

Original article



Art and artistic education as a transformative practice: Cuban stage humor and cultural decolonization

El arte y la enseñanza artística como práctica transformadora: el humor escénico cubano y la decolonización cultural

Arte e educação artística como prática transformadora: o humor teatral cubano e a descolonização cultural

Luis Enrique Amador Quiñones¹  0009-0003-2659-5030  kqqq73@gmail.com

Ivan Barreto Gelles²  0000-0002-6637-3518  tvebarreto@gmail.com

María Luisa Pérez López de Queralta¹  0009-0001-9137-2664  mlqueralta67@gmail.com

Elizabeth Marrero Ramos¹  0000-0002-6771-9963  elymarrero1990@gmail.com

¹ University of the Arts. Cuba.

² Audiovisual Media Company (Cinesoft). Cuba.

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ABSTRACT

Art and arts education functioned as transformative practices by fostering shifts in perspective, critical awareness, and cultural reaffirmation. This article aimed to determine how Cuban stage humor, a form of comedic theater, contributed to socio-cultural transformation and the development of decolonial thinking. The study was conducted using a qualitative approach with a hybrid methodological design that integrated theoretical and empirical tools, allowing stage humor to be

analyzed as a dynamic sociocultural practice. At the theoretical level, the inductive method was used to derive generalizations from the analysis of specific elements, while the historical-logical method enabled the contextualization of the phenomenon from its 19th-century roots to its contemporary expressions. At the empirical level, data triangulation was achieved through expert interviews, bibliographic review, and documentary analysis, as well as participant observation, in which the researcher assumed a dual role as creator and performer, providing an autoreferential perspective on creative processes. Key elements of Cuban stage humor—social satire, self-referentiality, and the adaptation of vernacular theatrical traditions—were systematized as educational and emancipatory tools. The results showed that this form of humor, by drawing on social reality and ridiculing its contradictions, promoted critical reflection and challenged Eurocentric paradigms. In conclusion, its value in arts education was highlighted as a means to transform cultural awareness from a social change perspective.

Keywords: art; art education; scenic humor; vernacular theater; decolonization.

RESUMEN

El arte y la enseñanza de las artes actuaron como prácticas transformadoras al fomentar cambios de perspectiva, conciencia crítica y reafirmación cultural. Este artículo tuvo como objetivo determinar cómo el humor escénico cubano, una forma de teatro cómico, contribuyó a la transformación sociocultural y a la formación de un pensamiento decolonizador. La investigación se desarrolló bajo un enfoque cualitativo con un diseño metodológico híbrido que integró herramientas teóricas y empíricas, lo que permitió analizar el humor escénico como práctica sociocultural dinámica. En el plano teórico, se emplearon: el método inductivo, que facilitó derivar generalizaciones a partir del análisis de elementos particulares; y el método histórico-lógico, que permitió contextualizar el fenómeno desde el siglo XIX hasta la actualidad. En el ámbito empírico, se aplicó una triangulación de fuentes mediante entrevistas a expertos, revisión bibliográfica y análisis documental, así como la observación participante, donde el investigador asumió un rol dual como creador y actor, aportando una perspectiva autorreferencial sobre los procesos creativos. Se sistematizaron elementos esenciales del humor escénico cubano, la sátira social, la autorreferencialidad y la adaptación de la tradición teatral vernácula, que lo convirtieron en una herramienta educativa y emancipadora. Los resultados evidenciaron que este tipo de humor, al nutrirse de la realidad social y ridiculizar sus

contradicciones, promovía la reflexión crítica y cuestionaba paradigmas eurocéntricos. En conclusión, se destacó su valor en la enseñanza artística como vía para transformar la conciencia cultural desde una perspectiva de cambio social.

Palabras clave: arte; enseñanza artística; humor escénico; teatro vernáculo; decolonización.

