



Master Arts and Society 2020-2021

Thesis

‘Artistic freedom: the value and illusion of boundaries’

A CABARET ARTIST’S PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

As old as the existence of art is the discussion of artistic freedom. Some argue that it is a significant right for Western democratic countries, while others posit it to be a disguised possibility to exceed normative boundaries. In times where the relevance of art is anything but self-evidence and where social media often prevails as its judge, artists find themselves on a slippery slope. One of the genres that is under pressure is the performing art of Dutch cabaret. The critical content that is conveyed by means of sharp tongues have, more than once, led to public discussions that questioned whether the performance is legitimized under the right of artistic freedom or whether it is a disguising insult.

In this thesis, I will explore artistic freedom from the perspective of Dutch cabaret artists to gain insights into their understanding and implementation of this notion. In doing so, provocation through cabaret is considered the entry point of the research, as this is where the art world and regular world collide. Therefore, this starting point allowed me to research the perceived boundaries of artistic freedom. By means of expert-interviews with Dutch cabaret artists André Manuel, Peter Pannekoek, and Janneke de Bijl, I was able to explore how they position themselves under the notion of artistic freedom. The research showed that the interviewees had a more nuanced opinion in comparison to what is addressed in societal discussions of artistic freedom. They indeed recognized it as a prerogative, however, they also felt the responsibility to handle this right with care by considering the contextual embeddedness of the performance and being clear about their intentions. Because the issue concerning artistic freedom takes place within the dynamics of a multi-layered and fast-paced society, it is receptive to subjectivity. This complexity should therefore be addressed from multiple perspectives in further research as there is not one all-encompassing correct answer.

“If you are sure of everything, art is an invincible enemy. If you doubt everything, art loses all its expressiveness.”¹

¹ Wertheim, “De politiek heeft geen parodie meer nodig.”

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction subject

If we are not allowed to expose obscene, provoking, controversial, or hurtful images in newspapers or on television, why does art seem to have a card blanche? Artists and others: “artistic freedom!”² However, this argument has been under fire for over more than fifty years. The Donkey-Trial of 1966, where writer Gerard Reve was charged with the, at that time, legal offence of blasphemy after depicting and writing about making love with God as a reincarnated donkey, is considered to be a significant occurrence within the discussion around artistic freedom.³ Despite the huge social outrage, the highest legal authority did not consider it proven that Reve’s intention was deliberately provoking, and he therefore won the lawsuit. For many artists, this trial is considered monumental for artistic freedom, while others consider it an eyesore.

Despite this apparent milestone, similar situations still occur within contemporary society. In 2007, visual artist Jonas Staal was accused of threatening politician Geert Wilders by means of his ‘Geert Wilders Werken’.⁴ The artwork consisted of sixteen commemoration-works in which the politician was depicted in photo collages and framed photos, surrounded by candles, teddy bears, and white roses. Staal stated to the court that the work wasn’t about Wilders personally but about showing a phenomenon and the way people tend to deal with it. According to the verdict, it was not proven that Staal intentionally wished the Member of Parliament dead since his art ‘merely showed’ and therefore did not call up for action. And so, artistic freedom prevailed again upon the right of freedom of expression.

² den Hartog Jager, *Het Streven*, 38.

³ Becker, “Vijftig jaar na Reve.”

⁴ Vermaat, “Wilders verliest zaak om kunstwerk.”

Both works were protected by their label of ‘being art’ since the higher order considered the artworks to be non-intentionally provoking and merely showing: “demonstrating and viewing does not oblige anything and leaves society the freedom to consider on a case-by-case basis whether they want something with the artwork in question”.⁵ The prerequisite of art being non-intentional and merely showing has been the artist’s (legal) justification against public-moral concerns for many years. That these examples both ended up in court in the first place, is therefore quite rare. Their label as ‘being art’ normally positions them in a unique, almost untouchable, position in which they enjoy a higher level of tolerance against the countervailing pressure of public-moral concerns.⁶ Most accusations against the work of an artist are therefore fought within society’s arena, especially today now that social media empowers the voice of the people. In contemporary societies, social media often prevails, besides the official legal judgement, as the prosecutor, defender, and judge of the social judgement.

However, regarding the artist’s unique position, the reciprocal relationship that exists between the arts and society may sometimes blur the implicit prescriptive wall that usually separates the art world from the regular world, and thus defines whether something is art. As stated by German artist Hans Haacke: “In a complex way, art always interacts with its social environment. Its communicative nature makes it intrinsically social.”⁷ This interaction with society is especially important for the controversially engaged artist, where they explicitly engage within topicalities, with the goal to provoke reactions, reflections, or public discussions through their art.⁸ However, its controversial nature does not always sit well with its receiver, i.e., society, especially since they are often the source of inspiration as well.

⁵ den Hartog Jager, *Het Streven*, 49.

⁶ Kearns, “The judicial nemesis: Artistic freedom and the European court of human rights,” 58.

⁷ Zomer, “Engagement van nu: meer dan ooit *over de grens*,” 28.

⁸ *Ibid*, 36.

Furthermore, by explicitly engaging with society, the artist steps out of its protected position in the art world and exceeds the symbolic wall between the art world and the regular world. Exceeding this boundary could therefore question the artwork's original categorisation as art. Precisely because of an artist's choice to socially engage his or her work, it becomes complex and ambiguous to defend a work of art against public-moral concerns and justify it under the protection of artistic freedom. The dependent relationship between the artist and its audience complicates this even more, since one could wonder whether this freedom is given by society, or taken by artists themselves. It is precise because of this ambiguity and complexity that I am researching the perspective of the artist within the debate of artistic freedom, as they are the ones who experience the value and possible illusions of its boundary. By emphasising this perspective, my aim is to provide insights on how such artists, within their discipline, experience and take account of artistic freedom.

The performing art of Dutch cabaret is an example of controversially engaged art whereby artists fuel their inspiration with societal, political, and/or cultural critique that is usually avoided in public.⁹ The label of art allows cabaret artists to critically reflect on topicalities by experimenting and pushing what is normatively accepted. However, this is not always appreciated by the receivers. For example, cabaret artist Martijn Koning made politician Thierry Baudet walk out of a talk show on live television, where he performed his column by means of 'roasting' this politician. This broadcast performance provoked a storm of criticism regarding Koning on which he responded that he does not understand who or what to apologize for: "the performance was intended as satire, and that's what it is".¹⁰ This has not been the first incident in the history of cabaret. Artists as Youp van 't Hek, Theo Maassen, and Hans Teeuwen have been under attack several times for exceeding public-moral

⁹ Herfkens, "A smile and a tear – Dutch cabaret as a satirical vessel for social critique," 1.

¹⁰ NPO Radio 1. "Martijn Koning over optreden Jinek: 'Ik weet niet wie ik excuses zou moeten maken'."

norms.¹¹ Cabaret thus allows humour, satire and/or irony, to be a style of provocation which, due to its societal engagement, often results in societal uproar as its protective shield of ‘being art’, and thus the right of artistic freedom, is complicated by the abovementioned characteristic. Leaving the subjectivity of humour in general aside, this genre raises questions on how far cabaret artists can push the boundary of what is accepted under the notion of artistic freedom before their humorous performances turn into insult. Because the performing art of Dutch cabaret, and the accompanying Dutch cabaret artists, are known for their socially critical content and their sharp tongues which, more than once, led to public discussions regarding the boundaries of artistic freedom, I have chosen to focus on this specific art genre for the current research. I will be exploring the point of view of Dutch cabaret artists regarding the discussion on artistic freedom by means of the following main research question:

‘How do Dutch cabaret artists position themselves under the notion of artistic freedom?’

The main research question will be substantiated by means of three sub-questions. The first sub-question concerns the cabaret artists’ understandings regarding the conceptual and practical implications of artistic freedom and will be researched according to the following question: *‘How do Dutch cabaret artists define artistic freedom both in words and in actions?’* The answer to this question provides information on the broader outlook regarding the discussion that is derived from the specific genre of cabaret. The second and third sub-question focus on the artists’ individual rationales concerning the performing art of cabaret. The second sub-question explores the artists’ motives on whether to choose to provoke or not by means of the question: *‘What are the intentions of Dutch cabaret artists when provoking*

¹¹ van der Bas, “Is Youp van ’t Hek nog van deze tijd?” Dijkgraaf, “Hans Teeuwen heeft boodschap voor ‘witte mensen op Zwarte Cross’.” ED, “Ophef na spraakmakende uitspraken Theo Maassen.”

by means of their performances?’ The third sub-question holds a more reflective attitude whereby the artists are asked about, if experienced present, their social responsibility: ‘*What role and position regarding society do Dutch cabaret artists assign themselves?’*

The abovementioned research questions allow me to research the discussion of artistic freedom from the perspective of contemporary Dutch cabaret artists and gain insights into their understanding and implementation of artistic freedom. Since the research tradition on cabaret is very minimal, as acknowledged by researcher and cabaret-critic Dick Zijp¹², I seek to contribute to the development of this research field. Furthermore, most of the research that was conducted in this field addressed cabaret performances, whereas this research focuses on the perspective of artists that realize these performances. The underlying and in-depth insights of these cabaret artists are therefore of added value. In summary, this thesis will thus discuss the concept of artistic freedom by exploring how cabaret artists in the Netherlands relate to the discourse and practice of this phenomenon. In doing so, provocation is considered an entry point in the prescriptive symbolic wall that allows me to research the perceived boundaries of artistic freedom.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 Selection and recruitment process

Since this thesis focuses on the perspective of the artists, in a search to understand how artistic freedom is defined and applied from their point of view, the research is categorized as an explorative research. As a result, I have chosen to work with an expert-group which is defined as a small group of people that, due to their amount of experience within the relevant field, are considered knowledgeable and thus specialists. Current expert-group consists of three Dutch

¹² Zijp, “Pleidooi voor ideologische-kritische benadering van cabaret,” 58. Dick Zijp, in discussion with the author, March 16, 2021.

cabaret artists who allowed me to identify individual in-depth experiences concerning the question proposed. The recruitment process of this group was primarily based on their performance-style, i.e., the degree of provocation. This style and whether it concerned a provocative character was assessed by means of multiple online reviews which can be found in appendix A. The availability and benevolence of the artists has played an important role in the selection process as well since current research has been carried out on a short-term. As a result, the expert-group concerned a purposive sample. Nevertheless, I was able to select artists with opposite performance styles which allowed me to examine if and what considerations are made when deciding to provoke or not. Gender and origin have also been taken into consideration because of representativity. However, the performance style and the availability of the artists were of decisive importance. This ultimately led to my expert-group that consists of two cabaret artists, from different generations, who's cabaret styles are often experienced as provocative, namely André Manuel and Peter Pannekoek, and a cabaret artist that holds a more moderate or non-intentional provocation style namely, Janneke de Bijl.

