

Conception of Teaching Work during the Pandemic: between the comical and the real

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ABSTRACT – Conception of Teaching Work during the Pandemic: between the comical and the real. This article aims to contribute to an understanding of the real working conditions of teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly within the framework of emergency remote teaching. To this end, it employs the analytical categories of humor and work examined in dialogue with teaching in Brazilian public primary education. The theoretical foundation draws on works related to theories of laughter and Historical-Cultural Theory, which inform the investigation of the empirical reference constituted by a selection of videos featuring comedian Diogo Almeida in the role of “Teacher Marli”. The methodological procedures are guided by Historical-Dialectical Materialism.

Keywords: Teaching Labor. Humor. Teaching Labor Precarization. COVID-19 Pandemic.

RESUMO – Concepção de Trabalho Docente na Pandemia: entre o cômico e o real. Este artigo objetiva contribuir com o entendimento das condições reais de trabalho docente no âmbito da pandemia de Covid-19 sob a representação do ensino remoto emergencial. Para tanto, utiliza-se as categorias de análise humor e trabalho em diálogo com a docência na Educação Básica pública brasileira. Utiliza-se como base teórica produções relativas às teorias do riso e à Teoria Histórico-Cultural, a partir das quais se investiga o referente empírico constituído de uma seleção de vídeos protagonizados pelo humorista Diogo Almeida no papel de Professora Marli, tendo como orientador dos procedimentos metodológicos o materialismo histórico-dialético.

Palavras-chave: Trabalho Docente. Humor. Precarização da Docência. Pandemia de Covid-19.

Introduction

The impetus for this article stems from research¹ conducted in a municipality in São Paulo, focusing on the organization of teaching amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic. This context has brought to light uncertainties, anxieties, theoretical-methodological disputes, and insecurities surrounding the teaching profession.

The study aims to contribute to the understanding of teaching work in the context of emergency remote education, utilizing the analytical categories of work and humor, situated within a historical-cultural perspective. To achieve this objective, the study employs a specific analytical lens: a selection of videos that humorously depict everyday teaching practices in Basic Education during the pandemic. These videos were chosen based on criteria such as comical value, view count, number of comments, language, hosting platform, and channel name. Additionally, the study considered the inclusion of specific terms in the video narratives, such as school, education, teaching, methodology, work, pedagogy, teacher, teaching materials, improvisation, sadness, working conditions, salary, payment, remuneration, precarization, technology, pandemic, virus, disease, transmission, and contagion.

Following these criteria, searches were conducted on the chosen platform (YouTube), resulting in the selection of five videos from the comedian *Diogo Almeida's* channel². These videos constitute the empirical framework of this study, serving as an inventory that enables the apprehension and contextualization of the reality under analysis.

The content of the selected videos aligns with Vygotsky's (2018) assertion that artists signify and produce meaning through the complex elaboration and (re)production of lived experiences. In this case, the humorous portrayal of teaching experiences offers a new way of presenting them, incorporating a range of comedic elements into the depiction of reality. The originality of analyzing emergency remote teaching through the lens of humorous media relates to Vygotsky's (1998) critique of early 20th-century psychological research methods. He emphasizes the need for new analytical frameworks alongside innovative methods.

This study adopts an investigative process rooted in the perspective of *collective work*, as discussed by Makarenko (1977), and employs the philosophical method of Historical-Cultural Theory as its investigative approach. This method, an expression of historical-dialectical materialism, distinguishes between the method of research and the method of exposition while maintaining their unity (Cedro; Nascimento, 2017). Regarding the method, it is understood that:

The research method is conceived as the analysis that reveals the internal relations and each element within the studied reality, while the method of exposition is conceived as the opposite process, presenting the reconstruction and synthesis of the phenomenon as if it had been constructed a priori. Thus, the object

is gradually revealed according to its inherent peculiarities (Cedro; Nascimento, 2017, p. 27).

The method is seen as intrinsically linked to the phenomenon, “[...] serving as both a premise and a product, a tool and a result of the investigation” (Cedro; Nascimento, 2017, p. 31). Consequently, the object of study initially appears as a chaotic concrete, progressing through necessary “[...] abstract mediations to be understood as a phenomenon in the form of a concrete thought” (Cedro; Nascimento, 2017, p. 67).

This text does not aim to propose a new method but rather to engage with existing methods through categories derived from the observation of the object within its historical context: emergency remote teaching, analyzed through the categories of work and humor under the framework of Historical-Cultural Theory.

The empirical reference is presented as a digital documentary source defined by satire, a discursive production constructed from a comedian's perspective on teachers in their generality, their social role, and their everyday practices. By employing humor, the actor brings to life interpersonal relationships directly related to teaching work, using fictional contexts and a constant play of roles in which he assumes the persona of a public Basic Education teacher in the Brazilian context.

Thus, in seeking to understand the reality of public Basic Education teachers in Brazil during the Covid-19 pandemic, the study turns to humorous sources as a means of capturing teaching experiences and comprehending the social significance of teaching work. For Vygotsky, the concept of *perezhivanie* (lived experience) “[...] refers to the individual's participation in meaningful actions, situations, and relationships that mobilize them internally and externally” (Oliveira; Andrade, 2020, p. 142). In this case, teachers' lived experiences are characterized as adaptive responses to the new situation, which brought about changes in the organization of teaching work, particularly in the unity of form-content and affect-cognition. Social distancing made face-to-face teaching impossible, eliminating direct, physical interaction. Tools related to information and communication technology, such as *YouTube*, *WhatsApp*, *Facebook*, video conferencing programs, and others, became the instruments for social interaction. In these new virtual environments, the conditions of teaching work underwent a deepening process of precarization.

