

What's Your Music?
Subjective Theories of Music-Creating Artists

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ABSTRACT

In an interview study with 17 music-creating artists (composers of contemporary 'classical' music, electronic music, musicals, movie scores, and jazz musicians) from Southern Germany, three types of music-creating artists could be discerned: the avant-gardists, the neo-romantics, and the self-disclosing artists. These types represent social groups that are prone to typical intergroup conflicts.

The different types of music-creating artists adhere to different aesthetic ideals: the avant-gardists emphasize the abstract beauty of musical structures and try to develop their music from within the music itself, the neo-romantics view music as the true language of the heart and try to express something through their music, and the self-disclosing artists feel the drive to express their feelings and sensations by means of music. As a consequence, different dimensions of musical communication are pivotal: formal aspects, the relationship between the musician and the listener, and self-disclosure. The three types of music-creating artists resemble the types of composers analyzed by Julius Bahle in the 1930s (*e.g.* Bahle, 1930).

Regarding their *modus operandi*, the musicians differ on a continuum between a purely rational creative work and the creation of music in an unconscious outburst of inspiration. Nevertheless, most musicians experience an alternation between phases of intuitive inspiration and phases of deliberate rational construction during the creative process. Therefore, a typology of musicians based on their *modus operandi* seems unhelpful.

KEYWORDS: musical creativity, composers, music as communication, types of musicians, composing process

INTRODUCTION

SINCE the foundation of psychology and sociology as independent scientific disciplines, a multitude of empirical studies have focused on the reaction of subjects to aesthetic stimuli. By contrast, the number of studies on producers of art, such as painters, sculptors, poets, and composers, is marginal, even though this topic was quite prominent in German psychology before World War II. The main objective of this paper, which is based on studies that formed part of my dissertation (Holtz, 2005a), is to take up these attempts from the early 20th century to analyze differences and similarities between music-creating artists within a communicational framework.

Around the year 1900, the Austrian composer and musicologist Friedrich von Hausegger broke new ground in the area of musical aesthetics: from the viewpoint of a ‘modern psychological conception’ (1903, p.363), he asked famous musicians how and why their music came into being. Famous composers such as Richard Strauss and Engelbert Humperdinck went on to answer von Hausegger’s questionnaire.

Von Hausegger’s methodology also inspired the research of Julius Bahle in the 1930s. Bahle used a whole arsenal of different research methods to investigate the psychology of the creation of music. One of his methods was the ‘far-distance experiment’, in which composers were asked to intensively observe themselves during the act of composing. Famous artists like Schönberg, Orff, and Honegger took part in such studies. Bahle also conducted experiments during which composers had to solve compositional tasks in his laboratory at the University of Leipzig (Bahle, 1936).

Bahle first defined different types of composers against a communicational background (1930). Referring to expression, representation, and appeal – the three functions of language described by Karl Buehler (*e.g.* 1923) – Bahle found three types of composers, which differ in terms of the predominant communicative function of their music. For the expression artists, their own feelings are most important. The representation artists try to set non-musical contents like ideas or experiences to music [1]. In contrast to this, the connection between the form artists and the appeal function of language supposed by Bahle is more subtle. These musicians, who neither care too much for expression nor for self-representation, are primarily concerned with the abstract musical form. The connection to the appeal function lies in the direct and unmediated effects of these musical forms on the listener. The music appeals to the listener to perceive it in a certain way.

In his later paper “Arbeitstypus und Inspirationstypus im Schaffen der Komponisten” (The work type and the inspiration type among composers; 1938), Bahle describes two types of composers that mostly differ in terms of their *modus operandi*: the representatives of the first type, called the work type, consciously construct musical work, tend towards experimentation, and judge the results of their work with their artistic reasoning. Bahle considers, for example, Bach, Beethoven, and Reger to be representatives of the work type. The second type is the inspiration type. These musicians create their music in an unconscious eruption of creativity. Only in later stages of the compositional process does rational reasoning come into play. Examples of representatives of this type are Schubert, Berlioz, and Tchaikovsky.

After Bahle’s withdrawal from scientific psychology during the Nazi era (*cf.* Wettersten, 1999), psychological studies on music-creating artists became rare.

Psychological studies using classical composers as subjects were published only occasionally (exceptions are Reitman, 1965, and Bennett, 1976). Possible reasons for this have been discussed to lie in the unwillingness of composers to participate in such studies (Sloboda, 1985, p. 103) and the long time-frames involved in the compositional process, which impede direct studies (Sawyer, 1992, p. 261).

