright seems to be facing a dilemma of creativity under the sign of *genre*: how does one work within generic boundaries, while simultaneously transcending them and their material-institutional substrate? More intriguingly, why do we need parenthetical qualifications about a lack of conscious engagement or, worse still, some form of culpability? What do these vacillations convey, if not a lack of preparedness or even enthusiasm for the coming revolution?[59] Finally, writing and staging any work was, for Brecht, a *process*: indeed, in the final subsection of the essay, he talks about the gradual evolution of *Mahagonny* between 1927 and 1930, "when attempts were made to emphasize the didactic more and more at the expense of the culinary element."[60] By his own admission, the *Novum* does not necessarily arrive with the kind of abruptness, force, or finality that his more forceful declarations about "genuine innovation" would have us believe.

In the context of our discussion here, it is instructive to remember that no esthetic mode comes with a singular political valence: reflexivity is not inherently radical in its take or effect on the social. For instance, the Hollywood musical—one genre marked by a high degree of reflexivity—works to decidedly conservative ends. As Jane Feuer has shown convincingly, musicals endlessly reiterate the myths of spontaneity, integration, and audience, thereby perpetuating the codes of the genre.[61] And when she observes that "the ritual function of the musical is to reaffirm and articulate the place that entertainment occupies in its audience's psychic lives," she might as well be talking about Bollywood in general, and *OSO* on particular.[62] Others have criticized and expanded on Brechtian theories of cinema (most notably theoretical interventions in the pages of the journal *Screen* in the 1970s[63]) to argue that formal experimentation does not automatically transform perceptions of reality.[64] Indeed, what we consider to be Brechtian tropes may be in operation in a wide variety of cinematic practices with a

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range of non-revolutionary effects. In recent years, we have such anti-realist strategies congealing, ironically, into a spectacular hyperrealism whose main objectives are neither critical thinking nor social transformation.[65]

We are in a position now to articulate what is possibly the most important lesson from placing Brecht alongside Bollywood: the move compels us to acknowledge Brechtian reflexivity as one among many such practices, with divergent political valences. It is only the persistent modernist lionization of Brechtian reflexivity (and its imputed cultivation, via the alienation effect, of politically discerning audiences) that has consecrated it as the avant garde mode *par excellence* within a global genealogy of non-mimetic esthetics. But Brecht frequently acknowledged his debt to Chinese performative traditions that made no attempt to occlude simulation or artifice in the service of a vulgar realism. Here one might also usefully recall Barthes' Brecht-influenced characterization of Japan as "an empire of signs," and Noël Burch's Brechtian-Barthesian formulation of the "presentational" mode of Japanese aesthetics that calls attention to the processes of signification. These cross-cultural appropriations are based on a fundamental misrecognition about the transformatory promises of "showing the showing." In China, Japan, or India, where western bourgeois realism does not enjoy an unquestioned hegemony, there is no "fourth wall" to break through to unravel a self-contained world of illusion: more often than not, such "reflexive" practices serve distinctly conservative ends. It is also instructive to remember Sylvia Harvey's rejoinder to Brechtian film theory: that "stylistic properties alone" do not ensure radicality; rather, the latter emerges from the triangulation of textual features, the social milieu, and informed media publics.[66] In the Indian context, civilizational models of an epic address do muster the kind of plot dispersion, perspectival fecundity, and dialogical hermeneutics Brecht desired for his epic theatre, but none of these elements are avowedly antithetical to the culinary pleasures of narrative forms. In fact, these features are routinely deployed to enhance the pleasures of the text—to produce precisely the sense of narrative jouissance that courses through *Om Shanti Om*.

Interestingly, at least one important Indian film critic dismissed the film by underscoring its insignificance in decidedly culinary terms: "despite pounding dance numbers, true-blue glamour and some inspired comedy, *OSO* remains the cinematic equivalent of fast food—it's fun but entirely forgettable."[67] Of course, for this critic, "culinary" is not a suspect category: rather, it is fast food that is the object of derision. Here we encounter the persistence of bourgeois taste cultures of the kind Brecht inveighed against in his polemics on the opera, cultures in which the only education possible is the education—normalization—of taste, intent on the reproduction of the extant social order.

