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**IMPRISONED COMICALITY:
the performativity of aesthetic experiences in anti-racist education
revealed for the teaching of theater**

COMICIDADE APRISIONADA:

a performatividade de experiências estéticas em educação antirracista reveladas para o
ensino do teatro

Elison Oliveira Franco

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0357-7038>

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Abstract: This text aims to intertwine the production of knowledge arising from aesthetic experiences in the performing arts, through the body in *performances of spiral time* (Martins, 2021) and their *archives* (Rabetti, 2000), with the promotion of anti-racist education in basic education. It analyzes the phenomenology of the comic and learning processes from various social and cultural contexts that seek to combat racism. To this end, the study presents an empirical, reflective, and theoretical account by the author-teacher concerning his practices and forms of knowledge within the universe of the performing arts, focusing on the comicality, laughter, and the figure of the clown. This discussion aligns with contents related to the teaching and learning process of theater in public schools, with particular attention to Law No. 10,639/2003, which mandates the teaching of Afro-Brazilian history and culture in the classroom (Brasil, 2003).

Keywords: comic; body; performativity; performing arts; anti-racist education.

Comicidade aprisionada:

a performatividade de experiências estéticas em educação antirracista reveladas para o ensino do teatro

Resumo: O objetivo deste texto é entrelaçar a produção de conhecimento, advinda de experiências estéticas nas artes cênicas, por meio do corpo em *performances do tempo espiralar* (Martins, 2021) e seus *arquivos* (Rabetti, 2000), com o fomento de uma educação antirracista na educação básica, analisando a fenomenologia do cômico e as aprendizagens provenientes de diferentes contextos sociais e culturais que buscam combater o racismo. Para isso, apresenta-se um relato empírico, reflexivo e teórico do autor-docente em relação aos seus fazeres e saberes no universo das artes cênicas, tendo como foco a comicidade, o riso e a figura do palhaço, consonante aos conteúdos voltados ao processo de ensino e aprendizagem do teatro na escola pública, com atenção à lei 10.639/2003, que exige o ensino da história e cultura afro-brasileira em sala de aula (Brasil, 2003).

Palavras-chave: cômico; corpo; performatividade; artes cênicas; educação antirracista.



1 Introduction

In order to address the relationship between art, teaching, and academic research, I present in this text¹ a personal narrative that brings together the study I conducted during my master's program, from 2012 to 2014,² with historical and contemporary aspects related to my own teaching and learning processes as an artist, educator, and researcher. The purpose is to reflect on practices and forms of knowledge in the performing arts from an anti-racist perspective, grounded in aesthetic experiences (em)bodyed within the phenomenology of the comic across different scenic, pedagogical, and cultural contexts.

The encounter and disencounter between one's own local artistic-corporeal practice and the world shape the construction of this text, as I emphasize my growing awareness of the need to promote anti-racist aesthetic education in public schools, specifically with high school students. The theoretical-methodological grounding of the discussion draws inspiration from Leda Maria Martins's (2021) notion of the body in *performances do tempo espiralar* (performances of spiral time), supported by archival analysis as proposed by Betti Rabetti (2000). The intention is to share aesthetic, experiential, formative, and dialogical perspectives, reinforcing an ethnic focus and an anti-racist understanding as traversed in and through my body.

According to Leda Maria Martins (2021), the Black body houses forms of knowledge that are not sustained solely by the function of the word (spoken or written), but also encompass images derived from visuality, orality, sonority, gesture, and tangible and sensorial inscriptions. The aesthetic apprehension of these elements reveals perceptions of Black corporeality and its nuanced cultural, historical, and contemporary meanings. For Martins, time in traditional African and Indigenous cultures, predominantly oral, revolves around a central point, namely the body, whose materiality is filled with symbolic inscriptions of Black and Afro-diasporic cultures, deeply tied to corporeality through ancestry. In her own words:

Spirality is what, in my understanding, best illustrates this perception, conception, and experience. The compositions that follow aim to contribute to the idea that time can be ontologically experienced as movements of reversibility, dilation and containment, non-linearity, discontinuity, contraction and relaxation, and the simultaneity of present, past, and future, as ontological and cosmological experiences whose basic principle is not rest, as in Aristotle, but movement.

1 This text is the result of the theoretical and methodological activities developed in the course Research Methodology in Performing Arts, offered by the Graduate Program in Performing Arts at the University of Brasília during the second semester of 2024, taught by Prof. Dr. Luciana Hartmann. In addition, it is a methodologically expanded and refined version of the paper presented in the Working Group (WG) Circo e Comicidade and published in the Proceedings of the 12th ABRACE Scientific Meeting: *O que podem as Artes Cênicas entre a máquina do mundo e as lutas pela terra* (What can the performing arts do between the machine of the world and the struggles for land), held from September 27 to 30, 2024, in São João del Rei, Minas Gerais.

