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T. V. Reed
Washington State University

FAMINE, APARTHEID AND THE POLITICS OF "AGIT-POP"
Music as (Anti)colonial Discourse

The mid-1980s saw the rise of a series of transnational, mass-mediated events and texts that have been variously called "charity rock," "benefit rock," or, with a nod to a rather different tradition, "agit-pop." The archetype and best known of these events is the *Live Aid* African famine relief concert of 1985, but *Live Aid* emerged from previous traditions and was followed by dozens of such efforts in countries around the world on a host of different issues, from Apartheid to the environment to AIDS to political prisoners (Garafolo 1992). These events have been among the most compelling attempts to create moments of global culture during recent years. They raise a host of disturbing questions, but they also hold out the possibility of one possible progressive axis of transnational communication.

I want to examine two clusters of these agit-pop events and texts with the aim of suggesting the possibilities and limits of their use as a left or progressive intervention into the terrain of mass-mediated public culture. In particular I want to examine their function as (anti)colonial discourses. I also want to use this analysis to disrupt or finesse the long-standing debate between those who, beginning perhaps with the Frankfurt school, find commodified mass-mediated culture utterly irredeemable politically, and those who, beginning perhaps with early British cultural studies, see popular culture as a zone of contestation allowing progressive political articulations.[1] Similarly, I want to enter obliquely into the "cultural imperialism" debate over the extent to which "Western" media are said to dominate global cultural flows by looking at how these transnational events inscribed relations between "the West and the rest."[2] To do this I'll first look a *Live Aid* itself,

1. On the history of this debate, see Brantlinger (1983). For examples of more recent perspectives, see MacCabe, ed (1986), Modelski, ed. (1986), Lazare, ed. (1987) and Mukerji and Schudson, eds. (1991).

2. For a clear summary of the cultural imperialism debate as it pertains to the transnational flow of rock culture, see Goodwin and Gore (1990).

along with the associated *Band Aid* and *We are the World/USA for Africa* famine relief projects. Then I'll analyze a cluster of musical texts originating in the US and Britain in support of resistance to South African Apartheid, in particular the American *Sun City* music/video project, and the "Nelson Mandela 70th Birthday" tribute concert in England.

I've chosen the famine and the anti-Apartheid projects as examples because they are similar enough to allow certain important political contrasts to stand forth, and because they allow me to examine two different ways that the left can contest for the meaning of mass-mediated texts. The most obvious similarity is that both famine relief and the struggle against Apartheid inscribe a relation between the colonial and the postcolonial/decolonizing worlds. More specifically, a shared focus on the African continent allows me to analyze both the dangers and the possibilities of Western pop and rock music as colonial and anti-colonial discourse.[3]

The prime difference between these two sets of events is that the famine project had its politics more or less thrust upon it and thus represents a case of a struggle by the Left to *appropriate* an ambiguous text, while the anti-Apartheid project was more or less politically radical from the beginning and thus represents an attempt by the left to *create* a text within mass media frames.

Let me treat the *Live Aid* cluster of texts first, through a kind of double reading: a textual analysis that elaborates a composite portrait of negative critical interpretations of the famine benefit, followed by a more positive (con)textual analysis that suggests the inadequacy of narrowly textual analysis in its tendency to reify ongoing signifying practices.

Mega-Benefits and African Famine

> Millions of kids are lookin' at you
> You say, `Let them drink soda pop'...
> From the African nation
> to the Pepsi generation...
> You're gonna make it rich
> as long as some poor bastard in Africa
> is lying in a ditch.
> The Pretenders, "How Much Did You Get [for your soul]"

3. My focus in this essay is on the reception of these texts in the US and the UK. I have not tried to speculate on how they were received in the varying ethnoscapes and under the varying conditions of the sixty or more countries to which the events were broadcast (in Italy, for example, the Mandela concert was seen in a stadium rented by groups of the Italian Left and was thus contextualized far differently than the typically more random viewings elsewhere). That is a topic for a longer work.

In the standard story told, the African famine relief pop / rock benefit phenomenon begins with the efforts of the moderately well-known Irish rock 'n' roller Bob Geldof. It is interesting that in this origin story Geldof's efforts are themselves set in play by the mass-media, in this case by a BBC documentary on the African famine that Geldof saw more or less by accident (Geldof 1986). Stunned and disturbed by the film, Geldof organized British rock and pop stars to produce a record that would draw attention to the famine and raise relief money to fight it.

