

# Critical cosmopolitans commandeer the Parade

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## Critical Cosmopolitans Commandeer the Parade

*Nikolas Febr*

*“The only purpose in preserving—making replicable—sounds is that they mean something; and their meaning helps mediate the social and cultural order in which they are born.”*

—Richard D. Leppert<sup>1</sup>

Music, the proverbially abstract art, is notorious for its propensity to elicit mutually contradictory responses from different listeners. These offer fascinating insight into music’s social meanings and functions. If musical productions that elicit particularly contradictory responses occupy one possible category of music reception, a separate category might be defined around performances of works that produce a relatively unified response among audiences, but a response that undergoes a reversal in the process of being represented and re-presented over time. Such is the case with the ballet *Parade* by Jean Cocteau, Pablo Picasso, Erik Satie, and Léonide Massine, greeted with general disgust at its 1917 premiere, awarded a degree of success in subsequent stagings as early as 1920, and now received as one of the great manifestations of avant-garde modernism. What is the meaning of this ballet, and what has brought about such change in its reception? *Parade* is a difficult work with which to approach such a discussion, due to the distracting mass of conflicting details around its conception and

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<sup>1</sup> Richard D. Leppert, *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 11.

production. But such difficulty is worth overcoming, for this piece occupies a pivotal position in art history. *Parade* spawned abstract and realist ballet, featured prominently in the movement toward a new and anti-German national voice for French music, and provided a strikingly new stage for the latest visual art, which increased modernism's visibility and impact upon other art forms.

The disgust with which *Parade* was greeted in 1917 was due primarily to the unprecedented ways in which it brought popular and street entertainment into the domain of high art. Many have proposed that the public's rejection of the work was in response to its embrace of avant-garde cubist techniques, but contemporary accounts reveal the importance of this to be only secondary.<sup>2</sup> The wartime Parisian public went to the ballet expecting to find lavish sets, illustrious dancing, and regal music, luxuries that might transport them from the harsh realities of war. Instead, they encountered a slender story line taken from the fairground; costumes that were alternately cubist collage and imitations of the garb of such popular figures as magicians and acrobats; and modest, unassertive music. Rather than transporting the audience into an exotic dreamland, these elements left them disappointingly in the humdrum of Paris. Some analysts proclaim that the presence of these popular elements, articulated in what they consider a repetitive, heartless manner, causes *Parade* to simply

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<sup>2</sup> Deborah Menaker Rothschild, *Picasso's Parade: From Street to Stage* (London: Sotheby's, 1991), 30.

lack all meaning whatsoever,<sup>3</sup> but I argue that in refuting so many artistic conventions and in upsetting not only the public but also Paris's artistic and intellectual communities, all of this conspicuously at the height of the First World War, this ballet exerts a remarkable depth of significance in radical ways. In taking a tour through the meaning of *Parade*, I shall follow one particular dialogue, that of "critical cosmopolitanism", using its principles to inform and illustrate how the authors of *Parade* comment upon society and the social order. In this project, the artists and their decisions are thus portrayed as critical cosmopolitans who "commandeer" the "parade" (i.e., the continual, ritual, and glamorous passing by) of traditional ballet.

In the intentions of its creators and in the function of the ballet upon its audience, *Parade* exhibits the main traits of critical cosmopolitanism. In *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation*, Rebecca L. Walkowitz treats modernism, cosmopolitanism, and critical cosmopolitanism within the context of British novels of the early and late twentieth century. Of simple cosmopolitanism, she emphasizes not only transnational community allegiance at the expense of local or national ties, multiple or flexible attachments, and a valuing of social deviance, consumer culture, and urban mobility, but also that being cosmopolitan "means engaging in an intellectual program rather

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Daniel Albright, "Postmodern Interpretations of Satie's *Parade*," *Canadian University Music Review* 22 (2001): 22-38.

than inhabiting a cultural position.”<sup>4</sup> This is to say that artists exhibit cosmopolitanism when they intentionally engage in a unity-destabilizing project that has meaningful outcomes, motivations, and a course of action. *Parade* exemplifies this principle, for Jean Cocteau specifically sought to make the ballet shocking, Erik Satie employed a radical compositional approach that was recognized in his designation as “spiritual father” for groups advocating a new French voice based on simplicity and humour, Picasso spearheaded a transnational movement that revolutionized painting in futuristic and at times vulgar ways, and Massine’s choreography moved in diametrical opposition to the classical ballet principles he had learned as a student at Moscow’s Bolshoi Theatre.

