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# PERFORMANCE AND SOCIAL DRAMA IN IMPROVISATIONAL THEATER:
## an Analysis of the Anti-racist Spectacle *Swag Hat*

# PERFORMANCE E DRAMA SOCIAL NO TEATRO DE IMPROVISO:
## uma Análise do Espetáculo Antirracista *Swag Hat*

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**Performance and social drama in improvisational theater:**
**an Analysis of the Anti-racist Spectacle *Swag Hat***

**Abstract:** This article aims to analyzehow improvisational theater can add to the resistance against the domination imposed by colonialism, particularly regarding the conflict inherent to social drama, in line with Victor Turner's work. It was chosen as a case study the anti-racist show "Swag Hat," improvised by the African American collective BlackOut during the most traditional festival of its kind in Europe.
**Keywords**: social drama; improvisational theater; post-colonialism; anti-racism.

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**Resumo**: O artigo tem como objetivo analisar como o teatro de improviso pode somar-se à resistência contra a dominação imposta pelo colonialismo, particularmente no que se refere ao conflito inerente ao drama social, em consonância com a obra de Victor Turner. Elegeu-se como estudo de caso o espetáculo antirracista "Swag Hat", improvisado pelo coletivo afro-americano BlackOut durante o mais tradicional festival do gênero na Europa.
**Palavras-chaves**: drama social; teatro de improviso; pós-colonialismo; antirracismo.

## 1 Introduction

In the context of Postcolonial Studies, racism is conceived as a type of abyssal exclusion by the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018, p. 56), because it produces "nonexistence, radical invisibility, and irrelevance." According to the author (2011), nonexistence is produced whenever a being is so disqualified that it fades and becomes invisible, or to such an extent that it becomes unintelligible. Thus, immesurable lines separate humans from so-called subhumans or nonhumans. After all, as the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre explains, colonial violence was not intended to "only keep those enslaved men at a respectful distance, but also to dehumanize them" (Sartre, 2005, p. 1). The abyssal line "does not allow us to free ourselves from the idea of racialized bodies [...]—these are the enslaved bodies, the refugee bodies, the immigrant bodies" (Martins; Santos, 2018, p. 34).

Abyssal exclusion is aligned with a historical project epistemologically guided to oppress and divide society based on Eurocentrism. Working together, the three domination systems of Western modernity—colonialism, hetero-patriarchy and capitalism—produce abyssal exclusions, i.e., they make "groups of people and types of social life nonexistent, invisible, radically inferior or radically dangerous, [...] disposable or threatening" (Santos, 2018, p. 57). Ultimately, racism fits into colonialism's domination system, even though it is constantly crossed by intersectionality with the other two systems.

Regarding racism, ethnic groups find themselves in a constant strugle, an acute contradiction that evinces, according to the British anthropologist Victor Turner's work (1982; 1987), the emergence of a social drama. In this context, resistance against exclusion must include the possibility of re-existence, reinvention, and re-imagination, a movement for which performance can play a central role—referring to social performance in a broad sense, which naturally includes artistic performance, given that art practice is part of social action. According to Turner (1982), re-existence is linked to ritual—and, by implication, to performative action. In his words, the ritual has a paradigmatic function, as a result of being able to "anticipate, and even generate change" under conditions of sociocultural transformations in individuals and groups, enrolling itself, during the performative flow, as a transformation "model" "in the minds, hearts and wills of the participants" (Turner, 1982, p. 82). For bell hooks (2019), in addition, the ritual ceremonial act is essential to ensure that a show is not a mere entertainment dramatic display.

Here, the creative object *Swag Hat*, an improvisational theater play performed by the African-American collective BlackOut, is presented as a case study on how improvisation co-created as a show can emerge as resistance against the domination imposed by colonialism, in its facet of racism, in the light of the concept of social drama, more specifically in conflict accusation and rearrangement.

