Fashioning identity and resistance: Shilpa Chavan's *HUM (we/us)*

Robert E. D'Souza

Published online: 11 Sep 2024.

Submit your article to this journal ☐

Article views: 112

View related articles ☐

View Crossmark data ☐

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Fashioning identity and resistance: Shilpa Chavan's *HUM (we/us)*

Robert E. D'Souza 🄳

Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton, Winchester, UK

ABSTRACT

Shilpa Chavan's short film *HUM (we/us)* blends fashion design, filmmaking, and social critique into a powerful artistic statement. This essay examines Chavan's innovative approach, exploring how she has collaborated to craft a visual and sonic narrative about identity, resistance, and community through a lens of postcolonial India. The analysis employs multiple theoretical frameworks, including gender theory, critical fashion practices, postcolonial studies, psychoanalysis, and sound analysis. Chavan's use of recycled materials and hybrid aesthetics creates a critical space for reimagining fashion's activist role in society, challenging dominant norms while envisioning new possibilities. The essay situates *HUM (we/us)* within the context of contemporary Indian and international art, drawing comparisons with works by artists such as Tejal Shah, Pushpamala N., Isaac Julien, and Zanele Muholi. It also examines the film's social and cultural impact, its critical reception, and its potential influence on future artistic practices. Through detailed analysis, *HUM (we/us)* emerges as a compelling example of interdisciplinary art practice sparking meaningful dialogue about complex social issues, demonstrating the power of art to challenge hegemonic narratives and imagine alternative futures.

Introduction

Shilpa Chavan's *HUM (we/us)*, produced in 2023 in collaboration with film director and musician Ashim Ahluwalia, is a complex short film that defies easy categorisation. It embodies and transcends the conventions of fashion film, serving as a nexus for examining gender fluidity, class dynamics, mental health, and community formation. These themes are explored through fashion as both an art form and social discourse. *HUM (we/us)* invites deep exploration through contemporary critical theory, offering rich terrain for understanding identity politics, postcolonial critique, and the transformative potential of artistic and critical fashion practices.

The narrative of *HUM (we/us)* unfolds in a colonial-style Indian home, opening with sepia-toned imagery that immediately situates the viewer in a space where past and

present collide. We follow a nameless protagonist, initially seen cleaning ornate cabinets and dusting figurines, their servile role emphasised by a uniform complete with a bow tie as belt. The film's aesthetic shifts between the shadowy, confined spaces of the protagonist's domestic labour and the separate more opulent areas inhabited by the family they serve.

As the protagonist navigates this hierarchical space, tension builds, culminating in a pivotal moment when time for tea is called by the striking of a clock and when they drop a tray of fine china. This act of destruction, whether accidental or subconscious rebellion, marks a crucial turning point in the film. Cast out, the protagonist undergoes a transformative experience, their convulsions on the floor accompanied by traditional flute music, symbolising a metamorphosis from servitude to self-expression.

The film then abruptly transitions to a wedding scene which the family had previously been in preparation for, where the familiar order is disrupted by the entrance of a diverse group of artists. Here, Chavan's background in fashion design comes to the fore, with elaborate costumes crafted from repurposed materials including dustbin plastic bags and waste materials. The protagonist, now part of this artistic collective, returns transformed. The once rigid social boundaries dissolve as members of this group engage with the family, starting a carnivalesque celebration, complete with vibrant colours, pulsing electronic music, and ecstatic dance.

Throughout, Chavan employs a rich visual language, using colour, costume, and carefully choreographed movement to explore themes of identity, class, and resistance. The film's soundscape evolves from oppressive silence to a vibrant audio tapestry, mirroring the protagonist's journey. By blending elements of fashion film, social critique, and experimental narrative, *HUM (we/us)* offers a powerful commentary on postcolonial identity, gender fluidity, and the transformative potential of art and community.

Chavan's multidisciplinary art practice, spanning millinery, fashion design, and visual anthropology, brings a unique interdisciplinary perspective to her work. Her background in science and fashion studies informs a critically rigorous and creatively broad approach. This multifaceted background manifests in *HUM (we/us)* through juxtapositions of past and future, handcraft and technology, analogue and digital, destabilising fixed notions of identity and cultural belonging while acknowledging binary tensions within the narrative.

This essay unpacks the layers of meaning in *HUM (we/us)* using a multi-theoretical lens, drawing on gender performativity (Butler), postcolonial theory (Bhabha, Spivak), psychoanalysis (Lacan, Fanon), sound studies (Chion), and semiotics (Barthes). The analysis also incorporates insights from spatial theory (Lefebvre) and feminist film theory (Mulvey) to provide a comprehensive understanding of the film's visual and narrative strategies. By situating Chavan's work within these frameworks, we appreciate its complexity and its contribution to broader discussions in fashion studies, film theory, and cultural studies. Additionally, this analysis illuminates how Chavan's art serves as a critical intervention, challenging hegemonic narratives and proposing alternative modes of 'being' and 'belonging' in a globalised, postcolonial world.

The essay begins by contextualising Chavan's work within a broader landscape of Indian fashion and independent cinema. It then moves into a detailed analysis of

HUM (we/us), examining the film's use of colour, costume, and set design as vehicles for meaning-making. The analysis continues with an exploration of the cinematography and sonic landscapes of the film. Subsequent sections delve more deeply into theoretical analysis, examining how the film engages with gender performativity and fashion as resistance, postcolonial critique and cultural hybridity, and psychoanalytic perspectives on identity. The essay then situates *HUM (we/us)* within the context of contemporary Indian and international art, drawing comparisons with works by artists such as Tejal Shah, Pushpamala N., Isaac Julien, and Zanele Muholi. Finally, the essay considers the reception and impact of *HUM (we/us)*, situating it within ongoing debates about the role of art in social change and the potential of fashion to serve as a medium for political as well as personal and social expression.

In early 2024, I had the privilege of engaging with Shilpa Chavan and her film *HUM (we/us)*, with our initial meeting sparking a series of in-depth conversations that provided valuable insights into Chavan's artistic process and vision. These discussions revealed the complex interplay between Chavan's established career and her evolving aspirations as an artist, particularly in relation to *HUM (we/us)*. Important to the conversation was that *HUM (we/us)* acts as a critical project and shift for Chavan in the reframing of her practice, previously understood from within the circles of fashion into that of contemporary art production. I argue that *HUM (we/us)* is more than just a 'fashion film' and Chavan is also clear that it is her expanded art practice that builds and is informed by her fashion knowledge rather than *HUM (we/us)* as a film made for the fashion world. Chavan has forged through this film collaboration, a particular critical approach that challenges understandings of identity and community through fashion, a central aim of the film and its inception. I argue that Chavan's approach demonstrates how art can imagine and enact social transformation and through a critically close reading of *HUM (we/us)* look to shed light on Chavan's collaborative and interdisciplinary art practice and the importance to her of building meaningful dialogue about complex social issues.

As a scholar based in a Western institution, I approach this analysis with an awareness of my own positionality. While striving to engage deeply with the specific cultural context of the film, I acknowledge the potential limitations of my perspective and the publishing of this paper invites further dialogue and critique, particularly from scholars and artists within India.

Contextualising Chavan's work

To fully appreciate the significance of *HUM (we/us),* it is crucial to situate Chavan's work within the broader contexts of Indian fashion, independent cinema, and socially informed fashion. Chavan's interdisciplinary trajectory reflects broader shifts in fashion towards more conceptual and politically engaged practices. The film's engagement with fashion as resistance resonates with contemporary designers using their platforms to address social and political issues within and beyond the fashion industry. Chavan's use of found and reused materials in *HUM (we/us)* goes beyond eco-fashion trends, explicitly integrating her activist motivations. The film critiques the fashion industry's role in inequality while exploring clothing's potential for personal and social empowerment.

Chavan's diverse educational background, encompassing science and fashion design, informs her broad-based approach. Her practice, as described in her online profile, bridges art and fashion by infusing unorthodox methods and appropriating everyday objects to create new vistas. This approach positions fashion not merely as adornment but as a medium for exploring complex ideas and challenging social norms and Chavan is evidently practicing what she preaches.

Understanding Chavan's work also requires considering the Indian fashion industry's transformations due to globalisation and the effects of globalisation per se (Appadurai 1996, 44). The rise of Asian designers on the global stage has led to renegotiations of what is contemporary 'Indian' fashion which Chavan's fusion of traditional Indian textiles with avant-garde designs participates in this dialogue, reflecting cultural identity and globalisation. As Niessen, Leshkowich, and Jones (2003) argue the rise of Asian fashion designers on the global stage is part of the larger global 'commodity flows' and is part of an ongoing dialogue about cultural identity and globalisation affected by the rise of middle-class global tourism (see Urry and Larsen 2011, 25).