Interestingly, psychologists have shown more interest in the concepts and attitudes of jazz musicians. On the one hand, ethnomusicologists have investigated the views of jazz musicians in the context of research on the links between the practice of jazz and the musicians' social world and culture (Berliner, 1994; Monson, 1996). On the other hand, jazz musicians have been interviewed in the context of creativity research (*e.g.* Sawyer, 1992). Here, the main objective is a description of the peculiarities of improvisation in a jazz context as compared to the work of a classical composer. The views of musicians are also important in the field of research on musical identities and musical communication. From the perspective of modern social constructionist approaches, people can display different identities in different social contexts. In spite of this, a relatively stable core identity emerges, especially from autobiographical narratives (Bruner, 1990). Any kind of identity must also be understood as the result of mutual social constructions resulting from communication with others (Gergen, 1994). Therefore, in any kind of musical activity (including listening to music, playing music, *and* creating music), people develop a musical identity, which itself conversely influences a person's musical activities. This musical identity is mutually related to a person's core identity and other identities (Hargreaves, Miell, & MacDonald, 2002) and is formed in interaction with others, while also influencing future interactions with others. Within the scope of this approach, MacDonald and Wilson conducted a series of focus group interviews

(MacDonald & Wilson, 2005) and semi-structured interviews (MacDonald & Wilson, 2006) with professional jazz musicians from Scotland.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Between 2003 and 2004, 17 composers, jazz musicians and ‘popular’ musicians living in Southern Germany were interviewed. Among them were two female composers. The interviews took place mostly in the homes of the composers. Four of the musicians were previously known to the author – who is an amateur clarinet and saxophone player in jazz bands and classical ensembles – from musical activities. The contact to other musicians was established with the help of former musical colleagues of the author. Other composers were approached via the contact address on their personal websites. Three composers refused to participate because of time constraints.

Eleven of the musicians described themselves foremost as composers of contemporary ‘classical’ music, three described themselves as jazz musicians (whereas one of these musicians also composes ‘classical’ pieces), one as an electronic artist, one as a composer of musicals, and one as a composer of movie scores. They included both beginners and established artists. All of the jazz musicians and popular musicians regarded composing music as a pivotal part of their musical activities. They were encouraged to refer in particular to their activities as a composer

in the interviews. The age of the participating musicians ranged from the early 20s to the late 70s (see Table 1).

< Table 1 >

THE INTERVIEW

In the first part of the interview, the participants were asked questions about themselves and their music. If necessary, the interviewer phrased the questions differently to ensure an adequate understanding of the questions by the interviewee. Whenever new, relevant issues emerged in the course of the interviews, the interviewer was free to inquire about these previously unplanned aspects.

After giving a short statement on their musical career and their musical activities, the participants were asked in more detail how they create their music. After an introductory general question on their *modus operandi*, the participants were asked whether there are rules according to which they create music, whether their moods, their surroundings, memories, or personal experiences influence their works, and how they would describe their feelings and their mental state when creating music (*cf.* Sabaneev, 1928). Afterwards, the musicians were asked to describe the creation of a showcase work of their own.

The next question – taking up Bahle’s concept of a work type and an inspiration type (1938) – addressed whether creating music felt to them more like hard work or more like being kissed by a muse. In the next question, the musicians

were asked to describe what their music actually is. Following this, they were asked whether their music is more like a ‘language of the heart’ (cf. Hausegger, 1903) or like ‘tonally moving forms’ (cf. Hanslick, 1854).

Another question in this section addressed the participants’ theories on possible correlations between the complexity of their music and the listeners’ reaction towards the music. The musicians were then asked why they believe they create music. The final question in this section asked whether a kind of symbolic meaning of their music is most important to them, or whether the abstract structure of the music is pivotal.

The second part of the interview addressed the musicians’ lay theories about their listeners. They were asked who they believe likes their music and what a listener has to bear in mind when listening to the music. They were also asked what they believe happens when people listen to their music. The next question addressed the influence of society, and the final question was on the musicians’ theories regarding the interaction between themselves and their listeners.

The interview sessions were tape-recorded and the tapes were transcribed.

THE ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS

THE RESEARCH PROGRAM SUBJECTIVE THEORIES

The analysis of the interviews was based on the principles of the research program Subjective Theories (Groeben, Wahl, Schlee, & Scheele, 1988; Groeben & Scheele,

2001). The idea of man underlying this concept can be viewed in the tradition of the man-the-scientist model in Kelly's Personal Constructs Theory (PCT) approach (1955). At least in those fields in which individuals have some experience or expertise, their actions are guided and controlled by theories, which resemble scientific theories in terms of their structure. Interviewees, or 'research partners', are viewed as being able to reflect and talk about the set of subjective theories guiding their actions. In the course of the research project, the researcher tries to reconstruct the interviewee's subjective theories. To ensure an adequate understanding of the interviewees' theories by the researcher, both the researcher and the interviewee have to agree on the formulation of the reconstructed theories. This process is called 'communicative validation'.