Although it is often described as a theatrical style marked by shallowness and commercial interest, improvisational theater has more corrosive and combative pretensions in its genesis, as attested by the uneasiness of its creator—the English pedagogue and director Keith Johnstone—to accuse colonialist oppression during the 1970s. Especially after reading the work "The Wretched of the Earth," written in 1961 by the Antillean psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon, during the war waged by Algeria for its independence from France, and which dealt with colonialism's psychological implications (Dudeck, 2013). The improvised play *The Last Bird* must be highlighted, being presented in the spring of 1972 at the Statens Teaterskole in Copenhagen, as a final project by Johnstone's students at the National Theatre School of Denmark, a work produced by the British as "an allegory of a colonial war of exploitation" (Dudeck, 2003, p. 86).

Keith Johnstone's critical attention to colonialist domination dialogues with theatrical education and precedes his Impro System proposition in broader arenas of discussion. Johnstone's own motivation for innovation passes through the field of Theater Pedagogy. According to Keith Johnstone, regular education can be a destructive process when bad teachers, supported by the rule to impose the values endorsed by the production system, ruin human talent by demanding their students to replicate standardized responses and reproduce authorized knowledge without critical thinking. In Johnstone's words, many teachers that the author dealt with in the British education system in the mid-1950s had a "colonialist attitude towards children, referring to them as 'the poor cattle' and showing remarkable distaste for the most inventive ones" (Johnstone, 1987, p. 9). To fight against such exclusion processes, Keith Johnstone resorted to the performing arts and gained national renown by suggesting the rescue of spontaneity in learning, for example, through the teaching of arithmetic with the use of masks and grammar with the help of scenography built in class.

Pedagogical experiences such as those mentioned above were decisive for Keith Johnstone to develop and teach "his own improvisation style," in which "all his work aimed at rediscovering the imaginative response in the adult through the rediscovery of the child's power of creativity" (Wardle, 1990, p. xiii). As a final result of this research, according to Lerat (2017, p. 48), Johnstone elaborated not a training method, but rather "a theatrical art aesthetic, a creation philosophy" based on the understanding that it is necessary to "deconstruct the inhibitions forged by our education in order to let out the direct and spontaneous imagination flow" (Lerat, 2017, p. 48). For Dudeck (2013), Johnstone developed the Impro System to provide the imaginative potential rediscovery of individuals who had been oppressed by formal education. For this same reason, his biographer states that, for Keith Johnstone, "theater is an informal classroom where life experiences can emerge collaboratively in order to (re)create genuine behaviors, relationships and imaginative stories spontaneously and in dialogue with the audience" (Dudeck, 2013, p. 1).

## 2 Performance and social drama

Proposed by Victor Turner (1982; 1987), social drama is fundamental to understand performance in life in society, with conflict being a central element in this perspective. For Bell (2008, p. 112), Turner's work is "extremely important for performance theories due to his characterization of life as drama," demonstrating the existence of a dynamic and systemic process that relates performative behavior—especially regarding game and ritual—and the social and ethical structures through which individual and group values are arranged to organize life in society.

At this point in time, it becomes crucial to note that Turner is a White, European scholar concerned with broad issues involving Anthropology and Social Sciences. Nevertheless, his work occupies a highlighted status in this text, that addresses problems involving racism, a movement operated not by Turner, but by the author of this article, Latin American, but not Black. Notably, among many other researchers, Wakeling (2007) affirms that sociology is a White people's discipline and, therefore, subject to myopic analyses, which stem from the ethnic composition of the academia as a whole, not only in Social Sciences. This is why we opted for resorting to a mediation to provide an epistemologically less unbalanced and ethnically more engaged counterpoint to the reflection undertaken here, which was made possible by the work of the researcher, artist and activist bell hooks.

Returning to Turner's work, societies are marked by oppositions and conflicts between social classes and subclasses, ethnic groups, cults, ideologies and political pacts, geographical regions, gender-based associations, relative age, and labor division, and such contradictions evidence the emergence of social drama, which he defined as "a sequence of social interactions of a conflictive, competitive or agonistic type" (Turner, 1987, p. 33). From this perspective, Turner (1982) argues that something resembling a drama is constantly erupting beneath the surface of the apparent peacefulness of social life, a phenomenon produced from the relationships between social actors, their conflict of interest, their alliances, their informal relationships and connection networks between individuals and groups.

