

## Observing the observers in O Bando:

### How can theatre and scientific research be so challenging?

Observar os observadores n'O Bando:

Como podem o teatro e a investigação científica ser tão desafiantes?

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#### Abstract

This article is essentially exploratory and starts with the observation *in vivo* of a creation work experience in scientific research and theatre in which international teams of researchers of the European Project ARGOS took part. This project brought together universities in France, Belgium, Greece and Portugal, a combination of observers with a range of professional profiles, and, finally, the artistic teams from the Portuguese theatre group O Bando: the director, the playwright, the head of movement and voice and three actors. A summary view of the similarities, differences and challenges of artistic and scientific work is presented, together with an analysis of the potential relationship between the scientific research experiment and the production of different levels of knowledge. Finally, the article presents the heuristic potential of dialogues in a “community of practice” constructed with the project observers. Logbook notes, photograph sequences and the words of the artists and scientists are used alternately and in dialogue.

**Keywords:** sociology, theatre, observation, community of practices.

#### Resumo

Este artigo assume um carácter essencialmente exploratório e parte da observação *in vivo* de uma experiência de “trabalho de criação” na investigação científica e no teatro. Nesta experiência participaram cinco equipas de investigadores internacionais do Projeto Europeu ARGOS. O projeto juntou universidades de França, Bélgica, Grécia e Portugal; cientistas e observadores com perfis profissionais diversos e a equipa artística do grupo de teatro português, O Bando, o encenador, o dramaturgista, a responsável pelo movimento e coralidade e três atores. O artigo apresenta uma aproximação preliminar às semelhanças, diferenças e desafios do trabalho artístico e científico. Analisam-se, de forma breve, as possíveis relações da experiência de investigação científica com a produção de diferentes níveis de conhecimento. Por fim, destaca-se o potencial heurístico dos diálogos de uma “comunidade de práticas”, construída com os observadores do projeto. Utilizam-se as notas do diário de bordo, sequências de fotografias e as palavras dos artistas e cientistas, de forma alternada e em diálogo.

**Palavras-chave:** sociologia, teatro, observação, comunidade de práticas.

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## Introduction

This article was written subsequent to an invitation, within the scope of the ARGOS Project<sup>2</sup>. Funded by the European Union's Creative Europe programme, this project is encompassed under the areas of Theatre Genetics and Theatre Studies. Five university partners are working jointly on this project. They are the University of Rennes, University of Lisbon, University of Lille, University of Antwerp and University of the Peloponnese. The project is being conducted in close collaboration with the artistic world and involves in situ monitoring of theatrical creation processes in five countries: Portugal, Italy, France, Belgium and Lebanon. The main idea of this project is to test and promote different types of observation, such as “integrated observation” (at the O Bando Theatre, in Portugal), “participatory observation” (at the Societas Raffaello Sanzio's Chiara Guidi, in Italy), “virtual observation” (at the National Theatre of Brittany, in France), “creative observation” (at the Au bout du plongeur, in France) and “intercultural observation” (at Moussem, in Belgium and Lebanon).

These various approaches to observation, based on more collaborative scientific and artistic practices (see Kester, 2011), are innovative in Europe and, in this case in particular, the diversity of the countries and teams involved is noteworthy. In some aspects, these approaches have already been tested by other ongoing European projects that provide a framework for them, such as the "Be SpectActive!" programme<sup>3</sup>, which has existed since 2014 and is co-funded by the European Union's Creative Europe Programme. The members of the programme network are festivals, theatres, cultural organisations, universities and a research centre. What is interesting about the initiative is its focus on artistic productions and participatory practices intended to involve citizens, in general, and the regular spectators (the “onlookers” of E. Goffman, 1991) in the creative and organisational processes, consequently stimulating reflection about the programmes and the main paradigms of policies in Europe, their constraints and their potential (see Bonet and Négrier, ed., 2018a, b).

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<sup>2</sup> This invitation was extended by Professor Maria João Brilhante, Associate Professor at the University of Lisbon's School of Arts and Humanities, where she is the director of MA and PhD courses in Theatre Studies and a researcher at the Theatre Studies Centre.

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.bespectactive.eu/>; on Facebook, [https://www.facebook.com/pg/bespectACTIVE/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/bespectACTIVE/about/?ref=page_internal); and on Twitter, <https://twitter.com/bespectactive>.

In turn, as affirmed by the coordinators, the main goals of the ARGOS Project, which involve having groups of observers present at working sessions in theatrical creation, are the following:

"(...) questioning artistic practice by having observers present during the process of creation; changing the relationship with the artistic milieu that is established in the areas of teaching and vocational training; renewing the tools and procedures of cultural mediation in the digital era in close collaboration with higher education training; re-dimensioning the perception of research in the field of theatre studies in light of the re-forging of the bonds between art and the world, through the constitution, consolidation and transmission of interactive features of the creative act. Lastly, the ARGOS project aims to create and model the European Creativity Factories, which seek to profoundly transform human and inter-professional relationships in the field of the performing arts"<sup>4</sup>.

The ARGOS project began in Portugal, in April 2019, and my challenge was to "observe the observers", to use the words of Maria João Brilhante. This period of observation occurred from the 22nd to the 24th of April 2019, during the O Bando theatre group's rehearsals of Dante's Purgatory/Divine Comedy. The group is based on a farm in Vale de Barris, Palmela, some 40 kilometres from Lisbon. Twenty-seven observers with different trajectories (from the educational, academic and professional point of view) were welcomed to the group's space on the farm; as were the members of the Portuguese and international research teams (Portuguese, French, Belgians, Greeks and Brazilians, with their different career paths – project directors, some already holding PhDs and others reading for them, students and cultural mediators); and the theatrical teams, including the director, three actors, the playwright and the person in charge of movement and voice<sup>5</sup>.