1.2.2 Procedure

The first step in finding cabaret artists to assess was to search for possible participants. This was primarily done through online research, however, art-critic and researcher Dick Zijp has provided me with some recommendations as well, with which I, prior to the other interviews, arranged a meeting with. His name is well-known within the field of cabaret due to his active role as a cabaret-critic and reviewer. Moreover, he is currently writing his PhD on the political implications of humour in the Dutch cabaret tradition (1960s-present). Due to both his practical and academic experience in the field of cabaret, I anticipated that a conversation with him would be very valuable for my knowledge and understanding regarding cabaret

theatre. The knowledge I have gained from this conversation can therefore be found throughout the thesis.

After selecting the possible cabaret artists, I reached out to them by email asking if they would be interested and available for an interview. The topic-list of the research was sent within this email as well so they could anticipate on what to expect (appendix B). If interested, further practical information concerning the interview was provided, such as the specific date, time, and which online platform they preferred. The informed consents were sent by email as well, asking the participants if they agreed on the conditions that I would record the interview for scientific purposes only and that the given information with name could be implemented within the thesis. The agreements of the informed consent have been documented on paper and on the recording of the interview.

1.2.3 Data analysis

Because of the Covid-19 regulations, all interviews were conducted online through Microsoft Teams or Zoom. These interviews were held separate and in a semi-structured way since I wanted the artists to have as much freedom as possible when answering the questions, as their experiences and perspectives were the focus of the study. However, I did want them to cover the same red thread, because of the reliability of the research, which therefore led to my choice of working with a topic-list that covered the core concepts (appendix B). In addition, I prepared a blend of closed-and open-ended questions that, in practice, were often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions (appendix C). I used Microsoft Word to transcribe all the interviews and coded them in NVivo 12 before conducting my analysis. The analysis of the transcripts started with open coding to identify patterns, followed by coding into potential themes. These themes were then reviewed, refined, or combined. In summary, the

data went through the three cycles of coding as recommended by Saldaña.¹³ Since current thesis focusses on gaining insights into the perspectives of the artists, and language, according to Foucault¹⁴, is a powerful construct, the decision was made to quote the artists in the result-section in their original language, i.e., Dutch. This decision was further substantiated by the implications of language concerning humour.¹⁵

1.2.4 Validity and reliability

The validity and reliability of the research has been monitored throughout the entire process by means of verification. Morse et al., define verification as the process of checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain.¹⁶ As a result, I went back and forth within the research cycle to ensure congruence among question formulation, literature, sampling process, data collection strategies, and analysis. This verification allowed me to monitor and ensure the validity and reliability of the research.

1.2.5 Reading guide

In this thesis, I considered three cabaret artists as my case-studies which allowed me to, in combination with the theoretical framework, explore the notion of artistic freedom from both a theoretical and practical angle. My aim was to uncover the perspectives of cabaret artists within the debate, and their position towards, about if and to what degree artistic freedom can be used as a legitimization for provocation within cabaret. In this regard, I have provided a

¹³ Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*.

¹⁴ Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, "Foucauldian discourse analysis," 110.

¹⁵ Mulkay, "On humour: Its nature and its place in modern society." Zijp, "Dick Zijp: 'Een neutrale blik bestaat niet'."

¹⁶ Morse et al., "Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research," 17.

theoretical framework which covers the most essential theoretical aspects regarding the research question proposed. The framework is divided into three parts.

The first part focuses on the concept artistic freedom by explaining how this notion came to be. Chapter 2.1 provides therefore a brief historical overview of how the artist appropriated this unique right of artistic freedom. The historical basis is of importance as the changes that happened at that time form the basis for the current position of artists and the attendant artistic climate. Subsequently, I discuss how artistic freedom is currently understood in Western democratic countries with a focus on the different institutions involved, as they are responsible for shaping the normative norms and values. In doing so, the focus lies on the legislative institute as this institution holds the final verdict and thus provides the foundation in which other institutes, such as political and social ones, function. The second part of the theoretical framework specifies the debate around artistic freedom by focusing on one specific art genre, namely the performing art of Dutch cabaret as a controversially engaged art genre. Dutch cabaret is a specific form of cabaret due to its combination of being both personal and socially critical. Furthermore, the subjective nature of humour leads that humour can be used in quite ambiguous ways. Within chapter 2.2, I argue that cabaret, by being socially critical, can be deducted to a form of engaged art and, because of its ability to use humour as style of provocation, can be considered as a form of controversially engaged art. The abovementioned chapters will merge within the third and last part of the theoretical framework, chapter 2.3, which describes the contemporary situation of cabaret artists in the Netherlands concerning the debate around artistic freedom.

Lastly, the findings of the analyses of the interviews are addressed within chapter 3 after which the conclusion, a critical discussion, and recommendations for further research are given in chapter 4.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 *The question of artistic freedom*

2.1.1 *The emergence of artistic freedom and the societal consequences*

The starting point for the theoretical discussion is the observation that modern societies tend to consider artistic creation as a special form of human activity and artistic freedom as deserving a special treatment which is more protective and/or more tolerant.¹⁷ This exceptional position originated from a long history of artists being in service of their monarchy. Their art merely operated within the practical function of religion and politics. This subordinate position changed when, in 1850, the slogan ‘l’art pour l’art’, or ‘art for art’s sake’, was introduced which led to a new era for the art scene. The transformations that happened back then formed the basis for the contemporary art world and the current position of artists.¹⁸ It is therefore important to understand how the position of the artist in society has shifted over time and how this goes hand in hand with the emergence of artistic freedom, before delving deeper into the current discussion around artistic freedom.

In the 18th century artists merely worked in service of, and commissioned by, the bourgeois, i.e., the ruling power, which consisted of religious and/or political art. This changed when the artists started to separate themselves from this dependency in the early 1800s. The royal and ecclesiastical clients were replaced by an anonymous public and intermediary functions such as art dealers and publishers.¹⁹ This initially led to a lot of resistance from society, but changed when society discovered the usefulness of the artist’s autonomous position. Society’s desire to grow and develop could be facilitated by the critical and outside stimulation of the artists. As a result, the notion of l’art pour l’art was accepted: “the idea that artists are placed within their own territory behind a safe ‘wall’ that allows them

¹⁷ Tanasescu, “Artistic Freedom and Its Limitations,” 9.

¹⁸ den Hartog Jager. *Het Streven*, 46.

¹⁹ Zomer, “Engagement van nu: meer dan ooit *over de grens*,” 30.

to disengage themselves from society”.²⁰ This symbolic wall provided artists with the freedom to experiment, explore, and push the boundary of what was morally accepted. This new independent environment allowed artists to choose for which purpose to create, and to what extent, and in what way, they wanted it to be interconnected with the norms and values of society. Furthermore, due to the lack of a direct practical function, such as religion, art was no longer an automatically integrated part of society which had the result that they were free to choose the aesthetic and social content of their work. However, due to society’s agreement to acknowledge the autonomous position of an artist, also known as society’s repressive tolerance, as first introduced by Marcuse²¹, a division arose that separated the now so-called ‘art world’ from the ‘regular world’. This division was characterized by a symbolic border, known as the wall, which is still standing within current society.²²

The wall facilitated a safe space for artists, i.e., the art world, where their new artworks were viewed, explored, and tested before being exposed to the outside world. Only when the works resonated within the wall, it became visible outside the wall, into the regular world. And so, when visible in the regular world, it implied the approval from the art world, and thus passed the ‘artistic filter’. Subsequently, because of its approval by the art world, the work was taken seriously within the regular world. The wall therefore marked the boundary between both worlds and simultaneously created a safe bubble for artists and their works. Thus, over the years, a shift of power from the bourgeois authorities towards the artistic gatekeepers appeared which allowed artists to exceed more on a moral and ethical level than regular citizens. This repressive tolerant relationship therefore seemed the ultimate utilisation of artistic freedom with mutual consensus.

²⁰ den Hartog Jager. *Het Streven*, 46.

²¹ Marcuse, “Repressive tolerance”.

²² den Hartog Jager. *Het Streven*, 16.

The wall is still present today, however, the position of the artist regarding the wall has changed. In the last few decades, artists have focused less on changing aesthetics and more on changing content. This shift is also known as the social turn, as introduced by art historian Claire Bishop, at which the focus lies on constructive social change: “artists use social situations to produce dematerialized, anti-market, politically engaged projects that carry on the modernist call to blur art and life.”²³ Thus, instead of disengaging oneself from society, engaged artists explicitly want to connect with it. They are trying to climb, and maybe even break, the wall that has been standing for almost three centuries. In this regard, art seems to fall back within a practical function, however, this time it concerns the society in general, instead of just religion or politics. How to position the artist’s unique autonomous position with the aim to socially engage? With this new development, questions arise as to whom these artists should relate and, subsequently, raises the question of who next determines the boundary of artistic freedom. Figure 1 seeks to capture the involved constructs regarding this determination process at which both intention and reception are considered crucial for the definition of this boundary as will be further explained in the following chapter.