*Parade* also fits Walkowitz’s description of “critical” cosmopolitanism, which concerns self-reflection, aversion to heroic tones of appropriation and progress, and a suspicion of epistemological privilege,<sup>5</sup> terms that betray their origin in post-colonial experience with its sensitivity to the excesses and moral dilemmas resulting from policies of domination. In creating *Parade*, the authors constantly revised and reshaped their ideas through processes of self-reflection and through vigorous disagreement and competition, as Cocteau, Picasso, and Satie each attempted to advance his own ideas. When heroic tones of exoticism might have been expected, *Parade* instead concerns a popular milieu and popular

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<sup>4</sup> Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 9,16.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

characters. Furthermore, it confuses matters of ranking and power through the portrayal of Chinese and American acts within a French *parade* mapped onto the bodies of Russian dancers. To investigate these themes of representation further, let us examine two specific portions of the work, the acts of the Chinese Conjuror and the Little American Girl.

In “*Prestidigitateur chinois*,” the authors of *Parade* portray a parody of a specific “Chinese” conjurer and thus raise interesting interpretational questions. The Chinese Conjuror (see Figure 1) takes the stage outfitted in a resplendent robe in red, yellow, black, and white, which nearly duplicates the actual costume worn by the most prominent “Chinese” conjurer on the international stage, the American Chung Ling Soo (William Ellsworth Robinson – See Figure 2). Deborah Menaker Rothschild highlights how Soo’s costume was different than that of most conjurers, who wore floor-length robes, and how Soo and Picasso’s conjurer both employed waist-length silk jackets with elemental imagery in red and yellow over calf-length trousers, a peaked cap, white stockings, black slippers, and a single long black queue.<sup>6</sup> Soo himself was an imitator of the first conjurer to bring magic to prominence on vaudeville stages, the genuine Chinese Ching Ling Foo (Chee Ling Qua). Soo copied Foo’s shaved forehead, long queue, Chinese costume, many of his tricks, and offstage habits like speaking through an interpreter. When Foo angrily challenged Soo to a conjuring face-off, Soo won and Foo

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<sup>6</sup> Rothschild, *Picasso’s Parade*, 101.

**Figure 1: Léonide Massine's original costume for the Chinese Conjuror in *Parade*.<sup>7</sup>**



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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

Figure 2: Poster for Chung Ling Soo.<sup>8</sup>



returned to China.<sup>9</sup> It may be simply that Soo was the better showman and the more skilled illusionist, but

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

for an American to be named a better “Chinese” conjurer than the original Chinese star raises interesting questions about authenticity. Could Soo also have been preferred because, as a Westerner, the type of allure and dazzle that Western audiences most valued may have come more easily to him than to Foo?

*Parade*'s Chinese conjurer is wrapped within so many identity folds that he constitutes a seamless personification of critical cosmopolitanism: *Parade*'s conjurer parodies an American conjurer imitating a Chinese conjurer, and this is further twisted by being mapped onto the body of a Russian dancer. In addition, while the American Manager introduces the Little American Girl, it is the *French* Manager who introduces the Chinese Conjurer. What does this say about representation and domination? Critical cosmopolitanism involves the “scepticism about the generalizations of collective agency, about political commitments defined by national culture, and about efforts to specify and fix national characteristics,”<sup>10</sup> just as this act portrays such scepticism and multiple viewpoints. Massine, who was not only choreographer but also dancer of the *Prestidigitateur chinois* and therefore the embodiment of these layers of identity, represents the super-modern, transnational artist. The Chinese Conjurer is not the only character who poses important challenges in representation and potential

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 76. It is interesting that this face-off occurred in real life, for one might expect to encounter such a story *within* an unorthodox work of art like *Parade*, not in the historical record surrounding it.

<sup>10</sup> Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style*, 8.

meaning; the next character to take the stage, the Little American Girl, poses similar questions.

