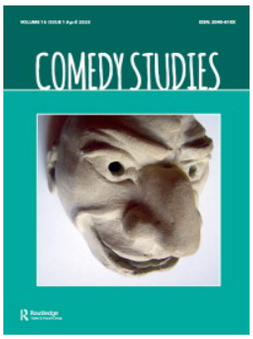

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The cabaret and its practices the description of a "textless" art form

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ABSTRACT

The texts of cabaret artists are generally not published and are otherwise only sparsely available. In this sense, cabaret is 'textless'; to define it based on text material therefore falls short. Instead, cabaret can rather be understood as a complex of practices and discourses, which can be described praxeologically. Aspects of the art form that have often been ignored up to now take in this approach centre stage. The approach chosen here is intended to identify the artistic and economic practices associated with cabaret and to allow conclusions to be drawn about the distinctive subject culture of the cabaret artist. This draft, which is still to be further elaborated, is intended to provide a new view of the social field, the practices, and the associated actors in order to contextualise the art form in its dependence on the human body, artefacts, media, time, and location.

KEYWORDS

Austrian cabaret; praxeology; theory of cabaret; Archival science; Theatre studies

Introduction

This paper begins with a very simple observation and a very simple conclusion from that observation: the texts of cabaret artists are generally not published and are otherwise only sparsely available. In this sense, cabaret is 'textless' – so the existing academic approach of defining cabaret based on the few existing texts is not appropriate.

In order to avoid any ambiguities in terms of definition and the use of the term, I would like to understand 'text' as a unit of realised/fixed speech, focusing on the eminent importance of fixation and (resulting) canonisation for the integration of artistic achievements into cultural memory (cf. Knobloch 2005, 32, Pudelek 2005, 521). Of course, cabaret is not 'textless' in the broadest sense, as will become clear from some of the following points. At the very least, the performances are preceded by something mentally fixed, which aims at repeatability (cf. Horstmann 2003, 595–596), just as there are various recordings of the events/performances for subsequent viewing. But the individual cabaret routine must be seen as an example of an unfinished

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work of art: The script is constantly being worked on, there is no final form, it thrives on performance and interaction. Nevertheless, the routine is more than a mere sketch: It is held together by the intention to create a coherent performance (cf. Thomé 2003, 833). In this sense, cabaret lacks the (written) 'text', the canonically established formulation (cf. Knobloch 2005, 38), i.e. the traditional starting point for a well-founded, cultural, and textual interpretation.

Instead of examining (often non-existing or lost) texts, cabaret can rather be understood as a complex of practices and discourses which can be described praxeologically. The term 'praxeology' refers to the science of practices. Practices are actions that several people in a society routinely perform. If we follow Andreas Reckwitz, we can make a general observation:

> A practice consists of certain routinised movements and activities of the body. […] This physicality of action and practice encompasses the two aspects of the "incorporation" of knowledge and the "performativity" of action. (Reckwitz 2003, 290)[1]

This approach makes it possible to focus on aspects of the art form that have often been neglected in the past.

The following article is a revised, expanded and finally translated version of a chapter I have already published (cf. Huber 2020) and consists of three parts: First, a brief overview of different attempts to define 'cabaret' is given to heuristically summarise the field and the conceptual elaborations. The focus here is on German-language literature, as international research on stand-up comedy only partially does justice to German-language cabaret. Research on stand-up comedy will therefore only be mentioned comparatively or in a form that expands the considerations. No further attempt will be made to differentiate cabaret from comedy or stand-up comedy, as can be found in other approaches (cf. Dunkl 2013), although this is not related to any (culturally) conservative or judgemental ambitions. Secondly, it is explained that a look at the Austrian cabaret archive reveals a side of the art form that has often little to do with the mentioned theoretical approaches. Finally, based on this observation, the approach chosen here is explained, which is intended to identify the artistic and economic practices associated with cabaret and to allow conclusions to be drawn about the distinctive subject culture of the cabaret artist. Three examples show what results the approach chosen here can produce.

The aim is not to establish a new (normative) definition or to disavow one or more of the existing attempts at a definition; however, the inadequacies of these for the objectives pursued here should be mentioned. This outline, which needs to be further developed, is intended to provide a new view of the social field, the practices, and the actors involved to contextualise the art form in its dependence on the human body, artefacts, media, time, and place. It is not possible to take all these points into account in this paper, but the possibilities of the approach should become clear. It is hoped that a praxeological approach can be combined with other inquiries that are interested in practices or take a more sociological view of cabaret or (Anglo-American) stand-up comedy, considering the differences between the two art forms as well as the many similarities between them (cf. Double 2013, Friedman 2014, Lockyer and Myers 2011, Quirk 2011, 2017, Tomsett 2023).

