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A case study in jazz historiography

Richard Ekins, Ph.D., FRSA

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The Rediscovery and Resurrection of Bunk Johnson – a Grounded Theory Approach: A case study in jazz historiography

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Abstract

This paper was written in the beginning phase of my transitioning from grounded theory sociologist (Ekins, 1997)[1] to grounded theory musicologist (Ekins, 2010)[2]. In particular, it provides preliminary data for a grounded theory of 'managing authenticity', the core category/basic social process (Glaser, 1978) that has emerged from my ongoing grounded theory work in jazz historiography. It was written whilst I was 'credentialising' (Glaser, 2010) my transition to popular music studies and popular musicology. In consequence, it incorporates many aspects that are inimical to classic grounded theory. As with so much of Straussian and so-called constructivist grounded theory (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007), it roots itself in G.H. Mead and a social constructivist symbolic interactionism – *inter alia*, a legitimising (authenticating) strategy. Moreover, as is typical of this mode of conceptualising, the paper fills the void of inadequate classic grounded theorising with less conceptual theorising and more conceptual description. Nevertheless, the article does introduce a number of categories that 'fit and work', and have 'conceptual grab' (Glaser, 1978; Glaser, 1992). In particular, in terms of my own continuing credentialising as a classic grounded theorist, it sets forth important categories to be integrated into my ongoing work on

[1] Ekins (1997) consolidates the grounded theory analysis of 'male femaling' set forth in Ekins (1993).

[2] Ekins (2010) sets forth a grounded theory of 'mainstreaming' with reference to traditional jazz, the mainstreaming of authenticity, and the relevant popular music studies literature.

managing authenticity in New Orleans revivalist jazz, namely, 'trailblazing', 'mythologizing', 'debunking', and 'marginalising', in the context of the 'rediscovering' and 'resurrecting' of a jazz pioneer. More specifically, the paper is offered to classic grounded theorists as a contribution to preliminary generic social process analysis in the substantive area of jazz historiography.

Introduction

This article focuses on a highly mediated event in the history of jazz. I conceptualise the 'event' as the 'rediscovery and resurrection' of William Geary 'Bunk' Johnson (c. 1879 [?1889] – 1949), a jazz pioneer more commonly known as Bunk Johnson.

Bunk Johnson was regarded as one of the top New Orleans jazz trumpet players in the period 1905-1915, before the recording of jazz. Between 1915 and the early 1930s, he toured the Southern States in minstrel shows and circuses before retiring from music in the Great Depression years. He settled in New Iberia, Louisiana, where he worked in the rice and sugar fields. He had lost his teeth by 1934 and was unable to play trumpet (Hazeldine and Martyn, 2000). He was 'rediscovered' in 1938 by a group of jazz enthusiasts researching early jazz. Fitted out with new teeth and a new trumpet, he first recorded in 1942. He recorded extensively in New Orleans, San Francisco and New York, between 1942 and 1947, before his death in New Iberia, in 1949. To many writers and enthusiasts, within that tradition of so-called 'authentic' New Orleans jazz which privileged New Orleans as the birthplace of jazz and which privileged those black 'stay at home' (Godbolt, 1989: 13) musicians who did not migrate to Chicago (or New York, or San Francisco) in the early 1920s (Charters, 1963; Stagg and Crump, 1972), the rediscovery and resurrection of Bunk Johnson is, arguably, the most important single event in the history of New Orleans jazz revivalism (Stagg and Crump, 1972). I am particularly concerned with issues relating to how this event has been placed within a particular type of narrative; the issues around unpacking and problematising the event; and alternative modes of historical writing through which histories are constructed.

Theoretically, my standpoint is rooted in a social

constructionist 'sociology of knowledge' approach to jazz historiography. Pivotal to my approach is George Herbert Mead's theory of time and the past (Mead, 1929b; 1932; Maines, Sugue, and Katovich, 1983), namely Mead's view that 'reality is always that of a present' (Mead, 1929b: 235); that all histories are social constructions from the standpoint of the present; and that 'no matter how far we build out from the present, the events that constitute the referents of the past and future always belong to the present' (Maines, Sugue, and Katovich, 1983: 161). As Mead stated 'We speak of the past as final and irrevocable. There is nothing that is less so' (Mead, 1932: 95). Rather, 'the long and short of it is that the past (or some meaningful structure of the past) is as hypothetical as the future' (Mead, 1932: 12). As Mead (1929b: 235) puts it:

> The past which we construct from the standpoint of the new problem of today is based upon continuities which we discover in that which has arisen, and it serves us until the rising novelty of tomorrow necessitates a new history which interprets the new future.

Methodologically, the article is rooted in a sociological grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978) to historiography which seeks to thematize alternative and competing histories, in terms of generic social processes (Glaser, 1978; Prus, 1987). I situate my use of grounded theory methodology within the 'narrative turn' in contemporary social science and cultural studies (Maines, 1993; Maines and Ulmer, 1993; Plummer, 1995; Ekins and King, 2006), which views alternative and/or competing histories in terms of 'stories' with a view to unpacking the stories or narratives researched, with reference *inter alia*, to their origins, developments, and consequences.

