

Political satire in Germany: from the political *Kabarett* of the thirties to Comedy TV

Gemma Casadevall

- *Political satire in Germany is related to a tradition inherited from French cabaret but taken on as their own by a handful of intellectuals, principally left-wing, in the twenties and thirties of the last century: the so-called political Kabarett. Its roots in the political avant garde give it a prestige that survives to the present day as well as a certain immunity to the media impact of other mass TV products, such as Comedy TV. Hitler made Kabarett the “political enemy” of the Third Reich, but the capitulation of Nazism also saw the rebirth of the genre, stronger than ever. Cabarets sprung up like mushrooms throughout Germany, although mainly in the two cities that had been the cradle for the genre, Berlin and Munich. A good cabaret artist knows no taboos: everything is allowed, provided the subject is handled with talent and they do not resort to silliness. This would be the line taken by the masters of the genre from Germany of the seventies, eighties and up to the present day, such as Dieter Hildebrandt and Gerhard Polt. Television has not damaged these Kabarett classics but has included them in its programming. There are those who say that Comedy, as a more crude form of political satire, threatens the cabaret tradition in Germany, but there are also those who have used it as their example, halfway between the two styles, proving that it is possible for both to coexist: namely Harald Schmidt, the most widely broadcast of all present-day cabaret artists.*

Keywords

Kabarett, cabaret, political cabaret, humour, satire, parody, Germany, Berlin, Munich, Kaiser, Weimar republic, Nazism, Third Reich, exile, capitulation, allied occupation, post-war, comedy, television

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1. Introduction

In Germany, talking about political humour means referring to a past quite a time before the birth of television and, essentially, to one word: *Kabarett*. This is a term adopted from the original French word *cabaret*, also with connotations of a subculture, bohemian life and musicals but which in Germany, more than in other countries where this genre has also been taken on board, has a political aspect and is related to intellectuality, whether it takes place at night or not.

The formula is the same: a small stage, an equally small company with just a few actors, often monologue experts, and a mix of humour and satire with a certain *carte blanche* to say what would be pure hard criticism in serious terms.

This worked in the twenties and thirties, when renowned journalists and writers such as Kurt Tucholsky, Erich Kästner and, albeit in passing, Bertolt Brecht placed themselves at the service of political *Kabarett*. In exile, it was also the political humour, with a more decadent touch, of Erika and Klaus Mann, the children of Thomas Mann, once Nazism had swept aside any criticism. And it existed once again after the Second World War, in a Germany occupied by the allied forces, where the victors and the defeated allowed themselves to be captivated by the rebirth of cabaret.

Goodbye to Berlin, by Christopher Isherwood, is probably the most accurate literary summary of what the arrival of Nazism meant for German cabaret of all kinds, not only political. The writer's fascination with the Berlin ambiances of the time also reflects the link of *Kabarett* with German intellectuality and particularly left-wing intellectuals or, as in the case of the Mann family, the intellectuality of those who went by the name of frivolous *enfants terribles*. But Berlin was not the only key city of *Kabarett*. As with the political

power, the Prussian capital had a domestic rival in Munich.

Berlin to the north, Munich to the south, with the consequent differences between the Prussian and Bavarian world. But in both cases there was a common core. It was essentially political humour, betrayal performed at night before a small theatre audience: this was the essence of *Kabarett* at the beginning. From this setting in the thirties or the post-war period, *Kabarett* went on to humorists, impersonators and *Show Meister* on public and private television with record audiences. Evidently, there has been a change in format, not only technical, which is also related to another German tradition, also beginning with a K, namely *Karneval*, the festival where anything goes until Ash Wednesday, the start of the 40 days of lent in Christianity. More multitudinous and noisier, less intellectual than political cabaret but equally rooted in the German tradition of political satire, serving as a prelude to the genuine settlement of scores between "real" politicians. In Bavaria, the meaning of *Ash Wednesday* now has little to do with going hungry, or thirsty, and a lot to do with meetings between politicians who, on this day, turn the monumental beer tents into a battleground where anything goes. Politicians exchange blows dialectically but at a distance, each in his or her own party's tent, in the same way that, throughout the carnival, his or her impersonators have gone onto the stage to parody them pitilessly, generally in the presence of the "victim", be it Chancellor Angela Merkel or the local political leader. This was the case in the time of the Bavarian patriarch, Franz Joseph Strauss, and is still the case with the heir to power in the most prosperous *land* in the country, Edmund Stoiber. The politician has no other option than to laugh, in amongst the audience, aware that all eyes and now also TV cameras are looking for the smallest sign of irritation that reveals a lack of a sense of humour.