Cabaret definitions and research

Research on German-language cabaret is largely confined to literary, theatre, and cultural studies. The focus is on historical sketches and, in some cases, on (re)evaluations of individual artists. Other disciplines rarely deal with cabaret, although a few sociological or at least socio-related works are mentioned below. There is also a certain ambivalence in the genuine, very limited research on German-language cabaret. In many places, one reads that it is impossible to define the genre and that it is almost a futile endeavour to do so. This is the case, for example, with the cabaret historian Volker Kühn:

> The light muse is difficult to deal with, even in retrospect. That which is not prepared to take anything or anyone seriously, not even itself, defies categorisation in pigeonholes and card indexes even years later. What is written for the day does not want to have an effect after half a century, not even to be ridiculed. What, like cabaret, is ignited by the times and, depending on the mood, whim, and demand, is intended to amuse, cheer up or simply spoil the fun of its contemporaries, does not want to continue to provide entertainment after the ages.
>
> Not even the spelling is agreed upon. What the capital C in CABARET is to one person, the hard K in KABARETT with the double t is to another. Situated somewhere between corny jokes and duds, pepper and punchlines, agitation and amusement, criticism of the times and a wink, it fits neither in the theatre nor on the operetta stage. (Kühn 1984 quoted by Veigl 2013, 8–9; for a very similar point about stand-up comedy, cf. Double 2013, 94)

Following on from this, it would be going too far to present the lack of (written) text, which is the starting point for these considerations, as the defining element of cabaret. It could be used to distinguish it from classical theatre comedy, but it would not be a unique characteristic in the current theatre scene. As already mentioned, this observation should lead to further considerations that focus on the practices of cabaret artists on and off stage.

Historical and systematic work on cabaret

Despite the pessimism about the above attempts to define cabaret, there are some attempts to come to terms with cabaret in an overarching way. Various texts in cabaret historiography are dedicated to the historical and thus changeable approach, often focussing on political persecution, censorship or the 'literary' dimension of the performances and the texts handed down (cf. e.g. Bauschinger 2000). In the Austrian context, the extensive oeuvre of Hans Veigl and Iris Fink should be mentioned here first and foremost (cf. e.g. Veigl 2013, Fink and Veigl 2014, Fink and Veigl 2016, Fink 2022). Veigl and Fink largely dispense with definitions of form and content. Instead, they focus on the socio-cultural background.

Apart from a few pioneering works (cf. Vogel 1993, 11–14), the systematic elaboration begins with Jürgen Henningsen's *Theorie des Kabaretts* (Theory of Cabaret), published in 1967. With regard to the reception of cabaret shows, he states: 'Cabaret is play with the acquired knowledge context of the audience.' (Henningsen 1967, 9) And further: 'If cabaret is play with the acquired knowledge context of the audience, then its possible objects

are the fracture points of this knowledge context.' (Henningsen 1967, 29) Henningsen's approach leads to a definition that has found many followers due to its openness and timeless validity. It is interesting for further considerations insofar as it allows certain practices of the self and phenomena of subjectivation to be named which address essential areas of cabaret work: In a praxeological twist, 'playing with the audience's context of knowledge' implicitly includes the component of sanctioning by this very audience in the event of actions that contravene the rules (cf. Alkemeyer 2013, 58), where the 'fracture points' in knowledge, through the stronger emphasis on reciprocity, are given a negotiable component. Moreover, the context of knowledge is always generated individually and depends on time and location.

The next notable works of systematic cabaret theory appear the end of the 1980s. Michael Fleischer's semiotic approach should be mentioned here, which, following Henningsen, takes a more linguistically informed approach to the multimedia character of cabaret, which at least includes the art forms of literature and theatre (cf. Fleischer 1989). The multimedia character of cabaret means that cabaret consists of signs from several sign systems and in turn establishes its own sign system. Fleischer's approach offers a variety of possibilities for differentiation – he describes no less than 60 different methods used by cabaret – and is also used repeatedly, at least implicitly, for example when it is suggested that a successful interpretation of a cabaret performance should be based on a thorough transcription and metrical analysis of the texts (cf. Kapitza 2017, 215). However, its practicability must be questioned, as the preconditions for this approach, i.e. the lack of a textual basis, set limits early on. For the approach proposed here, this is too strongly orientated towards the 'text'.

In 1993, Benedikt Vogel published his attempt at a cabaret theory in which he locates the essence of cabaret in a 'Fiktionskulisse' ('fictional backdrop') that is only half built up, i.e. a diminished scenic fictionality: 'The halved fictionality of cabaret finds its expression in the fictional backdrop' (Vogel 1993, 9). Vogel advocates thinking about authorship, performers, genre character, the chronology of a performance within shows including image and sound and reception (cf. Vogel 1993, 17–18). It is therefore hardly surprising that Vogel develops a very extensive notation that goes far beyond the text and seeks to capture the language, movement, costumes, space, music, and duration of the performances (cf. Vogel 1993, 52ff.). A point that is also of great interest for a praxeological approach.

