

Evaluation report on
DIALOG Projekt
THE VOID – Leerstellen (2022)

A project funded by the NRW KULTURsekretariat

by Mark Porter (Universität Erfurt)

Description of the project and participants

The dialog project *The Void: Leerstellen*, supported by the NRW Kultursekretariat (NRWKS), is the result of a proposal developed jointly by musician Alhousseini Anivolla and project leader Sandra van Edig to bring a group of musicians from Germany and other countries into musical, personal and conceptual dialogue around the theme of void, leading to a 60-minute performance as well as the cultivation of longer-term collaborations and visibility for the musicians involved. The project brought together:

Alhousseini Anivolla – A Bonn-based guitarist, songwriter and singer, who moved to Germany from Niger. He emphasises his Saharan roots, the importance of the desert, and has a particularly strong connection to the world music genre that has come to be known as desert blues.

Girum Mezmur – A guitarist, multi-instrumentalist and producer/arranger based in Ethiopia with a particular interest in Jazz, as well as its cross-over with a variety of other traditions and genres.

Werner Krotz-Vogel – Part of the jazz/pop duo *meoneo*, alongside Claudia Huismann. A German guitarist/bassist/multi-instrumentalist with a strong interest in world music, jazz and the fusion of different styles. Involved in a number of different musical projects alongside a career in the IT industry.

Jean Gnonlonfoun – Brussels-based percussionist/bassist/composer with roots in Benin and an interest in diverse African traditions and genres as well as their surrounding spiritual entanglements. Involved in a variety of different creative projects at the crossover of a variety of styles, including jazz, rock and funk, with a particular interest in advocacy for traditions that have been ignored and neglected in a European context.

Claudia Huismann – Part of the jazz/pop duo *meoneo*, alongside Werner Krotz-Vogel. German singer/songwriter/multi-instrumentalist with an interest in world music and the creative possibilities that encounters with diverse musical genres inspire.

In conversation with the author, the participants nuanced their stories of how the project originally came about slightly differently, but it seems that the concept can be

traced back to conversations between key individuals around the idea of void, in particular Alhousseini's experience that, whilst visitors to the desert where he grew up often expect it to be empty and desolate, his own experience is that it is a place of fullness which represents quite the opposite of these expectations. Alhousseini's experience met Sandra's more-philosophically orientated perspectives on void, and from these conversations and ideas, they decided to develop a project which would bring together musicians with whom they had existing contact, but who didn't all know each other to the same extent, utilising the funding on offer to finance travel and to hire a dedicated space for rehearsal and encounter. From Alhousseini's side, there was a particular desire to develop a depth of inter-personal exploration that would not normally be possible without this kind of environment, both exploring the depths of the theme around which the workshop centres and going deeper in relationship with the other musicians involved.

An existing network of friends

It should be clear from the beginning that this group was not constructed from the ground up for the project itself. A number of the musicians knew each other already, and all of the musicians are used to encountering music across cultural and international borders on a regular basis. To this extent the project exemplifies the cosmopolitan dynamics that have become increasingly visible over the course of the last century, bringing together individuals whose awareness of local identities and traditions is always held together with entanglements that reach out beyond a single place and stand in constant dialogue and negotiation with a range of others. Members of the project can be understood as possessing multiple belongings as well as a high level of cosmopolitan competence.

The cosmopolitan condition has been subject to a great deal of theoretical reflection in recent years. Onyx et al suggest that 'everyday cosmopolitanism reflects the ordinary interactions that occur between individuals of different cultures routinely negotiating across difference in order to coexist within a shared social space' (Onyx et al 2011, p61) and Anthony Appiah suggests that 'cosmopolitanism imagines a world in which people and novels and music and films and philosophies travel between places where they are understood differently, because people are different and welcome to their difference' (2005, p258). Beck, meanwhile, suggests that 'The central defining characteristic of a

cosmopolitan perspective is the “dialogic imagination” ... The dialogic imagination corresponds to the coexistence of rival ways of life in the individual experience, which makes it a matter of fate to compare, reflect, criticize, understand, combine contradictory certainties’ (2002, p18), while Vertovec and Cohen quote Waldron, who suggests that ‘[cosmopolitanism] means the ability to stand outside of having one’s life written and scripted by any one community, whether that is a faith or tradition or religion or culture – whatever it might be – and to draw selectively on a variety of discursive meanings’ (Vertovec and Cohen 2002, p4).”

