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Mario Dunkel

THE STORIES OF JAZZ

Narrating a Musical Tradition



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für das Institut für Jazzforschung an der
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edited by

Christa Bruckner-Haring
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Introduction

Invited as a special guest to the Southern Historical Association's thirty-fourth annual meeting in New Orleans in 1968, the novelist Ralph Ellison told the professional historians in his audience that they were "responsible liars" (Ellison et al. 1969: 62).¹ "Liars are not bad people," Ellison added, "I am by profession a liar" (ibid.). According to Ellison, "the role of lying [was] like the role of masquerading" (ibid.). If history "helps us to imagine ourselves," then writing history could be compared to carving a mask (ibid.: 63). This mask would be neither truthful nor deceptive. It would rather be a necessary instrument in the development of a self-determined identity, helping one "to achieve one's dreams, one's idea of one's self" (ibid.: 62). Ellison suggested that, so far, professional historians had carved historiographical masks in a hegemonic design, despite their ostensible independence as academics in a democratic nation. "I am going to be a little nasty here," Ellison said, "our written history has been as any produced in any communist country – only in a democratic way: individuals write it instead of committees" (ibid.: 63).

Ellison's description of the historian as a "responsible liar" anticipated some of the debates that would engage historical studies over the following decades. For one, Ellison implied that historical truth is a cultural product, and therefore relative rather than absolute. The concept of the lie, Ellison insinuated, was itself a historically grounded result of a predominant system of knowledge production, according to which truth and lies were strictly antagonistic symptoms of the eternal struggle between good and evil. As the anthropologist and writer of fiction Zora Neale Hurston has demonstrated, however, in some African American communities the word "to lie" took on alternate meanings, often defying the predominant binary framework of Anglo-American cultures. On her research trips to Eatonville, Florida, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Hurston noticed in the context of Eatonville's black community that "big old lies" did not signify the morally condemnable crime of intended deceit. The word "lie" rather denoted an orally transmitted story or tall tale (Hurston 2009: 8; Radano 2003: 46–47). By challenging the dominant ethical connotations of

1 Ellison's phrase has been misquoted as "respectable liars" by historian Jason Phillips in his introduction to a recent study on *Storytelling, History, and the Postmodern South* (Phillips 2013: 1). The difference between responsibility and respectability is a highly significant one in the context of Ellison's idea of historiography.

the word liar, Ellison thus not only told his audience that they were far from telling the absolute truth; he also suggested that historians in pursuit of a universal truth engaged in a white, hegemonic practice.

In Ellison's oeuvre, the discussion of responsibility points to the contradiction between the American ideal of democracy and the social reality of racial inequality. Take for instance the main protagonist of his novel *Invisible Man* (Ellison 2010 [1952]), who goes through the humiliating experience of entertaining a white audience in the American South by fighting a "battle royal" in order to win a scholarship to a black college. The amused audience revels in the protagonist's humiliating fight before demanding a speech. After reciting assimilationist lines from Booker T. Washington ("cast down the bucket where you are"; *ibid.*: 30), the anonymous protagonist says the phrase "social responsibility" (*ibid.*). The audience pretends not to understand, demanding that he speak up and repeat the phrase several times only to then laugh and jeer him. When the protagonist sets out to repeat the phrase again, he makes what he considers a "mistake" (*ibid.*). Instead of repeating "social responsibility," he says "social [...] equality," after which "the laughter [hangs] smokelike in the sudden stillness" and the audience starts to "shout hostile phrases" at the protagonist (*ibid.*: 30–31). The juxtaposition of the phrases "social responsibility" and "social equality" in *Invisible Man* points to the dilemma of social responsibility in a racially unequal society. How could individuals feel morally obliged to a society that treats them as unequals?

This is where, according to Ellison, the storyteller comes in. If assuming responsibility in an unequal society was impossible, it was the storyteller's task to contribute to that society's cultural transformation. In his speech at the 1953 ceremony for the National Book Award, which he received for *Invisible Man*, Ellison said that, in addition to presenting a development of modernist aesthetics, his novel was significant for "its attempt to return to the mood of personal moral responsibility for democracy which typified the best of our nineteenth-century fiction" (Ellison 1953). If in the U.S. democracy was an ideal, rather than a reality, it was the novelist's task as a storyteller to contribute to the actualization of this ideal. The socially responsible historian, Ellison thought, would have a similar function.

In Ellison's view, African American music and its history played a central role in developing history as a socially responsible kind of storytelling. As one of the guest speakers of jazz historian Marshall Stearns's 1951 course on the history of jazz, "Perspectives in Jazz," at New York University, Ellison witnessed and participated in a strand of socially responsible American storytelling – one that he would help to shape in the course of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s with numerous essays on blues and jazz (Lucas 1951: 46–48; Ellison 2002).

