

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND
AFRICAN STUDIES INSTITUTE

African Studies Seminar Paper
to be presented in RW
4.00pm SEPTEMBER 1976

Title: Cultural Politics: Black Performing Arts in Johannesburg

by: David Coplan

No. 045

- David Coplan

Max Weber (1964 ed.) was perhaps the first social theorist of power to note that activity in virtually any domain can serve as a basis of power, and that once established, such power can become available for use in other domains as well (Cohen 1966). Bertrand Russell (Cohen, 1969, p. 213) has most clearly expressed the implications of this notion for the study of power: "Power, like energy, must be regarded as continually passing from any one of its forms into any other, and it should be the business of social science to seek the laws of such transformation."

It is my contention that the study of Johannesburg's black performing arts within the framework of a theory of social power can contribute to the formulation of such "laws". Though he does not concern himself with the arts specifically, Richard N Adams (1970, 1975) has developed a theory which can be of considerable value in understanding the role of expressive culture in the transformation of power in complexly structured situations.

Adams' achievement is based in part on his careful distinction (1975, p. 10) between control, which is physical in nature, and power, which is psychosocial. While control of the total environment of interaction is energy and the basis of social power, energy forms and flows operate as power only when they are culturally recognised; that is, made relevant to some system of value and meaning.

This is the focus of Adams' second crucial distinction (ibid, p. 167), that between reality potential, or the degree of actual control on which the exercise of social power can be based, and cultural potential, or the extent to which an actor's ability to exert control is recognised by himself and others in the political field. Recognition may or may not affect control, but it will affect the ability to use control to influence others. There is thus an emergence from control to power. While the potential of control is unilateral, that of power is inherently reciprocal (ibid, p. 13, 24).

I would like to employ some admittedly oversimplified generalisations drawn from research into African performing arts in Johannesburg in exploring the notion that expressive cultural performance may be instrumental in the attachment of meaning to energy forms which constitute the cultural potential of power. This attempt is based on Durkheim's idea (1972) that cultural images are the repositories of systems of value of identity. I am also working from the premise that as systems of aesthetic action, forms of expressive culture order personal experience in ways which help to instrumentalise group values and personal identification. This is done by affectively and thus persuasively communicating their ideational components (Firth 1964, p. 292). The implications of this last statement are highly problematic. My purpose is not so much to affirm its validity as to explore the nature of these problems.

Functionally, systems of aesthetic action in Black Johannesburg have at least three main dimensions: the cathartic arousal and release of emotion in recreational contexts, or the 'entertainment' function; the ordering and re-ordering of experience by the manipulation of metaphoric images into 'strategic and stylised formulae for dealing with problematic situations' (Geerty, 1973, p 165), of the 'adaptive' function; and the evocation of cultural roles and normative principles which can lend a social contention the organising capacity of 'consensual power' (Swartz, Twiner, Tuden 1966, p 14), the 'power' function.

In emphasising the active interrelation of these three functions, we can conceive of them analytically or lying on a kind of continuum of differential concern with action for sociopolitical change. Music and drama as 'entertainment' are little concerned with raising the cultural potential of African power, and

may even serve to undermine this aspect of their other functions. At a performance by the group "Amagugu" at Orlando on July 10th, 1976, a female vocalist raised her arm in a clenched-fist salute as she articulated the word Amandla (Zulu: 'power') during a rather syrupy 'soul' ballad. Immediately more than 50% of the audience raised their arms in a similar salute and shouted in unison, Amandla Eyethu! ('power is ours'). Mr. Titus Masikane, the group's manager, said that while such demonstrations were not new, they had taken on a new forcefulness and significance since the outbreak of unrest in Soweto on June 16th. He added, however, that quite a few bands do this now in order to excite the audience, and that they were not seriously committed but merely 'playing to the market'. Allowing for the fact that Mr. Masikane's response may have been influenced by my identity as a white, the episode illustrates an ambivalence in black urban musical expression in Johannesburg. On the one hand it can be seen as promoting black unity and helping to provide a spur to organised political action outside the entertainment situation. Alternatively, the overuse of 'black power' symbolism by commercial bands 'entertaining' the crowd can trivialise its effects and allow its action potential to fall victim to faddism.

Performing arts provide a means of cognitive and moral reorientation to an urban industrial milieu through the adaptive transformation of the conceptualisation of experience. They are concerned with culture change, as adjustment to new environmental conditions. Therefore, and provided that this is not, in itself, explanatory, we can suggest that 'adaptation' is a key concept for the study of diachronic cultural processes (Adams, 1970, ch. 2).

In South Africa in the 1930s the great Zulu composer R.T. Caluya satirised the urban street musicians then known as abaghafi. These were rough, flamboyant characters who disrespected traditional values and imitated in their dress and manner the cowboys of American cinema. Sometime miners who were neither Christian nor Western educated, the abaghafi symbolised for 'respectable' African city dwellers the demoralising aspects of acculturation in the industrial environment (Vilakazi, 1957: 99ff). Over the years the umghafi was replaced by the tsotsi, also much celebrated in song (Damuzamdlele, 'BoTsotsi' Gallotone GB 1654). The term 'tsotsi' is remarkable in that it refers as much to a symbolic concept as to a specific category of individuals. The social disorganisation and value disorientation of the ethnically heterogeneous township was symbolised as much as characterised by the rise of the tsotsi. In daily experience an only too common criminal, he is conceptually an embodiment of conscienceless evils; an entirely amoral, egocentric character who can be associated with none of the makeshift sociocultural systems developed by urbanising Africans. He exists in a vague borderland between African and Western culture where no recognised set of organising values seems to apply. Though he is hated and feared by 'decent' urban Africans, it is interesting to note that the entirely negative portrayal of the tsotsi in such plays as L L J Mncuango's Ngenzeni (1959) (Gerard 1971: 266) has recently been softened in the work of popular dramatists such as Gibson Kente. Kente has often portrayed the tsotsi sympathetically as the frustrated victim of the inescapable circumstances of the township environment. This prompted one reviewer (S'ketch', Summer 1972: 28) to observe that 'meaningful theatre' has become involved with attempts to 'justify criminal action by sentimental speeches'.