Brecht's anti-culinary invectives index his deep mistrust of embodied experience and affect. For all his materialist acuity, the human body and its sensory faculties continued to vex him: hence his emphasis on conscious

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experimentation and the abstract act of thinking. Rey Chow, in her brilliant reconsideration of Brecht's legacy for modern critical thinking, brings out its central tension. The very act of reflexive defamiliarization takes shape in the performative arts as certain "protruding forms, most notably as gestures but also as captions, posters, fables, songs, and other visible bits and pieces. *Thought, in other words, has been made ex-plicit through staging*: rather than drawing things into itself by unifying them, it breaks them up, moves them apart, and gives them independence, in a series of sensuous ex-plications (out-foldings)."[68] Thus the "move to de-sensationalize," propounded with such critical fury by theorists from Louis Althusser to Laura Mulvey,[69] finds stage and screen incarnations with an intrinsically sensuous presence. This conundrum leads Chow to wonder: "what exactly is the status of the senses in relation to mediatized reflexivity?"[70] She goes on to argue that in the absence of any guarantee that defamilarizing gestures will eradicate experiential pleasure and that their lessons will reach audiences as intended, "theory" today must confront the viability of staging as a purely critical theoretical practice. Subtly inflecting Jacques Rancière, Chow poses what might be understood as a post-critical question: "How might the senses be (re)distributed after the critical censuring of illusionism, identification, empathy and other sensuous pleasures?"[71]

Possible answers have begun to congeal in the disparate body of thought known as "affect theory": supplementing—or, more radically, moving away from—the semiotic-ideological critique of representation, scholars have started analyzing the embodied resonances of cultural systems. The invocation of meta-figuration in the title of this essay signals not only its focus on reflexive figurations but also its desire to broaden our sense of figuration by articulating representation with resonance, the symbolic-deliberative depictions with the sensuous-felt potentiations. At least one strand of contemporary film theory appears to be striving for such an articulation: Miriam Hansen, drawing on Brecht's close interlocutor Walter Benjamin, explores the possibility for staving off the loss of experience and sensation in the wake of modern mass media. She focuses on *mimetic innervation*—the two-way loop of excitation and reinforcement between somatic and psychic processes—that presents the promise of novel forms of engagement between technologies of representation and the senses, thus expanding the fields of signification and reception.[72] Without going into a lengthy elaboration of its implications for theorizing cinema in general and Bollywood in particular, let me end with some conjectural claims on the basis of the preceding discussion of *Om Shanti Om*.

A Bollywood *Novum*?

That a commercial culture industry such as Bollywood serves the cause of social reproduction is not quite news. The "cultural studies" insight that,

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within a conservative mode of production, the industry indulges in significant sociopolitical negotiations is not that novel either. More to the point, what appears as fresh post-critical possibilities from western theoretical perspectives—namely, the realignment of the senses to media technologies, keeping in mind the critique of sensationalism that targets its sense-numbing reifications—may not, after all, be that new in the context of Indian esthetics. Even before the "New Bollywood"[73] came into existence, Bombay filmmakers—Raj Kapoor in the 1950s, the Anand brothers in the 1960s, Prakash Mehra and Manmohan Desai in the 1970s—were exploring and experimenting with new modes of signification and address, often confounding cinematic orthodoxies and eliciting charges of an illogical paradigm careening out of control. One might even argue that Bollywood already evinced its own self-conscious sophistication: for instance, in its fecund operations, it embraced the centrality of artifice to cinematic praxis and the ineluctable chasm at the heart of all communication—paying short shrift to debates raging elsewhere about realism, authenticity and fidelity.

