

The spectator's dancing gaze in *Moulin Rouge!*

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Moulin Rouge! is the third of Baz Luhrmann's trilogy of 'Red Curtain' films, which are set in a constructed world that appears at once both familiar and 'exotic', in this case, Montmartre, Paris, in 1899-1900. Devices are used to keep the spectator constantly aware of the constructedness of the images (Anon., 'Behind the Story', 2001 [online]). Luhrmann intends that the awareness of the film, as a film, forces the spectator to "wake up, participate! It's like you're confronted. It's like you're being asked will you give in, or will you go?" (Luhrmann in Murray, no date [online]). He calls this "audience participatory cinema" (Luhrmann in Anon., no date [online]). One of the ways in which the spectator is invited to participate in the action is by offering her/him various structured ways of viewing the action, which, if adopted, implicate the spectator in a network of looking and performing that exists both within the narrative and between the narrative and the spectator. These ways of looking are here termed 'gazes', following Laura Mulvey (1989), E. Ann Kaplan (1997) and Ella Shohat (1997). These gazes are constructed throughout the narrative, but most intensely through the heightened spectacle of the dance sequences. In these sequences, the camera and choreography collude to position the viewer's gaze in relation to various possible gazes. The physical movement, and the constructed gazes through which we see it, are inextricable, and thus the choreography in *Moulin Rouge!* happens in the interactive space between the physical movement and the construction of a gaze that frames, positions and manipulates it. The focus of this paper is on that interaction, which will be explored via a textual analysis of the dance sequences and other relevant parts of the film text. The result will thus be a particular, rather than definitive, reading of the choreography of *Moulin Rouge!*.

The notion of 'gaze' implies a mode of looking that constructs a power relationship between the looker and the looked at. This notion has been mobilised for film analysis by, for example, Mulvey (1989) in relation to gendering the gaze, and Shohat (1997) and Kaplan (1997) regarding the relationship between the gendered gaze and the imperial gaze. Following Shohat and Kaplan, this paper considers the complex intersection between gender and imperialism/colonialism in the types of gaze constructed both within the narrative and between the narrative and the spectator, in *Moulin Rouge!*.

These gazes are not constructed in *Moulin Rouge!* 'from scratch'. The two with which I shall initially be concerned initially draw on the construction of gaze as part of the generation of a culture orientated around the act of looking at the time and place in which *Moulin Rouge!* is set, *fin-de-siècle* Paris. Vanessa Schwartz (1998) argues that in turn-of-the-century Paris mass/popular culture was orientated to the development of a particular type of spectatorship as a mass cultural activity in contexts such as the embryonic cinema, where the practices of 'looking' and 'knowing' became synonymous. The role of spectator bestowed a certain power that could be exerted over the object of the look.

Shohat (1997) argues that there was an interaction between the development of this type of spectatorial gaze through cinema, and the imperialist contexts within which cinema was invented, one of these contexts being *fin-de-siècle* Paris. According to Shohat, 'Western' cinema acted as a disseminator of colonial discourse, for example by re-deploying the 'orientalizing' gaze, which Edward Said (1978) describes as

developing through nineteenth-century Western academia, as a mode of looking for the cinematic spectator. Various film-making devices (for example, narration, *mise-en-scène*) are used collectively to encourage the spectator to adopt a sense of authority and domination over the objects of her/his gaze, which draws on the colonial discourse of inherent Western authority and domination over its colonies in the Middle and Far East. However, the object of this mode of looking is not necessarily ‘the Orient’ itself, but can be other objects considered ‘other’ by the colonial, Western, male self, such as women, constructed as if they were ‘the Orient’, often by using ‘oriental’ tropes such as dancing. In *Moulin Rouge!*, and particularly in the choreographic sequences, Luhrmann offers spectators a glimpse of this type of gaze, constructed in the time and place that he depicts, while simultaneously critiquing it.

One way in which he critiques the orientalizing gaze is to offer alternative modes of looking. One of these alternative modes was also under construction in *fin-de-siècle* Paris. Marta Savigliano (1995) argues that the introduction of tango to turn-of-the-century Paris, and in particular to Montmartre, prompted the development of a new mode of looking that was like orientalism, in that it constructed and reinforced Western domination and authority over colonial others, but with particular reference to South American, rather than Middle/Far Eastern others. Exoticism, as Savigliano describes it, also possesses a number of structural differences from orientalism, such as the mobility of the relationship between the Western self and the exotic other. Furthermore, according to Savigliano, exoticism incorporates the possibility of ‘auto-exoticism’, that is, the re-appropriation of exoticism by the exoticised, exemplified by the re-appropriation of the exoticised tango by middle-class and élite

Argentines just before and after the First World War. This seems to imply what Homi Bhabha (1994) calls the 'return of the look', that is the turning of the exotic gaze back upon the exoticisers. However, for Savigliano (but not for Bhabha), this returned gaze does not have the power to exoticise, but remains dependent on the look of the Western self.