RESUMO

A arte e a educação artística têm atuado como práticas transformadoras, fomentando mudanças de perspectiva, consciência crítica e reafirmação cultural. Este artigo teve como objetivo determinar como o humor cênico cubano, uma forma de teatro cômico, contribuiu para a transformação sociocultural e a formação do pensamento descolonizador. A pesquisa foi conduzida utilizando uma abordagem qualitativa com um desenho metodológico híbrido que integrou ferramentas teóricas e empíricas, permitindo a análise do humor cênico como uma prática sociocultural dinâmica. Teoricamente, empregou-se o método indutivo, facilitando a derivação de generalizações a partir da análise de elementos específicos; e o método histórico-lógico, que permitiu contextualizar o fenômeno do século XIX até o presente. Empiricamente, aplicou-se uma triangulação de fontes por meio de entrevistas com especialistas, revisão bibliográfica e análise documental, bem como observação participante, na qual o pesquisador assumiu um papel duplo como criador e ator, contribuindo com uma perspectiva autorreferencial sobre os processos criativos. Elementos essenciais do humor teatral cubano — sátira social, autorreferencialidade e adaptação de tradições teatrais vernáculas — foram sistematizados, transformando-o em uma ferramenta educativa e emancipadora. Os resultados demonstraram que esse tipo de humor, ao se basear na realidade social e ridicularizar suas contradições, promove a reflexão crítica e desafia paradigmas eurocêntricos. Em conclusão, seu valor na educação artística foi destacado como meio de transformação da consciência cultural a partir de uma perspectiva de mudança social.

Palavras-chave: arte; educação artística; humor teatral; teatro vernáculo; descolonização.

INTRODUCTION

Art has historically demonstrated its capacity to transform society and individual consciousness, acting as a vehicle for critique and social change. In the field of art education, this transformative quality manifests itself when pedagogical practices transcend technical transmission to incorporate cultural values, identity, and critical thinking. Various experiences have shown that artistic creation, when it incorporates reflection on reality, can empower communities and individuals, fostering awareness of themselves and their context.

A prime example is Cuba, where stage humor, a popular form of comedic theater, has emerged not only as entertainment but also as a form of informal education and cultural intervention that challenges social conventions and fosters liberating thought. This movement, which has been institutionalized and studied due to its influence on national culture, validated the need to formalize and support the teaching of comedian arts, integrating creators from diverse university backgrounds, thus underscoring its inclusive and transformative nature. As prominent figures in the field have emphasized, overlooking humor and limiting Cuban culture to its ceremonial aspects is a grave mistake, as it constitutes an essential component in the formation of subjectivities on the island.

From a theoretical and pedagogical perspective, this study is based on a broad bibliography that allows us to understand humor as an emancipatory praxis. The research integrates the contributions of Acevedo (1966) on the theory and interpretation of humor as social critique, the reflections of Del Llano (2019) on humorous creation as a way of confronting reality, and the approaches of Giroux (2005) and Hooks (1994) on transgressive pedagogy, the politics of education, and teaching as a practice of freedom. It also incorporates the views on the tradition and modernity of Cuban humor by López de Queralta (2022), the foundational thought of Martí (1966) on satire and independent thought, the decolonial options of Mignolo (2011), and the terminology of theatrical aesthetics by Pavis (1998).

Also considered are Freire's (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed foundations, Mañach 's (2001) classic inquiry into mockery, and Nimführ and Tejeda's (2025) research on musical politics and decoloniality. Finally, the analyses of Ojeda's (2019) pedagogical art projects, Quijano's (2000) coloniality of power, Rodríguez Suero 's (2024) denied identities in art education, Salois's (2017) study of mockery

as a critical tool, and Taylor 's (2003) relationship between performance, cultural memory, and decolonization are integrated.

This article focuses on art and art education as transformative practices, using contemporary Cuban stage humor as a case study. It analyzes its conceptual and methodological contributions, showing how the integration of social satire, vernacular tradition, and active audience participation transforms humor into a pedagogical and decolonizing tool.