This experience was unique insofar as it allowed me not only to participate in one of the invisible moments of theatre group work (Borges, 2007, 2009, 2017a, b, 2018), but also because I was able to simultaneously observe two teams at work: the scientists and artists. The major challenges of this research experience were, therefore, to observe *in vivo* "[their] interactions behind the scenes" (Abbott, 2016b: 48), their commitment to science and the theatre, their efforts "to work together" (Becker, 1960, 1986) and, lastly, I sought to promote what seemed to me to be the best angle of analysis for an approximation to the values of these

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<sup>4</sup> See: <https://www.lettras.ulisboa.pt/pt/investigacao/projetos-financiados-flul/#%C3%A1rea-de-literaturas-artes-e-culturas>.

<sup>5</sup> The international scientific team working on the ARGOS project was present at O Bando from the 22nd to the 27th of April 2019.

groups ("othering process", Burlington, 2015) during the scientific and artistic "creation work".

## **Premisses, context and methodology**

H. Becker, renowned North-American sociologist (as well as jazz musician and photographer), interviewed by M. Perrenoud and G. Bois (2017), gave a straightforward answer to the question: "Finally, what can we learn from the study of ordinary artists? They teach us that all art is, seriously speaking, real work. Only romantics want to talk as though it's not work" (Becker, in Perrenoud and Bois, 2017: 5). Both Portuguese and foreign literature, along with the field work we have been conducting, show us the importance of the deep commitment that artists feel when they are working (Menger, 2005; 2014; Borges, 2008; Cabral and Borges, 2010; Borges and Pereira, 2012). Scientists too speak of research as work that affects them profoundly, highlighting their intrinsic motivation for undertaking it, as well as their taste for discovery and the pleasure they take in such moments (Borges and Delicado, 2010: 209-245). M. Weber (1990 [1905]) may have been one of the first authors to consider the similarities between these two worlds, of science and of art. In "Science as a Vocation", the author equates scientific activity to a "personal experience" and identifies the strong parallelisms between science and art (Weber, 1979 [1919], 116-118). Another important idea stands out in this text. For Weber, a scientist's career is marked by contingency, inspiration, intuition, imagination and uncertainty. It is precisely in these terms that French sociologist P.-M. Menger describes the requisites associated with artistic work (Menger, 2005: 7-27) and how scientific research and the arts stand apart and come together (Menger, 2005: 43-44).

"Firstly, through proximity: artists, alongside scientists and engineers, belong to the hard core of a "creative class" (...), at the forefront of the transformation of highly-skilled jobs. Next, by metaphorical contamination: the fundamental values of artistic competence – imagination, game-playing, improvisation, different behaviour and even creative anarchy – are regularly conveyed to other productive worlds. Additionally, through the value of example: the inventive spirit communicates with the entrepreneurial spirit in new and small companies, the network organisation (...). And lastly, by accumulation: the world of the arts and entertainment becomes an economically significant sector" (Menger, 2005: 43).

However, despite the importance of the foundations laid by Weber (1990 [1905]) and the marked development of social studies in the areas of science (Merton, 1973; Gregory and Miller, 1998; Carapinheiro and Amâncio, 1995; Gibbons et al., 1997; Clark, 1989; Delicado, 2008) and arts (Becker, 1960, 1982; Freidson, 1990; Bourdieu, 1998; Menger, 1999, 2014;

Buscatto, 2004; Heinich, 2005), little attention has been paid to the parallelisms of scientific and artistic research. If, on the one hand, social scientists participate in the most intimate moments of the work of artistic creation (see, for example, Villagordo and Domergue, 2011), increasingly seeking a collaborative praxis (Kester, 2011), on the other we have done little for the construction of mechanisms that enable us to work together and for reflection on these processes in science itself, through the exploration of the potential exchanges of practical research-knowledge and new "forms of dialogue" (Bohm, 1996) that may be established during scientific research with arts, and by the communication of the results.

"Dialogue" comes from the Greek word *dialogos*. *Logos* means "the word," or in our case we would think of the "meaning of the word." And *dia* means "through"—it doesn't mean "two." A dialogue can be among any number of people, not just two. Even one person can have a sense of dialogue within himself, if the spirit of the dialogue is present. The picture or image that this derivation suggests is of a stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us. This will make possible a flow of meaning in the whole group, out of which may emerge some new understanding. It's something new, which may not have been in the starting point at all. It's something creative. And this shared meaning is the "glue" or "cement" that holds people and societies together" (Bohm, 1996: 6).

There is insufficient discussion about the social sciences and the arts, or sociology and the theatre, and the ways in which they look upon the world (the third corner of the triangle). The researchers observe and participate in the artistic processes and projects, yet they may reflect more on their role in these contexts, the potential of the different types of knowledge that arise from them, and the mutual implications – of science and art –, as, indeed, can be foreseen from the words of Sophie Lucet, the ARGOS Project's French coordinator, on the website *La Fabrique du Spectacle* ("The Performance Factory").