According to Savigliano, tango exoticism first developed in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century in contexts such as the Moulin Rouge, which were already involved in Orientalism through, for example, the performance of the *danse du ventre* (belly-dancing). Danced orientalism and exoticism were part of a wider mass cultural construction of spectatorship taking place in Paris at this time (Schwartz, 1998). Savigliano argues that in the Paris of the 1890s the pleasure of dancing oneself was being separated from the pleasure of watching dancing bodies on stage, evidenced in the conversion of many dance halls into concert theatres during this period (Savigliano, 1995), including the Moulin Rouge in 1902 (Barthes, no date [online]). This separation between dancing and watching intersected with gender and class hierarchies and imperialist discourses of colonial mastery and pleasure. For example, dances associated with the working class, such as the cancan, were performed and watched in the same venues as the *danse du ventre*; both were both performed mostly by women, and were watched by a cross-class, cross-gender audience (Price, 1998). The complex intersection of gender, class and colonial hierarchies with the increasing separation between dancing and watching, found an appropriate laboratory in the developing medium of cinema.

In Luhrmann's depiction of this era in *Moulin Rouge!* the intersection of gender, class and colonial hierarchies in dance performance and spectatorship is emphasised. This is most apparent in the intersection of the three main protagonists, whose relationship involves complex gender and class differentials, with their equivalents in the musical within a musical, 'Spectacular, Spectacular!', which transposes the story onto colonial India. Luhrmann claims to have chosen to set *Moulin Rouge!* at the turn of the twentieth century, "because it was such a great reflection of where we are now. So clearly a time of technological change, of where the world was both moving forward and backwards, where people were pulling back into the nineteenth century or moving forward into the twentieth" (Luhrmann in Anon., 'Interview with Baz Luhrmann', 2001 [online]). Thus Luhrmann appears to be drawing a parallel between the turn-of-the-twentieth century world he creates on screen and the twenty-first century as it is variously constructed via cultural media today. However, this forces him to address the issue of the relationship between turn-of-the-twentieth-century and turn-of-the-twenty-first-century gender and colonial hierarchies in the choreography of *Moulin Rouge!*.

One way in which Luhrmann addresses these issues (although not necessarily at a conscious level of discourse) is through a comparison of a turn-of-the-twentieth-century colonial, orientalizing, masculine gaze, a turn-of-the-twenty-first-century neo-colonial masculine gaze, and a return of the gaze by the exoticised 'other', which are constructed in relation to choreographed displays of other-ness and self-ness in the dance sequences. I use 'neo-colonial' in the sense of the various forms of political, economic and cultural influence over other countries, particularly former colonies, which have developed since decolonisation, and which may be described as

a new form of colonialism. However, in the analysis of cultural texts, such as *Moulin Rouge!*, terms such as ‘colonial’ and ‘neo-colonial’ have been used to refer to the workings of colonialist discourses within the text (e.g. Shohat, 1997). By playing with the types of gaze on offer to the spectator through the danced sequences, Luhrmann invites the spectators not to merely watch, but also to participate in, a complex web of looking and performing, in which the danced performances, and the gendered and imperial/colonial power relations that they negotiate, are not just viewed, but elicited and constructed by the spectator’s gaze.

The first shots of the film set up an ‘orientalist’ frame. The camera provides the spectator with a towering view over Paris, reminiscent of the “overarching global point of view” of early orientalist film, which “sutures the spectator into a godlike cosmic perspective” (Shohat, 1997, p 29). The viewer has no choice but to take up what Savigliano calls an “up-down” (Savigliano, 1995, p 74) relationship to the action, creating a distant and seemingly objective perspective of moral authority.