2 Based on the author's master's thesis, supervised by Prof. Dra. Luciana Hartmann: FRANCO, E. O. *Por uma pedagogia teatral cômica: Kkkk ? kkkK*. 2014. Master's Thesis (MA in Arts) – Graduate Program in Arts, Institute of Arts, University of Brasília, Brasília, 2014.



In curved temporalities, time and memory are images that reflect one another (Martins, 2021, p. 23; our translation).

In order to remain attentive to the circularity of my corporeal movement in the performing arts, I also draw on the analysis of a journalistic report, described later in the text, whose observation seeks to identify *artistic procedures* and *technical repertoires*, as noted by Rabetti (2000, p. 8). In revisiting this record, I am drawn to the “consideration of memory as a privileged ‘region,’ a source that provides solid revitalizing material for the delicate exercise of reflection or artistic practice engaged in this encounter” (Rabetti, 2000, p. 4; our translation). In short, the archive under analysis enhances my memory of the Black corporeal experience lived throughout my artistic, pedagogical, and academic trajectory.

At the outset, I present an account of a scenic performance in a foreign context which, alongside other more local situations, inspired my perception of didactic-pedagogical approaches related to the realms of the comic and laughter in the development of the master’s research mentioned above and in my own artistic-pedagogical teaching practice. Immediately thereafter, I describe a sequence of dates beginning with that performative experience, with the aim of reflecting on methodological sensitivity in fostering anti-racist aesthetic education within educational settings. This includes the adoption of pedagogical strategies and procedures used in the classroom with upper secondary students at a public school in the Federal District in 2024, with a view to complying with Article 26-A of the Brazilian National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDBEN), as amended by Law No. 10,639/2003³.

Finally, it should be noted that the temporal framings presented throughout the text are not static. They may be read as corporeal-reflective-spiral crossings, akin to the marking of choreographic pathways, performative scripts, offerings of *ebós*, registered *quilombos*, and rediscovered bodily desires, as “Marked by discontinuity, reversibilities, temporalizing turns, and waves of sonic and rhythmic expressions, the embodied event includes individual and collective experiences, personal memory, and social and historical memory” (Martins, 2021, p. 80; our translation).

In other words, these are further events that fracture our corporeal perception while strengthening aesthetic experiences that confer the pluriversal knowledge of formative trajectories in the performing arts, revealing an interest in research from an anti-racist aesthetic perspective. Enjoy your reading!

³ It is worth noting that Law No. 11,645/2008 also amended Article 26-A of the LDBEN and, consequently, Law No. 10,639/2003, by incorporating Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into Brazilian basic and higher education curricula (Brasil, 1996, 2008). However, in this text, I do not address the historical and cultural aspects related to Indigenous peoples.

2 Practices and knowledges of the land in/through the body-world

Island of Malta, last week of July 2007

I was participating in a theater gathering on that small stretch of land located between the African and European continents (Figure 1). One day, the group of artists decided to return to the street for a public clown performance, in which we would wear ordinary clothing used in everyday life, while the clown costume would be kept in backpacks, bags, in our hands, or wherever else we could carry it. That day, the objective of the exercise was to choose a location, change clothes, put on the clown attire, and simply wait, as we were questioning the literal, immediate, and invasive communication present in some relationships between clowns and the public, and vice versa. Accordingly, I followed the agreement.

Figure 1 – Public clown performance by the author (right), Republic Street, Valletta, Island of Malta



Source: Jason Borg, 2007⁴.

While I was waiting, a pair of police officers approached and demanded that I and the other artists, who were also performing scenic actions, leave the street and move as close as possible to the sidewalks, so as not to obstruct the entrances and exits of shops and businesses. When they asked me to leave, I looked at them and gestured that I did not understand them, as they were speaking English and I was already dressed as a clown. Through gestures, the officers demanded, more or less three times, that I gather my belongings and, like the other clown-artists, relocate to the sidewalk.

At that moment, I recalled the walking and stumbling techniques I had learned in a workshop given by the Italian clown Leris Colombaioni, offered at the Sesc Fest Clown festival held in Brasília in 2005. I slowly removed each belonging from the ground, interspersed with little

⁴ The image and the report are available at: GRECH, Herman. Clowns arrested for clowning about. *Times of Malta*, Birkirkara, 27 jul. 2007. Available from: <https://www.timesofmalta.com/article/clowns-arrested-for-clowning-about.994>. Accessed on: Dec. 1, 2025.

jumps, hops, stumbles, and mockingly uttered sounds. As a result, at a certain point, one of the officers shook my arms, ordering me to be as quick as possible in my actions. Yet I continued the play, slo-o-o-wly, as I also noticed that the law enforcement officer was struggling, de-ter-mi-ned-ly, to suppress a slight smile at the corner of his lips.

