# The Art of Cultural Exchange

Translation and Transformation between the UK and Brazil

Edited by

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**Curating and Interpreting Culture** 



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# Foreword

#### Graham Sheffield

#### December 2016

Art connects us. For more than eighty years, artistic exchange has been central to the British Council's aim to create a basis of friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and the wider world.

Cultural exchange supports economic, social and cultural development, and strengthens connections. This is increasingly important in challenging times. By sharing ideas and ways of working, artists in the UK and Brazil can learn a great deal from each other. This ensures that both our arts sectors are enriched with talent and creativity, and become more resilient. The 2012-2016 period has become a paradigmatic example of international exchange as the transition between the London and Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games catalysed dialogues, both between individual artists and on an institutional level or around particular social questions, that might not otherwise have emerged.

As the arts & culture assume greater importance in global conversations and exchange – as we have seen this year during the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shakespeare's death – it has become increasingly important to be generous with our sense of ownership. Through *Transform* and *The Art of Cultural Exchange* programme, the British Council, Queen Mary University of London and the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro have explored how mutual, shared, international ownership and experience of culture make us stronger as artists and as nations.

Cultural relations are all about long term engagement: mutual trust and understanding mature over the years. The UK and Brazil have both seen major upheavals over the last four years, especially in 2016. None of this has diverted either of us from our core purpose in *Transform*, which readily transcends all political change. What we can be sure of is that we both need friendship and understanding in the world at large and that cultural relations are indispensable to achieving that: the texture and depth of the cultural relationship between Brazil and the UK have been transformed in the four years between London 2012 and Rio 2016, and long may it continue.

# **Preface**

#### Martin Dowle

#### December 2016

Though Brazil and the UK are geographically an ocean apart, culturally they continue, like opposites, to attract each other with a constant dialogue. Immediate mutual comprehension has not always been a hallmark of the exchange, but there has always been a willingness to explore our differences and similarities and to share what we know and what we feel, even if the disparity in contexts is greater than we generally imagine.

In a year that marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of Thomas More's Utopia, we can see that Britain's curiosity about Brazil goes back a long way. We know that More was inspired by the letters of Américo Vespucio, which detailed his voyages to Brazil, though the Utopia he painted was far from the reality of the 24 wretches cast off to their fate at Cabo Frio on his second voyage. Far from visions of paradise, European perceptions were swiftly transformed into images of hell, fuelled by Hans Staden's steaming cauldrons with explorers being cooked up for dinner by local Indians. Arguably, we have been cursed by simplistic stereotypes ever since – *samba* and bowler hats.

Fortunately, times have changed, though the British for a long time were known in Brazil more for their engineering than their arts. The French provided the neo-classical finery for Rio´s municipal theatre, while we provided the iron beams and the Staffordshire porcelain for the lavatories (at least they still stand the test of time after 100 years).

Today, however, we are forging ever more cultural links, and in all art forms. The 2012 to 2016 *Transform* initiative, which acknowledged the need to bolster our cultural relationship, has brought together 200 Brazilian and UK institutions, drawn audiences of 1.6 million, and given training to around 20,000 arts professionals and practitioners.

The Art of Cultural Exchange has been at the heart of our dialogue, evidence that the relationship has been thoughtful and about quality, rather than transactional. We are interested in innovation and creativity, social inclusion and diversity, as well as the exchange of ideas and good practice in a bewildering and changing world. We are interested in the voices and expressions of identity of

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the excluded, an ever increasing field of opinion in cities such as Rio, Recife and São Paulo, from which we in Britain have much to learn.

Queen Mary University of London and the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro are to be congratulated on the publication of the essays in *The Art of Cultural Exchange* cycle, which contain much food for thought. The British Council is proud to have been on the journey with them. If London is a village, as imagined by Takumā Kuikuro (*Ete Londres*), at least we are part of a global village, and along with the rest of the UK and Brazil, we need to examine it, warts and all.

# Introduction

#### Paul Heritage

In 1928, Mário de Andrade - icon of Brazilian modernism, poet, novelist, musicologist, public intellectual and the first Cultural Secretary of São Paulo - challenged his readers with the provocation that Brazilian cultural creativity loses its identity in the exchange with Europe<sup>1</sup>. Mário would have had much to contribute to our research project *The Art of Cultural Exchange*. He would have tested our understanding of cultural exchange as a mutual act of translation and asked what really happens when artists exchange ideas and practices from one cultural context to another. What gets lost? What gets learned? How are those who make translations themselves transformed? If translation is, as often said, a betrayal then how to understand the importance of the gaps and losses which open up during the process?

Since 2014, a combined research team from Queen Mary University of London and the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro has been investigating the transformations sought through artistic exchanges between the UK and Brazil with a particular but not exclusive focus on Rio de Janeiro. The city has been a global point of exchange since the Portuguese first established it as pivotal to the movement of precious metals and peoples: of silver and of slaves. Transformed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century into the city through which Brazil translated itself to the world, Rio de Janeiro generated the popular cultural languages that mediated Brazil internationally through to the 1960s: samba, carnival and Bossa Nova. The dissolution and degradation of the utopic image of the *Cidade Maravilhosa*<sup>2</sup> was only too evident by the 1970s as the city acquired a parallel reputation for its violence and social divisions. The decline seemed to have been arrested by the beginning of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with what promised to be the rising global

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Mário de Andrade, Ensaio sobre a Música Brasileira (1928).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Cidade maravilhosa (composed by André Filho; arrangement by Silva Sobreira) – the Marvellous City – was the title of a 1935 carnival song which made reference to what had already become a popular nickname for Rio de Janeiro. First recorded by Aurora Miranda, the song was made most famous in the voice of her sister Carmen and by the 1960s had established itself as the city's anthem, echoing through the streets of Rio de Janeiro at every subsequent carnival.