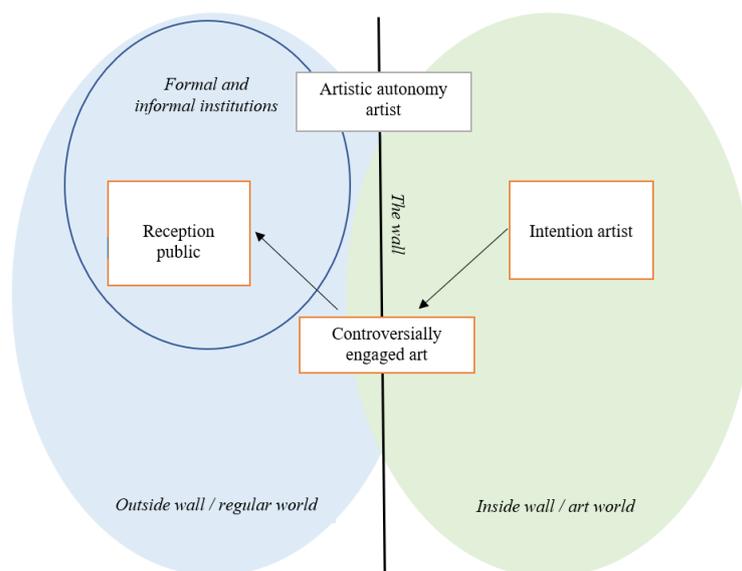


Figure 1. Visual representation of theoretical constructs.

²³ Bishop, “The social turn: Collaboration and its discontents.” 2.

2.1.2 *The institutional embeddedness of artistic freedom*

The theoretical search for how artistic freedom is currently understood and positioned needs, because of the shift as explained above, to be approached from different perspectives, or rather different institutions, as the answer is a result of societal forces.

Institutions are the kind of structures that matter most in the social realm as these constitute the norms and values of social life. Hodgson defines institutions as a system of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions.²⁴ The acknowledgment of the role of institutions is important for current research as it recognizes that much of human interaction and activity is structured in terms of overt or implicit rules, including those regarding artistic freedom such as intention and reception (figure 1). Generally, institutions enable ordered thought, expectation, and action by imposing form and consistency on human activities. However, today's society is filled with a variety of formal and informal institutions. Within Western societies, both the social and legal institute are of paramount importance when it comes to normative dispositions. According to Oxford Reference, the term 'social institutions' is used to refer to established ways of behaviour, or, more formally to major social systems of structures which organize the primary social practices, roles, and relationships within a culture.²⁵ Within these social structures, one can distinguish informal and formal ones. Social norms, for example, specify behaviour that is seen as desirable or legitimate in the shared view of societal member.²⁶ When violating the desired behaviour, this merely elicits informal disapproval from the group which means that there are no further formal consequences, i.e., an informal institution. The law, on the other hand, is an example of a formal social institution since it holds the official and final verdict regarding violations, which does result into formal consequences. Thus, in order to theorize the search of artistic

²⁴ Hodgson, "What are institutions?" 2.

²⁵ Oxford Reference, "Institutions."

²⁶ Licht, "Social norms and the law: Why peoples obey the law." 717.

freedom, it is needed to contemplate how and what institutions establish which rules around artistic freedom. Both the social and legal institutes are of paramount importance regarding the search for artistic freedom, as they constitute how the determination of artistic freedom is received (figure 1). However, since the legal institute holds the final verdict within Western democratic countries regarding the discussion around artistic freedom, I have decided to emphasize this institution specifically. Next paragraphs will therefore hold a judicial angle regarding the exploration of how artistic freedom is currently institutionalized whereby first, definitions regarding art and artistic freedom will be given and second, a critical outlook regarding the efficacy of this institution when assessing art will be provided.

Individual freedom lies at the core of modern societies and freedom of expression is, according to law professor Tanasescu, one of the foundational basic rights in any liberal democracy.²⁷ She states that the starting point for legal protection of freedom of expression is often used under the headings of free political speech and freedom of press. However, today's society recognizes a large variety of expressions, from which not all are that clearly defined. Art remains one of the most difficult expressions to define and it still does not have a legal definition.²⁸ As a result, the associated right of artistic freedom is, thereby, in many European countries not directly incorporated by law either. This is also the case concerning Dutch legislation which often results in conceptual and juridical unclarities regarding the practical implication, and the subsequently associated legal assessments, of artistic freedom. However, due to its subcategorization under the legal right of freedom of expression, it can be considered as an indirect right. Nevertheless, there is still no official legal definition of artistic freedom. Current thesis therefore defines art in accordance with Tanasescu her description: "Art is colloquially defined as a manifestation of expressions, a (product of) human activity

²⁷ Tanasescu, "Artistic Freedom and Its Limitations," 10.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 46.

made with the intention of stimulating the human senses as well as the human mind and/or spirit. Art can be an action, an object, a collection of actions and/or objects created with the intention of transmitting emotions and/or ideas”.²⁹ The aforementioned legal institute is subjected to informal institutions, such as social norms and morals. In the absence of a legal definition of artistic freedom, it can therefore be given from a public normative perspective. In this regard, artistic freedom is normatively understood as the right of the artist to afford liberties within the artwork. According to the policy perspective of UNESCO, which is also a form of a social institute, artistic freedom is defined as follow: “The freedom to imagine, create, and distribute diverse cultural expressions free of governmental censorship, political interference, or the pressures of non-state actors”.³⁰

The absence of legal definitions concerning art and artistic freedom makes the legal judgment of art in general difficult to substantiate, especially when its moral character is being questioned and whether it should be restricted or not. As a result of its categorisation as an indirect right of the absolute right of freedom of expression, Dutch Constitution allows the government to intervene on the right of artistic freedom, based on the condition under which freedom of expression may be restricted. Article 7 of the Constitution states that only the law can set limits on the content of utterances.³¹ The most important law that is allowed to set these limits is the Penal Code. The government is therefore allowed to restrict artistic freedom to protect the rights of others against, inter alia, slander, insult, incitement to violence and discrimination. In general, freedom may be restricted to protect national security, public order, public health, or good morals.³² In this regard, freedom of expression, and thus artistic freedom, is the rule and its restriction is exceptionally within the Netherlands. This restriction

²⁹ Ibid, 11.

³⁰ UNESCO, “Artistic Freedom.”

³¹ College voor de Rechten van de Mens, “Vrijheid van meningsuiting.”

³² College voor de Rechten van de Mens, “In Nederland kun je alles zeggen wat je vindt.”

on artistic freedom may theoretically seem cut-clear, however, due to absence of official definitions and the influences of other social institutions, this is precisely where the legal ambiguities come to light. For example, where do legal institutions draw the line when an opinion, that is protected under the freedom of speech, is considered as slander and/or discrimination by a specific person, group, or part of society? The College of Human Rights explains that the law states that all utterances, even if experienced as hurtful, shocking or disturbing, are allowed to be uttered.³³ Paul Kearns, senior lectures in Public International Law, Human Rights Law, and Law, Literature and Art, critically complements this by addressing that the seemingly paradoxical restriction on this right, as described above, applies as well.³⁴ Hence, the current state of affairs concerns that a judge will assess, for each situation separate, whether freedom of expression may be restricted or not.

The point that is being made here is that even the most dominant and, normally, concrete institution experiences ambiguities during the assessment of artworks, which complicates the societal discussion regarding artistic freedom even further. This is already the case for art in general, but even more so for provocative art. The controversial nature of such an artwork heats up the discussion even more, as people often feel that this art genre exceeds normative boundaries. Next chapter will therefore focus on the genre of controversially engaged art and how this genre is placed within the (legal) discussion regarding artistic freedom.

2.1.3 Controversially engaged art and the conceptual legal implications

Controversial engaged art genre seeks to explicitly push the boundary of what is normatively accepted by society, via provocative content and/or visual representation, with its main goal to

³³ College voor de Rechten van de Mens, “Vrijheid van meningsuiting.”

³⁴ Kearns, “The judicial nemesis: Artistic freedom and the European court of human rights,” 60.

awaken society and elicit, or reflection, on discussions.³⁵ In order to give maximum effect to the critical mirror that these artists want to offer, they benefit from pushing the boundary of what they can and may show the world, i.e., testing society's moral tolerance by means of their art.³⁶ Artists that intentionally make use of this tactic want to provoke a response on a specific topic, taboo, tension, or discussion so that space arises for reflection and new point of views. By providing this space, an artist has something to say, namely he or she wants to make society aware of something, throw up questions, or stir up a social discussion. These controversially engaged artists have the urge to do more than just make something that is aesthetically beautiful. These artists want to express their involvement in these problems through their work and their engagement is, according to Bishop and Zomer, an authentic attitude that is expressed in the working method and the subjects.³⁷ Pushing and possibly crossing the, by society established, normative boundary is therefore about connecting art to societal discussion and specific issues. However, by doing so, they often exceed the wall that is supposed to differentiate the art world from the regular one, which consequently changes the dynamics between those worlds. The caveat to this, however, is that controversy is not the goal of these artists, but a means to provoke discussions.³⁸

There is no straight line to be drawn when it comes to the assessment of art in general, let alone controversially engaged art, because whether something is seen as provocative depends on inter alia historical, cultural, and contextual variables.³⁹ However in general, an artwork is most commonly judged to be offensive if it violates dominant beliefs, values, tastes, and mores of society, especially those pertaining to sex or religion.⁴⁰ Lankford and

³⁵ Bishop, "The social turn: Collaboration and its discontents." 2. Zomer, "Engagement van nu: meer dan ooit *over de grens*," 12.

³⁶ den Hartog Jager. *Het Streven*, 107.

³⁷ Zomer, "Engagement van nu: meer dan ooit *over de grens*," 29.

³⁸ van Dongen, "Ethiek in de kunst,"

³⁹ Jennstål and Öberg. "The ethics of deliberative activism," 650.

⁴⁰ Lankford & Scheffer, "Museum education and controversial art," 201.

Scheffer state that when works of art for one reason or another offend people in the extreme, such that lines are drawn and defensive and offensive actions are taken by opposing sides, it is a case of controversial art.⁴¹ Art critic Hans den Hartog Jager argues that whether there are consequences for seeking out and pushing this boundary completely depends on the arbitrariness of society.⁴² This argument is in line with Hodgson's argumentation, as described earlier in chapter 2.1.2, at which he addresses the importance of societal forces regarding the boundaries artistic freedom.⁴³ Subsequently, this complicates the evaluation of when it is lawful to restrict someone's artistic freedom as the legal system is subordinate to these social forces. Especially when the law declares the protection of 'good morals' as one of the reasons to intervene, leaving out the fact that the value judgment of these so-called 'good morals' are open for interpretation as well. Therefore, definitional problems may arise when very difficult or, contentious concepts, such as art and morality, are counterpoised by the different institutions involved and, if it may come to that, in court.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the fact that engaged artists want to provoke a reaction, but are not able to know in advance how this reaction will express itself due to the ambiguity of the evaluation of something as provocative, makes it almost impossible for the legal system to proof the artists' explicit intention to provoke.⁴⁵ Zomer substantiates this with acknowledging the general assumption that art is 'merely showing', which contributes to the judicial elusiveness of art even more.⁴⁶

The value and/or illusion of today's artistic freedom is because of the abovementioned constructs, and with the fading of the wall, difficult to grasp. This is the case for all artists but especially for controversially engaged artists, who can be found in a variety of artistic genres, including visual-, literature-, and performing art. However, the latter art genre has, with

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² den Hartog Jager, *Het Streven*, 107.

