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PARODY IN POINTE SHOES: JOSEPHINE BAKER, BALLET, AND THE POLITICS OF AESTHETICS, 1925-35

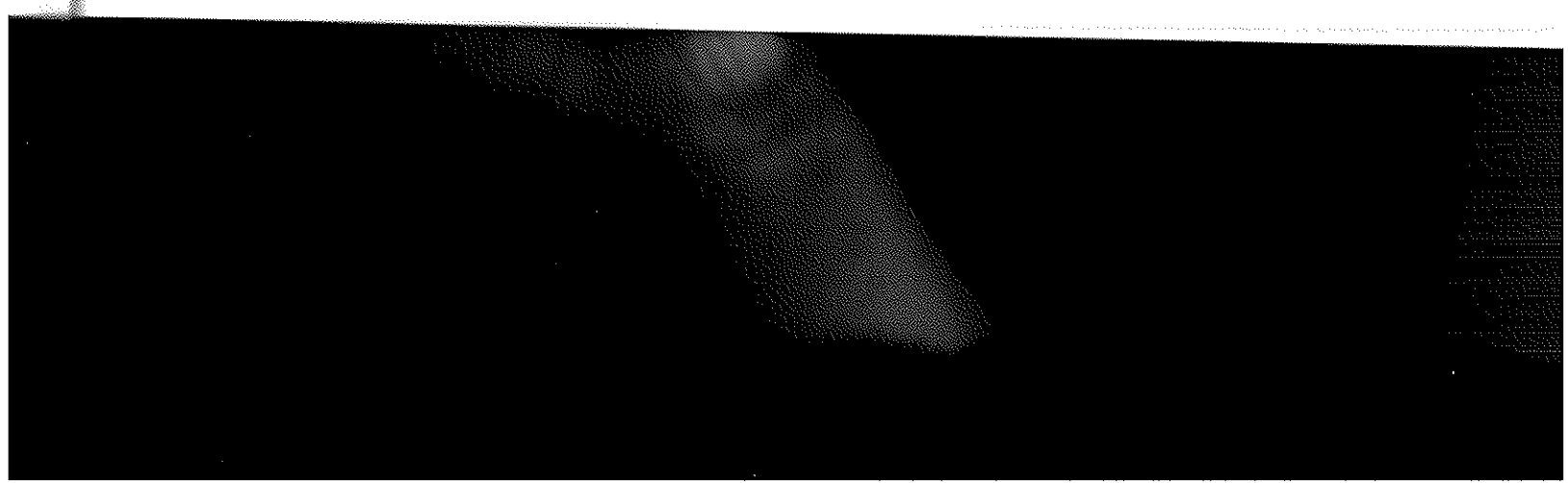
Andrea Harris

Josephine Baker's catapult to fame following her 1925 debut in *La Revue nègre* is now legendary. From that moment, Baker became a cultural icon, inspiring numerous biographies, documentaries, and choreographic homage, as well as an abundance of critical writings. One aspect of Baker's career that has received less attention, however, is the incorporation of classical ballet into her performances.

Discussions of Baker and ballet do exist, but they remain bound to the larger presence of George Balanchine. In his 1988 biography of Baker, Patrick O'Connor speculated that Balanchine taught Baker private ballet lessons in Paris, and many subsequent writers have drawn on his conjecture.¹ Then, as dance scholars in the 1990s turned their attention to the contributions of black dance to Balanchine's style, Baker emerged as one of the African American artists who influenced the Russian choreographer's reworking of classical ballet. In her discussion of the black dance vernacular in Balanchine's neo-classical aesthetic, Sally Banes identified Baker as one of the artists with whom he worked and one of his sources of inspiration (1994: 58). Similarly, Brenda Dixon Gottschild traced the Africanist presence in Balanchine's neoclassical

style in part to his work with Baker in Paris and the United States in the 1930s (1996: 70). Most recently, Beth Genné explored Baker and Balanchine's artistic and personal relationship in greater depth, suggesting that Baker was Balanchine's unrecognized but original muse and the model for the new American female ballet body that the Balanchine ballerina came to represent in the twentieth century (2005).

Such work on the interrelations between Baker and Balanchine has brought issues of race, gender, and class to bear upon contemporary dance discourse and, in turn, a more complete picture of ballet as an artistically and ethnically hybrid form has emerged. Yet to this point, Baker's work with ballet has only been understood in filial relationship to Balanchine and his oeuvre. It is true that the two worked together; Balanchine created a dance for Baker in the 1936 *Ziegfeld Follies*, and, according to Lincoln Kirstein, he also 'may have staged some small numbers for her in Paris' (Banes 1994: 58). However, Baker's story with ballet did not begin or end with Balanchine, and it encompassed much more than the creation of a neoclassical ballet style. In this paper, I examine the archival traces of three instances of Baker's work with ballet – *Le Cygne*



Noir?, a 1925 solo imitating Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova; her performance as a Baroque ballerina in the 1932 *La Joie de Paris*; and a *pas de deux* she performed with dancer Alberto Spadolini in Paris in 1934 or 1935.

I analyze Baker's work with ballet as parody, which Linda Hutcheon describes as 'an integrated structural modeling process of revising, replaying, inverting, and "trans-contextualizing"' some previous form of coded discourse (1985: 11). In Hutcheon's account, the fact that parody functions by establishing difference between itself and the text being copied is paramount: 'While the act and form of parody are those of incorporation, its function is one of separation and contrast' (ibid: 34). Thus, she defines parody as 'repetition with critical difference, which marks difference rather than similarity' through the operations of irony (ibid: 6). Yet in the midst of this differentiation, parody embraces an 'ironic ambivalence' that reaffirms its target text even as it challenges it – parody is 'authorized transgression' (ibid: xii). These key ideas – the simultaneous incorporation and contrast of a text, the marking of critical ironic difference from the mimicked text, and working both with and against an 'original' discourse – inform my analysis of Baker's parodies as intertextual forms that included and made commentary on a variety of aesthetic, cultural, and racial discourses.

Baker's classical interactions are moments that fall outside of the dominant narratives of both ballet and black dance; as such, they lie in archival fragments that largely exist as images without explanation. My materials consist of a performance billing advertising the second run of *La Revue nègre*, publicity photographs and

critical reviews of *La Joie de Paris*, and film footage of Baker's duet at a *Bal des Petits Lits Blancs*. By drawing together these previously disparate archival moments, I illuminate ballet as a repeated trope in Baker's work, her persistent intertextual engagement with white cultural forms and aesthetic discourses. In this case, the extant archival data does not provide a coherent text that is readily comprehensible, but rather offers only glimpses through which to rebuild an impression of what ballet meant in Baker's performances and why she returned to it again and again.² In all three of the classical parodies I examine, race is the object of critical difference that distances the original text, classical ballet, from Baker's parodic copy. For this reason, despite the incompleteness of the archives, the classical intertext in Baker's work cannot be left unexamined. Baker's classical parodies open windows onto issues that go far beyond the creation of an American neoclassical ballet style: the shifting relationship of modernism to the black body in performance, the representation of empire, and the black female dancer's negotiations within dominant discourses and systems.

Baker's first two ballet parodies, in 1925 and 1932, were single tableaux in music-hall performances. Jean-Claude Klein identifies the music-hall revue as central to an emerging modernist syncretism in the early twentieth century. In these music-hall parodies, the blending of jazz dance with the classical idiom demonstrates this syncretic aesthetic, so important to not only the 'popular' but also the avant-garde arts. But each of these parodies was also informed by changing conceptions of an art form – jazz – and a performing body – Baker's – both coded 'primitive.' In contrast to these earlier works, it is likely that

Baker had more of a hand in creating her role in the last ballet dance I examine, performed at a Paris charity event. In this classical parody, we catch sight of Baker's response to the racist and cultural discourses that continually encircled her performances in 1920s and 30s Paris, a response that re-aligns her balletic performances with an aesthetic tradition drawn from the American black vaudeville stage rather than from modernist neoclassical ballet.

LE CYGNE NOIR?: JAZZ AND BALLET MODERNISM

Originally scheduled for a six week run at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, managed by Rolf de Maré, the tremendously popular *La Revue nègre* was extended for several more weeks, postponing the appearance of the great Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova, scheduled next at the theatre (Baker, Jean-Claude 1993: 121). When the revue was finally moved to the Théâtre de l'Etoile at the end of November 1925, it featured a new act titled *Le Cygne Noir?*, danced by Baker and billed as a 'parody of Pavlova dancing the swan from Saint-Saens.'³

The parody turned on the fact that Pavlova's iconic status as a great classical ballerina was symbolized by her portrayal of the swan in the solo made for her by Michel Fokine entitled *The Dying Swan*, in which she wore a tutu, tights, and headpiece encrusted with white feathers. Pavlova was popularly known as 'the swan' and was often depicted in this role and costume. On one hand, *Le Cygne Noir?* simply inverted Pavlova's mystical whiteness with Baker's 'primitive' blackness. On the other hand, however, the dance pointed to multiple referents, sending concentric circles of meaning spiraling outward into dance history. Fokine's solo was itself an

exercise in revisionism that made reference to *Swan Lake*. The parody thus simultaneously recalled that Russian imperial ballet, in particular the roles of Odette and Odile.