Following Ellison, this book regards the construction of jazz history not so much as the story of how historians successively approximated the truth of jazz's "real" emergence and development. Instead, it considers the history of jazz as a set of nonfictional, culturally interactive stories, through which people have made sense of their worlds and negotiated their cultural locations. I argue that not only have jazz history narratives provided projection screens for individual and communal imaginaries, but they have also functioned as powerful producers and reproducers of cultural identities. As such culturally grounded stories, narratives of jazz history have intervened in, and have been produced by, intersecting discourses of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, space, nationality, modernism, and political ideology, among others. Narratives of jazz history are both producers and products of larger social and cultural transformations.

In pursuing this reflexive approach to the history of jazz, this book does not seek to invalidate more traditional historiography. It does not claim that historical facts are irrelevant; nor does it advocate for a renunciation of works that focus to a greater extent on musical rather than narrative developments. This book rather sees musical, social, cultural, and narrative developments as co-constitutive. It starts from the assumption that a phenomenon such as the standardization of a "jazz tradition" – a master narrative with slight variations, in which the history of jazz would be told and received transnationally – reveals as much about the history of jazz as it does about the cultures that produced and received this history. For this reason, this book seeks to complement investigations of musical history with a metahistorical perspective on the production and mediation of historical knowledge concerning these developments. This approach does not call into question the existence of a history of jazz, but it does seek to challenge the jazz tradition's claim to exclusive authority over that history.

The question of why and how the "jazz tradition" became such a powerful narrative motivates this book. The narrative's power is evident in its tenacity, longevity, and global reach.² I suggest that the reasons for its emergence and standardization lie in historical constellations and developments harking back to phenomena as diverse as music reception in the nineteenth century, European music discourses of the 1910s, and U.S. performances of jazz history in the 1920s, to name only a few. Aspects of what came to be known as the jazz tradition had been in the making for a long period of time, in transfers between various music cultures. In addition, the emergence of this tradition was conditioned by specific social contexts. The "jazz tradition" has in many ways interacted with

2 For accounts of the narrative's persistence in the twenty-first century see Lipsitz (2004: 9–26), Dvinge (2007), and Knauer (2018). While jazz studies scholarship has more recently moved away from reductive narratives about jazz history (Ake 2018), the jazz tradition continues to be reaffirmed in contemporary textbooks and jazz history books for general audiences.

larger social and political developments between 1920 and 1950, ranging from the New Deal to the African American civil rights movement, the early Cold War, and the anti-communist climate of the McCarthy era.

In focusing on the emergence of a jazz tradition, rather than on all other types of jazz historiography, this book is based on a problematic practice integral to traditions: selection. Since completeness is impossible, this book does not aim to present a total overview of all the historical narratives that have been told about the history of jazz. It rather seeks to understand the reasons why certain narratives of jazz became prevalent in particular historical contexts. What were the paradigms of jazz history narration? How and why did they change during the first forty years after the emergence of jazz? And why would a particular, rather marginal story of the 1930s become standardized as the “jazz tradition” in the 1950s, powerful and stable enough to be taught widely across the world until today? This book’s selection of examples that narrate the history of jazz thus has to do with their impact on the formation of this jazz tradition.

As Raymond Williams has noted, traditions are formed through processes of selection, exclusion, accentuation, distortion, and through rhetorical devices. They function as strategies in a larger struggle for cultural legitimation and economic success (Williams 2005: 39; Denning 2010: 152). Eric Hobsbawm agrees with Williams when he claims that traditions can be “invented.” He calls attention to multiple interests at play that can ultimately be inscribed into traditions. One of the primary motivations in the making of a tradition, accordingly, is legitimation. Traditions can legitimate cultures and cultural practices by representing particular historical narratives and bestowing value on them (Hobsbawm / Ranger 1983). While Hobsbawm still distinguishes between “genuine” and “invented” traditions, this book presumes that all traditions are to some extent fabricated. In doing so, it follows Michael Oakeshott and Hayden White, who hold that all forms of history rely on fictionalizations. Although history may be a means to approach a historical reality, this history is inevitably informed by the present (White 2010).

Scott DeVeaux was the first jazz scholar to transfer this notion of the constructedness of traditions to the jazz tradition in his seminal essay “Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography.” Based on White’s metahistorical approach to historiography (White 1973), DeVeaux identified an “official history of jazz” that, he argued, served a purpose: to legitimate the practice and history of jazz in the academy (DeVeaux 1991: 525–526). This legitimation, DeVeaux argued, was intertwined with some of the major narrative strategies of jazz writings, including an accentuation of linearity and organic historical developments, the personalization and individualization of musical change, and the emphasis on jazz’s ostensible aesthetic autonomy (DeVeaux 1991; Pfleiderer

2019: 284–285). Although it included a sketch of the reasons for this tradition’s historical emergence, DeVeaux’s article forewent a detailed analysis of how the various narratives of jazz history leading up to an “official” story of jazz interacted with their historical contexts. In addition, DeVeaux concentrated exclusively on written texts, rather than considering the various forms and media through which this official history had been narrated.