Present-day TV cabaret and Comedy have both been nourished by two traditions: that of political and literary *Kabarett* and that of the tents at the popular *Karneval*, where political satire strips off its artifice to reach the people. As used to happen in the cabarets of the twenties and thirties, the master or *Meister* is the one who is the fastest, with the sharpest tongue and the greatest capacity to go the furthest.

But behind TV comedy there are not the great writers of that time or the masters of improvisation of carnival but teams of scriptwriters who closely study the daily comings

and goings of politics, a minister's slip-up or the reaction of opponents, and who bind the programme together. Part of the work of good humorists is precisely to make people believe that they have personally thought up what they have just said, perhaps spontaneously.

Political *Kabarett* did not die with the arrival of television, at least not in Germany. Cabaret artists are professionals of renown, and good impersonators of today's politicians, be it Merkel or Stoiber, have a full schedule. Television hasn't killed it but it did provide a substitute, Comedy, which is not always of the same quality as that required by German tradition. Although it is more or less reminiscent of the same structure, behind it are scriptwriters addicted to excess and obsessed with audience ratings. While the private channels fight to have the most audacious comedy, public broadcasters keep to their long-standing masters of political cabaret and fight over the master of masters, for decades, one of the few examples that prove that harmony between *Kabarett* and Comedy is possible: Harald Schmidt, the solitary hero of the eponymous programme, although new formulas are regularly searched for. He does not need any other references. Anarchic, in the tradition of the historic Karl Valentin; irreverent with the left wing, right wing or whatever suits his purpose, as was Kurt Tucholsky in the thirties, and faster than Dieter Hildebrandt and his colleagues from the post-war period onwards. Schmidt will not go down in the history of literature. His sphere is television, but he has been able to win the game over gross Comedy and keep up the tradition of *Kabarett* on television.

The following sections recount some legendary names in the tradition of political *Kabarett*, exponents of the phases this has passed through in its little more than one hundred years of history, up to television parody and Comedy, split between masters and sappers.

2. The origins: Valentin, Tucholsky and *Die Weltbühne*

It all started with Karl Valentin (1882-1948) and the collapse of the *Kaisertum*, the empire. Not only the empire of Wilhelm II ended after the First World War but also the rigid censorship that had pacified the work of political satire until

then. The Weimar republic opened the door wide to political *Kabarett*. It was even a promising victim, both due to its political weakness as well as its arbitrary nature.

From Munich, Valentin imposed a new style of theatre, allegedly for the left-wing, onto the image of the traditional 'pushing and pulling' between a Prussian Berlin and a Bavaria that knows how to laugh. Theatre with a beer, capable of reaching both the common people and intellectuals. Such was the Valentin who, in 1911 and throughout the twenties, in tandem with Liesl Karlstadt, came out of the Bavarian bars to achieve renown throughout the country, even in the still Prussian Berlin.

Valentin understood what, years later, Jürgen Hennig would explain in his book *Theorie des Kabarett*s as a summary of political *Kabarett*: namely a game of complicity with an audience that, right from the start, shares certain knowledge with the cabaret artist. In other words, in order to create generalised laughter at the expense of a specific blunder and not of the character in question, it is necessary for the audience to be au fait with this blunder. Something that is relatively easy in our era of television with the repetition, even sometimes to the extreme, of recurring images of politicians but which, at that time, did not focus so much on a particular in appropriate phrase but on more firmly established and less particular attitudes.

Valentin embodied the start of political *Kabarett* whereas Kurt Tucholsky (1890-1935) was its consolidation. Valentin was a kind of clown, cabaret artist, mimic and intelligent political rebel, in the same way that Tucholsky, in addition to writing scripts for cabaret, became the most irreverent disseminator of political satire using the journalistic medium that became his *Die Weltbühne* (world stage). A sensual magazine, a paradigm of social criticism against everything and, in some way, the forebear of what are still the most firmly established magazines of political humour in Germany, *Titanic* and *Eulenspiegel*, clearly more accustomed to caricature and witticisms than *Die Weltbühne* was but nonetheless connected with this tradition. Tucholsky was a journalist, cabaret writer, poet, satirist and, ultimately, politically persecuted, as was inevitable.