Consensual power is motivated by the belief that normative behaviour will satisfy expectations. It refers to the generalised capacity of a goal-oriented group to elicit behaviour from its member in conformity with values on which the existence of the group is based (Swartz, Turner and Tuden, 1966: 14). Thus as a means for the establishment of consensual power, artistic performances increase group support for premises on which specific strategies for changing external constraints might be founded.

Music, for example, can function as part of systems of action which appeal to principles of order transcending those upon which social differentiation is based, articulating their principles and placing upon them an emotional change

(V.W. Turner, 1969). This has long been the case with M. E. Sontonga's Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika (c. 1900). More recently this has also been the inspiration behind the pan-African 'black consciousness' music of Dashiki, who regularly performed for functions of the Black People's Congress and the South African Students' Organisation. Though fear of detention led to Dashiki's dissolution in late 1974, the group had clearly begun to demonstrate that if a form of music is identified with a social group where demand for it is a badge of sympathetic identification, it can be a powerful recourse in inter-group struggle (Eisenstadt, 1965).

In Adams' terms, we can say that the reality potential of performing arts in a situation of social conflict is a function of their cultural potential. This cultural potential is, however, completely interdependent with the reality potential of the community at large for the achievement of group goals. Black Johannesburg, then, serves as a sort of limiting case in which an increase in the cultural potential of consensual power may be crucial to changes in the sociopolitical distribution of control in favour of a group coercively denied any explicit means of political organisation or expression.

While even a superficial assessment of their situation may give the impression that the African majority possesses little reality potential for control, it should be emphasized that South African society is based on a multidimensional interdependence of Africans and whites and the almost complete integration of African labour capacity with the requirements of the socio-economic industrial system. Though denied self-determination in virtually every aspect of co-operative life, black South Africans do have power potential by virtue of their physical control over their own bodies (Adams, 1975: 23) which implies the ability to withhold their labour from the system, or to contribute to its disruptive modification by collective disobedience to the legal order. To transform this control into power, however, requires directed self-control amongst significant numbers of the majority in the face of the unrestrained coercive power of the state. The emergence of African control into power may thus vitally depend upon increases in the cultural recognition of control and in the transcendent value of its individual and collective exercise.

The operational nature of musical behaviour as a sociocultural variable in the context of South African culture contact and urbanisation is partly responsible for the limited ability of the performing arts to generate symbolic systems capable of galvanising the sentiments of the mass of individuals in support of political action (Firth, 1964: 293). Cohen (1974: 138) notes that 'the symbolic order and the power order are involved in the creation and recreation of selfhood and also in the dynamics of continuity and change.' Although existing political or social organisation may disintegrate in the process of African urbanisation, identity systems often persist in the process of change. Thus while experience can be 'stored' in identity systems in symbolic form (Eisenstadt, 1965: 472), these systems are dynamic and can be manipulated in response to the circumstances in which people find themselves, the impressions they seek to convey, or the goals to which they aspire. It is, therefore, important to consider the question of social images of the ideal personality and how these images are generated, (Fernandez, 1972).

On the level of adaptation, a veteran mbaganga (African 'jive') vocalist, Simon 'Indoda' Mahlathini, has achieved phenomenal popularity among slightly urbanised Nguni speakers by creating an ideal contemporary masculine image. According to talent scout Cambridge Matiwane, his listeners enjoy the aggressiveness and drive in Mahlathini's style:

"His voice is full of attach, and Nguni people are former warriors who respect a powerful voice and it is nostalgic to them and reminds them of past glory. He sings about women, his mother, the homelands, life in general. Every song has a message. The women admire him like a warrior would be admired in olden days, but he is modern also."

Due to the endemic insecurity of township life, where houses and land cannot be purchased by residents and crime and violence are often inescapable, Mahlathini appeals to many semi-literate townsmen as well as the migrants and domestic servants. His audience enjoys looking backward and 'homeward' in time, yet his evocation of the ideal modern Ngumi male personality brings them forward into urbanised life. Though it includes elements of traditional melody, the form, style and rhythmic content of Mahlathini's music is entirely township in origin.

The struggle for the cultural recognition of African power in South African cities has centred on the differential values applied to cultures, and on the nature of collective African identity as defined by Africans on the one hand and by the dominant white minority on the other. African performing arts have been vitally involved in this dialectical process of culture and identity. Speaking to this issue, Magubane (1973: 1706) has posed a series of questions which are of central importance to research perspectives on urban African social and cultural problems. "Does repression affect the African's attitude to his culture, customs and his attitude to the dominant group's custom and culture?" The answer is certainly yes, but we must consider the further question, "How?" The answer to Magubane's second question (ibid), "What is the African's attitude to his partially destroyed culture?" is central to the argument of this paper.