This book, therefore, is greatly indebted to DeVeaux’s work, especially regarding its perspective on the social and cultural *functions* of historiography as well as its focus on narrative rather than on individual actors. It seeks to expand on DeVeaux’s essay in four main ways: First, it holds that DeVeaux’s influential article laid out a distinct perspective on jazz history writings that was subsequently elaborated and expanded in other texts (Gennari 2006; Hardie 2013). While this perspective has indeed identified some of the most powerful actors in the conceptualization of the jazz tradition, it has also been characterized by a limitation on rather narrow groups of critics and writers. While it is accurate that these critics were highly influential in establishing the jazz tradition – in fact some of them are also key figures in this book – this perspective has tended to sideline developments that need more attention. These include (1) popular music writings before the emergence of jazz, (2) popular music writings that were conceived outside of circles affiliated with hot jazz, such as the “Whiteman uplift movement” and early blues historiography, and (3) popular music historiography outside of the U.S. with a particular emphasis on transatlantic developments. This book addresses the way in which these larger popular music discourses have been significant factors in the emergence and standardization of the jazz tradition. Consequently, this book includes discussions of nineteenth-century writings on African American music, on the French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, and on the European surrealist movement, to name only a few.

In the course of its first forty years, what we now know as jazz overlapped with musics subsumed under labels as diverse as blues, race music, ragtime, Dixieland, symphonic dance music, tango, spirituals, gospel, swing, rhythm and blues, bebop, Afro-Cuban music, third stream, and many more. That some of these musics are now included in the jazz tradition has not always been self-evident. Seeking to understand the production of jazz history therefore requires looking at the ways in which questions of genre have been negotiated throughout the history of jazz. The writing of blues history, for instance, took place in constant dialogue with writings on jazz. We can see this, for instance, in the writings of blues composer and publisher W. C. Handy and of blues critic Abbe Niles. Niles’s writings, however, were seminal to the American conceptualization of hot jazz, and the fact that they have been largely overlooked

has distorted narratives of jazz's reception in Europe and the U.S. Not only did Niles's texts provide a conceptual benchmark, to which hot jazz critics of the 1930s frequently made reference, Niles also served as a personal mentor to John Hammond, who was perhaps the most influential hot jazz critic of the 1930s. Jazz scholars have likewise tended to sideline Paul Whiteman as a jazz writer, largely because the symphonic jazz music he promoted has been marginalized in the subsequent canonization of jazz (Howland 2002: xiii).

Second, this book concerns itself, more than DeVeaux's article, with the way in which jazz history interacts with larger cultural narratives and discourses. Indeed, one of my central arguments is the idea that the successful establishment of an "official" jazz history in the 1950s has much to do with the way in which this narrative reaffirmed and reconfigured larger U.S. cultural narratives. As John Gennari has pointed out, the narration of jazz history has often served as an analogy to the ostensible essence and national character of the U.S. (Gennari 2006). From its beginnings, jazz was received as a potentially national music. When it emerged as a concept in the mid-1910s, it was quickly used to fill a void, as a seemingly idiomatic national music able to compete with, and outshine, European national idioms. Consequently, the legitimization of jazz in the U.S. has also been achieved by demonstrating its relevance as a U.S. national property through the use of cultural narratives. This book details how musicians such as Paul Whiteman employed the story of independent success, for instance, when they drew analogies between their own, self-made musical careers and the teleological development of jazz. In addition, jazz promoters of the 1920s employed the frontier narrative when they cast the history of jazz as a narrative of domestication, recalling Frederick Jackson Turner's by then popular thesis that "Americanness" was defined by the unique experience of Americans on the Western frontier (Turner 1920). These first attempts to tie the history of jazz to the larger cultural narratives of the U.S. were continued and adapted by the next generations of jazz writers.

This strategy of linking jazz to U.S. culture was not only an attempt by jazz writers to claim legitimacy in a larger society; it also informed insiderist arguments concerning different versions of the history of jazz. This study therefore regards the narration of jazz history as a discursive field, where appropriations of music overlap and conflict. In its most extreme form, the history of jazz has functioned both as an expropriative and appropriative device. Narratives of jazz history, therefore, are always relational. They interact with (contradict, reaffirm, contrast, and reconcile) pre- and co-existing varieties of similar narratives. These narratives, however, are at the same time intricately entwined with larger social and cultural contexts, within which they often function as arguments for competing social and cultural visions.