⁴³ Hodgson, "What are institutions?" 2.

⁴⁴ Kearns, "The judicial nemesis: Artistic freedom and the European court of human rights," 60.

⁴⁵ den Hartog Jager, *Het Streven*, 49.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 154. Zomer, "Engagement van nu: meer dan ooit *over de grens*," 37.

regard to its normative evaluation, the advantage and disadvantages of being ‘more real’.

Quoting the artistic leader of Theatre Cosmic about the impact of art: “the theatre is still an unknown bastion, the effect on the audience is greater when you see and hear a rape than when it is simply written down”.⁴⁷ However, theatre still has the fourth wall which could be considered an equivalent of the symbolic wall as they both separate, and in doing so, indicate that what is happening behind the wall is ‘just art’. However, some art forms explicitly break through that fourth wall as well. The performing art of cabaret, for example, explicitly breaks through both the fourth and the symbolic wall as these artists address the audience directly, causing the fourth wall to non-exist. This subsequently leads to a shift in the artist-audience dynamics compared to regular theatre. In addition, contemporary cabaret artists have the tendency to explicitly exceed their performances beyond the protected area of the theatre into talk shows, radio, and columns. By climbing over this second wall, they find themselves in the regular world, which is a slippery slope when it comes to the discussion if they are still allowed to enjoy the legitimization of artistic freedom, as their interpretative title of ‘being an artist’ has been taken out of its original context. This slippery slope is especially present for Dutch cabaret artists since they are known for their socially critical content and their sharp tongues which, more than once, lead to accusations of insult and slander by the audience. One could then wonder, when exceeding this wall, do their expressions still enjoy the, although ambiguous, right to artistic freedom? The following chapter will dive deeper into the performing art of Dutch cabaret and the complex position in which these contemporary cabaret artists find themselves. Before going in-depth into the state of today’s cabaret regarding artistic freedom, a brief historical introduction of the genre will be given first.

⁴⁷ Schoonenboom, “Kwaaier en kwaaier.”

2.2 Dutch cabaret as a form of controversially engaged art

2.2.1 Introducing Dutch cabaret as a form of controversially engaged art

Dutch cabaret is a theatrical genre which found its origin in France in the 19th century. The genre was created for artists to distance themselves against the then-prevalent theatrical arts that mainly focused on spectacle and mainstream commercialization.⁴⁸ As a result, cabaret performances were not created to merely entertain people, but to convey a critical message. Precisely because of its distancing from mainstream theatre, cabaret was free to address topical issues that were not allowed in the grand theatres. This included insulting spectators as part of any societal critique. When cabaret found its way into the Dutch theatres, at the start of the 20th century, these core elements of an original French cabaret performance were adopted. However, over time it developed into a distinct form of comedy that is currently known as ‘typically Dutch’. Dick Zijp describes today’s typical Dutch cabaret as follows: “a solo performance of a cabaret artist who presents (semi) personal stories and observations interspersed with jokes, often combined with social and political commentary”.⁴⁹

The element of social and political criticism is especially important due to cabaret’s strong reputation as a way of protesting conventions, traditions, and dogmas. In doing so, the political and social criticism are often personally engaged: they address the audience directly to tell about their personal problems and struggles with the world around them and they thus present their authentic-selves on stage.⁵⁰ The dominant ideas of cabaret being socially critical and personally engaged have become deeply intertwined in today’s Dutch cabaret performances, which subsequently blurs the distinction between the cabaret artist and the man/woman behind the artist. As a result, this complicates the discussion of whether he or she is allowed to legitimize the performance under the protection of artistic freedom, especially

⁴⁸ Herfkens, “A smile and a tear – Dutch cabaret as a satirical vessel for social critique,” 2.

⁴⁹ Zijp, “Re-thinking Dutch cabaret: The conservative implications of humour in the Dutch cabaret tradition,” 6.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

when the performance is considered as provocative and/or offensive by the audience. This ‘autonomy versus engagement’ discussion will be further elaborated on in chapter 2.2.2.

The other essential element of cabaret is the use of humour. Humour is considered an effective means for critique because it is pre-dominantly believed to be ‘good-natured’ and ‘warm-hearted’. Jokes are generally perceived to be innocent and if considered differently, they are often dismissed under the motto of ‘but it is just a joke’. However, humour is also acknowledged to be rebellious or critical.⁵¹ Billig even argues that humour is cruel by nature since humour works by ridiculing others.⁵² The use of satire, ridicule, and irony are examples of such ‘cruelty’. Whether a critical humour style is used depends on social and cultural factors. Humour styles, and thus the positive or negative evaluation of jokes, are therefore related to national culture, class, professional culture, age, or gender.⁵³ The basic understanding of how satire works and why, will allow to explore the concept of social critique in-depth and will thus be discussed further in chapter 2.2.3.⁵⁴

In summary, Dutch cabaret is a specific form of cabaret due to its combination of being both personal and socially critical. Furthermore, the subjective nature of humour leads to humour being used in quite ambiguous ways. I argue that cabaret, by being socially critical, can be deducted to a form of engaged art and because of its ability to use humour as a style of provocation, can be considered as a form of controversially engaged art. The following chapters will further substantiate this statement. First, I will address the ongoing discussion of autonomy versus engagement and how this relates to the discussion of artistic freedom. Second, I will dive deeper into the role of humour as a satirical vessel for social critique.

⁵¹ Ibid, 32.

⁵² Billig, *Laughter and ridicule: Towards a social critique of humour*, 28.

⁵³ Kuipers, *Good humour, bas taste: A sociology of the joke*, 115.

⁵⁴ Herfkens, “A smile and a tear – Dutch cabaret as a satirical vessel for social critique,” 8.

2.2.2 Critical engagement versus authenticity

Historically, we find two dominant ideas discourses on Dutch cabaret. The first one is that cabaret is a critical and progressive form of comedy causing the comedian to be critically engaged with society. The second one is that cabaret is about authenticity and personal expression. This results in the assumption that comedians are themselves on stage and thus present the audience with personal stories and opinions. In today's discourse on cabaret, the notions of authenticity and engagement have become deeply intertwined which complicates the distinction between the artist and the person behind the artist and thus between being a form of art and an opinion. The aim of this chapter is to provide insights on how the artist's unique position, as described in chapter 2.1.1, merges the tension between a cabaret artist's critical engagement versus authenticity.

As described before, a shift regarding the artist's position within society happened around 1850. Instead of being in service of the bourgeois, artists enforced a unique position that allowed them to choose the content of their artistic expressions. The repressive tolerance of society, i.e., the societal acceptance of an artist being autonomous, led to the symbolic wall that separated the regular world from the art world. In this regard, the wall facilitated a protective bubble for the art world that allowed the artist to experiment which led to, *inter alia*, controversially engaged art. The performing art of cabaret can be considered as the product of such an artistic experiment as well since it did not emerge within the regular world but within the safe bubble of French artistic cafes, the so-called 'cabaret-artistiques'.⁵⁵ These cafes were not open for the regular public, only for members, which were usually writers and artists. Being separated from the regular world enabled cabaret artists to look at society from a critical, somewhat disengaged, distance which resulted in them taking on the role of social critics. The cabaret discourse of the beginning of the 20th century was subsequently

⁵⁵ Zijp, "Re-thinking Dutch cabaret: The conservative implications of humour in the Dutch cabaret tradition," 10.

characterized by this critical engagement, which implied that the cabaret artist should not be committed to one political ideology. As quoted within Wim Ibo's historical overview on Dutch cabaret: "It is precisely this autonomy or independence of any political ideology or any direct political goal that enables the cabaret artist to be truly critical".⁵⁶ However, around 1990, a new idea about Dutch cabaret arose: the idea that cabaret should be authentic and therefore an expression of personal statements.

Unlike the years before, the emphasis on the authenticity of cabaret artists ensured that their personal lives began to be an import inspiration for the performance. The cabaret artists were themselves on stage and presented the audience with personal stories and observations, i.e., everything but disengaged. Many authors in the 1990s believed that this personal form of cabaret posed a challenge to cabaret's critical nature, as known before, which created tensions between being authentic and critically engaged.⁵⁷ However, it should be noted that, unlike actors, cabaret artists never completely disappear into the roles they are playing, not even when they were solely critical, as their roles emerge from their personal selves. The literature overview from Zijp points out that many authors proclaim that personal cabaret can be critical at the same time, since the boundaries between personal and political engagement are never fixed.⁵⁸ This allowed the artists to play between 'the self' and 'the artist' which resulted in a style that is currently known as 'personal engagement'. To get a better understanding of the societal implications of this personal engaged style, it is essential to consider the role of humour since it is often by means of humour that cabaret artists seek to challenge or question commonly accepted ideas, norms, and values.

⁵⁶ Ibo, "En nu de moraal van dit lied: 75 jaar Nederlands cabaret."

⁵⁷ Zijp, "Re-thinking Dutch cabaret: The conservative implications of humour in the Dutch cabaret tradition," 13.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 14-18.

2.2.3 *The critical potential of humour: a satirical vessel for social critique*

Giseline Kuipers, expert on the sociology of humour, states that humour is an ambivalent form of communication: “What counts as “good” humour differs from group to group, from person to person, and from moment to moment.”⁵⁹ However, an important nuance in the use of language is the difference between humour and serious language use. Humour is a matter of framing: when you make a joke, you are suggesting that what you say should not be taken seriously.⁶⁰ On the other hand, sociologist Michael Mulkey says it is precisely this symbolic distinction between humour and serious language that allows jokes to be used for serious purposes.⁶¹ For instance, when an artist insults the audience by means of a joke, it can be for the sake of shock and entertainment or it could be part of a bigger critique regarding society. The latter is most likely because of its embeddedness as a joke. However, this does not exclude the first. To fully comprehend the situation, the joke must be placed back into its natural environment, which is its accompanying society, and the utility of its function should be determined, which in this thesis is a social one. The utility of its function will be explained first.