Note that the emergence of performative practices, because, in Turner's work, according to Schechner, "the conception of social drama is performative and intimately related to his understanding of the ritualistic process" (Schechner, 1985, p. 116). In a broader sense, from Turner's (1987) perspective, social drama is a type of meta-theater in relation to everyday life theater, i.e., it is constituted as a dramaturgical language over the ordinary language of role and status games that characterize the daily processes of interpersonal communication.

At the individual level, the social drama described by Turner can reveal the social actor's character, personal style, rhetorical skills, aesthetic and moral differences respecting the group, their preferences of choice and their courses of action. In social drama, a performance is instituted, in

which each actor uses "the entire sensory repertoire to transmit messages: manual gesticulations, facial expressions, body postures, breathing [...], stylized gestures, dance patterns, prescribed silences, synchronized moves" (Turner, 1982, p. 9). The author stresses that, in some of these performative possibilities, "both at the verbal and non-verbal levels, improvisation may not only be allowed, but obligatory" (Turner, 1982, p. 82).

In Bell's words, social drama is a "label" created by Victor Turner for a "procedural unfolding of social events" able to singularize, at the limit, "what happens in a community when someone breaks a rule, how the community then takes sides for or against the offender, and how the community works to solve the problem" (Bell, 2008, p. 106). Here, again, one perceives the centrality of the conflict for the concept—a conflict evidenced and reorganized by the performance.

According to Oliveira and Cunha, in Turner's work, conflict "is guided by culture and its crisis can even reiterate the 'sense of belonging' of a group," generating "the necessary friction so that social life does not become passive and inanimate" (Oliveira; Cunha, 2016, p. 76). By this perspective, the authors believe that "Turner's social drama can be seen as the 'liminal phase' in a community" (Oliveira; Cunha, 2016, p. 76), stemming from a crisis that destabilizes the social structure and, after mobilizing a reparative action—a cultural nature performance, "never ceasing to be political" (Oliveira; Cunha, 2016, p. 74)—tends to create a new balance, distinct from the initial situation.

In Victor Turner's work, the concept of "liminality" refers to the "unclassified place, where a person is outside society, where they have no *status* and are obliged to abide by the rules" of the same group that excludes them (Castro; Barragan, 2016, p. 9), as well as ethnically excluded individuals and groups in a society marked by the colonial heritage of racism. According to bell hooks, as a result of "the colonizing forces being so powerful in this White supremacist capitalist patriarchy," Black people must "renew a commitment to a decolonizing political process" (hooks, 2013, p. 67), seeking a meaningful praxis—which in this article gives the possibility of theatrical performance. For Turner (1987), social dramas are understood as units of harmonious and disharmonious social processes that emerge during conflicts. He advocates that social dramas follow a four-phased sequential pattern, namely: (1) rupture, in which regular social relations based on social norms are broken; (2) crisis, during which the rupture tears, a process in which more social actors tend to be involved; (3) reparation, a stage during which the actors seek some type of mediation, conciliation, or arbitration to legitimize a solution, in a process usually related to ritual actions; and (4) reintegration, that includes the rearrangement of the disturbed or unstructured social group, or the recognition and legitimization of an irreparable hostility between the parties in conflict.

## 3 Theatrical improvisation, social drama, and resistance

Broadly speaking, in Oliveira and Cunha's (2016) understanding, the four phases of social drama describes a process of questioning that a community experiences during an evident conflict. The authors build their argument using Theatre of the Oppressed created by the Brazilian director and playwright Augusto Boal, whose objective would be "to transform the people, 'spectator', to be passive in the theatrical phenomenon, into a subject, into an actor, into a dramatic action transformer" (Boal, 1991, p. 138). Specifically, Oliveira and Cunha (2016) endorse, in the social drama context, (Forum Theatre)—a subtype of Theatre of the Opressed that proposes to dramatize the problems of a community, inciting the oppressed population to bring to the drama game relevant themes for themselves, in plays developed so that any participant can intervene in the performance and transform the theatrical action. Based on deliberately incomplete narratives, Forum Theatre invites the audience to "suspend the unfolding of the dramatic action, replace the protagonist and improvise the alternative behavior they consider most appropriate to deal with the dramatic action" (Carmo, 2018, p. 588).