How can one approach the cultural “struggles” inherent in the narration of jazz history (Gramsci 1971: 238; Hall 2010: 73)? This book presumes that cultural struggles need to be investigated from an intersectional perspective that considers how different dimensions of culture interrelate. Intersectional perspectives hold that systems of oppression, such as gender and race, are co-constitutive. Consequently, cultural power dynamics can only be understood by considering how different regimes of oppression, marginalization, and discrimination interact. Dating back to Anna Julia Cooper and the early black feminist movement of the nineteenth century, this basic tenet was picked up and elaborated in the 1970s and 1980s (see Carastathis 2019: 15–68). In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw first used the metaphor of the intersection to describe the general relatedness of seemingly separate systems of oppression (Crenshaw 1989). While Crenshaw’s initial publications on intersectionality were concerned mostly with the interface of gender and race, intersectionality studies have expanded over the last decades to include various dimensions of culture, such as sexuality, class, age, ethnicity, and nationality (Collins 2004: 11). Feminist jazz scholars have done much to apply intersectional perspectives to the field of jazz (Tucker 2008; Tucker 2016). The term, by now, has also become integral to such activist projects as the “We Have Voice” collective, which demands intersectional justice in music scenes, as well as the music industry and educational institutions (Russonello 2018). In this book, I have chosen to focus on the intersections of those dimensions that seem most relevant in regard to my source material and its historical contexts. For this reason, I focus mostly on questions of race, class, gender, and nationality, considering additional categories occasionally as they are directly or indirectly addressed in the corpus.

Race is doubtless the most persistent and most actively contested discourse in the representation of jazz. The pathway towards an “official” history of jazz was marked by what W. E. B. Du Bois has called “the problem of the color line” (Du Bois 1903: 3) – that is, the ubiquitous and multilayered negotiation of racial difference and inequality in the U.S. The increasing inclusion of black artists in the jazz canon during the first half of the twentieth century may lead one to assume that the development of jazz history narratives echoes a kind of progress towards racial equality. It is important to acknowledge, however, that historical reality is much more complex. It is true that black artists tended to be increasingly included in the canon – and appreciated for their musicianship – as narratives of jazz history evolved; the fact that jazz became an interracial tradition to which both black and white musicians contributed may, to some extent, be framed as a pluralist, cultural achievement. At the same time, however, racial struggle has always informed the construction of jazz history. In forging representations of jazz history, authors have been confronted with a

myriad of pre-existing racial images and stereotypes that they have chosen to dodge, compensate for, contrast, and reaffirm – but no matter their choice, these concepts of race, in one way or another, have always informed representations of jazz history. The history of jazz is therefore tied to the contexts that enabled its narratability in the 1950s, including a culturally grounded “racial imagination” (Radano / Bohlmann 2001).

The fact that race has played such a dominant role in discussions of jazz has led to the marginalization of class, gender, nation, and other discourses. From its beginnings, the construction of jazz history has, for instance, also been aligned with the construction of socio-economic difference. In fact, race and class have constantly interacted with one another. As Jonathan Weinberg and others have observed, the body of black male slaves, for instance, has repeatedly functioned as an emblem of the American working class (Weinberg 2006: 115–134). In a similar manner, jazz has been described as an embodiment of both blackness and proletarian virtues, while aesthetic categories and concepts such as “hot jazz” relied on references to race and class. As I demonstrate in my final chapter, the development of an “official” jazz history during the late 1940s and 1950s was also based on the renouncement of class-based rhetoric and imagery, allaying suspicions that authors and musicians might be leaning towards communism.

Besides questions of race and class, representations of jazz history have also intersected with discourses of gender and sexuality. Over the course of its history, jazz has been gendered in various ways by writers who likened it to Cinderella (Whiteman, Walter Damrosch, Henry Osgood), Lorelei (Charles Edward Smith), Casanova in bed (Jacques-Henri L  vesque), Napoleon at war (L  vesque), and the force of Hannibal’s army at Capua, Italy (Jean Cocteau). Likewise, in the 1920s, German-language writers warned that the practice of jazz dance led to the “masculinization of women” (Bernhard 1927: 14). The idea that there was something masculine about jazz has proven remarkably persistent, and continues to shape jazz discourses into the twenty-first century. Jazz itself, however, was largely feminized in the U.S. during the symphonic jazz era. Its masculinization only became paradigmatic with the hot jazz movement of the 1930s. In order to understand the discursive power of gender constructions in narratives of jazz history, this book therefore considers how gendered and sexualized notions of music have interacted with other discourses.

By investigating the emergence of a “jazz tradition,” this book also seeks to illuminate gaps and absences from this official history. Calling into question the jazz tradition’s sole claim to the history of jazz helps to make visible the many blind spots in music history, revealing significant artists and aesthetics that have been obscured simply because they failed to fit into certain narrative frameworks. The question of who and what to include has preoccupied jazz

history discourses from the beginning. One may argue that, in fact, the narrative of inclusion has itself become a constitutive element of jazz discourse. As Sherrie Tucker and others have pointed out, inclusion is far from being a unidirectional process. Indeed, artists have been repeatedly excluded through the very strategies that enabled their inclusion. It is one of the dilemmas inherent in the act of inclusion: previously excluded artists who are being included are often framed as embodiments of the unjustified reasons for their exclusion. Consequently, female musicians have been included by pointing to their gender, while black musicians have been included through categories of race. In jazz discourse, the act of inclusion entails exclusions based on cultural difference. Tucker calls this dilemma “exclusionary inclusion” (Tucker 2016: 247). These dynamics are further complicated by the fact that we need to approach cultural difference from an intersectional perspective.

