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Our Actions Will be Infinite - An exploration and comparison of legacy in participatory arts projects in Brazil and the UK

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OUR ACTIONS WILL BE INFINITE

*Anderson Sa (founder member of AfroReggae)
Favela Rising dir. Matt Mochary and Jeff Zimbalist, 2005*

An Exploration of Participatory Arts Projects in Brazil



JASMINE WILSON
Clare Fellowship Research Report

November 2011

Introduction

I have been working in the participatory arts sector for around 15 years, producing and leading dance projects with a diverse range of communities and participants. The majority of the work has focused on providing participants with an intensive creative process and artistic experience, usually with a marketed performance outcome in front of a public audience. The work comes under the umbrella of a professional dance company and the company's touring schedule dictates that our participatory projects (under the company's creative learning department) take place over a short period of time, with up to 6 weeks recruitment and development time for participants, followed by the artistic director and company dancers arriving in the community for one or two weeks to pull the show together. These intensive periods of projects are fuelled by an extreme sense of urgency and "sprint to the finish" to produce the desired performance outcome. Over the years I have questioned whether this element of adrenalin rush, nearly always present in the professional performing arts domain, is something that we should be embracing or avoiding in the creation of more participatory work. Can the stress and pressure of putting on live work to a deadline create detrimental levels of stress in participants or is it beneficial to reflect a true picture of the professional world? Our projects have succeeded in offering high quality arts either through participation or as audience to people who may not have formerly had access to it and there has been tangible seeing the positive impact of these projects on individuals and communities. We have numerous examples of individuals whose lives have been changed by our interaction with them and we have been fortunate enough to be able to track some individuals, from our first encounter in a school hall through to their professional careers in the arts as choreographers, dancers and actors.

Wayne McGregor | Random Dance works closely with partners in the community such as schools, venues and local agencies to ensure that we can recruit the participants we need but also to embed legacy within the project, be that through signposting to other opportunities or ensuring that any interest in the arts sparked by our project can be built upon. The nature of the company's participatory work is very specific. It is completely driven by the artistic aesthetic of Wayne McGregor our artistic director, and our objectives are focussed on open access and providing a worthwhile creative experience, but the driver is always artistic rather than social. However in February 2010 my almost evangelical faith in the ability for projects like these to offer transformative opportunities for participants and audience alike was deeply shaken. During a meeting with Tim Smit, Founder and CEO of the Eden Project he discussed how he feels that projects such as those I produce can result in a negative impact on the receiving community. His feeling was that there can be a perception of arts organisations and companies "parachuting" their work in. These skilled companies more often than not then create the most wonderful projects involving vast and varied members of the community that are celebrated for their artistic achievement. However, the day after the performance the arts organisation leave, creating a sense of bereavement in the community – how can they ever recreate the high that resulted from their involvement in the project? There is a sense that rather than arts projects achieving the desired empowerment of participants, they create a dependency on outside organisations.

Since the meeting with Smit I have been grappling with the challenge he laid down to the work of Random and so many other UK arts companies in the UK I do still believe there is a place for this type of community-based participatory arts work but I have also been driven to explore alternative models. One of the obvious ways to build a long-standing relationship with a community is to have a permanent home or building that enables in-depth and worthwhile relationships to be built. These buildings can range from open spaces, similar to community centres with a cultural focus to dance companies that run their own schools. However, the interaction must go beyond just being architecturally present: engagement with a community needs nurturing and mutual understanding and it is this more slippery element that I am interested in examining. Is it possible to define the specific ingredients needed to ensure a community receive and engage with a cultural organisation enabling it to achieve its desired objectives?

In pursuit of my questions surrounding this subject and following a series of chance discussions with various colleagues from across the arts sector I travelled to Brazil – a country renowned for its unique brand of cultural engagement and outstanding arts projects that achieve social change. In Rio de Janeiro I was able to find a breadth of organisations working with different models and drivers and indeed different communities. What is so fascinating when exploring how cultural engagement works and indeed thrives in Rio, is the unique context and extreme social issues with which these organisations are working. In his 1994 book the journalist Zuenir Ventura coined the phrase *Cidade Partida* (Divided City)(1997) to describe Rio de Janeiro and the huge gap between rich and poor in the city. The 1000 or so favelas of Rio are home to 20 percent of the city's 6 million residents and are the physical expression of this division. Mainly situated on the hillsides surrounding the city these improvised communities are characterised by their lack of law and infrastructure. The vacuum created by this lack of government presence has been replaced since the late 1970's by an alternative rule, that of the drug traffickers.