After the interview sessions were transcribed, first of all a comprehensive interpretation of the interview was written by the author. At a second meeting with the interviewees, the researcher's interpretation of the interview and his reconstruction of the subjective theories were then discussed extensively. Following this, the interviewees and the interviewer cooperatively condensed the statements to keywords. Upon the acceptance of the chosen formulations by both the interviewer and the interviewee, the reconstruction of the interviewees' Subjective Theories was completed.

EXPLICATION OF RELEVANT ANSWER CATEGORIES

In the next step, the musicians' answers to the individual questions were grouped among common categories of themes. The development of relevant categories followed the principles of Qualitative Content Analysis (Mayring, 2000).

For example, to the question of whether their music is a language of the heart, or tonally moving forms, eight musicians (1, 2, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16, 17) answered that their music is both. Of these musicians, three composers (2, 6, 7) view the emotional side of their music as unavoidable and/or unwanted (see the quotation from the interview with composer 2 below). One composer and jazz musician (15) described a development from a very expressive to a more formal approach towards music over his musical career (see the quotation below). Two composers (1, 17) view their music primarily as a language of the heart, but feel the urge to integrate the formal dimension as means of creating 'art' (see the quotation from the interview with composer 17 below). One electronic musician (16) describes the creative process as starting with a spontaneous improvisation, which is consequently processed into a presentable form. One composer (11) is not sure whether she really wants to express emotions, but describes the need to harmonize form and expression. Seven musicians clearly viewed their music primarily as a language of the heart (3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 13, 14). One composer (10) would clearly prefer the term tonally moving form. Another composer (12) would prefer an expression like 'tonally moving heart', indicating that while she would refute the metaphor of a language for her music and does not really want to use music like a language for communication with the listeners, she nevertheless emphasizes the importance of her own 'heart', her feelings and emotions, for her music. This interpretation of the metaphor 'tonally moving heart' was a result of the dialogue-hermeneutic communicative validation described above.

ANALYSIS OF UNDERLYING DIMENSIONS

Next, general underlying dimensions within the three main topics (the musicians and their music, their relationships to their listeners and the public in general, and forms of interaction with the listeners) were analyzed. The answers described in the last section mainly cover the general theme of the importance of formal aspects compared to possible contents of the music. In addition, other themes were also addressed to a certain extent. For example, the issue of the importance of the listener during the compositional process was also addressed in the answer by composer 12, who does not want to communicate directly with the listener, even though she views her music as a direct expression from her heart.

RE-ANALYSIS OF THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

In the next step, it was possible to reanalyze the individual composers' answers to the different questions against the background of the analyzed underlying general themes and dimensions. For example, composer 3 frequently states that he wants his music to be liked by the listeners. But whenever the concrete creational process is addressed, he mentions that when he is creating music, he cannot think about possible reactions of the listeners or anything else but his music (see quotation below). At several points, composer 3 makes references to ecstatic experiences during the creative process. In this regard, the composer differed from other musicians, who also want their music to please the listeners but who state that they might very well reflect reactions to their music during the creative process.

DESCRIPTION OF DIFFERENT TYPES

On the basis of these relevant dimensions, different types of music-creating artists (as exemplary generalizations) were described in relation to response patterns that could be consistently found among the categorized answers of different musicians (*cf.* Wahl, Honig, & Gravenhorst, 1982). In the course of the creation of the types, the categories could be revised if necessary. This process was continued until each participant could be assigned to one type.

RESULTS

RELEVANT DIMENSIONS

BAHLE'S (1938) WORK TYPE AND INSPIRATION TYPE REVISITED

Some of the typical differences between composers' *modus operandi*, which led Bahle (1938) to his concept of a 'working type' and an 'inspiration type', can still be found within this sample of musicians. Nevertheless, most of the musicians experience phases of intuitive experimenting as well as phases of deliberate reasoning during the creational process. Extreme positions towards this issue – artists creating their music solely in an unconscious eruption of creativity or artists who create their

music in an exclusively deliberate cognitive way like a mathematician develops and tests theories and hypotheses— appear to be rare exceptions from the rule [2].

Intuitive experimentation, for example by means of improvisation, does play a certain role for all of the musicians. Whereas some composers develop a more or less substantial part of the final musical material by means of improvisation, other composers only use intuitive experimentation in a kind of preliminary work, during which they try out new sounds, harmonies, or rhythmical or formal patterns. The final composition itself is often developed without the help of an instrument merely ‘in the head’ of the composer, even by musicians who do not have an absolute pitch. It is then directly notated in a preliminary score. Whereas most composers report a strong need for emotional and acoustical tranquility during the creative process, two composer stated that they especially likes to compose in ‘moving objects’ like trains and airplanes. Many musicians who create their musical material in improvisations describe the need for a certain amount of emotional arousal during their creative work.