Groups conquered by the Zulu in the nineteenth century had often accepted much of Zulu culture along with administrative integration into their new empire (Omer-Cooper, 1966). Similarly, the dominating presence of a large white settler population which used African labour extensively, first for agriculture and then for mining and industry, led to the steady long-term development of syncretic cultural models amongst black South Africans (Ngubane, 1971).

Many Africans accepted the putative superiority of the European's cultural values and forms of expression along with his technological superiority. The government attempted to rigidify traditional African political institutions under the guise of 'indirect rule' in such policies as the Native Administrative Act of 1927 (Magubane, 1973: 1703). Nevertheless, those who could acquire Western education and thus advance under the new system became heirs to the prestige, though not the authority, of traditional leaders now unable to direct the destiny of their constituents or to effectively represent their interests. This process was particularly evident in cities, where those who had chosen the 'school' alternative (Mayer, 1961) rapidly came to associate economic and social advancement with the abandonment of 'inferior' traditional culture and the acquisition of things European.

The words 'uncivilised' and 'heathen' with which whites had long disparaged anything African came to be applied by Africans to each other in the urban struggle for socioeconomic mobility (Wilson and Mafeje, 1963: 172) and even Africans who spoke little English or Afrikaans feared to associate themselves with anything ihlati (Zulu) 'bush'. Along with the internalisation of white definitions of African self-identity and the urge to escape them came the positive valuation of the urban way of life and the deprecation of anything considered rural by the black urban community. Slowly, among permanent urbanites, patterns of social stratification based on socioeconomic status began to replace 'tribal' identification as a basis for group association and social interaction.

While the abstraction of these general trends provides some useful orientations, their development has been by no means uniform. The variable employment of differentially available cultural resources by categories of social actors created an immensely complex variety of strategies of social adaptation. European control of material resources and essentially uniform attitudes towards the African population in terms of their ethnic origin made tribal patterns of association increasingly less valuable as a person became progressively more urbanised. Nevertheless, the failure of the government to uniformly reward

efforts at westernisation or to permit any genuine social mobility or political self-determinisation vis-a-vis white society prevented the emergence of any clearly superior adaptive strategy of urbanisation. With the possibility of the situational selection of values came the necessity to weigh the disadvantages of abandoning those one already possessed in favour of the difficult struggle to acquire alien ones whose benefits turned out to be uncertain at best.

The diversity of social organisation and culture characteristic of all urban African communities has had serious consequences in Johannesburg. Despite the necessity for a unified response in crisis situations such as the forced move from the urban 'location' to distant Soweto beginning in the late 1930s, 'pluralistic' African urban society has been fragmented and riven with multiplex antagonisms. The current unrest and conflict in the townships has thrown this problem into even sharper relief.

As the African community grew, voluntary associations developed which served to provide welfare services, aid socio-environmental adaptation and fill the organisational vacuum left by the loss of traditional social institutions. In the city the choral dance music which had provided the essential basis of orderly social interaction at group functions in traditional society (Rycroft, 1975) was consciously repudiated. Despite this, music remained vital to social recreation and often provided an explicit organisational purpose and core activity for these associations. Choral music associations were especially common before World War II, with several often agreeing to support each other's performances with attendance and contributions. The 'Eisteddfod' choral competitions are still an important organisational focus for African professional people. Rotating credit schemes in the pre-war locations were often based on the revenues produced by 'Stockfel', known in the United States as 'rent parties'. Admission fees and the sale of refreshments augmented by the practice of bidding small amounts to bring performers on or send them off resulted in a sizable profit for the member in whose behalf the party was held. At the same time they provided the most frequent source of employment for local musicians and were a major focus of recreational life in the locations.

In both the voluntary associations and the rapidly proliferating venues of public entertainment, elements from African traditional and Western musical sources were combined in the 1920s and '30s to produce a variety of syncretic and imitative styles. These developed to serve the needs of social groups distinguished by education, socio-economic status, and identification with different sets of values and expressive symbols.

The South African racial 'caste' system, has worked to prevent the formation of an established urban African middle class and Hellman (1971) maintains that lorry drivers may earn more than white-collar workers because Africans have only recently been admitted to these trades. While this helped make differences in social status more arbitrary and difficult to detect, local categories of social differentiation gradually began to appear in the musical form regularly presented at nightspots, social occasions, promotional ventures and community organisations. Emerging social groups began to identify their aspirations not only with specific social and cultural values but with certain patterns of dress, social behaviour and musical preference. Although these patterns of musical identification have been highly complex, we can speak generally in terms of a continuum of musical emphasis from traditional to Western in preferred styles as one goes up the social scale. Still, processes of urbanisation and Westernisation have varied independently in black Johannesburg. Cross-cutting dimensions of general racial identification versus the white 'caste' and complex patterns of 'reference group' behaviour have developed as well.

In the 1930s and early 1940s, largely illiterate manual labour danced to the rough up-tempo syncretism of marabi at rowdy shebeens, while members of an educated middle class dressed in evening wear to participate in ballroom dance

contests adjudicated by whites. At the same time, stockfel tended to be neighbourhood affairs which attracted a socially heterogeneous audience, though they were frequently organised by members of class-oriented social networks. Formally dressed, polished performers of American instrumental and vocal orchestrations such as the Merry Blackbirds and the Manhattan Brothers also attracted a varied audience whose common denominator was simply the desire to urbanise.