As in any 'real' war, children figure high in the number of fatalities. In the conflict between Israel and Palestine, 467 under-18 year olds were killed between 1987 and 2001. Research undertaken by the NGO Viva Rio, shows that during the same period in the city of Rio de Janeiro, 3,937 under 18-year olds were killed as a result of small-arms combat. 70% of the Brazilian murder victims are aged between 15-24. These young people are not evenly distributed amongst the general population. They are usually young men who have not completed first grade education, live in marginal urban areas, and are of Afro-Brazilian descendency. Heritage, Paul, *Intense Dreams*, A People's Palace Projects Publication, Queen Mary University of London, p.71

In this report I aim to use a principal case study of Grupo Cultural AfroReggae to explore issues around the social impact of cultural engagement, including legacy, interaction with local community and artistic policy. I will also refer to other organisations I encountered during my visit; Nós Do Morro, Companhia de Dança Deborah Colker and Dançando Para Não Dançar.

Brazil

“AfroReggae is a paradigm. Why? Because it evolved at a very difficult time in Rio’s history, in the aftermath of a police sponsored massacre. Because they don’t limit themselves to complaining. Because they are concerned not just about fighting the police but about bringing real change to the lives of people. Because they are not just a movement of volunteers but a permanent presence. Because they are not a part of the academic elite. Because, with events such as Urban Connections, they create spaces that generate self-esteem for favela people who can then demand respect, both as human beings and citizens.” Quote from Paulo Baia, Undersecretary for Human Rights, Rio State Government, Neate, Patrick and Platt, Damian, *Culture is Our Weapon*, Penguin Books, 2006, p.152

“Before the arrival of AfroReggae in Vigário, the only thing you’d see about that neighbourhood on the news was police brutality, drug trafficking and negativity. But now? The news you see is all related to cultural projects produced by AfroReggae.” Quote from Anderson Sa, Founder member of AfroReggae, Neate, Patrick and Platt, Damian, *Culture is Our Weapon*, Penguin Books, 2006, p.68

As you walk across the bridge into Favela Vigário Geral, the landscape is dominated by a huge silver fist (a symbol of Afro Brazilian resistance) thrust high into the sky. This sculpture, on the roof of the Centro Cultural Waly Samao created and run by Grupo Cultural AfroReggae is a fitting symbol of the impact that the organisation have had on this community, its residents and indeed the cultural landscape of Rio and beyond. Afro Reggae were formed in 1993 in response to a massacre by police of 21 civilians in the favela and since then have used culture as a weapon to enable social change in Vigário Geral and other favelas around Rio where they have rolled out their unique brand of social engagement. The Centro Cultural was built a year ago and was made possible with a huge amount of corporate sponsorship from Petrobras, Red Bull, Nestle and Santander amongst others, who have each sponsored one of the state of the art studios (music rehearsal and recording, dance, drama, IT suite). Before its completion Afro Reggae had been hugely active in the community for over 18 years, working out of small rooms and studios but this cultural hub with its world-class dedicated studios and large outdoor performance space has achieved a special thing – a high quality, fully equipped cultural centre with an open access policy, offering free arts activity for the local community.

A visit to their cultural centre reveals a place of intense energy and noise - studios occupied with AfroReggae’s drama group rehearsing a new work for children, their dance company Makala (a symbolic name translating to coal – referring to it’s use as the base material for graffiti, a hugely popular and symbolic form in Brazil or it’s potential for transformation into a diamond, a reference to the possibilities the group offers) taking class and the AfroReggae band – from which all this activity was born – rehearsing.

The current Lonely Planet guidebook has a section entitled “Hope in Rio’s Favelas” that highlights the work of Afro Reggae alongside that of Nós Do Morro. Arguably the biggest and most visible socio-educational arts project in Rio at the present time, AfroReggae currently has a professional staff of 300, running around 70 projects across several favelas. Their projects are tailored to the needs of each community, what is possible there and who the local community members are who have the potential to carry the project forward.