Regarding the structure of the text, it begins with an overview of teaching work in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, depicting the emergence of emergency remote teaching and its relationship with the precarization of teaching work. In this direction, work is adopted as an analytical category, and a discussion is presented on the Marxist perspective of this concept to theoretically ground the process of precarization, considering work in its ontological dimension and its transformation into a commodity. This understanding is complemented by theories of laughter, which introduce humor as an analyti-

cal category, and by Historical-Cultural Theory as it relates to pedagogical activity. A historical overview of humor is then presented, culminating in the exposition and analysis of selected humorous video clips.

Finally, the article concludes with the synthetic idea of the entire analytical process: teaching work is precarized, and this precarization intensifies in the contexts and determinations of emergency remote teaching. This tension constitutes a fundamental aspect of pedagogical activity during the period under analysis and, in this context, also interferes with students' activities, as access to education is denied in the pandemic setting. It is acknowledged, therefore, that humor materializes these issues by enabling collective expressions of resistance.

Overview of the Historical/Real Context of Teaching Labor in Emergency Remote Education

The precarization of teaching labor is not a new phenomenon, emerging solely from the pandemic; it is historically rooted in the training of teachers, material working conditions, and the organization of education (Sampaio; Marin, 2004). It is noteworthy that labor and its relations have evolved throughout history, and within the context of capitalism, precarization is observed, further exacerbated by neoliberal policies (Souza et al., 2021). Education bears the brunt of these policies due to its pivotal role in human development, making it a target for speculation and regulation.

In a brief overview, it is evident that since the 1970s, the country has faced severe economic challenges, leading to an expansion of education, albeit in a deteriorated form, as noted by Sampaio and Marin (2004). According to them, “[...] in the subsequent decades of the 1980s and 1990s, the influence of international financing organizations, already present and decisive, became more pronounced, impacting the direction of schooling and the training of its professionals” (Sampaio; Marin, 2004, p. 1204).

Looking back to the early 1980s, specifically in 1983, over 50% of teachers in what was then called Primary Education had not completed Elementary Education, having only studied up to the fourth grade (Barbosa, 2014). Those who managed to graduate often came from night schools and “[...] had a training that lacked both general humanistic knowledge and specific knowledge related to the subjects they taught” (Ferreira Junior, 2010, p. 101).

Following the 1988 Constitution, there were some advancements in public policies, with the publication of official documents regulating education. In 1996, the third National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDB) was enacted (Brasil, 1996), and in the same decade, in 1997 and 1998, respectively, the National Curriculum Parameters (PCNs) (Brasil, 1997) and the National Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Education (RCNEI) (Brasil, 1998) were introduced. Despite these developments in the organization of educa-

tion, by 2017, the field was marked by paradigmatic disputes tied to education as a public policy, exemplified by the enactment of the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC) (Brasil, 2017), which, as Carvalho (2021) demonstrates, represents the materialization of neoliberal interests and conceptions of human development within a policy that claims to guide national education.

In contrast to the recent public actions shaping education in Brazil, teaching labor is understood in its social function of facilitating the appropriation of historically and culturally produced human wealth through its pedagogical intent (Araujo, 2003). However, when this labor is exploited for capital, it becomes alienated, negating any expression of autonomy and critical thinking (Bordalo, 2013).

With the pandemic declared on March 11, 2020, by the World Health Organization and the shift from in-person to emergency remote teaching, the abandonment of teachers by the public authorities became more evident. The necessary infrastructure for remote teaching was neither planned nor provided, reinforcing neoliberal actions (Souza et al., 2021).

In capitalist society, “[...] instead of affirming himself within capitalism, man³ alienates his essence. Instead of humanizing himself, he dehumanizes himself” (Leite, 2015, p. 48). Thus, teachers, often out of a so-called *love for the profession* or lack of alternatives, submit to imposed conditions to do their best for the students under their care, as if the responsibility lay solely with the teaching profession. This leads to a process of dehumanization of labor and the individual, as discursively constructed by political representatives, such as federal deputy Ricardo Barros, who on April 20, 2021, declared:

[...] it is absurd how we are allowing teachers to cause so much harm to our children's ongoing education. Teachers do not want to modernize, do not want to update themselves. They have passed their exams, are waiting to retire, and do not want to learn anything new. [...] only teachers who do not want to work (Só o professor..., 2021, online).

The deputy's statement places the responsibility on teachers, absolving the public authorities of ensuring working conditions, which aligns with Marques (2021), who states that “[...] another mechanism of pressure is the fact that teachers use their personal resources to provide and conduct distance education – their computers, phones, internet, data plans, and even their own homes” (Marques, 2021, p. 10). This highlights the normalization of a practice where teachers are responsible for providing the means to carry out their work, diminishing the state's role in ensuring the necessary resources for education to be legitimized as a universal right.

In this pandemic context, teaching practices were forcibly transformed to adapt to emergency remote teaching, requiring adaptation to new technological realities, often without prior training or the necessary resources. The portrayal of teaching labor during the pandemic often takes a comedic view of these situations, but beneath the laugh-

ter lies a denunciation of the precarious working conditions of teachers. The humor that permeates the Brazilian social constitution and the school microcosm serves as an agent to expose these constructions arising from labor relations in capitalist society during the pandemic, occupying the space where the public (the laughable discourses reflected on the teaching profession) and the private (the culturally and temporally marked identities of those who work as teachers) intersect, as explored by Saliba (2018b).