The camera’s subsequent rapid descent through the gates of Montmartre, voyeuristically dwelling on close-ups of pimps and prostitutes, reaffirms the necessity and virtue of this, literally, higher moral position. The camera’s lack of discrimination in its voyeurism between human bodies and landscapes encourages the viewer to enjoy both a sense of moral superiority over the inhabitants of Montmartre and a sense of the power of being the employer rather than the recipient of the gaze. The all-seeing power of the camera begins to offer the viewer a sense of domination over the territories of the scrutinised bodies, which will soon be identified with an ‘orientalizing’ gaze.

In the first major dance scene, this mode of looking is mapped onto the gendered, class-differentiated context of the Moulin Rouge dancefloor. Christian, a young writer who has come to Montmartre to find literary inspiration, is taken to the Moulin Rouge by his new bohemian friends (including Toulouse-Lautrec), whose play he has agreed to write. Taking the viewpoint of the naïve, inexperienced writer, the camera whirls and spins amid cancaning dancers, catching intimate glimpses of flesh, and particularly of bodies considered at the turn of the century as ‘other’: female bodies, black bodies, Siamese twins and dwarves. However, this intimacy does not engender a sense of identification with the dancers. Rather, the voyeurism of the camera turns its subjects into objects of sexual and exotic titillation. While the movement of the camera provides the spectator with the sensation of being part of the action, the objectification of the dancers distances them on two levels. The spectacular costumes of the dancers are contrasted with the suits of the elite male audience, visualizing the difference in status and gender between those who look and those who are looked at. However, like Christian, the camera sees the spectators as well as the performers. As we watch, the male audience becomes part of the spectacle, dancing with the dancers and even performing directly to the camera. The power differential represented by the internal audience’s gaze over the dancers is magnified for the film spectator, who watches the audience watching the dancers.

The intensity of this gaze-mediated power relationship is heightened by the appearance of Satine, the star dancer of the Moulin Rouge, who descends from the ceiling on a trapeze. Purposely costumed to reference other female icons whose status made them appear distant and unattainable, such as Marlene Dietrich, Marilyn

Monroe, Greta Garbo and Madonna (Freeman, 2001 [online]), Satine is initially constructed as an ultra-feminised, ultra-sexualised and virtually unattainable 'other' to the sea of identical tuxedoed men into which she descends. In her ensuing performance, she flirts with her male audience, alternately drawing them to her and pushing them away, but always in control of the interaction.

At the moment of her entrance we are also introduced to the character of the Duke, a rich Englishman, whose investment in the conversion of the Moulin Rouge into a theatre is secured by its owner, Harold Zidler, by promising him exclusive access to Satine. The Duke's desire for Satine seems to be represented visually by his gaze, which persistently breaks into our view of Satine's routine. However, an analogous visual relationship is also set up between Satine and Christian, who sees her for the first time, and is fascinated by her. The Duke's visual/sexual access to Satine is immediately constructed as rivalling Christian's visual/sexual access to her, as confusion arises over which of them will meet her in her boudoir after the show.

The subsequent scene takes place in Satine's boudoir, in the belly of a giant model Indian elephant in the Moulin Rouge's garden. The gaze-mediated relationship set up in the choreography/cinematography of the previous sequence between the Duke, Christian and the feminised, sexualised, distant otherness of Satine as female Hollywood star, becomes mapped onto a fictionalised, orientalist scenario, which becomes the film's sub-narrative. Zidler, Satine, Christian and the Bohemians pitch the Bohemian play, 'Spectacular, Spectacular!' to the Duke, hoping to secure his investment. In order to appeal to the Duke's appetite for the exotic, the play is set in India. Satine is cast as the Hindu courtesan whose "kingdom is invaded by an evil

maharaja”, played by Zidler, but representing the Duke. However, her attempt to save her kingdom is jeopardised when she falls in love with a “penniless sitar player”, played by Toulouse but representing Christian. Thus the plot is transposed to India, Satine’s sexual otherness is orientalised and cast as cultural otherness, and the Duke’s desire for her is cast as a colonization both of the Moulin Rouge and of her othered body.

The plot is pitched to the Duke in the form of a musical dance sequence, set to the music of Offenbach’s *Orpheus in the Underworld*. The choreography combines stylised musical theatre ‘steps’ with stylised ‘Indian dance’ movements, encompassing both the Western narrative and the Orientalised sub-narrative, the constructed ‘coloniser’ and the constructed ‘colonised’. The camera often takes the position of the watching Duke, so that the performance is played directly to camera. The spectator is thus encouraged temporarily to adopt the viewpoint of the colonizing Duke, whose gaze both fixes and distances the performers as orientalised ‘others’, dependant on his power and wealth.