Michael Billig argues that humour is cruel by nature since it works by ridiculing others.⁶² Within Dutch cabaret performance, this is primarily done through the element of satire.⁶³ It mocks through a feeling of despair, or a profound dissatisfaction. A satirist uses humour, insult, and parody to address perceived problems and issues of tragedy. In doing so, ridicule is not necessarily a bad thing. The positive understanding of ridicule is that it is a rebellious form of humour: it might be aggressive but used for good purposes. Billig argues that we use humour to ridicule those who transgress societal norms. By doing so, we

⁵⁹ Kuipers, “*Good humour, bad taste: A sociology of the joke*, 1.

⁶⁰ Zijp, “Dick Zijp: ‘Een neutrale blik bestaat niet’.”

⁶¹ Mulkey, “On humour: Its nature and its place in modern society.”

⁶² Billig. *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*.

⁶³ Herfkens, , “A smile and a tear – Dutch cabaret as a satirical vessel for social critique,” 2.

encourage him or her to comply with the norm. Accordingly, the prospect of ridicule and embarrassment protects the codes of daily behaviour, ensuring routine conformity with social order. On the other hand, it may also be the case that it is precisely these codes that the cabaret artist wants to discuss, reflect, or break. This decision depends on what the artist believes society needs. It is this dark, less easily admired practice of ridicule that constitutes the social core of humour.⁶⁴ Quoting Herfkens: “The Dutch cabaret artist is the town crier making others aware of present problems and taboos”.⁶⁵

The function of humour, as described above, can however not exist without its social and cultural embeddedness as this embeddedness provides the context from which the normative information is retrieved. Therefore, the cabaret artist depends on its significant other, i.e., its audience since they constitute the social and cultural context. The relation between the cabaret artist and his or her audience is different from most other performing arts since the artist plays directly towards the audience.⁶⁶ The fourth wall that normally keeps the audience at a certain distance, does therefore not exist within the performing art of cabaret. When visiting the cabaret artist’s performance, any spectator becomes part of the artist’s direct social environment. The observed environment, and therefore the audience included, is often addressed through satire. In doing so, the cabaret artist is not humble, instead, it is the spectator who is expected to listen to what the artist has to say.⁶⁷ Freud presents an analysis of the hidden nature of humour that constitutes this relation between joke teller and listener.⁶⁸ His insights are interesting, since it substantiates the awareness that jokes are not always ‘just jokes’ because, consciously or unconsciously, there is always a deeper layer within the joke because of its embeddedness in social relationships. First, he distinguished two types of jokes:

⁶⁴ Kuipers, “*Good humour, bas taste: A sociology of the joke*,” 2.

⁶⁵ Herfkens, “A smile and a tear – Dutch cabaret as a satirical vessel for social critique,” 2.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 10.

⁶⁷ Herfkens, “A smile and a tear – Dutch cabaret as a satirical vessel for social critique,” 3.

⁶⁸ Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*, chapter 7.

innocent and tendentious jokes. Innocent jokes are considered harmless while tendentious jokes pose a serious threat to the social order.⁶⁹ Tendentious jokes are a means to circumvent social taboos and to liberate controversial impulses, such as sexual and aggressive ones, that are usually suppressed because it is against the social norm to enjoy them. Since these jokes do not adhere to the social norm, they are considered controversial. When a tendentious joke is made, the impulses are directed to other persons or institutions. A tendentious joke therefore always requires three parties: the joke teller, the listener, and the target of the joke, whereas an innocent joke only requires two people, a joke teller, and a listener.⁷⁰ It is precisely those topics that are culturally defined as sacred, taboo, or disgusting that tend to be targeted as the subject of the joke. As such, jokes provide a mirror image of a culture's sense of morality which is previously described in chapter 2.1.3 as the arbitrariness of society.⁷¹ However, a tendentious joke can also alleviate customary restrictions for a moment during social interaction, i.e., during the performance.

Generally, when joking, people can say things that would be taboo in normal serious conversations. The 'joke-card' thus permits cabaret artists, in addition to their unique position as artists, to criticize, give orders, and mock listeners in ways that can otherwise be found offensive. In this thesis, humour is considered critical, revolutionary, and resistant. It can suggest something profound or encourage people to contemplate human behaviour in a creative way. In doing so, satire is not the main goal, but a means to make critique more manageable.⁷²

⁶⁹ Ibid, 139.

⁷⁰ Zijp, "Re-thinking Dutch cabaret: The conservative implications of humour in the Dutch cabaret tradition," 40.

⁷¹ Billig. *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*, 141.

⁷² Ibid, 10.

2.3 The contemporary position of cabaret in the Netherlands

Dick Zijp argued that the performing art of cabaret is generally seen as middlebrow art, which means that it is not considered a pure form of art, neither is it seen as pure amusement.⁷³ The categorisation as low-, middle-, or highbrow demonstrates, from a sociological approach, how people from different social classes draw strong symbolic boundaries based on comedy taste. Today, in many Western countries, comedy is considered arguably an emergent art that boasts considerable cultural prestige and attracts diverse audiences. Nevertheless, researchers Friedman and Kuipers revealed in their article that comedy taste is still strongly class specific.⁷⁴ More specifically, they found that the upper middle classes, possessing higher education and more cultural capital, generally exhibited tastes for highbrow comedy and rejected anything lowbrow, whereas the working and lower middle classes preferred more lowbrow comedy and were ambivalent about highbrow comedy. These high-low taste distinctions can be detected within the genre itself, causing today's cabaret to not be placed within one pigeonhole. Contemporary cabaret artists have indeed been experimenting with new forms of cabaret, by trying to think beyond the classical forms of engagement, while often playing with tradition and the perspective of the spectator as well.⁷⁵

As society progresses through time, it develops new social, cultural, and political topicalities. The challenge for contemporary Dutch cabaret artists is to find a balance in how, and in what way, to address these topicalities and new taboos. The growing prudence towards Islam and the rapid advancement of the digital age, for instance, affect the content of and how this is expressed. Especially in regard to the developments in the field of (social) media, many cabaret artists have expanded their theatrical arena into talk shows, columns, and social media platforms. These platforms however do not provide the same artistic security and autonomy

⁷³ Dick Zijp, in discussion with the author, March 16, 2021.

⁷⁴ Friedman and Kuipers, "The divisive power of humour: Comedy, taste and symbolic boundaries." 180-182.

⁷⁵ Zijp, "Re-thinking Dutch cabaret: The conservative implications of humour in the Dutch cabaret tradition." 64.

that a theatre offers. Without the original interpretative contextual frame of the theatre, in which cabaret artists used to perform, comedy's protective label as art becomes ambiguous and can be questioned. In addition, these online platforms provide a stage for everyone to express his or her opinion which means that the autonomy is not solely in the hands of the artist anymore. As a result, the controversially engaged cabaret artists run a higher risk of being misunderstood or overruled that, as argued in the introduction, is not always without its consequences. Stepping out of the moral sanctuary of the theatre thus means stepping out of the art world, over the wall, into the regular world with all its possible consequences.

Therefore, with the fading of wall and the conceptual definitions that went with it, both the art world and the regular world struggle with finding a settlement agreement on how to evaluate controversially engaged cabaret. With the lack of clear legislation, such a settlement normally functions as the unwritten rule to which all institutions adhere to. It used to provide information on how to assess such art and thus where to, normatively, draw the line of artistic freedom. However, with the rise of the social turn in which artists use social situations to explicitly engage with society and in doing so blur the distinction between art and regular life, the boundary of artistic freedom must be re-defined, and subsequently who should be responsible for this determination. In the context of this thesis, it leaves me wondering when will cabaret ceases to be art and will 'the man behind the myth' remain?

This quest for the code of conduct regarding the assessment of art and artistic freedom, is a complex, cultural, and a long-term process which concerns many different institutions. Taking into consideration the feasibility of this research, I was not able to address this entire process. I was, however, able to highlight one specific perspective within this exploration, namely the perspective of Dutch cabaret artists. I considered it valuable to emphasise their perspective regarding the discussion of artistic freedom as they experience both the prominent and slippery consequences of this right and its ambiguities. This is especially the case for

artists within the controversial art genre since they are known for their cutting-edge artistic discoveries rather than having legally recognisable qualities. By concentrating on the artists' perspectives, I was able to explore their intentions, motives, and thoughts concerning controversially engaged cabaret and in doing so, discover their position regarding the discussion around artistic freedom. To conclude, my aim was to uncover how cabaret artists position themselves under the notion of artistic freedom. Is the right to artistic freedom really of value for them or is it an illusion constituted by society?

3. Results

A final step in answering the main question of this thesis is the analysis of interviews I conducted. Despite the observation that they all applied different cabaret-styles, three specific themes recurred in all the interviews: the conceptual and practical understanding of artistic freedom, the contextual embeddedness of the performance, and the intention of the artists.

3.1 The conceptual and practical understanding of artistic freedom

Within the societal discussion around artistic freedom, some people consider the position of being a cabaret artist as a legitimization to push the normative boundaries, while other people would argue that it is precisely because of this position that such artists are the preachers of the spoken word. However, from the interviews it became clear to me that the opinion of the cabaret artists themselves is much more nuanced than what is being proclaimed within societal discussions. Their nuance stems from knowing that there is way more behind a performance than what appears on stage.

On a fundamental level, all three interviewees agreed that cabaret artists, due to the right of artistic freedom, should have more freedom to push the boundary of what is socially accepted. However, they disagreed on how far this freedom should reach. André Manuel and Peter Pannekoek, for example, stated that artistic freedom allows for total freedom when it comes to this topic. They consider this freedom vital to their profession and as long as the artistic reason is well embedded, no subject is sacred to them.