"The study of the process of creation (...) undoubtedly encourages one to rethink the connections between artist and researcher and to propose new perspectives in the field of theatre studies. If the archiving of the creative process is an analytical route that gives theory back its primary meaning, i.e. observation, and enables theory and practice to be brought back together again rather than being kept apart, the value shared by researchers and artists would become that of experience. (...) what the researchers and the artists have in common is both the fact that they are rethinking together and that they are sharing their theoretical knowledge and practical skills"<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Regarding the European Factories of Creativity, see the French project: <http://fabrique-du-spectacle.fr/analyses/le-processus-de-creation-est-il-un-moyendacceder-loeuvre>, 20 Mai 2014. Accessed June 19, 2019.

However, from the point of view of the work of creating, Menger (2005, 2014) considers that art appears to be more permeable to the inventive style of the artist and capable of generating greater inequalities in terms of remuneration and reputation, based on (at times minimal) differences in talent.

"Effectively, the arts reveal the arbitrary and unpredictable side common to all creative activity more directly than scientific research does. The freedom of creative activity is far greater in view of the rules of assessment, standards for validation and cumulative constraints of innovations and replacement of the old with the new, which weigh on scientific research" (Menger, 2005: 44).

Menger refers to the strong commitment of art and culture professionals to artistic work, greater autonomy, the flexibility accepted and claimed, the risky choices between material gains and symbolic gratifications (Borges and Pereira, 2012) and the strategic exploration of inequalities of talent, in the reputation market (Menger, 2005).

"The great variety of ways and means of artistic expression confirms it: creativity is placed there at the service of a boundless differentiation, making the arts infinitely more permeable to the most dubious demonstrations of individual invention and more directly subjected to consumer judgement and to different levels of reception" (Menger, 2005:44).

This is also why the arts are no longer studied as the reverse side of the work and the artist's romantic representations give way to the creator as a worker in a market of paradoxes that reveals some of the most significant transformations of contemporary employment system: the flexibility of employment based on work in the form of projects, on small "odd jobs" and on the strong interconnection between time spent working, time spent not working (but preparing moments of work) and time spent learning (Borges and Veloso, 2020).

In turn, in an article about photography and sociology, Becker (1986 [1974]) contends that sociological production and writing are not really all that disconnected from whoever produces them, their "personal expression and style":

"Sociologists like to think of science as impersonal. However, they recognize that people work differently, that some have easily recognizable styles of work, that some work has an elegance missing in other research. In short, they recognize a personally expressive component in sociological research and writing. They seldom discuss that component (I suppose because it contradicts the imagery of impersonal science)" (Becker, 1986 [1974]: 223).

Science has, therefore, its "creation work", it follows the established procedures and, generally, deems the final outcome to be a key moment; there is less discussion of the research moments within the research, the diversity of the reflections and materials (on different levels) that may be produced by the sociologists and their partners (PhD holders, grant holders and participants) in the projects, and the ways in which the findings are divulged to the scientific community, to the observers and to society in general (see Entradas and Bauer, 2016; Gregory and Miller, 1998). In this particular case, the experience of "observing observers" may serve to reflect on our work of scientific creation, which among other consequences and mutual impacts serves here as a means of opening a context of dialogue with the arts:

“(...) to develop engaged research not as a site for applying our theory and research but as a potentially inventive conversation between communities with differences. (...) Engagement, like good conversation and dialogue, should not be thought of as two parties looking at each other and interacting, but rather as a triangle. The parties are looking together at a world. In productive interaction of the three, a world of possibilities that was not seen before opens in front of the parties, placing demand on them to grow and change. (...) If we enter one-sided and protected we may do good things to and for the other, but being at risk in this way is the only way mutual learning and democratic decision-making occur. (Deetz, 2008: 290-291).

What, then, can we learn from this moment of *in vivo* observation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 40) of an experience of scientific and theatrical research (see Dewey, 2005 [1934])? In what ways might the scientific work influence the artistic work and vice-versa? What change when “the observer is the observed” (Bohm, 1996: 70)? How can we "work doing things together" (Becker, 1982; 1986a)? What can each observer do? What type of knowledge can be produced and how can that knowledge be divulged to the scientific and theatrical teams? The intention is not to provide an exhaustive response to all of these questions here but, in this way, a productive "turning point" is being sought (Rynes, 2007) to reflect on the experience of observation and dialogue (Bohm, 1996), the "othering" processes (Burlington, 2015; Abbott, 2016a) and the creation of a "community of practices" (Wenger, 1998) with artists and scientists.

## **Methodology**

Where methodology is concerned, I took my inspiration from Becker (*et al.*, 1989) and the dramatic text he produced in conjunction with colleagues with the aim of analysing three regional theatre centres in the United States of America (Chicago, San Francisco and

Minneapolis). Here I produce a dialogue, using the words of the observed. I also made use of the idea of "theatrical notations" (Pavis, 2000), challenged to a considerable extent by the ARGOS Project's internal seminar, orientated by Sophie Proust, leader of the French team, from the University of Lille: "(...) notation always involves interpreting and therefore making a more or less conscious choice from among the mass of signs of representation deemed noteworthy" (Proust, 2010: 361).

The "notations" – the use of the theatrical term here is deliberate in order to proceed with an attempt at hybridisation of the categories of the discourse – imply a selection, a choice of the words uttered by the participants who challenged me the most. During this observation experience, it was not possible to make sound recordings, shoot film or take photographs other than at the specific moments agreed upon on the second day of observation by means of a "research protocol", which the team in charge of the ARGOS Project distributed and all of the observers signed. It should be stressed that the meetings of the project's scientific teams were not open to the observers but only to the hard core of the project management; while this would have been interesting, it was nevertheless possible to observe the interaction between all of the teams at mealtimes, which we spent together, and during the shared breaks in proceedings.