Bearing these complex processes in mind, several jazz scholars have done important work over the last decades on the margins of the jazz tradition. In 1994, a study group centered around Robert O’Meally, at Columbia University and other New York institutions, revived Ellison’s notion of jazz as an aesthetics that transcends the medial boundaries of music, exploring interactions between jazz music, dance, poetry, visual arts, and film. In addition to resulting in several influential anthologies of jazz criticism, like *Jazz Among the Discourses* (Gabbard 1995a), *Representing Jazz* (Gabbard 1995b), *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture* (O’Meally 1998) and *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies* (O’Meally 2004), this opening-up of the jazz canon also led to innovative inquiries into the unseen areas of the jazz tradition. David Ake, Charles Hiroshi Garrett, and Daniel Goldmark’s collection of essays, *Jazz/Not Jazz: The Music and Its Boundaries* (Ake / Garrett / Goldmark 2012), similarly presents a conscious effort to give weight to artists and jazz-related practices that the jazz tradition, for various reasons, has tended to neglect or dismiss. By revealing the extent to which this tradition has been a malleable product of cultural discourses, my study commits to the attempt not to regard cultural relativity as a threat to the value of artistic expression, but to use it productively, illuminating aesthetics that have been marginalized in the construction of widely recognized musical traditions.

A third way in which this book expands on DeVeaux’s 1991 article has to do with its focus on transcultural exchange, in addition to questions of struggle and strife. While my discussion of jazz history up to this point has indeed emphasized aspects of cultural struggle, I also see the construction of jazz history as a site of transfer. Various versions of the history of jazz have functioned as mediators between different social groups and milieus, including academics, social elites, the middle class, the working class, European Americans, African Americans, readers outside the U.S., civil rights activists, and also the musicians themselves.

From its beginnings, the history of jazz has taken on both a promotional and a semi-educative function, often targeting the American middle class. Mediating between the knowledge of specialized insiders and the American public, the history of jazz at times became an integral part of what Joan Shelley Rubin and others have described as American middlebrow culture. According to Rubin, middlebrow culture needs to be understood in light of its function as a social mediator between the American middle class and the nation's socio-cultural elites. By rendering the formerly exclusive capital of cultural authorities accessible to the many, Rubin argues, middlebrow culture contributed to, rather than hindered, democratization processes in the U.S. (Rubin 1992: 31–33). John Howland has demonstrated how musicians such as Whiteman can be contextualized in American middlebrow culture, and my study elaborates on Howland's framework (Howland 2002).

In its mediating function, the history of jazz not only made jazz itself accessible to American middle-class readers, it also provided access to truncated versions of recent anthropological, psychological, sociological, and historical theories and academic debates. In doing so, narratives of jazz history have intervened in larger contemporary debates. They have provided analogies to subjects as diverse as the liberation of the id from repression (Robert Goffin, see Chapter 4), the Biblical diaspora (Barry Ulanov, Chapter 7), Marxist class struggle (Charles Edward Smith, Sidney Finkelstein, Chapters 5 and 7), and the liberation of the primitive soul from the forces of modernity (Hugues Panassié, Chapter 4). For many American middle-class readers, the history of jazz offered an introduction not only to jazz, but also to popular versions of such complex issues as the history of the U.S., slavery, the history of the American South, migration, psychic repression, social mechanization, African American history, cultural hybridity, acculturation, the history of Africa, and the history of American race relations. If the theory of African Americans' cultural prehistory in West Africa, for instance, had already been advanced by anthropologists and civil rights activists around the turn of the century (see Zumwalt / Willis 2008), many American middle-class readers were introduced to this theory not by reading books on anthropology, but indirectly, by learning about the African prehistory of American popular music. Significantly, this education about the global – rather than merely European – origins of U.S. culture took place as the nation was entering a new geopolitical phase as the world's largest economic and military power.

As a mediating story, the history of jazz cannot be reduced to a U.S. national context. On the contrary, the construction of an official jazz history needs to be understood as an inherently transnational phenomenon. Until the late 1980s, many jazz writers in the U.S. and Europe thought that although jazz was an American music, Americans had largely been blind to its value as art: European