“André: Als je een punt hebt waar je zelf eigenlijk niet achter staat maar je vindt het artistiek gezien een uitdaging, dan moet je dat gewoon proberen. Ik vind dat je in het theater nog steeds ver gaan kan, ook qua thematiek.”

Janneke de Bijl also agrees that this freedom is vital to her profession and that she does work from the principle of freedom, which means that she does not have any constraints

beforehand. However, for her personally this does not mean that she wants or needs to address everything or anyone within her performance. She does not consider this as a restriction of freedom, rather a form of communication.

Janneke: “Ik denk dat ik meer mag dan in het dagelijks level maar ik ben niet op zoek naar een ultieme vrijplaats dus ik kan alles wat ik wil. Ik denk dat je heel zorgvuldig moet omgaan met die vrijheid omdat je niet wil dat mensen jou anders opvatten dan jij bedoelt.”

When discussing their understanding of artistic freedom, a striking pattern occurred with all three interviewees. In addition to their general recognition of artistic freedom on a fundamental level, they all added the nuance that one rather needs to consider the practical implications of this freedom, especially in regard to the current discussion. What was meant by this, is that the performance is not an isolated occurrence. On the contrary, the performing art of cabaret is subjected to, inspired by, and fuelled by its environment. The most frequent mentioned construct of this environment was the contextual embeddedness, which entails the zeitgeist in which the performance is played, as well as its contextual frame, and the artistic conditions of the performance. In addition, they all agreed that the intention of the cabaret artist is of great importance when evaluation whether the performance is too provocative. Thus, all interviewees agreed that their position of being cabaret artists allows them on a fundamental level to have the freedom to push the normative boundary but that the practical implication of this freedom is not that cur-clear, as it is subjected to and inspired by its environment. However, they differed in their opinion on how far this freedom should reach on a practical level which is a result of, inter alia, personal characteristics and their chosen cabaret style. The following chapters will dive deeper into the abovementioned constructs.

3.2 *Contextual embeddedness*

The contextual embeddedness of the performance has been recognized as an important construct by the three interviewees since this embeddedness provides the interpretative frame from which meaning can be retrieved. As a clarification Peter, for example, stated the following:

“Het is natuurlijk een wereld van verschil of je iets op het podium zegt of in de kroeg, laat staan in een politieke arena. Je hebt een politieke arena en je hebt een artistieke arena.”

During the interviews, the importance of two types of contexts became clear. First, the societal context which entails the zeitgeist and the accompanying characteristics in which the performance is played. Second, the artistic context, which consists of both the contextual frame and the artistic conditions of the performance. These contexts were considered influential for the creative process of the cabaret artist, but also for the normative evaluation of the performance and thus for the discussion concerning artistic freedom. The following paragraphs will discuss this in more detail.

3.2.1 *The societal context*

Despite the acknowledgement of the overall significance of the societal context concerning cabaret theatre, all three interviewees emphasized a different angle regarding its significance. For example, both André Manuel and Peter Pannekoek argued that the performing art of cabaret screams for social content and that, as a result, society fuels its content. Despite their differences in the degree of social engagement, they both apply a generally provocative cabaret style when doing so, due to their personal artistic preference.

Peter: Ik heb harde humor. Ik vind op een podium mag je amoreel zijn en immoreel. Je mag ook moreel zijn alleen ik vind dat zelf qua smaak vaak wat minder interessant.

André came with the observation that certain topicalities have become more sensitive within today's society compared to, for example, ten years ago. According to André, today's society has become more prude when it concerns discussing such topicalities which complicates performing in his specific cabaret style, as it is then quickly interpreted as offensive and/or insulting. The emergence of (social) media facilitated this development, as it is a means to broadcast the performance, or part of the performance, and as it allows everybody to respond instantly. This development and shift in the societal context are the explanations of why André is not active on social media and why he does not want his performances broadcasted. When I asked him if he felt inhibited by this societal change, he answered as follows:

“Nou niet geremd want ik kan nog precies wat ik wil doen maar ik moet het gewoon wel doen in het theater, op de geëigende plek waar het thuishoort.”

Peter Pannekoek recognized the dangers of social media as well, but he also emphasized the positive effects. The current societal climate allows initiating more discussions which, for him, is one of the main assets of cabaret.

Peter: “Nou de verschuiving waar ik in geloof, afgezien van de slechte kanten van sociale media, wat er extreem goed aan is, is dat mensen een stem hebben gekregen die je eerst niet hoorde. Er is dus ook meer wrijving. Er is meer discussie over stukken omdat daarvoor, ja hoe moesten mensen dat uiten? Met een brief in de krant? Dat weet ik niet. Dus dat vind ik harstikke goed en die discussie is ook interessant.”

Thus, both André and Peter are aware of the changes within society and take the current societal context into account, however, for them this does not necessarily mean that they need or should adjust their content or cabaret style towards these changes. Janneke, on the other hand, positions herself differently concerning the latter. She argued that cabaret artists should always account for the societal context as their performances are subjected to these influences as well. The following explanation was given:

“Ik denk dat je altijd wel rekenschap moet geven van de maatschappelijke context want je maakt een cabaretvoorstelling niet op een eiland. Je maakt het binnen een bepaalde tijd en in een bepaald land dus daar heb je sowieso mee te dealen want in die tijd en dat bepaalde land zit je publiek ook dus is het logisch dat je daar op een bepaalde manier rekening mee houdt. En als je een bepaalde gevoeligheid die er heerst onterecht vindt, dan kan je dat ook bespreken maar dan erken je wel dat die gevoeligheid er is.”

According to Janneke her reasoning, cabaret artists need to consider the societal context and, as opposed to André and Peter, adapt to this. This adaption does not mean that you need to conform towards society, but it does mean that the differences need to be recognized. Thus, she considers the societal context and her performances interwoven as they exist with and influence each other. In this regard, Janneke argued that the legitimization of a joke as ‘just a joke’ is not possible. The fact people laugh at a joke and receive it as a joke indicates the societal embeddedness of the joke. It is a joke precisely because of its content. Janneke provided the following example:

“ ‘Maar een grap’, dat kan bijna niet want er is een reden waarom mensen lachen. Die sketch die wij toen hadden waarin Jasper een homo nadeed, die was grappig omdat mensen denken ‘o ja, zo ’n homo’. Dat was wel ‘maar een grap’ maar het feit dat we het grappig vonden kwam omdat we homo’s anders/raar vinden. Dus het feit dat het een grap is staat niet los van dat er inhoudelijk niks in zit. Het is een grap die ontstaat omdat er tegelijkertijd een bepaalde inhoud en stereotype aan geassocieerd wordt.

Thus, the influence of the societal context, i.e., the zeitgeist, on their performances was acknowledged by all interviewees but from three different angles. Each angle can be explained from their personal experiences, artistic goals, and considerations. André has the

most experience as an artist and, because of this experience, considers his specific cabaret style in high regard. He therefore decided not to adjust his style or content towards the societal context, but to limit his artistic playing field merely to the theatre, as he thinks that this is where the performance belongs. Peter, on the other hand, is one of the most successful upcoming cabaret artists and is, subsequently, exploring with both content as context. In doing so, he does not fear making mistakes. He rather considers them learning moments, as well in regard to social media. In this regard, both André and Peter allow their artistic personalities to exceed the normative boundary way more than their ‘regular selves’ off-stage. Janneke attest to this, however, at the same time she feels a moral responsibility towards her ‘regular self’ and the accompanying norms and values which inhibit her to exceed beyond a certain point. Subsequently, she applies a more moderate cabaret-style at which she does take account of the societal context.

3.2.2 The artistic context

Besides the societal context, the artistic context was considered of even greater importance as this is a construct they can control and to which they feel a great responsibility. The artistic context entails both the contextual frame of the performance, as well as its artistic qualities. Both were recognized as essential constructs by the interviewees that need to be taken into account when evaluating the performance.

Regarding the context in which the performance is played, all interviewees distinguished two categories namely, outside and inside the theatre. Outside the theatre concerns locations such as talk shows, social media platforms, and broadcasting performances on television. The interviewees ideally preferred to perform inside a theatre. For them, the location of the performance inside a theatre equalled the legitimate use of the right of artistic freedom. Besides the theatrical frame, which categorizes the performance as art and acknowledges

them as artists, the theatre also allows the artists to be the centre of attention and provides them with the time to structure their performance in a way that builds up to a certain point. The theatre can thus be seen as a small part of the art world within the regular world, which provides the space, time, and attention for the artists to create their own and intended context. Janneke considered this contextual distinction inherent to the difference between the artist and her regular self. She gave the following example:

“Ik heb ook aan de Slimste Mens meegedaan en ik merkte dat ze bij de redactie wilde dat ik “leuk” ging doen tussen de spelletjes door en toen dacht ik, ja maar dat kan echt niet. Dat is zo iets anders en dat snappen ze soms niet. Dan willen ze dat je net zo gaat praten als op het podium maar dan zou het echt opeens heel bruut zijn en dat is echt wat anders. Dus ik zie echt dat je je ‘echt zelf’ hebt en je ‘podium zelf’. Dat vind ik juist heel erg leuk, dat het echt een vak is wat je op bepaalde momenten doet en niet te pas en te onpas half gaat doen.”

Peter and André, on the other hand, experience less distinction between their artistic personalities and their regular selves. Therefore, they attached more value to the contextual distinction. Peter explained the difference between performing inside and outside a theatre as follows:

“Ten eerste mensen kopen een kaartje. Zij maken een bewust keuze om naar mij toe te komen. De kans is ook groot dat ze mij al redelijk leuk vinden en daarom een kaartje hebben gekocht. Ik heb daar anderhalf uur om uit te leggen wat ik wil. Bij mijn laatste voorstelling over de ophefcultuur en het moreel stenigen van mensen, daar kan ik anderhalf uur in alle rust naar dat punt toewerken. Bij televisie ben je eigenlijk een inbreker. Ik heb dat zeker ook ervaren omdat ik DWDD heb gedaan en Dit Was Het Nieuws. Je komt bij mensen thuis, die zappen en opeens ben je er. Die vinden je

misschien wel helemaal niet leuk, sterker nog die kunnen al een hekel aan je hebben.

Het is veel sneller en dat is veel moeilijker communiceren.”