Through a synthesis of the research work, the mechanisms by which humor contributes to the formation of national thought and the decolonizing spirit are discussed, reflecting on the relevance of incorporating these findings into art education to promote critical awareness and social transformation. The objective of this article is to determine how Cuban stage humor contributes to sociocultural transformation and the formation of a decolonizing thought, systematizing its essential elements as an educational and emancipatory tool.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study underlying this article was developed using a qualitative approach, with a hybrid methodological design that integrates theoretical and empirical tools for understanding the artistic phenomenon. This approach allowed for the analysis of stage humor not only as an aesthetic product, but also as a dynamic sociocultural practice.

Methods of theoretical scope

They were used to structure the logical basis of the research:

- Inductive method: It was used to move from the particular to the general, allowing the analysis of simple elements of the works to lead to the identification of complex structures of national thought.
- Historical-logical method: allowed the phenomenon of stage humor to be situated in its specific temporal trajectory, connecting the roots of the 19th century with contemporary manifestations in their cultural context.

Empirical methods and techniques

Data collection relied on triangulation of sources to ensure the validity of the findings:

- Interview with experts: comedians, playwrights and critics were consulted in order to gather expert opinions on the social function of humor.
- Bibliographic review and documentary analysis: an exhaustive study of audiovisual materials and theoretical texts related to decolonization and theatre was carried out.
- Participant observation: This resource was fundamental, given that the principal investigator played a dual role as both creator and participant within the sample studied. This condition provided a privileged self-referential perspective on the creative processes and direct interaction with the public.

The sample was intentionally selected and consisted of the trilogy of humorous shows written, directed and performed by Cuban comedians Luis Enrique Amador Quiñones (Kike) and Iván Camejo Vento between 2002 and 2022.

The trilogy includes the following key works:

1. People *in black and black*.
2. Laughter *is a very serious matter*.
3. Symphony *with nothing*.

These works were chosen for their concise representation of the evolution of contemporary Cuban stage humor and its capacity to incorporate social and historical references into a transformative discourse. The methodological approach combined the hermeneutic interpretation of the texts and performances with the validation of oral and documentary sources, ensuring a deep understanding of the subject of study.

RESULTS

The research results are presented organized according to the application of the stated theoretical and empirical methods, allowing a comprehensive view of stage humor as a transformative tool.

Results of the historical-logical and inductive method

Through the analysis of the trajectory of humor in Cuba and the induction of particular cases towards general structures, the following findings were obtained:

- It was determined that contemporary stage humor maintains a direct continuity with the comic theater of the 19th century, preserving the use of archetypal characters for social satire.
- Evolution of the symbolic character: the analysis revealed a "psychological mutation" in figures like the "little black boy." While in the past he represented the oppressed colonial sector, in the current exhibition he is reinterpreted as a shrewd spokesperson who addresses the racial and social tensions of modern Cuba.
- It was systematized how the show transcends the superficial joke to become a conscious artistic act that uses laughter as a cognitive filter to understand reality.

Results of the expert interview and document review

Consulting specialists and analyzing texts and scripts yielded technical information about the construction of humorous discourse:

- Experts agree that humor must maintain a "critical edge" (the whip) without losing its entertainment value (the bells), ensuring that the audience reflects while enjoying themselves.
- The script review confirmed the existence of a "discursive undercurrent" or subterranean current of meaning. The success of the work depends on the author, actor, and audience sharing implicit references to decipher uncomfortable truths beneath the surface plot.
- The historical documents analyzed show that the creation of the Center for the Promotion of Humor in 1994 was the turning point to legitimize humor as a valid and professionalized form of art within the country's cultural policies.
- Given the principal investigator's status as creator-actor, direct data were obtained on the stage interaction and structure of the works studied (*People in black and white*, *Laughter is a very serious matter* and *Symphony with nothing*):
- It was observed that the works take sensitive or "untouchable" themes from everyday reality and expose them with irreverence, forcing the viewer to a critical reading of their own context.