As time went by, a circle of curious, laughing spectators began to form, enjoying the moments when I removed my belongings from the street and carried them to the sidewalk: very slowly, with a few teasing gestures and jokingly... At times, I would show a plastic club that I had with me to the officers, as a mock act of self-defense, while at the same time sharing my gaze with those who were becoming accomplices in that scenic performance created randomly in that narrow street on the Maltese island.

When I finished gathering all my objects, the officers reprimanded me once again, in that unrecognizable English—which I swear and insist I did not understand—and turned their backs on me. I took advantage of the moment to make a mischievous gesture toward them, observed only by the audience. What I had not anticipated was that a White man, possibly European, who happened to be passing by at that exact moment, would approach the officers to report me, as he had not appreciated my playfulness. As a result, they returned and took me to the police station, while I said goodbye to the audience, composed of people of different nationalities, who continued to discuss among themselves the “heavy-handed” action of the police, particularly due to the defensive intervention of a tall Black man who had also begun to defend me.

After being held in a small room at the police station for approximately three hours, I was released through the mediation of the festival organizer.

Brasília, first semester of 2014

The account of that situation on the island of Malta is one example, among others, that led me to investigate the phenomenology of the comic as a possible methodology for teaching theatre, beginning toward the end of my undergraduate degree in Art Education with a specialization in Performing Arts at the University of Brasília in 2009. This inquiry culminated in the systematization of that artistic-pedagogical proposal in my master's research, defended in the first semester of 2014, specifically on May 12. Cultural context, the retrieval of memory, and the recovery of physical and artistic repertoire were among the attributes I identified in the comic as motivating factors for treating it as a pedagogical approach in the classroom.

The intentional production of the comic was the main characteristic highlighted in the study, not only as a means of identifying it, but also of distinguishing it from play, whose elements promote pleasure, freedom, motivation, and the willingness of participating students to experience theater classes in a playful manner. Flávio Desgranges (2011), in analyzing methodological proposals that employ play in the teaching-learning process of theatre, demonstrates that theatrical play serves to broaden understanding and deepen engagement with scenic elements, while also providing



conditions for addressing other issues related to the social, political, ideological, and even affective and emotional contexts of the participants.

Conversely, although I recognized the predominance of play in the teaching-learning process of theater, as it may be understood as a *foundational element of life and human relationships* (Huizinga, 2010), I observed that the comic manifests itself within play at the moment when participants realize that they can modify the rules of the activity, re-signifying them in humorous and/or ridiculous ways (Franco, 2013; 2014; 2016). Play thus came to be understood as a privileged space for provoking comic intentions among students, expressed through the adherence to or confrontation with social and artistic practices embodied by the group of participating students, whether in a game, an improvisation, or a prepared scene⁵.

The stimulation of the phenomenology of the comic, through the physical and artistic repertoire of the sociocultural practices of the participating students, was clearly delineated in the master's research, as was the recovered perception drawn from my own artistic-pedagogical experience as a clown. However, I did not devote significant attention to ethnic issues in the development of that research, despite the fact that contemporary debates on the comic and laughter have increasingly emphasized such questions.

It is important to note that the Brazilian Black movement has long questioned the ways in which Black and Afro-Brazilian people were (and still are) represented in certain artistic and educational productions, particularly those centered on the comic and laughter. This was the case with Abdias Nascimento, whose aesthetic sensitivity led him to critique the racist practice of *blackface* and to promote the affirmative visibility of Black bodies on stage through the creation of the Teatro Experimental do Negro (TEN), alongside many other intellectual contributions that valued the Black and Afro-Brazilian population (Nascimento, 2004; 2016; 2019).

Federal District, first semester of 2024

I seek to problematize ethnic factors in this text, as my artistic-pedagogical trajectory has involved affirmative experiences of the Black body in the performing arts. Perhaps because I allowed myself to be guided by the transgressive force of the comic and laughter, and because I did not engage, or fully commit, to debates on racism, I neither emphasized nor sufficiently deepened the ethnic-racial dimension in my master's research. Addressing this dimension would have significantly expanded the scope of the discussion on anti-racist education through the aesthetic cultivation of the comic and laughter in the classroom.