The first result of this project was the song, "Do They Know It's Christmas?" done by various British artists under the name *Band Aid* and released late in 1984. This was followed a few months later by release in the United States of the similar song, "We Are the World." Then, finally, on July 13th, 1985, the huge and extremely financially successful *Live Aid* concerts were held in London, and Philadelphia, and broadcast worldwide to more than one and a half billion people.

Even granting that there are many Christians in Northern Africa, it is difficult to imagine a more class-insensitive, and ethnocentric question to ask musically than "Do They Know It's Christmas?", unless perhaps "Do They Know that Harrod's or F.A.O. Schwarz is Open?". Thus begins a process of intense, narcissistic, ethnocentrism that permeates this whole project. This ethnocentrism is reinforced by the virtual absence of black artists from the British session, and from the British half of the concert. This is important not because every record or event has to be racially balanced, but because it served to underscore the emerging, racist message that the relief effort was about helpful Whites helping helpless Blacks. And it is especially grievous given the fact that Ethiopia, one of the more devastated of the famine areas, is viewed as a spiritual homeland by many black British, Afro-Caribbean, and African-American performers.

From the point of view of benefit profit making vis-a-vis their target audience, "Do They Know It's Christmas?" was perfectly conceived to play into those seasonal spasms of humanist guilt that become engraved on Christmas cards and fill the buckets of armies of Salvation of various sorts every holiday season in the UK and the US. Indeed, in these terms, the song exceeded all expectations, becoming a #1 hit, a gold record, and raising more than 11 million dollars.

While this money-making is impressive and while the personal motives of most of those involved are unimpeachable, viewed from both traditional and postmodern left perspectives these initial efforts of "Band Aid" can be read as putting into place some of the most problematic liberal humanist

discourses, from patronizing, patriarchal charity and philanthropy to deeply racist, imperialist echoes of the white man's burden.

When the text of musical famine relief migrates across the Atlantic to the United States, some of its most egregious aspects are mitigated a bit, but not much. Here the origins are significantly different in at least one respect, the race of the prime movers, virtually all of whom were black. Inspired by Geldof's project, the American effort was touched off by Harry Belafonte, an entertainer with a long history of political activism, much of it on the Left rather than in the liberal mainstream (*cf.* not only his fairly well-known connection to M. L. King and the Civil Rights movement, but also his connection to socialist and anti-colonial struggles, including strong ties to Castro's Cuba.)

Belafonte soon persuaded his friends Lionel Richie, Michael Jackson and Stevie Wonder to begin working on an American version of the Band Aid record. Unfortunately, Wonder, the only one of this trio with even minimal political savvy, was forced by other commitments to drop out, and the actual composition fell to the Pepsi twins, Jackson and Richie. The result was the immensely (if briefly) popular song, "We Are the World"—once ubiquitous, still insipid, it remained for many years the biggest-selling single of all time (replaced eventually in that honorific spot by Elton John's tribute to Princess Diana).

In video form the "We Are the World" text received wide air-play ("heavy rotation") on the then relatively new Music Television network, MTV. Again it was a spectacular success. Like "Do They Know It's Christmas?" the musical text can be characterized as extraordinarily ethnocentric, displaying a narcissism reinforced by the video which shows us no Africans at all, but lots of rich musicians, looking and sounding alternately and often simultaneously sincere, and self-satisfied. A sense of inactivist self-containment is reinforced visually by the extremely static staging of the video—no one moves from the claustrophobic recording studio.

The lyrics play back and forth between identity and difference in such a way as to utterly remove agency from Africans, while simultaneously pretending "they" are just like "us." The presumed identification between "the starving children" and the overstuffed rock stars is a classic example of how liberal humanism obfuscates difference, making analysis impossible. As the presumptive "we" of the title designates the First World, it serves to remove "our" responsibility by folding us into the Third World as one world; thus there is no difference from which to construct notions of relative responsibility for the famine. "We" too are its victims. While empathetic connection to those suffering from the famine might be desirable, such a pure identification with "them" erases the distance needed to understand and challenge the sources of

the very disparate political-economic and cultural conditions. Such identification erases at once internal differences of class, race, religion, and political ideology within the effected regions, and internal differences within the "First world," conceived here as generically prosperous as against the generically deprived, yet fully understandable, "Third world" (I use these rightly criticized terms here because in their firstness and thirdness they accurately reflect the ideology projected by these texts).