In the last 1940s and '50s, the snobbery of ballroom dancing and the 'polished' renditions of Western choral music by school and church-trained African choirs were mirrored in the 'bombing choir' contests of lower class Nguni males. Rycroft (1958: 55) reports that for "Zulu and Swazi men of little or no education who (were) newly weaned from country loyalties, 'bombing' (was) one of the marks of conspicuous townsmanship." Musically, these performances added a number of traditional features such as Zulu yelling, pentatonic polyphonies, and antiphonal part structure, to spontaneous imitations of middle-class choral singing. Many groups had impressive names, like the Newcastle Humming Bees, and wore 'smart' distinctive uniforms imitating urban middle-class attire. These included zoot jackets or blazers with badges, coloured pockets, lion-skin caps, bath-plug chains worn at a droop, two-toned patent leather shoes and bright socks and suspenders.

Like the ballroom dance competitions boisterous all-night 'bombing' contests (at such halls as the Polly Street Education Centre had their white judges. Ordinarily these were the first denizens of a nearby tavern who could be persuaded to serve, and whose entirely arbitrary decisions had the cardinal virtue of impartiality. First prize usually consisted of a goat or a considerable part of the takings (Rycroft, 1957: 33-35).

'Bombing' was not popular in the 1950s with non-northern Ngunis, who did not share the same musical traditions, or with strongly traditional Zulus and Swazis who rejected urbanisation and urban performance styles. Educated Zulus likewise rejected it as a rather embarrassing, almost satirical attempt by their 'raw' countrymen to imitate the expressive aspects of their lofty social and cultural aspirations.

This type of reference group behaviour is still reflected today in the more consciously satirical musical sketches featured at Mbaganga shows at the Rio Cinema on Market Street. There, a Gallo Co. M.C. who calls himself 'Very Fast' regularly appears on stage in athletic, slapstick routines of his own devising. Dressed in an academic gown, high collar, huge drooping gold cufflinks, and brightly polished outsize shoes, he mugs, postures and dances about the stage, joking aggressively in Zulu interspersed with English catch phrases from the workaday world, such as 'no time to waste!' and 'Do your job!' The shows offer mbaqanga music, 'jive' dancing and satirical sketches specialising in the deflation of the pompous. The contemporary 'polished' practitioners of the 'bombing' style, called mbube groups, are also sometimes featured at the Rio and I will have more to say of them later.

Let us now turn our attention to the aspirations of the politically conscious middle class and the Afro-American musical styles to which they have become so strongly attached. Though the degree of its early influence is uncertain, there is little question that interest in Afro-American jazz increased rapidly after the introduction of hand-wound gramophones, then considered a sign of status in the late 1920s. Louis Armstrong, the great swing bands of Basie and Ellington, and the close harmony vocal style of the Mills Brothers and Inkspots were popular with all classes of urbanising and permanent townsmen. Local groups such as the Manhattan Brothers imitated the Mills Brothers, setting vernacular lyrics to American melodies and helped get the African recording industry on its feet in the late 1930s. Broadcasting for Africans followed in the '40s. These rapidly became large-scale entertainment enterprises bent

on manipulating the creative vitality of local black musicians for commercial purposes.

In the thirties and forties, black American music gained increasing social relevance as the process of rapid urbanisation of Africans continued. The combined media of magazines such as *Downbeat* and *Ebony*, films like *Stormy Weather* and *Black Velvet*, and the recordings of the great American jazzmen all projected the image of dynamism, modernity, sophistication, fame and financial success in the music of a culture that was unequivocally black. While African elements in American jazz no doubt facilitated its ready acceptance amongst black urbanites in Johannesburg (Roberts, 1972: 257ff), its relevance to problems of urban African self-identity greatly enhanced its appeal. So strong was local identification with urban black American culture, and so prevalent were its manifestations in the 1940s that Johannesburg's largest location, Sophiatown, was popularly known as 'little Harlem'.

Jazz music was obviously neither ihlati nor tied to the parochial traditions of any specific tribal group. For the middle class, it provided a specifically Black model of urban modernity that incorporated many of the values and social aspirations adopted during the acquisition of European education. Black South Africa was largely isolated from the culturally oriented forms of nationalism that would lead to the independence of most of the continent. Here, educated Africans identified attempts to revive traditional culture with government schemes to retard their development by saddling them with a 'Bantu culture' artificially created by white bureaucrats in Pretoria (van den Berghe, 1964: 59, 62).

This perspective is still evident in the disparaging attitude which many educated Africans have toward the strongly syncretic mbaqanga music of performers such as Mahlathini. To them, mbaqanga is a sort of musical 'tsotsitaal' (township patois) promoted by 'tribal' government broadcasting services to keep Africans culturally backward - a logical counterpart to the government programme of 'Bantu education'. In addition, the middle class tends to see the traditional images of manliness, heroism and leadership evoked by Mahlathini as anti-progressive; a political and cultural dead end. What they seem to be up against in fact is the continuing viability for many urban residents, Zulus in particular, of 'tribal' institutions, and a deepseated reverence for traditional authority, whether African or White. The differing tastes in artistic performance styles appear to reflect a social cleavage fostered in part by a socio-economic order which has prevented the crystallisation of a unified urban social system.