His initial success started in the time of the Kaiser, between 1907 and 1911, as a social democratic party member. Also dating from this time was his idea of opening, in Berlin, what would now be a cocktail bar and bookshop,

where each person buying one of his books would be given a glass of schnapps. Tucholsky family background was Jewish but he gave up this religion during this decade, a long time before the Nazis came to power. He had even been labelled anti-Semitic because his texts also attacked what he called "Jewish meanness".

But Tucholsky cannot be put into a single critical box. His writings, his satires, disparaged both the military nature of the time of the Kaiser, before and after the empire had collapsed and the defeat of the First World War, as well as the political hypocrisy and legal apparatus of the Weimar republic, shaken by attacks against colleagues in the profession, on the left, democrats or simply editors, such as himself. Tucholsky scorned the Weimar republic in the same way he had scorned the Kaiser's empire, and *Die Weltbühne* became his means of criticism. He combined it with his work as a cabaret author, under his own name as well as the many pseudonyms he employed, both to hide his identity and also to conceal a lack of personnel. *Die Weltbühne* had other directors, such as Siegfried Jacobsohn and Carl von Ossietzky, before and after Tucholsky respectively, but he was its heart and soul.

Because of this, and in spite of having separated himself from the Jewish community, he could not survive under Nazism. Like so many other intellectuals of the time, such as Bertolt Brecht and Thomas Mann and family, Tucholsky emigrated. He did so at the beginning of the thirties, tired of increasing pressure against him and his *Die Weltbühne*. His destination was not France or the United States but Switzerland and afterwards Scandinavia, a meeting point of social democratic and also communist exile. From there he tried to continue with the magazine, with Ossietzky still in Germany, until the latter ended up in prison and, immediately after Hitler came to power in 1933, *Die Weltbühne* was banned. In exile Tucholsky continued his work as best he could, while the Nazis added his name to the list of "degenerate" authors whose books were burned as a ritual prior to their being banned.

Political cabaret, not only that of Tucholsky, disappeared under the Third Reich, albeit only in German territory. Some of those who stayed behind, such as Werner Fink, ended up in concentration camps. Tucholsky did not end up like this but neither did he live long enough to enjoy Germany's surrender. In 1935 he died from an overdose of sleeping ta-

blets at a hospital in Göteborg, Sweden. According to some biographers, it was suicide, although others believe it was an accident.

Tucholsky was considered to be one of the most prestigious journalists of the thirties and he represented, not only in how he lived but also in how he died, what characterises German political *Kabarett* of his time: acidic criticism, mental agility and also the stereotype that sarcasm is the delight of sad people. He did not have a happy existence nor was his end happy. In Germany, one of his most famous sayings, "Soldiers are assassins", is still a slogan on tee shirts and banners at anti-war demonstrations today.

3. The *Kabarett* in exile of the Mann family

Tucholsky departed and Bertolt Brecht and Helene Weigel left Germany some years later, just in 1933, after the fire at the Reichstag was used by Hitler's followers to take it out on communists, social democrats and other enemies of the regime. Their books also ended up on the bonfire and *Die Dreigröschener* (the Threepenny Opera), with music by Kurt Weill and its fantastic king of the bandits and brothels, Mack the Knife, took a long holiday.

With so many intellectuals in exile, the Nazis need not have bothered banning political cabaret. But they did. From the array of locales in the twenties and early thirties it became a politically controlled *Kabarett*, as was the whole country. This didn't kill the profession but it did force it to choose, as with many other branches, between exile or political persecution.

Tucholsky, Brecht and Thomas Mann were among the group who fled in time. Two of Mann's children were also with them, Erika (1905-1969) and Klaus (1906-1949), both writers like their father, but keen to shock on their own account. With them, *Kabarett* took up its path in exile. The Mann brother and sister decided to found what has gone down in history as a synonym for political *Kabarett* in exile, "Die Pfeffermühle" (pepper mill) in 1933. They founded it in Munich, up to then a place with quite a tradition in political *Kabarett*. They didn't only include satire but also a decadent lifestyle and passion for exhibitionism and sexual ambiguity, especially on the part of Erika.

The experiment in Munich didn't last long with the birth of

the Third Reich and the family left. Starting with the parents and then the whole company of Die Pfeffermühle, namely the brother and sister, plus her friend and lover, Therese Giehse, a pianist and a composer. The Mann *Kabarett* went on tour in Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands and other places, while the authorities of the Third Reich classified it as "the enemy of Germany" and stripped Erika of her German citizenship. She completed her "degenerate" persona both publicly and privately by marrying the renowned homosexual Wystan Hugh Auden, friend of Christopher Isherwood. Die Pfeffermühle thereby forged itself a terrible reputation among Nazi officials and also the rest of "sensible" society. With all this, the company disembarked in the United States and made their debut with their *Kabarett* in New York.