As active participants in a trans-nationally networked society, the different musicians come to the project already immersed, to a certain extent, in this kind of cosmopolitan dynamic. However, it is important to differentiate the cosmopolitan background within which they live and the individual competences which they bring. Vertovec and Cohen suggest six principal ways of imagining cosmopolitanism; they ‘argue that cosmopolitanism can be viewed or invoked as: (a) a socio-cultural condition; (b) a kind of philosophy or world-view; (c) a political project towards building transnational institutions; (d) a political project for recognizing multiple identities; (e) an attitudinal or dispositional orientation; and/or (f) a mode of practice or competence’ (Vertovec and Cohen 2002, pp8–9). Hannerz suggests that there are two different types kinds of competence: ‘both a generalized and a more specialized kind. There is the aspect of a state of readiness, a personal ability to make one’s way into other cultures, through listening, looking, intuiting, and reflecting. And there is cultural competence in the stricter sense of the term, a built-up skill in manoeuvring more or less expertly with a particular system of meanings’ (Hannerz 1990, p239). Participants in the project both brought with them a level of cosmopolitan competence in approaching the project and sought to develop this further through encounters and dialogues over the course of the workshop.

The project space provided a room in which to intensify existing connections, to bring them together into new combinations, but also to engage in a common journey which, the participants hoped, would lead to further collaborations and opportunities in the future. The embedding of the project in a wider context entails not only an understanding of its background, but an awareness that it was intended to carry forward into the future. In this sense, the project is far from self-contained and instead

forms part of longer-term attempts to develop relationships and creative trajectories which build momentum.

The meanings of “Void”

In centring on a common theme, the project offered a common point of focus which became the major organising category for the discussion and development that followed. Each of the musicians brought with them to the project both musical ideas (existing or developed specifically for the occasion), and a particular understanding of what void might mean in their own experience up to this point.

Alhousseini’s ideas centred around the desert, and its perception both as a place of emptiness and a place of life. Alhousseini’s musical input to the project primarily centred around his connection with the desert blues, a genre which seeks to reconnect popular styles of blues music with west African traditional musics which in some senses form the background out of which the blues originally developed (Ruano 2011).

Claudia’s contribution centred around the heartbeat, and the gaps that are present between each beat of the heart. She brought one of her own songs to the project and led the ensemble into a meditation around themes of death, using the idea of a train as a metaphor for life, asking questions of where it is going and bringing an existential dynamic to the collaboration.

The way in which Claudia’s meditations were brought into dialogue with some traditional drumming and call/response on the part of Jean was a particularly key moment within the dialogue that arose. In conversation, the musicians emphasised the contrast between Claudia’s thoughts of emptiness and end, and Jean’s perspective that death, as he has come to know it in voodoo traditions, is an occasion for celebration, and that it is normal to sing and celebrate when someone has passed away. Within the flow of the eventual performance, Claudia’s song gradually segues into more-energetic drumming and calling led by Jean, with the rest of the musicians drawn together to perform a ritual rooted in his own upbringing. In conversation during the course of the project, it turned out that this was a ritual with particular personal significance for Jean and was celebrated as a homage to and commemoration of his father, who he had wanted to bring to Europe before he passed away.

Werner wasn't necessarily so confident in a particular vision of the meaning of void at the start of the process. The idea triggered something for him and seemed to connect with ideas of silence and rest, however he had a problem with the abstract nature of the concept. In the end, it was the contrast between void and fullness, cosmos, and everything there is that really seemed to inspire his creative process. As a result of these deliberations, Werner brought various possibilities with him to the project: the possibility of developing a song that arises out of nothing; the possibility of exploring an old folklore piece understood as the "mother of all songs"; or the possibility of completely improvising something in the concert in collaboration with the audience, asking members to contribute a note or an idea. In the end it was the first idea that became part of the performance, with a piece very much focussed on the musical processes of development and growth in the context of the group.