Kerstin Pschibl describes cabaret as a system of interaction that is located between (no longer) everyday communication and (not yet) theatre communication. This results in specific forms of presentation that are peculiar to cabaret. In her approach, which is heavily influenced by Ervin Goffman, Pschibl emphasises the fundamental time-bound nature of the content of cabaret: 'One of the essential characteristics of cabaret is its limited shelf life, i.e. the limited performability of cabaret shows' (Pschibl 1999, 51). With her sociological approach, Pschibl emphasises what will also be the focus here: The interplay between artist and audience is not only a necessary one, but also a changeable one, which requires cabaret artists to have a certain flexibility and a sound knowledge of their own marketability. In this sense, Pschibl's approach can also be understood as a sociologically founded continuation of Henningsen's 'knowledge context'.

The most recent attempt to systematise cabaret and even reduce it to a formula comes from Natalie Dunkl. In her 'integrative cabaret theory', Dunkl attempts to define cabaret as an independent (sub)genre of theatre with considerable theoretical effort. In doing so, she comes to the following conclusion, in a variation of Eric Bentley's famous theatre formula:

> Cabaret emerges from the (performed) conversation between an overt character (X) and a covert counterpart (Y). The overt character is embodied by a cabaret artist (A), while the audience (S) watches and continuously emits stronger and weaker feedback signals. The corresponding formula is: A as (X speaks with Y) and interacts with S (Dunkl 2019, 258).

All of these approaches emphasise to varying degrees the essential aspects of cabaret, which of course play a role in the perspective chosen here: the time- and location-bound nature of the content, the great formal freedom, the indispensable audience (and the interaction with it) and finally the blurred boundaries between performer and stage character, between stage dialogue and everyday communication.

All of these approaches have their qualities, but on the whole they do not seem well suited to saying anything about the art form itself from a meta-perspective, as they are all – with the exception of Pschibl's approach – very strongly dependent on the (often non-existent) text or the (historically no longer reconstructable) performance. For this reason, the approach chosen here, with its praxeological orientation, attempts to focus on certain practices that make up cabaret and that question the subject culture of the cabaret artist.

A praxeological approach

Praxeology deals with actions that various people in a society routinely perform and includes their incorporation as well as their (everyday) execution. According to Reckwitz, it is about the 'physical-bodily mobility of knowledge', which can be interpreted by the social environment of the actor and by the actor himself as a 'skilful performance' (cf. Reckwitz 2003, 290). Practices, in turn, in their specific (not entirely) individual connections, determine subject cultures (Reckwitz 2006, 11–12), which can therefore be differentiated based on practices. With regard to practices and the social fields they open up, Reckwitz sees the greatest opportunities for differentiation in personal and intimate relationships as well as in the Foucauldian 'technologies of the self' that include the material environment of the actors (cf. Reckwitz 2006, 16). For example, certain communication media – from printed books to web-based, multimedia forms of distribution – make certain complexes of social practices possible in the first place (cf. Reckwitz 2003, 290).

Practices prefigure certain courses of action, but do not determine them and must be understood in the context of the implicit rules of the respective 'game' (cf. Alkemeyer 2013, 47). The changeable component of practices is thus more strongly emphasised, which makes Reckwitz's approach a practicable further development of Pierre Bourdieu's field and habitus theory, which of course anticipates the thoughts on serious play and types of capital used here (cf. Bourdieu 1987, 97; 1995, 27; 2012, 17; 2001, 198–205).

In the following, the artistic field 'cabaret' is to be understood as a place with a certain subject culture that has been recognised as 'playable' (cf. Alkemeyer 2013, 34).

In this field, artistic and equally economically motivated design parameters that are primarily aimed at 'aesthetic pleasure' (cf. Maase 2019, 107–108) become effective. A need for (self-)description – i.e. a certain practice of self-localisation on the part of cabaret artists – also fits in with this. This makes it possible to change the perspective: In pragmatic and simplified terms, cabaret is often what the cabaret artist makes of it and what he or she finds an audience for. This fits in perfectly with the approach of Alfred Dorfer (1961–), one of Austria's best-known cabaret artists: '[The] cabaret is not a concept, rather a brand. It culminates all the different styles that find their home on the (cabaret) stage.' (Alfred Dorfer quoted in Maier and Potzinger 2015, 40). The 'brand', the commercial orientation, and the self-situating within certain boundaries, are essential aspects of cabaret that are less discussed by the actors (at least publicly).

As a result, the public performance on an unspecified, but at least cabaret-capable stage is constitutive, as is a self-image as a cabaret artist. This brings the various social practices to the fore as socialised, well-rehearsed routines that are performed regularly, habitually, and competently, and the implicit knowledge available for them. This results in an approach that explicitly focuses on the individual, acting person, the artist subject. For this reason, the self-statements and self-reflection in interviews are an important source for the following. This (it is to be hoped) phenomenon-adequate approach makes it possible to subsequently focus on the question of different practices and the associated notions of the subject.