The role of Odette/ Odile, traditionally danced by the same ballerina, is among the most coveted in the classical repertory because of the technical and artistic virtuosity required to portray such binary opposites. Through Odette's 'soft, feathery steps, lyricism, swooning backbends, and lowered gaze,' we come to know her innocence, in contrast to Odile's 'strong, precise movements, her flamboyant virtuosity, and her direct gaze,' which signify her 'nefariousness' (Banes 1998: 61). As has been noted, the physical and dramatic nuances in the choreography draw on a gendered repertory of bodily signs to suggest contrasting character traits; however, color arguably works in the ballet as a more primary visual cue for the inherent difference between the look-alike swans – they are, after all, known as the 'White' and 'Black' swans. Odette's white tutu signals her virtue and trustworthiness while Odile's dark costume marks her wickedness and dishonesty. In her examination of nineteenth-century Russian painting and literature, Allison Blakely shows that contrasting imagery of blacks and whites served to create not only aesthetic tension, but also to connote moral difference, drawing on perceptions of Africans as impulsive and uncivilized (1986: 38, 50-70). The color-coded opposition of Odette and Odile similarly conflates aesthetic contrasts with ethical ones, drawing contrasts through signs that not only indicated unladylike behavior, but that were also racially coded. I would argue, then, that the counterpoint between the Black/White Swans sets two danced images of female sexuality

against one another: one morally pure and white, the other corrupt and black.

Swan Lake was first brought to France in 1922 by the Ballets Russes, where the threat posed by the Black Swan's strong movement, rhythmic attack, and assertive gaze had yet another cultural referent – jazz. The tensions between black/dangerous and white/pure mirrored the heated debates in 1920s Paris over the influx of jazz, which, for better or worse, signified the antithesis to European civilization for many Parisian citizens. In 1925, Baker was becoming the very embodiment of jazz, a 'Black Swan' herself, as her own dynamic movement and seductive appeal posed a new threat to her white counterpart – not only Pavlova, but European culture as a whole. *Le Cygne Noir?* exploited the anxieties that obsessed Paris, presenting a black female body – coded primitive, wild, and audacious – dancing in perfect imitation of a body and a form that stood for the pinnacle of white culture.

If parody is repetition with critical difference, here, that ironic difference was achieved through race. The parody turned on the fact that Pavlova – the icon of classicism – was white and Baker – the icon of 'jazz,' and all it stood for, as I will discuss – was black. Following Hutcheon's theory, the humor of the parody was enabled by intermingling complicity and distance between the original text and the parodic copy; in this case, by setting Baker's rendition of the classical form alongside the audience's recognition of her racial and cultural 'difference.' The parody's success was thus dependent on Baker's credibility as a ballerina; however, in 1925, she did not have any formal ballet training, but rather used the skills of imitation she honed when part of the

American black vaudeville circuit. Baker taught herself to dance by copying the dancers she saw in the revues. Johnny Hudgins, for example, recalls that when he and Baker appeared together in *Chocolate Dandies*, Baker would watch him from the back of the house and would then repeat it exactly like he did.⁴ Baker first had the opportunity to observe and imitate Pavlova when the touring cast of *Shuffle Along* caught 'Anna Pavlova and her Ballet Russe' in Stamford, Connecticut the night before they performed (Baker, Jean-Claude 1993: 58). Baker and Pavlova also performed on the same program twice in 1925: at the International Arts Decoratifs Gala on November 7, just a few weeks before the premier of *Le Cygne Noir?* (O'Connor 1988: 35); and on December 3 at a benefit performance held at the Opéra (Botrot 1925: 2). These encounters provided the source material for Baker to perform the classical style with an adequate degree of credibility in her parody.⁵

Whereas Baker's ability to imitate what she saw was key to the Black Swan parody, it was likely not her own creation, as at this early point in her career she did not exercise much control over what was included in her performances. Jean-Claude Baker, Baker's adopted son and biographer, speculates that the Black Swan parody was created amongst a group of artists and patrons who regularly associated together in the 1920s, including Caroline Dudley Reagan, the American who engaged Baker and the cast of *La Revue nègre* to come to Paris; Rolf de Maré, the manager of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and former director of the Ballets Suédois; Jean Borlin, the lead dancer and choreographer for the Ballet Suédois; Jean Cocteau; and Serge Diaghilev (Baker 2006). I have been unable to

find evidence to support his claim; yet even if we cannot show who exactly conceived of the parody of Pavlova, two factors remain key to its presentation: the music-hall's function and significance for the avant-garde who embraced *La Revue nègre* as an important event in modern art, and the incongruity of *Le Cygne Noir?* inside the whole of the review.

In his study of Parisian music, Klein identifies the music-hall as a catalyst for a modernist international style, characterized by the syncretism of cultural forms, which endowed the Paris music hall 'with a symbolic function that went way beyond its real significance' (1985: 182). Jazz music and dancing was central to the revue's 'synthesis of black rhythms and European harmonic structures and modes of expression [that shaped] the revue's image of modernity' (ibid: 181). The adaptation of African and African American aesthetics into European forms was also a prominent dynamic in much of the work of those at the forefront of ballet modernism, including the work of de Maré and his collaborators. As Richard Brender points out, the choreography of the Ballets Suédois was centered on the classical vocabulary, in combination with unconventional elements including African- and African American-inspired themes and styles (1986: 130-131). De Maré had a long interest in African art (he owned a home in Africa in the 1920s) and African American music and dance, as did Blaise Cendrars, Fernand Léger, and Darius Milhaud, for whom *La Revue nègre* exemplified the investment in African and African American cultural forms that characterized much of their work. If, as Klein argues, the 1920s music-hall was a medium for the syncretism that marked modernist developments, de Maré's

transformation of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées to a music-hall is meaningful to my discussion, as the music-hall offered a forum for continuing, if not heightening, the experimentalism with an international spectrum of cultural forms within a classical framework that characterised the Ballets Suédois.

When *La Revue nègre* moved theatres, *Le Cygne Noir?* was added to the middle of the show. Compared to the tableaux that surrounded it, the ballet parody appears out of place. The other numbers represented African Americans in accordance with the popular conventions of the day – a dance set in a Harlem nightclub, a boxing match, Baker's *danse sauvage*, and a cakewalk – and served to appease the audiences' appetite for a 'jazz' that was dynamic and exotic. The Black Swan parody was set in contrast to two overlapping stereotypes of 'jazz' – the African primitive and the American black – and it departed from both interpretations, signaling a shift in the aesthetic currents of modernist ballet.

The conventions of classical ballet were often a target of parody for the vanguards of early twentieth century dance. Fokine parodied the classical ballerina in *Petrouchka*, ridiculing her stiff-limbed rigor and mindless ineffectualness. Designer Jean Hugo described Cocteau's *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel*, presented by the Ballets Suédois, as 'a caricature of the classical dance' (qtd. in Garafola 1998: 103). In his review of a Ballets Russes concert, André Levinson wrote, 'A wild exaggeration and mockery of the Classical School seems to amuse the young ballet master, Balanchine. Elements of harmony, of balance, of grace of line, which make the ballet a divine thing, are intentionally excluded, and choreo-

graphic beauty is entirely disregarded' (1926: 67). For ballet's avant-garde, parody was a way to forge aesthetic rupture with the classical tradition on the path to innovation.

Yet whereas *Petrouchka* parodied the ballerina in order to satirize her automatic obedience to virtuosic convention and mechanical lack of emotion, in the 1920s, changes were taking place in dance modernism that countered Fokine's earlier expressionist interventions in the classical tradition. After World War I, a new imperative to restore the classical values of order, geometry, and simplicity of form swept across the arts. According to Kenneth Silver, this neoclassical shift, a nationalistic and patriotic response to the traumas of world war, was initiated by the Ballets Russes' *Parade*, in which Apollinaire celebrated the 'Esprit nouveau' that 'inherited from the classics solid good sense, a confident spirit of criticism, [...] and that sense of duty which limits or rather controls displays of emotion' (qtd. in Silver 1989: 122). But the postwar return to classical values also revolved around changing responses to the African and African American influences that had re-shaped French culture in the early twentieth century. *Le Cygne Noir?* sat astride this aesthetic shift.

As art historian Jody Blake points out, in the early decades of the twentieth century, African art and African American music and dance became widely accepted and influential in Paris, to the extent that some artists argued African art was preferable to traditional European aesthetic and cultural values (1999: 86). However, in the 1920s, the exuberance of the negrophilia that overtook Paris was increasingly mirrored by the fear of negrification, or the worry that the migra-

tion of African and African American forms into French society forecast the downfall of French civilization. For many Parisians, 'jazz' epitomized *l'art nègre* and the influx of African culture (commonly conflated with African American culture, and vice versa) into Europe (ibid). In this spirit, Clive Bell returned from his trip to Paris in 1921 to report that the sentiment there was, '*Plus de jazz!*' ('No more jazz!'). His influential essay of the same title exemplifies the cultural debates of the period, which argued, as Blake puts it, 'that the threat posed by jazz was tantamount to an undermining of the foundations of European art, with its emphasis on intellect, cultivation, and standards' (ibid: 85).

