

Empowerment

The main criterion of a new “dialogical aesthetic” should be the consideration of the extent to which the artist is able to catalyse emancipatory insights through dialogue enabling knowledge formation in the community that leads to ‘empowerment’ (Kester, 2013). It is a new concept of artist-role that Tucker (1992) parallels with those of the shamans, building creative bridges with their art to access invisible worlds. Gablik (1992) argues the importance of re-mythologizing the consciousness through rituals and re-enacting shamanistic healing to reconnect with nature and reclaim the gift of vision. Kester (2013) calls this bridge-building as being empathic listening and critical thinking informed by personal encounters, interconnectedness and interdependence (Gablik, 1992).

Akin to a shaman, the facilitator connects the past, present and future for the community. The project becomes a shared history linking up with the community’s own narrative. The shared enjoyment of social flow reverberates in the present (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). At the same time, it also plants a seed of social efficacy and confidence that may manifest in further projects (Bandura, 1977). As a contrast, the facilitator’s own disenfranchised position may need to be considered (Matarasso, 2001: “cultural Cinderellas” p. 74). This returns to the metaphor of the ‘wounded shaman’ (Tucker, 1992) as an image for the socially engaged artist.

This argument leads to positive risk-taking (Furedi, 2009; Gill, 2007). To become ‘wounded’ is a risk that a socially engaged project inherits. The participants, following the wounded shaman’s example, are willing to take risk in multiple ways. This embedded element of shared risk that necessitates trust through the interconnectedness and interdependence of the process, becomes the most essential tool of empowerment (Whelan, 2014), signifying a grassroots activity.