5 "In addition to play, other procedures were adopted to encourage the manifestation of the comic element: *improvisation*, through the provocation and appropriation of unexpected moments; *caricature* and *parody*, by amplifying the emphasis on movement explored comically; and the use of *focus* and *mask*, in the exploration of the body and in motivating the emphasis on corporeality within the physical repertoire presented by the students. In order to construct a favorable space that would encourage the expression of students' social practices, I also suggested that the art educator could initiate the teaching-learning process by comically provoking the context, drawing on their own physical and artistic repertoire in front of the students" (Franco, 2014, pp. 150-152, our emphasis; our translation).

Conversely, I was not driven by the fashionable use of the concepts of decoloniality and counter-coloniality, disconnected from their concrete relations with artistic and cultural practices centered on the comic and laughter in cultural groups unfamiliar to me. Professor Erico José Souza de Oliveira (2024), of the University of Brasília, for example, has questioned the fact that many Brazilian artists and scholars draw on Afro-Brazilian cultural practices to enrich their artistic creations while labeling them decolonial, without critically reflecting on cultural appropriation and class- and ethnic-based privileges. According to him, Brazilian universities continue to perpetuate coloniality and racism in their pedagogical and curricular practices, despite affirmative action policies and the struggles of Black movements. For this reason, Professor Erico José underscores the urgent need to rethink the relationship between the performing arts and subalternized cultures in Brazil, promoting a truly reflective decolonial practice, including with regard to the comic, as he concludes:

The arts of the comic, mime, and masks would need to confront the colonial reality within their own field in order to reframe the colonial postures embedded in their artistic and pedagogical procedures. This would entail a profound revision of their ideals of creative freedom and, above all, of their intercultural dialogues. Perhaps only then could they escape the appropriative residue surrounding Black-referenced cultural practices disguised as artistic-decolonial processes (Oliveira, 2024, p. 20; our translation).

As racism is foundational to the capitalist-colonial system, and to my own artistic-pedagogical experience, I had to learn not to be racist through the teaching and learning contexts I attended. Conversely, I also had to learn to be anti-racist through other social spaces with which I came to engage, such as certain public schools in the Federal District, in my capacity as a performing arts teacher. This process required racial literacy on my part, leading to a conscious awakening regarding discriminatory practices within the school environment, as well as sensitivity in promoting an anti-racist aesthetic education. Within this framework, the artistic-pedagogical experience related to the realms of the comic and laughter made it possible to identify an empirical pathway of formation and learning in the struggle against racism.

In this sense, when reconsidering the account of that scenic performance on the island of Malta in 2007, described several pages earlier, I was always reminded of the Black man who had defended me while I was being restrained and taken away by the police. At the time, however, I neither understood what he was saying nor the reason for his indignation amid the turmoil in the narrow streets of the Maltese city. I only perceived that he strongly disagreed with what was happening to me.

Because I had not read attentively the news report mentioned at the beginning of this text, I began to revisit records of my artistic trajectory while applying to the doctoral program in performing arts within the Graduate Program in Performing Arts at the University of Brasília. It was then that I decided to reread and fully translate the Times of Malta article. I came to understand that the report denounced testimony regarding prejudiced remarks directed at me precisely on the



day of the clown intervention, which helped me recall the reason for the conflict that arose during that scenic performance and, likewise, the defense mounted by that Black man.

A passage from the Times of Malta reported that: “As he was being arrested, an eyewitness said he heard commuters hurling insults at the dark-skinned Brazilian, telling him to ‘go back to your country’ and ‘go work elsewhere’” (Grech, 2007). In other words, beyond my detention, it was the racist and xenophobic insults that prompted the Black man to defend me as he walked down the street and witnessed the interruption of my artistic performance, in an act of solidarity and reaction. It is also worth adding the ensuing commotion among passersby and other police officers, who intervened to separate the heated arguments between the Black man and other tourists who were also defending me.

Whereas in Brazil, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), I may be classified as *pardo*, within the categories preto and pardo, whose combination constitutes the racial group identified as the Black population in Brazil—representing the largest share of the Brazilian population, nearly 56%⁶—in the context of the island of Malta I was read as a dark-skinned Brazilian. This constituted an empirical, and in that context deprecatory, re-signification of the Euro-white-centric imposition that defined the term Black, as it became a standardized means of grouping diverse peoples who did not fit the biological, physical, social, and cultural characteristics of the idealized white, normative, “civilizing,” hegemonic, and colonizing world, attributing to the “others” what came to be called “*Blackness* and/or Black identity” (Munanga, 2020, p. 19, our emphasis; our translation).