Moreover, in what I argue here is Chavan's critical practice aligns closely with Geczy and Karaminas (2017) ideas on critical fashion practice and 'critical fashion,' that engages with pressing social and political issues with dress as a potential vehicle and medium to critique. In *HUM (we/us)*, this critical approach can be seen to manifest itself in the way Chavan systematically uses styling and costume to comment on class divisions, gender norms, and postcolonial identity. The unpacking of Chavan's film can help raise an understanding of how clothing becomes 'activated' and 'activism' making *HUM (we/us)* more than just a mere 'fashion film'. As Geczy and Karaminas also argue, that, 'fashion has not been, in art academia or the art world more widely, a priority for study, or dismissed out of hand for all the traditional and much-cited reasons (ephemeral, frivolous, etc),' (2017, 4) meaning that there is a noted need for more critical engagement with fashion and clothing outside of the traditional fashion domains and a strong reason to consider Chavan's work both critically and theoretically here.

The film itself can also be understood within the evolving genre of 'fashion film' and as Marketa Uhlirova (2013) notes in *The Fashion Film Effect*, fashion films have emerged as a distinct form of artistic expression, blurring the boundaries between advertising, art, and narrative cinema. *HUM (we/us)* pushes this hybridity further, using the conventions of 'fashion film' to create a work that is performative in nature while simultaneously a critique of the fashion industry and a celebration of fashion's transformative potential. Chavan's collaboration with director Ashim Ahluwalia is significant in this context and can be seen framed within Uhlirova's thoughts on what film can do for fashion. Ahluwalia, known for his experimental approach to filmmaking, brings a cinematic sensibility which Uhlirova describes as 'film effect' that complements Chavan's fashion background and 'fashion effect'. As Chavan has noted to me, neither herself or Ahluwalia quite fits into their respective industries, and I she thinks this is also reflected in the nature of their film. This outsider status allows for a critical perspective on both fashion and film industries, resulting in a work that challenges conventions in both fields, though here it should be noted that Chavan is not promoting fashion but is heavily indebted to her use of fashion styling and design thinking.

The film's production context is also worth noting. As a collaboration between an artist, a filmmaker and a network of friends in supporting and appearing in *HUM*

(we/us) which represents a growing trend of the possibility of interdisciplinary projects across the creative industries. As Uhlirova (2013) further notes is also a phenomenon through the accessibility of digital production and dissemination. This aligns with what Lipovetsky and Serroy (2013) term of an 'aestheticization of the world,' where the boundaries between art, commerce, and everyday life can become increasingly blurred. While *HUM (we/us)* shares a space with certain fashion films and online content it is not indebted to a fashion industry, rather it is the fashion context and fashion syntax that are shared that should allow it to stand on its own artistic originality. It is a point that Chavan takes issue with leading to questions as to where this new work is now placed, where it is understood and recognised and where ultimately, she feels it belongs, as she navigates certain presumptions of *HUM (we/us)* in the location of its artistic identity.

Furthermore, the film's focus on marginalised communities and its celebration of diversity reflects broader shifts in society that also play out in the fashion industry. Moves to make both the fashion industry, fashion marketing and media more inclusive and representational of societal diversity conversely recognises fashion's enduring role in perpetuating rather than challenging social inequalities. *HUM (we/us)* can be seen as part of a movement, using fashion as a means to visibility and empowerment for marginalised groups, here through the film's engagement with queer aesthetics and drag performance which also situates it within a global trend of increasing visibility for LGBTQ + identities in the media. As Geczy and Karaminas (2023) note in *Queer Style*, fashion has long been a site of gender experimentation and identity play for queer communities. *HUM (we/us)* builds on this tradition, using fashion and performance to challenge heteronormative assumptions and celebrate gender diversity building on what Geczy and Karaminas term 'fluid' style.

Lastly, it's important to consider the film's production and reception in the context of India's socio-political climate. As Dwyer and Pinto (2011) argue, independent Indian cinema has increasingly become a site for exploring controversial social issues and challenging dominant narratives. Under the current Modi government, there have been growing concerns in India about censorship and the suppression of films addressing sensitive topics such as gender and sexuality. *HUM (we/us),* with its frank engagement with issues of class, gender, and sexuality, can be seen as part of this broader movement in Indian cultural production, particularly as an independent production in pushing political boundaries, despite potential local political risks. Ultimately, *HUM (we/us)* emerges from a complex intersection of global fashion trends, Indian cultural politics, and evolving forms of artistic expression. By situating the film within these contexts, we can better appreciate its significance as both a work of art and a form of social commentary.

Sonic and visual symphonies: decoding *HUM's* artistic language

HUM (we/us) presents a rich tapestry of visual and sonic elements that demand close analysis. The film's aesthetic choices serve as a complex system of signification, conveying meaning through colour, costume, set design, acting, and sound. Chavan and Ahluwalia's collaboration intricately weaves cinematography, acting, visual choices, styling, and sound into a seamless narrative loaded with symbolic meaning.

Figure 1. On set photography *Hum (We/Us)* portrait of The Protagonist, 2023. Photo: Appurva Shah.

Colour symbolism as code

The film's colour palette is meticulously crafted, reflecting Chavan's sensibility in utilising colour to convey shifting social hierarchies and emotional states. Chavan considers that costume design serves as her primary visual language whilst imagining India through a neo primitive lens while applying a highly coded colour palette. Chavan's approach to the use of colour are purposeful and complex in *HUM (we/us)* and her 'coding' borrows from general theories of colour psychology and Carl Jung's (1964) pioneering theories on the symbolic properties of colour. Echoing Jung's ideas on colour,

Chavan has viewed colour here as a psychotherapeutic tool, evoking specific emotional and spiritual responses. The protagonist's initial blue attire symbolises both social status and emotional state, associated with melancholy and potential oppression. Blue, often associated with melancholy in Western colour theory, here takes on a dual meaning of both oppression and potential. This duality is also reminiscent of ideas raised by Goethe's (1810) colour theory, which emphasises the subjective and cultural aspects of colour perception, significant in the Indian context with religious associations to Hindu gods. In contrast, Chavan styles the 'elite' wedding guests in rich colours and more intricate fabrics as a polychromatic display that serves as a visual representation of both social status and the opulence of their world. The use of gold recalls Derrida's (1987) concept of 'chromaticism,' reflecting transformation and fluidity. As the film progresses, transformations in colour schemes culminate in a kaleidoscope of hues, representing the breakdown of social barriers and celebration of diversity. Chavan uses colour as a device to reflect her characters' transformations and moments of 'fluidity,' aligning with Derridean concepts of colour resisting stable or fixed meanings. Gold, in particular, carries multiple symbolic meanings, including wealth, purity, transformation, and spiritual enlightenment. As the film progresses, these transformations are depicted through various colour schemes, culminating in a finale scene that pulses with a kaleidoscope of hues and coloured lighting. This vibrant display represents the breakdown of social barriers and the celebration of diversity. Chavan's evolving colour palette mirrors the film's narrative arc from oppression to liberation, embodying what Deleuze (1986) in his writings on cinema might term a 'colour-image,' where colour becomes an active agent of transformation rather than mere representation.

Costume as narrative device

Costume design in *HUM (we/us)* functions as a powerful narrative device, reflecting character development and serving as a medium for social commentary. Shilpa Chavan's background in fashion design profoundly influences her approach to filmmaking, with costumes not merely as adornment but as potent symbols for exploring and critiquing social hierarchies, cultural identities, and processes of individual and collective transformation.

Roland Barthes' seminal work *The Fashion System* (1967) offers a lens through which to decode the intricate semiotic web of costumes in *HUM (we/us)*. Barthes posits fashion as a language, where each garment or ensemble becomes a signifier, gesturing towards broader cultural meanings. Within this framework, the protagonist's initial uniform in the film emerges as a potent symbol of their subordinate social status, while the wedding guests' attire stands as a visual testament to privilege and power. These sartorial choices resonate with Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) concept of 'distinction,' wherein clothing becomes a tool for crafting and maintaining social hierarchies.

However, as the narrative progresses, Chavan subverts these established sartorial codes, wielding fashion as a tool for resistance and self-expression. This sartorial rebellion echoes Dick Hebdige's (1979) assertion that marginalised groups often deploy style as a form of 'warfare' against dominant cultural norms. The DIY aesthetic of the finale costumes, created from repurposed materials, embodies this subversive potential of fashion. Caroline Evans (2003) concept of 'the culture of recycling' is

particularly relevant here, as Chavan's repurposing of everyday objects into elaborate costumes speaks to the resourcefulness of marginalised communities and their ability to create beauty and meaning from the detritus of consumer society as well as continuing Chavan's longer-term engagement with the use of everyday and throw-away materials into her fashion designs. Chavan's use of DIY aesthetics in the production of the costumes, particularly in the finale, reflects what Joanne Entwistle (2000) terms the 'situated bodily practice' of dress, where each costume change signifies not just a change in appearance but a shift in social position and self-conception. By repurposing discarded items into spectacular outfits, Chavan not only comments on sustainability in fashion but also metaphorically illustrates an emancipatory process in the film, where marginalised individuals can reclaim and redefine the very symbols of their oppression.