- In the play *People in Black and Negro*, it was found that the monologue uses the racial theme as an initial pretext to then reveal general social conflicts (economic and marginalization) with which the entire audience identifies.
- In *Laughter is a very serious matter*, it was noted that the use of direct address to the audience builds a reflective complicity, transforming the theatrical space into a place of active dialogue.
- A significant finding was the presence of "speech bubbles" or final messages of optimism. The characters conclude with phrases of overcoming adversity that convey values about the importance of willpower and hope, fostering a hopeful catharsis in the audience.
- In *Sinfonía con de nada*, the fusion of elements of "high culture" (symphonic music) with Cuban popular rhythms was identified, breaking aesthetic hierarchies and vindicating the validity of mestizo culture.

Art, humor and transformative practice: conceptual foundations

The results of the documentary and theoretical analysis allow us to understand stage humor as a transformative practice embedded within the creative dimensions of theater and comedy. The study determined that this manifestation involves both a literary dimension of creation and a technical execution of performance. Comedy, in this context, is identified as a structure that transcends mere entertainment to offer a contradictory perspective of reality, where the spectator's everyday environment clashes with the environment represented by the comic characters.

Research suggests that a reflective awareness of reality underlies stage humor. In the specific case of the Cuban stage, a confluence of festive elements with a profound satirical vein was observed, allowing for a critical view of the world through laughter. A key finding is the operational distinction between "the comic" and "the humorous," where the latter is elevated as an aesthetic and ethical act that dignifies laughter by advocating for an active social stance. The data indicate that humor arises from popular roots with a corrosive character, functioning as a tool for denouncing social injustices and as an engine of change originating from grassroots social sectors.

The cultural tradition analyzed highlights that humor should operate as a balance between entertainment and critique; laughter allows the content to be assimilated, but satire ensures that the audience is not limited to mere enjoyment, but rather engages in reflection. In the contemporary

works analyzed, it was identified that a humorous attitude constitutes a particular way of confronting the world's problems and a cognitive filter that reveals aspects of everyday life that often go unnoticed.

Vernacular tradition and social criticism in Cuban stage humor

- The study confirmed that contemporary humor is based on the legacy of Cuban vernacular theater, especially in the use of archetypal characters to satirize social tensions. Three fundamental links were identified:
- Society as a point of reference: the works analyzed draw directly from the social context, taking sensitive situations and conflicts and demystifying them. This approach often employs coded or subtextual exposition that engages the viewer in deciphering the messages, ensuring that the humor reflects the public's real concerns.
- undercurrent: a current of deep meaning was detected beneath the surface plot. The performances operate on apparent and latent levels, configuring an interpretive game where the success of the staging depends on the audience's ability to grasp the implicit social references.
- The Black boy as a symbolic character: this emblematic figure reappears, reinterpreted as a symbol of identity. The analysis showed that the contemporary character retains his defiant essence and resonates with the new sociopolitical context, inviting collective self-reflection on issues of race, nation, and marginalization in a critical yet accessible way. In the trilogy studied, the strategic use of these resources was observed. For example, the racial element is used as an initial pretext to delve into universal social problems, allowing diverse audiences to identify with the work. Likewise, a deliberate revival of traditional vernacular aesthetics was noted, but imbued with a psychology relevant to the present day, where the characters directly address the audience, breaking the fourth wall.

Pedagogical effect and social resilience

One significant aspect observed is the implicit educational effect. Although the works are not didactic in a formal sense, they contain messages of optimism and resilience. The protagonists often conclude the performances with messages that instill a sense of collective motivation, conveying values about the importance of willpower and hope.

In this way, it was found that stage humor not only denounces problems, but also provides a catharsis that stimulates social resilience, teaching that happiness and overcoming depend on the desire to move forward.

Stage humor and decolonization: the victor's discourse

One of the most significant findings is the identification of humor as a space for resistance and the construction of decolonizing thought. The analysis revealed that this practice acts as a "discourse of the victor," representing a distinct and empowered voice that resists being subordinated. The comedian and their persona speak from a place of local identity with pride, mocking elites or external influences, and refusing to passively accept dominant values.