In the post World War II era, black South African nationalists identified their aspirations with the general principles of British social democracy so flagrantly violated by the government, while the majority of permanent townsmen identified more closely with Duke Ellington than with Kwame Nkrumah. Black American music provided a system of affective symbolic images allowing for the positive restructuring of African self-identity, but it was dependent on foreign sources of generation and distribution and did little to create a sense of historical continuity for urban Africans or to enhance the value of indigenous cultural traditions.

Perhaps more importantly, it placed positive emphasis not on racial unity or cultural pride so much as on a conceptually delimited world of 'entertainment' which could be effectively separated from strategies for change in the larger society. Its values and symbols were intimately linked to the ethos of American showbusiness, and the social metaphors it provided were embedded in the form of media press releases.

Returning to a crucial point noted earlier, we can observe that the entertainment function of music in modern society may undercut adaptive and power functions by facilitating the delineation of what Schutz (1970: 252) has called a 'finite province of meaning', within which the cognitive effects of

symbolic action may be confined. As Peacock (1968) discovered among Indonesian urban proletarians and Manning (1973) among Bermudan blacks, symbolic action in aesthetic activity may be confined to the world of performance, and their effect on attitudes and actions outside is extremely problematic, being either immediate, subconscious, cumulative, delayed, or entirely disassociated. Thought of as entertainment, the symbolic power of South African urban black musical arts may be dissolved into self-contained enjoyment, a process little affected by performers who must seek commercial success by treading a fine line between expressive ineffectuality and punitive censorship. Alternatively, there is evidence that the positive valuation of black cultural identity in the affective form of popular music and drama may in fact lead to a gradual, perhaps even subliminal, increase in African pride and racial unity. This may have appreciable long-term effects on the foundations of consensual power.

Avenues of approach to this problem have been suggested by a number of scholars who have applied anthropological techniques to the study of 'politico-symbolic interdependence in modern complex society' (Cohen, 1974: 137). Geertz (1973: 52) has described culture as 'a set of symbolic devices for controlling behaviour', and Adams (1975: 26) sees 'symbol control' as a mediating factor between control and power in any power structure.

As the creators of the culture of 'professional entertainment' and the urban industrial system of which it was a part, the white minority has exerted considerable influence upon the structure and symbolic content of African performing arts in Johannesburg. Prior to the founding of the Gallo Recording Company in 1926, there were two major sources of urban African musical production. The first was 'makwaya', choral music performed and consumed by the higher social strata under the direction of whites and educated Africans in the schools and churches. The second was the rough syncretic music of the illiterate 'drinking people', including famu and later marabi, performed in shebeens and streets by youngsters and itinerant musicians from the mines. At first very little of this music was recorded, but with the rapid spread of the gramophone in the 1930s record companies recognised the sales potential of the African market and acted quickly to supply it. At first the companies recorded almost any group that presented itself at the studios, making very little attempt to rearrange the music or performance style to suit market tastes. "In those days (1928-c1936) we sold everything" relates Arnold Goldblatt of Gallo (Africa).

By the late 1930s, Griffiths Motsieloa and his Pitch Black Follies were doing well with Xhosa Makwaya recordings, but the real credit for getting the African recording industry really off the ground must go to the Manhattan Brothers. Louis Armstrong's superb trumpet playing, big bands like Count Basie's, and polished vocal groups like the Mills Brothers now represented urban cultural aspirations, and the local self-rehearsed syncretic bands found it hard to compete. The Manhattan Brothers' beautifully polished Zulu versions of American hits made up for the local inferiority complex to some extent, as their unprecedented popularity attests.

In these early days of African recording, white musical producers developed a system which enabled local artists to retain a ^{substantial} ~~superficial~~ share of the market. According to Hugh Tracey, they would 'farm out' an American, English or Afrikaans tune to an African musician, who would then extract from it a four bar melody segment. This segment would then be repeated over and over with only slight variations on accordion, violin, guitar or saxophone to a lively four beat or two beat rhythm. According to veteran bandleader Wilson 'King Force' Silgee, the authentic 'street' marabi was never recorded.

As time went on, black musical producers such as Hamilton Nzimande have taken control of the creative process, employing musicians on a permanent staff basis and shuffling them from one group to another as occasion requires. The music they produce has achieved consistent commercial success by appealing to a

common denominator of public taste. Equally important has been the exposure of this music on the radio, and the publicity build-up which has created local 'stars' in the American mould.

Amongst more educated Africans, the snobbery born of a deep-seated sense of cultural inferiority combined with the misguided efforts of white educationists and entertainment industry personnel have fostered a strong distaste for indigenous performance styles, whether created in the 'homelands' or the townships. Ballroom dance contests and western choral performances have long been considered a worthwhile aspect of 'Bantu development', as the programmes of the Johannesburg Bantu music Festivals have shown. Hugh Tracey observed that whites have had a tendency to see every African singer they like as a potential Paul Robeson. Frequently such performers are packed off to Europe for classical training, from whence they either never return, or return singing the Halleluhah chorus to the total neglect of African vocal traditions. Despite the marvellous 'tonic solfa' compositions of R P Caluza and J Mohapeloa, the teaching of music to Africans in the form of tonic and dominant harmonies has hobbled originality by replacing the horizontal structure of African music with a simplified European vertical one.

Amongst the African lower classes, the spontaneous creativity of township music making has repeatedly been standardised and drained of its vitality by the commercial music industry under the guise of 'improving' it and 'polishing it up'. The fate of the Lenny Mamboya, Spokes Mashyane and the Kwela music of Johannesburg's irrepressible African street urchins at the hands of Gallo (Africa) and the producers of the African musical play King Kong is a case in point.