Drawing on humor produced by Diogo Almeida, some relevant passages illustrate this relationship and form the empirical basis for reflection. The selection criteria, as mentioned in the introduction, include: comedic value; number of views; number of comments; language; hosting platform; and channel name. Additionally, the use of the following terms in the video narratives was considered: school; education; teaching; methodology; work; pedagogical; teacher; teaching; material; resource; improvisation; sadness; working conditions; salary; payment; remuneration; precarization; technology; pandemic; virus; disease; transmission; and contagion. This approach leads to the empirical reference of productions related to pedagogical practices in the context of the pandemic and consequent social distancing.

With this methodological procedure outlined, the video titled *The Difficulties of Recording Online Classes* (As dificuldades..., 2020) is presented, which, as of the writing of this article, has 270,000 views and 1,000 comments. In this case, the blending of public and private spheres, already inseparable (as a local cultural characteristic), is accentuated due to pandemic practices. The protagonist transforms her home and personal space into a workplace, even assigning tasks to her husband, who was previously uninvolved in her teaching work.

In a brief description of the scene, the actor portrays the character Teacher Marli persistently attempting to record a class to send remotely to her students. She starts by trying to position her smartphone using household items like jars, stools, and broomsticks, lacking the necessary equipment such as a smartphone stand. When she finally positions the device, it falls because it is not properly secured. After several attempts, she asks her husband to hold the phone, but this also fails as his hands shake. In the end, she is unable to record the class as she intended, leaving her frustrated.

This video critiques the lack of material conditions for carrying out these new, unexpected tasks, such as the use of improvised and makeshift strategies to support the camera or smartphone, which now serves as an essential tool for producing and transmitting lessons (Marques, 2021).

The intimate relationship – working from home, *using* her husband as a volunteer, and her personal phone as a work tool – becomes public, and this incongruity can be seen as mechanically humorous. Reflecting on Bergson's theory of comedy, Goldefeder (1981) discusses the comedic causality derived from disharmony, which directly relates to the analysis of the teacher's working conditions in the video.

The author notes that “[...] for Bergson, there must be something in the cause of comedy that is slightly and specifically offensive to social life for society to respond with this gesture, which he would qualify as defensive” (Goldefeder, 1981, p. 98).

It is pertinent to highlight the construction of the character's personality. The comedian builds the humor of the main character through an explosive, irritable persona striving for self-control and moderation amidst the adversities of her teaching practices. Here, the use of a *magnifying lens* as a tool to significantly highlight and mark traits gathered from daily life and a culturally formed collective in pursuit of the laughable is evident.

In Saliba's (2018a) studies on the formation of humor in Brazilian society, it is common to note the presence of striking characters in media culture who stand out precisely for their exaggerated, selected, and repeated portrayal of everyday social attitudes, which, through these portrayals, become laughable in their peculiar representation of the whole.

This is demonstrated in one of the channel's most engaging videos, *Online Pedagogical Meeting* (Reunião..., 2020), with 393,000 views and a spot in the *trending uploads* section. In the scene of a pedagogical meeting among school staff, the protagonist teacher initiates the comedic process by joining the video call with a towel on her head, arguing with her husband, and displaying exaggerated behaviors that reflect stress, exhaustion, and dissatisfaction with her work, along with personal remarks that would be inappropriate in a formal setting.

This new working condition in the pandemic's digital landscape has led to increased overload and accumulation of tasks for teachers (Souza et al., 2021) and has generated mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and neurotic reactions (Marques, 2021).

In two other videos from the channel, titled *24-Hour Online Class* (Class..., 2020) and *Teachers Have No Life with Remote Teaching! Let Me Live!* (O professor..., 2021), Teacher Marli vents about the extension of working hours during the pandemic, where she receives calls, emails, and messages from students, parents, and school administrators (principals, coordinators) as if teachers were available around the clock. This portrayal further emphasizes the mental exhaustion teachers experience due to the precarization of their working conditions. Another relevant point, beyond material conditions, is that teachers also faced pandemic-related difficulties in their personal lives, grappling with their anxieties and personal problems (Marques, 2021), and even so, their work became increasingly bureaucratized.

At this point, two foundational concepts will be addressed to clarify and support the analysis. The first is the reality as a materialist historical expression of labor, representing both its formative, mobilizing, and propagating nature for humanity and its productions, and, in its contradiction, its placement within a capitalist production model. The second is the notion of humor/comedy as a critical force in relation to society, within the limits of a specific time and culture. Thus,

the discussion on the conception of teaching labor during the pandemic, when addressing the relationship between the comedic and the real, raises a first question related to the very concept of labor.

Labor from a Marxist Perspective

To understand the articulation between teaching labor and emergency remote teaching, it is necessary to grasp the concept of *labor* as it is referred to and how it is configured as an analytical category in the context of emergency remote teaching. Thus, given the intention to contribute to understanding the real conditions of teaching labor during social distancing, which is the objective of this article, it is essential to present relevant points of Marxist theory inherent to the analytical category: labor. This necessity arises from observing the efforts of competent authorities to enable changes in the legislation governing teaching labor; for this, an approximation of the research object to Marxist theory in the realm of labor is made.