Girum connected ideas of void particularly strongly to experiences of loneliness during childhood, and to the lack of opportunity to play together with his much older siblings. As he grew up, accordion and guitar, as well as cats and dogs served as companions to him and as something of a coping mechanism for dealing with his own internal void. Girum sees this experience as fundamentally shaping his own personality and was particularly keen to emphasise and understand the subjective aspect of void. The project allowed a means to understand the different nature of each-other's voids, with the hope that in somehow serving their own personal voids and bringing them into encounter they might also serve other people in the process.

Sandra, as the only non-musician invested in the project, was interested in void on a more philosophical level, and seems to have been fascinated by the differences in perspective that different individuals brought with them. Her involvement was, therefore, more centred around bringing the different individuals together and helping to shape the common exploration than necessarily disclosing too much of her individual contribution throughout the collaborative process.

Whilst void served as a key driving theme for the dialogue which took place, it is important to emphasise the mixture of motivations and goals that were present. Jean, in particular, emphasised the role of the project as a strategic opportunity to foster awareness of the diversity of African percussion instruments in Europe, performing on instruments that went beyond stereotypical associations between Africa and the

Djembe, some of which are at risk of dying out. Whilst Jean was more articulate than the other musicians in voicing these other goals during our interview conversations, it is inevitable that all had a mixture of different goals and motivations in participating in this kind of project. Funding instruments offer a strategic opportunity that is available for appropriation in a range of different ways, and often the articulation of one set of goals which coincides closely with the interests of the funder sits alongside a range of other goals which are not foregrounded quite so visibly in funding applications and strategic documentation.

Becoming a musical journey

It is hard in this report to document the exact process by which the different ideas that the musicians brought with them turned into the product that made it into performance. The degree of caution surrounding potential external influences on the group dynamics, together with the relatively late confirmation of the project arrangements unfortunately meant that I was only able to accompany the later stages of the collaborative process. Untangling the creative process backwards from the end result, however, is interesting in itself.

On hearing the music for the first time in rehearsal it was hard to find boundaries and markers, instead I seemed to hear a relatively continuous flow that slowly transitioned between different grooves via occasional more-defined moments of clarity and articulated meaning. A sense of clarity, in contrast, slowly emerged over the course of time, as I began to identify different sections and pieces that had been contributed and were led by different members of the ensemble. The result is, indeed, a flow that is not always marked by clear boundaries. The repetition of grooves over extended periods of time sometimes made temporal markers hard to locate, whilst some pieces merged into each-other and transition sections sometimes had their own character and purpose that was connected to, but not entirely determined by the pieces that they led out or in to.

A sense of continuity is both important here, and serves to blend between what are, in reality, relatively clear boundaries and transitions between distinct musical items. In essence, the resulting creation is an amalgamation of the different musical ideas and pieces that the musicians brought with them, arranging them in a sequence, finding appropriate ways of developing the material in collaboration with the rest of the group,

and juxtaposing them both with the other contributions and with framing devices that serve to draw out some of the intended meaning and dialogue beyond the affordances of the pieces in isolation.

These different pieces and contributions were organised not via completely scripted sequences or structured notation but, rather, by means of a flipchart which set out to define key moments that needed to happen along the way. This offered both a certain amount of freedom and a degree of consensus and structure that was enough to coordinate the musicians together according to an agreed framework and plan. It seems that the flipchart was established at the initiation of the two Germans among the group, who felt the need to set down this kind of outline after the initial rehearsals in order to ensure that there was a shared basis of reference and that everything wouldn't constantly be subject to further re-negotiation and reinvention as different individuals forgot what had been agreed in a particular rehearsal.