Specifically, I argue that that plurality of histories of the rediscovery and resurrection of Bunk Johnson have emerged within one or more of four modes of 'story telling' which I term 'trailblazing', 'mythologising', 'debunking' and 'marginalising'. Trailblazing presupposes a positivist theory and methodology of social science and sees its history as a progressive discovery of 'truth' (Giddens, 1974). Mythologising may usefully be linked to W.I. Thomas's (1928: 572) 'theorem', that 'if men (sic) define situations as real. They are real in their consequences.' Within this narrative mode, what 'counts as

truth' is paramount, without prejudice to its 'actual truth', or, indeed, without prejudice to any view taken on the nature of truth, whether a correspondence theory, coherence theory, 'objective relativist' theory, or whatever (Mead, 1929a; Robischon, 1958). 'Debunking' refers to that mode of jazz history within which Johnson's discovery and resurrection is 'debunked' in regards to Bunk's own story of his role in the history of jazz; in regards to historical accounts which have placed him as central to the early history of the genre; and in regards to Bunk's role as a leading figure in New Orleans jazz revivalism (Feather, 1946; 1959; 1987). Finally, 'marginalising' refers to that mode within which particular histories are ignored or sidelined within dominant historical narratives. For example, Bunk Johnson's discovery and resurrection is largely ignored within the processes of mainstream jazz canonisation consolidated within academic jazz studies as it has emerged since the 1970s (DeVeaux, 1991; Meeder, 2008: 86).

My central argument in terms of popular music studies historiography is that the degree to which this reliability, veracity or partiality of a given source, is problematised varies according to the mode of historical writing. More fundamentally, the meanings of reliability, veracity and partiality in regards to the 'story' of the rediscovery and resurrection of Bunk Johnson are, in large measure, contextual to the mode within which they are considered.

Trailblazing

'Trailblazing' in regards to the rediscovery and resurrection of Bunk Johnson emerged within the turn to earlier jazz traditions that followed various disillusionments with so-called 'swing era' jazz (Schuller, 1992) at the end of the 1930s. One of these emergents – was the so-called New Orleans jazz 'revival'.

Carr, Fairweather and Priestley (1987: 416) define 'revivalism' as 'The conscious return, by a new generation of jazz musicians, to an earlier style or form of jazz'. They continue, most importantly, for our purposes: 'The term is most generally applied to the re-adoption of New Orleans jazz (either in its sophisticated Oliver/Armstrong incarnation or in the more basic styles of George Lewis and Bunk Johnson) by young musicians in the late 1930s in the USA and the early

1940s in Great Britain and Europe.' This definition highlights the dichotomising that took place, within New Orleans jazz revivalism, between enthusiasts of the 'sophisticated' New Orleans migrants to Chicago/New York (such as Oliver, Armstrong and Jelly Roll Morton) and enthusiasts of the 'more basic' New Orleans-based 'stay at home' (Godbolt, 1989: 13) musicians (such as Lewis, Johnson and Jim Robinson).

Revivalism undoubtedly had its nostalgic components. The early advocates of this revival (e.g., Blesh, 1943; 1949) were happy to be referred to as 'purists', for instance. They sought a past 'purity' in jazz which they considered to have been 'contaminated' by swing era jazz. However, as Gendron (1995: 32) puts it:

> These purists were driven not only by nostalgia but by a revulsion toward the swing music industry, which by shamelessly pandering to the mass markets had in their eyes forsaken the principles of "true" jazz. A small spate of sectarian journals appeared on the scene to give vent to these revivalist views and concerns. They set themselves off as the only alternative to the two dominant mainstream jazz journals Downbeat and Metronome, which were altogether beholden to the swing phenomenon'.

Arguably, this formulation supports Pickering and Keightley's (2009: 936) central argument 'that nostalgia can only be properly conceptualized as a contradictory phenomenon, being driven by utopian impulses – the desire for re-enchantment – as well as melancholic responses to disenchantment.'

Put another way, these 'purist' revivalists sought a jazz authenticity that the alleged 'progress' of the swing era had destroyed for them. Elsewhere, I have distinguished the 'authentic' as the 'original', as the 'real thing', the 'non-commercial', the 'sincere', the 'emotionally direct', and the 'pure' (Ekins, 2009). All these components were variously hungered for by the 'purists' and they set the background for the rediscovery and resurrection of Bunk Johnson, and 'explain' the appeal of Bunk, once re-discovered, who for his devotees both embodied and epitomised all these facets of authenticity – more so, than the 'sophisticated' Oliver/Armstrong/Morton incarnation of revivalism.