So what is new here? Whereas Bombay cinema did not bother to actively theorize its operations, the reflexive turn has pushed its codes and conventions into conscious cognizance. Scholars and media commentators have now joined the fray, bringing the kind of serious attention to the industry that Hollywood has enjoyed for nearly a century. But the purported newness, in all its performative aplomb, begs careful scrutiny. Recent attempts at novelty in Bollywood, buying into festival circuit conceptions of new-ness and drawing on the strategies of the "New Hollywood" or the Asian "New Waves," often appear stale and reified.[74] It is the occasional film such as *Om Shanti Om* that is more successful in achieving a rare freshness in engaging audiences in multiple ways, even when its brand of renewal is predicated on tropes as archaic as reincarnation. Reflexivity in the Bollywood context slides effortlessly into the mythic: instead of seeking polemical interventions in the service of an epochal transformative agenda, reflexivity here loops representation with its myriad modulations, its conditions of possibility, its reception. And therein lies the genius of *OSO* and the "New Bollywood": the "Bollywood model" anchors its regeneration in the DNA of cultural memory, in its corporeal resonances, thereby predicating its supposed "break" from the past precisely on the reflexive "citation, exaggeration and historicization" of its "*masala* aesthetics."[75] The confidence and gestic bravado with which this regeneration is staged suggests that the Bollywood *novum*—always about to arrive, always en route, always untimely—may already be upon us.

Notes

1. One influential formulation of the two modes appears in Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in Japanese Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). The "representational" hides the process of cinematic

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production, rendering it transparent to promote an illusion of reality. In contrast, the "presentational" draws attention to representation's conditions of possibility and perhaps to its ideological functions.

2. The adage mouthed by the ambitious protagonist of the film *To Die For* (Gus Van Sant, 1995), "You are nobody unless you are on TV," updates this need for our hyper-mediatized contemporaneity: it might well be the mantra that guides the participants of the various reality shows, not to mention the Kardashians and Rakhi Sawants who turn the whole world into one.
3. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972/1957) 142.
4. In fact, Barthes argued that the various avant gardes emerge from the bourgeoisie, so that their interventions target mainly the realm of aesthetics and not social status: "What the avant-garde does not tolerate about the bourgeoisie is its language, not its status." (139) In that early work, Barthes did not have anything to offer on the connections between self-reflection and mythologization: those links would be explored two decades later in his autobiography (Barthes, 1975), where he interrogated the genre by staging the continual erasure of the *autos* or self, and allowed perhaps only one admittedly vanguardist, if tenuous, myth—that of a hyper-reflexive autobiograhical subject/praxis. The question that is pertinent here: how might Barthes be useful when the "subject" of self-knowledge and mythologization is an entire creative industry with its myriad agents and institutions, practices, and networks, and driven by commercial entrepreneurialism rather than high post-structuralist criticality?
5. That formulation is Lauren Berlant's; see Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
6. John Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008) 1.
7. Three of the most feted Hollywood releases of 2011—*The Artist*, *Hugo*, and *My Week with Marilyn*—corroborate this trend towards industrial reflexivity.
8. Madhava Prasad, "Surviving Bollywood," in Anandam Kavoori and Aswin Punathambekar, eds, *Global Bollywood* (New York: NYU Press, 2008) 43.
9. Prasad, "Surviving Bollywood,"50.
10. Other films not linked to Varma and his associates, but which featured memorable "industry" sequences, include *Swarg* (1990), *Akele Hum, Akele Tum* (1995) and *Bombay Boys* (1998).
11. Even industry stalwarts such as Amir Khan, Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, and Zoya Akhtar, with their large-budget productions, claim a certain "indie" credibility and distance from Bollywood. See "Indie Directors Lobby for Separate Theatres," *The Times of India*, July 4, 2012, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-07-04/news-interviews/32524770_1_nfdc-bengali-film-national-film-development-corporation (accessed July 30, 2012).
12. A Pepsi ad starring Ranbir Kapoor, the industry-anointed future king of Bollywood, flaunts this commercial imperative in the very notion of "Youngistan," an alternative, out-of this-world realm of belonging for today's cool, hip, and resourceful youth.
13. *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* deals with the complicity of media conglomerates in political conspiracies; *Rang de Basanti* addresses the real-life link between shady defense contracts and accidents causing the death of airforce pilots, drawing provocative parallels between the British Raj and the postcolonial Indian state, and ends in a takeover of the government-operated radio station in Delhi; and *Peepli (Live)* spoofs the desperate opportunism of contemporary media pursuing audiences.