*Parade's* Little American Girl is a character constructed from images about America that Cocteau and Picasso learned from silent films and American music-hall pantomimes. The popular film serials *The Perils of Pauline* and the *Exploits of Elaine* featuring Pearl White were released in France by Pathé Studios from 1913 to 1916. They portrayed a woman in places of thrilling danger, such as being enmeshed in problems with detectives or Indians, airplane misadventures, car accidents, train wrecks, and fires at sea.<sup>11</sup> A second model for the Little American Girl came from Mary Pickford, "America's Sweetheart," who inspired Cocteau by her "girlish innocence in cork-screw curls, flounced dresses, and big bows."<sup>12</sup> It is remarkable that Cocteau chose a female character to represent America, but the choice is understandable when we consider that a precedent had been set by Pearl White, who had reached great fame in France, and the fact that seeing a woman portray such incidents as steamships sinking and playing cowboys and Indians would impart a greater impression of freedom than if a man were portrayed in the same predicaments. *Parade's* only solo female character is surrounded in the ballet by two domineering managers, a comical horse, a magician, and a pair of acrobats.<sup>13</sup> Cocteau's

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<sup>11</sup> Rothschild, *Picasso's Parade*, 81.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>13</sup> To clarify the structure: The three acts are I. The Chinese Conjuror, II. The Little American Girl, and III. The Acrobats. Each act is preceded by an introduction by a manager, the French manager introduces the conjurer, the American manager intro-

choice of employing only one female character<sup>14</sup> and in having her portray an “innocent” little girl reflects not only the contemporary status of women in French society, but also the lack of esteem for women that Cocteau in particular held throughout his career.<sup>15</sup>

The Little American Girl poses representational questions similar to those posed by the Chinese Conjuror:

A well-known photograph [shows] Marie Chabelska in her nautical American school-girl costume, with flat, turned-out feet, with her legs bowed out in an innocent but extremely unladylike fashion, and with her forearms sticking forward, fingers curled and thumbs pointing right and left—a what-me-worry shrug with her whole body.<sup>16</sup>

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duces the American girl, and a comical horse (representing a manager) introduces the acrobats.

<sup>14</sup> In fact, the ballet’s première involved two female characters: the Little American Girl and a female acrobat, who shared the Acrobats’ section of *Parade* with a male acrobat. But this was not part of Cocteau’s original design: he ceded to Massine’s request for a female acrobat to accompany the male acrobat, to enable the choreographic possibilities offered by a pair of dancers.

<sup>15</sup> For an extended discussion of the ways in which women were restricted from full access to society, and from expression and control of themselves as autonomous individuals, see Janine M. Lanza, *From Wives to Widows in Early Modern Paris: Gender, Economy, and Law* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Albright, “Postmodern Interpretations,” 36.

**Figure 3: Marie Chabelska as the Little American Girl in *Parade*.**<sup>17</sup>



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<sup>17</sup> Rothschild, *Picasso's Parade*, 39.

Examining this photograph, one is struck not only by the features mentioned in the description of Chabelska's remarkable posture, but also by her eyes and facial expression, which betray that she is no naïve little girl. How might Chabelska's dreams as a successful Russian ballet artist recently sent to work in the West be tested in this role? How does her existence as a mature artist become sexualized by the audience when she is portrayed as a Little American Girl? Chabelska's role signifies beyond a buoyant portrayal of American exoticism, and beyond the discussions of critics who noted:

the incongruity of the exquisite Russian dancers performing slapstick turns...One English journalist who in 1919 observed the prima ballerina Tamara Karsavina in the role of the Little American Girl had this to say: "There are dozens of music-hall performers who can do this sort of thing better, because they are more to the impudent manner born. Of course there is a curious sort of interest in seeing Karsavina at all in such a part, just as there would be in seeing Mr. Asquith as Charlie Chaplin."<sup>18</sup>

Through its collage-like personification of freedom, the Little American Girl signifies a particular kind of modernism. In *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern*, Jayna Brown focuses on the topic of identity creation and recreation in the same time period as *Parade*. She discusses how "[contemporary] critics used the metaphor of the woman as city to describe the hypnotic, seductive, and

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<sup>18</sup> Ernest Newman quoted in Rothschild, *Picasso's Parade*, 95.

sometimes cruel power of the city, its phantasmagorical distractions and diversions, its promise to fulfill every sensual desire.”<sup>19</sup> The Little American Girl’s act portrays no characteristic “little girl” themes and has to do with America primarily inasmuch as it relates how America’s identity in the French imagination was firmly attached to technological progress, speed, and freedom from Old World traditions and problems. Indeed, most of her pantomimed actions concern technological novelties connected to the rhetoric of futuristic advancement inherent in American cities. Even as the American “founders of classic modern dance... organized their signature works around Orientalist imaginings of the native woman’s sensuous freedom,”<sup>20</sup> the French authors of *Parade* projected freedom through the representation of an American. Beyond quotidian freedoms such as employment opportunities and dress, the “New Woman” also suggested increased sexual freedoms. Cocteau recognizes this and points toward sexualizing the Little American Girl in writing that:

the United States evokes a girl more interested in her health than in her beauty. She swims, boxes, dances, leaps onto moving trains—all without knowing that she is beautiful. It is we who admire her face, on the screen—enormous, like the face of a goddess.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 168.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>21</sup> Jean Cocteau quoted in Francis Steegmuller, *Cocteau: A Biography* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970), 166.

