



DISCOURSES IN DANCE

VOLUME 4 / ISSUE 2 / 2008
editors ramsay burt and susan leigh foster

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

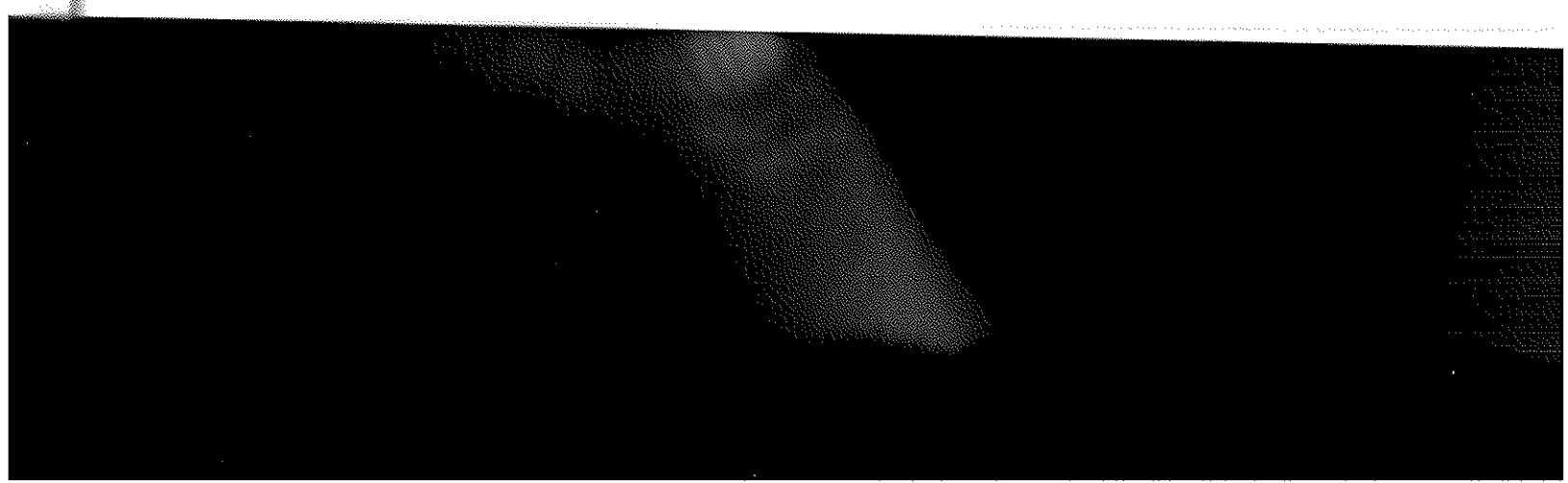
Andrea Harris

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 racialist 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 unremitting 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; Leger 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

cohabit 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 reworked her hybrid dance form into a means through which to engage and negotiate racial and cultural discourses.