As Suhor (2010) points out in his review of Bruce Boyd Raeburn's (2009) book *New Orleans Style and the Writing of American Jazz History*, 'What we today call "jazz journalism", "jazz criticism" and "jazz history" began, like jazz itself, as the work of passionate amateurs.' The rediscovery of Bunk occurred during the preliminary research work by 'passionate amateurs' for the seminal pioneering book of jazz scholarship, *Jazzmen* (1939). In particular, the editors of *Jazzmen*, Ramsey and Smith (1939), had engaged fellow jazz enthusiast and record collector William (Bill) Russell to write what became the two chapters on 'New Orleans Music' and 'Louis Armstrong'. Louis Armstrong had told Russell that the really important trumpet player to track down was the man who later turned out to be Bunk Johnson. Bunk, according to Armstrong, 'would know all about the early days of jazz in New Orleans' (Berger, 1994: 88, drawing on information supplied by Eugene Williams). Bunk, it transpired, had given up playing after the loss of both his instrument and his teeth following a bandstand murder fracas in 1931 (Raeburn, 2009: 113). Not to be put off by such difficulties, a group of enthusiasts, of which Russell was to play by far the most important long-term role, first tracked him down (to his home in New Iberia) and then bought him a new horn and new teeth. In due time, these enthusiasts then arranged recording sessions in New Orleans with a band comprised of New Orleans 'stay at homes', several of whom who had played with Bunk in the 1920s and earlier.

However, Bunk's recordings were not the first by these 'stay at home', previously unrecorded elderly jazzmen. Two years before Bunk's first recording in 1942, Hale Broun had come to New Orleans with the intention of recording Bunk, but found that Bunk's teaching commitments in New Iberia – several hours out of town – made it impossible. Instead, Broun recorded the legendary (previously unrecorded) trumpet player Kid Rena with an assembled group of New Orleans-based musicians[3]. It was this recording, in particular, that fired Bill Russell's enthusiasm to record Bunk with a similar band.

Russell's comments on this session provide an excellent

[3] Now available as 'Prelude to the Revival, Vol. II – Kid Rena, 1940', *American Music*, AMCD-41.

introduction to his mindset at the time. Russell (1942: 28-30; cited in Raeburn, 2009: 12) writes of this Broun session:

> considerable confusion still exists in regard to the question of "authentic," "classic" and even "recreated" New Orleans jazz . . . hot fans who have wondered just how a full New Orleans jazz band, would sound, at last have that opportunity.' (Kid Rena) 'who like Armstrong and Oliver learned the blues from Bunk (led the band) with a lack of precision in ensemble and section playing . . . (as the very essence of) the rough and ready, knock em' down and drag out style of music which we call New Orleans hot jazz . . . Many of us will probably never know what the great King Bolden's band was like, but this album gives us the first chance we've had to hear the nearest thing to it.

When Russell finally got his chance to record Bunk, he used the same trombonist – Jim Robinson – with George Lewis on clarinet. While Rena was well past his prime, prematurely aged through alcoholism and ill health, Bunk – according to Russell – was sublime, particularly in the way his choppy lead trumpet reduced the melody 'to magnify the intensity of the ensemble' (Raeburn, 2009: 126). 'He (Bunk) really simplifies the tune. This is what my teacher Arnold Schoenberg used to call "reducing" a tune. Reduction rather than elaboration of the melody.' Moreover, Bunk's "variations", often subtle, are ingeniously constructed (Russell, 1942; reprinted in Hazeldine and Martyn, 2000: 265).

For Russell, then, not only is Bunk the missing link between Buddy Bolden, who according to the jazz foundation myth led the first jazz band (Marquis, 2005), and Louis Armstrong – the first sophisticated soloist in jazz, but both his trumpet style and his band style are indicative of the earliest forms of 'authentic' early ensemble jazz. Moreover, Bunk is a brilliant proponent of the style – unlike the 'past his prime' Kid Rena. Furthermore, not only was Bunk a very important musician for Russell, he was also an important source of early jazz history. Bunk had a 'phenomenal memory' (Wagner, 1993: 270); he was a prolific letter writer; and he was only too keen to set Russell right on early jazz history and his own role in that history. Indeed, as is evident, from a close reading of *Jazzmen* (1939), the editors Ramsay and Smith were

enormously influenced by Bunk Johnson in their reading of early jazz, just as Bill Russell was. Indeed, the first preliminary page, after the title page, features part of a letter from Bunk to the editors:

> Now here is the list about Jazz Playing. King Bolden and myself were the first men that began playing Jazz in the city of dear old New Orleans . . . and I was with him (Buddy Bolden) and that was between 1895 and 1896 . . . And here is the thing that made King Bolden Band be the First Band that played Jazz . . . so you tell them that Bunk and King Bolden's Band was the first ones that started Jazz in the city or any place else. And now you are able to go now ahead with your Book. (Ramsey and Smith, 1939)