The cabaret and its performers in the archive

The cabaret artist: one role among many

The collection of bequests and estates from the cabaret sector is generally a marginal phenomenon in archives. Thus, among many writers, musicians, and theatre makers, one or two cabaret bequests can usually be found. The Brenner Archive in Innsbruck, for example, is home to the estate of Otto Grünmandl, the Archive of Contemporaries in Krems to that of Karl Farkas (1893–1971) and the Literature Archive in the Austrian National Library in Vienna (amongst others) to that of Gerhard Bronner (1922–2007). The inclusion in other archives is easily explained: cabaret artists appear in a wide variety of media formations and roles outside of cabaret – as authors, musicians, playwrights, etc. – and are collected based on this role.

In contrast to these scattered 'individual cases', the Austrian Cabaret Archive in Graz (ÖKA for short) has set itself the task of systematically documenting different forms of cabaret in Austria. This mainly takes the form of exhibitions and publications. These holdings, in addition to several bequests and estates, consist largely of extensive audio and video collections, a library and a collection of newspaper articles with over 40,000 individual texts. There are separate collections on groups, stages and festivals, including posters, flyers, etc. (cf. Austrian Cabaret Archive, n. d.). Overall, the boundaries of the 'Austrian' in the ÖKA are to be seen in the primary area of activity: This is why, for example, Dirk Stermann (1965–), a German living in Austria and with Christoph Grissemann (1966–) part of the Austrian duo 'Stermann und Grissemann', is collected, but Dieter Nuhr (1960–), who also performs in Austria but is primarily active in Germany, is not.

As the texts of the actual performances are often missing or only available as cryptic notes, a phenomenon also familiar to English-language research on stand-up comedy (cf. Double 2020, 69–72), the cabaret artists are somewhat inauthentically represented in the archive, and material outside their cabaret work takes centre stage. These materials in the ÖKA show, as already indicated here, that the attribution of 'cabaret artist' always correlates with other roles of the respective actors, which contributes to the construction of a specific artist subject whose practices span many art forms. The different collections of the archive are examined from this point of view: the collection of newspaper cuttings, the library and, finally, the collection of audiovisual recordings. The last point is followed by some reflections based on a praxeological approach.

The various roles of the cabaret artist are particularly reflected in the largest section of the collection, the newspaper cuttings. In most cases, the reporting, if it is not an explicit review of a performance, is an interview. The cabaret artist answers questions as 'themselves'. In the foreground is the widespread assumption of a naive notion of 'authenticity', i.e. a seamless correspondence between stage persona and performer (cf. Gilbert 2020, 88.). The newspaper cuttings in the ÖKA also show the different aspects of cabaret artists' self-promotion, as well as the associated practices, which range from perennial favourites such as offensive vulgarity and a lack of 'political correctness' to criticism of the government and the phenomenon of consciously sexualising oneself.

Looking at the library in the ÖKA, which, alongside the collection of newspaper reports, represents the best documentation of over 100 years of cabaret history in Austria, it is noticeable that the book publications also only touch on cabaret in passing. The publication of entire shows is missing, with few exceptions: Most notably an annotated edition of the early programmes of Leo Lukas (1959–), whose estate is also in the archive, published with the participation of the ÖKA (cf. Kleindienst 2018). The cabaret artist Gunkl (Günther Paal, 1962–), who has made the texts of nine of his solo evenings freely available on his website, deserves special mention here.

There are also, of course, many (auto-)biographies of those involved, some of which include excerpts from various revues or brief historical outlines of certain stages of their work. Some of these books were also written with the participation of Georg Markus, an expert on Austrian cabaret history. However, these are primarily biographies of actors and actresses, and their involvement in cabaret is often just one stage in their lives. Most of the publications collected in the archive present a different artistic role of the respective artist. There are, for example, the poems by Otto Grünmandl and Georg Kreisler (1922–2011), the novels by Ludwig Müller (1966–) and Dirk Stermann or the collected columns by Alfred Dorfer and Thomas Maurer (1967–). The cabaret artists are also 'authors' – even if the ÖKA restricts its collection of books to satirical publications that are culturally related to cabaret.

As for the 'actual' cabaret, i.e. the recordings of individual performances, there is now lively publishing activity, much of which can also be found in the archive. The agency and distribution company *Hoanzl*, founded in 1991, has an almost monopolistic position in terms of video and DVD recordings of Austrian cabaret productions (*Preiser Records*, founded in 1952, must be mentioned here as a pioneer in the field of Austrian cabaret LPs.). First and foremost is the *Best of Kabarett* series, that presents shows

from all over the German-speaking countries, both on CD and DVD. In addition to other editions, the publishing programme also includes many individual titles by virtually all of Austria's well-known cabaret artists. The edition *Der österreichische Film* ('Austrian Film') is also published by *Hoanzl*. This includes many satirical works and productions involving cabaret artists, such as Wolfgang Murnberger's films with Josef Hader (1962–), Niki List's *Müllers Büro* (Muellers Office) with Andreas Vitásek (1956–) or several films by Harald Sicheritz, who worked with almost all the greats of the Austrian cabaret scene from the 1980s to the early 2000s. In addition to the *Hoanzl* releases, there are many other audio and video productions, i.e. many television and radio productions, which together document the cabaret scene well, especially since the late 1980s.