“Junior (Executive Producer) says we are not a franchise and you can’t just drop AfroReggae anywhere like McDonalds. We can’t just come in and create an illusion and then leave, it has to be a considered and continuous process”
Quote from Juninho, AfroReggae band member Neate, Patrick and Platt, Damian, *Culture is Our Weapon*, Penguin Books, 2006, p.70

In the favela Parada de Lucas, the AfroReggae intervention is a computer and technology centre set up by a resident and former systems analyst. Cantagalo, a favela situated in Copacabana is home to AfroReggae’s circus project. A visit there reveals a AfroReggae’s circus company, a dedicated and focussed group of circus performers/break dancers rehearsing in a fully kitted out room in the Crianca Esperanca children’s centre (a huge building that also hosts classes by another NGO Dançando Para Não Dançar). As they rehearse, young boys come in to demonstrate their break dancing moves and the AfroReggae team are open and welcoming, helping the boys achieve their positions and showing off their own physical prowess.

As usual all the company members we meet are in Afro Reggae t-shirts and are open to our visit. One of Afro Reggae’s strengths and something that they exploit to the maximum is their brand. It is how they have achieved such a high level of ongoing corporate sponsorship - they are now able to value their brand each year and sell that onto sponsors such as Santander. The bank is keen to have a presence in the favelas, opening banks and cash machines where there are no current facilities and they can achieve this by working with AfroReggae as a partner. This partnership is typical of AfroReggae’s approach towards what we would call fundraising – it is has to be a two way process rather than creating dependency on sponsors by going cap in hand to corporations for funds.

“There are two lines of thought, Either we can work like any other NGO, depending on continued outside funding, or we can create products of high artistic and cultural quality for commercial consumption and develop partnerships with companies, foundations and government for mutual benefit”
Quote from Jose Junior Neate, Patrick and Platt, Damian, *Culture is Our Weapon*, Penguin Books, 2006 p. 172

Junior’s leadership style also ensures that the AfroReggae philosophy is crystal clear and all members of the AfroReggae team are on message, whether welcoming visitors into a cultural centre or leading workshops internationally. It is also a condition of involvement with AfroReggae that staff and participants have no involvement with drugs or alcohol.

“Not everyone in AfroReggae will become an artist but we want them to use the methodology they learn in the workshops, be it capoeira or percussion, in their own lives, whether they become a business owner or a doctor or lawyer.”

A shining example of the AfroReggae philosophy of working with individuals to achieve their potential and raising the esteem and aspirations of favela residents is Rafael Rodrigues. He has been working with AfroReggae since he was a teenager and is now an important member of the team, as a teacher and valued performer in the dance and drama companies. He first encountered AfroReggae at the age of thirteen when he attended a dance class with a friend. He is keen to point out the misconception that everyone who comes to AfroReggae is saved from a certain involvement with criminal life of the drug traffickers.

“The people generally think that if you aren’t in AfroReggae you will be a criminal. But we have to think about it – there are so many people in Vigário Geral who with AfroReggae aren’t (criminals) but maybe if they didn’t have AfroReggae they would find something else. AfroReggae is important in this place but people have family – my family is wonderful and my mother gave to me education and everything I need. AfroReggae was an important place that allowed me to develop my profession and travel around the world. I didn’t know I could be a dancer – there I discovered it.”

Rafael’s mother is also a significant member of the AfroReggae family. Her restaurant *Chupetinha* has a partnership with AfroReggae, providing a place for visitors to the project - including many celebrities - to eat her wonderful home cooked traditional food. The entrance to the restaurant features a beautiful mosaic that was made possible by sponsorship from Red Bull.

As well as his career as a dancer, Rafael also has a degree in tourism – a subject chosen for its opportunities for travel. The fluid and responsive structure of AfroReggae is allowing him to exploit both his areas of interest with the creation of a cultural tourism project that he is setting up across AfroReggae’s various centres. The programme aims to exploit the cultural and personnel potential of the favelas to provide a programme for Rio’s tourists, including tours, workshops and a hostel.