Thus, for Oliveira and Cunha, the questioning provoked in Forum Theatre would consist of a moment of social rupture, in which "oppression is analogous to the moment of the broken rule in the social drama" (Oliveira; Cunha, 2016, p. 76) analyzed by Victor Turner. The authors also emphasize the need for participants to be able to "develop 'improvisational' skills" for the performance at the Forum Theatre (Oliveira; Cunha, 2016, p. 72).

Created by Augusto Boal in the context of Theatre of the Opressed, Forum Theatre refers to a practice experienced in popular collectives in Brazil, as well as in other Latin American and European countries, with the objective of "representing the conflicts of a community, as well as the proposals agreed upon in a meeting," so that the conflict and suggestions for solutions are "discussed among all and put into practice from improvisations carried out at the time," appearing to be the performative process that Boal calls "instant dramaturgy," one of the performance modalities that characterize "improvisation as show" (Muniz, 2015, p. 101).

For Leep (2008), three major possibilities can be described for incorporating improvisation in the creation of performing arts: improvisation as a resource for the preparation of actors and actresses, improvisation as a supporting method in rehearsals of a show, and improvisation as a performance presented to an audience. Under this third category, there are scenic experiences that Muniz (2015) classifies as "improvisation as show," which brings together, for example: the Theatre of the Opressed, by Augusto Boal; the Living Theatre, by Judith Malina and Julian Beck; the Playback Theatre, by Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas; and the Impro System proposed by Keith Johnstone, also known as improvisational theater, and abbreviated as *Improv* or *Impro*.

Schjelbred declares that improvisational theater presents itself as "a special type of theater" that is established simultaneously as performance art and as a performative practice, in which

"improvisation comes first; theater is secondary," and which invites performers to enter the stage accepting four fundamental challenges: "there is no script to follow, no memorized text to be delivered [to the public], there is an empty space and an audience that expects to be entertained" (Schjelbred, 2014, p. 59). According to the author, the ephemeral character of the theater is put in evidence: there was no text before, there may be no later remnant of the performance and, in order to set the creation process in motion, the *performers* must necessarily exist only in the moment and for the moment. For Schjelbred (2014), by qualifying the genre as *Performance Art*, improvisational theater is characterized as an attempt to spontaneously make a multiple ideal: politics, entertainment, theater and art.

Broadly speaking, Fischlin, Heble, and Lipsitz advocate that, in Arts, improvisation functions as "a life-affirming imperative," through which participants can confront established power with their truth, "summon and promote resistance, activism, and mobilization in relation to institutions" (Fischlin; Heble; Lipsitz, 2013, p. 56) that are prevalent in the construction of totalizing narratives and in the production of hegemonic knowledge. For the authors, this function becomes urgent in the face of the emergence of conservative populism, authoritarian governments and exclusionary regimes under the dimensions of socioculture and economics.

In line with this idea, for Imre (2005), activism and political struggle directly associate art with resistance, since artistic practices make it possible to contest against dominant practices and hegemonic institutions. Given this context, resistance can be understood as a type of opposition to the current social order, based on the objectives of challenging the dominant systems of production and circulation of ideas, questioning the devices that control hegemonic types of social representation, refuting this representation possibility, shedding light on oppression systems.

According to Raby (2005), resistance suggests the recognition of power dynamics between dominant and oppressed groups, as well as the development of conscious, progressive and politically directed actions towards targets that can be individual or multiple, to establish local or structural oppositions to authority systems. For Ribeiro, resistance develops itself by means of a "creative adjustment" aimed at opposing "the force of an energy that threatens to disrupt the subject-world equilibrium" (Ribeiro, 2007, p. 74). Such creative adjustment can obviously refer to the ideal of improvised creation, based on free imagination.

Ultimately, as Fiona Bannon (2018) reflects, the idea of social performance is associated with the recognition of rich possibilities that emerge when people actively engage with each other by collaborative, collective, and co-creative practices. Modeled as performances, such meetings give rise to creation processes that enable new learning and development with regard to the lived experience. According to the author, such performative interactions need to be related to behaviors recognized as holding moral integrity, a sense of justice and equity, the ability to inform and lead to action.