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14. This is most evident in *Rang de Basanti*, which ends with images of viewers from all walks of life—but especially college students—calling in to television stations to express their solidarity with the youthful protagonists even as they are ruthlessly gunned down by security forces as so many exterminable terrorists. Interestingly, this film has helped an entire culture of candle light marches as a form of peaceful mass protest, especially in the solidly middle class urban enclaves of Bangalore, Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai.
15. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2007); Nigel Thrift, *Knowing Capitalism* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005); Jon Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
16. See my essay, "The Mellifluous Illogics of the Bollywood Musical," in Steven Cohan, ed. *The Sound of Musicals* (London: The British Film Institute, 2010) 41–53.
17. Ashish Rajadhyakha describes this process as a form of seepage from the realm of cinema into the domains of fashion, music, art, and so on: what he calls the "cinema effect" whereby, paradoxically, cinema itself comes to be increasingly absent. This argument about the marked disappearance of cinema from contemporary Bollywood, and its relationship to a concomitant disappearance of the state and statist imperatives of an earlier era, especially the narrative production of a right-bearing citizen-subject, is most illuminating. My argument about the transmedial production of a contemporary "cinema" is less invested than Rajadhyaksha's in marking cinema as an "absence"; his stance is ultimately a mournful, modernist one (already signaled in the title of his book, "in the Time of Celluloid"), and that is why he returns time and again to the realm of art/installations that seeks to re-estheticize cinema as a "serious" cultural project. But his account of the shifts in the intersection between narrative economy and political subjecthood has resonances with my own argument about an evacuation of the "political" as an overarching and clearly articulated agenda. Ashish Rajadhyaksha, *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid: From Bollywood to the Emergency* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2009), see especially pp. 84–129.
18. Reincarnation is a well-traversed road for Bombay film plots including *Madhumati* (1958), *Milan* (1967), *Neelkamal* (1968), *Mehbooba* (1976), *Karz* (1980), *Bees Saal Baad* (1988), and *Karan Arjun* (1995).
19. In an interview on NDTV, SRK said that he was motivated to get the ripped physique when his son's friend called him fat, and the son had to agree. Aired on February 3, 2008.
20. These physical problems are discussed at length in Nasreen Munni Kabir's documentary *The Inner/Outer World of Shah Rukh Khan* (2005).
21. Farah Khan, quoted in Mushtaq Shiekh, *The Making of Om Shanti Om* (New Delhi: Om Books International, 2008), page numbers not provided for this volume.
22. Jean Baudrillard, "The Ecstasy of Communication," in Hal Foster, ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983) 131.
23. Baudrillard, "The Ecstasy of Communication,"130–131.
24. I have written about this search in a different context. Bhaskar Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009) 89–91, 105.
25. This character, originally featured in promos for Star TV Network's Channel [V], has since been the locus of *Quick Gun Murugan* (2009), a full-length Bollywood spoof of westerns and South Indian action films. The film involves reincarnation of a vegetarian cowboy to fight a beef-eating villain scheming to take over the McDosa restaurant chain.