connoisseurs had to point it out first. This notion of the European “discovery” of jazz stems from both the considerable impact of European critics on U.S. jazz criticism and the function of French and Belgian writers in the American legitimization of improvised hot jazz as a type of art. Most of the major American and European jazz writers were in close contact with one another. Hammond, for instance, not only said that he discovered his fascination for jazz in Europe, but he also wrote much of his early criticism for European magazines, such as the British *Gramophone* and *Melody Maker*. In addition, he befriended European writers and artists and spent much of his time in the UK, especially after 1929 when, with the wide distribution of the radio and the onset of the Great Depression, the U.S. music market began to dwindle (Erenberg 1998: 11–15). American jazz enthusiasts also modeled jazz organizations such as the United Hot Clubs of America – an American association of record collectors and jazz enthusiasts – after the European “hot club” and “rhythm club” movements. Although before the 1930s, hot jazz had already been celebrated as a valuable type of music in the U.S., it had been largely conceived through a folklorist lens. By the early 1930s, however, French and Belgian critics began to aestheticize improvised jazz as an autonomous art. While Belgian critic Robert Goffin saw jazz as a manifestation of musical surrealism, the French jazz enthusiast Hugues Panassié described and taxonomized jazz as an anti-modern artistic synthesis of intuition and intellect. Their aestheticization of hot jazz left a permanent impression on U.S. jazz critics.

Besides requiring a transnational perspective, the investigation of jazz history as a type of twentieth-century storytelling indeed calls for a consideration of the means by which the history of jazz has been narrated. A fourth and final aspect in which this study differs from DeVaux’s therefore has to do with my transmedial approach. In his comparison of historians to novelists, Ellison emphasized that his critique of “official” historiography referred to “written” history, thus drawing attention to the role of media in the discursive narration of history (Ellison et al. 1969: 62). Indeed, the representation of jazz history has always occurred across different media. By the 1940s, the development of jazz had already been communicated through channels as diverse as live concerts, compositions, radio shows, seminars, drawings, photographs, caricatures, newsreels, and films. A list of those jazz musicians who were involved, in one way or another, in the transmedial performance of jazz history would have to include Paul Whiteman, W. C. Handy, Nick LaRocca and the Original Dixieland Jass Band, Jelly Roll Morton, Benny Goodman, Rosetta Tharpe, Count Basie, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Quincy Jones, to name only a few.

The making of jazz history therefore needs to be understood not only as a type of *historiography*, but also as what I call “*historiopraxis*” – a “transmedial

performance” of history (Dunkel 2014a; Dunkel 2015). Historiopraxis, in my view, is more than a concern with narrative form. Considering the narration of history as a transmedial phenomenon has important discursive implications. If narratives of jazz history are powerful agents in both cultural transfers and the struggle for cultural hegemony and musical ownership, then the successful use of different media significantly contributes to these narratives’ discursive power. Consequently, a transmedial approach to jazz history performance is especially helpful in identifying paradigm shifts in the narration of jazz history.

The inclusion of various kinds of non-textual material, however, also poses a big methodological challenge, as it extends the corpus of relevant representations of jazz history immeasurably. Hence, while this study does incorporate narrations of history in various media, it does not include all kinds of representations suggesting historical developments. Rather, its corpus remains selective, in that it is generally limited to nonfictional examples. This does not imply that fiction is considered less relevant, nor do I consider the boundaries of fiction and nonfiction to be stable and clearly defined. Rather, I hold that not only do fictional and nonfictional narratives tend to be conceived in different ways, they are also *received* differently (Plantinga 2017: 113–114). Consequently, nonfictional narratives *function* differently than fiction. By using different narrative strategies that gesture towards the nonfictional, they are subject to different readings and different interpretations than fiction. They appear to recipients as nonfiction, and thus ask them to generate a fixed body of historical knowledge based on these representations. For this reason, my approach – focusing on nonfiction in transmedial narration – differs somewhat from the pioneering discussions of the representation of history and memory in jazz films, jazz cartoons, and other media by such writers as Krin Gabbard or Nic Pillai (Gabbard 1996; Pillai 2016).

By tracing the historiopraxis of jazz from its beginnings until the publication of Marshall Stearns’s *The Story of Jazz* (Stearns 1956c), this study concentrates on a crucial period of less than forty years, during which a previously non-existent jazz tradition grew into an institutionalized and relatively stable cultural story. The fact that in 1956 the standard jazz tradition was one of an interracial (but predominantly African American) improvised music resulted from multiple interacting factors. For one, socio-economic and cultural transformations encouraged the popularization of certain versions of jazz history, while hindering others from being recognized as plausible, desirable, or usable narratives. For instance, the Whitemanesque narrative of domestication lost its popularity during the Great Depression partially because his glorification of contemporary American music as the preliminary peak of a rapid cultural and musical evolution made little sense during a period of massive economic

crisis. The emergence of jazz ethnography in the late 1930s would have been similarly unthinkable without the New Deal, the Federal Writers' Project, and the ensuing encouragement to foreground America's social margins. Likewise, the temporary disappearance of American Marxist and socialist approaches to the history of jazz coincided with the end of the Popular Front era and the rise of anti-communism in the late 1940s. In the 1950s, *The Story of Jazz* negotiated such contemporary phenomena as the African American civil rights movement and the new role of the U.S. as the perceived Western leader of a potentially peaceable and democratic intercontinental community.