Asked about their way of improvising music, the interviewed jazz musicians differ widely in terms of the degree to which they record and/or analyze improvisations in order to improve their improvisations’ quality or to develop new musical material. Most of the improvising musicians in this study use such techniques (for a different position, see endnote 2). The jazz musicians also differ in the degree to which they prefer either emotional tranquility of arousal during an improvisation. Whereas some musicians emphasize the need to soak up the atmosphere of the concert event in an improvisation, others describe the need to insulate themselves from their surroundings during a performance.

In summary, the interviewed musicians differ from each other in the ratio of deliberate, cognitive, constructional work and of intuitive improvisation and experimentation. However, the construction of two separate types of musicians along this dimension appears to be problematic, because almost all musicians report the need for an alternation between phases of deliberate construction and of intuitive experimentation. Moreover, the different possible functions of improvisation in the compositional process – in Bahle's (1938) model one of the core features of the 'inspiration type' – complicate the distinction of separate types of musicians' *modus operandi*.

Another important dimension along which the musicians differ is the 'germinal idea' (Bennett, 1976; Graf, 1947) of their music. For some musicians, their music derives from emotions or experiences; some mention thoughts and other pieces of art, some mention their 'id', others mention abstract aesthetic concepts, to name but a few. This question leads us directly to the next section.

THE ABSTRACT FORM, THE MUSICAL CONTENT, AND SELF-EXPRESSION

The terms 'formal aspects of the music' or 'musical form' refer to a conscious and deliberate design of the musical material according to artistic considerations. Musicians vary in terms of the importance they attach to these formal aspects of their music. For some musicians, they are pivotal, whereas for others it is more important to convey a message or to disclose their inner world. Those who adhere to the primacy of formal aspects may judge the music of composers who pay relatively little attention to the form of their music as lowbrow and trashy, whereas those to whom

other aspects of musical communication are most important may judge the music of their formalistically oriented colleagues as a kind of intellectual and unsubstantial fooling around. One composer answered the question regarding who is supposed to like his music as follows:

I can tell you this pretty precisely because I experience this quite frequently: critics do not like my music; narrow-minded avant-gardists, who consider every musical piece, which contains more than one note, within which you scrabble about, which you deform, and which you twist around, and from which you cannot detach ... who consider every piece that contains more than one note and no quarter and eighth tones old-fashioned and outdated ... and in 90 percent of the cases the audience likes my music and very often the performing musicians like it because they say 'Great! Finally an intelligible score which you can play and have fun with', you don't need an interpreter, they like my music – the listeners and the musicians – and that's all I want. I do not want to please the critics, I don't care for them, even if I ... may have a hard time because of this. (Interviewee 17; Holtz, 2005b, p. 422; this and the following statements were translated from German into English by the author)

For a Polish composer living in Germany, these conflicts between different groups of composers appear to be a typical 'German' problem:

... certainly there are some composers, and I am sorry to say this, but especially in Germany, who don't like my music. Here [in Germany] they all

compose like in the 60s. I think those days are over. I also compose experimental works, but more as a kind of practice or such like. They are composing eye-music, complicated scores, and quarter tones and so on. There is a special audience for such music, but I think that this is bad music. That's why some professors at German conservatories do not like what I am doing. They have said very unpleasant things about my music, it is too simple, too romantic, too tonal, but I know ... first, 'de gustibus non disputandum est', and I know that everything was done in a consistent way and I can honestly explain every note of my works ... (Interviewee 1; Holtz, 2005b, p. 24 f.)

Many musicians experience a tension between the desire to deliver a message through music and the urge to satisfy a genre's formal standards. The following response of interviewee 17 to the question of whether his music is a 'language of the heart' or 'tonally moving forms' reflects this balancing act:

... it is both ... I want it [the music] to be a language of the heart for psychological reasons, because I want to reach my audience and because I want to communicate something. On the other hand I want to make tonally moving forms for artistic reasons, because we also want to create art and the artistic part is the tonally moving form, which does result from rational construction. (Interviewee 17; Holtz, 2005b, p. 421 f.)

The tension between the form and the message exists, of course, only for those musicians who try to deliver a kind of non-musical message to the listener. Those

musicians who describe their music in line with Hanslick's (1854) concept of 'abstract tonally moving forms' will more or less try to create their music influenced only by the needs of the music itself. Nevertheless, these artists also recognize the influence of their emotions and their experiences on their works, but the influence of these personal sensations is described as a primarily unwanted and unavoidable side-effect, a mere epiphenomenon of the creative process or of being a human itself. This view is expressed in the following answer of a classical composer on the same question as before:

I cannot separate these ['language of the heart' and 'tonally moving forms'], I have to say, I refuse to view these as two different things, because you cannot separate these when talking about humans, anyway. I don't even believe that there is mathematics without emotions, because there are also statements – logical or supposedly logical statements – which cannot be separated from the subject making these statements. They are always influenced by the subject's moods and living-conditions. And even if I work strictly formally and make plans and calculations and things like that, this is influenced by the result I am trying to attain, and these ideas are there even before I write down any notes at all. (Interviewee 2; Holtz, 2005b, p. 48 f.)