This spirit manifests itself on three levels:

1. Thematic level: the works address racism, inequality and bureaucracy without taboos, promoting an honest national dialogue on issues that often remain buried in official discourse.
2. Aesthetic and symbolic level: signs of popular culture are integrated into contexts traditionally reserved for foreign formality, breaking down the dichotomy between "high culture" and "popular culture." This helps to decolonize the public's aesthetic sensibility.
3. Linguistic level: the use of colloquial speech and local references strengthens communication with the national audience. Collective laughter at authority figures has a liberating effect, emotionally educating the audience to question hierarchies and absolute truths.

It was found that contemporary stage humor is an indispensable element for independent national thought. By reflecting back to society its own image, with all its virtues and flaws, humor fulfills an act of cultural affirmation and civic education. Furthermore, it was determined that this movement represents a commitment to authenticity in the face of globalizing trends or external pressures, prioritizing ethical consistency over political expediency. Finally, the study demonstrates that popular creativity can open spaces for institutional legitimacy, transforming the conception of what is considered valid art and compelling art education to broaden its pedagogical horizons.

DISCUSSION

The interpretation of the results obtained confirms that contemporary Cuban stage humor transcends the realm of entertainment to establish itself as a pedagogical and decolonizing practice. When comparing the findings with the definitions of the Royal Spanish Academy (n.d.), it becomes evident that theater is not merely a technical representation, but a space for dramatic composition where comedy operates as a critical metalanguage. This contradictory perspective of the world, described by Pavis (1998), allows the spectator to recognize themselves in the characters' environment and reflect on their own reality.

The distinction between the comic and the humorous is fundamental to understanding the transformative potential of this practice. While the comic can be limited to the surface, humor introduces a sense of the sublime that elevates the aesthetic status of the artistic act (Acevedo, 1966). The results demonstrate the enduring relevance of Acevedo's (1966) theses, who defines humor as a suprasocial and corrosive attitude that arises from the people with a desire for reform. This critical nature coincides with Martí's (1966) view of satire; the results of the analyzed trilogy confirm that art must balance denunciation with entertainment to ensure that the audience thinks while enjoying themselves.

In this sense, the humorous attitude described by Del Llano in 2019 as a way of confronting reality is manifested in Camejo's work from 2012, who uses humor as a cognitive filter. This process of filtering the everyday is what allows art education to become a practice of freedom, according to the principles of hooks (1994), where the public learns to question its context.

A central finding of this research is the identification of humor as a discourse of the victor. This notion breaks with the logic of the colonality of power described by Quijano (2000) and aligns with the decolonial options proposed by Mignolo (2011). By appropriating vernacular tradition and resignifying archetypal characters, the humorist performs an exercise in cultural memory that Taylor (2003) defines through the relationship between archive and repertoire. This is not a repetition of the past, but rather an updating that challenges the identities denied in traditional educational systems (Rodríguez Suero, 2024).

Freire's (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed. Humor fosters critical awareness where dissent is key. The ability to laugh at hierarchies emotionally educates individuals to question power structures, an aspect that Giroux (2005) considers vital for cultural workers. Likewise, the use of mockery as a critical tool, analyzed by Mañach (2001) and taken up by researchers such as Salois (2017), proves to be a mechanism of resistance that levels social structures in the performance space.

Finally, the observed aesthetic hybridization represents a response to the musical and aesthetic coloniality described by Nimführ and Tejeda Martínez (2025). By validating popular culture in traditionally formal settings, humor contributes to a decolonization of sensibility. As Ojeda (2019) suggests, these socially engaged art projects function as auteur-driven pedagogies that transform the viewer, consolidating humor as an ally of the sovereignty of national thought.

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Conflict of interest

Authors declare no conflict of interests.

Authors' contribution

The authors participated in the design and writing of the article, in the search and analysis of the information contained in the consulted bibliography.



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