In this paper, the use of photographs is also inspired by Becker's texts (1986b: 232; 1998:10): this photographic material let us experience, at close quarters, the context in which the logbook entries were made; and the "sequences of photographs" (Becker, 1998) give an account of the movement of my gaze and the positions I took up, while observing and photographing. Ultimately, it is a matter of "catching", in writing now, and when reviewing the images, the moment when the gaze veers off: from the artistic team to the scientific team and the group of observers.

“All the above, supposing it is accurate, should serve the two purposes of methodological and critical inquiry: on the one hand, to tell us what we were doing all the time, but perhaps hadn't thought out explicitly; on the other, to show how what we have been doing uncritically can be done intentionally and consciously. We can look at such sequences (...) and make our comparisons self-consciously and systematically and thus understand better why they work the way they do, why we feel they tell us so much about the world we live in” (Becker, 1998: 10).

In the transcription of the logbook notes and in their written presentation, the records I made alternate, in the form of dialogue, and the words of the intervening coordinators of the



project's artistic and scientific teams communicate with each other and illustrate the points of contact and distance from these micro-worlds of research and theatre. Regarding the methodological constraints in the use of these logbook notes, which are not transcriptions of recordings and have not (yet) been read and approved by everyone involved, Becker's response (in an interview by Camille et al., 2010) on how to overcome the constraints of using certain statements, in this case more informal ones made by colleagues close to Becker, was considered: we lose more by not using the material, and by making excessive use of formal sociology, than the other way around (Becker, in Azaïs, 2010, note 28)<sup>7</sup>. The first photographs of the observers at work (Sequence 2) were taken prior to the signing of the protocol and with the consent of those in charge. As for the photos of the rehearsals and the artistic team, these were taken at the times set for the purpose by the O Bando theatre group, in order to counteract the effect of large numbers of observers photographing the three actors. A light was then used to indicate the times and moments of recording and photography, as can be seen in Sequence Five.

## **Observing the observers**

### **1. The meeting with the observers from the Portuguese team**

The meeting to prepare the observers from the Portuguese team took place at the University of Lisbon's School of Arts and Humanities (12 April 2019). Present at the meeting were: Ana (intermediate generation, Portugal, team leader); Matilde (younger generation, Portugal), a student of theatre at the Escola de Teatro de Cascais (Cascais Theatre School), who has known O Bando since she was five years old; Hirton (older generation, Brazil), reading for a PhD in Performing Arts and Moving Images at the University of Lisbon's School of Arts and Humanities; Consuelo (intermediate generation, Ecuador), reading for a PhD, studied Theatre Genetics; Luana (intermediate generation, Brazil), reading for a PhD in Theatre Studies; Paula (intermediate generation, Portugal), researcher at the Study Centre at the School of Arts and Humanities; Vera (intermediate generation, Portugal), researcher at the CIES<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> The initial text was sent to the theatre group's director, João Brites. The director took care to re-read all of the logbook notes that were relevant to him and to make the adjustments, more in terms of style than of content, per se (14 September 2019).

<sup>8</sup> First names are used to facilitate the reading of the text.

Maria João Brilhante: "Being present and participating, so that our gaze may contaminate the process" (leader of the Portuguese team from the University of Lisbon's School of Arts and Humanities; logbook notes, 12 April 2019).

Hirton: "They're building the set and Brites [the director] is already thinking about us [the observers], where we're going to sit in the rehearsal room" (reading for PhD in Performing Arts; logbook notes, 12 April 2019).

Maria João Brilhante: "It is necessary to establish a relationship of trust with O Bando. Be cautious. Be present, be noted and integrated in order to be a community" (logbook notes, 12 April 2019).

The Portuguese team leader thus indicated the main premisses of the field work to be conducted by the observer-participants. As observers of the theatrical process, none of us should remain invisible and, naturally, our presence would tend to become an element of the artistic creation.

## **2. "In the eyes of the others"<sup>9</sup>**

The theatre group's first meeting with all of the teams, both Portuguese and international, took place at the Quinta in Vale de Barris (22 April 2019). These photos were taken on the first two days – Photos 1 and 2 on the first day and Photo 3 on the next day; they record the geographical context of the theatrical structure, located, as director João Brites says, "in the country".

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<sup>9</sup> The expression is inspired by A. Abbott's text, published in the book organised by Didier Demazière and Morgan Jouvenet (Abbott, 2016b).

## Sequence One



**Photos 1, 2 and 3** | The entrance to the peaceful valley, where the theatre group O Bando is located, in Palmela. 22 April, 2019. @V. Borges.

Outdoors at O Bando, the project coordinators and the observers were preparing for their mission. Seated on benches that had been positioned in a square-shaped layout by the theatre group's team, the meeting began. Under the attentive eye of the birds that were lingering there,

as pointed out by director João Brites. The introduction of all of the participants was a crucial moment for the project.

João Brites: "Who are you? And what do you do?"

The director suggested and we each identified ourselves and spoke about our motivations to participate in this experience of observation. In the group of 27 observers, 17 were women from a variety of positions (students, teachers, researchers, cultural mediators). The actors were not present, but only the members of the artistic director's team: the director, the playwright and the person responsible for movement and voice.