The audiovisual collections also show an expansion of the role descriptions and subject presentations of the artists, because here too the job description is broadening. In addition to writing and cabaret artistry, there is also acting, sometimes also screenwriting, and occasionally composing. From a praxeological point of view, the visual discourse of subject representation is also of interest with regard to the 'brand' of cabaret, which is strongly sales-oriented, including its dramaturgical form, spatially structuring and physical performance.

The recorded cabaret show

But no matter how many of these recordings are collected, the difference between final recording, performance and textual basis remains, as in all performative art forms. There is almost a performative contradiction between the stored publication of the performances, prepared by the media, which only represents an iteration of a series of performances, but nevertheless suggests a fixed form, and the 'spontaneous', one-off performance, which gives space to individual expressions. The fact that the recording of a cabaret evening, in whatever form, means an additional staging and uses a corresponding, adapted script, is usually not taken into consideration (further thoughts on this cf. Double 2013, 318–322). The recorded performances often have little to do with the everyday routine of touring and cabaret theatre. For example, Josef Hader's programme *Privat* (Private) (1994) was recorded in the Burgarena Finkenstein, an open-air stage remotely reminiscent of ancient theatre stages, and not in a classic cabaret venue.

The initial situation of the performance, that there is a text structure – or in some cases just a mind map – that is adapted to suit the place, the audience or the time frame, can sometimes be reconstructed from the (unfortunately few) pre- and posthumous estates. For example, the estate of Karl Farkas, one of *the* Austrian cabaret legends, preserved in Krems, contains different versions of one and the same sketch, each with new and interchangeable transitions, so that it could be included in several programmes. This practice can also be seen in the case of Peter Orthofer (1940–2008), whose estate is administered by the ÖKA and who wrote shows for Alfons Haider (1957–) and Hans Peter Heinzl (1942–1996), among others.

Other moments during the performances which represent interaction with the audience, whether spontaneous or planned, are naturally lost in the recordings. There is also a certain variance between première and dernière, as is usual in theatre

performances, which can be observed especially in the later cabaret shows of Lukas Resetarits (1947–). To make an oblique analogy to music: There are only live albums, no studio LPs, 'overdubs' must be accepted here and without knowing the details. The fact that audio and video recordings have been produced (and sold with great financial success) for the past 30 years or so means that there are now at least a few recorded versions of a cabaret artist's tour – in contrast to the not-so-distant 1960s, when recorded shows were the absolute exception (cf. Huber 2023). For some performances, however, the ÖKA has a second or even third recording from various radio broadcasts or through unpublished recordings, or 'bootlegs', from the established cabaret theatre Theatercafé in Graz, as well as through generous donations, such as from the journalist Peter Blau, who for many years recorded many revues in Vienna (at the Kulisse, Spektakel, Niedermair, etc.).

To sum up these thoughts: Looking at the archive's collection, it becomes clear that the artists perform in many roles and produce a lot of material that cannot necessarily be categorised as cabaret. This should not be understood as a shortcoming, but as a simple fact. The approach described focuses on certain areas of observation that Reckwitz identifies with subject cultures (cf. Reckwitz 2008, 135–147); in this section, particular attention is paid to media practices, i.e. issues of recording, transmission and distribution. Basically, as mentioned, work, consumption, exchange (with oneself and others), political convictions and the associated commitment are used as defining aspects of a subject form – including meta-reflexive/pragmatic turns (cf. Alkemeyer 2013, 49).

Subject culture, practices and networks

This brief survey of the ÖKA's collections suggests a subject-centred approach, which in turn allows conclusions to be drawn about subject culture and subject stagings based on existing practices and discourse formations (cf. Reckwitz 2012, 239–268; Reckwitz 2016a). Here are three examples that arise from observations in the archive – but which also go beyond its limits. 1. the self-image in (meta-textual) performative work, 2. the implicit knowledge of cabaret practices through current media distribution, and 3. the possible positioning of artists in the field.

Self-image as a cabaret artist: on stage

In this context, the performance of the artist-subject presents itself as an inseparable and (intrinsic) core of the art form of cabaret (cf. Reckwitz 2016b, 201), i.e. a performance in front of an audience that aims for uniqueness and unrepeatability. However, there is also somewhat of a 'service component' to the performance (cf. Reckwitz 2016b, 203). This provokes immanent evaluation, at least on the part of the recipient, and acts as a corrective – the cabaret artist observes him or herself and the audience's reaction and changes his or her approach. This is where the implicit knowledge, the 'skilful performance' of the actor who can adapt to the prevailing rules becomes apparent.

This can also be interpreted to mean that cabaret artists are increasingly becoming 'public figures' whose artistic endeavours are easier to follow and are also charged with certain expectations which vary depending on the media (cf. Reckwitz 2016b, 212). In the words of David P. Marshall, it can be said that cabaret artists have at

least partially arrived in the 'star system' and that they themselves (and not their art form) have become a 'brand' (cf. Marshall 1997, 130–132), as evidenced by various interviews and series of articles.