The film's engagement with drag and queer aesthetics further amplifies its use of fashion as social commentary. Chavan's inclusion of drag performers, drawn from her own network of friends and acquaintances, adds another layer of complexity to the film's sartorial narrative. These characters, including drag kings Melancholia and Inqalaab Singh, drag queen Glorious Luna, acid attack survivor Daulat, and plus-sized model/artist Payal, represent a diverse spectrum of marginalised identities. Their presence in the film not only challenges conventional beauty standards but also highlights the intersectionality of identity and oppression. These costumes, with their exaggerated forms, embody what Judith Butler (1990) describes as the 'parodic proliferation' of gender identities. They serve to denaturalise conventional gender presentations, revealing their constructed nature within the hegemonic norms of the film. Chavan's styling of even the normative characters suggests that identity in *HUM (we/us)* is constructed through a shifting visual language, where drag's transgressive quality is utilised to explore the fluidity of identity. Butler's writings help us understand the intentionality behind these gender performances in *HUM (we/us),* which are driven by a desire for self-identity. The protagonist's journey from a uniform signifying servitude to a spectacular self-made ensemble in the film's climax visually represents this quest. However, it is worth questioning whether the protagonist finds it difficult to alter their fundamental social experience, even when liberated to dress outside of the norm. This raises the possibility that the finale, despite its flamboyance, represents a limited rebellion – a momentary performance of freedom rather than a sustained transformation.

Moreover, the hybrid nature of the costumes, blending elements of traditional Indian dress with avant-garde and Western influences, reflects what postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha (1994) terms 'cultural translation'. Bhabha argues that cultural translation is not simply about transferring meaning from one culture to another but about creating new hybrid forms that challenge essentialist notions of cultural identity. The costumes in *HUM (we/us)* embody this process of cultural translation, creating a visual language that is neither purely 'Indian' nor 'Western' but something new and transformative. Chavan's use of colour in costume design is particularly significant in commenting on class, gender, and cultural identity, aligning with Michel Pastoureau's ideas in *The Colors of Our Memories* (2012), where he argues that colour is not just a physical phenomenon but a complex cultural construct laden with social and historical meanings. The transition from the more muted initial uniform of the protagonist to the riot of

Figure 2. On set photography *Hum (We/Us)* of The Tri-Colour Tribe, 2023. Photo: Appurva Shah.

colours in the finale serves as a visual metaphor for liberation and self-expression. The film's focus on the transformative power of fashion also resonates with Elizabeth Wilson's argument in *Adorned in Dreams* (1985) that fashion can serve as a form of 'utopian gesture,' allowing individuals to imagine and temporarily embody alternative versions of themselves and their society. The carnivalesque atmosphere of the film's finale, with its spectacular costumes and performances, creates just such a utopian space where new identities and social relations can be imagined and enacted. Furthermore, the communal aspect of fashion in the film's climactic scenes aligns with what Otto von Busch (2009) terms 'fashion-able,' viewing fashion as a collaborative, empowering practice rather than a top-down industry. The scenes of characters helping each other create and don their costumes in *HUM (we/us)* exemplify this communal, empowering approach to fashion.

The film's engagement with fashion also intersects with postcolonial critiques of the global fashion industry. As Simona Segre Reinach (2019) argues, the fashion industry has a long history of appropriating and commodifying cultural elements from

marginalised communities. By placing the power of fashion creation in the hands of marginalised characters, *HUM (we/us)* offers a counternarrative to this history of appropriation, suggesting the possibility of a more equitable and diverse fashion ecosystem. Lastly, the film's use of fashion as a medium for social commentary can be understood through the lens of what Tansy Hoskins (2014) terms 'anti-fashion,' advocating for a critical approach to fashion that recognises its potential for both oppression and liberation. The journey from uniformity to spectacular diversity in *HUM (we/us)* embodies this dual nature of fashion, demonstrating how it can be used both to enforce social norms and to challenge them.

Chavan's use of fashion in *HUM (we/us)* goes far beyond mere costume design, serving as a powerful tool for social critique and imaginative transformation. By repurposing the language of fashion, Chavan creates a visual discourse that challenges dominant narratives about class, gender, and cultural identity. The film demonstrates the potential of fashion to serve not just as a reflection of society but as an active force in shaping social relations and imagining alternative futures.

Set design as spatial politics

The film's setting evolves from a claustrophobic domestic colonial styled space to expansive carnivalesque environment of a wedding hall cum rave mirroring the protagonist's journey from confinement to liberation reflects a complex interplay between space and social justice. This spatial progression can be understood through Henri Lefebvre's (1991) concept of 'the production of space' where social, and in this context, power relations are both reflected in and shaped by these spatial arrangements. We can expand this thought further in considering the temporal nature of the film in terms of its uncertain history and that these spaces evolve and bridge over time encompassing a history and dynamic of changing social relations that Chavan is alluding to in *HUM (we/us)*. The initial domestic setting, with its opulent yet oppressive atmosphere, recalls Gaston Bachelard's (1994) phenomenology of domestic space, which provides a rich framework for understanding how the different spaces Chavan uses can symbolise various levels of access, privilege, and social hierarchies. Chavan's choice of setting encourages us to consider not just the physical layout of the interior space but also the emotional and symbolic significance in shaping human experience and social relations for the protagonist and other characters. Her use of the house as a metaphor for social hierarchies offers insight into the ways in which space and power intersect in everyday life. Different rooms within the house represent varying levels of access and privilege. The breaking of the tea set within this space takes on added significance, representing a rupture in the spatial (and by extension, social) order. The transition to the more fluid, dynamic wedding spaces in the film's latter half embodies a liminal zone (Bhabha 1994) where fixed identities and social hierarchies can be challenged and reconfigured. In the final scenes, where everyone dances together, the characters find themselves in an environment that encourages new ways of thinking and being. This spatial transformation visually represents the film's themes of social mobility and the breaking down of rigid class structures. By understanding these spatial transformations through the lens of the third space, we gain further insight into the film's narrative and thematic complexity.

Figure 3. On set photography *Hum (We/Us)* of The Tri-Colour Tribe with Director Ashim Ahluwalia and Artist Shilpa Chavan, 2023. Photo: Appurva Shah.

Cinematography as visual rhetoric

Chavan's collaboration with her long-time friend, Indian film director Ashim Ahluwalia, has allowed Chavan to expand her visual production and styling. This has opened a new creative space to rethink her work beyond traditional photographic styling and into the temporal realms of experimental film or video art and through the exploration of new narrative forms. *HUM (we/us)* was made independently, without any commissioning or gallery support and with a limited production budget. This sparse production draws on the technical and production support of Chavan and Ahluwalia's friends and colleagues, acting as a decentralised collective network to enable the making of the film, which was shot over two days in Mumbai. This independent and experimental approach, made at the margins of both the film and art worlds in India, affords Chavan and Ahluwalia the autonomy to create the work without external constraints, interference, or commissioner expectations. It also allows for a shared purpose among many of those playing characters who are already marginalised in their current lives, to engage with and celebrate their lived experiences as a form of their own activism through their appearance and presence as themselves in the film.

Ahluwalia employs a range of cinematographic techniques to visually convey Chavan's themes. In the early scenes, tight framing and static shots emphasise the protagonist's confinement within social and physical boundaries, utilising the building's natural frames of doorways and spaces outside the main living areas. Ahluwalia builds a certain tension at the start of the film deliberately extending the mundanity and banality of cleaning with long drawn-out shots of a character also slowly engaged in the rituals of cleaning. This opening visual strategy, which closely follows the protagonist as they clean, represents the introduction of the film's gender and power dynamics, closely aligning

with Laura Mulvey's (1975) concept of the 'male gaze' in narrative cinema, but subverts it by positioning the marginalised protagonist as the object of the camera's (and by extension, society's) scrutiny. Ahluwalia's deliberate slowing down of the film acts to set the viewer up in the protagonists stifling world but as the narrative progresses from cleaning to the protagonist having to serve afternoon tea to the family of the house, the camera work becomes more dynamic, with sweeping movements and wider angles that suggest liberation and expanding possibilities. This shift in visual style embodies what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) might term a 'line of flight,' a vector of escape from oppressive structures.

The use of close-ups within the film, particularly in moments of emotional intensity, recalls Béla Balázs' (1952) theory of the face in cinema. This is especially relevant as Chavan and Ahluwalia have created a silent film where none of the characters speak, and the soundtrack is instead used to convey emotion and narrative flow. Ahluwalia's intimate head shots allow for deep engagement with the characters' inner lives, fostering empathy and understanding across lines of difference, and allowing the film to explore the characters' inner lives more intimately.

Sonic landscapes, sounds as cultural studies

The film's soundscape plays a crucial role in shaping its narrative and emotional impact, offering a rich field for analysis through the lens of sound studies and cultural theory. The sonic landscape of HUM (we/us) evolves from oppressive silence to a vibrant audio tapestry, mirroring the protagonist's journey and the broader themes of transformation and liberation which Ahluwalia crafts a multisensory experience that transcends mere visual accompaniment, embodying the concept of 'audio-vision'.[1] This term was coined by film theorist Michel Chion (1994) to describe how sound and image interact to create meaning in cinema arguing that sound in film does not merely accompany the image but actively shapes how we perceive and interpret what we see. This synergy between sound and image is particularly evident in key moments of HUM (we/us).