The Duke’s casting as the invading maharaja signifies his wealth and power, but also his role in a colonial framework of desire. His position as a male, English aristocrat who desires to ‘own’ exclusive rights to the feminised, orientalised other through his status and wealth, is structurally analogous to the late-nineteenth/early-twentieth-century European (and at this time predominantly English) desire to colonise the feminised and orientalised countries of ‘the East’. According to Shohat (1997), in early cinematic orientalism the viewer was encouraged to identify with the Western, male coloniser as hero. We are offered this identification briefly in the ‘pitch’

sequence, above, in which the spectator views the performance through the Duke's eyes. However, the Duke has already been identified as the rival and ideological opposite of Christian, whose narration guides our interpretation of the story, and with whom we are most encouraged to identify. Through the Duke's rivalry with Christian for Satine's attention, power, money and desire are set against equality, morality and love, and more importantly, a colonial masculine gaze is set against a neo-colonial one.

The Duke's sexual desire for Satine is constructed as inseparable from the desire for colonial conquest. This layer is explored in the 'Like a Virgin' sequence, in which Zidler reignites the Duke's desire for Satine by claiming that he makes her feel 'like a virgin'. In doing so, he invokes the colonial ideology that justifies conquest by the claim that unconquered lands were virgin territory, *terra nullius*, wilderness in need of colonial rule. Zidler is accompanied by the Duke's pristine, English, male servants, who dance a controlled, choreographed musical theatre routine, using stylised jazz and tap dance steps, which contrasts with the seemingly unchoreographed, sexualised, orientalist female cancan dancers at the Moulin Rouge, constructing a physical distinction between coloniser and colonised. Half-way through the sequence, the Duke, having been convinced by Zidler, takes on the role of the coloniser, chasing Zidler, who now plays the part of Satine/the Hindu courtesan, using a white tablecloth as a makeshift bridal veil/sari. At the climax of the sequence, the Duke stands on a table, towering over the cowering Zidler, simultaneously performing the 'up-down' gaze through which the Duke views Satine and through which the spectator has been encouraged to view the action. Thus the

Duke's desire to conquer Satine is linked to a type of colonial masculinity, empowered by the conquest of the virginal, orientalist, feminised 'other'.

This is contrasted with the type of masculinity represented by Christian. Christian's non-materialistic, humanistic, bohemian idealism is contrasted with the Duke's possessive, unscrupulous megalomania. Both the Duke and Christian have come to Montmartre from England at the height of its colonial powers in 1899, to find, respectively, sexual gratification, and inspiration and love. Christian's fascination with Satine is not an objectifying fascination, motivated by desire for conquest, but rather a 'subjectifying' fascination, allowing the distance put in place by her initial 'orientalization', to be removed, gaining entry into 'her world'. On this level, Christian appears to be the antithesis of Shohat's colonising hero.

However, although Christian's ideology is narratively identified with post-revolutionary Bohemian idealism, in a late-twentieth/early-twenty-first-century context, Christian can, alternatively, be read as a construction of a neo-colonial hero. As a young, middle-class, creative, sensitive, liberal male, Christian epitomises current 'new man' ideologies of masculinity. His colonisation of the world of the 'other', i.e. Satine's world, takes the form not of a territorial conquest, but of a moral redemption. The principle of the worship of love, rather than money, although already upheld as a principle by the Bohemians, is only activated by his arrival. He not only provides a writer for, and secures the production of, a Bohemian play about the supremacy of love, but convinces a woman who "sells her love to men" that "the greatest thing you'll ever learn is just to love, and be loved in return".

Satine's construction as a distant, untouchable 'other' is initially reinforced by her orientalization in the sub-narrative: her role as a Hindu courtesan stands for her othered, colonised status, fixing her identity as high-class prostitute. However, the emergence of Satine's conflicting ambitions, to become a "real actress" through the patronage of the Duke, and "to love and be loved in return" through Christian, destabilises her identity, necessitating the conflict between the Duke's colonizing masculinity and Christian's neo-colonial, redemptive masculinity, to be played out. However, the battle between these two definitions of masculinity, figured as a battle between Christian and the Duke over Satine, would be difficult for Luhrmann to explore further within the orientalist context so far constructed in the film. In *Moulin Rouge!*, orientalism is constructed as a distancing/'othering' through which power relationships are stabilized by their performance. For example, the musical/dance sequence in Satine's boudoir which sets up the film's orientalist sub-narrative, both fixes the identities of the protagonists and reaffirms the power relationship between the Duke and those who perform under his gaze. However, as the conflict between Satine's ambitions becomes apparent, Luhrmann needs to set up a different construction through which destabilised/conflictual power relationships can be explored. Even though it appears to have arrived in Paris at least seven years after the period in which *Moulin Rouge!* is set (Cooper, 1995), Luhrmann uses the Argentinian Tango.