Also, it is worth remembering that postcolonial thought is also based "on the postulate that the only true learning is that which transforms the world," emphasizing a rationality that reflects on "the way in which the dialectic of master and slave, of colonizer and native, must be transcended" (Mbembe *et al.*, 2006, p. 121). Regarding our text concerns, as bell hooks argues, "the issue of race and representation is not restricted only to criticizing the *status quo*," but to "present critical alternatives and transform our worldviews and move away from dualistic thoughts about good and bad" (hooks, 2019, p. 32).

Here is highlighted Midgelow's position that education and practice in the performing arts "enable transformative potentialities, challenge long-standing inequalities and suggest strategies for ethical encounters," as well as allow for the recognition of types of colonization, the problematization and the challenge to "naturalized social hierarchies and oppressions," presenting a "differentiated attention to the socio-spatial power forces that govern the ethics of the majority" (Midgelow, 2019, p. 3). From this perspective, when it is attentive to improvised performance, theatrical education enables the opening of new critical paths and possibilities of original contestation to domination systems such as colonialism.

## 4 Impro System, social drama and postcolonial resistance

Although such relations seem not to have been established yet in the academic literature, the social drama, the conflict and its questioning, as well as the improvisational skills in its performative rituals, can also be accessed from Keith Johnstone's Impro System, such as Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre. This is argued via the case study of the show *Swag Hat*, presented on the occasion of the 24th edition of Impro Amsterdam, in 2019, with an improvised performance by the African-American collective BlackOut, which had been invited to the event as the headliner. The prestigious Impro Amsterdam is the oldest festival of this kind in Europe. Its 24th edition, to which this article's author was present as a spectator and participant of *Workshops*, was held at the Compagnietheater, a concert hall that once was a church. The *Swag Hat* was performed on the night of February 1st, 2019 by the BlackOut group, the only non-European theatrical collective present at the event.

The fact that the BlackOut collective is composed of artists from the United States—a nation that symbolizes the Global North imperialism—should not discredit the experiences of resistance of its participants, who, as Black people, are also characterized as a social group systematically victimized by the injustices and oppressions caused by capitalism, hetero-patriarchy, and colonialism. From Bhambra and Santos' (2017) perspective, this field of experiences can be designated as the anti-imperial South—an idea that refers to a non-geographical, but epistemological South, composed of various epistemologies united by the fact that they have the power to create knowledge based on the struggles against capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy, but which can be produced "wherever these struggles occur, both in the geographic North and in the geographic South" (Santos, 2018,

p. 19). Thus, one cannot fall into the fallacy of a "hierarchy of oppressions" and believe that the racism suffered by a Black American is more tenuous or palatable than the racism directed at a Black South American, Caribbean or African—all manifestations of racism and/or White supremacy are equally monstrous and aberrant. It should be added that Martins (2019) and Santos (1993), among many other academics, understand racism not as an anachronism, but as one of the most horrible operators of today colonialism and as an essential part of the capitalist world's system development, from its origins to today.

The creative object *Swag Hat* was born from the classic structure "The Living Room," one of the most widespread formats of the Impro System, as shown by **Figure 1**. In the improv context, "format" is understood as an intended structure for the show, a type "previously designed with the rules/protocols/definitions of the game already known by the play's team" (Proença, 2021, p. 4). Such structures can be as simple as determining the duration of the show or each scene, or even as complex as a detailed set of information "that guides artists on stage and in technique, in a common science and parameter" (Proença, 2021, p. 4). Arnett understands a "format" as a "collectively agreed structure that artists use to create a show" (Arnett, 2016, p. 6), and such structure can be defined as the order in which the scenes are shared with the audience, the style to be followed in the scenes, the scenic movements admitted or undesirable in the context of that presentation, or by some combination of these three factors.