The audience at *Parade's* premiere responded negatively to Chabelska's pantomimes in particular: Simone de Caillavet (daughter of playwright Gaston de Caillavet, and remembered in literary history for her connection to Marcel Proust) reproached *Parade*, saying that "the great republic who is France's friend deserves better than to be symbolized on the stage by an American girl who is certainly epileptic."<sup>22</sup>

Satie's music for the Little American Girl centres on an appropriation of a Tin Pan Alley song by Irving Berlin, "That Mysterious Rag," which was published in Paris by Édouard Salabert in 1913 as "Mystérieux Rag." Used in a revue at the Moulin Rouge by the dance team Manzano and La Moro, this song reached some level of popularity in France, and Satie no doubt came across it during his employment on popular stages.<sup>23</sup> Yet nobody seems to have noticed the many ways in which Satie's piece parallels and comments on Berlin until Joseph Machlis pointed this out in 1961.<sup>24</sup> Satie's altered melodic contours and more progressive harmonies may have kept his first audiences from noticing the parallel to a specific piece known in France, even if people certainly recognized that Satie's score contains a significant ragtime influence.

Satie's appropriation of the Berlin tune is different from other instances of musical appropriation in this period, such as Milhaud's use of jazz in *La Création du*

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<sup>22</sup> Francis Steegmuller, *Cocteau*, 187.

<sup>23</sup> Steven Moore Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian: From Cabaret to Concert Hall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 477-478.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Machlis, *Introduction to Contemporary Music* (New York: Norton, 1961), 215.

*monde* (which was inspired by *Parade*) and Delage's use of Hindu music in *Quatre poèmes hindous*, for Satie was an insider to venues of popular music. Satie composed dozens of popular songs and was employed for two decades as pianist, conductor, and composer for venues such as the Chat noir and the Auberge de Clou. As such, he encountered a variety of popular music on a regular basis, and he was accustomed to working with musical devices such as those presented by "That Mysterious Rag." Furthermore, Satie embodied the bohemian lifestyle of the typical *chansonnier*, living in a squalid "cave" that was off-limits to even his closest friends, and spending his earnings on liquor and, curiously, umbrellas, as quickly as possible. Whereas Milhaud's use of popular devices in *La Création* acts "to highlight rather than submerge the jazz components, to speak the musical language of jazz unequivocally and approvingly and make explicit use of its formal devices,"<sup>25</sup> Satie inhabits his method of using popular music devices: Satie not only speaks the language of popular music unequivocally and approvingly, but does so *within* his own, consistently developing, musical identity. Whereas Milhaud is comparable to the tourist who focuses on one region only as long as it remains under exotic allure,<sup>26</sup> Satie is a constant *flâneur*, who never fully steps out from his practice of slumming in the popular haunts of Paris.

Viewed as a signifier, popular music in *Parade* functioned in a disturbing way upon the audience at

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<sup>25</sup> Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 84.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-93.

its premiere. When Jean d'Udine, reviewer for *Le Courrier musical*, characterized Satie's score as "infinitely more stupid than ingenuous, more boring than droll, more senile and antiquated than audacious and innovative,"<sup>27</sup> he provided an indication of the shock that Satie's music caused French listeners. Popular music was acceptable in its place, and could even be consumed by people of upper classes when performed in *cabarets artistiques*, fairs, or circuses (but not in the café-concert or music-hall institutions, which catered more narrowly to lower classes),<sup>28</sup> but it was taboo in the hallowed halls of ballet. Because most of Satie's public was illiterate in the formal popular music techniques that ground *Parade*, many resorted to thinking its meaning null, attacking it as "stupid" and "antiquated." In reality, of course, Satie's score was inspired and visionary, and came to be viewed as a cult object among young composers in France. *Les Nouveaux jeunes* or *Les Six*, as they later became known, was founded in the wake of *Parade's* premiere by Satie devotees. Cocteau provided a visual indication of this level of meaning and signification in *Parade* as a whole in the "PA/RA/DE" sign shown before the first manager's entry. Although the similarity between the French words *parade* and *parodie* would not necessarily be noticed in speech, Cocteau's sign, by separating the word into its constituent syllables, emphasizes the similarity and suggests that *Parade* is meant as *parodie*. By definition, parodies

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<sup>27</sup> Jean d'Udine quoted in Alan M. Gillmor, *Erik Satie* (Boston: Twayne, 1988), 208.