The film opens with diegetic sounds of domestic labour, what Chion calls 'materializing sound indices.' These sounds, coupled with the absence of non-diegetic music, emphasise the protagonist's isolation and confinement, aligning with the visual portrayal of their constrained existence. As the narrative progresses, we witness a gradual expansion of the sonic palette. The introduction of traditional Indian music in the middle sections of the film creates what ethnomusicologist Steven Feld (1982) might call an 'acoustemology' – a way of knowing and being in the world through sound. Feld argues that sound is not just a reflection of culture but a means through which culture is actively produced and experienced. The use of traditional music in HUM (we/us) serves to locate the narrative within a specific cultural context while also highlighting the tension between tradition and modernity that runs throughout the film.

The shift to electronic music in the film's climactic scenes represents what Josh Kun (2005) terms as an 'audiotopia' as 'sonic spaces of effective utopian longings where several sites normally deemed incompatible are brought together, not only in the space of a particular piece of music itself, but in the production of social space and the mapping of geographical space that music makes possible' (2005, 23). The pulsing beats and synthetic textures of the electronic music in HUM (we/us) create just such

an audiotopia – a sonic space where contradictions and conflicts can coexist, and new identities can emerge. This musical progression from traditional Indian music to electronic sound also reflects Ahluwalia's reflection of broader trends in postcolonial or more global or pop music and cross over production. A fusion of traditional Indian music with global styles which Vijay Mishra (2002) considers in Bollywood cinema also represents a negotiation between local cultural traditions and the forces of globalisation. In *HUM (we/us)*, this musical hybridity serves as an aural counterpart to the visual hybridity of the costumes and set design, embodying another 'third space' of cultural production.

Ahluwalias also uses what Chion terms 'synchresis' – the forging of immediate and necessary relationships between what is seen and heard – is particularly effective in key moments of the film. For instance, the sound of breaking china during the tea set incident reverberates beyond the immediate moment, symbolising the shattering of social barriers. This moment of synchresis creates what Walter Murch (2001) calls a 'conceptual resonance' between sound and image deepening the viewer's engagement with the film's themes.

The absence of dialogue in the film is also significant, aligning with what Chion terms 'the audio-logo-visual contract' (1999). By relying on music, ambient sound, and visual storytelling rather than spoken language, *HUM (we/us)* creates a universally accessible narrative that transcends linguistic barriers. This choice also foregrounds the materiality of sound itself, drawing attention to what Roland Barthes in *Image, Music, Text* (1977) calls the 'grain' of music in – the physical, embodied quality of sound that exists beyond signification.

The film's use of silence is equally important to its sonic strategy. As John Cage (1961) famously demonstrated in his composition *4'33"*, silence is never truly silent but filled with ambient sounds that we usually filter out. In *HUM (we/us),* moments of relative silence serve to heighten tension and draw attention to the power dynamics at play aligning with what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) discusses applied to the protagonist as the 'silence of the subaltern' where silence becomes a marker of oppression and marginalisation.

The gradual increase in volume and complexity of the soundtrack over the course of the film can be read as a sonic representation of what Jacques Attali (1985) terms 'noise' that noise – understood as sound that disrupts existing harmonic systems and has the potential to prefigure new social orders. The cacophonous finale of *HUM (we/us)* with its mix of electronic beats, flashing lights, traditional instruments, and the sounds and dancing of celebration, embodies this disruptive, transformative potential of the 'noise' in the film.

In conclusion, the visual and sonic elements of *HUM (we/us)* work in concert to create a rich, multisensory experience that both reflects and shapes the film's thematic concerns and narratives. Through careful manipulation of music, ambient sound, silence, and synchresis, Ahluwalia has created a soundscape that not only enhances the narrative but also serves as a powerful tool for exploring issues of cultural identity, social transformation, and the embodied experience of marginalisation and liberation. The film's innovative use of sound contributes significantly to its overall impact, demonstrating the potential of sonic strategies to convey complex cultural and social messages.

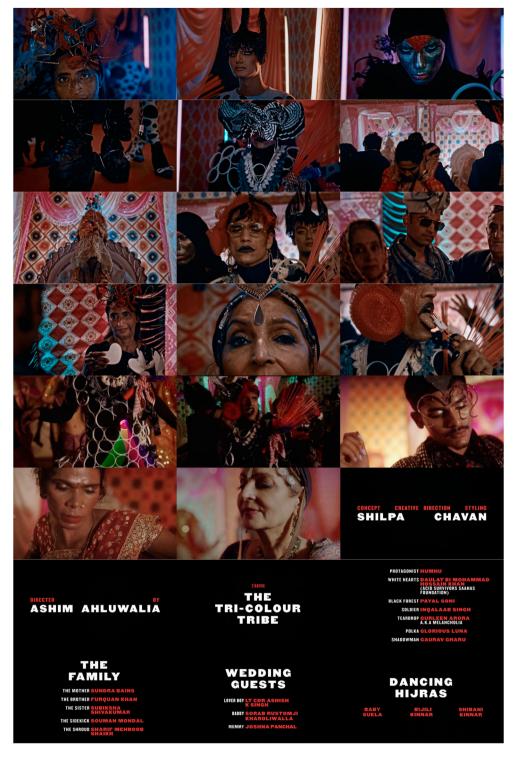**Figure 4.** Film stills from *Hum (We/Us),* 2023. Courtesy of Shilpa Chavan.

Figure 5. Film stills from *Hum (We/Us),* 2023. Courtesy of Shilpa Chavan.

Theoretical frameworks: unpacking *HUM's* critical interventions

Having explored the visual and sonic elements of *HUM (we/us)*, we now turn to a deeper theoretical analysis of the film's content and implications. The following sections apply various critical frameworks to unpack the complex layers of meaning within Chavan's work. By examining the film through the lenses of gender performativity, postcolonial theory, and psychoanalysis, we can better understand how *HUM (we/us)* functions as a critical intervention in contemporary discourses on identity, culture, and social transformation. These theoretical approaches not only illuminate the film's thematic richness but also demonstrate how Chavan's artistic practice engages with and challenges broader social and cultural narratives.

While psychoanalytic and postcolonial theories offer distinct lenses for analysing *HUM (we/us),* their intersection provides a richer understanding of the film's exploration of identity formation in a postcolonial context. Fanon's writings (1952, 1961), bridging psychoanalysis and postcolonial theory, is particularly relevant here. The protagonist's journey in the film can be read as both a psychic decolonisation process (Fanon) and a movement towards Bhabha's 'third space'. This intersection illuminates how individual psychological processes are inextricably linked to broader cultural and historical forces.

Gender performativity and fashion as resistance

HUM (we/us) offers a vivid exploration of gender as a performed act, echoing Butler's seminal theory of gender performativity.[2] Butler argues that gender is not innate but a series of repeated actions creating the illusion of a stable identity, describing it as 'the repeated stylisation of the body' (1990, 33). This idea is vividly portrayed in *HUM (we/us)* through the protagonist's journey with clothing and style, beginning with the protagonist restricted by their servant's uniform, a visual symbol of both their social status and prescribed gender role. This uniform exemplifies what Pierre Bourdieu (1984) describes as 'symbolic violence,' reinforcing social hierarchies and limiting self-expression. The protagonist's initial servant uniform not only signifies class position but potentially also lower caste status. Their transformation through fashion thus represents a challenge not only to class hierarchies but also to the caste system, highlighting the intersectional nature of identity and oppression in the Indian context.

As the story progresses, the protagonist defies these imposed identities through bold and unconventional fashion choices, starting with their manipulation of the uniform's bow. The transformation culminates in a striking, self-created outfit, reflecting Butler's notion that gender is a 'stylised repetition of acts.' This metamorphosis is more than aesthetic; it represents a reclaiming of agency and identity. Butler notes, 'If the ground of gender identity is the stylised repetition of acts through time … then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style' (1990, 179). The protagonist's DIY costume, made from repurposed materials, exemplifies this 'subversive repetition,' challenging conventional expectations of both gender and class.

The inclusion of drag performers in *HUM (we/us)* further amplifies the film's engagement with gender performativity. Butler argues that drag performances can reveal the

imitative structure of gender itself, stating, 'In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency' (1990, 175). The exuberant costumes of the drag performers in the film serve a dual purpose: they celebrate gender fluidity while simultaneously exposing the constructed nature of all gender presentations. However, it is crucial to note that Chavan's exploration of gender performativity is not a simple transposition of Western theory onto an Indian context. Instead, it engages with local traditions of gender fluidity, such as the inclusion of the hijra community, which has long occupied a 'third gender' space in Indian society. Anthropologist Gayatri Reddy's (2005) study of hijra identity in South India reveals how this community challenges binary notions of gender, both aligning with and complicating Western queer theory through their constant negotiation of identities across various social contexts. Tanupriya and Pannikot further note, 'Hijras are often seen as the counterpart of transsexual identities in the West, but it should be understood that hijras are gendered identities embedded in the cultural history of India' (2021, 28). By including representations that evoke the hijra tradition, *HUM (we/us)* locates its critique of gender norms within a specifically Indian cultural landscape. While Western queer theory has increasingly embraced intersectionality, Reddy makes clear that, in the Indian context, the intersection of caste, class, religion, and gender in hijra identity requires a more nuanced approach and it should be noted that unlike the protagonist and some other characters in the film who use changing their clothing as a device for self-identifying the hijra's within the cast and not performing their identity but already self-identifying through their choice of clothing.