Conversely, when I refer back to the walking and hopping techniques employed in that performance, learned in the workshop led by Leris Colombaioni, I highlight the learning and exploration of that methodology aimed at fostering playfulness and producing laughter. This is not only due to studies that may point to the technique underlying the popular artist on stage, countering superficial readings of spontaneity, as noted by Rabetti when she wrote: “[...] behind the desire to exalt the typical and the characteristic lies the presence of technical repertoires as efficient as they are frequent in certain theatrical artistic expressions that, while maintaining a *strong dialogue* with tradition, do not necessarily constitute a casual artistic emergence” (Rabetti, 2000, p. 9, author’s emphasis; our translation). I would like to situate the symbolic aspects that reveal the influence of Black African culture within my aesthetic-formative trajectory, even if they are imperceptible at first glance, by assessing the attempted erasure of Black and Afro-diasporic cultures in Brazilian theater and cultural manifestations.

As problematized by Alexandra Dumas (2022), a professor at the Federal University of Bahia, we must attend to the silencing of African heritage in Brazilian arts and popular cultures,

6 More information on the 2022 Census, see: Belandi, Caio; Gomes, Irene. Censo 2022: pela primeira vez, desde 1991, a maior parte da população do Brasil se declara parda. Agência IBGE Notícias, Rio de Janeiro, 22 dez. 2023. <https://agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/agencia-noticias/2012-agencia-de-noticias/noticias/38719-censo-2022-pela-primeira-vez-desde-1991-a-maior-parte-da-populacao-do-brasil-se-declara-parda>. Accessed on: Jan. 5, 2025.

which ultimately reinforces *epistemic racism* and *aesthetic racism*. She demonstrates that many studies continue to employ terms and nomenclature from conventional theater to address Black, Afro-Brazilian, and Indigenous manifestations that do not even adopt such characteristics in their scenic and cultural expressions. According to the author, this imposes a universal and colonizing gaze of White, European, Aristotelian theater onto the cultural manifestations of marginalized groups, which have, on the contrary, survived precisely through resistance to colonial domination, as expressed in their ways of being and doing. Moreover, she points out that such cultures do not separate fiction, aesthetics, and art from their realities and cosmologies, explaining the importance of the term Afro in popular designations:

Often, the Afro component of the popular is discarded in its enunciation, promoting the erasure of its African cultural matrix and transforming it into folklore, national, Brazilian, popular, regional, or traditional culture. Through this procedure, there is a risk of annihilating the web and tensions that involve power, thereby affirming epistemic racism and aesthetic racism. By foregrounding the matrional reference through the use of the term Afro-popular, an intention emerges to make visible the processes of cultural invisibilization to which *quilombola communities, peripheral populations, and small towns forgotten by the country's economic and governmental centers* are subjected" (Dumas, 2022, p. 10, our emphasis; our translation).

In other words, the erasure of Black African influences in Afro-Brazilian artistic and cultural practices must be questioned in order to reveal the practices and forms of knowledge, read as subalternized, of Afro-diasporic peoples, whose contributions can be highlighted within Brazilian performing arts. For this reason, I wish to emphasize other scenic knowledges that were already embodied in me at the time of that performance, such as the aesthetic experiences of performances with the *Quadrilha* *Êta Lasquêra*⁷. The sharing of gaze and complicity with the audience, among other scenic elements so strongly reinforced in clown training workshops, were also explored in the various performances we presented dressed as *cangaceiros*, the theme adopted by the *quadrilha* group in the many circus *arraiais* throughout the Federal District.

I am thus interested in emphasizing that those performances already fostered playfulness and laughter through the construction of a ludic environment conducive to the manifestation of the comic element—sometimes consciously, and at other times quite unintentionally. Nevertheless, the phenomenology of the comic was present, owing to the unusual moments that were intentionally seized upon, in line with the understanding that "[...] thinking about the specificity of comic-popular techniques enables us to reflect on the values appropriated by them" (Tibaji, 2010, p. 19; our translation). This is stated without neglecting the symbolic and constitutive aspects of the presence of Black and Afro-diasporic culture in our formation, such as Afro-Brazilian civilizational values, which not only contributed to but also cultivated our aesthetic, artistic, and sociocultural interrelations—namely memory, orality, ancestry, circularity,

⁷ Group founded in 2000 by young artists and social actors from the community of Samambaia, XII Administrative Region of the Federal District, located 25km from the center of Brasília.

corporeality, playfulness, cooperativism/communitarianism, religiosity, vital energy (*axe*), and musicality (Trindade, 2010).