But what of the reliability, validity and partiality of these 'passionate amateur' jazz history writers and their work *Jazzmen*? Fitzgerald (2008: 4-8) traces the evolution of the study of jazz from the 'recreational' to the 'scholarly'. He touches on a central and recurring problem in any study in jazz historiography that arises from the vexed interrelations between the writings of jazz enthusiasts and jazz journalists, on the one hand, and the writings of academically trained cultural studies/popular music studies/jazz studies/American Studies/Black Studies/Afro-American studies writers, on the other. On a stereotypical view, the enthusiast and journalist is not overly preoccupied with many of the virtues held dear by academics – rigour, discipline, peer review, and so on. In particular, the enthusiast and/or journalist rarely problematises the nature of his writings; whereas the academic is trained to do precisely that. We might say that the enthusiast and journalist just 'does' history, whereas the academic is continually reflecting on the nature, reliability, and validity of the 'knowledge' s/he produces, which is the constant companion of his 'doing' history. Or as Thornton (1990: 954) puts it: 'Histories necessarily exclude, but academic histories are in a position to problematise what has been left out.'

In the context of the discovery and resurrection of Bunk Johnson, however, we should be wary of dichotomising the jazz enthusiast and jazz journalist, and the academically trained commentator, too sharply. When he died in 1992, the *Times* of London summarised Bill Russell's contribution to

New Orleans jazz revivalism thus: 'Bill Russell was the single most influential figure in the revival of New Orleans jazz in the 1940s.' As Kukla (1998: 3-4) puts it, drawing on the *Times* obituary: 'Russell . . . had kindled interest in the subject in his thought-provoking contributions to the 1939 book *Jazzmen*. He furthered it by helping to rediscover and later record the pioneer trumpeter Bunk Johnson, and he consolidated it through the series of recordings of other pioneers he made for his American Music record label from 1944-1955'.

Specifically, it was, principally, within the interrelations between Bunk Johnson and Bill Russell that one of the two major strands of New Orleans jazz revivalism emerged – that strand with Bunk (with George Lewis) as figurehead. In particular, Bill Russell's *American Music* label established a collection of recordings which came to define 'authentic' 'old-style' New Orleans jazz. These recordings included the first recordings made by a number of other New Orleans trumpet players, including DeDe Pierce and Kid Thomas Valentine, who were to play central roles in the subsequent history of New Orleans revivalism right up to their deaths, respectively, in 1973 and 1987, and beyond (Ekins, 2006; 2008).

Moreover, Russell, through his various writings and his collection of materials on Bunk established by far the largest collection of Archival material available on Bunk. In the 1950s, he played a major role in the establishment in the Archive of New Orleans Jazz at Tulane University, New Orleans, now the William Ransom Hogan Jazz Archive (Fitzgerald, 2008: 77-91), and later received an honorary doctorate from Tulane University, *inter alia*, in acknowledgement of this. On his death in 1992, the bulk of his vast jazz collection, including, his material on Bunk Johnson, passed to The Historic New Orleans Collection, where it is housed in Williams Research Center and provides the finest single collection of Bunk Johnson materials available to the present day researcher.

Thus, although in one sense Russell and his colleagues were 'recreational', they were also 'semi-academic', 'amateur scholars' (Fitzgerald, 2008: 4-8). Most of them, including Russell, had academic training in other disciplines. Perhaps, the best way of conceptualising the early enthusiasts of Bunk is to say they followed the approach Stebbins (1982; 2007)

refers to as 'serious leisure'. In particular, 'They transferred the rigorous methodology of their formal training to their non-professional "hobby"' (Fitzgerald, 2008: 7). Moreover, as a recognised profession of 'jazz studies' with its own university degrees evolved, these pioneering 'amateurs' frequently took up important roles within the profession.

Bill Russell (1905-1992) was a particularly good example of this. He was, initially, trained as a violinist and composer, gaining a diploma in violin, music history, and music theory from the Quincy Conservatory of Music, in addition to his Music and Education degree from the University of California. He studied with Arnold Schoenberg in California; and with Ludwig Becker and Max Pilzer, respectively concert-masters of the Chicago Symphony and New York Philharmonic (Kukla, 1998: 4). By the early 1930s he had emerged as a composer of avant-garde music for percussion instruments. Soon afterwards, however, his fascination for jazz – particularly, of its important for American musical and cultural history – began to override all his other interests. When he first heard Bunk's playing, the die was cast. From thenceforth, he devoted his life to the study of New Orleans jazz, and to the collection of oral histories and other materials. New Orleans-style was quite simply 'the best music (he) had ever heard'. His highly regarded book on Jelly Roll Morton was published soon after Russell died (Russell, 1999). But his book on 'New Orleans Style' was never finished, and after decades of research on Bunk, his 'Bunk Book' was barely started. Rather it was left to a British jazz enthusiast and expert (Mike Hazeldine), in collaboration with an unscholarly musician and expert (Barry Martyn) to write Bill Russell's books for him (Hazeldine, 1993; Hazeldine and Martyn, 2000; Russell, 1994).