Figure 1 - The BlackOut group starts the show "Swag Hat," on the night of February 1st, 2019, at the Compagnietheater in Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Source: Zeca Carvalho (2019)

According to Schutte (2018), "The Living Room" consists of an improvisational structure of long form, created by the group The Family, from Chicago, and systematized by director Charna Halpern. In this format, the improvisers are seated in armchairs or chairs arranged in the scenery like a living room, with an open space in front, to allow the action to be enhanced through its physicalization. In a succinct way, the group requests a suggestion from the audience, from which a conversation is developed between the performers and, at a given moment, someone gets up and proposes a scene inspired by that interactive contact in which, until then, the verbal elements of the performance predominated. At the end of the scene, which can move towards the possibilities of comic, dramatic or, generally, a combination of aspects of humor and drama, the group resumes the conversation, deepening the questions proposed in the newly performed scene or requesting a new suggestion from the audience to motivate another scene, and so on.

In the aforementioned presentation of *Swag Hat*, African-American artists proposed to the audience conversations and scenes based on the problematization of issues involving prejudice and racial violence. The initial suggestions of the spectators dealt with the stereotyping of Blacks in the United States and Europe, the double violence involving racism and homophobia, and the multiple types of segregation associated with different ethnicities in contemporary America. The first three scenes passed without incident, being most of the audience European improvisers, comfortably watching a variation of "The Living Room" format, with which probably almost everyone in the room was familiar with.

At the end of the third scene, however, instead of again resorting to the audience for an additional suggestion to proceed with a fourth conversation-scene sequence, an actress from the group broke the protocol expected for the "The Living Room" format, addressing a group of spectators directly, confronting them with the fact that, the night before, on the sidewalk in front of the Compagnietheater building, she had been a victim of racial assault by the occupants of a car passing by. According to the performer, despite the brutality of the aggression, there had been no kind of protection or solidarity from those people with whom she was talking at that moment, who now sat quietly in the dark of the audience. As the spectators remained perplexed and speechless before that open challenge, the group once again occupied the game space to perform a last scene, in which the cast seemed to aim discussing the collective responsibility for racial violence and also for resistance to aggression. In the same scene, the characters that had been improvised in the previous scenes were also brought back to the stage, in an outcome commonly expected in long-form Improv shows.

As shown in **Figure 2**, in that final moment the group resorted to body arrangements based on the old children's game of war horse, pictorially recorded, for example, by the Flemish Renaissance painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder in the painting "Children's Games," from 1560[1]. On war horse, one person places another on his shoulders, like a horse offering support to a knight,

1 See: Scaglia; Fabiani; Godoy, 2020.

creating a new body unit, traditionally related to children's combat games. In the final scene of Swag Hat, however, sometimes the heaviest pPerformer was on top of the lighter one, establishing the need to seek other ways of support for the "knight," as the effort was too exhausting for the "horse." Other spontaneous combinations of war horses were enthusiastically celebrated by the audience, who, despite their applause, did not interfere in the scene, although they had been tacitly provoked to perform some kind of intervention.

Figure 2 - After provoking the audience, the BlackOut collective presents the conclusion of "Swag Hat," at the 24th edition of the Impro Amsterdam festival

Source: Zeca Carvalho (2019)

By analyzing the BlackOut collective's performance based on Turner's model (1987) for the understanding of social dramas from four phases of action, it can be suggested that the group seems to have satisfactorily transited through the stages of rupture, crisis and reparation, although the phase of reintegration could perhaps have been better elaborated. The rupture occurred through the accusation in the improvisations of the racism inherent to that social group; the crisis occrured when members of the group (the audience) were directly pointed out as colluding with racist practices; reparation was subjectively proposed through war horses, multi-corporeal orders that suggested symbiosis and synergy in resistance, leading to a collective solution to the social drama. Synergistically, it must be remembered that bell hooks lists two factors as essential for the establishment of relationships based on the resolution of unfair imbalances between Black and White people interested in anti-racist activism: "sincere confrontation and dialogue about race; and reciprocal interaction" (hooks, 2013, p. 143), elements that seem to have been contemplated in *Swag Hat*. Possibly, alternatives for reintegration—the fourth phase of action suggested by

Victor Turner—could be proposed in the workshop given by the BlackOut group the day after its presentation, an activity restricted to a few paying people, which the author of this work was absent.