In the hope of providing a fresh look at the construction of jazz history as transmedial storytelling, this book draws on a variety of unpublished sources. I make extensive use of the Marshall Stearns Collection at the Institute of Jazz Studies (IJS) at Rutgers University in Newark. Besides providing valuable resources on the construction of *The Story of Jazz* (Chapter 8), this collection contains Stearns's unpublished manuscripts, syllabi for jazz courses, and correspondence with a variety of other important academics, musicians, and jazz historians. I also consulted the Sidney Finkelstein Collection at the W. E. B. Du Bois Library at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and the Barry Ulanov Collection at Columbia University, New York. The Finkelstein Collection was particularly illuminating regarding Finkelstein's correspondence with publishers about their perceived efforts to censor his books during the McCarthy era. Another important resource was the Edward Abbe Niles Papers, owned by the Watkinson Library at Trinity College in Connecticut. My argument about the significance of Niles to the emergence of the hot jazz paradigm in the late 1920s and 1930s is based on unpublished primary material from this collection, including the correspondence between Niles and W. C. Handy. The Niles Papers also contained an important 1928 correspondence between Niles and the teenage John Hammond at Hotchkiss High School in Connecticut, which testifies to the fact that Niles served as Hammond's mentor. In addition, I consulted the now digitized Nick LaRocca Collection at Tulane University, which, among other materials, provides access to LaRocca's correspondence with Charles Edward Smith, John Hammond, and Marshall Stearns.

Covering four decades of jazz history performances (1917–1956), this book is divided into eight chapters, that proceed both thematically and in a more-or-less chronological order. It exemplifies how the construction and performance of jazz history has interacted with a variety of cultural discourses. As much as the history of jazz has helped to transform these discourses, it has also been produced by them. Although narratives of jazz history have often been read as neutral accounts of factual, historical events, the quest to articulate jazz's development can only be understood by considering the various discourses in

which performances of jazz history have been invested. By providing an account of the construction of jazz history and the intricacies of its performances from 1917 through 1956, this book hopes to demonstrate how the official history of jazz emerged and became standardized in the 1950s. In doing so, it also aims to illuminate how the historiopraxis of jazz, in its many varieties, has been a highly significant aspect of the political, social, cultural, and musical history of the twentieth century.³

3 This book draws on several previously published articles I authored. See bibliography.

1. "The Art of Rhythm"

Constructing the History of Jazz in the 1910s

Until the mid-1920s, the large majority of attempts to explain the genealogy of jazz were highly speculative, and mostly limited to short, lurid articles. This chapter takes as a starting point an early article on the origins of jazz, "Whence Comes Jass" (Kingsley 1917), by the press agent of New York's Palace Theater, Walter Kingsley. "Whence Comes Jass?" is perhaps the most significant early American text on jazz, due less to its quality than to its wide circulation, impact, and the enormous popularity it enjoyed among other music critics and writers on the history of jazz. Kingsley's article first appeared in the *New York Sun* on August 5, 1917, was extensively cited only three weeks later in *The Literary Digest* (n.n. 1917), and was published again in *Current Opinion* a year later (n.n. 1918; see Merriam / Garner 1968: 381). It continued to serve as a major source throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, including in an article by Henry Finck (Finck 1924) and in early monographs on jazz, such as Paul Whiteman's and Mary Margaret McBride's *Jazz* (Whiteman / McBride 1926), Henry O. Osgood's *So This Is Jazz* (Osgood 1926), and R. W. S. Mendl's *The Appeal of Jazz* (Mendl 1927).⁴ As late as 1930, the English jazz critic Stanley Nelson cited Kingsley's text as a sound theory for the emergence of jazz, before the influential Belgian jazz writer Robert Goffin refuted Kingsley's theories in his 1932 study *Aux frontières du jazz* (Goffin 1932: 44–46).

I argue that the popularity and impact of Kingsley's article had to do with the text's combination of two influential discourses on jazz. On the one hand, Kingsley's reception recalled the legacy of minstrelsy performances in the United States, employing popular images of black primitivism and barbarism associated with the minstrel stage. On the other hand, Kingsley employed a counter-discourse to the racially deprecating images that his article reproduced. Rooted in nineteenth-century proto-ethnographic studies of black music and in the cultural anthropology of Franz Boas, this counter-discourse allowed Kingsley to point to the inherent aesthetic value of early jazz as "the art of rhythm," as Kingsley called it (Kingsley 1917: 3). The combination of these ostensibly contradictory discourses was important for the construction of the first narratives about the

4 Co-authored by Whiteman and the journalist Mary Margaret McBride, Whiteman's autobiography, *Jazz*, for instance, cited a passage from William Patterson's rather obscure dissertation *The Rhythm of Prose* (Patterson 1916), quoted in Kingsley's article in 1917.