On the other hand, even as this too pure form of identification is proffered, the subtext offers its opposite, a pure difference between the "We" and the "They," we the saviors and they the victims. Thus, clearly the most ironically truthful line in the song is the one that goes, "We're saving our own lives." Intended to achieve identification, it marks the true distance by suggesting that the we who will be saved are not the Africans but the song's singers and audience, saved from having to think seriously about an "unpleasant thing" by simply giving a few bucks for famine relief.

Taken together, these two records could be said to add up to this message: *we* (in the West) are the world, and *they* (in Africa) don't even know it's Christmas.

The problematic aspects of these two record / video efforts are magnified, but also somewhat diffused by the mega-concert that grows out of them, *Live Aid* proper. Unlike the records, which make no reference, and the videos, which make minimal reference, to the famine itself, the televised concerts did attempt intermittently to address some of its causes. Recorded vignettes by "experts" in the field of hunger were interspersed with musical performances. But the ideological limits of those vignettes were quite narrow. No one, for example, seriously addressed the relation of hunger to Western agricultural policy or to the neo-imperialism of International Monetary Fund (IMF) debt manipulation. Apart from or combined with philanthropic appeals, most commentaries coded the famine as either a natural disaster or a technical problem. The latter discourses reinforced the sense of African backwardness embedded in the implicit development theory underpinning the overall master narrative of victims and saviors. Some of the appeals did move beyond charity or technocratic elitism, though not many, and particularly in the American context of broadcast on commercial television, they become quite obscene set alongside the perpetual orgy of consumption portrayed in and appealed to via commercials.

Moreover, again and again the African famine is imaged in the televised event via pictures of starving women and children; as these images build upon one another Africa is both "feminized" and "infantilized." One pervasive logo, used throughout the American broadcast of the event, begins

with an image of the African continent, which then suddenly and magically becomes transformed into an electric guitar. Indeed, in a curious metamorphosis it appears as though the feminine womb of Africa gives birth to the phallic guitar that will be its savior.

Combining elements of consumption and reduction to victimage suggests that the Anglo-American audience, in effect, is consuming black Africans. And in fact, one of the logos for the project superimposes a place setting, a knife, a fork and a spoon, over a map of the African continent. Cultural theorist Zoe Sofia, who analyzes what she terms the pre-Oedipal sexo-semiotics of technology (Sofia 1986), argues in her more Swiftian moments that the only solution to what she calls the "Cannibal-Eyes" of mass-mediated consumer capitalism is to eat the rich, preferably on a prime time game show. Whether or not eating the rich is the solution, surely consuming the poor is part of the problem.

Summing up this critical reading of the famine relief benefits, one could say that *Live Aid* deploys a falsely universalizing liberal humanism, robs Africans of agency and reinforces Western ethnocentrism and racism, puts forth a vision of passivity which equates children with women and both with Africa, and obfuscates the colonialist sources of the famine by coding it as a natural disaster or as a technical problem rather than as a political issue. Or put more colloquially, this analysis views Bob Geldof as a kind of hapless hip Jerry Lewis who takes up starving Africans as his "kids" and holds the biggest telethon in history.

As the alacrity with which I've presented this analysis makes clear, I find a good deal of truth in it, particularly as an analysis of the *immediate* effects of the event as presented to an Anglo-American audience, with echoes that have no doubt shaped the US public imagination up through and into the Somalian campaign or current concerns over "African" AIDS. But I *don't* think such an analysis is the *whole* or ultimate truth about the events if they are conceived not as one moment in time but as migrating, transcultural and transhistorical texts with ongoing, contested meanings.

To begin with, these events need to be contextualized and historicized. As Stuart Hall has argued, the relevant historical context is the emergence in both the US and the UK of a rather successful right-wing hegemonic project which goes by the name of Reaganism in the US and Thatcherism in Britain. That context included a largely successful effort to wipe out all vestiges of liberal and laborite notions of mutuality and community.

In such a context, Hall contends, even read most minimally as liberal philanthropy, the *Live Aid* event-cluster was the single most important counter-moment to the installation of the right-wing's orgy of greed, self-interest,

and "up-by-the-bootstrapsism". Hall calls the famine relief efforts "one of the great popular movements of our time," and believes it offered a "direct democratic" challenge to "bureaucratic" power. He even suggests that *Live Aid* put the new right on the defensive, that it represented one of the few significant rips in the seams of its emerging hegemony [Hall (1988) 251, 254].