These civilizational values reinforce memory and the corporeal elements of Black African ancestry, re-signified by performed Black bodies, or even as “[...] doubly repeated behaviors, which allude to the reiteration of the performed action, its repetition in time and as time and duration, as well as its simultaneous ephemerality” (Martins, 2021, p. 38; our translation)⁸. In this regard, it is important to highlight the significant number of Black men and women in the *Quadrilha* *Êta Lasquêra*, who sustained our aesthetic-cultural encounters (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Performance by the *Quadrilha* *Êta Lasquêra*, in which I appear as part of the second couple, on the left, and lying on the ground, on the right



Source: Personal archive, 2003

Thus, I perceived the boisterous manner in which we danced *quadrilha*, randomly swaying arms, legs, and spine, amid jumps, shouts of animation, and variations in bodily movement driven by the rhythms of *xaxado*, *xote*, *baião*, and *forró*. These characteristics were expressed in the way each participant danced when privileging a mischievous gaze or the rough, yet festive, aspect of the *cangaceiros* and *cangaceiras* of Virgulino Lampião and Maria Bonita's band—a theme researched and presented by the *quadrilha* to this day (Figure 3).

⁸ It is worth contextualizing that Leda Maria Martins was based on the concept of *restored behavior*, coined by Richard Schechner, to address performance in his study (Martins, 2021, p. 38). For more information on the concept, see: SCHECHNER, R. O que é performance?. *O percevejo: revista de teatro, crítica e estética*, ano 11, n. 12, 2003, p. 25-50.

Figure 3 – Performance by the *Quadrilha Éta Lasquêra* of Samambaia, Federal District



Source: Personal archive, 2007

At that time, *Éta Lasquêra* introduced innovations and made an impact in competitions by presenting itself entirely dressed as *cangaceiros* and by performing dance steps of French origin through its own reworking of the theme, in which the delicacy and subtlety of the minuet were reinterpreted through the low-bodied movement of a stylized *xaxado*: stamp one foot, then the other, dragging and lifting the knee; thrust and accentuate the hips; playing and parodying in a distinctly ethno-Brazilian manner, *etcha!*

Another aesthetic experience that reinforced accounts of my scenic-corporeal knowledges was the *Paixão do Cristo Negro* (Passion of the Black Christ), in which comic moments also emerged during rehearsals or performances⁹. In the improvisations we created to construct that staging, on one occasion I played the disciple Judas Iscariot, who, in the conceived scene, was supposed to withdraw abruptly when Jesus Christ would denounce him as the group's traitor. In that improvisation, with all eyes and fingers pointed at me, I paused, looked at everyone, and provocatively produced a caricatural, mocking cry: *buuááá!* Everyone laughed, as I broke the pattern and revealed the defense and fragility of that "perverse" disciple "villain," historically rejected by the Christian world.

These comic effects were displayed precisely in the performances we staged for large audiences gathered on Good Fridays—for example, when I portrayed King Herod, whose scene depicted the ridicule the historical character directed at Jesus Christ, within an atmosphere of orgy, festivity, mockery, and buffoonery (Figure 4).

⁹ Religious and artistic-cultural manifestation held in Samambaia, Federal District, since 1997. From 1998 onwards, the adjective *negro* (Black) was added in order to present a Jesus Christ with Afro-Brazilian qualities, more corresponding to the Brazilian people, instead of affirming that he was in fact Black.

Figure 4 – Scenes from *Paixão do Cristo Negro* of Samambaia, Federal District



Source: Personal archive, 2003

I do not wish, by this, to disregard the experiences I later had in my teaching-and-learning process in performing arts, with a focus on the comic, laughter, and the clown figure¹⁰. Rather, my aim is simply to highlight my corporeal awareness, more or less perceptible, of the effects that produce comicality, which was further expanded in the clown workshop I attended in 2003, through the systematization of exposure to ridicule, the exploration of my own flaws or “personal trash,” and mastery of focus and triangulation on stage.

In addition, I seek to demonstrate the presence of certain elements characteristic of the African worldview *embodied* into the artistic, pedagogical, and cultural practices I experienced, even when addressed indirectly, such as memory, ancestry, circularity, corporeality, playfulness, and communitarianism, along with the affirmative visibility of Black bodies on stage, since “the body in performance restores, expresses, and simultaneously produces this knowledge, inscribed in the memory of the gesture” (Martins, 2021, p. 130; our translation).

I understand that, upon reconsidering the analysis of these accounts, I can begin a renewed conceptual approach centered on the influence of Black and Afro-diasporic cultures in my aesthetic-formative trajectory, without resorting to the nomenclature of the White European-Aristotelian theatrical system to characterize popular cultural practices, and with an Afro-centered framing that I have integrated. As “to affix an Aristotelian theater reference as the sole interpretive measure of a Black Brazilian cultural practice sounds like an act of whitening through rational scientification or of Black matrilineal invisibilization, subordinating its postulates to a hegemonic model” (Dumas, 2022, p. 11; our translation).