Once qualitative research methods became an established part of academic social science – whether in social anthropology or sociology – every elementary research methods text book warned against the dangers of being too heavily reliant on one 'key informant'. Moreover, with the advantage of hindsight, it is easy to note the tendency of jazz musicians (amongst others) to construct histories around themselves. Arguably, too, Russell became somewhat infatuated with Bunk. However, Russell was an extraordinarily meticulous researcher; he had a 'phenomenal memory' (Wagner, 1993: 270); his oral history methods were

in advance of his time; and he was constantly cross-checking 'facts' with his other sources. Like so many research pioneers, he cannot be criticised for not following standard methods procedures because there were none (cf. Welburn, 1986; Porter, 1988).

However, two 'facts', particularly, have come to haunt Russell, as we shall see. In the first place, subsequent scholarship was to argue that Bunk lied about his age (see 'Debunking' below). This 'story' says Bunk was ten years younger than he claimed. Thus to argue as Russell, and his coterie did, that Bunk was the missing link between Buddy Bolden and Louis Armstrong was, so many critics said 'bad history'. It was 'bunk'. Bunk would have been too young to play with Bolden. In the second place, as jazz scholarship became more sophisticated, increasingly more sophisticated theories of the origins and development of jazz were constructed. For instance, *Jazzmen* had rooted the origins of jazz in the 'story' of the importance of the New Orleans 'Congo Square' slave meetings as being vital in providing the rhythmic foundations of jazz. Again, it rooted its 'story' of the development of jazz, in the migration to Chicago, seen as following the closure of Storyville – the Red Light district of New Orleans – in 1917. Both of these 'theories' have subsequently come under heavy attack (see, especially, Collins, 1996). Again, much of the structure of *Jazzmen* lays down the beginnings of a jazz canonisation, which contemporary theorists might wish to render problematic.

However, on balance and in its own terms, a convincing case can be made that 'Even without an "institutionalized means of validating adequacy of training and competence of trained individuals," (Russell's) work met all the accepted standards of the definition of the professional (Stebbins, 1977)' (Fitzgerald, 2008: 7-8). Even today, many of the leading writers on jazz have no directly relevant formal training. Moreover, as McDonald (2006) point out, jazz is still under-represented within popular music studies and canons of popular music. Certainly, there is minimal work on New Orleans jazz revivalism in cultural studies and/or popular music studies, and what there is tends to focus on the British experience (Goodey, 1968; McKay, 2003; 2004; 2005; Moore, 2007).

Significantly, in a series of interviews two years before he

died, Russell convincingly defended his earlier views on Bunk, notwithstanding the subsequent critiques both of Russell's jazz scholarship and Russell's allegedly inflated view of Bunk's musical abilities and Bunk's importance in the history of jazz[4] (Russell and Pointon, 1992).

Mythologising

'Trailblazing', as a mode of historical writing, purports to discover 'truths'. Thus Russell thought he had made a major rediscovery with his written and recorded work with Bunk. Many writers still maintain that his contributions to *Jazzmen*, although in need of refining, still set many of the parameters of jazz history today (Hazeldine, 1993: xi). These early jazz 'historian' pioneers may not have problematised the reliability, veracity, or partiality of a given source, in the fundamental way, presupposed by critiques of positivism in the social sciences, but within their broadly 'positivist' view of the world they did in regards to the 'facts' they unearthed. In regards to their aesthetic judgements as to the value of the music they commented upon, they would – had they been reflective – presumably have followed the positivist distinction between statements of fact and statements of value, and considered they were making value judgements, subject to opinion and debate.

When we move to the historical mode of writing I term 'Mythologising', however, we enter a different terrain in regards to reliability, veracity and partiality of sources. Here, we might say, the 'value' (the 'meaning') accorded the

[4] This BBC Radio 3 series 'Bunk and Bill' had its origins in a long interview Mike Pointon and Ray Smith did with Bill Russell in 1990, some of which was used for the radio program. According to Pointon (personal communication) Russell 'reluctantly agreed that it might lead to a book if transcribed'. Subsequently, Pointon and Smith have added material on Russell and a book is forthcoming, probably, this year (2010). Pointon is a jazz musician and prolific jazz writer. He is self-taught as an oral historian. In my email interview work with Pointon, supplementing my face-to-face interviews, I had written: 'Is it possible to have copies of your Bunk programs? My assignment is in "historiography" – "The Discovery and Resurrection of Bunk Johnson"! As, is the way with these academic courses, it will be a question of setting out the various "narratives" on this - NOT coming out with some "truth"!' Significantly, Pointon replies: 'I warn you, though - it IS the truth, at least from Russell's perspective!' Original letters of the correspondence from Pointon to Russell on this program are included in the Bill Russell Collection, Williams Research Center, New Orleans.

rediscovery and resurrection of Bunk Johnson, subsumes the 'truth' 'value' of that rediscovery's component 'facts'. The emphasis now becomes the W.I. Thomas 'theorem': 'If men (sic) define situations as real, they are real in their consequences'. On the pragmatic theory of truth (neither a correspondence theory nor a coherence theory, but an 'objective relativist' theory), 'fact' and 'value' are interrelated in complex empirical ways, and – except analytically – are inseparable (Mead, 1929a; Joas, 1993). In the present context, however, it is sufficient to argue that it was the very 'mythologizing' of Bunk's rediscovery and resurrection that enabled its impact to be so great within what became a world-wide New Orleans jazz revivalism movement, that continues to this day.