“It’s a good moment for Rio and we have the key with Afro Reggae, we can make so many different things. What’s more important to me is that people who live in Vigário Geral can stay and have a profession with the project. It’s the (unique) part of this project. Residents will study and become tour guides and receptionists”

AfroReggae is not an organisation driven by an artistic imperative or aesthetic, rather it was born from and is continually driven by a need to address an extreme social problem, that of the drug trafficking and factions that are present in every favela not currently under the UPP (police pacification) model. They work to mediate between rival drug factions as well as working directly with individual traffickers at all levels (factions can have an almost military structure) to provide them with an exit strategy from the faction. They do this by a variety of methods according to each individual need, including providing employment opportunities, informal coaching and training in the arts and technology. One of their methods of engagement that makes them so unique is the adoption/reflection of the attractive elements the

drug trade can provide for young favela residents – the sense of being part of a gang, financial compensation etc as a means of engaging the young favela residents.

“In a way AfroReggae consciously mimics the organization of the traffic – our clothes, our structure, even our slang – because we want to mirror what attracts young people. But of course, we try to show that you can make money and attain power through other means – through your creative abilities.” Quote from Anderson Sa AfroReggae band member. Neate, Patrick and Platt, Damian, *Culture is Our Weapon*, Penguin Books, 2006, p.130

It is very clear that in addition to reflecting attractive and familiar lifestyle choices as a method of engagement, the choice of art forms that AfroReggae work with also build on a sense of familiarity. In Vigário Geral the cultural activities provided are those that are most attractive and therefore accessible to the local community, in particular the young people most at risk of choosing drug trafficking as a career. This is a considered decision but also a direct result of cultivating teachers and leaders that come from the community they serve – there is an inherent understanding of the needs and interests of the clients.

An afternoon spent at the Waly Samao Cultural Centre provides an insight into what could be called the artistic policy of AfroReggae. A group of young teenage boys developing their skills in Brazilian Hip Hop while having their sound mixed by one of the AfroReggae staff makes for a loud and energetic session. It is uplifting to see the boys mimicking the stance and vocal style of their role models – the AfroReggae band, whose rehearsals attract a large audience of boys and teenagers.

The Makala company class is a lively and energetic session (complete with three toddlers who are accompanying their young dancer mothers). The company form mixes contemporary with Afro Brazilian dance and it is in the travelling sequences that are closer to African dance that the dancers really shine. Their new dance work is enhanced by the live traditional music provided by an eight piece band who are as engaged in the process as the dancers – resulting in heated discussions about tempo and volume. Outside in the amphitheatre there is constant activity, whether it be an impromptu performance by a young samba band, a drumming workshop for children or the technical set up for that night’s gig. These might all be referred to as “popular” art forms in Brazil and therefore not regarded highly by the middle classes, however their accessibility and authenticity ensure that the centre is relevant to the local residents. However the daily classical ballet classes the centre is now offering to local children are proving extremely popular, demonstrating how one cultural engagement can lead to another.

Driving along the Avenida Neimayer, next to the beautiful Leblon Beach, our taxi driver informs us that he won’t take us up to the Nós do Morro Cultural Centre as it would mean driving into the Favela of Vidigal and he feels it is too dangerous. In a quick call to Zezé Silva, executive producer of Nós Do Morro to let her know, she advises us to drive to the entrance of the favela where someone will meet us, but also commands us to throw a barrage of insults at the taxi driver as we get out of the cab, being sure to make him aware of how bigoted he is being in his narrow minded view of this community. Before we

get to Vidigal however, we pass the Sheraton Rio Hotel and Resort, a luxury hotel with pools, tennis courts and private beach. Its situation, right next to the favela is a reminder of the complexity of this city with its highly visible indications of social apartheid. We are met at the lively entrance to Vidigal and driven up the steep hill (Nós Do Morro translates to “us of the Hillside”) to an old villa (once the home of an artist) that is the organisation’s home.