In the dance criticism of the period, this scrimmage between African and European culture appears as a confrontation between black dance and ballet. For instance, in Levinson's essay, 'The Negro Dance,' he attempted to codify the aesthetic differences between 'Negro dance' and ballet. He wrote,

Pavlova glides, Dixon [Harland Dixon, a Charleston dancer] taps; this [...] is the difference between the pas de ballet and the Afro-American dance step. [...] Marie Taglioni delighted her audiences by appearing to run over a field of grain without bending the stalks. [...] The Negro stepper, who pounds the platform with unrelenting vigor, producing an infernal racket, is a no less sincere expression of another type. (1927: 71-73)

Levinson went on to state that the Negro dancer's talent is more of a 'psychological,' even 'glandular' sense 'allied to their excessive hyste-

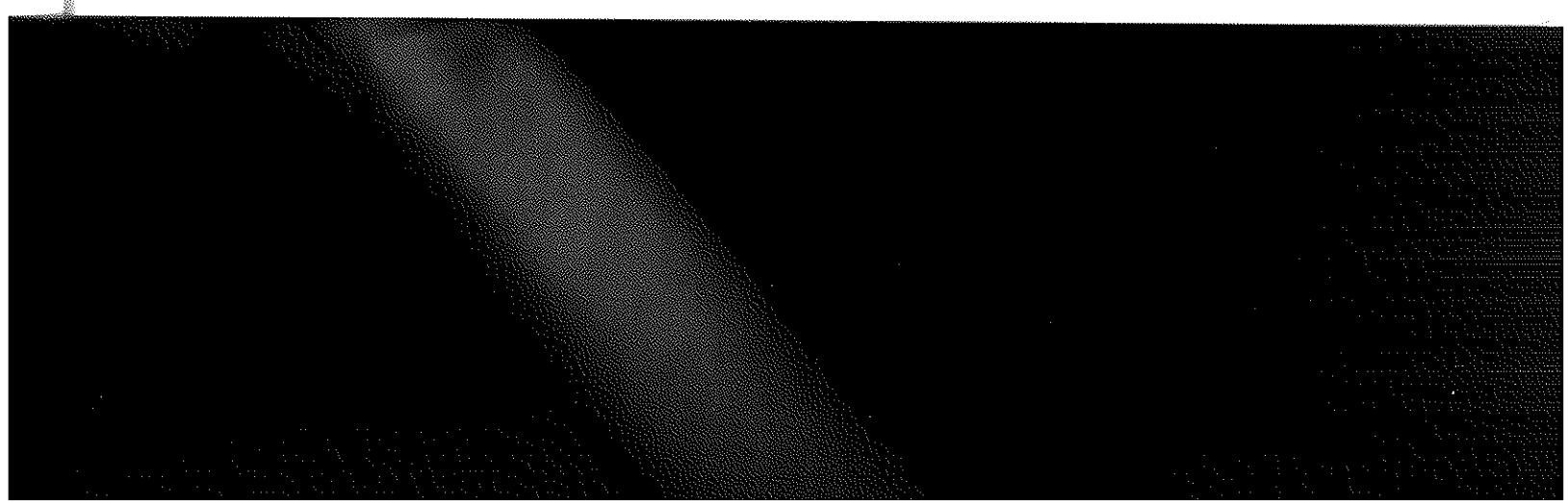
ria and their unbelievably high animal spirits; a 'fruit of savagery' he found enviable, but inferior to the more cultivated and complex ballet. In similar spirit, Arnold Haskell asked his readers, 'Imagine a performance of *Les Sylphides* by loose-limbed, "coal-black mammies!" Such a thing seems utterly ridiculous' (1930: 455). And Pavlova also described jazz as a degenerate form, stating,

[Jazz] is the very lowest form of amusement, and one for which I have nothing but the most supreme contempt. It is entirely without beauty; the music is a very horrible noise made by instruments that are raucous in the extreme and which emit only an intensified form of savage rhythm. Furthermore, as concerns the dancing, there is in it a pretence of harmlessness which in reality contains an underlying viciousness that is calculated to cause an infinity of harm' (qtd. in Kerensky 1973: 104).

The ideology of what Cocteau termed the 'call to order,' a return to the classical qualities of harmony and simplicity to carry France and French art forward in the wake of the Great War, echoes in such artistic hierarchies of the virtues of ballet over the decadence of jazz. In an environment increasingly critical of jazz, the problem was how to preserve the tremendous influence that many avant-garde artists had garnered from African and African American forms. One solution was to cleanse jazz of its primitive connotations and highlight instead its formal principles (Blake 1999: 137-162).

In jazz and the music-hall, artists affirmed a model of essential form, geometric rhythm, and

kinetic clarity that could revitalize a flagging European tradition that they perceived as stuck in the psychological, decorative, and romantic. Cocteau, for example, argued that through jazz a 'musician might pick up the lost thread' and return to a classical economy of design found in 'machinery and American buildings,' which he associated with ancient Greek art 'in so far as their utility endows them with an aridity and a grandeur devoid of any superfluity' (1926: 20, 21). Cocteau drew heavily on popular sources in works such as *Parade* and *Les Mariés*, but he insisted in his 1923 book, *Call to Order*, 'What I turned to the circus and music-hall to seek was not, as is so often asserted, the charm of clowns and negroes, but a lesson in equilibrium' (ibid: viii). In a similar vein, Darius Milhaud's compositions for the Ballet Suédois' *La Création du monde* were to have 'discovered classical ideals of simplicity and restraint in American and Parisian popular sources,' such as the black vaudeville performances he saw on his trip to the United States (including Baker's performance in *Shuffle Along*) (Perloff 1991: 201, 201-202), and Léger contended that 'African sculpture from the classical period' imparted 'a balanced relationship of curved and horizontal lines, born from the geometric order' in his designs for the ballet (1965: 63, 64). In writings from 1924 and 1925, Léger (whom Baker credits for the idea to bring 'a real black troupe from New York' to the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées) criticized the efforts of the ballet's 'star artist' to 'elicit the enthusiasm of the audience' with his 'authoritarian personality' as 'stale' and an 'obstacle to unity' (Baker 1988: 51; Léger 1965: 38, 39, 71). As replacement, he called for the 'plastic passages' of the music-hall spectacle, which glimpsed a 'plastic beauty' that was 'totally independent of



sentimental, descriptive, and imitative values,' in which 'geometric form is dominant' (ibid: 39, 63, 64). Such sentiments were informed by the Purist movement, which was extended from painting and visual arts into performance by writers such as Léger, Cendrars, and Cocteau (Brender 1986: 134). The Purist concept of how shapes and colors produce 'primary sensations' that can be transmitted to viewers universally continued the *l'art pour l'art* notion, made popular by Wassily Kandinsky, that pure forms create vibrations in the soul of the receiver that then resonate throughout the senses. Le Corbusier and Amédée Ozenfant wrote in their Purist manifesto:

Primary sensations constitute the basis of the plastic language; [...] it is a fixed, formal, explicit, universal language determining subjective reactions of an individual order [...]. It does not seem necessary to expatiate at length on this elementary truth that anything of universal value is worth more than anything of merely individual value. It is the condemnation of 'individualistic' art to the benefit of 'universal' art. (1964: 62)

The Purists saw in African art an ideal artistic tradition free from the individualism and commercialism that 'deformed' its European counterpart, a model for a 'universal' art that could communicate to everyone through the effect of simple, pure forms on the viewer's senses (Brender 1986: 134-135). Ozenfant, for instance, wrote elsewhere of African sculpture's 'emotional language of pure and universal means' (qtd. in Blake 1999: 151). As Christopher Green writes, the Purists' emphasis on universal forms allowed 'a Eurocentric faith [in the] French tradition to

cohabitate with the modernist commitment to the non-European and to so-called "primitive art" '(2000: 216).

Brender links de Maré and his Ballets Suédois collaborators' attraction to ethnic art forms to Purist influences (1986: 121). For de Maré, folk dance represented 'the purest and most complete expression of the modern state of the soul,' and he argued, 'Ballet must be a language that knows no national boundaries [...] even if it is based on a nation's folklore, it must be understandable to everyone through the most general spirit of that folklore' (qtd. in ibid: 126). African forms in particular offered an alternative model of an art form that could communicate the 'modern state of the soul' universally. In his eulogy for Borlin, Cendrars directly links African styles to the dancer's destruction and re-creation of cultural forms:

[Your dancing is like] sailors, mulattos, Negroes, savages [...] you've thrown a monkey wrench into the French balletic tradition as it has come down to us from the ancien régime and Italianism via St. Petersburg. [...] Billboards and loudspeakers have made you forget the pedagogy of the Académie de Danse, with its [...] good taste, affectation, and virtuosity. When you've forgotten all this you've discovered rhythm, the beautiful rhythm of today [...]. (qtd. in ibid: 133-134)

Through African art and African American performance, the old, with its love of individualistic 'affectation and virtuosity,' could be destroyed and rebuilt into 'the beautiful rhythm of today'. These ideas – mixing ethnic and classical elements, the contrast of 'individual' personality to

'universal' form, and the 'primitive' as a means of renovating European tradition – circulate in Baker's Black Swan parody.

As noted earlier, I have been unable to determine exactly who conceived of *Le Cygne Noir?*, and I cannot make the necessary connection to de Maré, Léger, Cocteau, or other members of the ballet avant-garde. Moreover, to the best of my knowledge, none of the choreography, nor any evidence of its iconography, has survived. However, the fact that Baker's parody of Pavlova differs so greatly from the other tableaux in *La Revue nègre's* second run suggests it was unusual and experimental. Further, both in form and function, *Le Cygne Noir?* bears remarkable similarity to the long interest of de Maré and his associates in the combination of African and European art forms; in a tongue-in-cheek manner, the parody makes literal the potential of Africanist art as an alternative to the European tradition. Given the intentional use of race as the object of ironic difference in *Le Cygne Noir?*, it is important to situate it within the larger context of dance modernism, primitivism, and, most importantly, the relationship between the two in 1925 Paris.