Hall is perhaps exaggerating a bit here, to balance what he sees as a kind of knee-jerk left purism that produces the kind of analysis I gave above. But I think the core of his logic has been borne out, both in the evolution of the *Live Aid* project itself, and more importantly, via its use as a model for many of the more directly counter-hegemonic musical mega-events which followed in its wake.

With regard to *Live Aid* itself, let me try to at least partially redeem rock's Jerry Lewis and "his" mega-telethon by describing the way in which Geldof responded to critiques like those I leveled above. As the Irish rocker freely admits, he began his project as a political naïf, indeed so naive as to claim that the famine was not a political issue. Finding himself, however, on the covers of the conservative journal *Spectator* and *Marxism Today* during the same week, he soon got the message that his event *was* political, and was capable of being claimed by both the Right and the Left (Tannenbaum 74). Amidst this political maelstrom, Geldof learned about Third World debt, about defense spending, about world agricultural policies, and eventually found himself before the UN, hectoring the assembled delegates for not dealing with the effect of Western agricultural policy on Africa, and supporting a call for a total moratorium on African debt, among other things [Denselow (1989) 246-47].

Criticism primarily from the Left, moved Geldof and the project further and further away from charity and its discourses. Policies for dispersal of *Live Aid* funds were formulated that put only what was absolutely needed into emergency relief, directing the rest to long-term development programs, and eventually to attempts to *Africanize* all the projects, turning them over to local control by the people affected (Geldof; Deneslow).

Despite the fact that millions of people desperately needed these efforts, many on the Left (I among them) seemed willing, almost eager, to believe the worst about the dispersal of *Live Aid* funds and goods. Rumors of corruption and inefficiency spread wildly. But in fact, an independent audit found the *Live Aid* project to have been extremely efficient, above the standard for such work. Indeed, funds are still being distributed today, out of a total raised that now approaches $250 million dollars worth of cash, goods, and services (Tannenbaum 1990).

I dwell on Geldof not to make him heroic but to offer him as an allegory writ large for a process that many of the viewers of *Live Aid* underwent in a less visible way when they tried to do more than send a check. They joined various ongoing hunger relief projects in droves, and once there they usually began a process of political education that was for many also a process of radicalization. That process did not happen automatically, however, and that is my real point—it happened because some on the left chose to struggle for the meaning that *Live Aid* would have, some chose to try to reshape it to their analysis and their agenda. Rather than simply condemning it as naive, neo-colonialist, racist, and all the other things I've suggested it was, they chose to attempt to decolonize the event, to liberate it into more fruitful political discourses and actions.

The second, related struggle set off by *Live Aid* was an effort to use the specific breach it had made in the New Right's hegemonic process to open up other spaces of resistance. Hundreds of subsequent musical benefits and mega-benefits in dozen of countries attest to the ongoing impact of *Live Aid.* And of those the most dramatic, dramatic especially in reversing some of the imagery of *Live Aid* itself, are those projects entwined with the anti-Apartheid struggle.

Music Against Apartheid

> We're rappers and rockers
> United and strong.
> We're here to talk about South Africa
> We don't like what's goin' on.
> "Sun City" • Artists United Against Apartheid

In the US the *most* interesting of these efforts was made by a group of musicians calling themselves Artists United Against Apartheid, whose major project was a record and video entitled, "Sun City." Far more politically explicit and aggressive than *Live Aid,* it forms for me a kind of test case for examining how far one can radicalize dominant, mass-mediated forms.

The project was started by Little Steven Van Zandt, formerly the lead guitarist for Bruce Springsteen's E-Street Band and more recently, like Geldof, a moderately successful solo artist. In Van Zandt's telling, after learning from some American anti-Apartheid activists about the situation in South Africa he traveled there himself and spoke with numerous white and black South Africans involved in the liberation movements. Asking different groups what he could do to be most effective, he was told again and again that his appropriate role would be to tell his fellow musicians *not* to play at Sun City, a Las

Vegas-like tourist complex in the heart of one of the so-called black South African "homelands" ("Sun City" video 1985).

So began the *Sun City* project which aimed to reinforce and expand a UN-sponsored musicians boycott of South Africa, and to educate the American public via music about the liberation struggle and about conditions of Blacks living under racist systems, not only in South Africa but in the US as well. Eventually the project came to include a single, an album, a video (directed by Jonathan Demme and Hart Perry), and various ancillary texts (including the obligatory T-shirt, as well as glossy picture books and a rockumentary).