Nós Do Morro is a community theatre school and company founded in 1986 by Guti Fraga, a journalist, actor and director. The initial activity of the company was creating performances for and with the residents, providing cultural activity to those with limited access. This then grew into a theatre school based in the community, offering classes in drama, dance, music and theatre history. The building houses a small theatre, practice studios and a library. In contrast to the modern, fully equipped centres of AfroReggae and Companhia de Dança Deborah Colker the building is basic and slightly faded and almost hidden amongst the other buildings on the hillside. This perhaps reflects Nós do Morro’s integration and organic growth within with the community. The work of Nós do Morro is based in the classical theatre tradition, exploring work by Brazilian and international writers. They have a long-standing association with the Royal Shakespeare Company that has resulted in a series of exchanges and this year, as part of their 25th anniversary celebrations the RSC will lead a weeklong forum including workshops and seminars.

Although working from a classical tradition, the artistic policy at Nós do Morro is to make work that is wholly relevant to the community. During an interview with Zezé she used the term “colloquializar”, roughly translated to making colloquial or conversational. She stressed the importance of not abandoning the local element in the creation of a new production and that this element enables them to expand their members’ cultural landscape, bringing in new theatrical language and styles. Shakespeare works are staged using local cultural references such as language and music. Before work starts on a new text a director may ask group members to explore various characters for several weeks before revealing the actual play they are working on. There is also a strong tradition of devised work, which can be utilised to explore issues around and reflect on everyday life in the favela, providing a strong sense of identity for the audience. These various methods utilised by Nós Do Morro ensure a sense of ownership and relevance to the cultural work that in turn leads to a greater engagement, enabling people to explore new creative territory.

Unlike AfroReggae, Zezé is keen to state that Nós Do Morro do not work directly with the drug traffickers to address the social problems of the favela. The focus is less instrumental than that of AfroReggae – Nós Do Morro’s driver is cultural rather than social. Any social impact comes as a result of the activity and geographical situation of the organisation rather than direct social intervention.

“Of course (we) want Vidigal to be a safe place, just because (we) are not fighting against the drug problems themselves doesn’t mean (we) don’t believe that Rio should be safe. We need to give that impression to the

outside world. There are certain values you need to project as a community.”
Zezé Silva

A striking similarity between Nós Do Morro, AfroReggae and indeed all the other cultural organisations (to varying degrees) I encountered during my visit is the holistic approach to working with programme participants. These organisations not only provide cultural activity, they also serve to fill a gap left by the state in essential services such as health and social care. At AfroReggae, any person entering their programmes has access to teachers and social workers so that issues that may prevent them from gaining benefit from the programme can be identified. An awareness of an individual's situation and context enables the AfroReggae team to provide a more individualised and effective trajectory through the organisation. Nós do Morro adopt what they term a 'triangular' approach to the wellbeing of their members, they feel for the programme to have maximum impact they must strike a balance between theatre, home and school. They achieve this by having social workers assigned to each member so they can look after the individual and any needs and issues involving the family. They work with the schools to ensure that all its young members are achieving the necessary grades and provide extra assistance where necessary. Also they have a partnership with doctors who work in the highest quality hospitals where they can send members and their families who don't have adequate health insurance.

Dançando Para Não Dançar is a project that offers a full study programme for approximately 450 young people from across eleven communities. Their mission is to use dance (classical ballet in particular) to “fight social exclusion and promote the culture of peace and citizenship among children of poor districts in Rio.” On our visit there, not only did we see their three dance studios and IT suite but we were also shown a medical room that houses their doctor, dentist and nutritionist. What was surprising was that these services are not only available to students enrolled in the programme but also to their families also.

“enhancing the participation of the family, is extremely important to the development of citizenship and a better quality of life” Dançando Para Não Dançar website 15 October 2011

During my time in Rio I was struck by the depth of involvement and breadth of services that these cultural organisations offer their individual participants and their families alongside the main artistic activity. Of course they are working in a different social context to the UK - in the favelas social exclusion is present in the extreme but what is interesting is the intention. There is not a comparable cultural project in the UK that offers such a cohesive, networked level of interaction and services to participants.