Somewhat the same happened as with Bertolt Brecht: the label of enemy of the Third Reich helped the company get into the United States but did not win them an audience. At first curious, they eventually foundered on the indifference and hostility of North American authorities, who saw them (and watched them) as potential enemies.

Erika put the *Kabarett* to one side and, when her parents followed them into exile in the United States, she became her father's secretary and interpreter. Die Pfeffermühle expired, as did the political *Kabarett* that had remained inside the Third Reich. The company of the Mann brother and sister was not revived after the Second World War. For Erika, as for Thomas Mann, return to her country of origin was unthinkable. Finally, the suicide of her partner in arms, brother and soul mate, Klaus, in 1949, was such a profound watershed in her life that it became impossible to look back.

Erika and Klaus' Die Pfeffermühle could not be exported outside the Germanic sphere, as usually happens with all political satire, perhaps because of the old rule of complicity with the audience that was so well-known and practised by Valentin. Germany would therefore have to wait for *Zero Hour* (1945) to see this form of *Kabarett* triumph once again in the territory that had expelled it.

4. From allied occupation to television *Kabarett*

"If all the plans come to fruition, soon there will be more cabarets here than houses still standing". This sentence is

by Erich Kästner (1899-1974), probably the most successful German author of his time, and the time and place were symptomatic: 1945 in Munich. One of the cities most closely related to the history of Nazism and one of the many throughout the country where the Zero Hour landscape was made up of ruins.

With this phrase, Kästner summed up the rebirth of locales dedicated to cabaret, political or artistic, of the post-war period. On any corner, eaten away by bombs, a *Kabarett* poster would appear, as if spontaneously generated. In spite of the scarcities of the post-war period, or perhaps because of the Germans' need to feel alive again, Munich and Berlin once again, and in a short period of time, became the seats of this supposedly minor art. The country was being rebuilt from its ruins and *Kabarett* was also revitalised, as if it were part of a kind of common strategy of the allies and survivors to overcome the past.

Kästner was also among those who practised this kind of reconstruction. In 1951 he founded a bar in Munich, whose name said it all: Die kleine Freiheit ('the little freedom'). The author was basically known for his absolute bestseller of the time, *Emil und der Detektiv*, a book written in 1928 that crossed the barriers of so-called children's literature, was translated into more than 50 languages and also filmed back in the time of the Weimar republic. He was a collaborator on Jacobsohn and Tucholsky's *Weltbühne*, his books were burned by the Nazis, as were others, but the Gestapo came to get him at his house to interrogate him. However, in spite of it all he didn't go into exile nor was he deported. He survived Nazism in silence and, once the war was over, he saw that the time had come to retrieve *Kabarett*. His was a more literary than political variant but, nonetheless, on the stage of *Die kleine Freiheit* they spoke of Nazi Germany, the war and the destruction left behind by the Third Reich.

Probably nowhere has seen such a development of this genre that can be compared with the German case. The double capacity for cabaret in Berlin and Munich gave way to a multiplicity scattered throughout the country and particularly in the Ruhr basin, around what would, after the Second World War, become the provisional federal capital of Bonn, a statute that remained in place until the country was reunified. The Ruhr basin is also the domestic seat of the noisiest and most popular *Karnevals*, the other source that has nourished present-day mass TV cabaret.

Those artists totally related to literature or journalism gave way to a new generation of political cabaret artists who took maximum advantage of everything. If it was the cold war, well the cold war; if it was the time of student protests, in 1968 and even well into the seventies, well that then. If Helmut Kohl was in power, they dunked slices of bread in a characterisation of the provincial nature of this apparently not very brilliant politician who, for 16 years, dominated the most powerful country in Europe.

There are no restraints in German political *Kabarett*: the whole political spectrum of the time can be satirised in five minutes, from right to left, from top to bottom. Everything can be turned on its head but form is maintained when entering the private terrain. German political cabaret artists are people with a certain reputation, to some extent inheriting the tradition of great names dedicated to the genre. Some things are below them.