<sup>28</sup> Nancy Perloff, *Art and the Everyday: Popular Entertainment and the Circle of Erik Satie* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 19-41.

signify through the discursive space between the object being portrayed and the critique or parallel presented.

The popular elements incorporated into *Parade* include nearly the entire repertoire of gestures, the presence of musical referents, notably the ragtime tune of Irving Berlin, and sound-making devices from typewriters to a revolver. These do not represent the full scope of elements that were envisioned for the work, however, for some planned elements were excluded from production. Cocteau originally devised that the circus barkers should verbally assault the audience with advertising hype conveying the potential benefits, ridiculously inflated, that the audience would gain if they partook of the inner show. Cocteau is also the sole source of the extra-musical noises present in the score, and together with his planned verbal escapades this would have resulted in a more cohesive, tumultuous result than is made by the intermittent statements of what seem like random noises. Picasso had the most influence in redirecting this and other plans by Cocteau, devising alternate schemes that better matched his imagination. Regarding the inclusion in the final production of the various sound effects, Satie seems to have surrendered to Cocteau, writing to Diaghilev that “I don’t much like the ‘noises’ made by Jean, but there is nothing we can do here. We have before us an amiable maniac.”<sup>29</sup>

Just as the presence of popular elements acted as a signifier of the superiority of low-art in *Parade*, so the ballet as a whole functions as a signifier. *Parade*

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<sup>29</sup> Erik Satie quoted in Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 482.

displays an aversion to heroic tones of appropriation and progress and obscures any distinction between who is seeing and what is seen, these being basic tenets of critical cosmopolitanism.<sup>30</sup> Whereas *The Rite of Spring* followed theatrical tradition in portraying exotic representations of distant in time and space, *Parade* refused to do so, portraying characters popular on the stages of Paris, with its setting also in contemporary Paris. Indeed, it is this refusal that most strongly identifies the ballet's modernism. Whereas costume, gesture, and musical, visual, and dance elements may function in classical ballet to construct exotic identity, the dancers of *Parade* so strongly assert their contemporary popular identity that reviewers found the work profane and worthless. Although the historical record makes clear that the authors did not expect the negative backlash that greeted the work, in emphasizing vulgarity and coarseness during the production it is clear that they intended to capitalize on the unexpected, signifying multiple possible interpretations that demanded self-reflection.

Confusion was another way in which the whole of *Parade* operated as signifier. In his early sketches for the set design, Picasso included a silhouette of audience members, intended to represent real audience members extending into the ballet's backdrop. Coupled with the fact that the set, behind the theatre's real proscenium with great red curtain, includes another proscenium curtain, plus two sets of curtains confusingly portrayed in front of *and* behind the principal subjects of Picasso's immense drop-

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<sup>30</sup> Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style*, 2.

curtain that is revealed prior to the set's exposure, Picasso aims for dizzying illusions concerning who is the audience and what relationship they have to what is portrayed on stage. Since *Parade* signifies confusion, disorder, and upheaval, it is not surprising that the response to the ballet should have been the same. According to Cocteau's biographer Francis Steegmuller, Cocteau's chief theme in *Parade* is:

that any performance seen by an audience is as nothing compared with the invisibles that artists are up to within (whether behind the scenes, within their own heads, wherever), invisibles concerning which the painfully indifferent public lacks any interest, let alone understanding.<sup>31</sup>

Picasso's depictions of perspective lived up to Cocteau's theme that there is more than meets the eye.

In seeking to define different devices by which artists may activate critical cosmopolitanism, Walkowitz discusses *vertigo* as a process whereby "useless details, trivial sensations, exquisite moments, transient beauty, playful nicknames, and decorative objects" interrelate with "fascism, world war, colonialism, displacement."<sup>32</sup> *Parade* clearly makes use of many such "trivial" elements, and its prominent position during the First World War almost assures that, whether or not its artists intended, it will be regarded as a kind of social commentary. Cocteau's initial work on the ballet began in the winter of 1915-1916 when he was stationed near the western end of the Allied

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<sup>31</sup> Steegmuller, *Cocteau*, 161.