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26. Apparently, Manoj Kumar—known for his Hindu-centric depictions of the "motherland"—saw a communal angle in *OSO*: he charged SRK and Farah Khan, both "fundamentalist" Muslims, of plotting against "a respectable Brahmin Pundit" like himself. "Manoj Kumar: Shah Rukh Khan Is Communal," November 19, 2007, http://www.ibosnetwork.com/newsmanager/templates/template1.aspx?articleid=21051&zoneid=1 (accessed July 31, 2012).
27. Philip Lutgendorf, "Om Shanti Om," *Philip's Filums*, http://www.uiowa.edu/~incinema/Om%20Shanti%20Om.html (accessed August 1, 2012). Lutgendorf singles out "the odious chapter on the industry in Pico Iyer's pop-travelogue *Video Night in Kathmandu* (1989)" as an example of such a condescending attitude.
28. *The Making of Om Shanti Om*, penned by the film's co-scriptwriter Mushtaq Shiekh, provides this gloss on the plight of junior artiste: "Men, okay, now if you are tall, fair, broad shouldered, then you are 'Decent' and you are in Class A. You would get to be in hotel scenes, wedding and airport scenes and such. Class B men are ordinary looking men and they are your street crowd, villagers, constables and such. The women's Mahila Kalakar Sangh has its Super Class—the kind that gets into party, wedding airport scenes and such. Then the Class A who can fill up market scenes, hospitals, theatre scenes and such and the Class B which are beggars, villagers and so on. How much you get paid depends on what class you are in. Class A male junior artiste are paid Rs. 570 per shift for a serial and Rs. 615 per shift for a film. Super Class members of Mahila Kalakar Sangh are paid Rs. 650 per shift for a serial and Rs. 690 for a film." (The volume does not provide page numbers.)
29. For an analysis of *OSO* as a postmodern Bollywood film, see Neelam Sidhar Wright, *Bollywood Eclipsed* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Sussex, 2009) 85–95, http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/2360/1/Wright%2C_Neelam_Sidhar.pdf (accessed June 14, 2012).
30. "How the Dhoom Tana SFX Was created," Bollywood.com, http://www.bollywood.com/node/2612 (accessed June 9, 2012).
31. These details are supplied by Farah Khan as part of her commentary on the DVD.
32. The information and the quotations in this paragraph are from Mushtaq Shiekh, "That 70's Show," *The Making of Om Shanti Om* (page numbers not provided in original).
33. The term is Gautam Bhatia's. Bhatia, *Punjabi Baroque* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1994).
34. In fact, Hollywood in the seventies produced a number of reincarnation tales, the most prominent ones being *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* (1970), the multiple Oscar-winner *Patton* (1970), *The Reincarnation of Peter Proud* (1975), and *Audrey Rose* (1977), involving such A-list figures as Vincent Minnelli, Robert Wise, Barbara Streisand, and Francis Ford Coppola.
35. http://entertainment.oneindia.in/bollywood/gupshup/2007/subhash-himesh-karz-100907.html (accessed July 26, 2012). Of course, Subhas Ghai asserts that the influence was restricted to only one scene—"The rest of the story and script was written afresh as per Indian myths and beliefs."
36. Wendy Doniger, *The Woman Who Pretended to Be Who She Was: Myths of Self-Imitation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
37. "Bollywood Mat Kaho Na," *Hindustan Times* February 5, 2011.
38. See, for instance, "Now, Copyright is Replacing the Copycat Culture in Bollywood," *The Times of India* (August 22, 2008), http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2008-08-22/mumbai/27899715_1_film-makers-blaise-fernandes-hollywood-studios (accessed January 29, 2012); "Hollywood, Bollywood in Anti-Piracy Drive," *The Hollywood Reporter* (March 18, 2010), http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/hollywood-bollywood-anti-piracy-drive-21760 (accessed June 10, 2011);