Savigliano (1995) posits that it takes three to tango: the female dancer, the male dancer and the gaze, which observes and exoticises their performance. These three do not possess fixed identities, but rather embody contradictory tensions. The female dancer both submits in order to camouflage her resistance, and resists as a form of

seduction. The male dancer's embrace is simultaneously a form of control. His seduction is perhaps only a technique of conquest. The gaze exoticises by its detachment, but is engaged in the dance as well. Satine embodies the contradictory tensions in the female tango dancer's role, but the contradictory impulses of the male tango dancer are shared between the characters of the Duke and Christian. In the Duke we find the power and control that, at times, appear to dominate the female tango dancer. In Christian we find the acquiescence that allows her the freedom to resist, but that serves to seduce her. The gaze is that of the film spectator, thus far constructed alternately as distanced, voyeuristic and orientaling, and as naïve, idealistic and subjectifying. However, as described below, another gaze within the narrative is now introduced, which offers an alternative viewing position for the spectator.

The tango takes place in the Moulin Rouge, which is being used as a rehearsal-room for the Bohemian play. Christian and the Bohemians and dancers, who are in the play, wait there as Satine visits the Duke in his tower, a meeting that will determine the ending of the play, and thus the ending of the narrative of the film - the outcome of the battle between Christian and the Duke over Satine. As the scene begins, Christian's gaze, with which the spectator has been encouraged to identify, becomes identified with the gaze of the Bohemians and dancers who wait with him. We have had glimpses of their gaze throughout the film, but only at moments when Christian is not present. This is an interesting shift, as the gaze appears to move from a position of relative (neo-colonial) power in Christian, to a position of impotence in the Bohemians and dancers - from the look to the 'return of the look' (Bhabha, 1994), a gaze that Savigliano argues has no power to exoticise. It is significant that

this occurs at the moment at which the Duke is at his most powerful; by threatening to withdraw his investment, he has lured Satine to his tower. The previous glimpses we have been offered of the gaze of the Bohemians and dancers have been at moments when Satine's impending death has been suggested, creating a strong sense of powerlessness in the face of a greater force. By inviting the spectator to identify with the Bohemians and dancers, the supremacy of the Duke's position appears enhanced by their "down, up" (Savigliano, 1995, 74) perspective on the action.

The intermediate status of the Moulin Rouge space, between a dance hall and a concert hall, between a place one goes to dance and a place one goes to watch, is important here. For the Bohemians and prostitutes in the rehearsal-room, a place where minor characters watch, and perhaps imitate/emulate the protagonists from a distance, watching and dancing become indivisible. Savigliano suggests that the gaze can double itself and dance instead of (or as well as) the tango couple. Thus throughout the tango sequence, the camera switches between the protagonists, who tango figuratively in the narrative, and the Bohemians and dancers who watch and dance the manoeuvres of those under their gaze, but who they cannot control. We see the action through their eyes, and interpret it through their dancing, but we also feel their sense of powerlessness to affect the outcome. The spectator is thus encouraged to adopt the gaze of the 'Other', a gaze that heightens the play of class and gender dynamics in the narrative by performing it in the tango, but is impotent to direct that narrative.

In the rehearsal room, the 'Narcoleptic Argentinian', one of the Bohemians, describes the tango to Christian as "the story of a prostitute and a man who falls in

love with her”, and then begins to dance with one of the prostitutes with whom Satine works, ‘Nini-legs-in-the-air’. The Narcoleptic Argentinian plays the “penniless sitar player” in the play, the character identified with Christian. Nini has been characterised up to this point as jealous of Satine’s success. In the tango, her jealousy becomes imitation, as she dances the role of the prostitute/Satine.