The mention of King Kong introduces the field of African musical drama into our discussion. If anything, white 'cultural imperialism' or 'symbol control' has done more damage to the development of drama amongst urban Africans than it has to urban African music. This has been possible because although traditional African vocal materials found their way into syncretic township music, the dramatic recitations and praise poetry of traditional society did not survive in the urban environment. Thus the keen African interest in integrated dramatic and musical expression was directed toward the models of the dominant white theatrical tradition.

Until very recently, written 'literary' drama has had relatively little appeal to the man of the urban African public and played an insignificant role in the cultural processes which have reflected and shaped their experiences and aspirations. Therefore, in this paper we will focus on the largely unwritten, improvised form of musical drama born in the townships, which at present still attracts an enormous and enthusiastic African audience.

Popular African musical drama got off to an encouraging start when an Amanzimtoti school teacher, Esau Mtetwa, organised some of his students into a company called the Mtetwa Lucky Stars in 1929 (Gerard, 1971: 258). This group combined dance, song and spontaneously dramatised scenes from traditional and modern African life, employing techniques of broad gestures and mime that brought the humour and the meaning through to every kind of audience, both black and white. Unfortunately, following their appearance at the Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg in 1936, a European promoter arranged for them to perform in London and that was the end of the Lucky Stars.

Subsequently, no African directed group arose to continue the developments begun by Mtetwa, and his ideas for popular African theatre were inherited ultimately by a white impresario, Alfred Herbert, who began his African Jazz and Variety revue about 1950. Herbert did not present complete theatrical pieces, but rather a burlesque or potpourri of jazz and township vocal numbers, comedy sketches and fanciful pastiches of 'tribal' and urban African life.

Beautiful, scantily-clad African girls populated the stage, performing such 'African' dances as 'the snake dance' and 'the dance of temptation'. Such performances were more pleasing to whites than blacks, the latter having in any case little chance to view their performances.

Herbert took his troupe on tour of Southern Africa and even, though unsuccessfully, to London, after which they finally disbanded in 1965. Although he unabashedly proclaimed that his show was meant to show off the 'sexulating rawness and glamour of some of the most beautiful non-European women' (Star, 4th March, 1961) Herbert also felt he was developing 'native' talent and raising the standards of 'non-European' theatrical performance, giving them the eventual chance of international recognition. It is true that a member of Herbert's performers, such as Miriam Makeba, did go on to star in the first African production to achieve overseas success, King Kong, and to further careers in England and America. Apart from draining the African community of talent in order to serve white and foreign audiences, this merely reinforced in the minds of blacks an equation between the approval of such audiences and artistic excellence. 'African Jazz and Variety' merchandised a debased 'African culture' and established a white commercial medium of black theatre which lives on vigorously in such white produced and directed black 'musicals' as Ipi Tombi and Meropa.

June Chabaku, a social worker with long experience in African theatre has made the following observations:

"Our modes of communication have been adversely affected by lack of acceptance by others and ourselves. Our self-definition has been denied . . . commercial productions like Meropa mix customs, costumes and dances from several tribes, as if blacks were just one mass of flesh, unlike whites. They stereotype us . . . whites get Africans together for an indigenous show, because there is money in it . . . use white performing techniques and costumes, making the dances sexier and more spectacular, seamier and more suggestive, and Africans participate because of the money. But if a black man puts on an indigenous production, he will get no backing, not even from his own people, who will wonder what will they get out of it, and if it's really indigenous, the white entrepreneur rejects it, it's only through his format or recipe that anything can succeed, and this is destroying what is black. Black theatre groups that are white sponsored will get grants from Anglo-American, but not black theatre on its own . . ."

In the name of 'entertainment', even performance styles developed by the recording industry specifically for working-class African consumption, such as Mbaqanga shows, now feature burlesques of traditional dancing and obscene tableaux from Ipi Tombi. Even well-intentioned collaborative efforts such as the 1959 musical King Kong have been oriented towards the 'international' format and white critical standards. Although not as ethically reprehensible as pure commercial exploitation or government restriction and censorship, the motives and procedures of the white producer and director of King Kong and the very success of the show further convinced Africans that this was the way for black musical theatre to go. With the exception of Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela, most of the members of the King Kong cast who decided to stay in London have never been heard from professionally again.

Within a year of King Kong's closing in South Africa, numerous imitations of varying quality appeared, including Shanty Town, and Alfred Herbert briefly transformed his revue into a township musical entitled Shebeen. None of these shows enjoyed significant success, and white sponsored black theatre has yet to produce another work with any appreciable appeal to blacks.

The real inheritors of the King Kong legacy is Gibson Kente, whose work illustrates several of the paradoxes we have discussed thus far. Although he maintains that his dramatic inspiration and techniques come from Broadway and the dialogue of his plays is largely in English, Kente has achieved enormous popular success by playing specifically to the mass of African working people in the townships. Despite his statements to the contrary, Kente's theatre has attracted little attention from whites (whose performance standards he almost completely ignores) except for the watchful eye of government censors.