Mythologising takes two major modes: those that I consider in terms of 'romanticising' and 'splitting', respectively. The former is a not uncommon mode of historical writing. For the latter, I draw upon psychoanalytic formulations of splitting (e.g., Freud, 1940).

The romanticising 'mythologising' story is built upon a mythologized Bunk. It also built upon a mythologised English trumpet player Ken Colyer, who became the undisputed leader of a 'purist' Bunk orientated sect within British New Orleans jazz revivalism (Melly, 1984). After first hearing the Bunk Johnson records that filtered through to England in the mid-late 1940s, Colyer devoted his life to a career which sought to popularise 'authentic New Orleans jazz', by which he meant, primarily, the music of Bunk Johnson and the other 'stay at homes' who he heard and, in some cases, played with and recorded during his trip to New Orleans in 1952/1953 (Colyer, 1952/1953; 1970; 2009).

Bunk was mythologised by his worldwide devotees for the more hagiographic writings about him, which stressed the circumstances of his rediscovery, his new set of teeth, his alleged 'petulance', his heavy drinking (Sonnier, 1977: 14) and so on. In the same vein, Ken Colyer was mythologised (romanticised) for his dramatic pioneering pilgrimage to New Orleans, his surly character and his heavy drinking. Colyer joined the merchant navy and waited until he got to a port near New Orleans, at Mobile, Alabama, whereupon he jumped ship and headed for New Orleans on a Greyhound bus. After several months in New Orleans, he was incarcerated in the

New Orleans parish prison for overstaying his visa and/or, according some accounts, playing with black musicians in a segregated New Orleans (Colyer, 1952/1953; 1970; 2009; Pointon and Smith, forthcoming).

Both Bunk and Ken Colyer were lionised by their devotees. In Britain, the formation of a Bunk Johnson Appreciation Society, in the late 1950s, subsequently re-named the New Orleans Jazz Appreciation Society, in the early 1960s, was the stomping ground of many of those New Orleans-style English musicians, discographers, record producers and writers who came to prominence from the 1960s onwards (Pointon and Martyn, 2010: 3; Burns, 2007). This pioneering work was subsequently developed in Sweden by the Bunk Johnson Society. These developments, in collaboration with American enthusiasts, have led to the institution of a Bunk Johnson Festival in Bunk's home town of New Iberia. Moreover, there is now a Bunk Johnson Collection housed in a special room in the New Iberia Parish library; a named 'Bunk Johnson Park' in New Iberia; and the beginnings of a Bunk Johnson Collection in the Bayou Teche Museum, New Iberia. Many members of this jazz sub-world attempt serious scholarship themselves about Bunk and jazz (more Trailblazing). However, even in these cases, it was often the mythologizing that remained the anchor and inspiration of their endeavours. More often, most enthusiasts rest content with the mythologizing.

The proponents of early revivalism split themselves off sharply from the 'modern' bebop movement that was the other major response to the disillusionment with the 'swing era' in the late 1930s and early 1940s. This gave rise to the so-called 'jazz wars' of 1942-1946 – first, between adherents of jazz and swing and later between devotees of earlier jazz and bebop (Gendron, 1995). Soon afterwards, as we have seen, the revivalist movement split into two, those following Oliver/Armstrong/Morton and those following, principally, Lewis and Johnson.

A second 'jazz wars' then developed, particularly in England, between what for a while were called the 'traditionalists' following Ken Colyer vs. the 'revivalists' following the revivalist tradition begun in San Francisco by Lu Watters, in Australia by Graeme Bell, and in England by George Webb, in the 1940s and 1950s. In the 1960s, the

terminology changed. The dispute was now between those who favoured 'classic jazz' (Oliver/Armstrong/Morton) and what became known as 'Contemporary New Orleans Jazz', following the 'second wave revivalism' that developed from the early 1960s (Bissonette, 1992) onwards, in New Orleans, following, *inter alia*, the opening of Preservation Hall, where musicians in the Bunk/Lewis tradition played, including Lewis, himself, until his death in 1968 (Carter, 1991).