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strength of the Brazilian economy, symbolised by its successful bid to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2016. Unfortunately, as we close this chapter of our research in March 2017, the promise seems to have been illusionary which makes the need to continue the transformations imagined in these cultural translations ever more urgent.

An important part of the way in which Rio began to re-build its self-esteem has been the new dialogue that has been possible with communities that, despite often being located in the topographic centre, have forever been confined to a social and civic periphery. It is these territories – *favelas* and other peripheral communities - that have seen the renaissance of a new utopian vision of transformation through the activities of cultural organisations that offer a re-translation of the city and of its relationship to its own citizens and to the world. *The Art of Cultural Exchange* has mapped the way in which cultural exchange etches the immense contours of Brazil - drawing on case-studies from the Amazon to São Paulo - but our understanding of the transformative curve of international cultural exchange has been very much shaped by the internal translations that have been attempted in Rio de Janeiro over the last thirty years.

Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK) and the British Council, *The Art of Cultural Exchange* has spent two years investigating cultural exchange between the UK and Brazil as a means of understanding how artists interpret, transmit and circulate ideas, ideologies and forms of knowledge with specific reference to the production of new 'translations' produced from and, where possible, between peripheral territories. The research has sought to increase understanding about present practices of cultural exchange within the historical legacy of the ways in which Brazil and Britain have engaged in translations of themselves and each other across the last 500 years in order to enable new strategies for the future. Recognising that as arts organisations emerge from peripheral territories in both Britain and Brazil, they make possible new translations for all of us.

*The Art of Cultural Exchange* set out to examine five key research questions:

- How can we define cultural exchange and understand the possibilities and limits of such initiatives as an act of translation?
- What are the transformations sought in translating cultures?
- How far is it possible to achieve reciprocity in the act of translation during cultural exchange?

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- How sustainable is the process of transformation?
- How is it possible to stimulate innovation through the choice of those who engage in the act of translation that is undertaken through cultural exchange?

The research has been conducted across three simultaneous lines of enquiry:

- Mapping of cultural exchange projects between UK and Brazil 2012-16
- Five case-studies
- Debates and discussions (including two public seminars based around eight specially commissioned Position Papers)

Source material in the form of interviews, testimonies, photographs, audio recordings, fieldwork commentaries and creative texts was gathered across the five case studies to provide a series of reflections related to Brazilian/British cultural exchange over four years. Further information about this material can be found on www.inter-cultural.com. We have edited this publication (also available in Portuguese at www.peoplespalaceprojects.org.uk/en/publications) in a way that seeks to maintain the multiplicity of voices engaged in these mutual acts of translation and transformation. This book is a multivocal text which means that the reader will find deliberate shifts in tone, accent and style. It does not need to be read in any particular order, nor is there a particular priority of knowledge. A Brazilian anthropologist will write about hyper-dialetic historical processes in a very different way from a theatre director marking out a manifesto for change. Actors talk differently from art historians just as policy makers use a rhetoric distinct from academics or activists. We want the reader of this book to hear all these voices as they reflect on the art of cultural exchange.

Almost a hundred years ago, Mário de Andrade challenged Brazil to (re)discover Brazil. As Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda alerted in her presentation at the final seminar for *The Art of Cultural Exchange* in October 2016, this quest is as urgent as it is impossible. Citing the British sociologist Stuart Hall, Buarque de Hollanda reminded us that there are no roots, only routes. We hope that across these pages the reader can follow some of the voyages of discovery undertaken during cultural exchanges between Brazil and the UK. We encourage you to find and to follow your own pathway through the publication, allowing yourself to be surprised by the direction you take just like the artists who have revealed themselves for the moment of

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exchange. Open the unknown and ask what to do with it, as Simon McBurney does in the play that arose from his encounter with indigenous Brazil<sup>3</sup>. Perhaps that is the best of what we can hope from cultural exchange. As I reviewed the material we have gathered for this publication, I found myself drawn again to the journey I have been making in a cultural exchange with Brazil that began in 1991. Brazil has offered me a route towards affirming art's capacity for collective, cohesive action rooted in territory, identity, memory and transformation. I hope Mário de Andrade would have approved, as our research draws together the exchanges that reveal a shared search for active art practices that are social, territorial and engaged in the construction of communities, cities and perhaps even countries. Perhaps he would have seen how in these exchanges between the UK and Brazil, artists continue to go beyond the borders created by the accidents of migration to redefine what we can be in the world.

Paul Heritage Rio de Janeiro and London, March 2017

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> see *Village Encounters*: from the Amazon to Broadway. The reference is to a quote that McBurney used when creating his play, *The Encounter* "There was always the same question when opening the unknown: What to do with it?" Petru Popescu, *Amazon Beaming* (London: Abacus, 1993).

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