African and African American pre-history of jazz, which would be elaborated by jazz writers over the course of the 1920s and 1930s.

“Whence Comes Jass?” needs to be understood against the backdrop of American entertainment culture during the mid-1910s. As a press agent of the newly established Palace Theater in New York – “the premiere venue for high-class vaudeville” (Howland 2002: 106) – Kingsley was not only exposed to various forms of music, but was also an integral part of a diverse and rapidly evolving amusement culture industry (Gebhardt 2017). We can safely assume that Kingsley was familiar with the type of New Orleans jazz that the Original Dixieland Jass Band (ODJB) helped to popularize after their January 1917 arrival in New York. As a vaudeville promoter, he was also exposed to the multi-faceted musical life of 1910s New York, featuring a variety of popular musics, ranging from Tin Pan Alley to rhumba, tango, folk musics, spirituals, refractions of folk music and spirituals, piano ragtime, and orchestrated ragtime composed and performed by both white and black musicians (Howland 2009: 20). According to Kingsley, jazz denoted a type of black dance music that was new to the colorful repertoire of variety entertainment. He associated it, for instance, with a recording of Cuban rhumba music used by the famous dancers Rose and Jenny Dolly in one of their performances. As part of a vaudeville act, jazz was fundamentally rhythmic and visual. According to Kingsley, “it wants to appeal to the eye as much as to the ear” (Kingsley 1917: 3).

As an element of 1910s vaudeville shows, jazz was part of a broader variety entertainment aesthetic. Early twentieth-century vaudeville shows were highly eclectic collages of various forms of popular entertainment, including a colorful range of musics. Following film scholar Henry Jenkins, Howland has argued that vaudeville entertainment led to the emergence of a distinct, transmedial “vaudeville aesthetic” in American popular culture. Nicholas Gebhardt has recently added that the transformations of vaudeville culture also led to a more fundamental shift in musicianship and musical experiences (Gebhardt 2017). Based on the spectacle of juxtaposition and contrasts, vaudeville frequently relied on racial, ethnic, and social stereotyping in order to effectively use the shows’ strongly limited time frames (Jenkins 1992; Howland 2002: 166–177). Jazz’s early association with the racialized aesthetics of vaudeville thus facilitated its performance and reception as a fundamentally racial expression.

Jacques Rancière has argued that spectating is not separable from performance; on the contrary, spectators are always already part of an aesthetic performance. Their assumptions, knowledge, and expectations are interwoven with the performances they watch and listen to, just as the performances become part of the spectators’ life-worlds. In the case of vaudeville, audiences projected their tacit historical assumptions on the racialized bodies of entertainers. These

projections, then, were part of the audiences' viewing and listening experience (Gebhardt 2017: 17–18; Rancière 2009). In a way, Kingsley's article articulated and elaborated on these tacit historical assumptions, transferring them from other vaudeville practices to jazz.

In addition to drawing from his personal impressions of contemporary vaudeville entertainment culture, Kingsley could dispose of a number of powerful discourses on black music that had come into existence before the emergence of jazz. By 1917, Kingsley's notion of West Africa as the origin of black music's transhistorical essence, and its subsequent transportation to America by black slaves, had already existed for a while. While texts commonly traced the origins of black music to Africa, African American musicians, by the turn of the twentieth century, began to narrate this trajectory musically. Dating back at least to Will Marion Cook's 1898 musical *Clorindy, or the Origins of the Cakewalk*, African American composers often employed an "Africa-to-Dixie-to-Harlem" narrative, thereby underscoring the value of black culture in Harlem (Howland 2002).

What made Kingsley's article popular with jazz writers of the 1920s was Kingsley's application of the Africa-to-Dixie-to-Harlem model to jazz (including the implication that jazz was originally black music), and his pioneering employment of important legitimization strategies for popular music, such as the consideration of academically authorized research. Kingsley described the prehistory of jazz in the following way (Kingsley 1917: 3):

The word [jazz] is African in origin. It is common on the Gold Coast of Africa and in the hinterland of Cape Coast Castle. [...] In the old plantation days, when the slaves were having one of their rare holidays and the fun languished, some West Coast African would cry out, 'Jaz her up,' and this would be the cue for fast and furious fun. No doubt the witch-doctors and medicine-men on the Congo used the same term at those jungle "parties" when the tomtoms throbbed and the sturdy warriors gave their pep an added kick with rich brews of Yohimbin bark – that precious product of the Cameroons.

This passage conjures a variety of stereotypical images. In a way that was typical of a stereotype-oriented entertainment culture, Kingsley lumped together everything that he regarded as black into one syncretic and racialized essence. Accordingly, the ostensible hedonism and sexual license of the American slave plantation were identified with African black magic, voodoo, and the "jungle 'parties'" of the Congo. Kingsley's article associated jazz with a fantasy world of exoticism and sexual liberty with clear-cut gender roles, where primitive and martial men were in charge of submissive women ("Jaz her up").