Dieter Hildebrandt (1927-) belongs to this family of cabaret artists arising and growing as public celebrities in the post-war period, as well as his troop of the *Scheibenwischer* (literally windscreen wipers). They are the best example of a cabaret artist's style with regard to the country and with a more than loyal public. Trained in Kästner's school of cabaret, Hildebrandt is the most classic of all political cabaret artists of the last few decades. Alone or accompanied by other professionals like himself, since the mid-seventies he has combined political cabaret in the theatre, in its own sphere, with television.

Notizen aus der Provinz, the programme where he would act as presenter and scriptwriter, erupted on the second public channel, ZDF, at the beginning of the seventies and, in just a few years, became an unquestionable audience success, with ratings of 30 and 45 percent. In this programme, Hildebrandt played with his image of feigned provincial innocence, so familiar to TV viewers and, therefore, with an almost innate capacity to place the audience within his complicit game.

It wasn't always easy. In 1980 the programme was suspended as this was an electoral year and it could have influenced the electorate. The programme was deemed to be identified with and influence citizens to such an extent. Hildebrandt looked 100% like the man in the street, apart from his talent for turning his witticisms into political bombs and, by extension, politicians into outright enemies of his talent.

Having overcome the impasse of the eighties, he returned to the screen with *Scheibenwischer*. This programme didn't have any clear schedule, was broadcast between four and six times a year in the eighties and ended up on the first public channel, ARD, turning its stars (Hildebrandt and his collaborators Bruno Jonas, Mathias Richling and Georg Schramm) into the most popular faces on television. Between 1980 and 2003, 144 programmes of this series were shown on public television, with its usual masters and special guests, generally colleagues from the same profession. Retired and having just reached 80 years of age, Hildebrandt continues to be a point of reference for German television and political satire that shifts between the popular element and the finesse of criticism, always avoiding cynicism. He is a true dinosaur of political *Kabarett*, with a good constellation of equally good peers on similar programmes, such as Gerhard Polt, who, far from becoming bloody rivals, side with and complete the panorama of the best tradition of political *Kabarett*.

5. Comedy TV, preying on audiences

Historians and those studying political *Kabarett* cannot agree as to whether political *Kabarett* is endangered by Comedy TV or whether, simply, it has changed in format and we are observing a new dimension of the same phenomenon. In his study entitled *Politisches Kabarett - Definition, Geschichte und Stellung*, Martin Siegordner warns that Comedy TV has pushed political *Kabarett* to one side. Another person studying the area, Eckhard Schumacher, states in the book entitled *Konkurrenzloses Lachen* that there are simply barriers between professionals. In other words, not everything we see as distortion of the tradition of political satire is necessarily a betrayal.

What seems to be true is that the dividing line between the more or less transmuted heirs of political *Kabarett* and the figures of Comedy do not lie so much in the television or stage format but in one word: talent. As mentioned in the introduction, in Germany there is one example that acts as a bridge between the two concepts, *Kabarett* and Comedy: Harald Schmidt. Not even those who are most sceptical or hostile towards Comedy deny that Schmidt has an exceptional talent that brings him close to the tradition of the best.

In the antipodes of this situation we find others such as Stefan Raab and a very long list of professional colleagues, generally on private channels, that are synonymous with gross humour and elbow each other out the way for ratings.

In the German region, Schmidt is a phenomenon comparable to Hildebrandt both on the stages that are so traditional for cabaret as well as on television. In other words, a continued success, in spite of generational differences and also differences in character and clientele. He is an exponent of the generation born with the "economic miracle" already underway (August 1957), three decades younger than Hildebrandt, and represents the Germany of today that has not gone through war or even the immediate post-war. Irreverent, released from a past that belongs to his parents but not to him, he allows himself to go much further than his predecessors in the iconoclastic panorama of the Germany of today or of the past.

Like Hildebrandt, Schmidt started on Berlin public television, at the end of the eighties, but became a "TV animal" par excellence on the private channel, SAT1, with his *Late Night Show*. A programme practically tailor-made for him as the star, interviewing guests who were actually extras. He was christened Dirty Harry because of his corrosive humour and has been the unbeatable soul of the late night slot, where more is permitted than usual. The programme format was easy: himself behind a desk, a band playing intros and outros for different people, an audience ready to comply with his mission to laugh and a seat where the interviewee, whether a star or not, would fade into the background and be subjected to an avalanche of ill-timed questions. A Comedy format known and well-established in other countries.

Schmidt is a TV phenomenon and, therefore, no matter how much his programmes may appear to be an exclusive product of his talent, he has a good scriptwriting team behind him. He has his own personality to distinguish himself from his rivals who, by the way, are also supported by their own scriptwriting teams. Moreover, Harald Schmidt never looks stressed, afraid of losing his audience ratings. Another difference to most of his Comedy rivals.