Supporters of 'serious' sociopolitically oriented black drama deplore what they see as Kente's commercialism, shallowness and lack of political conviction. Though there is some truth in these charges, we must grant Kente a certain 'commercial' integrity. More politically conscious groups like Workshop '71 have yet to reach the broad mass of Africans in Soweto and must achieve their limited successes at small venues in white Johannesburg, such as the Box Theatre at 'liberal' Witwatersrand University. Kente's mixture of broad characterisation and gestural expression, raw township humour, a range of township musical and dance forms and an almost bathetic sentimentality regarding the long-suffering blackman is apparently what black people want from urban black theatre. In detention at this writing, Kente has suffered constant interference from the police and government censors. Yet he has managed to create a performing art form for the urban African community whose themes concentrate on the value of self-sacrifice, black unity and education, and which manages to ask the crucial question "How long must we suffer?"

While 'serious' non-musical theatre has been rightly regarded as more relevant to pressing sociopolitical problems, it has yet to become a 'popular' art, even among the African middle class. As Kente has apparently discovered, music and physical action are the sine qua non of expressive cultural communication with the majority of South Africa's urban blacks. Mona Glasser (1960; 55) recounts that even with King Kong, which used dialogue essentially only to provide transition and continuity between songs "less sophisticated African viewers complained there wasn't enough music - 'why does everybody talk all the time?'".

The hobbling of politically symbolic expressive culture by commercial media, government repression and censorship and most problematically, by the concept of 'entertainment' there remains an important factor in the fitful growth of the cultural potential of power in the African community. The issues involved in the Johannesburg case have important implications for our general understanding of the role of the performing arts in sociocultural change, and they are far from resolution.

Meanwhile there are changes taking place in South African urban black culture, once again spurred by developments in black America, and many questions about the interrelation of music, identity and power may be answered there in the near future.

Briefly, black American interest in the cultural heritage of Africa, brought to South Africa by the many artists who have incorporated identifiably African elements into a variety of musical idioms, has promoted the creation of a distinctly African self-identity on the part of politically conscious black urbanites. American 'soul' music is tremendously popular in the townships. Equally important is the renewed interest which permanent urbanites are taking in older forms of syncretic music in the search for a positive and identifiable urban African cultural heritage. Their form includes the strongly traditional a capella vocal music of Mbube group like Ladysmith Black Mambazo, and the Mbaqanga jazz of the early 1950s with its strongly South African rhythmic and melodic flavour, popularised recently by Dollar Brand's recording, 'Mannenburg is where it's happening'. Remarkably, the government's African broadcasting services, in seeking to promote separate 'Bantu cultures' and to retard the acculturative modernisation of the African population, has promoted the revival of these and other older syncretic styles. Urban Africans have responded by

using this music to concretise a positive sense of self-image and cultural pride, entirely contrary to the government's intentions.

The most politically sophisticated Africans find their new 'black consciousness' best expressed in the unique blends of indigenous traditional music of the Transvaal and progressive American jazz and rock created by 'Malambo' and 'Dashiki', now a political exile. 'Dashiki's' articulate drummer and poet Lefifi Tladi had this to say about 'black consciousness' music:

"Malambo is the only pan-African trend here, that even a Nigerian can understand. We should develop a purely African urban or national dress like the Nigerians, like dashikis, so we don't copy American fancy dress and try to build a false identity around it. But the high quality of Black American music has made it hard to resist . . .

"We must regain our history. Urban life dilutes and deauthenticates us. We are looking for an African aesthetic and a tradition deeper than any one tribal tradition, to make blacks feel positive about themselves . . . music that doesn't relate to the political situation is nonsense. Music cannot be mere entertainment in an enslaved society, but people think it's just entertainment here. Poets have been more relevant. But the poetry is in English, so we can't grab the grass roots."

Tladi's awareness of the difficulty of reaching the 'grass roots' or ~~hard-man~~ ^{grass roots} of urban Africans points up a key problem of the 'black consciousness' movement. Yet the many music festival awards won by Malambo and their widespread fame amongst urban blacks indicates significant popular awareness of the 'African identity' movement, even if this fame is based more upon what they represent culturally than upon what they play.

In theatre, the Tony award winning Sezwe Bansi is Dead has demonstrated that there is a socially relevant tradition of black South African theatrical art which has something unique to contribute to world theatre. Actor and part-creator of Sezwe, John Kani, sounded a new note of pride in observing that South African black theatre can stand comparison with any other: "People are people all over the world. We can learn from writers and playwrights from overseas, so why should it not work the other way. We are not something different here" (Rand Daily Mail, 21st November, 1972)

Similarly, at Workshop '71, a small multiracial group is demonstrating with plays such as Survival, that the township musical dramatic idiom can be made to carry a strong social and political message.

Reflecting a wider public interest in incorporating what is 'African' into what is 'modern' many people are becoming aware of a need to preserve and revive indigenous cultural values and modes of expression, whether traditional or urban, in the context of pancontinental African nationalism. In the community centres of Soweto, youth club leaders now teach both traditional and urban syncretic dances of past and present in an effort to aid the young in discovering and taking pride in who they are and might hope to be. One such leader, Jume Chabaku, comments:

"These dances that we have frowned upon, now form a lot of what is cultural in the community. Not only (dances) from the old urban locations, even traditional dances being done in a very rural area, have now been accepted and taken up as urban means of communication."

The group of youngsters who performed traditional rural dances at the Gymnastrada in Germany in 1975 were not from any 'homeland' but from Soweto.