Considering the theoretical and empirical references, Marxist theory is adopted as the basis for analyzing the act of teaching in the activity of public school teachers, with the apprehension of the labor category as described by Marx and scholars of his theory.

Labor, from a Marxist perspective, contains within it the significant contradiction of the capitalist mode of production. On one hand, labor is a condition of human existence, both in the sense of reproducing material life and in the potential development of human beings. This process occurs between humans and nature, resulting in the transformation of nature through human activity (labor).

However, with the historical development of capitalist societies, and as a primary condition for the establishment of the capitalist mode of production, labor is not merely a human activity that transforms nature to satisfy immediate needs. Labor takes on a specific form, that of wage labor, where the immediate purpose is not explicit in the product of an individual's labor. The individual works in exchange for a wage, and the products, instruments, and means of production do not belong to the worker but to another individual who pays the wages of a group of workers (laborers) who cooperate. The labor power of these workers becomes a unit (*atom*) of Capital. It is transformed, generically, into a commodity (Marx, 2017).

Labor, mentioned as a condition of human existence, as an activity exclusive to the human species, is one of the central issues indicated by Marx and Engels (1989) that establishes a relationship with the function of education from the perspective of Historical-Cultural Theory (Vygotsky, 2020). This issue can be observed in the following excerpt:

Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion, or by anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence [...]. By producing their means of subsistence, men indirectly produce their actual material life (Marx; Engels, 1989, p. 13).

It is noted that when mentioning the means to distinguish humans from other animals, Marx and Engels use categories such as consciousness and religion, both for humans, but it is in the activity of production, in labor, that the generic distinction is made, as in the activity of Teacher Marli, who, while organizing teaching intentionally, despite the anxieties of working conditions in emergency remote teaching, exercises this human potential to develop historically accumulated human capacities through pedagogical activity (labor).

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels present as the first historical fact the production of the means to satisfy needs, such as drinking, eating, sheltering, and clothing, that is, the production of material life itself, which is when the distinction between humans and other natural beings is made. From the moment humans begin to satisfy their primary need, that of material existence, the very action of satisfying it and the instrument already acquired with this new satisfaction lead to new needs, what Marx and Engels call the first historical act (Marx; Engels, 1989).

First, labor, vital activity, productive life itself, appears to humans only as a means to satisfy a need, the necessity of maintaining physical existence. Productive life, however, is generic life. It is life-generating life. The authors, when discussing “[...] the division of labor conditions, instruments, and materials, the fragmentation of accumulated capital among various owners, and subsequently the separation between capital and labor, as well as the various forms of property itself” (Marx; Engels, 1989, p. 76), indicate that labor itself only endures under conditions of fragmentation. The more refined the division of labor becomes, the more accumulation grows, and fragmentation itself becomes more refined.

Considering that “[...] labor is, above all, a process between man and nature” (Marx, 2017, p. 255) implies thinking that labor is, before all the complexity and historical implications contained in this term, a *relationship*.

Cotrim (2015) presents as typically human forms of relationship labor, war, and the state, and mentions them as activities of sensitive beings. Labor, for this author, is a relationship mediated by an activity oriented between person and nature. The person who performs this oriented activity (the laborer) employs their labor power, which Marx calls simple labor power, pointing out that every ordinary person, without any special development, possesses it in their corporeal organism (Marx, 2017).

Marx considers that the circulation of commodities is the starting point of capital and that, still regarding the commodity, its production and developed circulation – commerce – compose the historical presuppositions from which capital emerges, dating back to the 16th century, what the author calls the inauguration of the modern history of capital through commerce and the market (Marx, 2017).

Thinking about labor in the second decade of the 21st century is different from thinking about labor in the 16th or even the 19th centu-

ry, but considering that, even with the time that has passed since Marx's studies, capitalist social relations remain and, now, according to Cassin (2002), are reorganized as globalized, neoliberal, and post-modern capital, and, also thought by Mészáros (2011), as *globalized* “in a time when the *absolute* systemic limits of capital are being activated on a global scale” (Mészáros, 2011, p. 235, author's emphasis).

Manacorda (2007), when studying labor, also from a Marxian perspective, draws attention to the fact that alienated labor, as a historically determined result of the division of labor, is posed as a negative form of self-expression, or as posed by Marx and Engels (1989, p. 77):

[...] self-expression and the production of material life are so separated that material life appears as the end, and the production of material life, that is, labor, as the means (now this labor being the only possible, but, as we see, negative, form of self-expression).

Marx, when dealing with the character of labor represented in commodities, defines it with a dual nature. He defines as useful labor “the labor whose utility is thus represented in the use-value of its product, or in the fact that its product is a use-value” (Marx, 2017, p. 119). Thus, this labor defined as useful will be that thought of in terms of its utility, its uses, it is a specific productive activity suited to an end. Labor, in this case, is the mediator of the product, and its raw materials and each element of material wealth not provided by nature that takes the form of a special productive activity, directed to an end, adapts specific natural materials to specific human needs (Marx, 2017). Considering its physiological sense, Marx points it out as the expenditure of human labor power, and it is by this property, of abstract labor, that it generates the value of the commodity and it is, however, by the property of concrete and useful labor that use-values are produced (Marx, 2017).

Touching on the object of this text, when reflecting on the necessity of Teacher Marli's labor – teaching, as a central but not sole expression – it is understood that this form of action brings to light the indispensability of formal education to the contours and reproduction of the capitalist mode of production.