Whether it is in the resolution of conflict, the renewal of the urban landscape, reversal of economic decline, or to rescue of lost lives to crime/delinquency, the arts are looked to as offering real alternatives to social exclusion and fragmentation. A series of socio-historical factors have produced a context that is extreme, but also a response that sees arts organisations creating intense and complex interventions. It is the totalising way in which so many of these Brazilian groups respond that first alerts the British visitor to the gap

between UK and Brazilian initiatives in this field. In the absence of adequate education, family structures, economic activity and security, arts organisations fill the void with an intensity that makes invidious any meaningful comparison with almost all British arts-based initiatives with a social dimension, Heritage, Paul Intense Dreams, A People's Palace Projects Publication, Queen Mary University of London p.8

UK arts projects such as Dance United are addressing similar social issues but with a purely artistic approach, using the transferable “side effects” or outcomes of dance activity to achieve an instrumental impact. Its Academy initiative is a 12-week programme of dance and study with young offenders, culminating in dance performances.

Dance as both context and mechanism is crucial to the way change is brought about. The Academy demands professional standards of discipline and performance while providing a high quality environment in which individuals are supported, given respect and treated on their merits. Participants' learning is informed by a number of non-verbal, dance-mediated processes, which work to bring about wider changes in attitude and behaviour. These include the mental discipline and bodily control encapsulated by focus and the development of 'embodied confidence'. The public performance dimension of the programme creates both a pressure that generates co-operation and responsibility and a sense of achievement, which in turn sponsors ambition. Miles Andrew and Strauss Paul, A summary of a Dance United report June 2006 to June 2008

Another UK example of an arts project that offered additional support services to its participants was Leaps and Bounds, a project in 2005 led by Birmingham Royal Ballet and culminating in a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*.

(The project) was designed for young people aged 15 - 19 years who were considered to be disadvantaged and/or “at risk”. The project was to mix a personal development training programme with preparation and training for a full-length ballet performance in which the young people would perform alongside the dancers of BRB. It would last for around 18 months. At the outset the definition of disadvantage was never agreed by the partners, which allowed for individual interpretation by the local authorities when selecting the young people. The young people were referred from a number of sources: Connexions, Looked After (ESS and 16+), Youth Offending Services, PRU's, Barnados, Youth Service, individual schools' 'at risk' pupils, including excluded pupils, at risk of exclusion, suspended, 'tagged' young people, those with mild autism, those in hostels, teenage mothers, and young people with deep seated personal issues, health issues such as bulimia and poor home backgrounds. Most of the young people selected had never taken ballet classes, some had never performed on a stage and most had never worked with a professional dancer or attended a theatre to see a ballet. Leaps and Bounds website 24 November 2011

The obvious distinction between the Brazilian projects I visited and the UK examples is the level of integration of additional services within the organisations. UK cultural projects that focus on social inclusion require working with in partnership with external organizations to provide social

support rather than having them as an integrated part of the team. The Brazilian projects I visited have social workers, teachers and medical practitioners on staff to provide services to all participants as and when they need them. In this way they not only reflect the gap in provision left by the state but can also provide a “net” that replaces the necessary support that may be lacking within the family environment. The interaction goes beyond providing cultural activity to providing a lifestyle and family. This leads to engagement of extreme depth and also longevity – the eldest member of Nós Do Morro is 68 and although he hasn’t been with the group since childhood it is a reflection of the extended engagement projects like this can offer. In the UK the majority of cultural projects not only have a defined timeline precluding ongoing engagement with either a community or individual but also tend to focus on defined sectors of a community, be it youth, elders or those with special needs, rather than addressing the needs of a community as a whole. This is due to restrictions imposed by funders, artistic imperatives or in opposition to the favela situation, rigid infrastructure. It is impossible in the UK for arts projects to provide a bridge between all the services an individual may need to thrive or indeed survive so often we focus on only one facet, that of the artistic.

In looking for a Brazilian organisation that most closely matched my own professional context and practice I was keen to visit Companhia de Dança Deborah Colker and examine their participatory and outreach work.

Cia de Dança Deborah Colker is a contemporary dance company, internationally renowned for their abstract work that mixes circus, striking sets and dance. In line with Wayne McGregor | Random Dance the company is led by an internationally renowned choreographer whose vision leads the company. In 2005 the company opened their movement centre, based in Gloria, a residential neighbourhood in Rio. The centre houses the company, a dance school and until last year a social project for 13 young talented dancers.

Here we want to think and experiment movement, educate and raise awareness of the body that thinks, changes, feels; the body that dances. Create a common space for both the company and school, where professionals and students get together and establish a relationship with dance through art, health and leisure.