As the target of the parody, Anna Pavlova represented a style of ballet that the 1920s avant-garde perceived as outmoded sentimentalism. In contrast to the new generation of Ballets Russes dancers, whose dancing emphasized line, shape, and steps over communicating personality, Pavlova was known for her expressive performance style and dramatic interpretation of her role.⁶ Diaghilev's derision of Pavlova's 'cabotinage,' for instance, criticized her theatricality in similar manner as the Purists' rejection of individ-

ualistic art and psychological drama (Kerensky 1973: 38). If Pavlova's celebrity was a hangover of the 'deformed' individualism of European culture, the muscular vigor and formal efficiency of jazz signaled by Baker's dancing body represented the power of *l'art nègre* to overcome that deformation (especially in light of Baker's own growing stardom). As Pavlova symbolized the old ballet – sentimental, emotive, affected – Baker's jazz/classical hybrid renewed that tradition for the modern age. The parody's folding of jazz-coded elements and signs into ballet embodied the Purists' efforts to allow the revival of classical aesthetics to commingle with the avant-gardes' dedication to African and African American forms. The parody thus had a pedagogical function, a lesson sent from the music-hall to the Paris public in the tenets of a modernism which synthesized the classical and the primitive into a play of pure movement forms that cast off the burdens of the psychological and the individualistic to become 'understandable to everyone.'

Le Cygne Noir? created an image of the black dancing body that rubbed against the grain of convention in *La Revue nègre*. The dance's representation of jazz offered an alternative for its audience: neither the African primitive nor the American inner-city black, but rather the streamlined expression of the universal modern soul. Yet despite the avant-garde's best intentions to create an alternative social model or a utopian universalism from African culture, this borrowing ultimately 'elevated' African and African American art out of their own histories into the timeless order of classical forms and reified the dominance of European culture. This effect parallels Balanchine's work with black dance forms.

While jazz was an important influence on Balanchine, its steps and rhythms were subsumed into the classical idiom as a means of renewing it, and all obvious traces of black dance itself, or of its culture or context, disappeared in his neoclassical ballet, until excavated at a much later date by dance historians. And thus dance historiographers must distinguish Baker's ballet from Balanchine's: whereas his developing aesthetic submerged jazz into the classical as a means of renewing the European tradition, her own work with ballet developed according to a very different intent, as I shall show in the last ballet parody I analyze. First, however, in the next parody, Baker's mimicry of ballet was again put in service of recreating an older tradition, this time between former and future visions of the colonial body.

LA SINGERIE DE XVIII SIÈCLE: 'THE MOST CIVILIZED DANCE' AND THE COLONIAL BODY

La Joie de Paris, which opened at the Casino de Paris in December 1932, contained several tableaux in which Baker parodied other performers or performance styles. In one scene, for example, Baker dressed as a white chanteuse with blonde hair and light skin to sing her famous song *Si j'étais blanche*, which Bennette Jules-Rosette writes 'made an ironic visual swipe at Josephine's blonde music-hall rival, Mistinguette' (2000: 64). Another tableau featured Baker in drag as a male jazz band conductor. As Baker moved to the Casino in the 1930s, she undertook a concentrated transformation of her image from exotic black dancer to sophisticated diva, in collaboration with her manager/husband, Giuseppe (Pepito) Abatino. Jules-Rosette notes that Baker's adopting these

markers of 'the other' in *La Joie de Paris* – blonde hair, light skin, masculine clothing – revised the exoticism of her *La Revue nègre* performance. This helped Baker create 'an identity discourse of empowerment' that allowed her to integrate into white culture and overcome cultural barriers (ibid: 67). Yet another one of the 'others' that Baker played in *La Joie de Paris* was a ballerina, dressed in an eighteenth-century panier, skirt, bodice, and pointe shoes, in a parody titled *La Singerie de XVIII Siècle*.

Much of the scholarship on Baker during this period when her celebrity reached commodity status reaches a similar conclusion: Baker's performances conflated signs of 'civilized' and 'savage,' manipulating racial stereotypes in order to challenge them.⁷ But perhaps not enough attention has been paid to the role that the music-hall played in signaling, as Klein puts it, an 'enterprise of "hybridisation"' (1985: 185), and, within this venture, the attitudes and discourses provoked by the hybrid subject in colonialist Paris. *La Singerie de XVIII Siècle* not only supported the revue's popular aesthetic of international, intercultural variety, it also steered the viewer away from the binaries of the past towards the promise of a modern interculturalism under the French *mission civilisatrice*. In this vein, Hutcheon's description of parody's 'ironic ambivalence' is significant, because even as the tableau contrasted a past history of colonialism, it reified a new ideology of the colonial subject, and Baker's mimicry of the classical ballerina was central to this task (1985: 32). Yet the early 1930s also marks an important turning point for Baker's ballet parodies, as, from this point, she re-worked her hybrid dance form into a means through which to engage and negotiate racial and cultural discourses.

Designer H. Fost's setting for the tableau reproduced a 'singerie,' or sitting room decorated with painted representations of monkeys and grotesque Chinese figures, that was common in eighteenth-century French mansions such as the Chateau de Chantilly. 'Singerie' also refers to an eighteenth-century genre of painting that featured monkeys dressed in human clothes and mimicking human actions. Parisian audiences would have easily connected this setting to scientific accounts and popular depictions that linked blacks to animals, particularly monkeys, as reviews of *La Singerie* below illustrate. Inside of this racist frame, Baker performed the academic vocabulary with what critics found to be remarkable skill. Gustave Fréjaville wrote that she performed 'expertly the artifices of the most civilized dance, *pointes*, *rond de bras*, et *révérences*' (1932: n.p.). Another critic described 'the most unexpected of classical dancers, Joséphine Baker, who executes with grace and surprising style the *pointes* and traditional *révérences*' (Anon 1932: n.p.). And André Levinson, who devoted his entire column to the topic of Baker's balletic performance, somewhat begrudgingly noted, 'she succeeds, without apparent effort, in balancing her *petites promenades*, however briefly, *sur les pointes*' (1932: n.p.). Whereas the framing of the tableau depicted the 'primitive' in bestial and grotesque terms, Baker's expert rendition of French classical dancing troubled that representation.

The overlapping of the primitivism in the tableau's mise en scène and the classicism danced on its stage mirrored another juxtaposition, an intertextual one that was clear to viewers – Baker's *La Revue nègre* persona versus her role

in *La Joie de Paris*. Critics' comments on the 'old' versus the 'new Joséphine' persistently refer to her ballet performance in *La Singerie* as evidence of her transformation. Fréjaville pointed out how Baker's dancing in *La Singerie* differed from the following tableau, in which Baker's role as a jazz band leader showcased her 'spontaneous gestures and profound instincts for rhythm.' In this latter, more familiar scene, Fréjaville wrote, 'we may recover the original qualities of the little exotic dancer of 1926 beneath the intelligent and willful talent of the brilliant Parisian artist of 1932' (1932: n.p.).⁸ Levinson, who elsewhere attempted to codify the inherent aesthetic contrasts between European and African dance, clearly struggled with the classicism of *La Singerie*, questioning why a renowned artist such as Baker would attempt to 'appear what she is not.' He wrote,

The artist handles [the challenge of classical dancing] honorably, but the success is upsetting when one remembers how, at the time of her memorable Revue Nègre, at the Champs-Élysées, Joséphine provoked paroxysms in the delirious public with her animalistic movement. Why is it that the 'Si j'étais blanche' refrain of her song expresses the real nightmare that visibly haunts this already accomplished being, who is by her nature primitive, untainted, and 'prehuman'? (1932: n.p.)

Whereas Levinson perceived an oxymoronic clash between the classical and the primitive in Baker's dancing, in a not-too-different light, Nancy Cunard mourned the passing of Baker's *danse sauvage* as a betrayal of 'authentic' African American culture and criticized the

revue's effort to 'bring Josephine into line with the revolting standard of so-called "national taste"' (qtd. in Lahe-Gonzales 2006: 47). The relationship between the 'old,' or conventionally exotic, and the 'new,' or classically-trained, Baker was woven into the fabric of *La Joie de Paris* itself as well as into 1932 popular and critical discourses, and *La Singerie* played on and played up this irony. The revue thus invited the viewer's perceptions of the primitive 'other' to oscillate between convention and difference, folding the 'exotic' primitive and the 'brilliant Parisian artist' together in Baker's dancing body. This paradoxical dynamic between the metropolitan and the native body in *La Joie de Paris*, concentrated in *La Singerie*'s classical parody, reproduced contemporary concerns about the representation of the colonial subject in the future of French colonialism.

The year before *La Joie de Paris* opened, the 1931 Colonial Exposition ran for six months in Paris. Although the Exposition celebrated international colonialism, the directors planned the event to counter existing negative views of French colonialist practices with a new vision of France's colonial power (Morton 1998: 357). The need to distance the future of French colonialism from its past, and the current exposition from previous ones, informed the plans which General Marcel Olivier, former colonial military officer and deputy director to the Exposition, made for the 1931 Exposition. 'We dreamed of renewing,' he wrote, the 'picturesque ambience – although quite false and sometimes excessive – of the successful colonial sections at the 1878, 1889, and 1900 expositions' because, as he explained:

[That] conception of an Exposition of

Exoticism was later enriched, amplified, and led toward more elevated goals. It was no longer a matter of artificially reconstituting an exotic ambience, with architectural pastiches and parades of actors, but of placing before the eyes of its visitors an impressive summary of the results of colonization, its present realities, its future. (qtd. in ibid).