The preeminent content of the music, as well as the *modus operandi*, can also change over the lifetime. A classical composer and jazz musician described his personal development from a more intuitive, emotion-driven style of creating music to a more deliberate and analytical style with the following words:

[My music] ... has developed from, let's say, egocentric eruptions of emotions towards more general themes. At the time when I was a student, when you start, when you are searching, when you have not yet found the right path [...] when you write something for a loved one [...] when you write away the pain from your soul – this still happens today, it can always happen that an experience is so strong that you try to transform it into music immediately, but in general today I am writing about more general – I don't want to call it themes, but sensations. The beauty of structure, for example, how it resonates in music. I now try to develop my works from within the music itself.

(Interviewee 15; Holtz, 2005b, p. 354)

The musicians also differ widely in the degree to which music has to contain or to reveal something 'new' in order to be judged as valuable. Especially those artists who adhere to the primacy of formal aspects of the music also tend to emphasize the importance of novelty. Other musicians like interviewee 2 even negate the possibility of true novelty in the music of the 21st century.

THE MUSICIANS' RELATIONSHIPS TO THE LISTENERS AND TO SOCIETY

All of the interviewed musicians across all genres would agree on the 'aesthetic minimum' of authenticity of the music. A musical piece must at least please the musician's musical taste. Music that is exclusively written to please the desires of

supposed listeners regardless of the musician's preferences and musical knowledge cannot be taken seriously and can in no way be considered a piece of art.

However, the musicians differ widely in their willingness to consider possible reactions of listeners during the composition process. Whereas some musicians are willing to take into account the musical knowledge, preferences, and experiences of their listeners, for example for pedagogical reasons, other musicians make it clear that no reasoning about what others think about their music must influence their musical works.

Of course I do not exclusively compose for my desk drawer; rather, you have to of course take into account who you are aiming at with a composition. Nevertheless, it must not happen that these opinions, which you just imagine because you never know, engross you and that the composition itself is influenced by them. (Interviewee 10, Holtz, 2005b, p. 253)

Another reason for not thinking about the recipients in the creative process is that the music is meant to be a pure and authentic disclosure of the musicians' inner world. This attitude towards composing is displayed well in the answer of a classical composer on a question regarding possible interactions between the composer and her listeners during the creative process:

... While I am composing I do not think about how the music will affect the listeners or how they may feel about it; mostly I am so moved by my own feelings and thoughts ... being so deeply within the music I cannot think about

the outside, about how the music is perceived. (Interviewee 12; Holtz, 2005b, p. 288)

Another classical composer answered the question on the possible effects of the complexity of his music on the listeners as follows:

That's a good question, ..., good question, I can't tell, I have not thought about it yet, not at all, as I said, ..., I do want to please people, but in the very moment, I do not think about it, the questions aims at, ..., whether people like it or, ..., what their response is, ..., I do not think about response when I compose, ..., I'm composing right out of my heart, and when I have finished a work, ..., then I am finished, I have emptied myself by means of creating music, I would say, but afterwards I need to have the courage to present or to disclose it [the musical work] to the listeners. (Interviewee 3; Holtz, 2005b, p. 77)

The more complex and abstract the music is, the more demanding it is believed to be for the listeners. Therefore, composers of more 'sophisticated' music will expect a listener who really wants to experience the music, to concentrate and to listen actively. It can also be helpful if the listener prepares himself for a musical performance by studying the music or similar music in advance. Many composers know that most likely, only musically well-educated listeners will understand and like their music. These musicians are also often willing to explain their music to the listeners by means of texts (e.g. in booklets) or talks before concerts. However, also

some creators of highly complex and sophisticated 'state-of-the-art' avant-garde music hope that their works at least partly can be understood intuitively by a 'naïve' listener, if the listener is willing to open his/her mind and not let expectations and musical habits influence his/her perception of the music.

Other musicians will deliberately try to create their music in such a way that it can be understood intuitively by a broad audience. These musicians will likely refuse to explain their music in words, because the music has to be able to speak for itself. This position can, of course, foremost be found among those musicians who want to deliver a non-musical message through their music and who are willing to take into account the listener's reactions during the composition process.

The musicians also vary according to the degree to which the music is influenced by societal issues and by the degree to which the music is intended to change society itself. Some musicians – of course those who want to deliver a non-musical message – may create musical works as a statement on or reaction to political and societal events. Other musicians – those who emphasize the importance of the abstract form – may even deny the possibility that music can have a profound impact on societal issues. Nevertheless, in the form of a side-effect or epiphenomenon, music may have an impact on society, even if this is not a deliberate intention of the composer.