As Satine removes her gloves in the tower, Nini begins to dance with the Narcoleptic Argentinian. At first they circle each other; she seems as willing a partner in the seduction as he is, but soon she catches the eye of another man. The camera flicks between Nini’s eyes, those of the Argentinian, and her new partner, highlighting the play of gazes in this seductive triangle. The Narcoleptic Argentinian now grabs her by the wrists, using his strength to restrain and manipulate her, forcibly regaining control over her movements, before tossing her aside in the direction of her new partner. Soon she is moving from man to man, the line between freewill and desire becoming more and more blurred. Her footwork is quick and precise, so that moment by moment she can switch between resisting and seducing, mirroring Satine’s subtle manipulation of the Duke’s emotions in the tower.

The tango sequence is interspersed with shots of Christian’s gaze, watching his exoticised self/substitute, the Narcoleptic Argentinian, simultaneously controlling and being seduced by Nini, representing Satine. His gaze upon the dance is indicative of his separation from the location of the real action, also a tango, between Satine and the Duke, a dance he can only imagine. Shots of Satine and the Duke in the tower are also inserted, making explicit the three-way relationship between Christian’s gaze, Satine’s manipulation of the Duke in the tower, and the tango in the

Moulin Rouge that physicalises this complex relationship. The speed of the cuts combines with the speed with which control of the movement alternates between the partners in the tango, to suggest the delicate balance of power in the game Satine is playing with the Duke.

Thus Satine's identity is at the centre of a broader, metaphorical 'tango', in which her partners alternate between the Duke and Christian. Like the role of the female tango dancer described by Savigliano, Satine's identity "remains unsettled, incomplete, on the move in those transitions between accepting and resisting subordination to his [the Duke's/Christian's] identity" (Savigliano, 1995, p 78). The gaze of the camera performs her alternative identities by dancing instead of (or as well as) the tango couple, bestowing and withdrawing the power of its privileged sight from her alternative fates, to become civilised by the Duke's money, to become civilised by Christian's moral principles, or to return to her former, uncivilised identity as a prostitute.

Savigliano argues that tango was different from previous versions of exoticism, including orientalism, which crystallised the identities with which they dealt by inserting the distance of a gaze between the performer and the spectator. Rather, the tango mediates shifting identities, particularly gender and class, through direct bodily contact, with the gaze not distancing the spectator from the action, but dancing too. The shifting identities of the tango, as opposed to the fixed identities of the orientalism that Luhrmann constructs, appear to allow Satine a degree of resistance to, and manipulation of, the Duke. However, Savigliano argues that the tango in its colonial context had the opposite effect: when performed in Paris its exoticism was

read as a powerful appropriation of the passion of the colonised, but when re-performed in Argentina, as an attempt to re-appropriate this power through auto-exoticism, its exoticism could only re-affirm the country's colonised status.

The further entrapment of the colonised through the illusion of power offered by the tango is also the ultimate consequence of Satine's resistance. Early on we are made aware that Satine has aspirations to become a "real actress". These aspirations become real possibilities through the Duke's offer of patronage, symbolised by his gift of a dazzling 'oriental' necklace. But the very orientalization that has won her these possibilities also fixes her in the unequal power relationship that denies them: even if she allows the Duke to help her become a 'lady', her debt to him means that she is still little more than a prostitute. However, Satine's love affair with Christian gives her a different aspiration outside of colonial frameworks of power and status (but not outside of neo-colonial ones), to "love and be loved in return". These alternative modes of redemption from her lowly social position form an axis of conflict in the tango sequence.

Savigliano argues that these oscillations of the female dancer between resistance and subordination constantly reshape the identity of the male tango dancer, ultimately defining his masculinity. As our gaze switches between metaphorical and literal tangos, the Duke's colonial masculinity, and Christian's neo-colonial masculinity, which together make up the contradictory impulses of the male tango dancer, become polarised - opposites that will destroy each other on contact. Christian gazes at the Duke's tower, excluded by its stone walls from the workings of colonialist power inside. However, when the Duke sees Christian in the courtyard below, this

meeting of contradictory gazes provokes the Duke to take his colonial masculinity to its logical conclusion: the sexual conquest of Satine.

The Bohemians and prostitutes now perform a tango in unison, the choreographed movements prefiguring the inevitability of the narrative. The explicitly choreographed routine contrasts with the improvised quality of the solo tango at the beginning of the sequence, juxtaposing Satine's earlier improvisatory ability to manipulate the Duke by pretending to submit to him, with the Duke's increasingly choreographed control over her. The spectator's gaze, which has been identified with the exoticised gaze of the 'othered' Bohemians and dancers, is now transferred to the eyes of a racial 'other', Chocolat, a black, male Moulin Rouge dancer, whose gaze we see moving from the literal tango to the metaphorical one as he leaves the rehearsal-room to enter the tower.