In point of fact, none of the earlier trailblazers who had championed Bunk Johnson had made the split in revivalism as sharply as many of the world-wide jazz traditionalists/revivalists did and continue to do[5]. Here, we might say, there was yet more mythologizing. Moreover, the trailblazers, themselves – particularly Bill Russell – became increasingly mythologised. Note, for instance (Hazeldine, 1993: ix):

> It is impossible to over-estimate Bill Russell's importance to New Orleans music. As a research and historian he was without question *the* authority. He not only started out searching out pioneer jazz musicians before anyone else, but knew them all better. Over the years he interviewed and collected material on more New Orleans musicians than all the other researcher and writers put together.
>
> Without his insight and single-minded dedication, Bunk would have remained and been forgotten in New Iberia and the recordings that are the very foundation of our understanding of this music would not have been made. Without his leadership and inspiration, two generations of jazz research and the rediscovery of hundreds of New Orleans musicians would never have happened. Tulane Jazz Archives would not exist, nor would Preservation Hall and scores of jazz record labels that have continued his pioneering work.

[5] For example, the drummer who most interested Bill Russell was Warren 'Baby' Dodds. Baby Dodds played on both the 'classic' Louis Armstrong Hot 5's and Hot 7's of the 1920s and on almost all of Bill Russell's Bunk Johnson recordings. Indeed, Russell issued three volumes of his *American Music* LPs featuring Baby Dodds soloing and talking about his drumming. In the same vein, Russell spent a large part of his professional life writing his book on Jelly Roll Morton.

Debunking

All the full length studies of Bunk variously either refine ('refining') the trailblazing or the mythologizing (Hillman 1988; Sonnier, 1977; Hazeldine and Martyn, 2000). An early paper by Berger (1947), written at the height of the 'purism' and 'cultism' surrounding the initial rediscovery and resurrection of Bunk, set the standards for the story which critiques Russell's research methodologies, in the service of debunking Bunk. However, most 'debunking' is ritualistic, either as part of a critique or 'rubbishing' of revivalism, generally – as in the 'jazz wars' of 1942-1946 (Gendron, 1995); or of the Johnson/Lewis variant for being especially weak musically – as in many of the record reviews, before an alternative revivalist jazz canon was constructed (see below – 'Marginalising').

The butt of the 'rubbishing' is variously Bunk's lying about jazz history and his place in it; and the weakness of the music he produced during his resurrection. On one view, he was an old, worn out man, when he was recorded, however good he may have been in his day. On another view, there is no particular evidence to suggest either he was ever amongst the top ranks of jazz trumpet players, or that his place in early jazz history should be accorded any particular importance.

Mostly, these views are asserted, rather than argued for. His worth is simply dismissed ('dismissing'). I will leave for another time detailed consideration of this 'debunking', and dwell rather on the more important points made by Berger (1947) which set the standards for subsequent debunking.

Berger finds the 'cultish activity' surrounding the rediscovery of Bunk to be 'offensive'. He argues that the authors of *Jazzmen* were led astray by Bunk's self-aggrandisement – 'the chroniclers of jazz must exercise more selectivity if there is to be any trustworthy historical literature on the subject' (Berger, 1947: 96). In particular, he asserts that it was 'in accepting Bunk's word so uncritically that some of the writers of *Jazzmen* made their greatest error' (p. 96), before going on to argue the errors in Bunk's account according to his own interview material with other musicians. Relatedly, Berger argues that other musicians have legitimate claims to importance in jazz history, which the emphasis on Bunk tends to conceal, before concluding: 'The superlative-

minded jazz connoisseurs, always pointing out the "best" this or the "first" that, inevitably tend to diminish the stature of other great players, both Negro and white. The jazz community can do with fewer ready-made judgements from oracles about who is the *best* cornetist or the *best* trombonist, or the first collector to hold Bunk's mouthpiece or see his teeth in the glass on the window sill' (p. 99).

Other challenges to Bunk's veracity appeared later in Gushee (1987), for example. But it was the scholarly Marquis's 'trailblazing' research on Buddy Bolden (Marquis, 2005) whose detailed consideration of the evidence on Bunk's birth date , placed Bunk's birth date ten years earlier than he claimed, thus making it impossible for him to have played with Bolden. This may well become the accepted view in early jazz scholarship. Interestingly, some Bunk devotees are now beginning to reconstruct their own histories of Bunk arguing 'Does it really matter (his birth date)? It takes nothing away from a remarkable musician and a charismatic personality' Hazeldine and Martyn, 2000: 19).

Marginalising

In his 1942 *Jazz Quarterly* article extolling the genius of Bunk, as an 'old-style' New Orleans lead trumpet player, Russell had written: 'naturally almost every sin known to European musical culture is committed – lack of precision, out of tunefulness, smears, muffs – in other words we have with us once again the well known "sloppy New Orleans ensemble" – but an ensemble whose unpredictable rhythms, vitalizing accents, and independence of parts (even when playing isometrically) are more thrilling than any symphonic group' (Russell, 1942, reprinted in Hazeldine and Martyn, 2000: 265).