Both André and Janneke gave a similar description of Peter his explanation. André, however, supplemented this answer by emphasizing the importance of control, especially in regard to the difference outside the theatre:

“Dat is het allergrootste voordeel van een theatervoorstelling want daar ben jij de baas en dan kan jij vertellen welke kant het opgaat. Jij houdt in de gaten, als artiest, in hoeverre je de bocht uitvliegt. Dat mensen er niet mee aan de haal gaan zoals nu natuurlijk op een heleboel andere platforms wel gebeurt. Ik denk ook echt dat als een cabaretier in de problemen komt, dat ook vaak buiten zijn eigen bubbeltje is. Dan is dat vaak in televisiefragmentjes of een keer tijdens een interview.”

Besides this difference in location, all interviewees also emphasised the importance of the artistic quality of the performance. This evaluation depends, inter alia, on what cabaret style is used since this determines the structure and type of humour that is applied. As mentioned before, André and Peter acknowledge that their performance style can be quite provocative, however, they emphasize that it is just a style form and not a means on itself. They consider the failure to recognize their performance as an artistic style form, as the crux of the problem concerning the discussion. In this respect, André stated that it is necessary that the quality of the joke is met, especially when it concerns provocative styles such as satire and roasts. However, the evaluation of whether a joke is qualitatively good is subjective and I can therefore not provide a definite answer. For André, the purpose of the joke is of decisiveness:

“De kwaliteit van een roast maakt natuurlijk of het wel of niet zinvol is om te doen want als je alleen maar onbenullige grappen maakt over iemand, wat voor zin heeft dat dan. Maar als het ergens prikkelt, als het ergens iets triggert omdat je aan iets zit wat heel gevoelig ligt bij een aantal mensen, ja dat vind ik mooi. Maar dan is het nog steeds

afhankelijk van de kwaliteit van de grappen. Goede humor is iets wat in één opmerking iets kraakhelder kan krijgen maar tegelijkertijd ook troost biedt.”

Janneke applies a more moderate/non-provocative style in her cabaret performances at which she is also very alert on ensuring the quality. She considers the structure of the performance the highest priority when doing so.

Janneke: “Wanneer je grappen maakt, moet jij de sympathie hebben. Dus wanneer jij iemand kapot maakt of over iemand iets negatiefs zegt, moet het publiek voor jou zijn want anders gaan ze niet om jou lachen want dan gunnen ze jou dat niet. Dus je hebt allerlei manieren om te zorgen dat het publiek met jou meegaat bijvoorbeeld duidelijk maken dat iemand jou eerst iets heeft geflikt. Dan wil het publiek graag dat jij diegene terugpakt.”

Thus, all three cabaret artists consider themselves responsible for their performance by making sure that what they are advocating is clear. Due to the inevitability of human subjectivity, the interviewees value clarity more than whether the audience does or does not agree, or whether they think it is funny or not. Quoting André on his example:

“Superieure satire schopt altijd tegen schenen aan. Er zijn altijd mensen die er enorm veel problemen mee hebben maar dat hoort ook zo en daardoor is het niet minder goed. Daarom is het ook superieure satire.”

This clarity can be artistically ensured by means of the theatrical frame, structure, and quality of the performance. The purity of the cabaret style is thus related to its integer use. In regard to this integrity, the intention of the artist was considered of great significance as well.

3.3 Intention

The interviewees experienced it as their responsibility to use their right of artistic freedom in a responsible way which, for them, meant that their performances are well thought through and

that their intentions are clear. Even though their performances differed in content and style, all three had the intention to provide the audience with a new perspective so that they can look at topicalities in a new way. In doing so, the use of a specific cabaret style facilitates the way in which the new perspective is offered. Peter even compared this coping mechanism of humour with religion:

“Het leven is nutteloos uiteindelijk en je probeert daar zin aan te geven. Dat hebben we eeuwenlang gedaan door allemaal religies en voor mij is humor in dat opzicht religie. Gewoon een beetje kunnen lachen, lucht kunnen brengen in het leven, in de situatie. Ik vind humor gewoon een heel fijn glijmiddel om het op die manier te brengen.”

However, this does not mean that they want to convey or persuade a certain message from a superior position. Nevertheless, their position as cabaret artists does provide them with a certain amount of distance to society, that enables them to gain these new and surprising point of views, which can then be shared within their performances. Janneke substantiated this by means of an example of her own performance:

“Ik sta niet op het podium om mijn mening te geven of om iets te bereiken in die zin. Maar ik sta wel op het podium om mensen ergens anders naar te laten kijken. Eigenlijk hoop je een soort nieuwe luikjes in mensen hun hoofd te openen maar dat zijn niet per se luikjes van ‘ik ga een beter mens worden’. Het kunnen ook luikjes zijn van ‘wat raar hoe we elkaar eigenlijk begroeten’ en dat je daar dan met een nieuwe blik naar kijkt. Het zou heel tof zijn als dat ons een beetje lukt maar dat hoeft niet per se ethisch te zijn voor mij. Dat kan ook gewoon op sociaal vlak. Mijn boodschap is bijvoorbeeld meer ‘wat zijn mensen eigenlijk raar’.”

In general, the intention of the cabaret artist is thus to provide the audience with the opportunity to think differently. In contrast, this does not mean that the audience immediately

needs to agree with the perspective that is presented. Whether this should be the case differs per cabaret artist and thus depends on the cabaret style and whether the intention is conveyed clearly. For instance, Peter acknowledged that he prefers to create confusion within the audience:

“Ik vind het zelf niet zo interessant om het bij een overwegend links publiek te gaan hebben over Geert Wilders want dan zijn mensen het toch wel met je eens. Ik vind dat een beetje lui dus ik zoek dan liever naar een nieuwe, beetje schurende, ingang. Als ik een stuk doe, dan wil ik verwarring scheppen. Maar je wil het op een zo’n goed mogelijke manier doen dus dan moet je er bij stil staan.”

André pushes this controversial angle even further. He is of the opinion that the intention with which the performance was made is of decisive importance concerning its normative evaluation.

“Ik zou er bijvoorbeeld niet voor terugdeinzen om een extreemrechts theaterprogramma te maken. Ik zit echt wel aan het linker-linker-linker kantje van het politieke spectrum maar ik zou ook een extreemrechts programma kunnen maken als ik vind dat er een artistieke reden is. Theater maakt je met een idee erachter en die moet dan wel duidelijk zijn.”

It can be challenging for the audience to grasp this controversy, and it is therefore essential that the concerning cabaret artist makes his or her intentions very clear. This, in turn, is also an artistic quality since it needs to be done properly.

In conclusion, from the interviews with the cabaret artists, it became clear that both the contextual embeddedness of the performance and the intention of the cabaret artist are considered of great importance when evaluating controversially provocative cabaret. Because of the variability of society and human subjectivity in general, they argued that it is impossible, and not desirable, to please the entire audience and/or society. It is not their goal

to persuade the audience towards the perspective that they are offering, rather they want to provide space to be able to think differently so that critical discussions may emerge. In doing so, the audience does not need to agree with what is advocated, however, it should be clear what is conveyed and why. Hence, in regard to the discussion of artistic freedom, they find it legitimate that they enjoy this right, however, they feel the accountability to handle this right of artistic freedom in a responsible way which entails considering the contextual embeddedness of the performance and being clear about their intentions (figure 2).

André: “Het idee achter kunst, lijkt mij, en dat zal ik ook altijd tot de lengte der dagen blijven verdedigen, is dat het zo vrij is als je maar wil dat het is. Daarbij is het de lach wat ons bevrijdt.”

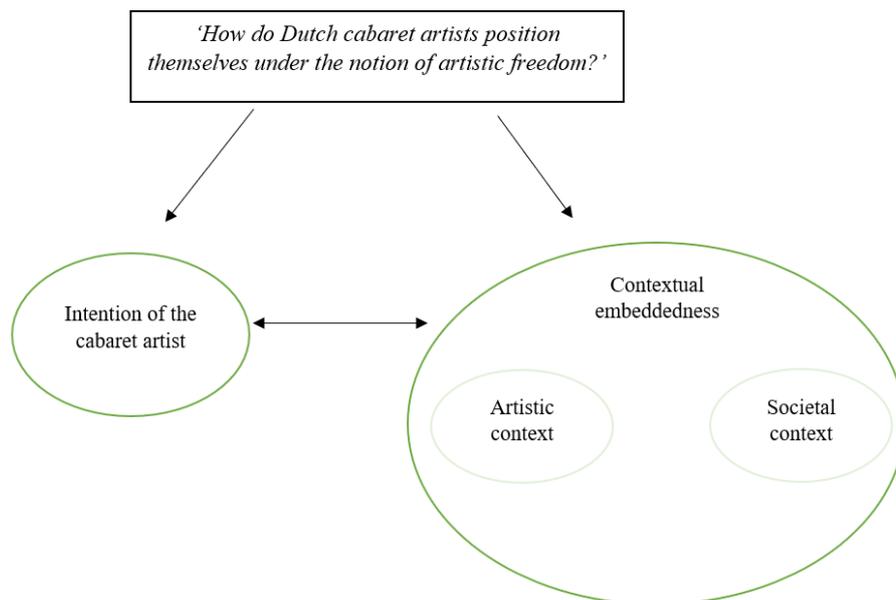


Figure 2. Visual representation of the results.