Dialogue and tension in communication

Interestingly enough, however, it was not the two Germans who had helped to instigate the flipchart who subsequently insisted on sticking with earlier agreements as rehearsals went on, indeed Claudia valued her freedom particularly highly. Instead, it was Jean who often brought the group to matters that had been agreed upon, largely out of his own concern that the group would end up producing a polished performance. More than any others in the group, Jean was highly focussed on the importance of bringing together a competent performance, and this played out both in the dynamics of rehearsals, where he pushed for greater levels of synchronisation, communication and certainty amongst the musicians, and in the first performance in Münster, where his strong stage-presence served to anchor the performance at key moments. In understanding the creative process, it was important to observe the way in which communication and the negotiation of different values and emphases functioned within the group.

Conversation during the rehearsal week took place in a mixture of English, German and French, sometimes involving the mediation of Sandra in order to overcome the linguistic divides between different contributors, and sometimes taking place through gestures and vocal or bodily imitation of particular musical ideas or emphases. Whilst the

possibility of translation enabled communication where necessary, the fact that sub-group conversation was possible without it, as well as the less-immediate nature of translated communication meant that linguistic divides served to influence the nature of group dynamics to a significant degree. Sandra and Werner could communicate easily with each-other in German, whilst reaching out to Girum through their mutual competence in English. Alhousseini and Jean, meanwhile, whilst competent in a number of other languages, were here restricted largely to French as their primary language of communication, a language which Claudia seemed to have very basic competence in, but not enough to formulate or understand the more-complex ideas which they needed to communicate. This meant that, for the purposes of rehearsal, the band was subdivided into smaller units who were able to communicate easily and spontaneously amongst themselves on a linguistic level, but who needed additional assistance when there was a need to express ideas or priorities to others with whom they shared no common language. They could communicate through gesture, through the vocalisation of musical ideas and through basic vocabulary, but didn't have an easy and free-flowing exchange on the level of spoken language.

As with any musical ensemble, there was a sense that the musicians sometimes brought with them differing priorities and emphases which led to them seeking different things from the group dynamic and from the ultimate performance, whether that be in terms of freedom, communication, polish, groove, level, or anything else. Such differences are common to a broad range of musical groups (Berger 1999) and did not present any unexpected difficulties in this setting. Indeed, the friendly and open spirit in which rehearsals were conducted seemed, for the period of preparation at least, usually to be sufficient to diffuse any tension that arose, through mutual good-will and a desire to work together and understand one-another better.

There was significant variation in who chose to speak and to lead within the rehearsal environment, and it was notable that some members of the group ended up sitting out on particular discussions either as a result of linguistic barriers, a desire not to involve themselves in a particular conversation or simply because their personality or interests meant that others more-naturally took the lead in contending for or discussing particular musical priorities. For much of the time that I was there, communication within the rehearsal space was largely mundane in nature. It focussed on questions such

as “am I playing too much there?” “How do we know when to stop?” “Please look at me to know what to do” and “Should this be in a particular key? Or doesn’t it really matter?”

This mundane focus may well have been a function of the stage at which I was permitted to enter the rehearsal process. There had been some uncertainty as to whether my presence would have been welcomed in the early stages of the creative process, and thus I entered the rehearsal space after many of the initial discussions and negotiations were already over. During my time with the group, more-meaningful conversations seemed to take place in interview and away from the rehearsal space, and it is important to emphasise the extent to which the individuals explored each-other’s personalities, backgrounds, cultures, journeys and experiences of void through the period of the workshop. The theme of the week was not accidental or superficial, but one which they genuinely desired to explore, and through which they were willing to share deeply personal stories and experiences through which they were willing to make themselves vulnerable together with the others, a willingness which was able to happen because of a mutual trust between them. To this extent, the project embodied a healthy and valuable process of dialogue for the participants, allowing them to explore each-other’s experiences, cultures and perspectives around a focussed theme in an environment of trust and mutual sharing.