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39. "Mellifluous Illogics" in Cohan (2010); *Mourning the Nation*, especially pp. 8–9, 25–27. For an earlier, somewhat essentializing account, see Vijay Mishra, *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire* (New York: Routledge, 2001). For a more recent critical engagement, see Anustup Basu, "The Eternal Return and Overcoming 'Cape Fear': Science, Sensation, Superman and Hindu Nationalism in Recent Hindi Cinema," *South Asian History and Culture* 2.4 (October 2011) 557–71.
40. Paulo Coelho's The Alchemist (New York: Harper, 1993).
41. Bertolt Brecht, "Short Description of a New Technique of Acting Which Produces an Alienation Effect," in John Willett, ed. and trans. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964) 136–140.
42. To the extent a film is a *performative* work, the Brechtian notion of gesture—with its implications of mobilizing consciousness via staged/mediatized reflexivity—may be productively extended to an entire film.
43. Bertolt Brecht, "The Epic Theatre and Its Difficulties," in Willett (1964) 23.
44. Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. A. Bostock (London: Verso, 1998), 18. Quoted in Rey Chow, "When Reflexivity Becomes Porn: Mutations of a Modernist Theoretical Practice," in Jane Elliott and Derek Attridge, eds *Theory after "Theory"* (New York: Routledge, 2011) 135–148. As Meg Mumford has noted, "'to show the *Gestus'* came to mean *to present artistically the mutable socio-economic and ideological construction of human behavior and relations*." Meg Mumford, *Bertolt Brecht* (New York: Routledge, 2009) 54, emphasis in original.
45. Chow, "When Reflexivity Becomes Porn,"144–145.
46. Brecht, "The Modern Theatre Is Epic Theatre," 34–35.
47. Brecht, "Epic Theatre," 35–36.
48. Brecht, "Epic Theatre," 36.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Brecht, "Epic Theatre," 41.
52. Brecht, "Epic Theatre," 40.
53. Brecht, "Epic Theatre," 39.
54. Brecht, "Epic Theatre," 41.
55. Brecht, "Epic Theatre," 42.
56. Brecht, "Epic Theatre," 37.
57. Brecht, "Epic Theatre," 41.
58. Ibid.
59. Since these musings are based on Willett's English translation, and not Brecht's German original, I have to acknowledge the possibility of somewhat different nuances.
60. Brecht, "Epic Theatre," 42.
61. Jane Feuer, "The Self-Reflective Musical and the Myth of Entertainment," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 2.3 (August 1977) 313–326.
62. Feuer, "The Self-Reflective Musical," 325.
63. See, especially, *Screen* 15.2 (1974).
64. See, for instance, Dana Polan, "Brecht and the Politics of Self-Reflexive Cinema," *Jump Cut* 1 (1974), http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC17folder/BrechtPolan.html (accessed October 16, 2012).
65. Thomas Elsaesser, "From Anti-illusionism to Hyper-Realism: Bertolt Brecht and Contemporary Film," in *Re-Interpreting Brecht: His Influence on Contemporary Drama*

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and Film, Pia Kleber and Colin Visser, eds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 170–185.

66. Sylvia Harvey, "Whose Brecht? Memories for the Eighties," *Screen* 23.1 (May–June 1982) 55–56.
67. Anupama Chopra, *First Day, First Show* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2011) 336.
68. Chow, "When Reflexivity Becomes Porn," 138–9, emphasis in original.
69. Rey Chow quotes from Mulvey's (1975) critical injunction with respect to cinema, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," published in *Screen* soon after the journal's special issue on Brechtian film theory: "It is said that analyzing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intention of this article." 142.
70. Chow, "When Reflexivity Becomes Porn," 142.
71. Ibid.
72. Miriam Hansen, "Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street," *Critical Inquiry* 25 (Winter 1999) 306–343.
73. I use "New Bollywood" in the sense invoked by Sangita Gopal, with its implications of a new urban middle-class consumerism, a globalized address, and an obsessive reflexivity. Gopal, *Conjugations: Marriage and Form in New Bollywood Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), especially 15–21.
74. See, for instance, the media hoopla around the Cannes reception of Anurag Kashyap's *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012)—a cine-diptych which, in spite of its eye-popping style, produced yawns from this writer.
75. Gopal, *Conjugations*, 20. While I find Gopal's account convincing, my sense of the "shift" is oriented more toward underlying aesthetic continuities, and I take a slightly more dour view of the "new lions" of Bollywood.

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