Overall, I know that across all these lands I have inhabited, learned, and shared. More than a parochial ideology, I understand that the critical and analytical dialogue on racism across the world enabled the elaboration of practices and knowledges in performing arts from a corporeally anti-

10 My first clown workshop was with two artists and clowns, at that time, members of a recognized theater group from Brasilia. The initiation was performed in the city of Samambaia, in the second semester of 2003, inspired by some proposals of the LUME Theater Group, linked to the University of Campinas, with which the two lecturers had previously had a formative experience.

racist perspective. This contributes to my formation and resonates with my practice as a performing arts teacher in public secondary schools of the Federal District's State Department of Education.

Samambaia, Federal District, last week of June 2024

That dark-skinned Brazilian (myself), as read within that insular context, took into account the dignified prominence of Black skin tone upon entering the profession as a teacher in several public secondary schools in the Federal District, especially from 2016 onward. Over time, I began to mature my own Black corporeal self-perception, permeating my teaching sensitivity in the presentation and approach of anti-racist artistic-pedagogical content, particularly that related to the comic and laughter. This also occurred in dialogue with the philosophical reflections of Leda Maria Martins when addressing bodily performances that transmit the knowledge of African cultures transposed to the Americas:

Inscribing knowledge was not, then, synonymous with mastery of an alphabetically written language. Inscribing knowledge was, rather, synonymous with an embodied experience, with an embodied knowledge that found in the performing body its place and environment of inscription. The word was danced, the gesture was sung; in every movement there resounded a choreography of the voice, a score of diction, a pigmented inscription of the skin, a sonority of colors (Martins, 2021, p. 36; our translation).

This movement of inscribing corporeal knowledge also inscribed the colors on/in my body in the fight against “recreational racism” (Moreira, 2019; our translation) in everyday school life, that is, a type of humor that propagates racial hostility, racial oppression, and hate speech. To this end, I sought to foster and render visible the aesthetics of Black and youth bodies in the teaching-learning process of the curricular component of Arts¹¹. I also addressed the critique of blackface in the secondary-school classes I teach, content that is articulated in the *Curriculo em Movimento* of the New Upper Secondary Education of the Public Schools of the Federal District (State Department of Education, 2022, p. 68). During the curriculum review and drafting process, I joined the team of writers in the Languages field, representing the Art component and recovering dignified aspects of Black and Afro-Brazilian history and culture in the wording of a relevant support document for classroom pedagogical practices¹².

11 For this, see the systematization of other anti-racist artistic-pedagogical experiences in the form of articles. See: FRANCO, Elison Oliveira. A bela feira afroindígena: por uma educação estética antirracista. *ouvirOUver*, [S. l.], v. 17, n. 2, p. 393-412, 2022. Available from: <https://seer.ufu.br/index.php/ouvirouver/article/view/60838>. Accessed on: Dec. 1, 2025; FRANCO, Elison. O ilê performático da biodiversidade dos Orixás e das Iabás: os saberes das Africanidades para a sustentabilidade contemporânea. *Revista VIS: Revista do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Artes Visuais*, [S. l.], v. 20, n. 2, p. 187-200, 2022. Available from: <https://periodicos.unb.br/index.php/revistavis/article/view/41252>. Accessed on: Dec. 1, 2025.

12 Pedagogical ethnic-racial and anti-racist guidelines related to the Art curricular component are included in the curriculum's own learning objectives, such as the critique of blackface (“LGG34FG”) and the legacy of Black historical figures (“LGG35FG”) (State Department of Education, 2022, p. 68).

In other words, my Black corporeal experience sensitized me to approaches to content aimed at implementing Law 10.639/03, which mandates the teaching of Afro-Brazilian history and culture in schools (Brasil, 2003). While debates on blackface may seem outdated in academic and postgraduate circles, in basic education they remain quite incipient. It was precisely the pedagogical, historical, and critical contextualization of blackface that led me to a very powerful assessment activity conducted by a student, converging with the Black corporealities outlined in this text.

I refer to the conception of the “creative notebook” by student L. P., aged 17, designed in the form of a circus¹³. He reconsidered the physical spaces that can safeguard knowledge produced in the performing arts, drawing on the anti-racist artistic-pedagogical practice we experienced. According to the student, the circus-shaped creative notebook was conceived to demonstrate that it is a space that encompasses everyone—that is, plurality and cultural diversity (Figure 5).