The female dancers cower away from their increasingly aggressive male partners, who form a circle around the exhausted Nini, who falls from one to the next, until finally she collapses, as if dead, in centre of the circle of men. She preempts the narrative, as the opposing demands of Satine's rivalling tango partners seal her eventual fate.

Chocolat enters the tower and sees, as we do, that the Duke is about to rape Satine. We watch from Satine's point of view as the Duke's desiring gaze moves closer. In a shot that is almost too quick for the spectator's eye to see, Chocolat knocks the Duke to the ground. The camera then returns to Satine's frightened eyes, and Chocolat's

gaze from the shadows at the Duke on the floor. The gazes surrounding it subsume Chocolat's action, as if the gazes were the real protagonists.

But Satine's salvation is short-lived. Zidler tells her that the Duke will kill Christian unless she sleeps with him. She must reject Christian's love to save him. Thus Satine is forced back into the role of the prostitute. She can no longer manipulate the Duke, as she had done earlier through her figurative tango, and is trapped by the contradictory masculine forces surrounding her into giving up her exotic resistance, and succumbing to the Duke's orientaling gaze. Her identity becomes re-fixed, and thus Luhrmann switches back to an Orientalist frame, which has been used in the film to construct fixed identities, rather than the mobile identities of the tango.

This submission to the orientaling gaze is performed through Satine's performance in the Bollywood-influenced choreography of 'Spectacular! Spectacular!', under the gaze of the play's large, male, upper-class audience, which includes the Duke. The orientalist frame is set up before Satine's entrance as the chorus dancers perform stylised Bollywood gestures such as angular use of the hands and lateral head movements. Satine then enters wearing a jewelled headdress and glittering, midriff-revealing costume. Like her orientalizing in the boudoir scene at the beginning of the film, when her identity as a prostitute was fixed in relation to the gaze of the powerful Duke, Satine is again distanced as an othered spectacle, this time framed by the proscenium stage of the newly converted Moulin Rouge theatre. The dance she performs constructs 'Indian' otherness in terms of explicit sexuality, both through her individual movement, and the visual effect of the group set pieces. However, unlike her appearance at the beginning of the film, here Satine exudes a dark

sexuality, an orientalization by force rather than by choice. As in Said's (1978) description of nineteenth-century orientalism, Satine's gendered and metaphorically cultural otherness is constructed as sexual licentiousness in order to make it complicit with colonization (in this case, by the Duke). The captivity involved in her orientalization is confirmed as her costume is completed with the dazzling 'oriental' necklace the Duke gave her in his tower, and Zidler as the fictional maharaja, and the Duke as the metaphorical maharaja, both whisper "she is mine".

The orientalist sub-narrative and primary narrative then merge as Christian appears on stage wanting to pay Satine for the love she has 'sold' him. However, as he leaves the theatre, Toulouse literally breaks into the orientalist frame, falling on to the stage on a counterbalance, shouting Christian's maxim of romantic liberal equality, "the greatest thing you'll ever learn is just to love and be loved in return".

This act seems to break the orientalist spell, which had artificially fixed Satine's identity as a prostitute, as Christian and Satine's love, and the Duke's plot to kill Christian, are both revealed. Thus, in the subsequent dance sequence, constructed as a 'happy ending' finale, romantic liberalism and truth seem to defeat Orientalism as the cast conspire to prevent the Duke's manservant from shooting Christian. Zidler punches the Duke, and Christian and Satine declare their undying love for each other in the midst of a whole-cast, choreographed finale sequence. The Duke's colonial masculinity, constituted by conquest of the orientalist 'other', appears to be thwarted by Christian's neo-colonial masculinity, constituted by moral redemption through the equality of love.

However, the prophesy of the ending of the tango sequence, that Satine's exoticised resistance would not liberate her but merely confirm her colonization, is finally played out. As the play ends and the curtain falls, Satine dies on stage of consumption, a disease associated with the lower-class status from which the orientalizing gaze, which fixes her status as a prostitute, has rendered her unable to escape. Her death is heavily interspersed with shots of the gaze of the surrounding Bohemians and dancers of the cast, still in orientalized costume, heightening the visual impact of their otherness and thus the sense of powerlessness in the face of a greater force that we are offered through their 'down-up' gaze. The Duke leaves the theatre, as his colonial masculinity is no longer required to enslave her.