A key question for me in discussion with the musicians was whether the process of dialogue should be understood as inter-cultural communication in the sense of dialogue across potentially challenging cultural boundaries, or whether the musicians understood themselves as already sharing a common musical/cultural space to the extent that dialogue was inter-personal than inter-cultural in nature. The intimate nature of the rehearsal space served to foreground the personal and the individual, whilst the diverse cosmopolitan competences of the gathered musicians also meant that, whilst connections with particular cultural traditions were often drawn, there was a strong sense that these were always being capitalised on in a highly intentional and self-conscious manner. The focus on a common theme and common project served less to foreground differences of culture and tradition and more to foreground a common process of creativity for a common goal. The musicians seemed to approach the rehearsals largely as an inter-personal discursive space, interacting with each-other in

ways that made sense of their different senses of creativity and of their own personal journeys from and between different individual and geographical spaces.

Scales of intercultural dialogue

What, then might be the meaning of such interpersonal dialogues when examined through the lens of intercultural dialogue? And if, as I have suggested, this project involved a number of individuals already highly cosmopolitan in identity and experience, what exactly does it mean for them to come together in this kind of state-sponsored forum?

Jude Bloomfield poses a similar question, asking:

“Why, if interculturalism is a natural process, does it require the intervention of policy? My contention is that the process has been interrupted by nation state formation and power that put boundaries around culture, enforced a standardised language, written script and main discourse in public administration and jobs – that cemented the professional middle classes commitment to the nation-state. This was codified in national narratives of unique origins – the invented traditions as Hobsbawm & Ranger have termed them, which became embodied in school, history texts, museums, broadcasting systems, the canon of high culture – including concepts of excellence and artistic quality embodied in funding systems.” (2007, p3)

Whilst the opening up of new dialogues is important, the role of projects such as this should not necessarily always be understood in such terms; they can also enable dialogues which are already taking place to achieve recognition and to become part of the structural materials of state systems which have traditionally served to fence off identities and relationships between cultures. As the participants in the project themselves pointed out in interview, it is an opportunity to acquire cultural capital and recognition because they are now able to demonstrate that they have been officially sponsored and supported by the state. They therefore receive through projects such as this a valorisation and legitimation for their intercultural work which, in turn, helps to secure status and further opportunities for them further down the line. Whilst the project offered additional room for encounter and dialogue that they had long wanted to carry out, through financial support that helped to bring in musicians from further

afield, it is the relationship between the state and existing intercultural dialogue that is transformed through participation in this project more, perhaps, than the intercultural dialogue itself.

It is important to highlight the broader implications of this perspective. Nora Ratzmann, in a discussion paper for UNESCO highlights the need to understand intercultural dialogue not primarily in terms of single events, but in terms of longer-term structural transformations of society:

“Intercultural dialogue works best when deployed as long-term strategic objective: One-off events have little effects on participants’ attitudes and understandings. Only if dialogue processes are sustained over a long timeline, societal transformations can take place” (2019, p54)

Ratzmann highlights the dangers of intercultural dialogue remaining “an idealised diplomatic tool and rhetorical discourse without much effect” (2019, p36), and suggests that “synergies and exchanges between different initiatives and actors are commonly missing.” (2019, p39). She lists different principles according to which intercultural dialogue can be evaluated. The first, drawn from the council of Europe suggests that:

“a good practice is characterised by: (i) an interactive communication process in which all are equal participants, (ii) a change of attitude among participants induced by the dialogue process, (iii) as some form of alternative understanding developing, (iv) as having an impact on mainstream institutional practices (in terms of staff, programming, audience participation), (v) being transferable, (vi) and encompassing an element of critical self-reflection and impartial evaluation” (2019, p47)

Whilst the second, from the Centre for Social relations suggests that:

“it needs to (i) be underpinned by human rights, promoting equality, (ii) go beyond the superficial level, as one one-off events do not tend to create lasting behavioural changes, (iii) be a targeted well-planned and outcome-focussed dialogue, (iv) be an interactive communication process, enabling empowerment or the development of self-confidence in individuals and a sense of collective responsibility, (v) based on social action or geared towards tackling division allowing for greater participation and ownership of outcomes (instead of being a dialogue for the sake of dialogue), (vi) be a learning

experience for those participating, especially where there has been non-dialogue and engagement is within a context of hostility, division and difference, (vii) not be a one size all approach (delivery of ICD should be based on local priorities, have relevance to the region and be guided by corporate priorities), (viii) take into account that good practice in one place may not be transferable to another but may inspire other areas to adapt practice to fit their context, (ix) recognise the wider benefits of intercultural dialogue to individuals, groups, communities and society as a whole.” (2019, p47)