Figure 5 – Students’ creative notebooks



Source: Personal archive, 2024

If, for the student, the circus is the space that brings everything together, for me the poetic-pedagogical gaze upon its spatiality also strengthens the perspective of an anti-racist education. I address this because, throughout the classes, I highlighted the work of Black artists in the performing arts, such as the clown Benjamim de Oliveira (1870-1954), thereby rendering visible an aspect of Afro-Brazilian history and culture. Put differently, this involved recovering a personality from Brazilian culture within the performing arts, against the backdrop of circus content, by foregrounding the Black clown who developed circus-theater theatricality in Brazil (Marques, 2006; Silva, 2022). I also drew a parallel with Leda Maria Martins’s reflections on the movement of the Black body in the development of Brazilian theater:

13 The “creative notebook” is an evaluative procedure that I designed for students to systematize the contents developed during Art classes. Some of this activity can be followed by the televisa report: G1-DF2. Alunos de escolas públicas personalizam cadernos, *G-DF2*, Distrito Federal, 11 dez. 2023. Available from: <https://g1.globo.com/df/distrito-federal/df2/video/alunos-de-escolas-publicas-personalizam-cadernos-12186641.ghtml>. Accessed on: Dec. 1, 2025.

Integrating scenic idioms and codes, gesture draws the body within ornamented spatialities. Expanded and scanned in and through spatialities, this transitory body walks, rests, runs, always in migrations that perform an occupation, whether literal or symbolic, of places and non-places, instituting *aquilombamentos*, reterritorializing spaces, and rendering them an expressive part of scenic movements and wanderings (Martins, 2021, pp. 79-80; our translation).

These scenic movements led me to present, after the assessment activity on Black visualities, several Black artists to students in order to reinforce learning related to Law 10.639/2003. The didactic and pedagogical presentation of the life of the Black clown Benjamim de Oliveira revealed a distinct form of comicality, as it showcased the aesthetic practice of an artist who—like many others of Black African origin—was nearly silenced in the consolidated history of the performing arts. Nevertheless, the growth of contemporary research and studies on his work has come to celebrate his existence and artistic legacy (Marques, 2006; Silva, 2022).

Moreover, the affirmative exposure of Black artistic-corporeal trajectories offers a compelling pedagogical reflection, in contrast to the racist practice of blackface and contemporary productions of the comic and laughter that follow that path. This can lead students toward an effective anti-racist teaching-learning process, grounded in careful attention to the intentional and conscious development of education for ethnic-racial relations, through an affirmative aesthetic perspective on content connected to the Art curricular component, with a focus on theater education in basic schooling, as occurred through attention to Black corporealities.

Finally, it is worth recalling that upper secondary education constitutes one of the key stages for the implementation of Article 26-A of the Brazilian National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDB), as amended by Law No. 10,639/2003, within Brazilian basic education. The text of the law already stipulated that “in primary and secondary education institutions, the teaching of Afro-Brazilian History and Culture becomes mandatory” (Brasil, 2003; our translation). In this sense, ancestral codes, inscribed in and transmitted through the Black body, become a fundamental aesthetic approach for activating critical thinking in the education of students in both public and private schools throughout Brazil.

3 Black-corporeal considerations in (*dis*)continuous trajectories

It was through the interweaving of my Black-corporeal practices and forms of knowledge in the performing arts, set against the background of my master's research on the phenomenology of the comic, that I constructed this text. The aim was to share didactic and pedagogical strategies and procedures for the implementation of Article 26-A of the LDB, especially Law No. 10,639/2003, in upper secondary theater classes, through content connected to the aesthetic universe of the comic and laughter from an anti-racist perspective, such as the critique of blackface and an artistic-pedagogical focus on the circus and Brazilian dark-skinned clowns.



The memory of my Black-corporeal experience fostered both the disposition and the persistence to confront Brazil's systemic racism. This dialogue with the world reinforced the need to share, through this writing, anti-racist artistic-pedagogical practices in basic education and—why not—in other levels of education and educational contexts as well. I thus envisage that different teaching and learning contexts may draw on studies and practices related to the universe of the comic and laughter from an intentionally anti-racist aesthetic-corporeal perspective.

Therefore, with my Black body, I move forward... I continue... In/through... Samambaia... Brasília... Federal District... Minas Gerais... Belo Horizonte... São João del Rei... Ouro Preto...



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Academic Biography

Elison Oliveira Franco - Universidade de Brasília (UnB)

Doctoral student at the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Artes Cênicas da Universidade de Brasília, Brasília, Distrito Federal, Brazil.

E-mail: elisonarte@gmail.com

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