Sophie Lucet: "We want to create a new community of observers. Not only the researchers who are in direct contact but others too, including spectators, students and cultural mediators, to share the knowledge" (co-general coordinator of the project and leader of the French team from the University of Rennes II; logbook notes, 22 April 2019).

Sophie Lucet explained to the participants what the scientific teams expected from the community of observers. We would be expected to take notes in the interactive notebooks distributed by the team and we would sketch "outlines" about what we observed, which could be in the form of words, drawings, brief notes, longer notes and impressions. At the end of the observation process, the written notes would be handed over to the hard core of the scientific team and would be processed solely by the scientific teams, as stipulated in the research protocol.

Sophie Lucet: "It is not just creating proximity to an artist, but to an open community, seeking to share knowledge and memories" (logbook notes, 22 April 2019).

Lucet highlighted the five types of observation envisioned by the ARGOS Project: (i) the integrated observation that was the intention at O Bando; (ii) the participated/participatory observation; (iii) the virtual/immersive observation, deemed to exist thanks to the processes at the University of Rennes, the use of technology and virtual reality; (iv) the intercultural observation, which will occur when the teams follow the actors during a festival (in Switzerland with the Lebanese team); and (v) the creative observation, for which the director will provide the documentation: the rehearsals have not yet started and the observers reflect upon what the spectacle might consist of (logbook notes, 22 April 2019).

Sophie Lucet: "What are we expecting of the O Bando experiment? During the observation, we are taking notes, sketching outlines about what we are observing, records, significant moments of the experience, and these notes which should translate the joint-presence of the group" (logbook notes, 22 April 2019). And she continues: "There is a protocol with O Bando. A relationship of trust is established around a protocol. Later, a questionnaire will be distributed" (logbook notes, 22 April 2019)<sup>10</sup>.

Seated in the audience area in O Bando's rehearsal room, the observers were writing in their notebooks. This time, as on many occasions throughout the process, it was the director, João Brites, who set things in motion.

João Brites: "Every process is a pathway" (director of O Bando, logbook notes, 22 April 2019).

The director presented the five main points that mark the theatrical process of O Bando: "Firstly, I would like my theatre to be popular. [When I asked about this, the director explained to me that this would mean "making theatre popular by making it more accessible, which would not mean a lack of quality or facilitating the performance, but equality: theatre is for everybody]; then, there is the prevailing tradition that we work with texts that were not written for theatre. 'I love the stage directions. I love everything that happens on stage but also what is said without words, indirectly' (...); when working with O Bando, the stage set also steers the on-stage narrative (...); we choose spaces that would be considered unconventional; when the actors enter the space that has been designated as the stage, they become characters" (logbook notes, 22 April 2019; notes read by the director, 14 September 2019).

### **3. "Theatre with a transparent glass backdrop"**

On the first afternoon (22 April 2019) the actors made their entrance in this work context. The three actors took a long, lingering look at the group of people before them; one of the observers, Hirton, was making a (partial) video recording of the occasion and, for a few minutes, the observers sitting in the audience took photographs of the actors sitting on their

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<sup>10</sup> There is no intention, within the scope of this exploratory article, to analyse the modules of the questionnaire devised by the ARGOS team.

seats in the centre of the stage; or merely looked at them. The following sequence of photos shows how I moved from the audience to the side of the stage, where I could "observe the observers", the project coordinators and the artistic team.

## Sequence Two





**Photos 4 to 7 | Rehearsal room 1.**

On the stage, sitting on the chairs: the three actors, the playwright and the person responsible for movement. In the audience: the observers and the people responsible for the ARGOS Project. At the far end, next to the side wall, the director J. Brites; and the person in charge of recording, Hirton, who is holding the metal square used during filming. The metal square visible in the photographs was the mechanism used by the director to create his "frame" for the moments when the process was being observed and filmed at the same time. Vale de Barris, 22 April 2019. @ V. Borges.

That afternoon, work was in progress when Miguel Jesus asked: "How can we all work together? [artists, scientists and observers in general]" (permanent playwright in O Bando, logbook notes, 22 April 2019). The answer would come on the second day (23 April 2019), when the observers were invited by J. Brites to leave their places in the audience. His idea was that the theatre teams and the research teams of observers would be able to hold a dialogue and work together. To do so, they needed to be in the same place:

João Brites: "Everyone centre stage, in a circle, in the rehearsal room! It is a more egalitarian model and requires everybody's participation" (logbook notes, 23 April 2019). The observers left the audience and worked in proximity to each other and to the coordinators, the actors and the director; essentially, the teams mixed and mingled. The director sought to encourage dialogue, using the description of work in the theatre as his support

João Brites: "I like to think of a theatre hall with a transparent glass backdrop. People walking past in the street can see the actors at work. (...) It is important to show that people in the theatre work. If I could, I would always have an audience present during rehearsals. The visibility of the processes is important. We can work in a closed environment. But, in that case, the virtual presence of an audience must become real for the actors. It is always terrible because it is like a courageous battle (...) for whoever is there in front of the people. When we do everything behind closed doors and then we open them, it might seem as though



everything has been resolved, but that is not the case. Everything changes" (logbook notes, 23 April 2019; notes read by the director, 14 September 2019).