Let me discuss the video first because a number of contrasts with the "We Are The World" video are immediately apparent. The first important difference is that on "Sun City" black people, African-American and Afro-Caribbean musicians and most importantly black South Africans, play central roles, visible in active and not just passive forms. Second, the musicians are moving, they are going somewhere, there is movement, perhaps even *a* movement happening. The sense both lyrically and visually is a demand to act on, not just consume these images. Third, to reinforce this message, the images themselves are far more kinetic throughout. On the one hand, the piece fits relatively seamlessly into the flow of MTV-style rock video imagery thus allowing it into that mass-mediated space. On the other hand, what it shows on closer inspection is raised, clenched fists (mostly black ones) ripping away at Apartheid and by suggestion ripping away veils of televisual illusion to show some of the realities of Apartheid beneath. And it is vital that it can be read as Africans, not just the rock stars, who are ripping away at these images.

Van Zandt started his project a far more politically savvy and politically radical individual than Geldof, and thus his project too was far more radical from the beginning. When he, like Geldof, eventually found himself at the United Nations, in this case to receive a humanitarian award for his work, he was careful to make explicit his project's distance from charity and its attendant discourse of victimage. His speech said in part,

> This is not a benefit record because though the needs of black South Africans are great they do not ask us for our charity, and though the black South African suffering is horrifying, they do not ask us for our pity. ["Making of *Sun City*" 1986.]

Despite this clear attempt to distance *Sun City* from the discourse of *Live Aid* Little Steven has frequently acknowledged that his project would not have been possible without various precedents set by the famine project, from directing focus on the African continent to disinterring notions of inter-

national human rights to politicizing rock musicians (several of whom appear in both projects). The *Sun City* project's tack was not to totally reject liberal notions of humanitarianism, but instead to try to move its audience through and beyond that position to a more politically engaged one. This is reflected in the distribution of profits from the project which were more or less equally divided along lines that allowed the project to finesse the ideological border between humanitarianism and political action. Roughly a third went to the families of political prisoners, a third to educational centers and colleges set up in Tanzania and Zambia by the African National Congress, and a third to grass-roots educational outreach efforts by the anti-Apartheid movement in the US [Garofalo (1991) 260].

In virtually all the material released by the *Sun City* project, the finger was pointed not just at South Africa but at the US as a prime supporter of South African Apartheid and as a site of home-made racism. At every opportunity, Van Zandt was careful to articulate this key point: "I hope that by focusing on the exaggeration of racism in [South Africa], we can realize that racism is very much alive in our own country, and that we can begin to dismantle our own Apartheid right here at home" [Marsh (1985) 80].

By Apartheid at home, Van Zandt means US racism generally, and also Apartheid within the musical community, both the segregation of black and Latino musics, and the domination of the industry by white producers. He and collaborator Arthur Baker tried to undermine the segregation and segmentation of musical audiences by bringing together the particular mix of musicians used on the session (rappers, rockers, punks, funksters, reggae singers, salseros, new wave musicians, jazz artists, and importantly, Nigerian and South African musicians, among others). While the music industry likes to talk about diverse musical styles as simply reflecting different, freely chosen "taste cultures," demographic analysis makes clear that race, ethnicity, class, gender and, of course, age make up the prime determinants of musical subcultures, serving important self-definitional functions but also serving to reinforce social divisions which doubly serve capitalism—by dividing potential oppositional forces and by economically exploiting these diversities commercially. Attempts to bridge these subcultural divisions musically formed an important subtext of the *Sun City* project. Using the term "musical Apartheid" to describe these divisions risked trivializing "real" Apartheid, but was also a key to bringing the issues back home.

There was also a pragmatic marketing value to this multiple crossover list of artists, since it was hoped that maximum airplay might be achieved as the various specialized radio formats would pick up on particular artist(s) re-

presenting their genre. But as I'll discuss in a moment, this part of the strategy met limitations.

I find two aspects of the *Sun City* project particularly suggestive. First, it utilized virtually all the available, relevant mass-mediated forms, pushing them close to their didactic limits, while maintaining enough of the form to keep it recognizable and thus available as a "popular" item. And second, the project sought to create substantive links to grassroots activism.