Furthermore, Chavan's use of fashion as a medium for exploring gender performativity extends Butler's primarily linguistic and philosophical framework into the realm of material culture. This aligns with more recent developments in fashion theory, such as Joanne Entwistle's concept of fashion as 'situated bodily practice'. In *The Fashioned Body* (2000), Entwistle argues that dress is fundamental to microsocial order and that the body and dress operate dialectically: dress works on the body, imbuing it with social meaning, while the body is a dynamic field that gives life and fullness to dress. Entwistle also applies Foucault's thinking on power dynamics to the social forces inherent in clothing. This dialectic is vividly illustrated in *HUM (we/us)* through the way characters' identities evolve in tandem with their changing costumes. Butler's ideas on performativity also draw on Foucault's ideas on power relations applied to gender.

Chavan's engagement with fashion as resistance resonates with Elizabeth Wilson's (1985) theories on subcultural style, where she argues that fashion can serve as a form of 'oppositional dress,' allowing marginalised groups to assert their identities and challenge dominant norms. Chavan's DIY aesthetic of the finale costumes in *HUM (we/us),* created from discarded items, embodies this concept of oppositional dress. By transforming symbols of their oppression and opposition into spectacular costumes, the characters enact what could be termed 'semiotic guerrilla warfare' (Hebdige 1979) communicated through their symbolic fashion choices.

Moreover, Chavan's focus on collective transformation through fashion aligns with recent scholarship on 'critical fashion,' which Otto von Busch (2018) argues can be a tool for social change, particularly when it moves beyond individual expression to

Figure 6. On set photography *Hum (We/Us)* of The Alter of Strength, 2023. Photo: Appurva Shah.

foster collective agency. The communal nature of the fashion rebellion in *HUM (we/us)*, where marginalised individuals come together to create and celebrate their own aesthetics, exemplifies the potential for fashion to serve as a catalyst for social transformation. The film's exploration of gender and fashion also intersects with postcolonial critiques of Western beauty standards. As Mina Roces and Louise Edwards note (2007), fashion in postcolonial contexts often involves a complex negotiation between local traditions and global influences. The hybrid aesthetics in *HUM (we/us),* which blend elements of traditional Indian dress with avant-garde and Western influences, reflect this ongoing negotiation of cultural identity through fashion that also plays out through Ahluwalia's shifting soundscape.

In conclusion, *HUM (we/us)* offers a nuanced and culturally specific engagement with theories of gender performativity and fashion as resistance. By visualising these concepts through the medium of film, Chavan extends theoretical discussions into the realm of material culture and embodied experience. The film demonstrates how fashion can serve not only as a means of individual expression but also as a powerful tool for collective resistance and social transformation. In doing so, *HUM (we/us)* also contributes to ongoing discussions in gender studies, fashion theory, and postcolonial criticism about the intersections of identity, culture, and power.

Postcolonial critique and cultural hybridity

While the precise temporal setting of *HUM (we/us)* remains ambiguous, the opening scenes, set in a British Raj period house, evoke a time of colonial rule in India. This

Figure 7. On set photography *Hum (We/Us)* of The Family, 2023. Photo: Appurva Shah.

setting provides a rich backdrop for postcolonial analysis, particularly through the lens of Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and the 'third space'. The film's early scenes with the protagonist cleaning are set in a dimly lit interior of a home that exhibits a distinct colonial aesthetic, characterised by an eclectic mix of Victorian and Edwardian furniture, ornate wooden cabinetry, and intricate decorative items and figurines that reflect the era's fusion of British and Indian styles. The opulent yet oppressive atmosphere is underscored by heavy drapes, richly patterned rugs, and an array of objects that signify the cultural imposition of British tastes and domestic norms onto Indian households. This setting serves as a visual metaphor for the entrenched social hierarchies and the pervasive influence of colonial power, providing a poignant backdrop for the film's exploration of class and identity. Ahluwalia describes this as a 'dystopian tropical fairy-tale,' in which Chavan's styling creates a liminal space where colonial histories and legacies and contemporary Indian realities are able to collide, producing new forms of cultural expression and identity.

Chavan's aesthetic choices, particularly in costume design and set decoration, manifest Bhabha's concept of a 'third space' where new cultural forms emerge,[3] challenging essentialist notions of identity. The film blurs temporal boundaries, incorporating contemporary elements like makeup and mobile phones into its seemingly historical setting. This might be read as Chavan reinforcing those issues of class and gender still exist in the present, while also existing stretched across periods of time from historic roots.

Chavan makes what might be an innocuous china tea set, into a potent symbol in the film and its British colonialism in India, plays a crucial role in the film's narrative. Its presence in what seems to be a well to do Indian household speaks to what Ashis Nandy (1983) terms the 'intimate enemy' – the way colonial culture becomes internalised and reproduced by the colonised, here played out in an Indian context through class and caste. However, the tea set's destruction marks a rupture in this colonial narrative and that of the servitude of the protagonist. This act of breaking aligns with what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) calls 'decolonizing the mind' representing in the film a symbolic rejection of colonial values and aesthetics as well as signalling a rupture in the protagonist's mental health. Yet, importantly, this rejection does not lead to a simple return to a pre-colonial 'authentic' Indian identity. Instead, it opens up a space for new, hybrid forms of cultural expression which is most evident in the film's costume design. Chavan's fusion of traditional Indian textiles with avant-garde designs creates a visual language that is neither purely 'Indian' nor 'Western,' but something new and transformative. This hybrid aesthetic challenges essentialist notions of cultural identity and points towards the possibility of new, fluid identities.

The film's engagement with hybrid identities also resonates with wider ideas about living in the 'borderlands' between and across cultures which have broader applicability especially in a culturally globalised world. The characters in *HUM (we/us),* particularly in their transformed states, embody a kind of consciousness, navigating and combining elements from different cultural traditions and times to create new modes of being. Furthermore, the film's portrayal of marginalised communities coming together to create their own spaces of celebration and self-expression aligns with what cultural theorist Partha Chatterjee (2004) terms the 'politics of the governed'. Chatterjee (1993) argues that marginalised groups in postcolonial societies often create their own spheres of autonomy and cultural production outside of formal political structures. The carnivalesque finale of *HUM (we/us)* can be read as just such a space, where subaltern groups assert their right to self-representation and joy. The film's use of fashion as a medium for exploring these postcolonial themes is particularly significant and in *Clothing Matters* (1996), Emma Tarlo consider how dress and identity in India has long been a site of cultural negotiation and resistance, from Gandhi's adoption of khadi as a symbol of nationalist resistance to the complex politics of the sari in post-independence India. In *HUM (we/us),* Chavan builds on this tradition, using clothing as a means to visualise the process of cultural hybridity and identity formation in contemporary India. Moreover, the film's DIY aesthetic, particularly in the finale costumes, speaks to what Néstor García Canclini (1995) terms 'hybrid cultures' and that in postcolonial contexts, people often engage in bricolage, combining elements from different cultural traditions to create new forms of expression. The repurposed and reimagined costumes in *HUM (we/us)* exemplify this process of cultural bricolage, with Chavan turning the detritus of everyday consumer culture into spectacular creations that defy easy categorisation.

The film's soundscape also contributes to its exploration of cultural hybridity. The progression from traditional Indian music to electronic beats mirrors the visual journey from constraint to liberation. This sonic hybridity aligns with what Bhabha (2000) calls the 'vernacular cosmopolitan' which becomes a mode of being that is simultaneously rooted in local traditions and open to global influences. It's crucial to note, however, that *HUM (we/us)* does not present an uncritically celebratory view of

hybridity. The film's initial scenes, with their stark depiction of class inequality, building on Bhabha, Aijaz Ahmad (1995) reminds us to critique the 'privilege of hybridity'. Ahmad argues that celebrations of cultural hybridity often overlook the material inequalities that persist in postcolonial societies and by grounding its exploration of hybrid identities in a narrative of class struggle and marginalisation, *HUM (we/us)* maintains a critical edge, reminding viewers of the ongoing legacies of colonialism and inequality in contemporary India. The film's engagement with queer and transgender identities adds another layer to its postcolonial critique as Gayatri Gopinath (2005) argues in *Impossible Desires* queer identities in postcolonial contexts often challenge both colonial legacies of heteronormativity and nationalist narratives of 'authentic' culture. The drag performers and gender-nonconforming characters in *HUM (we/us)* embody what Gopinath terms 'queer diasporic cultural forms,' which 'mediate between the local and the global, the national and the transnational' (2005, 14).

In conclusion, *HUM (we/us)* offers a nuanced exploration of cultural hybridity and postcolonial identity formation. Through its innovative use of fashion, music, and narrative, the film creates a 'third space' where new identities and modes of resistance can emerge. By grounding this exploration in the lived experiences of marginalised communities, Chavan avoids the pitfalls of uncritical celebrations of hybridity, instead offering a complex vision of postcolonial Indian identity that acknowledges both the possibilities and challenges of cultural fusion in a globalised world.

Psychoanalytic perspectives on identity

The pivotal scene in *HUM (we/us)* where the protagonist shatters the china tea set serves as a powerful entry point for psychoanalytic interpretation. This moment of destruction, set against the backdrop of a colonial-style home, can be read as a symbolic rupture in the protagonist's psyche, marking the beginning of a journey towards self-realisation and collective transformation.