In the context of this particular project, it is clear that the musicians themselves had longer-term and larger-scale outcomes in view, understanding this dialogue project as something which would open up future opportunities, and which had a role in the longer-term development of their relationships with each-other. However, these evaluation criteria suggest that it is equally important to ask in what ways the state might be able to harness this kind of project in a longer-term manner which helps to integrate it with broader social and structural inter-cultural dialogues. What will be the longer-term impact on mainstream institutional practices? Whose attitudes or self-confidence is this kind of project designed to influence? Which communities in NRW would benefit from the increasing visibility of intercultural dialogue that this kind of project has the potential to enable?

If the focus within the project was largely on the transformation and deepening of interpersonal relationships and dialogues, then it is the potential transformation of larger-scale relationships and structures which needs further future consideration.

Participatory vs presentational performance

In thinking about the broader impact of the project, the move from workshop space to performance space is important to examine. A good rehearsal dynamic does not necessarily translate automatically into a good performance, and the range of challenges faced in encountering an audience are different in crucial ways from the challenges faced in working together internally in a group. Indeed, the translation from rehearsal space to performance space was far from smooth, and in a manner that helps to focus more-closely on the significance of the project.

During the rehearsal process, the musicians occupied almost the whole room, facing inwards in a circle so as to establish clear lines of communication with one-another, and with one-another only. Indeed, the process up to this point focussed very strongly on this internal communication among the band. Not only were questions of synchronisation and signalling key to many of the discussions in the rehearsal space, but the music itself had been built up around an intensely personal exchange of meanings and stories between members of the group.

Prior to the performance, there had been some discussion of the audience during rehearsals, and crucial moments such as entrances and exits had been thoroughly discussed and rehearsed in order to avoid unnecessary confusion during the performance itself, however the first performance venue, in Munster, posed numerous challenges of its own unrelated to these earlier preparations.

The concert itself was relatively small-scale in nature and seemed, to a large extent, to address itself to a relatively established public who regularly attend similar events at the Musikhochschule in Münster. In arriving at the venue, the musicians seem, at least in part, to have been surprised that another group would be playing first, setting a highly energetic musical dynamic that contrasted quite significantly with the more-introspective focus of the performance focussed around the void. Indeed, as the performance began, the dynamic in the room was, at least initially, not conducive to the kind of silent atmospheric opening that the musicians had prepared for, with audience members chatting, coming in and out, and taking photos. It seemed in general that at least part of the audience had come expecting quite a different kind of performance from the one that they actually got, perhaps showcasing more visibly spectacular and demonstrative performances of particular cultural traditions. As a result, it took some time for both the room and the performers to adjust to the dynamic that they were now in. An initial sense of unease was confounded both by difficulties with the lights and confusion on the part of a couple of audience members that the organisers were charging for tickets, an alteration from their normal expectations that had not been sufficiently established in the publicity materials that they had received.

The move from rehearsal room to performance venue can helpfully be theorised through Thomas Turino's understanding of presentational and participatory performance:

“Briefly defined, participatory performance is a special type of artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions, only participants and potential participants performing different roles, and the primary goal is to involve the maximum number of people in some performance role. Presentational performance, in contrast, refers to situations where one group of people, the artists, prepare and provide music for another group, the audience, who do not participate in making the music or dancing [...] Participatory performance is a particular field of activity in which stylized sound and motion are conceptualized most importantly as heightened social interaction. In participatory music making one’s primary attention is on the activity, on the doing, and on the other participants, rather than on an end product that results from the activity [...] Although the quality of sound and motion is very important for the success of a participatory performance, it is important because it inspires greater participation among those present, and the quality of the performance is ultimately judged on the level of participation achieved. Quality is also gauged by how participants feel during the activity, with little thought to how the music and dance might sound or look apart from the act of doing and those involved. That is, the focus is primarily inward, among participants in the moment, in contrast to the presentation and recorded fields, where artists’ attention involves varying degrees of concern with listeners not involved in the actual doing. The result is that participatory music making leads to a special kind of concentration on the other people one is interacting with through sound and motion and on the activity in itself and for itself” (Turino 2008, 26–9)

