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The Art of Involvement

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of Master

of Philosophy in Development Studies at Massey University

Claire Bryant

1998

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Abstract

Levy (1996, 367) says,

> *The art of involvement discovers the current of music. How do we make a symphony rise from the murmur of a multiple? How do we transfer the sound of a crowd into a chorus, without a musical score? The collective intellect continually brings the social contract into play, it keeps the group in a state of renewal.*

This thesis focuses on the role of the relations of production in building human capital, recognising this as a component of economic development, along with mobilising financial capital and utilising the natural resource base. Although relations of production sometimes destroy human capital, this thesis discusses examples where marginalised groups have used creolisation strategies to resist globalisation and build their human capital - first, Maori seeking to improve their position of equity within the economy and, secondly, women seeking to use the Net on their own terms. The privatising of the economy, and of the Net, symbolises the continued exclusion of marginalised groups from control, or even much influence, within the post-industrial economy of text and image flows now dominating global economics and culture-making. The risk for Maori and women is that the hunger of a global digital entertainment industry (which today includes marketing, movies, games, politics, chat lines and the news) for different and especially new information, even in the midst of what is, for the individual, infinitely abundant information, is that their stories will be absorbed but leave them with no means of exchange.

The telling of different, but equally persuasive stories, is characteristic of the use of creolisation strategies that resist global cultural colonisation. In both large and small ways, the Maori and women in the case studies are using involvement in interactive performances to deny the power of the one-way monologue transmitted by elites seeking passivity, isolation and un-resisting consumption. Although we may live in a 'sea of stories' and sometimes the tide seems to bring only other people's stories it is useful to remember the power of the undercurrent to subvert surface intentions.

I use hermeneutic methodology to discuss historic examples of interactive performance and, by comparing these with present day case studies, I develop the argument that such performances have always been used to build human capital. As a relation of production, interactive performance is based on mutuality and negotiation and, when people have the opportunity to practise these skills, they also increase their choices to adopt them in their daily life. By providing 'safe' environments, like flags on the beach within the marae and on the Net, interactive performances create a collective playspace that encourages people to practice and explore self determination skills, and remember the presence of the undercurrent.

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