First the mass-mediated texts. As I already suggested, the video version utilizes the hyper kinetic style of rock videos but tries to disarticulate that kineticism from the postmodern nihilism of MTV (Kaplan 1987), and rearticulate it to political struggle and direct action. Some have suggested that the video does this by making political action look like too much fun, too much like a street party. But I would argue that this is precisely one of its *strengths*. This objection exemplifies a continuing left puritanism that is, I believe, deadly to the possibility of a counter-hegemonic project. The inability of recent oppositional movements to articulate (link) politics and pleasure is one of the key factors that has condemned them to marginality even among that notoriously rebellious social category, youth. Indeed, the pleasures of *political* transgression remain one of the better kept, presumably guilty, secrets of the left, and recent attempts to foreground the pleasures of political as well as cultural transgressions seem to me a key area of theoretical activity.

In addition to the music video we just saw, the project also used two other video formats, recoding what is perhaps the most banally narcissistic of all popular culture forms, the "Making of" format (as in "The Making of Michael Jackson's *Thriller*," or the "The Making of *The Brady Bunch Joins the Sandinistas*" (actually, I made that one up).

The genre is designed to take you "behind the scenes." In the *Sun City* versions, you are indeed taken behind the scenes but the pretext of giving glimpses of the recording and filming processes is used to extend the audience's glance behind the scenes of Apartheid. The "Making of *Sun City*" video tape, a ten-minute version of which was shown on MTV and a 45-minute version of which was released for home use, include charts and graphs illustrating economic conditions in South Africa, interviews with Winnie Mandela and other anti-Apartheid activists, and testimony from most of the musicians taking part in the project. These latter comments naturally vary considerably in their perspicuity, but that too may serve a function as it allows for identification from those in the video audience who feel initially too uninformed to act.

Thus the star-fan matrix, normally the site of mystifying identifications, is here used to secure identifications that open the possibility of acting despite

not (yet) having an elaborated analysis of South African politics. Lest I make the educators and the educatees among my readers nervous, I will make clear in a minute that neither I nor the *Sun City* project are touting the virtues of ignorance here. I am just noting that some space needs to be left in such a project for the uninformed to make a first step and the inexpert comments of the musicians provide such an opening.

Similar use is made of the "star book" form, the glossy, vacuous genre normally used to provide purchasers with a mini poster collection, full of lots of pictures and minimal, usually not very intellectually demanding, text. The *Sun City* version of this book genre does have lots of pictures, including obligatory ones of the musical stars who play on the record, but it also includes pictures of Nelson Mandela, of South African miners, of the victims *and* the resisters of Apartheid. The glossy book does have a good deal of self-indulgent star nonsense, but it also has a fairly substantive, though not daunting, text that includes plenty of encouragement to get a more in-depth analysis of Apartheid. Indeed, the book, the record, the cassette, and virtually all other associated paraphernalia of the project contain bibliographies on South African history and the anti-Apartheid movement, as well as ways to contact anti-Apartheid organizations. This leads me to my second set of exemplary actions by the *Sun City* project.

From its inception, Van Zandt had a sense that having emerged from his contacts with grassroots activists in South Africa, the project should be put to the service of grassroots activists in the United States. He tried to accomplish this in a number of ways. Most directly, he traveled around the country, offering himself as a speaker and making contact with dozens of local anti-Apartheid solidarity groups. He also made the video widely available to these groups for use as an organizing tool, both to draw new people to meetings and to educate them once there.

The *Sun City* project also created a teaching packet to accompany the video for use both by community groups and in schools. The packet included not only educational materials but a list of direct, political actions from all around the country that had been inspired by *Sun City*, actions that could be emulated or improvised upon locally (Garofalo 1991).

In sum, the *Sun City* project was an ambitious, in many ways successful, attempt to mediate between a mass-produced and distributed cultural text and local sites of reception. Or put more strongly, it set out actively to produce articulations to local movement groups, as well as setting up more general "reading formations" that would insure a radical reading of their text.

But if the project reveals a number of potentially useful approaches to making and distributing oppositional mass-mediated texts, it also suggests some limits likely to be encountered by any such effort.

First, while the anti-Apartheid project made a significant financial and educational impact, when compared to the more politically vague famine relief efforts, *Sun City’s* impact was less spectacular. The album and single made it onto the Billboard Top Forty but had trouble getting sufficient radio air play and never moved very far up the charts. This fact underscores my sense that the project may have pushed near the limit of what a didactic, radical intervention could do within the commercial mass media’s terms.