<sup>32</sup> Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style*, 32.

trenches in Belgium; prior to this post he had been assigned to an army ambulance that set out frequently from Paris to tend wounded soldiers at the front.<sup>33</sup> This shows that he was enmeshed in the realities of war while conceiving *Parade*, just as the public was at its premiere. In 1912 the Titanic sunk, and Satie's musical section in which the Berlin tune occurs, entitled "Steamship Ragtime," was originally entitled "Ragtime of the *Titanic*."<sup>34</sup> *Parade*'s premiere on 18 May 1917 occurred scarcely three weeks after the major French offensive on the Chemin des Dames failed at the cost of tens of thousands of French lives plus tens of thousands of African soldiers and others representing the Allied Forces. *Parade*'s portrayal of fearsome grimaces from the Chinese Conjuror, a near-fall of the acrobats, the exhaustion and collapse of the managers, revolver shots and a steamship siren, Morse-code SOS, the complexities of representation – all these are the "exquisite moments" and "trivial details" by which *Parade* exerts meaning through the momentum of vertigo or stream-of-consciousness. In rejecting ballet conventions, *Parade* exudes a freeing posture, yet one that is enmeshed in war and threat of destruction. Steegmuller notes that artists in Montparnasse frequently engaged in "sick jokes" over the war, which they termed "an insane disaster;"<sup>35</sup> the representation of *Parade* is likewise insane, and concerns the disaster of something normally very simple: a parade.

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<sup>33</sup> Rothschild, *Picasso's Parade*, 46.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>35</sup> Steegmuller, *Cocteau*, 182.

Through its multifaceted makeup and systematic refutation of ballet norms, *Parade* not only astounded those who witnessed its premier; the ballet continues to represent a remarkable moment in the history of theatre. In seeking to challenge artistic norms, the authors by definition acted critically; that is to say, their production characterized critical cosmopolitanism not only theoretically, but in a practical way that had substantial repercussions for later artists. *Parade* defines a new type of multifaceted artistic collaboration: just as Cocteau thought of *Parade*'s realistic main acts as truly embodying cubism because of the process of metamorphosing real gestures into dance, so the entire process of creating *Parade* may be thought of as Cubist, as modernist, transnational, trans-genre, and trans-disciplinary.<sup>36</sup>

*Parade*'s impact reached into successive artistic movements, and even as its authors seemed to work in such a way as to deny or defy national unity, the work became part of a movement toward a new national style for French music. Although Satie's entire career was characterized by unorthodox essays in the rejection of the norms of grand art music and the championing of the bohemian hangouts that were his natural habitat, *Parade* was the piece that catapulted him into public consciousness and into the attention of the Parisian and international musical communities. With the score to *Parade* reaching a status of cult object and "Bible" for *Les Six*, young musicians together with Satie advocated a new national style for French music based on Satie's incorporation of light,

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<sup>36</sup> Albright, "Postmodern Interpretations," 36.

unassuming, and popular, elements into his art music composition. The term “sur-réalisme” first appeared in print in connection with *Parade*, having been coined by Guillaume Apollinaire some months before and described as “a rejection of plain realism in favour of an art more real than any photographic imitation of surface appearances could ever be.”<sup>37</sup> *Parade*’s intense realism is one that emphasizes the mundane, to the point of projecting a magnification of the complexities, transnational interrelatedness, and absurdities of society. Just as Walkowitz’s critically cosmopolitan authors confuse and confound different modes of perception in order to multiply meaning, so Cocteau, Picasso, Satie, and Massine diverged from accepted modes of representation and even from each other’s modes of representation, resulting in an intricate dance of identity and of modernism.

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<sup>37</sup> Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 483.

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**Abstract**

This essay considers the ways in which the 1917 Ballets Russes production of *Parade* functioned as a critical commentary on society and the social order. Rebecca L. Walkowitz's writing on "critical cosmopolitanism" (actions characterized by self-reflection, aversion to heroic tones of appropriation and progress, and a suspicion of epistemological privilege) frames the discussion. Popular entertainment and avant-garde art, together with the techniques of vertigo, *flânerie*, and the representation of exoticism and of identity more generally, reveal that *Parade's* authors (Cocteau, Massine, Picasso, and Satie) constructed a critically cosmopolitan, modernist entity. This adds a further dimension to the understanding of *Parade*, a work that also figures prominently in the dawning of realist ballet and that led to the first appearance of the term *surrealism*.