Nevertheless, Johannesburg's black performing artists still find themselves

in an 'imitative' position. The continued dependence of urban cultural expression on white controlled and American supplied products of mass media reinforces the 'entertainment' syndrome. Soul music, sharp expensive dress and international stardom still provide the cultural models of a great many middle class youth. The value of urban African performing arts is still measured locally by foreign standards. The success in London of Umabatha, Welcome Msomi's 'traditional' Zulu version of Macbeth, convinced many people that indigenous song and dance are worthy of respect and attention. Yet the very fact that a rehash of Shakespeare in Zulu wrapping could be considered 'indigenous' raises interesting questions about the future role of traditional culture in urban African theatre.

Hampered by an inferior 'Bantu' musical education which fosters a lack of familiarity with and understanding of indigenous music, blacks rarely have the skills to work seriously with traditional cultural resources. Some mature observers feel that even the music of Malombo has been irrevocably deflected as a cultural force by the entertainment concept. Currently, the majority of Malombo's audience is white.

We must ask ourselves, however, if "entertainment" may not be one of the few cover stories under which a sociopolitically effective form of expressive culture reaching significant numbers of people may operate safely in Johannesburg's repressive atmosphere. We must also ask whether the "harmlessness" suggested by the label inevitably leads to ineffectiveness in fact.

In speaking of South Africa, Dantzinger (1971:283) notes that technological forces do not immediately bring about change, and that "only when modernization affects the realm of 'ideas' does it become potentially subversive for the old form of domination." To understand the role of expressive culture in this ideational transformation we must distinguish the effects of cultural imperialism, media production and dissemination, and imported black American cultural models which are peculiar to black South African social history from the more generalized variables of the power process.

Kenneth Burke (1966:173) has argued that "political movements have their origin in the aesthetic sphere; aesthetics instigates the changed forms of consciousness needed to generate even the most practical of changes in society." we need to specify the conditions under which this may be so. Because the effect of sociohistorical conditions must be isolated from and then interrelated with variables of the power process if we are to discover the role of aesthetic action in the potential creation of consensual power, the cross-cultural study of distinctly urban-industrial forms of artistic expression is a research necessity. As Peacock (1968:256) discovered in urban Java, the analysis of "artistic events may tell us more about the group's social existence than the analysis of vague shifting elements in the social system." As the "limiting case" of Johannesburg has shown, the concept of entertainment in its various localized forms may serve as a useful point of departure.

References Cited

- Adams, Richard N.
 1970 Crucifixion by Power. Austin: University of Texas
 1975 Energy and Structure. Austin: University of Texas
- Burke, Kenneth
 1966 Language as symbolic action. Berkeley: University of California
- Cohen, Abner
 1969 Custom and politics in urban Africa. Berkeley: Univ. of California
 1974 Two-dimensional man. Berkeley: University of California
- Cohen, Ronald
 1966 Power, authority, and personal success in Islam and Borneo. In
 M. Swartz, V. Turner, and A. Tuden, eds., Political anthropology.
 Chicago: Aldine
- Dantziger, Kurt
 1971. Modernization and the legitimization of social power. In
 H. Adam, ed., South Africa: sociological perspectives. London:
 Oxford University Press.
- Durkheim, Emile
 1912 Les formes elementaires de la vie religieuse. Paris: Alcan
- Eisenstadt, S. N.
 1965 Social change and modernization in African societies south of the
 Sahara. Cahiers d'Etude Africaines, XV, 1965:453-472
- Fernandez, James
 1972 Persuasions and performances: of the beast in every body...and the
 metaphor of Everyman. Daedalus, 1972
- Firth, Raymond
 1964 Essays on social organization and values. London: Athlone
- Geertz, Clifford
 1973 The interpretation of cultures. New York: Basic Books
- Gerard, Albert
 1971 Four African literatures. Berkeley: University of California
- Magubane, B.
 1973 The 'Xhosa' in town, revisited urban anthropology: a failure of
 method and theory. American Anthropologist, 75: 1701-1715
- Manning, Frank
 1973 Black clubs in Bermuda. Ithaca: Cornell University Press
- Mayer, Philip
 1961 Townsman or tribesman. Cape Town: Oxford University Press
- Ngubane, J.
 1971 South Africa's race crisis: a conflict of minds. In H. Adam, ed.,
 South Africa: sociological perspectives. London: Oxford Univ. Press
- Omer-Cooper, J. D.
 1966 The Zulu aftermath. London: Longmans
- Peacock, James
 1968 Rites of modernization. Chicago: Chicago University Press

- Roberts, J. S.
1972 Black Music of two worlds. New York: Praeger
- Rycroft, David
1957 Zulu male traditional singing. African Music, I, 4
1958 The new 'town music' of Southern Africa. Recorded Folk Music, v. 1. Sept./Oct.
1975 A royal account of music in Zulu life. Bull. of the S. O. A. S. xxxix
- Schutz, Alfred
1970 On phenomenology and social relations. Chicago: Chicago University Press
- Swartz, M. and V. Turner and A. Tuden
1966 Introduction. Political Anthropology. Chicago: Aldine
- van den Berghe, Pierre
1964 Caneville. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press
- Vilakazi, A.
1957 A reserve from within. African Studies, vol. 16: 93-101
- Weber, Max
1964 ed. Theory of social and economic organization. T. Parsons, trans., 2nd. ed. New York: Free Press
- Wilson, M. and A. Mafeje
1963 Langa. Cape Town: Oxford University Press
- * * *
- Hellman, E.
1971 Social change among urban Africans. In H. Adam, ed., South Africa sociological perspectives. London: Oxford University Press