The shattering of the tea set serves as a powerful metaphor for the protagonist's psychic rupture, inviting a Lacanian interpretation[4] while simultaneously echoing Fanon's concept of psychic decolonisation.[5] In *HUM (we/us)*, the protagonist's initial state of alienation within the oppressive household environment reflects what Lacan terms the 'fragmented body' stage. The uniform they wear at the beginning of the film can be seen as a false mirror, reflecting not their true self but an identity imposed by societal norms and power structures. According to Chavan, the bow that the protagonist wears was chosen by her as a symbol and device of the shifting mental state of the protagonists starting as an element of a uniform of servitude when it is tied around their waist, to an emancipatory symbol of their mental freedom when they later wear it as a tie.

The breaking of the tea set in the film aligns with what Frantz Fanon describes in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) as the moment when the colonised subject becomes aware of their alienation within the colonial system. Fanon writes, 'As I begin to recognize that the Negro is the symbol of sin, I catch myself hating the Negro. But then I recognize that I am a Negro' (1952, 197). Similarly, the protagonist's act of destruction can be seen as a painful recognition and the beginning of a process of psychic decolonisation. While Fanon's work in 'Black Skin, White Masks' provides a crucial foundation for understanding the psychological impacts of colonialism, his later work *The Wretched of the Earth*

(1961) offers further insights applicable to Chavan's film. Fanon argues that colonialism creates a 'world divided into compartments,' a psychological and physical segregation that we see reflected in the film's initial setting. The protagonist's journey from isolation to community mirrors Fanon's call for collective action as a means of psychological liberation.

Political psychologist Ashis Nandy's seminal work *The Intimate Enemy* (1983) offers a nuanced understanding of colonialism's psychological dynamics, providing valuable insights for analysing *HUM (we/us)*. Nandy argues that colonialism colonises minds in addition to bodies and space. This concept is vividly illustrated in *HUM (we/us)* through the protagonist's initial internalisation of colonial values, symbolised by their subservient role in the colonial-style household. The film's narrative arc can be read as a process of 'decolonizing the mind,' to borrow Nandy's phrase, as the protagonist sheds these internalised colonial values and embraces a new, hybrid identity. However, it's crucial to approach this psychoanalytic reading critically, particularly in a postcolonial context. As Ranjana Khanna (2003) argues, the uncritical application of Western psychoanalytic concepts to postcolonial subjects can risk reinforcing colonial power structures. Khanna suggests that we need to 'provincialise' psychoanalysis, recognising its cultural specificity and limitations when applied to non-Western contexts.

The film's subsequent transformation of the protagonist, facilitated by their encounter with a community of fellow outsiders, can be understood through Lacan's ([1953]1977) concept of the 'social I'. Lacan argues that our sense of self is fundamentally shaped by our relationships with others and our position within the symbolic order of language and culture a tension played out in the relationships between characters in the film. The protagonist's integration into a community of marginalised individuals allows for the emergence of a new 'social I,' one that is no longer defined solely by oppression and alienation but by solidarity and creative self-expression. Laura Mulvey's seminal work *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) provides a feminist psychoanalytic approach to film that is relevant to Chavan's work and Ahluwalia's use of the slow lingering shots at the start of the film, particularly as the protagonist slowly cleans. Mulvey's concept of the male gaze and its objectification of female bodies can be productively applied to *HUM (we/us)* however, Chavan seems to subvert this gaze, presenting the characters marginalised bodies not as objects of desire but as subjects of their own narratives. Todd McGowan (2007) offers a more recent take on Lacanian film analysis that can enrich our understanding of Chavan's film. McGowan argues that cinema's power lies in its ability to expose viewers to the 'Lacanian Real' – that which resists symbolisation. The disruptive, transformative moments in *HUM (we/us)*, such as the breaking of the tea set or the explosive finale, could be read as a disruption of the 'Real' that challenges the symbolic order of colonial and postcolonial Indian society.

This communal transformation is visually represented in the film's climactic scenes, where characters wear elaborate costumes created from repurposed materials. These costumes can be interpreted as new, empowering mirrors, reflecting back to the wearers a transformed image of themselves or what Kaja Silverman (1996) terms 'productive mimesis' where marginalised subjects can use mimicry and masquerade not just as a form of camouflage but as a means of actively reshaping their identities and challenging dominant norms. The film's exploration of collective transformation or 'group fantasy' (Guattari 1972) allows for marginalised groups to create shared fantasies that allow

them to imagine and enact new forms of social relation. The carnivalesque atmosphere of the film's finale, with its explosion of colour, dance music, and joyful performance, can be seen as the enactment of such a group fantasy, providing a psychic space for the reimagining of identity and community. However, it's important to note that *HUM (we/us)* does not present this transformation as a simple or complete resolution of psychic conflict. The film's open-ended conclusion suggests an ongoing process of becoming, aligning with Lacan's view that the subject is always in a state of 'lack', always seeking a wholeness that remains elusive. This tension between transformation and incompleteness is a 'time lag' of postcolonial identity (Bhabha 1994), where postcolonial subjects inhabit a temporality that is neither fully in the present nor entirely free of the past, but in a constant state of negotiation between different cultural and historical influences.

While psychoanalytic theory offers valuable insights into *HUM (we/us),* it's crucial to consider its limitations, particularly in a postcolonial context. Spivak (1988) critiques the tendency of Western discourses, including psychoanalysis, to speak for the subaltern subject. Chavan's film, by giving voice and agency to marginalised characters, could be seen as a response to this critique, demonstrating how subaltern subjects can represent themselves. This can be seen played out by certain characters in the film who dress and play themselves such as the hijra's, the acid attack victim and plus sized model who are part of Chavan's real-life community represented as themselves within the film as a marginalised reality. Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity challenges the binary oppositions often found in psychoanalytic thought. The fluid, transformative identities presented in *HUM (we/us)* align more closely with Bhabha's notion of the 'third space' than with traditional psychoanalytic models of the psyche.

In conclusion, while psychoanalytic theory offers valuable insights into the processes of identity formation and transformation depicted in *HUM (we/us),* it's crucial to apply these concepts critically and in dialogue with postcolonial theory. Chavan's film presents identity not as a fixed essence but as a dynamic, ongoing process shaped by relationships, cultural norms, and the creative potential of fantasy, lived realities and performance. By visualising this process of psychic transformation, Chavan offers a nuanced exploration of the psychological dimensions of postcolonial identity formation and the potential for marginalised individuals to reclaim agency and wholeness in the face of oppression.

Situating *HUM (we/us)* in contemporary art

HUM (we/us) makes a significant contribution to contemporary art discourses by bridging fashion, film, and social critique. It aligns with interdisciplinary practices that challenge conventional boundaries and address pressing social issues. In the context of Indian contemporary art, it resonates with a trend of multimedia works exploring identity, gender, and class. Chavan's work is situated within a rich tapestry of Indian contemporary art that challenges societal norms and explores postcolonial identities through diverse media,[6] while also echoing global artistic movements addressing identity and marginalisation.[7]

Tejal Shah's video installation *Between the Waves* (2012) offers a compelling parallel, exploring queer identities and ecological futures through a surrealist aesthetic that, like Chavan's work, blurs the boundaries between reality and fantasy. However, while Shah's work focuses on creating fantastical, non-human queer ecologies, Chavan grounds her

Figure 8. On set photography *Hum (We/Us)* of White Hearts (Acid attack survivor), 2023. Photo: Appurva Shah.

exploration of queerness in the specific context of class and labour in India. This difference highlights Chavan's unique contribution: her ability to weave queer aesthetics into a critique of social hierarchies rooted in India's postcolonial reality. Similarly, Pushpamala N.'s photographic series *Mother India* (2005) critiques national and gender identities through performance and visual storytelling. Both Pushpamala and Chavan employ costume and staging to deconstruct stereotypes and challenge dominant narratives about Indian womanhood and gender using the body as sites of performance to blend personal and political narratives. Chavan's use of fashion as a medium for social commentary finds kinship with artists like Mithu Sen, whose interdisciplinary work incorporates elements of design and everyday objects to explore issues of gender, sexuality, and power. Sen's playful yet critical approach to artmaking resonates with Chavan's transformation of discarded materials into elaborate costumes in *HUM (we/us)*.