### Sequence Three



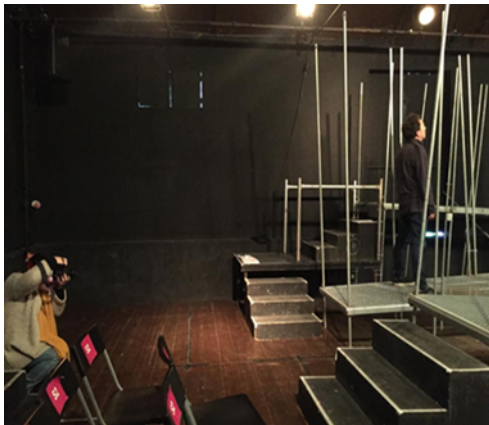
**Photos 8 to 10 | Rehearsal room 2.**

Artistic team and team of observers (they were fewer in number on the last day). The light that lets the observers know when they can take photographs is visible. So too are the artistic team's work tables. Vale de Barris, 23 April 2019. @ V. Borges.



Now, from this side, when one observes the other and feels the presence of many other observers, artists and scientists: what consequences does this double process have for our "creation work"?

#### Sequence Four



Photos 11 to 14 | Rehearsal room 2.

In the first photo, an observer is photographing the actor. The director suggests that the observers move around on stage. There are blank spaces of different sizes between the photos to represent the “game”<sup>11</sup> that was experienced during this work of scientific and artistic creation.

Vale de Barris, 23 April 2019. @ V. Borges.

On the second day, the team of researchers and the project leaders summed up their search for ways to organise the moments of observation and image-gathering, explaining the delivery of their research protocol.

Ana Clara Santos: "We do not want to interfere directly in the work. The observers do not hold discussions with the artistic team. In accordance with the observation protocol, each one of us will have a place" (coordinator of the Portuguese team, logbook notes, 23 April 2019).

Sophie Lucet: "Each process is different. The work begins with the search for a process. We are here to see the thing come together" (logbook notes, 23 April 2019).

Nelson Monforte: "Yesterday I thought about how this would affect me. Do I have to create some sort of defence? Should I think about them or not? This observation could be very useful, everything seems to be taking a different slant. I try to catch the others' eyes. Which could be interesting. Your thoughts seem to loosen up. I can be more relaxed. That's my first impression. It's different from being with the whole choir [he refers back to the part of the performance when all the members of the local choir were present]" (actor, logbook notes, 23 April 2019).

Rita Brito: "What I found most interesting was that your presence put me in a state of alert. I'm being observed so now I have to be on the alert" (actress, logbook notes, 23 April 2019).

Fernando Luís: "Before coming into your presence, I thought it was going to be very violent [the day before, when I asked him how he felt, the actor admitted: "it's very violent". On the second day, with everyone sitting around in a circle, the actor was more relaxed in the presence of the observers]. When we have an audience, our ego swells a bit. It's a different type of force. It helps complement our work. They are our first audience and we're going to be raising the bar" (actor; logbook notes, 23 April 2019).

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<sup>11</sup> The notion of play and its close connection to artistic innovation and competence should be mentioned here (Menger, 2005: 43). I would like to highlight the contribution of Fernanda Eugénio and Ricardo Seïça Salgado (2018) in respect of the operability of the theatrical game.

João Brites: "It wasn't a waste of time" (logbook notes, 23 April 2019).

## Sequence Five



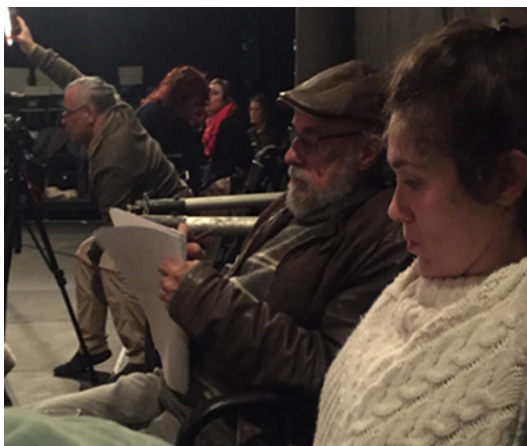
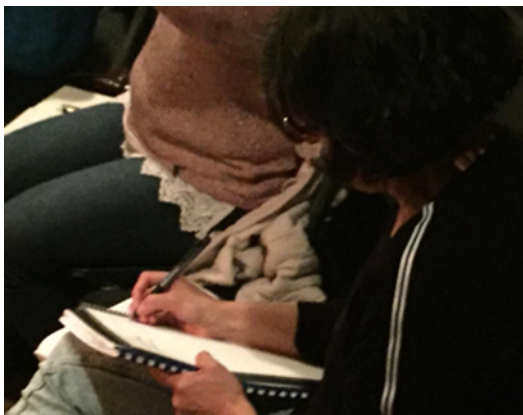
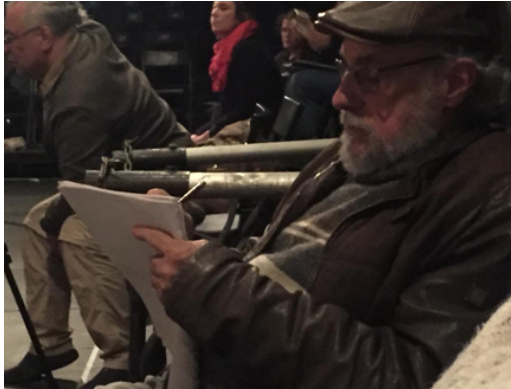
**Photos 15 to 17 | Rehearsal room 2.**

The artistic team during the rehearsal: the three actors and the playwright beside the set, discussing the scene; on the other side, the director and the observers. The actors during the rehearsal. Vale de Barris, 23 April 2019. @ V. Borges.