Therefore, it can easily happen that the performer and his stage persona become indistinguishable. This well-known problem has led to several attempts at differentiation, broadly based on a three-part distinction proposed by Henningsen in 1967. Henningsen distinguishes between the stock character or archetype who inhabits the stage, a second character, i.e. the cabaret artist who plays the stock character with satirical, comic intentions, and finally the real person of the cabaret artist (cf. Henningsen 1967, 19–23). But, as is so often the case, things become interesting when the seemingly clearly distinct personas merge and their constructed nature becomes apparent.

An excellent example of how the interplay of the public persona/figure of the cabaret artist, monetary/economic interests and the skilful performance can have a reflective, artistic effect is the work of Roland Düringer (1963–). Düringer's often multi-layered works, which also leave the realm of cabaret and acting – in 2016, for example, he founded a political party – play with conventions and thus with the audience's expectations. His show *Düringer spielt Dürflinger* (Düringer plays Dürflinger) from 2004, in which Düringer plays the stage character 'Dürflinger', who in turn is a big Düringer fan and performs the best-known Düringer sketches badly, allows special insights into different practice complexes in this context.

On the one hand, Düringer presents the 'star' that he himself has become, along with the myth-making that goes with it, and at the same time plays with the prejudice of the 'authentic' and 'undisguised' cabaret artist. On the other hand, the performance itself, which works with elements of cringe comedy, offers insights into the small-scale stage actions and props. The failure of the sketches, including physical aspects such as bad timing, slips of the tongue or simply a bad parody, demonstrates their absent, functioning form – provided, of course, that the viewer is familiar with Düringer's past shows. Since Düringer was one of the best-known and most successful cabaret artists in Austria at the time of the performance, following the popular successes *Benzinbrüder Show* (The Gasoline Brothers Show) (1997), *Regenerationsabend* (Regeneration Evening) (1999) and *250ccm/Die Viertelliterklasse* (250ccm/Quarter Litre Class) (2001), this can certainly be assumed. However, the second half of the evening shows that re-evaluation is part of the rules of the game and the associated practices: After Düringer as Dürflinger has increasingly confused the audience by the intermission, in the second half Düringer relies on his usual approach and situates the stage character Dürflinger in his socio-cultural context and then turns his everyday ridiculousness into a crowd-pleasing show.

Düringer shows how great the implicit knowledge of cabaret and its conventions is and how much performers and recipients participate in it. A descriptive interpretation of cabaret could end here with Henning's 'knowledge context' and his distinction between the various roles of the cabaret artist or Pschibl's interaction system. More important, however, seems to me to be the knowledge of the practices and subject culture of the 'cabaret star' using Düringer as an example. The cabaret artist's self-reflection reveals what cabaret (at a certain time and place) demands of the artist and the audience – and this is not just knowledge or a specific form of

communication, but rather an acquaintance with the implicit forms of behaviour and subjectivity typical of cabaret.

Becoming a cabaret artist: influences, implicit knowledge and self-image off stage

At this point, we should take another look at the ÖKA's audiovisual collection and the fact that cabaret shows can easily be consumed at home. After all, this is also the reason why an analysis such as that of the Düringer show is possible at all 20 years after the performance. Following Bruno Latour's complex linking of technical, economic, scientific and (in the broadest sense) changes and developments in the history of mentality and consumption, I would like to suggest that cabaret recordings should be understood as an advanced form of inscription and mobilisation of this art form (cf. Latour 2006, 280). This refers not only to the archivable CD or DVD, but also to the availability of cabaret (and stand-up comedy) recordings on platforms such as YouTube or Netflix. The reproduction and dissemination of cabaret performances through mobile inscriptions (cf. Latour 2006, 273) and the associated dissemination of knowledge about certain (performative) practices and the subject culture of cabaret leads to new forms of comparison and self-reflection.

It is now not uncommon for cabaret artists to begin learning their idols' sketches by heart as fans. Examples of this – e.g. the cabaret artists David Scheid (1983–) or the cabaret agent Julia Sobieszek (1986–) – can be found in the podcast *Pension Schöller* by Rudi Schöller (1975–) (cf. Schöller 2021–). Each episode features an Austrian cabaret artist as a guest, and Schöller's opening question is: 'How did you actually get into cabaret?' This shows not only the massive influence that cabaret artists such as Josef Hader and Alfred Dorfer had on the next generation of cabaret artists, but also the fact that the art form continues to open internationally, especially to the English-speaking world. Erika Ratcliffe (1994–), for example, describes how she doesn't consume Austrian or German-language cabaret at all, but is primarily interested in American stand-up comedy. Michael Buchinger (1992–) also says that the American author Tina Fey (1970–) and her TV series *30 Rock* had a great influence on him long before others. The distribution of cabaret thus leads to the dissemination of implicit knowledge: Through the consumption of readily available cabaret shows (often as early as childhood), behaviour that conforms to the rules of cabaret is incorporated. And this is a different kind of knowledge than that which, for example, cabaret artists Simon Pichler (1956–) and Leo Lukas pass on in their cabaret workshops, where, for example, Campbell's 'hero's journey' or methods from improvisation theatre are made usable for cabaret (cf. Pichler 2021).