Internationally, *HUM (we/us)* aligns with works that employ multimedia approaches to explore identity, marginalisation, and social justice. These connections reflect broader global developments in contemporary art, which I have critically examined in relation to Indian artworks and events (D'Souza 2012, 2013; D'Souza and Manghani 2016). These global connections underscore the universal relevance of Chavan's themes while highlighting her unique contribution to ongoing artistic dialogues. Isaac Julien's

multi-screen video installations, such as *Looking for Langston* (1989) and *Ten Thousand Waves* (2010), provide a rich comparative framework for Chavan's work. Julien's exploration of queer identity, race, and diaspora through layered narratives and visual complexity complements Chavan's critique of class and gender norms. Both artists employ poetic visual languages to address complex social issues, creating immersive experiences that challenge viewers' perceptions. Zanele Muholi's ongoing photographic series *Faces and Phases* (2006-present) shares Chavan's commitment to representing marginalised communities. Muholi's powerful portraits of Black LGBTQ + individuals in South Africa resonate with Chavan's inclusion of diverse bodies and identities in *HUM (we/us)*. Both artists use their work to increase visibility for underrepresented groups and to challenge societal prejudices. Wu Tsang's *Wildness* (2012), a documentary that blends fiction and reality to explore a queer nightclub in Los Angeles, parallels Chavan's interest in liminal spaces where alternative identities can flourish. Like *HUM (we/us),* Tsang's work celebrates the transformative potential of community and performance while acknowledging the challenges faced by marginalised groups. The work of Renate Lorenz, particularly her collaborative video works like *No Future/No Past* (2011), which examines queer temporalities and feminist theory, provides another point of comparison. Lorenz's exploration of the performative aspects of gender and identity aligns with Chavan's use of fashion and costume as tools for critiquing societal norms.

By situating *HUM (we/us)* within this global context of contemporary art practices, we can appreciate Chavan's unique contribution to ongoing dialogues about identity, representation, and social change. Her innovative use of fashion as a critical tool, combined with her engagement with Indian cultural specificity, offers a fresh perspective on these global themes. Chavan's work exemplifies the potential of interdisciplinary approaches in contemporary art, demonstrating how the intersection of fashion, film, and social commentary can produce powerful and thought-provoking works that resonate across cultural boundaries.

Social and cultural impact

HUM (we/us) contributes significantly to broader social and cultural discourses, challenging societal norms and prompting discussions on contemporary issues emerges at a time of significant socio-political tension in India. The rise of Hindu nationalism under the Modi government has been accompanied by increased pressure on artistic expression, particularly works addressing issues of gender, sexuality, and religious plurality (Jaffrelot 2021). In this context, Chavan's celebration of gender fluidity and critique of social hierarchies takes on added political significance, positioning the film as a form of artistic resistance to conservative nationalist narratives.

The film critiques rigid social hierarchies and gender norms in Indian society, inviting viewers to question established power structures and imagine alternative social arrangements. The film's exploration of gender fluidity, particularly through its inclusion of hijra characters and drag performances, contributes to ongoing discussions about gender identity in India. It challenges traditional binary conceptions of gender, offering a more nuanced and inclusive vision of identity expression. This aspect of the film resonates with growing global conversations about gender diversity and transgender

rights. Moreover, the film's portrayal of class transformation, as the protagonist moves from a position of servitude to one of creative empowerment, critiques entrenched class divisions suggests the possibility of social mobility through creative expression and community solidarity, challenging fatalistic attitudes about social status.

Chavan's innovative use of fashion as a medium for social critique sets *HUM (we/us)* apart and expands the potential of fashion in art and activism. By repurposing discarded materials into elaborate costumes, Chavan demonstrates how fashion can be a tool for reimagining identity and challenging social norms. The film's approach to fashion aligns with growing discussions about the role of clothing in identity formation and social signalling. It suggests that fashion can be more than mere adornment or consumption – it can be a powerful means of self-expression and social critique. This perspective contributes to ongoing debates in fashion studies about the political potential of dress and style. Furthermore, Chavan's work intersects with discussions about cultural appropriation and hybridisation in fashion. The film's blend of traditional Indian elements with avant-garde designs offers a nuanced perspective on cultural mixing in a globalised world, contributing to dialogues about postcolonial fashion practices.

The DIY aesthetic and use of recycled materials in *HUM (we/us)* position the film within critical discussions about sustainability in art and fashion. By transforming waste into visually stunning costumes, Chavan demonstrates the creative potential of sustainable practices, challenging the fashion industry's often wasteful production methods. This aspect of the film contributes to growing conversations about ethical consumption and production in the arts. It aligns with movements in contemporary art that prioritise environmentally conscious practices and critique consumer culture. Chavan's approach suggests that limitations imposed by sustainability concerns can be a source of creative innovation rather than restriction. Moreover, the film's focus on community and collective creation offers a model of artistic practice that contrasts with individualistic notions of authorship. This collaborative approach to artmaking resonates with discussions about ethical labour practices in the arts and the potential for art to build community and foster social cohesion.

Conclusion

HUM (we/us) emerges as a polysemic work that significantly advances discourses in contemporary art, fashion studies, and social critique. Chavan's innovative synthesis of fashion design, experimental filmmaking, and incisive social commentary offers a nuanced exploration of identity formation, modes of resistance, and community dynamics in postcolonial India. This multidisciplinary approach extends abstract theoretical concepts into the realm of embodied, visual representation, thereby bridging the often-disparate worlds of academia and artistic practice.

The film's portrayal of gender as a series of performed acts not only challenges essentialist notions of identity but also posits the transformative potential of performance and sartorial choices. This aligns with Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity while simultaneously grounding it in the specific socio-cultural context of contemporary India. Furthermore, Chavan's deployment of fashion as a medium for exploring cultural hybridity resonates with Bhabha's (1994) concept of the 'third space,' creating a

liminal zone where entrenched identities and social hierarchies are contested and reconfigured.

The psychoanalytic dimensions of *HUM (we/us)*, particularly its nuanced exploration of identity formation and the dialectic between individual and collective psyches, provide a sophisticated portrayal of the psychological journey from alienation to self-realisation and communal belonging. This aspect of the film contributes valuable insights to ongoing scholarly discussions about the long-term psychological ramifications of colonialism and social marginalisation, extending beyond individual trauma to encompass collective and intergenerational experiences.

While *HUM (we/us)* has been analysed through multiple theoretical lenses, it is imperative to critically reflect on the applicability and limitations of these frameworks, particularly within the Indian context. As scholars like Khanna (2003) compellingly argue, the uncritical application of Western concepts to non-Western contexts risks perpetuating the very colonial power structures and epistemologies it critiques. This critical reflection opens up avenues for future research that could explore more culturally specific theoretical frameworks or hybrid approaches that synthesise Western and non-Western perspectives.

The significance of *HUM (we/us)* is further underscored by its critical reception and accolades, including prestigious awards at international film festivals. These recognitions highlight the film's success in bridging the worlds of fashion and cinema, and its innovative approach to costume design and styling. The overwhelmingly positive critical reception, praising its visual innovation, social commentary, and cohesive blending of disparate elements, speaks to the film's artistic merit and cultural relevance. Its inclusion in various international festivals and exhibitions demonstrates its global appeal, while its resonance with diverse audiences attests to the universality of its themes and the power of its visual language.

The impact of *HUM (we/us)* is likely to extend far beyond its immediate reception, influencing future works in both art and fashion. Chavan's innovative approach to fashion as a medium for social critique opens up new possibilities for engaging with pressing social issues through artistic practice. The film's sustainable practices and DIY aesthetic may inspire a shift towards more environmentally conscious and creatively daring approaches to design, while its celebration of diverse body types and identities could contribute to ongoing efforts to make the fashion industry more inclusive and representative.

For contemporary art, *HUM (we/us)* demonstrates the potential of interdisciplinary approaches that blur the lines between different artistic mediums. It may encourage more artists to explore the intersection of fashion, film, and social commentary, leading to new forms of artistic expression. Moreover, the film's engagement with issues of gender, class, and cultural identity in the Indian context, while resonating with global audiences, may inspire more nuanced and culturally specific explorations of these themes in India and start to get a wider reception at home.

In conclusion, Shilpa Chavan's *HUM (we/us)* stands as a significant and timely contribution to contemporary art and cultural discourse. Its innovative approach to fashion, nuanced exploration of identity and community, and critical engagement with social issues position it as a work that not only reflects a current moment of social engagement but also points towards new possibilities for artistic practice and social transformation.

Furthermore, the film serves as a catalyst for rethinking the very frameworks through which we analyse and interpret cultural productions in an increasingly globalised yet

culturally diverse world. It challenges us to develop more sophisticated, culturally sensitive, and interdisciplinary approaches to art analysis, thereby enriching both academic discourse and artistic practice. Through its powerful visual language and thought-provoking narrative, Chavan's film invites us to reimagine the boundaries of art, fashion, and identity, offering a vision of a more inclusive and creatively liberated world while simultaneously prompting a critical examination of the theoretical lenses through which we view and interpret such artistic endeavours.

Notes

1. The concept of 'audio-vision', developed by Michel Chion in *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (1994), emphasises the synergistic relationship between sound and image in film. Chion argues that sound in film does not merely accompany the image but actively shapes how we perceive and interpret what we see. He introduces terms like 'added value' and 'synchresis' to describe how sound and image mutually influence each other, creating a unified audiovisual experience that is greater than the sum of its parts.

2. Butler's theory, introduced in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and further developed in *Bodies That Matter* (1993), posits that gender is not innate but a series of repeated actions creating the illusion of a stable identity. Drawing on speech act theory and Foucauldian notions of power, Butler argues that gender is 'a stylised repetition of acts' (1990, 33) that becomes naturalised through social norms and institutions. This theory has been influential in queer theory and feminist studies, challenging essentialist notions of gender and sexuality. Butler's theory has influenced numerous works in fashion and film beyond *HUM (we/us)*. For example, it has been applied to analyse gender representation in fashion photography (Evans 2003) and queer aesthetics in contemporary cinema (Halberstam 2005). These applications demonstrate the impact of Butler's ideas on visual culture and identity politics highly relevant to understanding *HUM (we/us)*.