The 1931 Exposition aimed to glorify the global accomplishments of French colonial power, replacing the exoticism of the past with an updated view of the French 'civilizing mission' as an internationally productive force. Patricia Morton argues that, under the pressure of this nationalist sentiment, it was necessary to successfully represent both metropolitan and colonial France alongside one another in the Exhibition – a design conundrum that was achieved through a pastiche of French architectural classicism with other elements that conveyed a 'colonial' flavor (ibid: 363-366). This amalgam of the power of French civilization alongside its colonial history was repeated – indeed, it was performed – the following year in *La Singerie de XVIII Siècle*.

The representation of exoticism was one of the most important elements of *La Singerie*, and critics noted the parody historicised concepts of the exotic. *Comedia* reported that it depicted 'the exoticism of 1732,' and the political magazine *Revue Action Française* saw in the tableau 'la naissance de la mode exotique (the birth of the exotic fashion' (Fréjaville 1932: n.p.; Sordet 1932: n.p.). However, the tableau did not strive for historical accuracy, but rather cast its references to the French cultural past in broad strokes across the stage. For instance, despite the title, Baker's tulle tutu was an invention of

the Romantic period, and the blocked satin pointe shoes she wore never crossed an eighteenth-century stage, leading Levinson to comment on the 'anachronism' of the piece (1932: n.p.). Similarly, Baker's dancing was not Baroque, but rather embodied its own history of French migration, as both her earlier imitations of Pavlova and the formal lessons she began taking in the 1930s suggest that all of her background in ballet was informed by the Russian classical style.⁹ Moreover, Fost's decorative rococo *singerie* would have appeared antiquated and garish against the neoclassicism of both Baker's dancing and the balance and simplicity popular in 1930s architecture and design. In form, then, the parody incorporated elements from a previous era of French culture, but its function was to contrast them; that is, *La Singerie* incorporated French exoticism in order to separate itself from this past, much as the 1931 Colonial Exposition strove to overcome the 'excessive' and 'artificial' exoticism of French colonialism's history.

If the music-hall helped prompt a 'thrust towards an international subculture, product of a deculturation-acculturation process, which soon overtook the whole of the Western world,' then the syncretism of *La Singerie* can be seen as the aesthetic counterpoint to the attitudes and anxieties about the colonial project that shaped the 1931 Exhibition (Klein 1985: 182). *La Singerie* layered past and present visions of French colonialism and images of the colonial subject: the primitive exotic versus the primitive 'civilized' – as encapsulated in the critical commentary on the 'old' versus the 'new' Baker. The 'new' Joséphine functioned as antiphrasis against colonialism's former exoticism – and against her former exoticism – but this irony also functioned as an 'evalu-

ative strategy,' asking for the viewer's own interpretation of exoticism itself (Hutcheon 1985: 53). In critic Robert Kemp's interpretation of *La Singerie*, for instance, the 'new' Baker erased the primitivism of jazz and answered the needs of the modern age:

Naturally, they will announce immediately that this second Joséphine, a shade lighter, with supple limbs, is not worth as much as the first Joséphine, la Venus noire, with arched low back, who went around on all fours, sticking out her rear end, and glistening with sweat. Don't you believe it. [...] It can be granted that it was not indispensable that Joséphine Baker appear on pointe. [...] But what exquisite sensibility she has! She understood that the time for the wild movements of rag-time and erotic choreography had passed [...]. It is precisely what our calm souls need. The art of Joséphine Baker emerges out of the era of fervor and disorder. (1932: n.p.)

The tableau invited the viewer to see the 'wild' and 'erotic' past of exoticism as antiquated and decadent. In a manner similar to the 1931 Exposition, the French colonies and the French metropolis were held in tension not only in the setting of *La Singerie de XVIII Siècle*, but also in Baker's own performing body. Framed against both the excessiveness and vulgarity of yesterday's exoticism and her own previous *sauvage* identity, Baker's performance of the classical ballerina literally embodied the integration of the 'primitive' with, as Fréjaville put it, 'the most civilized dance,' playing out the new vision of French colonialism as a productive civilizing

force. It is fitting, in this sense, that Baker was named Queen of the 1931 Colonial Exposition, before protests that she was neither French nor African arose (Rose 1989: 23; see also Kraut 2003: 439).

Hutcheon (using Bakhtin's terminology) writes that parody can be both 'centripetal [...] a homogenizing, hierarchizing influence' and a 'centrifugal, de-normatizing one' (1985: 76). In *La Singerie*, the centripetal force of the parody drew together the French cultural past, consolidating its legacy and authority. Baker's own hybridity, the play between the former and the new Joséphine that underscored the entire revue but was especially crystallized in *La Singerie*, drove this effect, which reified the creative power of Parisian civilization and the French empire as its global agent. However, this new Joséphine also had centrifugal potential. Baker's mastery of classical ballet, the authorized form, could scatter the terms of recognition upon which cultural, aesthetic, and racial codes were based.

With her move to the Casino de Paris, Baker began private voice and dance lessons, which, as Jules-Rosette suggests, played an important role in transforming Baker's image from savage to sophisticated (2006: 16). Baker's newly-found technical prowess became a launching pad from which Baker could render genre permeable and malleable, reinventing not only her own identity but also the classical aesthetic itself. Her last ballet parody differs from the previous two, as it no longer signals the changing relationship of modernism or colonialism to its primitive Other, but instead becomes the means through which Baker gained access to the dominant system of

representation and challenged its rules.¹⁰

BAKER AND BALLET: PARODIC INTERVENTIONS

If the 1930s indeed marked a turning point for Baker, one in which she began to exercise greater control over her public image and increasingly found ways to negotiate and challenge racial stereotypes, parody was a key means of resistance for her. Of course, Baker had always utilized parody, even as early as her American debut in *Shuffle Along*, in which she stepped out of the chorus line and improvised her own comic routine. Crossing her eyes, making faces, or suddenly breaking into a laughing smile became quintessential Baker motifs that she regularly inserted to undercut the stereotypical subtexts of her performances. But as she matured as an artist in Paris, Baker created her own hybrid form that intervened in the opposition of an idealized white femininity to a savage black one – or as she put it herself, the way dancing 'which practiced by a white woman is moral and by a black woman transgresses' (qtd. in Rose 1989: 134).

A film clip shows Baker dancing a balletic *pas de deux* with an anonymous male partner. A brief segment of the film, the only extant footage of Baker dancing on pointe, appeared in the 1986 British documentary *Chasing a Rainbow: The Life of Josephine Baker*, which apparently supplied the source material for several discussions of Baker and ballet.¹¹ But details on the source, context, date, or the identity of Baker's partner remained absent from the existing scholarship on this fleeting image of Baker's ballet dancing. In January 2006, I located this film in its entirety at the Gaumont-Pathe Archives in Paris. It

depicts a *Bal des Petits Tits Blancs*, an annual Paris charity event, and includes part of 'an unpublished dance by Josephine Baker.' But I was still unable to date the film or to identify the male dancer until I located Italian professor Marco Travaglini, whose biography of his uncle, Alberto Spadolini, details his brief stint as Baker's dance partner at the Casino de Paris and on tour in the early 1930s.

Spadolini was an Italian painter who worked with Anton Giulio Bragaglia's Teatro degli Indipendenti in Rome. Virtually nothing was known about Spadolini's other artistic life as a dancer until after his death. In 1978, Travaglini found a box in his uncle's attic filled with photos, clippings, articles, and other documents of his appearances at the Casino and on tour in France, Europe, and the United States. Spadolini's dance career began while painting a dance hall in Villefranche-sur-Mer for Paul Colin. On a work break, the painter began to dance to the sounds of the orchestra rehearsing and when Colin saw him, he promptly hired him for one of his spectacles. In 1932, Henry Varna and Baker saw Spadolini dance at the Casino de Monte-Carlo and invited him to dance with Baker in *La Joie de Paris* (Simonari 2006; Travaglini 2006b: 8). Spadolini was Baker's dance partner from 1932-1935. When I sent the clip to Travaglini, he confirmed that it was indeed his uncle dancing with Baker. The artist's strong profile, smile, and physique are clear in the film, and the anonymous male dancer is finally identified as Alberto Spadolini.

Spadolini's identity and his style of dancing help narrow the time period of this previously undated film. His movements clearly reflect training in

ballet and are performed with a consistently light, lifted quality that contrasts earlier descriptions of his 'savage dancing.' Bragaglia writes that Spadolini was unversed in the academic technique when he began dancing, and began ballet lessons with Alexandre Volinine, a dancer with the Ballets Russes and partner to Anna Pavlova, two or three years after he started dancing in 1932 (Travaglini 2006a).¹² Spadolini and Baker's partnership ended in 1935 after Baker reportedly took offense that the London press praised Spadolini but criticized her, and the two never danced together again (Simonari 2006). Thus, the duet must have been filmed sometime between 1934, when Spadolini began ballet lessons, and 1935, when his partnership with Baker ended.