## 4 Conclusion: colonialism, resistance and improvisational theater

Although sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018, p. 188) adopts the term "colonialism" in a broad sense, to mean a modern Eurocentric way of domination based on "the refusal to recognize the other's integral humanity." He also refers to the term "coloniality," used by Aníbal Quijano (1992) to designate "forms of colonialism that survived the end of historical colonialism" (Santos, 2018, p. 51). Nevertheless, the author prefers the name "colonialism," as "there is no reason to reduce colonialism to a specific type, that is, to historical colonialism based on territorial occupation by foreign powers" (Santos, 2018, p. 51). Consequently, for Santos (2011), it is restrictive to believe that the colonies' independence meant the end of colonialism—much less racism, which received a closer look in this work.

According to Quijano, through colonialism "a new social domination system and a new social exploitation system were produced in the same historical movement," as well as "a new conflict pattern," thus pointing "a new and historically specific power pattern" (Quijano, 2005, p. 17), characterizing a system of social domination that had as its founding element the idea of race, the first social category of modernity. Racism still endures as one of the most horrible structures of colonialism. In Santos' words, "racism, far from being a residue or an anachronism, is progressing as an integral part of the development of the capitalist world system" (Santos, 1993, p. 41), especially in the new and grotesque aspects worn by the production system, which has been casting extremely racist characters such as Jair Bolsonaro, Donald Trump, Viktor Orbán, and Javier Milei to ensure colonialist domination.

In this sense, from a critical perspective, Parker (2021) argues that, in the performing arts context, improvisation needs to address above all freedom and resistance to the immorality of racism and class elitism, expressing artists' proposals on themes and issues such as: resistance to authoritarianism and many types of supremacy; the voice and power of action granting to socially disadvantaged groups; the historical contextualization of contemporary struggles; and the possibilities creation for change, by replacing fear and powerlessness with hope, connection and collective sense. "In the capitalist patriarchy of white supremacy," bell hooks reflects, one must have "the courage to defend our belief in democracy, in racial justice, in the transformative power of love" (hooks, 2013, p. 40). It is not by chance that such ideals and practical developments coincide with the third and fourth phases of action associated with social drama by Victor Turner.

In line with Seham, performing improvisations enables the spontaneous emergence of "experience and memory sediments," which can be summoned to the game, "repeated, rearranged,

applied with others, and used to [...] improvise alternatives of resistance to the *status quo* (Seham, 2016, p. 362). It is about reinventing the social drama with improvisation. To this end, from the perspective of improvisational theater, each participant is seen as the holder of a broad backgroundthat can be transformed into art—and the process of improvising consists of using all the emotions, images, sensations, concepts and stories that have been stored and applying them in new creative possibilities with the support of imagination (Goldie, 2015).

Finally, Carvalho recommends that collectives of improvisational theater maintain a sociopolitical agenda that meets the need to investigate the imbalances that manifest themselves when the limits of humor are tested and, finally, to "enhance the struggle against the oppressions imposed by Western modernity" (Carvalho, 2023, p. 23), such as colonialism. In this work, the analysis of the show *Swag Hat*, by the group BlackOut, in the light of the action phases of the social drama according to Victor Turner, demonstrates how such a possibility can materialize in performance. Moreover, if bell hooks (2019) glimpses the difficulty of imagining any arrangement other than an exclusive space for Black people in which they can use comedy to criticize and make fun of Whites' behavior, the show *Swag Hat* seems to emerge as a resistance arena.

Expanding the previous discussion to other intervention fields and to resist to other means of domination, it is suggested to reinforce the relevance of Theatrical Pedagogy in the process of contestation and struggle against hegemonic powers, whether they are related to colonialism, hetero-patriarchy and/or capitalism. According to Santos, the so-called "performative knowledges" are crucial for the community education and for the resistance appeal, since the performative character of the knowledge that engages and mobilizes the subjects dedicated to fighting oppression "reinforces the renegotiation, or even the subversion of reality, which is necessary for the struggle to continue" (Santos, 2018, p. 166).

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