... you always have to ask yourself what effects music can have at all. I believe that music cannot have any substantial impact on politics or society or anything else at all, at least not in a direct way. But what complex music can surely accomplish is to sharpen the awareness and the senses, and this is

certainly the opposite of what the advertising and entertainment industry does. This is to dull the senses and the awareness and in this way to also destroy every kind of political awareness, so to speak. Hence, any artistic activity which stimulates complex thoughts is by its nature subversive. (Interviewee 2; Holtz, 2005b, p. 53 f.)

THE GENRE

The consequences of a musician's affiliation to a certain genre are very extensive and extremely significant. The form of the music, the *modus operandi*, and the system of signs and symbols used by the musician must be analyzed against this background.

This point is closely connected to some of the formal aspects discussed earlier, but it seems necessary to analyze these points separately: on the one hand, there are formal elements that have importance in different genres. On the other hand, the consequences of the affiliation to a musical genre concern more aspects of the music than just its form. For example, the communicative situation of a jazz musician improvising music 'live' in front of the audience is very much different from the situation of a composer creating music in a private work room. In this case, the genre's influence on the content of the music is mediated by a different *modus operandi* in the creation of music (*cf.* Macdonald & Wilson, 2005 and 2006).

Against the background of the respective genre, every musician has to decide to what extent he/she wants to follow the rules and typical preferences of the respective genre. He/she can be a follower, a rebel, or an innovator (*cf.* Sawyer, 1992). Most classical composers as well as most jazz musicians reflect upon their

place in the history of music. Whereas some musicians try to be part of the avant-garde – the frontrunners of new developments – others deliberately stick to the aesthetic ideals of earlier periods in music history like the Renaissance or the romantic era. Often, philosophical or political arguments are also used in this discourse. A composer who is primarily known for his movie scores gives the following reasons for composing in a neo-romantic way:

I can tell you how I happened to compose in a neo-romantic way. The romantic art of the 19th century was essentially a counter-movement to the beginning ‘machine age’, not just in the field of literature and the fine arts, but also in the field of music. I think in our times a counter-movement against the beginning automatization of the mind is necessary. (Interviewee 13; Holtz, 2005b, p. 296 f.)

DIFFERENT GROUPS OR ‘TYPES’ AMONG MUSIC-CREATING ARTISTS

PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON THE TYPOLOGY

The musical content – or the preeminent aspect of musical communication (*cf.* Bahle, 1930) – appears to be a better basis for a typology of musicians than their *modus operandi*. Whereas there appears to be a kind of continuum between purely rational creative work and an unconscious outburst of inspiration, the commitment to certain aesthetic ideals determines large parts of the creative process, the contents of

the music, and the musician's relationships to the listeners and to society. The adherence to one of the aesthetic ideals described here implies a whole coherent set of characteristic attitudes, habits, and preferences.

THE AVANT-GARDIST

This prototype is defined by a preeminent importance of formal aspects of the music (*cf.* Hanslick, 1858; Stravinsky & Craft, 1962). The music ties in with the tradition of the European musical art of the 20th century. While the music is meant to continue this tradition, it should also contain something new in order to be considered a noteworthy piece of art.

The importance of the depicting functions of music is marginal for these musicians. Only abstract intellectual concepts or allusions to the history of music can or should be displayed in the music. The emotional content of the music or its self-disclosing function are of no importance at all. Whenever such effects are discussed, they are considered mere epiphenomena of the relevant processes in the creation of music.

Considerations of possible reactions of the listener *must not* influence the composer's work, even if some involuntary deliberations are unavoidable. The music is mainly written for a group of musical experts who can notice and appreciate its construction. The representatives of this type differ by degree in terms of their hope that uneducated listeners might also find a way to understand their music if they are prepared to open their minds. Many of these artists are willing to explain their music

to the audience. The main difference from the neo-romantics lies in the deliberate exclusion of the listener from the compositional process.

The only political component of the music can be its ability to initiate a kind of independent thinking within listeners. The music cannot and must not be used for any kind of propaganda. Thus, the music is not intended to appeal for a change in the attitudes or behavior of its listeners.

Representatives of this type are most frequent among the 'classical' composers. Nevertheless, these concepts can also be of importance among the jazz musicians. Six of the 17 musicians can be assigned to this type. Among these musicians are 5 composers of classical music (among others interviewees 2 and 10) and one jazz musician (interviewee 15).