Furthermore, considering the exhaustion of the main character, highlighted in the videos in her expression of the high amount of labor power expenditure and long working hours, it is possible to relate it to what Marx discusses regarding the consideration that must exist by the person who possesses labor power, for, to remain a free owner of this power, they must sell it only for a determined period, since, if they sell it entirely (their labor power), “[...] they transform themselves from a free man into a slave, from a possessor of a commodity into a commodity” (Marx, 2017, p. 242).

Still concerning the sale of commodities, Marx (2017) asserts that for someone to sell commodities without them being their own labor power (or capacity to work), this person must possess the means of production, raw materials, instruments of labor, among other things. He further illustrates this through the figure of *a musician of*

the future (referring to a dreamer, a utopian individual), arguing that not even such a person could live off the products of the future. Thus, from the very moment of their existence, humans must consume both before and during the unfolding of their productive act (Marx, 2017).

Cotrim (2009), when addressing the differentiation of labor in its dimension as activity, understands that when the focus is on the active aspect or the activity itself, Marx employs the term *labor process*, whereas when the emphasis is on the product of labor, the term used is *productive labor*. The author further points out that the concept of *productive labor*, within Marx's analysis, derived solely from the labor process, is not adequate to the capitalist production process (Cotrim, 2009).

It is explained that productivity in Marx can be associated with the fact that the labor process necessarily results in a product or becomes objectified in some way. Alternatively, in the analysis of pre-capitalist societies, the term productive is used to designate material labor, where the term is linked to the productivity of labor as it undergoes changes, given the differences among the concrete elements of production.

In the forms of the capitalist production process, labor must be fundamentally understood as aiming at the production (and/or reproduction) of surplus value, ensuring that the self-valorization of capital within this process guarantees its own reproducibility. Productive labor, therefore, comes to be conceived as a determination of the capitalist labor process, as the objectification of labor into commodities—considering the employment of labor power sold by the worker—incorporates expressions of unpaid labor that precede and determine the valorization of value. This value, as capital, benefits the capitalist who appropriates the surplus product arising from this process. As Marx (2004, p. 109) emphasizes, “[...] a worker is productive who performs productive labor, and productive labor is that which directly generates surplus value, that is, which valorizes capital”.

The emphasis of this argument lies in the fact that “[...] every productive worker is a wage laborer, but not every wage laborer is a productive worker” (Marx, 2004, p. 111). The persistence, maintenance, and development of the capitalist mode of production also consider the circulation of surplus value objectified as commodities. Thus, labor is incorporated that, even if it does not directly imply the valorization of capital in production, constitutes part of the exploitative processes of capitalism.

Teaching labor in public basic education, if considered unproductive in the sense that it does not directly transform its product into capital but instead sells itself (as wage labor, in the case of teachers) as a useful service in the reproduction of labor power and the training of new workers for the labor market, is still determined by capitalist contradictions. It remains fundamental for the reproduction of capital in and for itself.

Thus, applying Cotrim's (2009) propositions to reflections on teaching labor, it is highlighted that the category of *productive labor* is elaborated with the Brazilian public school system and the mediat-

ed/developed teaching labor within it as its backdrop. Even if teaching labor does not directly align with this form of labor, it constitutes part of the totality of exploitative labor processes in capitalist society. As Frigotto (1986) emphasizes, even if concretized as unproductive labor, the public school (in this analysis) is situated within and is determinant for capitalism by being *indirectly* productive, enabling the formation of potentially productive workers through the performance of labor in its specific school context, while considering this concrete time of analysis as unproductive and immaterial.

When considering the category of immaterial labor, it is pertinent to address the forms of intellectualization of labor power. According to Amorim (2006), when there is a continuous incorporation of retained knowledge as exchange value, it generates flexibility, rapid displacement, and permanent self-transformation.

Considering that Amorim (2006), Galvão (2009) propose that the term *immaterial labor* be used to designate phenomena such as a new type of production based on information, knowledge, and automated means of labor; the characteristics of labor power in relation to the worker's level of qualification, which implies greater autonomy and a predominance of intellectual labor; and the intangible nature of the goods and services produced.

Examining teaching activity through the category of labor in Marxian theory, encompassing the excessive range of functions attributed to this profession, does not fully elucidate the nature of teaching labor during the pandemic (as an object). However, it allows for an understanding of the conditions (im)posed by capital in its current structure. In this sense, it becomes possible, above all, to trace its characteristics, traces, and history in the material, in the reality (ex)posed in the productions of this category, which can otherwise be extracted through the analysis of teaching activity as depicted in the audiovisual works used in this article. Thus, humor is employed as an analytical category that aids in unveiling part of the object in its reality.

The Comic as an Analytical Tool

In a historical and cultural understanding of humor, akin to what Saliba (2017) proposes, it is emphasized that the perception of humor as a historically generated cultural product must consider the formations and relations of societies across different eras, including varying conceptions of science, aesthetics, and specific material and property relations.

Choosing humor as a resource for understanding the historical and material moment experienced by individuals working as educators, amidst a sanitary, social, and economic crisis, is directly related to its dialogical capacity and transformative potential. Humor, through history and culture, emerges from the logical-temporal relations and interrelations experienced by humanity.