In *Moulin Rouge!*, orientalism is constructed as a type of gaze that stabilizes and fixes gender and class identities, the neo-colonial gaze as creating apparently equal identities, and the exoticized return of the gaze as destabilizing and subverting these identities. Initially, the spectator is placed in a position of power in relation to the action, by being encouraged to employ an orientalizing, 'up-down' gaze, but is quickly encouraged to adopt a neo-colonial gaze, implying equality. However, this neo-colonial gaze remains punctuated by the orientalizing gaze, which is continually offered to the spectator as an alternative mode of looking. The spectator is then also offered, at first sporadically and from the tango sequence onwards more consistently, a view of the action through the eyes of the exotic 'other', a 'down-up' perspective that exposes the unequal power relationships involved in the orientalizing gaze with which we began. We return to the orientalizing gaze in the Bollywood-influenced sequence, as it appears that Satine is trapped by these exposed power relationships, only for this orientalizing gaze to be seemingly overthrown by the Bohemian

principle of equality. But this equality does not last, and the spectator is again offered the powerless 'down-up' perspective of the exotic other as Satine dies.

The orientalizing and neo-colonial gazes are offered to the spectator via the competing male characters, and are thus masculinized in relation to the feminized dancing object of their gaze, Satine. However, the exoticized return of the gaze is initially embodied by male and female characters (the Bohemians and dancers), thus questioning the masculinization of the gaze, and then becomes embodied by Chocolat, whose status as a male dancer questions the feminization of the dancing object of the gaze, and the incapacity of the gazed upon object to gaze her/himself. Thus the conflict between orientalizing and neo-colonial gazes can be read as a conflict between masculinities that is challenged by the exoticized gaze of the other. This challenge is constructed as a defeat of the orientalizing gaze and a blow to the neo-colonial gaze. When the colonial and neo-colonial gazes lose their defining object, with the death of their dancing Other, Satine, the Duke and his colonizing gaze leave the Moulin Rouge, and Christian's neo-colonial idealism is temporarily shattered; but the Bohemians and dancers continue to watch from the wings, and theirs becomes the only stable perspective for the spectator to adopt. Their gaze from a position of powerlessness is not affected by the death of an external, dancing object of the gaze because it was not based on fantasies about that object; in fact, their gaze has been associated with knowledge of Satine's impending death throughout the film. Rather, their perspective is based on their own position as the objects of an external gaze, in itself precarious (Savigliano, 1995), but a position which remains intact at the end of the film, as the Moulin Rouge audience wildly applaud the show.

However, the spectator is finally left with the possibility of a more nostalgic mode of neo-colonial gaze, as Christian eventually begins to recover from Satine's death and ensures that his neo-colonial love for her "will live forever" by writing their story. The exoticised other cannot have the last look, or the last dance.

Thus, Luhrmann explores colonial, neo-colonial and exoticised gazes, in relation to danced performances that both define and are defined by them. A critical exploration of these gazes is only possible because of the constructed interactive space that binds the gaze to the physical movement on which it gazes, the space in which I have argued that 'the choreography' resides. The spectator who engages with this offer of various ways of looking can become actively involved in a network of gazes, and thus in the inextricable interaction of these gazes with the performing body, an interaction through which the intersection of gender and colonial identities can be negotiated. The spectator thus becomes actively involved in the choreography as a process of mediation. For example, the line between the Duke's gaze and the gaze of the spectator in the elicitation of Satine's orientalised performances is blurred by the link between his colonial gaze and our cinematic gaze via the intertwined histories of cinema and colonialism. And in the tango sequence it is the dancing of the spectator's gaze between the tango dancing of the Bohemians and dancers, and the metaphorical tango between the Duke and Satine in the tower, that produces the choreography.

This active role for the spectator allows the possibility of a choreography that is not a fixed entity that the spectator views, but rather a choreography that is negotiated somewhere in between the view presented of the physical movement, and the

spectator who actively engages with it. Therefore it allows the possibility of a spectator who is active in the mutually eliciting, mutually defining interaction between gaze and movement, and thus can critically position her/himself within the choreography itself.

Note

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Notes on contributor

Clare Parfitt completed her first degree at Cambridge University, studying Social Anthropology. Subsequently, she gained an MA in Dance Studies with distinction from the University of Surrey, Roehampton, UK, during which time she wrote the paper published here.

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