Analysing the interviews in terms of the artists' self-image provides much more than an aid to interpreting a particular show or a collection of influences. The way in which cabaret – or, looking beyond the boundaries of language, (stand-up) comedy – has become increasingly mobile as a result of the media changes of recent decades not only influences the form and content of what is presented, but also enables the development of a cabaret habitus of its own with forms of differentiation in relation to Bourdieu's types of capital. It is therefore not surprising that the answers to 'How did you get into cabaret?' in the millennial generation portray cabaret (and comedy)

as a career choice. Elli Bauer (1987–), for example, points out the wide array of practices involved: A successful show includes not only text, music and staging, but also social media profiles, a website, an agency, a press release, photos, flyers, posters, a stage rider, merchandise and, especially at the beginning of the career, participation in competitions. All of this in turn requires a network of professionals with the appropriate expertise and equipment (cf. Bauer 2021).

But it is not only this small-scale analysis of performances or the attempt at a cross-work interpretation or observations on the interplay of media distribution and self-image that result from the question of the practices prevalent in cabaret. Going back to the last point on Bauer's practices: A look at the many cabaret competitions and prizes shows how far the market-oriented self-image of the economically orientated subject form has progressed – not only among the actors and actresses, but in the industry, including the audience.

Self-positioning in the cabaret field

In addition to prestigious cabaret prizes, awarded on the basis of jury decision, such as the *Salzburger Stier* (Bull of Salzburg) (1982–) or the *Österreichische Kabarettpreis* (Austrian Cabaret Prize) (1999–), there are many local audience and jury prizes, each of which is associated with a competitive evening event. It should be noted that Austrians win at German and Swiss cabaret competitions and, of course, the reverse is also true. With the exception of the *Grazer Kleinkunstvogel* (Cabaret bird of Graz) (1987–) and the *Freistädter Frischling* (Piglet of Freistadt) (1995–), there is usually only little fame to be gained by the winners. The competitions, which are often only advertised regionally, receive only minimal media attention.

The development whereby cabaret artists are increasingly competing against each other indicates that, apart from the cultivation of a certain skill and knowledge, entry into the field is being more explicitly standardised (cf. Alkemeyer 2013, 60). This is linked to the implicit modes of action already indicated, which sanction regular and irregular behaviour (cf. Alkemeyer 2013, 58): The audience ultimately decides on the awarding of prize in most cases. In addition, the competition situation means an interplay of recognition and addressing, which leads to the development of certain (distinction) practices in the first place (cf. Alkemeyer 2013, 63): Looking at how Austrian cabaret has developed over the last 40–50 years), there are new, specific dramaturgical sequences that are coordinated for 10, 20 or 30 min, depending on the competition specifications. Likewise, as already indicated in the previous sections, the individual competitions require, aside from the obvious talent and a 'skilful performance', application materials including video recordings, show outlines and professional photographs, which indicates a knowledge of self-presentation, or a social field consolidated in this direction.

The question of a position in the social field is linked to more and more prerequisites and distinctions. The competition is a possible entry condition into the field, also to be understood as repositioning by increasing symbolic capital, with the consequence that this represents a precondition for contacting a management or a booking agency. However, with the proliferation of competitions and the reciprocal effect of the low prestige of the prizes, this function is increasingly disappearing.

Regarding the ÖKA, in many cases winning a competition means being included in the collections for the first time, as this is when, for example, newspaper coverage, i.e. a textual, discursive moment, begins. As a result of the self-presentation described above, which becomes necessary even before entering the 'actual' field, cabaret artists also determine the discourse about themselves for a long time: most of the first reports are paraphrases of the promo material they have written themselves. In order to get a nuanced picture here, a longer observation of the self-presentation and self-marketing that takes place on the websites and on social media would have to be carried out (cf. Giacomuzzi 2017).

This poses major difficulties for the archive and its collecting activities. Appearances on social media do not have to be a marketing extension of stage activities, but artists' activities on social media can become the reason for attempting a stage career in the first place. More and more cabaret artists are appearing on major stages who have not taken the route of competitions and small stages but have generated their audience *via* other channels such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok or Instagram. Recent examples of this include Michael Buchinger, 'Toxische Pommes' and the duo 'Dr. Bohl' (Paulus, 1996–, and Benjamin Gaspari, 1999–), who sold out the Wiener Stadtsaal (with a capacity of around 400 people) with their very first performances. This clearly shows how the entry conditions into the field are changing and how the subject form 'cabaret artist' is being enriched by other roles, e.g. 'Youtuber', 'TikToker' or 'influencer' – or perhaps vice versa.