THE NEO-ROMANTIC

Another group of musicians among the composers as well as among the other musicians can be distinguished, which, in an attempt to appeal not only to experts but also to naïve listeners, attempts to tie in with the ideals of the romantic music of the 19th century. The truthfulness of expression is pivotal for the value of a musical work, and not the novelty or the formal perfection of the music. Through this truthfulness, these musicians try to draw a boundary between themselves and creators of popular music, who only produce music according to the needs of the music market. The neo-romantic *must* write his/her *own* music. The expression of sensations, feelings, thoughts, and attitudes is essential. In this process, the musician must use the musical means required by his or her musical knowledge and preferences.

In spite of this, the music should also be comprehensible for the audience. The artist may consider possible reactions of the audience when creating his work. It is possible to tell stories or to transmit political messages through music. Nevertheless, if the neo-romantics want to create 'art', the form of the music must be taken into account. These musicians often feel a kind of tension between their wish to express something in a comprehensible way and their wish to create noteworthy pieces of art.

Pedagogical deliberations can also be of importance. As far as the *modus operandi* is concerned, the neo-romantic composers prefer to a greater extent to try out their ideas by means of improvisation, as compared to the avant-gardists.

Six of the 17 musicians can be assigned to this type. Among these musicians are 4 composers of classical music (among them interviewees 1 and 17), one composer of movie scores (interviewee 13), and one composer of musicals. One of the avant-gardist classical composers also creates musical pieces that appeal more to the concept of neo-romanticism.

THE SELF-DISCLOSING ARTIST

Representatives of this type can be found across all genres. To these musicians, the expression of thoughts, feelings, and attitudes is central. Everything that makes up a musician as a person is also an important feature of the music. Similar to the avant-gardists and in contrast to the neo-romantics, no compromises in terms of potential wishes of the listeners are possible. The musician has to radically express him or herself and nothing else. Hence, there is no room for any considerations of the listeners' reactions.

The motivation for these musicians to create music is the wish to express themselves by means of music. This wish is experienced as a vague desire. Many of these artists state that they would perish or go crazy without the possibility to express themselves in their music. Some of the representatives of this group experienced early in their lives that they can express themselves easier through music than through words.

For this group, a composition process relying heavily on improvisation is typical. Five of the 17 musicians can be assigned to this type. Among them are two classical composers (including interviewees 3 and 12), two jazz musicians (4, 9), and a composer of electronic music (16). One jazz musician and classical composer (interviewee 15) developed from a self-disclosing artist to more of an avant-gardist over the course of his life.

DISCUSSION

Taking into account the musicians' self-definitions, five of the 6 representatives of the neo-romantic type used the term 'romantic' themselves within the interviews to describe their music. Four of these musicians also use the term avant-garde or avant-gardism as an antipode of their musical approach. In contrast, the avant-gardists seem to assume that 'they' are the true representatives of contemporary composers. None of the 6 musicians classified as avant-gardists use avant-garde or avant-gardism to describe their musical approach. The exclusive focus on unreflected intuition, which is typical for the self-disclosure approach, seems to represent a kind of discursive

escape route for musicians who want to escape the schism between avant-gardism and romanticism.

Therefore the neo-romantics and the avant-gardists in particular seem to represent social groups of musicians, which result of social positioning and identity construction (*cf.* Van Langenhove & Harré, 1994). Hence, these classifications appear to be more than mere “broad category labels” (Kozbelt, 2008, p. 51).

Many musicians report typical intergroup conflicts like conflicts for scarce resources, which is a further argument for the social reality of these groups. Some of the neo-romantics complain that while their music is liked by most of the audience, they are discriminated against by most music publishers, critics, and at contemporary music festivals. However, some of the avant-gardists blame the music industry and their ‘backward-oriented’ colleagues for ruining the musical taste of the audience. As a consequence, they feel in a sense excluded or even expelled from the public sphere.

The conception of the avant-gardist resembles Bahle’s appeal type (1930). The different naming, which emphasizes the aesthetic ideals of these artists, is meant to be more elegant than the equation of the formal aspects of music with the appeal function of language. To me, the neo-romantics and the self-disclosing artists also want their music to directly appeal to the listener to perceive it in a certain way. The difference from the avant-gardists lies in the marginal importance of the expressive and the depicting function of music in contrast to the formal inherent qualities of music itself. The formal aspect of musical communication can be regarded as a specific feature of art, which is of only marginal importance in natural language, with the exception of poetry and the old arts of rhetoric.

The neo-romantic and the self-disclosing artist resemble Bahle's representation type and expression type (1930). The term neo-romantic is preferred over representation type, because the content represented in the works of the neo-romantics can reach from feelings or abstract concepts and sensations to stories and political statements. Although there is not always a clear-cut non-musical representation underlying the music, there is always the wish to reach and touch the listeners. There is a clear commitment to the ideals of the romantic era. Music is viewed as the true language of the heart. The musician's truthful expression is the highest aesthetic ideal for these artists. Hence, the difference from the avant-gardists and the self-disclosing artists does not lie primarily in the content aspect of musical communication, but rather in the relationship aspect (*cf.* Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967; Schulz von Thun, 1981).