While radio stations offered a variety of plausible non-political reasons for not giving the song more airplay, it seems clear that its political message scared them. Similar difficulties were encountered when the project sought to have “The Making of *Sun City*“ documentary aired on PBS (AKA the oil network). They were refused access, despite numerous awards given to the video, on the grounds that it would violate the “journalistic integrity“ of the network to air a program that simply promotes the ideas and careers of its producers. At the time this statement was offered, PBS was running two Lucasfilm documentaries on the making of those apparently less commercial ventures, “Star Wars“ and “Raiders of the Lost Ark“ [*Nation* 1986/87].

As a result of this virtual censorship, the impact of the *Sun City* project was not on the scale of say, “We Are the World,“ although its exact impact is difficult to measure. My own informal poll of my students, probably not a scientific sample of two billion people, confirmed my sense that *Sun City* is considerably less well-known than “We Are the World,“ even among progressive students. But more than half of those surveyed had seen the *Sun City* video or heard the song. According to one source, the “Sun City“ video received a “heavy rotation“ slot on MTV [Ullestad (1987) 67], which is to say, it received a serious showing there.

1985 and 1986 were peak years for anti-Apartheid activism in the US, particularly through various divestment campaigns on and around college campuses. The *Sun City* project certainly did not create this movement, but just as certainly it furthered it, providing a far more powerful outreach tool than those usually available to local activists.

It also helped pave the way for the next stage of contestation, a move by the anti-Apartheid movement to appropriate the level of the “spectacle“ proper, in this case the “Nelson Mandela 70th Birthday Tribute” concert held on June 11th, 1988 in the same London stadium that had housed *Live Aid*. Let me now move towards a conclusion by saying a few brief things about this concert and its context.

At the level of pure numerical spectacle, the Nelson Mandela concert rivaled even *Live Aid*. Its world-wide audience is estimated to have been around 600 million people in some 60 countries [Garofalo (1990) 341]. Once again, I wouldn't want to speculate on what these numbers mean across the vast array of differing ethnoscapes in which the event was received, but it is possible to say something about what they meant in the UK and the US, which in this case provide interesting contrasts.

Tony Hollingsworth, who produced the birthday tribute, claims that he hoped to make the show act as "a flagship... whereby the local anti-Apartheid movements could pick up from the enormous coverage...and run a far more detailed political argument than you could have on stage" [in Garofalo (1991) 266-67]. Local anti-Apartheid groups in Britain at the time of the concert were organizing a "Nelson Mandela: Freedom at Seventy" campaign into which the concert played very effectively. Chitra Karve, a spokesperson for the British anti-Apartheid movement, said that given this context "every second of the [concert] was political" [Garofalo 1990 346]. This would seem to be confirmed by the fact that membership in local anti-Apartheid groups increased three-fold in the weeks after the concert. A post-concert survey in Britain showed that 75% of people between the ages of 16 and 24 knew of Mandela and supported his release [Denselow (1989) 282].

Such knowledge may not have run very deep, but it was apparently broad enough to effect changes in, among other things, media coverage of South Africa. According to Hollingsworth, the agitational and consciousness raising elements of the concert combined to alter the terms of media discourse in Britain vis-a-vis the liberation movement. Prior to the concert, Mandela was routinely referred to on the BBC and in other media as the leader of as a "terrorist" organization; after the concert and its attendant publicity, Hollingsworth claims, this kind of representation was no longer possible [Garofalo (1990) 346]. Whether this is wholly true or a promoter-activist's exaggeration, there is no doubt that events like the Mandela concert played a key role in transforming the image of Mandela and the ANC, not only in Britain but worldwide.

Perhaps the most eloquent testimony to this claim comes from Nelson Mandela himself who, upon his release from prison twenty months after the concert, chose to make his major public appearance in Britain not in Parliament, but at a rock concert in Wembley stadium. By his presence there and in the speech he delivered on the occasion, Mandela made clear his belief and the belief of the movement that events like the 70th birthday tribute were playing a role in their struggle.

Did songs and musical spectacles lead to the freedom of Nelson Mandela? No, of course not; 27 years of struggle by black South Africans, a worldwide network of solidarity workers, and a complex process of pragmatic gambling on the part of Pretoria did that; moreover Mandela is still only relatively free after his release from the more visible of his prisons.