3. Bhabha's concept of the 'third space', central to his theory of cultural hybridity (1994), is visually manifested in *HUM (we/us)* through Chavan's innovative blend of traditional Indian elements with contemporary and avant-garde designs. Bhabha's 'third space' as a concept has been influential in analysing various forms of postcolonial art. For instance, it has been used to interpret the works of artists like Jitish Kallat, Anish Kapoor and Mona Hatoum, who blend cultural influences in their sculptures and installations. In literature, Salman Rushdie's magical realist novels are often seen as creating textual 'third spaces'.

4. Lacan's concept of the 'mirror stage' (1949) offers insight into the psychological journey of the protagonist in *HUM (we/us)*. The film's opening scenes, where the protagonist is confined within the colonial-style home, mirror the tension between an idealised self-image and lived reality that Lacan describes. The protagonist's initial uniform can be seen as a false mirror, reflecting an identity imposed by societal norms. The pivotal moment when the protagonist breaks the china tea set symbolises a shattering of this misrecognition, initiating a process of identity reformation. Chavan's visual narrative traces the protagonist's journey from a fragmented, alienated state to a more integrated sense of self, reflecting the ongoing tension between ideal ego and actual self that Lacan posits continues throughout life. Lacan's 'mirror stage' has been widely applied in film theory, notably by Christian Metz (1982) in his psychoanalytic approach to cinema, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*. Metz argued that the film screen itself functions as a mirror for the viewer, creating a complex interplay of identification and misrecognition. This concept has been used to analyse audience reception and the construction of subjectivity in cinema.

5. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Fanon explores the psychological impacts of colonialism on colonised subjects, drawing on his experiences as a psychiatrist in Algeria. Fanon combines psychoanalytic theory with existential philosophy to analyse how racism and colonialism create a sense of alienation and inferiority in the colonised subject. He argues that this

'colonial trauma' affects both individual psyches and collective cultural identities, necessitating a process of psychic decolonisation alongside political liberation.

6. For instance, Tejal Shah's *Between the Waves* (2012) and Pushpamala N.'s *Mother India* (2005) similarly employ multimedia approaches to critique gender and national identities. Shah's five-channel video installation explores queer ecology and non-binary identities, while Pushpamala N.'s photographic series deconstructs stereotypical representations of Indian womanhood. Both artists, like Chavan, use own bodies as sites of performance, blending personal and political narratives to challenge dominant cultural narratives.

7. *HUM (we/us)* finds parallels in works like Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston* (1989) and Zanele Muholi's *Faces and Phases* (2006-present) which I first saw when it was shown at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale in India in 2018. Both artists explore queer identities and marginalised communities while Julien's poetic exploration of Black gay desire during the Harlem Renaissance and Muholi's ongoing photographic series documenting Black LGBTQ + individuals in South Africa both use visual art to increase visibility for underrepresented groups and challenge societal prejudices. These works, like Chavan's, demonstrate how art can serve as a powerful tool for social critique and identity affirmation.

Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Robert E. D'Souza is Professor of Critical Practice at Winchester School of Art and Director of the Social Practices Lab at the University of Southampton (UK). He is co-editor of Journal of Visual Art Practice and his books include *India's Biennale Effect* (2016), *Barcelona Masala: Narratives and Interactions in Cultural Space* (2013) and *Outside India: Dialogues and Documents of Art and Social Change* (2012). His work has been exhibited widely including Bergen Kunstall 3,14 and osloBIENNALEN in Norway (2019), India Habitat Centre in India (2019), Tate Exchange at Tate Modern in the UK (2018) and Kochi-Muziris Biennale in India (2014).

ORCID

Robert E. D'souza http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0977-0082

References

Ahmad, A. 1995. "The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality." *Race & Class* 36 (3): 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/030639689503600301.

Appadurai, A. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Attali, J. 1985. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Bachelard, G. 1994. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Balázs, B. 1952. *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art. Translated by E. Bone*. London: Dennis Dobson.

Barthes, R. 1967. *The Fashion System*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Barthes, R. 1977. *Image-Music-Text*. London: Fontana Press.

Bhabha, H. K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Bhabha, H. K. 2000. "The Vernacular Cosmopolitan." In *Voices of the Crossing*, edited by F. in Dennis, and N. Khan, 133–142. London: Serpent's Tail.

Bourdieu, P. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Butler, J. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. 1993. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge.

Cage, J. 1961. *Silence: Lectures and Writings*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Canclini, N. G. 1995. *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Chatterjee, P. 1993. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Chatterjee, P. 2004. *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Chion, M. 1994. *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Chion, M. 1999. *The Voice in Cinema*. New York: Columbia University Press.

D'Souza, R. E. 2012. "Outside Art: Art Location and Global Tensions." In *Outside India: Dialogues and Documents of Art and Social Change*, edited by Robert E. D'Souza, 115–157. Delhi: W + K Publishing.

D'Souza, R. E. 2013. "The Indian Biennale Effect: The Kochi/Murziris Biennale 2012." *Journal of Cultural Politics* 9 (3): 296–312.

D'Souza, R. E., and S. Manghani. 2016. *India's Biennale Effect: A Politics of Contemporary Art*. New Delhi: Routledge.

Deleuze, G. 1986. *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Deleuze, G., and F. Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Derrida, J. 1987. *The Truth in Painting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dwyer, R., and J. Pinto. 2011. *Beyond the Boundaries of Bollywood: The Many Forms of Hindi Cinema*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Entwistle, J. 2000. *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*, 6–39. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Evans, C. 2003. *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Fanon, F. 1952. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press.

Fanon, F. 1961. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.

Feld, S. 1982. *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Geczy, A., and V. Karaminas. 2017. *Critical Fashion Practice*. London: Bloomsbury.

Geczy, A., and V. Karaminas. 2023. "Queer Style." In *The Routledge History of Fashion and Dress, 1800 to the Present*, edited by V. Pouillard, and V. Dubé-Senécal, 472–490. London: Routledge.

Goethe, J. W. 1810. *Theory of Colours*. London: John Murray.

Gopinath, G. 2005. *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Guattari, F. 1972. *Psychoanalysis and Transversality: Texts and Interviews 1955–1971*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).

Halberstam, J. 2005. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York University Press.

Hebdige, D. 1979. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen.

Hoskins, T. 2014. *Stitched Up: The Anti-Capitalist Book of Fashion*. London: Pluto Press.

Jaffrelot, C. 2021. *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Jung, C. G. 1964. *Man and His Symbols*. London: Aldus Books.

Khanna, R. 2003. *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Kun, J. 2005. *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lacan, J. 1949. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." In *Écrits: A Selection*, edited and translated by Alan Sheridan, 1–7. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Lacan, J. (1953) 1977. "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis." In *Écrits: A Selection*, edited and translated by Alan Sheridan, 30–113. London: Tavistock Publications.

Lefebvre, H. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lipovetsky, G., and J. Serroy. 2013. *L'esthétisation du Monde: Vivre à L'âge du Capitalisme Artiste*. Paris: Gallimard.

McGowan, T. 2007. *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Metz, C. 1982. *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Mishra, V. 2002. *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire*. New York: Routledge.

Mulvey, L. 1975. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16 (3): 6–18. https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6.

Murch, W. 2001. *In the Blink of an Eye: A Perspective on Film Editing*. Los Angeles: Silman-James Press.

Nandy, A. 1983. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. 1986. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: James Currey.

Niessen, S., A. M. Leshkowich, and C. Jones. 2003. *Re-Orienting Fashion: The Globalization of Asian Dress*. Oxford: Berg.

Pastoureau, M. 2012. *The Colors of Our Memories*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Reddy, G. 2005. *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Reinach, S. S. 2019. "Cultural Appropriation in Fashion and Entertainment." *Fashion Theory* 23 (3): 367–374.

Roces, M., and L. Edwards. 2007. *The Politics of Dress in Asia and the Americas*. Portland: Sussex Academic Press.

Silverman, K. 1996. *The Threshold of the Visible World*. New York: Routledge.

Spivak, G. C. 1988. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C. in Nelson, and L. Grossberg, 271–313. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education.

Tanupriya, and D. Pannikot. 2021. "Enactment of Gender and Performing Selves: A Study on Hijra Performativity." *Journal of Language, Literature and Culture* 68 (1): 27–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/20512856.2021.1882027.

Tarlo, E. 1996. *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Uhlirova, M. 2013. "The Fashion Film Effect." In *Fashion Media: Past and Present*, edited by D. Bartlett, S. Cole, and A. Rocamora, 118–129. London: Bloomsbury.

Urry, J., and J. Larsen. 2011. "Theories." In *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, edited by J. Urry and J. Larsen, 1–30. London: Sage.

von Busch, O. 2009. *Fashionable: Hacktivism and Engaged Fashion Design*. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg.

von Busch, O. 2018. *Fashionology: Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty', Volume 2*. London: Intellect Books.

Wilson, E. 1985. *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*. London: Virago.