Company mission on CDC Website 31 October 2011

The school runs a range of dance classes for children and adults. I was staying near the school and each day I saw a number of young girls running to and from the building with their Deborah Colker branded leotards. As in the UK there are private ballet schools throughout Rio, mainly accessible to the middle classes. The main difference with the classes at the Deborah Colker studios is in the link with the company, although the activities are kept separate with the company being housed in a different part of the building, Deborah’s reputation and links to the profession ensure that the teachers are of the highest quality, sometimes past or present dancers with the company. Another element that distinguishes the classes is the price. Fees for classes are kept low to enable access for a wider community and bursaries are available. However, Deborah Colker was keen to state that wherever possible

she asks for a contribution, however small, to place a value on the activity for the young person and their family.

In 2010 CDC initiated its social project. The idea grew out of a perceived lack of professional pathways for young dancers emerging from other social projects. (Due to funding issues the project was only able to run for two years with one cohort of dancers but there is an aspiration to relaunch in the near future.)

"There are many dance social projects in Brazil, where children from poor backgrounds can stay for six or seven years...But once that's finished, they're not ready for the challenge of working as a dancer, but they can't grow any further inside these projects. So Joao (Elias Alvares da Silva, CDC Executive Producer) said let's try to find very special, high level students from these projects and choose the best to come here and study." Interview with Deborah Colker, The New Scotsman 13.5.10

CDC worked with other arts and social projects in the favelas such as Nós Do Morro to identify talented individuals who then embarked on a month long audition process. 200 young people were invited to the initial stages of the audition, although CDC reported a high drop out rate due to the intensity of the process and the level of commitment required. 13 young dancers were eventually selected for the programme. The schedule was formulated to reflect that of the main professional company. The young dancers worked for full days to study dance technique and rehearse a specially created piece that was a medley of Deborah's old works. Performances of the work took place in the Deborah Colker building and other small spaces around Rio. 12 of the 13 young dancers on the programme have gone on to have careers as professional dancers with a few graduating into the main company.

The social project was successful in targeting and nurturing young talent that may not otherwise have had access to the professional dance world. The provision of a direct pathway into the profession and also the exposure to the inner workings of a professional dance company provided a unique aspirational experience. The project required participants to travel out of their communities and undertake an intensive training process that was driven entirely by the artistic aesthetic of Deborah Colker. Although the initial recruitment stages of the project were driven by a social objective the operation of the resulting apprentice company gave no concession to that context. In a discussion with Executive Director Joao he reported that the main issue identified in the communities where the "talent spotting" took place was disempowerment and a low level of aspiration. When asked how they combated this, he responded that it was essential to create a realistic programme of dance training with a level of intensity that is usual for professional dance companies. Their thinking is that if "you want something then you need to work hard for it" and that there are no concessions to this.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly the common element in all the projects I encountered in Brazil offer and a shared similarity with participatory arts projects across the world is in the use of the arts to provide a window onto an alternative reality and a

point of aspiration for participants. However due to the unique social context in Brazil (José Junior, founder and Executive Coordinator of Afro Reggae calls it the context of war in a nominally peaceful society) and the inequality of social care from the state, these cultural organizations have to reach new heights of intervention that go beyond that seen in participatory arts programmes in the UK. This unique level of engagement creates a huge impact, capable of moving individuals out of their social situation and providing them with new sets of positive choices.

In terms of my own practice the trip to Brazil has had a deep influence on my thinking around the formation of future projects. Since returning I have been concerned with how I can apply some of the best practice I observed in Brazil to my UK context. In my current position the work is clearly driven by the artistic vision of the director, creating parameters around the content, however there are some changes in structure that could be adopted to deepen engagement and increase the impact and legacy of projects. Although in my current context it wouldn't be viable to recreate the kind of holistic practice I viewed in Rio, I am keen to create projects that have are shaped by and have an extended interaction with communities. Consulting with individuals and communities on their long-term aspirations in relation to social change and cultural skills would enable the formulation of projects that although may not be able to fulfill all needs, can be part of the desired change. So rather than projects creating grieving communities they contribute to an infinite change within them.

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