In the duet, Spadolini's costume – tights, boots, a tall hat, and a cape – and the steps he performs – *pas de bourrée*, *pas de basque*, *brisé*, and *ballonné* – are derived from the classical tradition. His footwork is quick and light, skimming across the floor in a detailed rhythm. Volinine was famous for his virtuosic sequences of beats, and, as a teacher, was known for increasing his students' elevation in jumps. Spadolini's intricate footwork and nimble *balon* likely point to his teacher's influence. In contrast, Baker's costume is not wholly classical, but rather combines an elegant ball gown with pointe shoes, and her movements blend balletic with jazz steps and contrasting qualities of light gracefulness with strenuous, active physicality. As she glides across the stage with light prancing steps on pointe, holding her skirt up to show off her shoes, she does not lift up and away from gravity, but rather bends her knees, accentuating the lifting of each foot from the ground, as if the ballerina's flutter-

ing string of bourrées were slowed down, stretched out, turned-in, and transformed qualitatively from floating to strutting. Similarly, Baker's pointe work does not replicate the weightless effortlessness and lyrical smoothness of ballet, but instead is syncopated, grounded, and vigorous. She prances in a large circle and then quickly makes a transition into a rendition of 'trucking,' an African American vernacular step, on the tips of her toes. She leans forward slightly at the waist, breaking the long vertical line of the classical body. She does not hold her torso still and upright, but rather lets movement ripple up through her spine, reverberating in a fluid bobbing motion in her neck.

The disparity in the two dancers' styles in the clip suggests that the duet was not the work of a single choreographer.¹³ Whereas Baker combines ballet and jazz vocabularies, Spadolini adheres to the classical tradition. Moreover, both Baker and Spadolini had a history of independent working habits. Travaglini asserts that Spadolini choreographed his own dances (2006a), and Spadolini claimed he never danced the same dance twice (Etienne 1933: n.p.). In this regard, he is much like Baker, who, according to Jean-Claude Baker, also preferred to improvise on stage, and would constantly change the material that others choreographed for her. It is likely, therefore, that Spadolini and Baker each choreographed their own individual steps in this dance, collaborating to coordinate their spatial patterns and to create partnering, such as the music-hall lift at the end of the duet.¹⁴

Their stylistic discrepancy also points to Spadolini and Baker's changing aesthetic interests. In the 1950s Spadolini created a series of paintings of

ballerinas whose gentle and reflective *port de bras* and *épaulement* sharply contrast the passionate, athletic, and partially nude dances he performed and saw in the musical revues. Spadolini's dancing in this *pas de deux* foreshadows his later painterly interest in classical themes and aesthetics. Baker, on the other hand, creates an athletic hybridization of ballet and African American dance that simultaneously incorporates and breaks with the classical tradition.

In the film, Baker puts into motion a spinal motif that she had used in photographs and publicity images for at least a decade prior. A photograph taken of Baker soon after she arrived in Paris in 1925 shows her on the roof of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées during rehearsals for *La Revue nègre*.¹⁵ She stands in profile next to a railing, her legs rotated outwards with her toes facing away from one another at a ninety-degree angle and her bent knees creating a diamond shape between her legs. Baker's lower back is pronouncedly arched so that her rear end protrudes behind her, and she faces the camera with her eyes crossed and a silly expression on her face. Petrine Archer-Straw interprets this photograph as illustrating Baker's consent to colonialist demands and desires; in her reading, Baker complies with white culture's expectations by '[t]wisting her body into a pose that looks more animal than human, [and crossing] her eyes in stupefied mock innocence' (2000: 94). She argues that because Baker's pose echoes the way Sarah Baartman, a South African woman known as the 'Hottentot Venus,' was posed in medical spectacles of the early 1800s, it reproduces colonialist stereotypes of the black female buttocks as a sign of excessive sexuality (ibid: 122). This interpretation, however, lacks a close

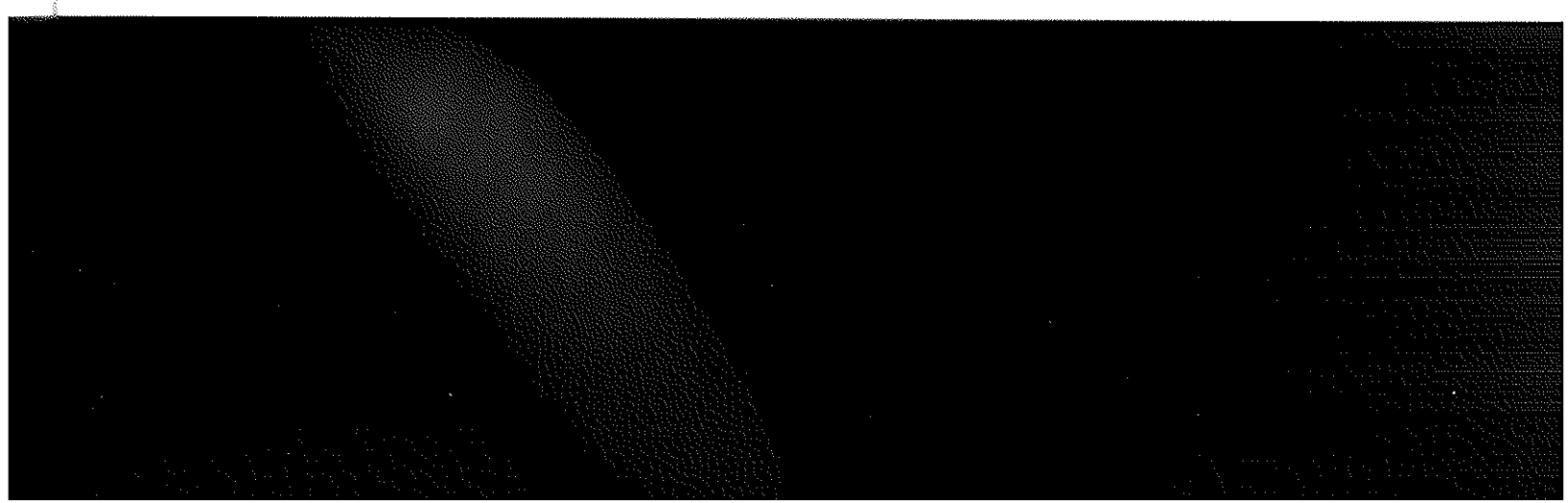
analysis of Baker's movement – not just position – in the image. If placed alongside a later photograph featuring Baker in the same pose in a different context, another reading emerges.

In this second photo, taken when she was in rehearsal for *La Joie de Paris*, Baker's jazzy demi-plié on pointe forecasts the blending of 'primitive' and 'classical' values in *La Singerie de XVIII Siècle*.

Inside the more overt classical signifiers in this later photo, the plié takes on a doubled meaning, simultaneously referring to ballet vocabulary and to the African American Charleston.¹⁶ This mixture of Africanist and Europeanist styles in Baker's movement also appears in the 1925 photo, taken on the roof of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées – known as 'the home of grand ballet and of the highest artistic productions generally' – on the eve of her debut in *La Revue nègre*, which was poised to be a clash between the classical ideal and jazz, its Africanist Other.¹⁷ That Parisians understood it as such can be read in Paul Colin's autobiography, in which he described that the neoclassical frescos and architecture of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées 'seemed to stiffen at the sight of this black tumulte. Angels and muses flinched in indignation. Celestial harpists reacted in visible horror to the clattering sound of tap shoes' (qtd. in Dalton and Gates 1998: 920). In this light, Baker's rooftop pose can be read as a critical commentary on the cultural and aesthetic binaries – ballet/jazz, European/African, black/white – that were continually held in tension in the discourses surrounding her performances.

Further, Baker's pose in these photos also dia-

logues with racial discourses that circulate in aesthetic standards. In ballet, the buttocks are deliberately minimized so as not to disturb the long, vertical alignment of the classical body. Dixon Gottschild states that this mandate to diminish the size of the rear end affects all female bodies, regardless of race; however, she argues that the protrusion of the buttocks is always 'seen as a black attribute, even when it is attached to a white dancing body' (2003: 185). Such distinctions were not lost on Baker's public; recall that Kemp used similar imagery to distinguish between 'the first Josephine [...] with arched low back [...] sticking out her rear end' and the more refined 'second Josephine' who danced on pointe in *La Singerie*. In both racist and aesthetic discourses, the protruding rear end is a sign of excess, a 'too much' that must be shorn away by processes of evolution, civilization, or corporeal discipline. How Baker positions her lower spine in these images – a motif she repeats in her *pas de deux* with Spadolini – is important to understanding her classical mimesis as parody, which, in Hutcheon's terms, 'in its ironic trans-contextualization and inversion, is repetition with a difference' (1985: 32). The critical difference between the classical ballerina and Baker's parodic copy is concentrated in her arching lumbar vertebrae. While on one level, Baker's exaggerated pelvic tilt, emphasizing the buttocks, appears complicit with colonialist fantasies of the native body, on another, it purposefully re-writes an Africanist discourse into the classical code. Baker's movement rejects the value that ballet (as well as many Europeanist dance forms) places on the long, unbroken vertical axis of the body and the cohesive, stable line of the torso. Instead, her spine moves with the curvilinear aesthetic sense that Kariamu Welsh



Asante has described as a principle of the African tradition (2001: 146). This rewriting becomes even more significant when taking into account that the trope of classical verticality has been used to justify racial and class difference since antiquity (Banes 2000: 268).¹⁸ In essence, Baker's 'twisting' of her body in this pose does not reify, but rather mocks cultural judgments such as 'more animal than human,' intervening in the ancient process by which physiognomy signifies socio-political and moral hierarchies.