According to Vázquez (1999, p. 272), the comic is “[...] a form of social critique,” and laughter, freedom. The author exemplifies the

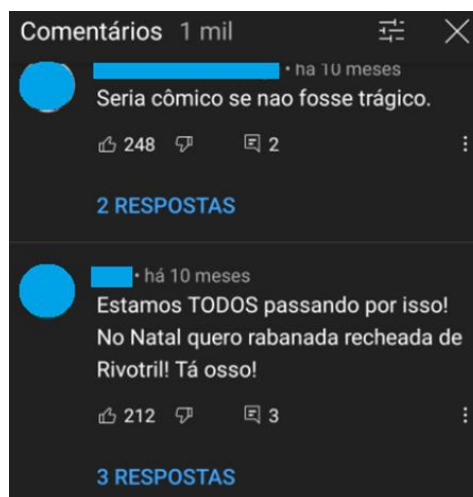
comic in Charlie Chaplin's 1936 film *Modern Times*, where the actor enacts automatic gestures representing the mechanization of capitalist society, in which even eating reflects the commodification of man (Vázquez, 1999).

In this vein, the concept of labor, within the scope of this article, aligns with the concept of humor as a dialectical perspective involving the struggle of opposites as a law of development, characterized by its transformative and/or reproductive potential within a hegemonic context. Eagleton (2020) highlights that:

[...] while it may censure, unmask, and transform, [humor] can also dissolve essential social conflicts into an explosion of hilarity. Mutual laughter can be a form of mutual disarmament, as the laughing body signals its inability to inflict harm. [...] However, the defenseless and uncoordinated body is hardly in a position to construct this social order. In this sense, comedy poses no threat to sovereign power (Eagleton, 2020 [1774]).

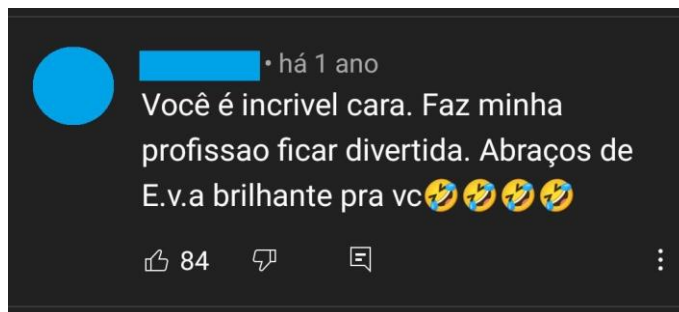
Thus, the capacity of laughter, when mutual, to bring people together in a relational condition of opposition is emphasized. Through unity in critique using humor as an instrument to highlight irregular social factors in collective life, or even *domestication* of bodies by including a group in conditions surrendered to laughter itself, humor becomes a limiting facet of everyday anxieties, revealing an unjust, hilarious, and inevitable reality. Under these conditions, the comments on the videos serve as empirical references for analysis, allowing for an abstraction of how their content resonates with the target audience—in this case, Brazilian basic education teachers during the pandemic—as demonstrated in the following figures:

Figure 1 – Comments exemplifying mutual disarmament through humor



Note: Translation of the image: "It would be comical if it weren't tragic." and "We're all going through this! For Christmas, I want French toast stuffed with Rivotril."
Source: This year I'll have to pass everyone, Márcia, even those who has never been approved! (2020).

Figure 2 – Comment exemplifying mutual disarmament through humor



Note: Translation of the image: “You’re amazing, man. You make my profession fun. Hugs from a brilliant E.v.a to you.”

Source: The difficulties of recording online classes (2020).

In the highlighted cases, it is noted that humorous representation is directly related to a collective sense that perceives *a tragic humor*, in everyday experiences, and finds contentment in the representation itself, in an aspect of relieving laughter, yet not mobilizing. The sensation conveyed by the discourses seems more related to a pleasure in feeling (as a person) understood by others, considering the large number of *likes* included in each comment, a form through which positive digital interaction is facilitated.

Thus, the importance of the critical humorist belonging to a specific category of workers is underscored, particularly in the face of a discursively conditioned reality, understanding them as transformative agents. Saliba (2017, p. 18) emphasizes that “[...] in each era, verbal apparatuses are formed that become part of lived reality: the affective experience of humor and laughter is not limited to words alone but can only be disseminated through words”.

In understanding language and, consequently, thought, Vygotsky (2020, p. 398) asserts that “[...] a word devoid of meaning is not a word; it is an empty sound”, as the word reflects consciousness. Language and thought are also understood as ideologically constituted functions (Bakhtin, 1981), and viewing humor as the construction and propagation of these manifestations constitutes it as a bearer of indispensable sociocultural perspectives for understanding historical reality, as a discursive fragment manifested in its various genres—in this case, in virtual satire.

By considering humor as the empirical referent, its capacity to record and expose contexts within their respective periods is acknowledged as a potential and instrument for reflection and dialogue with the theoretical framework. To this end, a brief history of humor theories is presented below.

Overview of Humor: From Antiquity to Contemporaneity

In its diverse perspectives across time, humor has been tied to a typically human essence and as a consequence of a social organization aimed at self-regulation, maintenance, or even the sublimation of typically individual subjectivities inserted within a regulating collective. Saliba (2017) and Santos and Rossetti (2012) discuss these theories of humor throughout history, characterizing them into definitions related to the superiority theory, the relief theory, and the incongruity theory.

In Roman antiquity, laughter was considered a divine gift; in early Christianity, it was seen as an emanation of the devil, with laughter being “[...] as old as humanity itself” (Vázquez, 1999, p. 264) and linked to the comic.