In 2003 he decided to take a "creative break". His reappearance one year later on public television's leading channel was something of a media event. And he measured up to expectations: reappearing with a long beard and hair, as if to demonstrate that he had thought long and hard

during his retreat, and picked up the thread he had left hanging, once again on the public channel of his early days and without any kind of regard towards the politicians of today and even less towards the ghosts of the past. He is one of the few cabaret artists who can allow themselves to step on historic taboos or politically incorrect themes of the present in his parodies, be they Jews, Turkish immigration, without resorting to silliness.

He's fast, in a couple of minutes capable of covering Nazism, the history of the Red Army Faction or RAF, the terrorist group founded by Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof, and the bad times being had by Bayern Munich in the German league. He has a particular instinct for knowing where the limit is between irreverence and hitting below the belt, something that allows him to place himself, without any hesitation, in politically incorrect terrain, including somewhat ridiculous jokes about Turkish immigration, and to get away with it, without anyone really being able to feel defamed or insulted.

At the other extreme, as we have already mentioned, is Stefan Raab, a paradigm of the Comedy moderator who does display a panic of losing ratings. Raab is not the only case and he has many colleagues on private channels in the same situation, but the issue here is not to provide a list of names but to give a general overview.

One example of the distance between a Schmidt and a Raab, related to a recent delicate debate in German politics and public opinion: namely whether it was appropriate to pardon the last prisoners from RAF, the group that had killed 34 people until it ended in 1998. It should be noted that the relatives of some of these victims still do not know who had actually committed the murder in each specific case, because there was a law of silence and collective action within the organisation. While the history of the RAF was being reviewed and the political weeklies offered new versions of the deaths of attorneys, bankers and heads of companies in the so-called "German autumn of '77", the bloodiest time of the terrorist group, Schmidt and his scriptwriters set a trap for the audience. In answer to the question "who do we relate with Nazism and who with the RAF?", using a series of photographs of people such as Hitler, Meinhof and others, Schmidt finally managed to get the audience to doubt when placing figures, such as the writer Günter Grass, whose biographical episodes were related with both the Third Reich

and with the radical left. All this, with an air of frivolous elegance that characterises him and without going below the belt.

Raab really put his foot in it with a photo montage, inspired by the photograph of the former head of the employers' association, Hanns Martin Schleyer, published by the RAF during the kidnapping, also in 1977. He "played" with the image of this kidnapping, enveloped in symbols of the armed group, replacing it with one of the candidates for the German version of Fame Academy, who had been expelled after "196 days of being kidnapped" he had said.

"That has nothing to do with satire or humour", said Jörg Schleyer, the son of this RAF victim, murdered by three shots a little after Baader and two of the earliest members of the group had appeared dead in their cells at the Stammheim prison. Once again, it was clear that the difference lies not so much in the definition between Comedy and *Kabarett* but between talent and stupidity.

6. To be continued

To finish, we might say that, of all the current generation, namely that of the post-war period and of today, Hildebrandt is a kind of dinosaur of *Kabarett*, capable of touching all the buttons on stage or on television. Schmidt represents the TV animal par excellence and Raab the degeneration of the tradition of political satire. But there is one last name to mention, who for many has been the best cabaret artist in modern Germany: Gerhard Polt.

He has not had the media presence of a Hildebrandt or a Schmidt but he's an example of an ongoing career, influenced by his loyalty to the principles of German *Kabarett*. To him belong some of the most legendary episodes of the genre, such as a historical parody of the Bavarian world and its hegemonic party, the Social Christian Union of Bavaria, in which an ineffable teacher from the German embassy in an African country tries to explain, in a mix of English and other languages, the peculiarities of the "regional" democracy of the world of Stoiber and of the current *Kaiser*, Franz Beckenbauer.

German television recently remembered this wonderful performance (*Democracy today*, from 1993), on the occasion of Polt's 65th birthday. This occasion served to reflect

on whether *Kabarett*, as such, has a future, whether it will die devoured by the impact of Comedy and whether it is possible to continue parodying politicians who are basically so ridiculous they make satire or caricature almost impossible. In other words, whether the everyday reality exceeds the fiction of *Kabarett*.

While there is politics, there will be lying, corrupt or simply inept politicians whose dirty laundry needs to be aired. And while there are talented cabaret artists, there will be *Kabarett*, was Polt's reply.

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