These 'sins' detailed by Russell played a large part in Bunk's marginalisation in the history of jazz canonisation. No amount of emphasis upon 'expressive', 'from the heart' playing taking priority over sophisticated or even adequate technique affected this marginalisation. Moreover, jazz canonisation in academic jazz studies favours an evolutionary story of 'progress'. Bunk could be rejected as a candidate for such canonisation. In consequence, Bunk is either ignored entirely, or his role is marginalised as outside the mainstream of jazz history. Often, this marginalising is of the entire

revivalist movement. In Townsend (2000), for instance, a 194 page book with an embracive intent – *Jazz in American Culture* – the 'revivalist' movement is afforded a mere seventeen line paragraph with no mention of any actual revivalist musician. Meeder's (2008: 86) treatment is illustrative of exemplary marginalising of Bunk, when Bunk is mentioned in such 'jazz studies' texts. Significantly, Meeder is a graduate student of the prestigious Masters' programme in Jazz History and Research at Rutgers University. In his chapter on 'Bebop and Moldy Figs', he writes:

> While critics squabbled, older musicians enjoyed increased attention and reinvigorated careers. Louis Armstrong returned to small New Orleans style combos in 1947, and made some of his best recordings in fifteen years . . . Sidney Bechet also made a comeback . . . In 1945, Bechet formed a working group with trumpeter Bunk Johnson which did not last long but began a resurgence of interest in both players. Johnson, who was born in New Orleans in 1889, became a sort of fetish for jazz purists. Because of his age (he had claimed to be ten years older than he was), and the false claim that he had taught Louis Armstrong, Johnson was lauded by many as the authentic voice of jazz. No mind was paid to the fact that his playing did not really resemble recordings of the New Orleans musicians from the 1920s. On the contrary, his quiet, simple approach to playing (and his choice of repertoire, since he did not shy away from popular tunes of the 1940s) indicates that Johnson was part of a scene of New Orleans musicians who had developed their own tradition of music apart from the mainstream of jazz.

Thus do 'marginalising' stories deal with all the trailblazing and mythologizing work on Bunk that I have detailed! Not surprisingly, perhaps, the trailblazers and mythologisers, themselves, largely ignore such work and continue with the development of their own alternative canon, set forth in the core texts of Ramsey and Smith (1939); Charters (1962); and Stagg and Crump (1972), for instance. Developments include such work as Bethell (1971); Carter (1991); Turner (1994), to say nothing of the myriad of articles in such core alternative canon enthusiast's magazines as *New Orleans Music*, and similarly inspired publications and internet sources,

comprising an 'alternative canonic hub' (Karja, 2006) of Bunk inspired revivalism.

Towards a Conclusion

I have been concerned to situate the rediscovery and resurrection of Bunk Johnson within a popular music history studies and cultural studies framework. It must be said that no detailed study of Bunk exists within these frameworks. Indeed, as McDonald (2006: 125) makes explicit there is a need to combat 'the under-representation of jazz within popular music studies and canons of popular music', more generally. In these regards, this essay is a pioneering and innovative work. In particular, I have situated my treatment of Bunk within a theoretical framework drawing on G.H. Mead's theory of the time, the past and history, and a methodology rooted in grounded theory. G.H. Mead's work is pivotal to much sociological (symbolic interactionist) social constructionism, but the approach is under-utilized and under-explored in popular music studies and cultural studies, and, indeed, in the related fields of Jazz Studies, Black Studies, African-American Studies, and so on. In particular, Mead's theory of the past is especially under-utilised and under-explored in popular music history, cultural theory and in the social sciences, generally. For the purposes of this article I have simply presupposed the approach. Further work would need to develop the approach's implications and its similarities and dissimilarities with other approaches that are or might be utilised in popular music history studies.

Because of the unfamiliarity of my chosen substantive area in popular music studies history, I chose to elaborate the historical modes of 'trailblazing' and 'mythologizing' at the expense of a more detailed treatment of 'debunking' and 'marginalising'. In any event, however, detailed questions of reliability, veracity or partiality of a given source do not really arise in the debunking and marginalising modes, because neither mode takes either the trailblazing or mythologizing stories seriously. Indeed, they do not take the rediscovery and resurrection of Bunk Johnson seriously! Nevertheless, further work on the marginalising mode would profit from the sort of sophisticated conceptual and analytical distinctions made on canonic discourse by Everist (2001) and Weber (2001).

Finally, to conclude on the question: What has been missed out of the various accounts we have considered? From the grounded theory approach of this article, story telling within each of the four narrative modes considered tends to ignore (miss out) aspects that the other modes highlight. To go further than this would be to argue for an essentialism or 'real' past historical 'truth' that Mead's theory of the past belies. For Mead, and, in consequence for this essay, reality is always rooted in the present and with each new present the possibilities of new pasts will arise.

Author:
Richard Ekins, Ph.D., FRSA
Emeritus Professor of Sociology and Cultural Studies
School of Media, Film and Journalism
Centre for Media Research
University of Ulster at Coleraine, UK
Email: rjm.ekins@ulster.ac.uk

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