In humor characterized by superiority, the laughable is directly tied to an elevation of the laughing subject in relation to another or another social group, expressing a typically human trait by pointing out weaknesses in others (or admitting one’s own weaknesses) and relating to the social sphere by highlighting and reclaiming differences and, why not, distinct identities among groups or classes. This conclusion is based on Santos’ (2012) exposition, which draws parallels with classical theories of laughter in thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes and René Descartes. Regarding Hobbes’ understanding of laughter, Santos (2012) describes it as “[...] a sign of contempt, indicative of low self-esteem on the part of the one laughing at another’s failure, and even a threat to peace” (Santos, 2012, p. 22).

In a similar direction, establishing a connection between the ideas of Hobbes and Descartes in the 17th century (Santos, 2012), the discussion aligns with Saliba (2017), for whom this aggressive humor reveals itself in sophisticated ways in the present (coinciding with the object’s contemporaneity), alongside digital media culture.

The relief theory is directly related to psychoanalytic strands and finds a benchmark in Freud’s (1996) studies. Here, humor is linked to a release valve for psychic expenditures and, akin to dreams, represents a defense mechanism against anxieties. As for incongruity, it involves the genesis of humorous expression through relational disparities between two causes, form-content relationships, or perception-representation of the world. This means considering the origin of humor as by and for humans, as well as its propulsive and analytical force in social relations.

Bergson (1993) highlights that the laughable arises in its full social function of signification, being inevitably tied to a group and highlighting, repressing, or controlling characteristics of that group, thereby serving a social maintenance function. For him, “[...] to understand laughter, one must place it in its natural environment, which is society; one must above all determine its useful function, which is a social function. [...] Laughter must correspond to certain requirements of communal life” (Bergson, 1993, p. 9).

Propp (1992) emphasizes that comedy and laughter cannot be perceived in nature, far from humans and their typical characteristics, unless human traits are attributed to external objects—such as assigning human characteristics to an animal, for example. He also highlights a certain gradation of value among different types of comedy, which, compared to the field of aesthetic philosophy, would be divided between *high* comedy—related to *refined, beautiful* humor, typical among the ruling classes—and *low* comedy, devalued, *vulgar*, directly linked to popular literature and the masses. This discussion aligns with the earlier comparison regarding the ideological capacity perpetuated or critiqued by humor and its study.

Specifically in Brazil, Saliba (2018a) argues that we live in a collectivity constituted by involuntary humor. Similar to the global post-17th century scenario, where humor entered the public sphere through the so-called humorous pact (a moment when humor distinguishes itself from reality to produce the comic intentionally, under specific figures and moments of everyday life), the divergence of Brazilian reality at this moment becomes apparent. In this context, humor is (con)fused between the public and private realities of individuals, undifferentiated in everyday relations. In this case,

[...] Brazilian history has not created and did not create any authentic and lasting identity; it merely helped segregate and isolate the majority of the population — it did not create public spaces [...] Between the formal and public dimension and the tacit universe of personalist coexistence, a fragmented comic representation of the country was constructed, giving Brazilians, in those ephemeral moments of laughter, a sense of belonging that the political sphere had stripped from them (Saliba, 2018b, p. 4).

Thus, considering that humor is an integral part of Brazilian reality, the humorist could be seen as an analyst, investigator, or collector of traces of “[...] a reality that is already funny” (Saliba, 2018a, p. 99). When thinking about teachers, considering the historical and cultural perspective of the specificity of Brazil regarding humor, these individuals can be seen as a collective immersed in the roots of typically Brazilian laughter.

Humor enters the classroom, being a common figure in textbooks, and permeates interpersonal relationships and the actions that make up the daily practice of teaching. And this, given the widespread use of information and communication technologies, is disseminated through components of media culture, such as memes⁴, gags⁵, posts on social networks, comic strips, and television programs like *Teacher Raimundo's little school*, which premiered in 1990 (with a new edition starting in 2015), addressing comic relations in school life, as well as the catchphrase “*and the salary, oh*”, delivered by actor Chico Anysio in the role of a teacher, accompanied by a diminishing gesture.

In the case of humorist Diogo Almeida's videos (which also carry characteristics of denunciation), this funny everyday reality can be perceived in the following figures, taken from his videos:

Figure 3 – Comment related to the lack of material/technological conditions for teachers



Note: Translation of the image: "Marli with an iPhone and a Dell computer... belongs to the pedagogical gang."

Source: 24-Hour Online Class (2020).

Figure 4 – Comedian portraying a teacher improvising resources to work during the pandemic



Note: Translation of the image: The Difficulties of Recording Online Classes.
Source: The Difficulties of Recording Online Classes.

Specifically in this study, by adopting the work of a humorist as a compiler of the reality of school life and the atypical working conditions of public basic education teachers, the aim is to demonstrate the possibility of objectifying the multiple subjectivities of this collective. Through an analysis of these audiovisual productions, it is possible to grasp traces related to the real conditions of teaching labor during the period of emergency remote education. The materialization of these conditions in a humorous format (as a playful recreation of reality) highlights issues that alter the nature of teaching labor and were intensified during the pandemic, such as: work overload, lack of material and technological conditions for carrying out *unexpected* and unprecedented tasks, the extension of teaching hours, and the erosion of personal life due to a false notion of productivity in the educational context.