#### 4. The loneliness of theatre and scientific research

João Brites: "Your loneliness and ours. From a playwriting point of view, they are not special" (logbook notes, 23 April 2019).

##### Sequence Six





**Photos 18 to 22 | Rehearsal room 2.**

João Brites, the director, with his notebook. Paula Magalhães, the researcher, with her interactive notebook. Juliana Pinho, head of movement and voice, and Miguel Jesus, the playwright, observe the work on stage. Vale de Barris, 23 April 2019. @ V. Borges.

J. Brites: "If we are in the same situation and live in the same geographical territory, we all react in the same way. We, in the theatre, do not portray ideas; we must find the scenic materiality in what lies beyond the ideas. It is the ability to materialise that opens the door to the ideas. I usually confront the actors with the materiality of predefined situations. As I have a more pictorial, cinematographical vision, I try to discover that materiality along with the actors by means of concrete actions. I build a sequence of images knowing that the word is the main factor of explicitness. At the moment I'm still missing "the land" but I'm building the images. We use the vocabulary close to each of the actors as a starting point. All three are very different. Here, what is concrete is the game we are playing with the styles of acting that they are most comfortable with. We are still not completely clear on the way this disparity can give rise to stylistic coherence in the performance. We work on the transposition; verisimilitude is not required, but credibility is. You can see that it is theatre but you believe

what you are seeing nonetheless. We have specific propositions for each of them, because they have different natures. They are not doing exactly what we want. Each does what they are asked in their own way. If we ask them to do the same, they must focus on different concrete details to differentiate the quality of what they do or say" (logbook notes, 23 April 2019; notes re-read by the director, 14 September 2019).

Sophie Proust: "This is absolutely fascinating. When you are talking about it, does it help you? Or is to give them [the actors] guidance?" (Leader of the French team, from the University of Lille, logbook notes, 23 April 2019).

João Brites: "It's not actually going to happen like this. It's an intention. It's unexpected. It's unintelligible even for me. The result is unpredictable. We're not illustrating the ideas. All I can tell you is that we're travelling by bus or plane; I can't tell you where we're going" (logbook notes, 23 April 2019; notes read by the director on 14 September 2019).

Maria João Brilhante: "It's an exercise. See mistakes being made, observing and roving. It's a challenge" (logbook notes 23 April 2019).

A day before the participation of actor N. Monforte, at the 25th of April celebrations in Lisbon ("a once-in-a-lifetime experience", in the words of J. Brites), the director met up with the core group from the scientific team and all of the observers. Brites showed them the schedule of work to be carried out over the forthcoming days. "We'll do scene four in the morning; we will repeat scene four". He also reflects on the importance of considering this stage of the artistic process as though it were a "sieve" (to a certain extent this is what we do when we reflect on the value of our notes from the logbook or stage notes).

Juliana Pinho (addressing actress R. Brito): "Look at them [the observers]. Look again. That look affects everything" (head of movement and voice; logbook notes, 23 April 2019).

## **Discussion of the results**

This paper is based on the logbook notes that I made during observation work at the Portuguese theatre group O Bando. It is a preliminary text and necessarily incomplete. The proposal was to "observe the observers" during the period when the scientific and theatrical



teams were developing a project. The moments that the teams spent on "the work of creation" were intense and changed, influenced and possibly strengthened relations between researchers and artists, younger observers and the group. The researcher who observes and is observed, the observers who observe each other and ask, "What are you going to do with this?" (words of a young PhD student, logbook notes, 24 April 2019). The director who invites the observers to move around the stage, the observers who remain seated, hesitant. Observing our own and their work of creation is a real challenge.

In this case, my "observation of the observers" became more the observation of practices, speeches and processes. As I sought understanding that was both empathetic and reflexive with the teams of researchers, the artistic teams and the group of observers, I found that the experience of "othering" is decisive in:

- (i) establishing a connection between artists and the strengths and limits of their contexts of theatrical creation, the possible paths to the end result, without the constraints to which scientific research is confined;
- (ii) opening and generating critical discussion about theatrical and scientific work, but also about their publics, audiences, observers, co-participants, co-curators (Borges, 2017a, b, 2018);
- (iii) reflecting on artistic organisations, their daily routines and the frameworks of their teams' interaction (Borges, 2019);
- (iv) observing the teams of researchers at work, due to the necessary reflection on our day-to-day routines and the difficulties and potential still to be explored; for example, the teams of international researchers appeared more accustomed to working with theatre groups where everything is almost complete before starting the rehearsals, making it interesting to see how we manage the uncertainty in terms of scientific research and its own "work of creation".
- (v) thinking about the relationships of mutual influence of these two micro-worlds;
- (vi) promoting different levels of knowledge that the observers (from students to project directors) can produce.

In the dialogues about an experience of scientific research and theatre work, we can see how well the words of North-American sociologist A. Abbott fit in: "(...) The social process is made by human beings, and our analysis of them must begin with humane sympathy and its consequence of some partial degree of immediate understanding" (Abbott, 2016a, Kindle

locations: 5160-5165). This means that empathy is natural and necessary in the contexts open to our research, but that empathy must also be a conscious process if we are not to lose the critical reflexivity and analytical distance that our work requires. The "feeling with" that this author talks to us about must be mobilised for the understanding of the values of the groups that came together there; their boundaries and internal research policies, among other pertinent aspects. For example, so that we can subsequently think about how we can promote an effective exchange of information, stories and resources that serve to stimulate a "community of practices" (Wenger, 1998).