4. Conclusion and discussion

Where artistic freedom traditionally seemed to be a blessing, many contemporary cabaret artists experience it, with the advent of social media, to be a slippery slope. Violent reactions from society are not unconceivable anymore and the artists of today are aware of this hazard. The issue concerning artistic freedom is complex as it takes place within the dynamics of a multi-layered and fast-paced society. With this thesis, I wanted to capture the main constructs underlying the discussion around artistic freedom and, in doing so, explore and emphasize the perspective of Dutch cabaret artists concerning this topicality by means of the following research question: *'How do Dutch cabaret artists position themselves under the notion of artistic freedom?'*

From the interviews, it became clear that the answer to this question is not unequivocal as the cabaret artists pointed out that the answer depends on multiple conditions. First, all three cabaret artists considered the right of artistic freedom as their prerogative. However, they did recognize a difference in the fundamental and practical understanding of artistic freedom, that, subsequently, has its consequences when put into practice. Second, the contextual embeddedness, which consists of both the societal- and the artistic context, and the intention of the artist, were considered as the main conditions that need to be considered when practicing and evaluating the right of artistic freedom. The contextual embeddedness of the performance provides the interpretable framework, which is formed by the current societal climate, the location in which the performance is placed, and the chosen cabaret style with the proper structure which preserves the artistic quality. This contextual embeddedness is considered essential, as the interviewees experienced this to be their best effort for keeping in control of the performance. Third, they considered it as their responsibility to handle the right of artistic freedom with care and find it therefore essential to be clear about their intentions, which is done by means of its contextual embeddedness. In this regard, it is not their goal to

shock or persuade the audience with the perspective that they are offering. They merely want to offer the opportunity to think differently and in doing so, the audience does not need to agree with what is advocated or change their opinion. Lastly, the artists pointed out that, even if all these conditions are met, people can still be offended by their performances. This is attributable to the subjectivity of the human, which has its negative and positive aspects as it is also this subjectivity that is causing the magic of art to happen.

In regard to the theoretical considerations that are laid down in the theoretical framework, the following discoveries stood out in comparison to the results. First, with the absence of an official legal definition of artistic freedom, the description as given in chapter 2.1.1, was in accordance with the fundamental understanding of the artists. They considered it a privilege of their profession and therefore agreed with the observation that artists indeed hold a unique position within society. Unlike to what was expected from the theoretical framework, the artists did not use their position to fulfil the role of a social critic. The artists believed that they had something new or unexpected to share, however, none of this was accompanied by a deliberative intention to persuade, change, or create a better society. They merely want to offer the audience an opportunity to gain new perspectives or insights conveyed by their performances. In doing so, they consider it the right of the spectator to like or dislike it, to feel offended or not, and to express this if felt necessary. Furthermore, the cabaret artists considered their performances as a form of communication, a dialogue in which one can agree to disagree. According to the interviewees, it is precisely because of this reciprocal freedom, that art is enriching. However, they also recognized that the practical implication of artistic freedom is not as simple as the fundamental description might make it seem. Regarding this practical implication, the artists emphasized the importance of the theatre as a clearly demarcated artistic area. Especially in these modern times, where social media can break through all physical walls, they find it essential that their intentions are clear

which can, *inter alia*, be derived from its physical location. The cabaret artists experienced the walls of the theatre as their protective shield that clearly separates the regular world from the art world. When transcending this wall, the cabaret artists acknowledged that it blurs the original distinction and that they, therefore, need to be very clear on their intentions when doing so. Thus, where the theoretical framework was not able to define this wall with certainty, the interviewees filled this gap. Furthermore, regarding the question to what extent cabaret artists are allowed to push the normative boundary under the header of artistic freedom, all interviewees were of the opinion that this depends on individual moral compasses, instead of the arbitrariness of their audience. They acknowledged that it is impossible to adjust to everybody's sensitivities and that this should also not be their aim as they want to elicit discussions. It is therefore not considered convenient to completely depend on the audience, but rather to comply with their own personal boundaries and rules, which are based on their inner moral compasses. By doing so, the cabaret artists expect some good faith from the audience as well since a dialogue requires benevolence.

As acknowledged by Dick Zijp⁷⁶, the research concerning the performing art of cabaret is very minimal. For further research, I would therefore recommend continuing to explore this genre, as there are still a lot of knowledge gaps. For instance, I would recommend to approach this topicality from a sociological perspective. This research focused on the artistic point of view regarding the discussion of artistic freedom, however, the artist and its audience influence and depend on each other. Subsequently, the notion of artistic freedom cannot and should not be realized without highlighting the perspective of this significant other. The dynamics between the artist and society in preserving the right of artistic freedom yield an interesting contribution. In addition, it would be interesting to take the capitalistic

⁷⁶ Zijp, "Pleidooi voor ideologische-kritische benadering van cabaret," 58. Dick Zijp, in discussion with the author, March 16, 2021.

context into account when researching the contemporary understanding of artistic freedom. From the interviews, it became clear that the cabaret artists, ideally, would like to work in total freedom which also means being independent of the supply and demand of society. However, since they make a living with their art, they are subjected to capitalistic commercial purposes. For further research, it would thus be of added value to research how this conflict of interest intervenes with the notion of artistic freedom, as cabaret artists find themselves in a difficult balancing act: with one foot in and the other foot outside society.

I end this thesis by acknowledging my own biases concerning controversially engaged cabaret theatre. Beforehand, I considered the controversial statements of certain cabaret artists as unnecessary as it, from my point of view, merely elicited societal uproar. However, after conducting this research, my opinion has changed as I now understand and respect the train of thought that underlies these performances. Let this thesis be a reminder that there is always more than what meets the eye, especially concerning art.

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6. Appendices

6.1 Appendix A – online reviews chosen cabaret artists

André Manuel –provocative cabaret style:

- <https://www.volkskrant.nl/cultuur-media/andre-manuel-is-weer-grof-gitzwart-en-goudeerlijk~b6075e37/>
- <https://www.volkskrant.nl/cultuur-media/dreejklezoew-is-een-slim-gestructureerd-maar-ook-lekker-rumoerig-programma-vier-sterren~b8449945/>
- <https://bunkertheaterzaken.nl/artiesten/andre-manuel/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wy1hW1yiGfE>

Peter Pannekoek – provocative cabaret style:

- <https://www.parool.nl/nieuws/peter-pannekoek-nu-was-er-geen-enkele-lach-mijn-comedyhart-bloedde~b91b7fe5/>
- <https://www.theaterkrant.nl/recensie/later-was-alles-beter/peter-pannekoek/>
- <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/echt-vilein-of-gevaarlijk-worden-de-grappen-van-peter-pannekoek-niet~bd8fba2/>
- <https://www.volkskrant.nl/cultuur-media/pannekoek-omarmt-het-duister-en-houdt-een-gloedvol-pleidooi-voor-mededogen-vier-sterren~b029d10e/>

Janneke de Bijl – moderate/non provocative cabaret style:

- <https://www.parool.nl/nieuws/wat-fijn-dat-er-types-als-janneke-de-bijl-rondlopen~bfb6dac8/>
- <https://www.volkskrant.nl/cultuur-media/piekerende-janneke-de-bijl-goed-op-dreef-in-debuutshow~bff365e0/>
- <https://www.theaterkrant.nl/recensie/zonder-zin-kan-het-ook/janneke-de-bijl/>

6.2 Appendix B - Topic-list interviews

Doel onderzoek:

Ontdekken hoe de grenzen van artistieke vrijheid worden begrepen, toegepast en eventueel opgerekt door Nederlandse cabaretiers.

Topic-list:

- Begrip van ‘artistieke vrijheid’ in theorie (woorden) en praktijk (toepassing).
- Morele grensbepaling artistieke vrijheid: maatschappij versus cabaretier.
- Rol/positie van (“provocerende”) geëngageerde cabaretiers in de huidige maatschappij.
- Relatie cabaretiers en publiek.
- *Intentie cabaretier en ontvangst publiek.*

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6.3 Appendix C - Interview questions

Introductievragen

1. Waarom bent u cabaretier geworden?
2. Wat karakteriseert cabaret voor u? (*wat maakt cabaret cabaret?*)
3. In hoeverre zou u uw cabaretstijl classificeren als (kritisch) maatschappelijk betrokken en/of provocerend?
4. Zoekt u als cabaretier de grens op van wat u kan zeggen tijdens uw voorstellingen?
 - Ja, waarom?
 - Nee, waarom?
5. Waar baseert u uw keuze op om wel/niet te “provoceren”?
6. Bent u van stijl veranderd door de jaren heen?
 - Was daar een aanleiding voor?

Artistieke vrijheid

7. (Hoe) ervaart u artistieke vrijheid?
8. Ervaart uzelf een verschuiving van hoe artistieke vrijheid vroeger en nu wordt opgevat/uitgevoerd?

In verschillende artikelen komt naar voren dat cabaretiers, wanneer een grap verkeerd is gevallen of geïnterpreteerd, verkondigen dat het ‘spot/ironie’ is en zich dus verdedigen onder het mom van artistieke vrijheid.

9. Heeft u het idee dat artistieke vrijheid wordt gezien als bescherming/legitimering voor het opzoeken van grenzen binnen cabaret?

Grensbepaling AV binnen cabaret

10. Is er ooit iemand in uw voorstelling weggelopen?

11. Wanneer iets als provocerend wordt beschouwd is persoonsafhankelijk: Wanneer gaat voor u ironie/spot over tot beledigen?

- Waar houdt voor u kunst op en begint de mens?

Rol/positie cabaretier t.o.v samenleving

12. Vindt u dat een cabaretier zich zou moeten excuseren als het publiek het (te) beledigend vindt?

Socioloog Michael Mulkey zei dat het juist het symbolische onderscheid tussen humor en serieus taalgebruik is waardoor grappen voor serieuze doeleinden gebruikt kunnen worden.

13. Wat is voor u de meerwaarde om maatschappelijke kritiek via kunst/cabaret te uiten?

14. Wat is volgens u de rol van cabaretiers binnen de huidige samenleving?

Cabaretier heeft wellicht lastigere positie dan bijv. schilder m.b.t. leveren maatschappelijke kritiek omdat hij/zij eigenlijk onderdeel is van het kunstwerk. Daardoor onderscheid tussen 'het is kunst' en 'persoonlijke mening cabaretier' onduidelijker:

15. Hoe ziet u deze balans tussen de autonome positie van een cabaretier als kunstenaar en zijn/haar maatschappij kritische betrokkenheid?

Relatie cabaretier en publiek

Relatie van cabaretier en publiek lijkt vrij complex door het subjectieve karakter van humor en het huidige polariserende klimaat.

16. Hoe ervaart u de relatie met uw publiek?

17. Houdt u rekening met het wel/niet gebruiken van maatschappelijke gevoelige onderwerpen die als provocerend kunnen worden ervaren door het publiek? (bijv geloof, pedofolie)

18. Wanneer u een voorstelling maakt, houdt u dan rekening met het feit dat u bepaalde (groep) mensen zou kunnen kwetsen?

19. Heb ik in uw ogen, in het kader van dit onderwerp, nog iets vergeten te vragen?