A comparison of the two approaches to the field reveals two completely different compositions of artist and audience: The aspiring cabaret artists meet an interested audience at the above-mentioned competitions, while the aforementioned internet personalities bring along their fans from their respective platforms, who are often not very interested in cabaret per se. The subject form 'cabaret artist' thus takes on a form that is less and less indicative of the 'actual' practices immanent in the stage but which is of interest as a practice in the sense of the technologies and communication media used or a socio-spatial positioning (cf. Alkemeyer 2013, 63). Whether 'Dr. Bohl' and others perform cabaret, comedy, skits, reels or whatever: The interested audience ultimately also follows them to the traditional cabaret venues, as their operators have recognised the economic potential of the artists and book them proactively and even without an existing stage show, as in the case with 'Toxische Pommes', for example (cf. Paulitsch 2022). Again, cabaret is what the cabaret artist makes of it, finding a stage and an audience.

Another aspect of the increasingly differentiated field is the growing number of opportunities for positioning. The Vienna-based *PCCC** (*Politically Correct Comedy Club*), which has been run by Denice Bourbon (1976–) and Josef Jöchl (1981–) since 2017, is worth a mention. The artists of the *PCCC** are politically aware and place the concerns of underrepresented marginalised groups from the LGBTQIA+ spectrum at the centre of their performances. In this sense, the *PCCC** can be understood as a stage (with the main venue being WUK in Vienna), with very specific ideas about performances and audience composition prevailing, which means 'sensitive readings' of material before the performances and a departure from the heteronormative audience as a target group (cf. Waldboth 2022, 13). In the meantime, some artists, above all Malarina (Marina Lacković, 1990–), winner of the *Österreichischer Kabarettpreis* and the

Salzburger Stier among others, have managed to move away from the 'niche' of the *PCCC** to the main stages of the business.

From a sociological perspective, the phenomena described here can be read as a generational change, both on the part of the actors and actresses and on the part of the audience (cf. Moretti 2009, 30–31). This applies both to the TikTokers and YouTubers who are successful on the big stages and to the *PCCC** as a whole, even if one places it in the long line of ancestors of feminist theatre-making and cabaret. It is also possible to scrutinise the cabaret scene and the changes that have taken place in it to see whether certain forms of expression have perhaps outlived their artistic fallibility and whether transformation thresholds can be found in cabaret that have led to this (cf. Moretti 2009, 23–25). The Covid-19 pandemic would be an obvious candidate for this, but that would be a topic for another text.

Summary

The praxeological approach to cabaret sheds light on several areas of the art form that have been largely ignored. On the one hand, it brings into focus the practices of performers that can be directly linked to their stage persona, i.e. the (physical) performance and practices of interaction with the audience and with themselves. On the other hand, the artistic and economic aspects of the subject culture associated with cabaret reveal the marketing of one's own person, which is expressed in competitive situations or advertising materials, including the associated self-stylisation.

Inextricably linked to the subject of cabaret culture is the conflation of many roles. A look at the ÖKA shows that the terms 'cabaret artist' or 'cabaret performer', where material on the respective artists is available, is usually associated with other roles such as 'author', 'actor' or 'musician'. It is only in the last few decades, since audiovisual recordings have been recognised as marketable, that (theoretically) 'pure' cabaret artists have been available for the archive.

If you look at the collection, many areas are already uncollectable or will be in the near future. The competitive situation described above is an example of this, as is the ever-changing media landscape. Social media content is (currently) only relevant for the ÖKA if it is picked up by conventional mass media. The more the promotion of cabaret events and the primary artistic activity shifts to the Internet – e.g. through cabaret artists' websites, YouTube channels, Facebook, Instagram or TikTok postings, etc. – the less material can be collected. The less material that can be collected, the more 'textless', as understood here and also in a broader sense, cabaret becomes. However, the practices of the performers in these forms of communication and self-presentation would not only be highly relevant in terms of the chosen approach, but these materials sometimes actually offer the only evidence of different artists. How an expansion of the collection could take place must (for the time being) remain open at this point.

The praxeological approach thus offers great potential for the under-researched art form of cabaret. In this sense, the possibilities outlined here should be understood as a suggestion for further work that could also be used historically. For example, self-portraits in interviews, a detailed description of the artists' various fields of activity, extensive research on touring activities or a look at the props used and the physical aspects of the respective performance are suitable follow-ups to this paper. Going

one step further, it would be possible, for example, to look at praxeological constellations and changes in the context of media revolutions (radio, TV, Internet, social media, streaming services), competitive situations with other forms of entertainment (comedy, sitcom, game show) or changes in the financing system (stages, competitions, management structures, royalties). Gender relations – on, in front of and behind the stage – could and should also be analysed more closely. Last but not least, with reference to the title and the starting point of this paper: One could also ask what role the practice of writing down cabaret texts plays, i.e. when a conceptually oral medium is transferred to writing, and what particularities, for example, certain historical periods or groups of artists exhibit. The role of a (missing or existing) archive should also be considered in this context.

Note

1. All translations, unless otherwise stated, are the author's own.

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