The music of the self-disclosing artist is not as outward-bound as the music of the neo-romantics. The self-disclosing artist views himself as a slave to his creativity. He/she has to let the music come out – without any deliberation about how the music is perceived by others – or he/she would founder. Nevertheless, there are transitional positions between all three types. Some musicians describe a development over the lifespan from one type to another. Others describe different aesthetic approaches in different areas of their musical activities.

This paper on musicians' lay theories must be considered as a first exploratory investigation of a rather unexplored field. Hence, the findings presented here need more empirical testing. It is possible that the somewhat 'old-fashioned' schism between avant-gardists or 'formalists' and romantics, which resembles the 'war of the romantics' in the 19th century, is typical for the German music scene. It is also very likely that different types of musicians (or at least different aesthetic ideals) might be

found among different populations of musicians (endnote 2 gives examples of two further possible types).

The existence of the avant-gardist type of music-creating artists in a sense contradicts the findings of other authors, who emphasize the aspect of the communication of emotions by means of music (Juslin, 2005). Whereas the communication of emotions appears to be the pivotal aspect of musical communication among listeners (Juslin & Laukka, 2004) and musical performers (Lindström et al, 2003; Minassian, Grayford, & Sloboda, 2003), it is not viewed as pivotal by the avant-gardist composers.

Taking into account the perspective of the music-creating artist, a model of musical communication should transcend the concepts of musical communication as communication of emotions (Juslin, 2005) or as communication of information (Cohen, 2005). A multi-layer approach like that of Schulz von Thun (1981) or Watzlawick (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967), including the abstract form as a dimension inherent to and specific for an artistic communication, appears appropriate. Nevertheless, one should take into consideration that the transfer of theories from the field of natural language to the field of music (*cf.* Riess & Holleran, 1992) always runs the risk of oversimplification.

However, in spite of the attempts of the research program Subjective Theories to ensure an adequate understanding of the interviewees' subjective theories by the researcher through communicative validation, it needs to be taken into consideration that the interviewees' accounts of their subjective theories might be biased. According to Impression Management Theory (*cf.* Tedeschi et al., 1971), the interviewees might, for example, be motivated to present themselves and their

musical work to the researcher in the most favorable light. Hence, the musicians' answers only allow an insight into their discourse (*cf.* Potter & Wetherell, 1987) or social representations (*cf.* Moscovici, 1961; Wagner & Hayes, 2005) regarding their music and the creative process, and not necessarily their music and the creative process *per se*.

In the future, it will be very important to connect the field of musical production as it is described here with the field of musical intermediation and the field of the reception of music. The 'double pyramid' model of musical communication proposed by Miell, MacDonald, and Hargreaves (2005), which tries to integrate the situational context of a musical performance and the situational context of a listener's reaction to the music in a single communicational model, represents a modern and very interesting framework for this task.

NOTES

[1] The expression type and the representation type among artists were previously analyzed by Müller-Freienfels in 1912.

[2] Whereas none of the 17 musicians in the main study expressed such extreme positions, there were some examples in a preliminary study in 2001 (Holtz, 2002). Two jazz musicians described themselves as a medium for a kind of spiritual external force, which gains a material reality through their improvisational work. When creating music, they try to ‘turn off’ their consciousness and to empty themselves in a meditation-like process of all thoughts and feelings. After emptying themselves in this way, the music can flow through them and materialize itself as sounds. An example of an exclusively deliberate compositional process came from a composer of experimental electronic music. This artist views his compositions only as traces of an act of research into the connections between mathematics and music.

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TABLES

Table 1:

Sex, Genres, and Type Affiliations of the Participants

Number	Sex	Genre	Type
1	Male	Classical composer	Neo-romantic
2	Male	Classical composer	Avant-gardist
3	Male	Classical composer	Self-disclosing artist
4	Male	Jazz musician	Self-disclosing artist
5	Male	Classical composer	Neo-romantic
6	Male	Classical composer	Avant-gardist
7	Male	Classical composer	Avant-gardist
8	Male	Classical composer	Neo-romantic
9	Male	Jazz musician	Self-disclosing artist
10	Male	Classical composer	Avant-gardist
11	Female	Classical composer	Avant-gardist
12	Female	Classical composer	Self-disclosing artist
13	Male	Composer of movie scores	Neo-romantic
14	Male	Composer of musicals	Neo-romantic
15	Male	Classical Composer/ Jazz musician	Avant-gardist (in the past self-disclosing artist)
16	Male	Composer of electronic music	Self-disclosing artist
17	Male	Classical composer	Neo-romantic