In the duet, Baker puts these strategies into motion. Her parody plays a game of 'I am/I am not' that revised the earlier representations of her as the 'classical' dancer. The significant difference between this parody and previous ones is that here, the classical idiom is not dominant. Spadolini performs the only classical vocabulary in the duet; in Baker's dancing, ballet is largely subsumed into jazz, the pointe shoes becoming one of the few clear remaining traces of the classical. The classical is thus turned into the object of appropriation, put in the service of an African American vernacular, inverting Purist as well as colonialist agendas. Baker's ballet parody remade the classical signifiers into a hybrid form that created an alternative representation of the black female dancing body and brought black knowledges, previously disparaged and denied, to bear on a form previously coded classical, high, and white.^{19 20}

CONCLUSION: THE AESTHETIC LINEAGE OF BAKER'S BALLET PARODY

All three of these ballet parodies were built on a particular mix of intertextual play and transcultural contact. However, in the last parody, the classical vocabulary that underpinned *La*

Singerie, and *Le Cygne Noir*? is largely absent from Baker's *pas de deux* with Spadolini. This distinguishes the last parody from its two predecessors and provides a glimpse of Baker's own work with ballet. While it is impossible to know what Baker's own response to the particular cross-cultural interactions that informed *Le Cygne Noir*? and *La Singerie* might have been, she makes clear in her 1927 autobiography that she was aware of what was at stake in such cultural appropriations, directly referencing the elisions of African American history and culture in modernist music and dance. She comments, 'The Europeans saw the Negroes dancing the Charleston. They invented another that hardly resembles the first' (1927: 89). And in another passage, she re-connects black music to the slave culture of the American South, writing,

To know the Negro songs – the real ones – it is necessary to go down to Mississippi on one of the paddleboats. It is evening, the Negroes stand still at the edge of the river and sing their songs, the old songs of the slaves, tender, sensual, monotonous – or in other times, ardent and brief, full of cries, full of gestures. The Europeans would like to impose rhythms cut from these songs, they do not understand that the songs cannot have any other rhythms than those of chance and place and blood, than that evening (ibid: 128).

Baker's recognition of the tension between black and white forms and the erasure of black culture in white aesthetic narratives is the key factor missing from previous accounts of her work with classical ballet. In response to a syncretism that

exploited black dance for an avant-garde renovation of the European tradition, or a renewed vision of imperial productivity, Baker's own incorporation of ballet developed according to a different intent. It injected an African American aesthetic into its European counterpart not to renovate the latter, but rather as an expression of dissidence against it. This practice continued the aesthetic tradition of the black vaudeville stage where Baker began her career.

For African American theatre artists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, performance techniques of imitation, inversion, and reversal offered a pragmatic means of negotiating and dissenting with racist meanings, representations, and politics in situations where overt resistance was disallowed or dangerous (Krasner 1997: 5-12). It was as a young performer on this stage that Baker learned to use dance and movement as a way to expose, critique, and refuse racist codes and conventions. The classical parodies she performed in Paris were indebted to the tradition and strategies of early African American theatre, where the blending of white and black cultural forms often worked to destabilize the authority of the dominant culture.²¹ Dance historians have traditionally focused on how the incorporation of black, ethnic, or folk forms into their white counterparts transformed the latter, but much less investigation has been undertaken of this 'other' syncretism, in which marginalized subjects manipulate the rules and codes of the dominant system to both authorize and transgress.

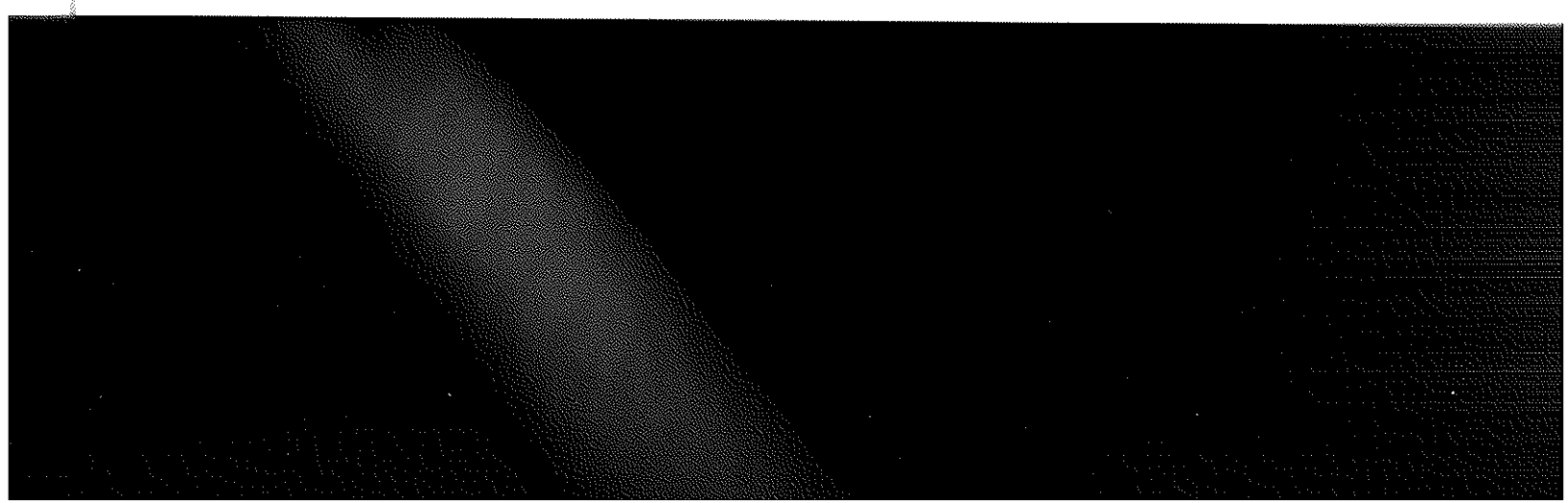
This historical lineage is important because it situates Baker's work with ballet as part of a black performance aesthetic rather than merely a

corollary to a white one. By holding the classical body in tension against its African American other, Baker exposed the classical as not a 'pure' form, but rather a contingent and codependent one. Her ballet parody mocked the authority and stability of the cultural discriminations that persisted around her life and work; indeed, her parody mocked the very notion of the classical itself. We can now see Baker's balletic intertext from a different perspective: neither in its filial relation to Balanchine's neoclassicism nor as a footnote to it, but rather as a different aesthetic approach that continued and developed a history of African American engagement with and resistance to dominant forms and discourses.

NOTES

¹ See O'Connor 1988: 118; Wood 2002: 220-221, 239-240; Baner 1994: 58. Most recently, Beth Genné argues there 'is fairly conclusive evidence' that Balanchine taught ballet to Baker, noting that biographers O'Connor and Wood concur on this point (2005: 36-37). Yet neither O'Connor nor Wood provides historical references that support the supposition that Baker studied with Balanchine, and Baker, for her part, does not mention Balanchine in any of her biographies. Genné's attempt to track down sources for the claim produced the following email response from O'Connor: 'I do remember that the reference to Baker having informal lessons with Balanchine appeared in more than one published source – probably magazine articles – which was why I felt justified in using it. [...] although I still have a lot of my notes, they are not in any particular order now and difficult to get at' (qtd. in *ibid.*: 53, n.10). O'Connor's supposition has provided the sole source material for subsequent writers; however, we perhaps need to question the assumption that Baker's ballet performances would have required and originated with vigorous training by a skilled 'master'.

² In this regard, I am indebted to Tripp Evan's comments about the archive as a lens through which the picture



- must be reconstructed, rather than a clearly readable text when one is examining subjects who fall outside of the dominant history ('Out in the Archives: Experience and Theory in Queer Archival Work' (Roundtable discussion), Modernist Studies Association conference, Doubletree Hotel, Tulsa, OK, 20 October, 2006.
- 3 I thank Jean-Claude Baker for sending me a copy of the performance billing for *La Revue nègre* at the Théâtre de l'Etoile, which lists the Black Swan parody among the principal tableaux.
 - 4 Hudgins told this story to Jean-Claude Baker. Author's phone interview with Jean-Claude Baker, Fort Worth, TX, 24 July 2006.
 - 5 According to Jean-Claude Baker, Marcel Sauvage, co-author of Baker's 1927 autobiography, told him the following anecdote: Sauvage and his friend, André Levinson, disagreed whether Baker was a truly talented dancer, as in Sauvage's view, or 'a savage,' as in Levinson's. To settle the argument, the two planned a dance contest between Baker and one of the leading dancers of the Paris Opéra. Without any prior training, but rather through imitation, Baker performed a classical dance on *pointe* that was 'absolutely flawless,' leading Levinson to change his mind about her talents. Interview with Jean-Claude Baker, 24 July 2006.
 - 6 On changes in the performance style of Ballets Russes dancers in the 1920s, see Garafola 1998: 338; also see Lynn Garafola, 'The Making of Ballet Modernism,' *Dance Research Journal* 20:2 (Winter 1988): 27-28.
 - 7 Several writers have analyzed Baker's manipulation of normative images and representations as part of her strategic evasion of colonial and racist power. See, for example, Brenda Dixon Gottschild 2003: 154-165; Bennetta Jules-Rosette 2000; Kraut 2003; and also Nancy Pauline Nenno, 'Masquerade: Woman Nature Modernity,' *diss., U of CA, Berkeley*, 1996, 125; Wendy Martin, "'Remembering the Jungle": Josephine Baker and Modernist Parody,' *Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*, eds. Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995): 310-325; Michael Borshuk, 'An Intelligence of the Body: Disruptive Parody through Dance in the Early Performances of Josephine Baker,' *Embodying Liberation: The Black Body in American Dance*, eds. Dorothea Fischer-Hornung and Alison D. Goeller (Hamburg: Lit Verlag Munster, 2001): 41-57; Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993): 69; André Lepecki, 'The Melancholic Influence of the Postcolonial Spectral: Vera Mantero Summoning Josephine Baker,' *Blackening Europe: The African-American Presence*, ed. Heike Raphael-Hernandez (New York: Routledge, 2004): 136-138.
 - 8 In publicity photos by Studio Piaz, Baker is pictured dressed in a full tuxedo and top hat, presumably depicting this tableau, which was titled *L'Âme de Jazz*. Yet critical reviews describe a 'half nude' Baker in this scene who directs a 'colored jazz band.' The fact that Baker often used the Studio Piaz photo for publicity, despite its contrast with the actual performance, points to the way in which her appearances at the Casino were used to shed her *Revue nègre* image and boost her emerging image as a glamorous diva, as well as her own accruing agency over her public image in the 1930s.
 - 9 Baker credits a Russian ballerina, Madame Vromska, in her 1977 autobiography, as well as an unnamed ballet master whom subsequent writers have suggested may have been Balanchine. See note 1.
 - 10 This idea draws on Moe Meyer's account of parody, in which the 'original [...] is the signifier of dominant presence' and parody thus becomes the means through which the marginalized subject can enter the dominant discourse and gain access to the system of representation. See his Introduction to *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*. (London: Routledge, 1994): 11.
 - 11 See, for example, Genné 2005: 37-38; O'Connor 1988: 118; and Wood 2002: 225 (Wood incorrectly attributes this clip to the 1932 '*La Joie de Paris*'). Also in Mindy Aloff, 'Jazz Age Princess,' *Dance Magazine* July 1989: 34; and Margo Jefferson, 'Josephine Baker: The Dancer,' *Dance Ink* Dec. 1990: 31. A segment of the footage is shown in *Chasing a Rainbow: The Life of Josephine Baker*, narr. Olivier Todd, dir. Christopher Ralling, Csaky, 1986.
 - 12 In Anton Giulio Bragaglia, *Danze popolari italiane*, Rome:

- Enal, 1951.
- 13 Beth Genné speculates that this clip features George Balanchine's choreography for Baker, and that it is possibly Balanchine himself who partners her (2005: 37-38). However, the male dancer is Alberto Spadolini; additionally, if I am correct in dating the clip to 1934 at the earliest, based on Spadolini's history with ballet, Balanchine would have already been in the United States. Moreover, Baker's style in this clip is not consistent with Balanchine's method of incorporating jazz into ballet, which, as Dixon Gottschild has argued, drew the stylistic and energetic qualities of African American dance into ballet whilst retaining the classical aesthetic (1996: 60). In contrast, Baker's dance inverts this process of appropriation, subsuming the classical into jazz.
 - 14 When Beth Genné showed the film clip to Frederick Franklin, who danced with Baker in the 1930s, he told her that this jumping lift was common to 1930s music-hall repertory. See Genné 2005: 54, n.16.
 - 15 This photo is reprinted in Archer-Straw 2000: 95; O'Connor 1988: 27; and Rose 1989: 114b
 - 16 I thank Beth Genné for pointing out the way in which this knee bend also references the beginning of the Charleston movement.
 - 17 'Paris Notes, Troubles of the Opera' *The Dancing Times* April 1921: 567. On the meaning of the architecture and design of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in early twentieth-century Paris, also see Blake 1999: 96 and Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989) 16-21.
 - 18 Bernard Williams points out the relation between postural verticality and slavery in ancient Greece, citing Aristotle's claim that 'nature aims to make the bodies of free men differ from those of slaves, that latter adapted in strength to necessary employment, the former upright and not suited to such work' (qtd. in Banes 2000: 268). See 'Necessary Identities,' in *Subjugation and Bondage: Critical Essays on Slavery and Social Philosophy*, ed. Tommy L. Lott (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998): 10-11.
 - 19 This thought is indebted to Homi Bhabha's description of the hybrid subject, who 'reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal so that other "denied" knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of authority.' See Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. (New York: Routledge, 1994): 162.
 - 20 Marion Smith proposes that the idea of the 'ballet blanc' did not exist until the twentieth century, and was created in part by Levinson's writings on Marie Taglioni and the Romantic ballet, which stripped the 'colorful, heterodoxical' elements of the form – as well as the male dancer – from the record ('The Disappearing Danseur,' Society of Dance History Scholars Conference, The Banff Centre, Banff, Canada, 18 June 2006). I would add that Levinson's writings on Negro dance of the period, in which he struggled to theoretically distinguish ballet from jazz, were an important part of his efforts to invent a 'white ballet.' If the discourse of a white, feminized ballet did indeed emerge around and in contrast to Baker, jazz, and *l'art nègre*, her parodies of that discourse become all the more meaningful.
 - 21 The blending of white and black theatrical forms has a complex history on the African American stage that is beyond the limits of this article, but two brief examples will illustrate the relationship of such a lineage to Baker's ballet parodies. In the 1898 *A Trip to Coontown*, Bob Cole's whiteface performance incorporated but inverted minstrel representations, providing a forum for his song 'No Coons Allowed!' that mocked the effect of Jim Crow laws on black Americans (Krasner 1997: 31-33). Noble Sissle described *A Trip to Coontown* as 'an operetta based on European models,' and Cole's success may have influenced Sissle's attempt in *Shuffle Along* to blend white and black theatrical forms in order to embed progressive representations of African Americans and serious commentary on black rights inside of its otherwise conventional minstrel characters and racial humor [Sissle qtd. in Marshall and Jean Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (New York: Da Capo, 1994): 119]. For an analysis of *Shuffle Along*, see David Krasner, *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theatre, Drama, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance 1910-1927* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan,

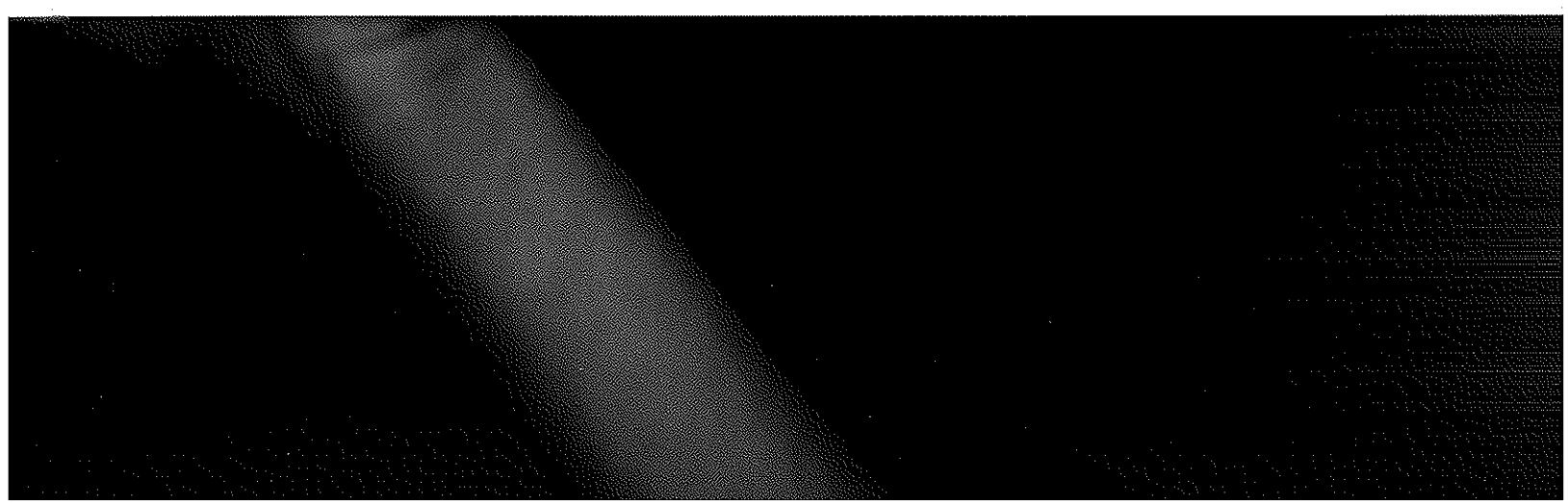
2002): 239-265.

Cole was a former performer with Black Patti's Troubadours, a company formed by the classically trained opera singer Matilda Sissieretta Jones, nicknamed 'Black Patti' in comparison to opera star Adelina Patti. In 1896, Jones left the concert stage (where, as a black classical singer, she was advertised as a rarity to white audiences) to form Black Patti's Troubadours, an all-black company that only appeared in African American venues. [See John Graziano, 'The Early Life and Career of the "Black Patti": The Odyssey of an African American Singer in the Late Nineteenth Century,' *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 53:3 (Autumn 2000): 543-596]. Along with a mix of specialty acts such as comic dancing, the cakewalk, a Buck-dancing contest, and minstrel elements, the Troubadours' shows also featured an 'Operatic Kaleidoscope,' in which Jones performed selections from operas with the entire cast, none of whom shared her classical training or background. As Ida Forsythe, a dancer and singer with the company, remembers, 'We all stood in a row behind [Jones] and yelled our heads off, belting out our own version of how each opera should go, and I used to think the sound was wonderful' (qtd. in Stearns 1994: 78). True to its name, the 'Operatic Kaleidoscope' fractured the classical harmony and authority of the form, as opera was removed from its high, European context and woven into the black vaudeville variety show as merely one more act, interspersed amongst African American dances and parodies of racial stereotypes. One could argue that Baker's parody of the classical ballerina did similar cultural work.

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