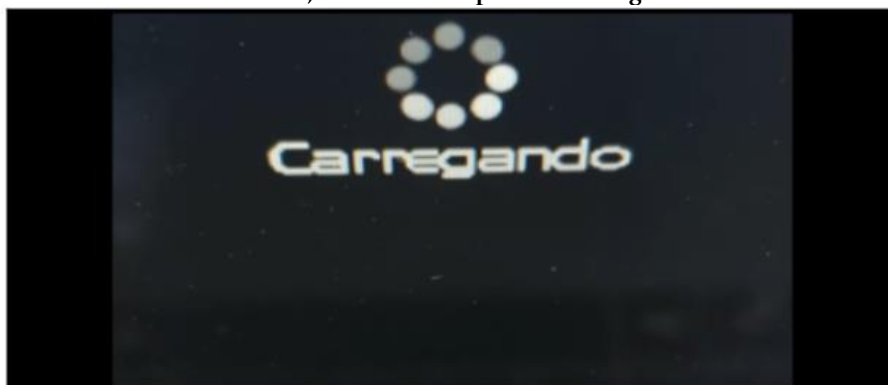
Final Considerations

The dialogue between the analytical categories of labor and humor leads to a synthesis centered on denunciation. In the production of humorous videos, the humorist abstracts, through scriptwriting and performance, the exploitation of teaching labor. This labor, alienated within a context where production relations strain those who sell their *intellectualized* labor power, gives rise to new expressions of exploitation embedded in the ephemeral pedagogical relations of a pandemic context.

In this movement, it is pertinent to highlight another major issue of emergency remote education, inherent to the overall precarization of teaching labor: the exclusion of students from education. The lack of public policies aimed at mitigating this eventuality in education is striking, denying the determinations of this delicate moment.

With estimated benefits for approximately 18 million students and 1.5 million teachers, Bill (PL) No. 3,477 of 2020, which provides for guaranteed internet access for educational purposes to public basic education students and teachers, was vetoed by the President of the Republic, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, in a dispatch published in the Official Gazette of the Union on March 19, 2021. The justification for the veto was that *the measure faces legal obstacles due to the lack of an estimated budgetary and financial impact* and, furthermore, because *it increases the rigidity of the budget*. This veto can be analogously represented by the following figure:

Figure 5 – Screen of an electronic device used by a humorist's character in a video, with the inscription “Loading”



Note: Translation of the image: Loading.
Source: 24-Hour Online Class (2020).

The image (Figure 5) was captured using a screenshot tool from the video *Online Class*, also from the humorist's channel, and can be seen as an allusion to the message repeatedly and persistently encountered by public school teachers, given the lack of adequate public policies for reliable broadband internet communication. The image, and by analogy, the veto of the aforementioned bill, is a portrait of educators, not only during the period of remote classes and online teaching but also as a reflection of the long-standing burden they have *carried*, even with limited and personal resources, in supporting part of Brazilian public education.

Figure 6 – Cartoon: Remote Work



Note: Translation of the image: “Carrying out”.
Source: Created by Mariane Silva do Prado (2022).

The cartoon shown (Figure 6) was created to establish a humorous relationship with teaching labor during emergency remote education, depicting the burden of work during this period and the circumstances experienced by many teaching professionals. In the image, we see Teacher Marli carrying the materials she used to conduct her classes, including the broom that, in some videos, appears as a smartphone stand. Revisiting the concept of lived experience (*pe-rezhivanie*), according to Prestes (2010, p. 117, author's emphasis), art "[...] has the function of overcoming individual feelings, and the creative aspect of art lies in its ability to enable the transfer of a shared experience." Thus, the humorist's artistic production addresses the lived experience of teachers in a generalized way, expressing the common experience of educators.

Laughter is resistance when it comes from the mouths and eyes of the oppressed classes. When it originates from the oppressor classes, laughter is a relinquishment of humanity, as it is under forms of slavery, alienation, barbarism, and the despicable.

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Notes

¹ Genesis and development of the organization of mathematics teaching in a municipality in São Paulo. Available at: <https://bv.fapesp.br/pt/auxilios/94265/genese-e-desenvolvimento-da-organizacao-do-ensino-de-matematica-em-um-municipio-paulista/>. Access on: Oct. 30th, 2024

² Regarding the ethical considerations related to the research materialized in the text, it is noteworthy that the videos are publicly available on the YouTube platform and that authorization was granted by the author, Diogo Almeida, submitted as an additional document during the article submission process. Furthermore, YouTube's guidelines include certain exceptions to copyright rules, commonly referred to as fair use, as outlined in their policies (available at: https://www.youtube.com/intl/ALL_br/howyoutubeworks/policies/copyright/#copyright-exceptions. Accessed on: October 30, 2024). The production of a scientific text that uses the cited author's videos as an empirical reference, without aiming for profit but rather for citation—a category that includes critique, analysis, and reporting, as described in the platform's guidelines—falls within the ethical requirements associated with the use of third-party audiovisual content.

³ In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels explain the term "man" as the term ideally used by philosophers to refer to individuals who are no longer subject to the division of labor (Marx; Engels, 1989, p. 78).

⁴ As highlighted by Souza (2013), it refers to everything that propagates, in the form of textual fragments, on the Great Network (or cyberculture), possessing some humorous content.

⁵ The term originates from Anglicism, typically related to media and theater, referring to the comic effect of a funny story being narrated through moving images (Santos; Rossetti, 2012, p. 44).

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