For a community of practices to exist, a combination of factors and values is deemed necessary: a "common field" that is built by dialogue, an exchange of impressions which may result in changes in performance during the process and greater participation by, and involvement of, the participants. The sharing of a particular field of interest, in this case the commitment (Becker, 1960) of all of us to theatre, is one of the necessary conditions for the construction of a community of practices. But this important connection that we have with the theatre is insufficient in itself for us to build the community. There must be an interest in creating responsive moments of work and dialogue must be actively encouraged (in the line of Bohm, 1996) to make the critical and reflexive interchange of those involved more open. By generating dialogue, we help each other build the (different) works that each of us can do, depending on their pathway. Thus, we share information and learn as a group. A "community of practices" is not just a community with common interests; it implies the sharing of sources and an effort to address recurring problems by means of engagement in scientific practice and the informal learning that can be done through it. A group of observers with professional and academic profiles as diverse as those we see here can become a "community of practices" (Wenger, 1998). It is made up of individuals who do not have the same training but have a common interest, share knowledge and are in the process, in the same way as described by Weber's foundational sociology (1979 [1919]).

What can be expected of this community of O Bando observers? That it could become a community of practices during the course of the project, promoting new practices and contexts in creation and research (see Bonet and Négrier, 2018a; Walmsley, 2016). The scientific team sought to bring together a group of observers with different ages and from a range of disciplines and with different university and non-university pathways; the theatre director, too, sought to take advantage of the presence of the scientific teams and the observers to talk about the theatre group's working process, question it and put observers and actors on



the same stage. By doing so, he promoted sharing, presentation and a demonstration of the ways that O Bando stages and rehearses its theatre performances. The free and open way in which the director unveiled the uniqueness of the moments of theatrical creation was noteworthy, identifying ruptures, continuities, difficulties, options and creative possibilities ("wander around the stage," the director told the observers), all of it always subject to the scrutiny of the social scientists, scientific teams and the greater or lesser ease of the observers in attendance.

In an informal conversation, João Brites explained that he always strives to learn more, regardless of the circumstances, and, in this particular case, he sought to understand the extent to which scientific practice, engaged with the theatre through the working experience of these teams, could be of benefit to this group's theatrical process (logbook notes, 24 April 2019). It was clear that the work of the project's scientific teams was genuinely valued, as was the strong affinity of the observers, as the days went past<sup>12</sup>. From the point of view of the observers, and their search for a place in the process (there could be many different places but formal arrangements are not always easy to make), it could be interesting to develop a "research-practice collaboration". Which should happen with all of the observers in attendance<sup>13</sup>. Here, it could be interesting to consider Becker's comment (in Azaïs et al., 2010) about how musicians (we could easily replace the word "musicians" with "researchers") combine partial knowledge to create a collective activity that is satisfactory for the different people involved in the process (see Schütz, 2006). And consider this excerpt from Abbott (2016a) too:

" (...) we have to modify our practice continuously, not in the direction of making it more and more "scientific" or "clean," which simply ignores more and more important aspects of particularity, but in the direction of making it more and more humane. This does not necessarily mean vaguer, more fuzzy, or more ethnographic, as is usually assumed. For example, it might mean having completely alternative forms of coding that reify alternative particularities. Such humanism does not mean, for example, that we can't code variables trying to describe people. (That is, positivism could be humane in my sense). But it does mean that we have to ask ourselves about the ways in which our doing such coding does violence to the nature of these people as moral beings in the value and meaning space that is inevitably theirs by virtue of their humanity" (Abbott, 2016a, Kindle locations: 5160-5165).

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<sup>12</sup> It is particularly worth noting that meals were taken in the theatre group's kitchen and these daily episodes allowed for enhanced exchanges between the scientific teams and the observers.

<sup>13</sup> The observers present, especially the younger ones, can be more than occasional participants in the scientific project (see "enriched audiences" by Walmsley, 2016; and proactive audiences, by Bonet and Négrier, 2018a, b; and Gruber et al., 2008).

## Final conclusion

This paper was written in the form of a dialogue and based on the logbook notes made, and the photographs taken, during the work of observation, carried out at the O Bando Theatre Group. What we have here are two social worlds that look at each other, come together and attempt to intermingle. Seeking to prolong the arguments of the paper, we can reflect more deeply on the experience lived in these two micro-worlds: the extent to which their "work of creation" is similar and distinct, sometimes freer along the ways and sometimes more subject to the rigidity of conventions. Above all, and looking here for a more generic scope for this type of scientific and artistic experience, we can acknowledge that each observer has a productive contribution to make, allowing us to see the theatrical and the scientific work through the eyes of the other. Hence the main interest of this challenge of "observing observers": to think that, as researchers, we are inserted in a laboratory so rich that we cannot stay for the discussion of the artistic experience, but through it we can strive to think about the scientific experience, its meanings, the infinite possibilities for collaboration with people of different ages and backgrounds, capable of producing different levels of knowledge. By broadening the conclusions of this observation of a joint dimension of the social worlds of art and science, this exercise makes us consider how the scientific teams could always be more open, collaborative and relational, transformative and capable of building dialogues and a renewed "community of practices".

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## **Webgraphy**

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