But did these spectacles and the work of musicians play any significant role? There I think the answer must be an equally emphatic, yes; especially if those events are seen as connected to the vast networks of local organizers who appropriated them for their work at the grassroots. The anti-Apartheid projects suggest the possibility that transnational and even global texts can be articulated to particular local political conditions with ideological goals partly outside of mass-mediated frames.

Let me conclude by using the rather different experience of the reception of the Mandela concert in the US to suggest some limitations, pitfalls, and points of struggle for those attempting to use mass-mediated public cultural forms for radical purposes.

The Mandela concert broadcast in the United States was a significantly de-radicalized version of the British concert. The Fox network which secured American rights to the event chose to cut out all of the anti-Apartheid political speeches, including those by musicians prefacing their songs. Moreover, in a deeply ironic, perhaps intentionally cynical, fashion, several of the sponsors of the American showing were themselves companies doing major business in South Africa. This is a stark instance but it reminds us of what should never be forgotten, that these events and texts occur in a matrix of late capitalist enterprise, that commercial sponsors can both subtly and directly undermine projected political meanings.[4]

More generally, such events in no way challenge and in many ways reinforce capitalist relations of production. Mega-events require immense amounts of capital, and thus most have required some degree of capitulation to corporate sponsorship (*cf.* Weinstein 1989). This dependence could be lessened, however, and the potential for oppositional messages heightened, by use of the "ideology of rock" (its largely erroneous but useful self-definition as rebel music)[5] to appeal for non-corporate funding from musicians and other wealthy music industry personnel. The *Sun City* project's stronger

4. For an analysis of Amnesty International's rock concert tour as commodification of transnationalism, see Weinstein (1989).

5. I see rock as a politically ambiguous force that most often serves domination but that contains a self-mythologizing dimension which leaves it more open than most mass-mediated discourses to intervention from the left. These issues are much contested among critics of rock. See, for example, the various perspectives offered in Frith, ed. (1989), Frith and Goodwin, eds. (1990), Grossberg (1992), and Jarrett (1991).

message was made possible in part because it was not a capital intensive venture, but also because it was conceived in essence through the discourse of "rock" as it defines itself against the discourse of "pop" in events like *Live Aid*.[6]

The challenge mega-events offer to late capitalist modes of consumption are also admittedly weak ones. Their images of normally highly individualistic performers and highly individualistic audiences doing collective work do provide some sense of structural as opposed to merely personal power. But this power is, generally speaking, fairly easily folded back into the more empty collective power felt at any large rock concert. Indeed, one cannot fail to at least raise the Baudrillardian question of whether consuming images of Nelson Mandela raising his fist is significantly different from consuming images of Michael Jackson raising his. But I think Baudrillard is most aptly seen as a writer of dystopian science fiction rather than as a chronicler of our present; the potential for rock music in this context to occlude or implode politics is certainly present, but it is not inevitable. Ultimately, the "Sun City" video, for example, does interpellate its viewers in different ways than does "We are the World" and I think those differences matter politically. But those differences are only weak potentialities until they can be linked to movements around and beyond these media texts.

The great Civil Rights organizer and theorist Ella Baker always made a distinction between mobilizing people and organizing them. Charismatic leaders, whether they be preachers, politicians, or rock stars, play a role in *mobilizing* people. But *organizing* them is something else. Organizing people to struggle with and by themselves requires deeper, more sustained dialogue and different kinds of actions than those of consuming mass-mediated images.

However, if it is true that mobilizing people is not enough, it is equally true that without it there can be but little organizing. Romantic images of face-to-face contact cannot alone compete with the dramatic visions of the mass-mediated imaginary.

The space of social movements and the space of media hyper-reality are different ones, and that difference is crucially important in creating a radically democratic politics. But for the space of movements to be more than a refuge for the politically correct, we must also create a third space of mediation that attempts to shift that bizarre hyper-real mass-mediated public culture

6. The relational, contextual rather than stable nature of these two discourses is suggested by the fact that many of the same personnel played on both "We Are the World," and "Sun City" while their musical codings were unmistakably different.

towards points where those who believe the new world order looks all too much like the old one can enter and offer a different vision.

Just as mobilizing is surely not enough, any social movement or NGO that is serious about extending its constituency beyond the margins needs at some level to contest for and with the realm of mass-mediated messages. That kind of politics, I've been arguing, may need some global counter-spectacles and more than a little of that transnational language known as rock 'n' roll.

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