Whilst the workshop week did indeed have the ultimate performance in view, the focus of interaction during the week was often largely participatory in nature, with the different musicians seeking to understand one another, interact across the room and engage together in the production of meaning. In moving to a presentational performance, it was impossible to carry this dynamic across in exactly the form that it had emerged, with the presence of the audience introducing demands and expectations that the participatory dynamic had not fully anticipated. This demanded a certain amount of re-orientation, both on the part of musicians and on the part of the audience, which I believe was achieved over the course of the performance, but which highlights the contrasting goals of the workshop process as a whole, both as a project for mutual engagement and as a public activity designed to showcase something to a wider audience.

Throughout the workshop week I was asked by members of the group, whether I was able to understand the meaning of the music, and what they were trying to communicate around the topic of void. My answer to that question was somewhat non-committal, in that it had taken me some time to figure out the different meanings being woven together in the performance. The moments that did become clear were usually as a result of particular lyrics or symbolic devices that offered a clear point of reference, or from the deeper understanding that was the result of conversations with the musicians over the course of the week. At the performance itself, such momentary understandings were deemed insufficient, and Sandra instead offered a brief introduction the performance, reciting a number of key words at the beginning in order to offer the audience enough of a hint as to what they might look out for without seeking to fully control how they might experience the music's significance for themselves.

These hints and this approach clearly paid off for some audience members who were keen to praise the virtues of the performance at the end of the evening. For others, they were less persuasive, as different individuals wandered in and out over the course of the evening. In trying out new dialogues and new interactions it is impossible to fully control the process in advance. It involves the taking of risks, time to understand expectations, and the development of appropriate responses to a situation. The flow of the performance developed over the course of the evening, and by the conclusion, some of the musicians had clearly hooked onto the elements of their performance which were particularly capable of drawing in audience members. The end of the performance capitalised on these moments, with an encore involving a more participatory and high energy dynamic. The event had found its groove, and the move from workshop to performance was complete.

Conclusion – a valuable dialogue?

There are many possible perspectives from which to evaluate this project, and it should be clear already that according to some criteria the project will be seen as immensely valuable and enriching in nature, whilst from others we might question the shape and the ambition with which the funding has been applied. The call for proposals from the NRWKS remains relatively open to a variety of different perspectives and priorities, an openness which is very welcome. However, the process of accompanying the project left me with a number of questions which may benefit from further clarity in future projects.

- 1) The extent to which these dialogues are for the benefit of the musicians vs the importance of performance, media coverage and attracting an audience. My report highlights the different priorities that come to the foreground depending on which aspect is held at the centre. Alongside this, I was somewhat surprised by the lack of any clear route for media engagement via, for example, livestreaming or broadcasting – media which the musicians themselves were keen to engage with throughout the rehearsal process. Writing this report a month or two after the performances, it is notable how little media coverage it is possible to locate of the event online. If a goal of the project was to raise the visibility of musics, cultures, cooperations and musicians, then it seems to have done so largely within the confines of the particular events that were put on, rather than in view of a larger public.
- 2) Exactly what kinds of dialogues does the NRWKS aim to promote? Are they designed for musicians of all competences and status? For those who have previously collaborated or who are new to these collaborations? The existing relationships and competences of many of the musicians involved in this performance raises the question of whether the NRWKS wishes to invest in the furthering of existing strengths or to draw in new participants who might be engaging in this kind of project for the first time.
- 3) Since the project largely involved the reworking of existing repertoire that the musicians brought with them, there is also the question of what kinds of product the NRWKS would like to see as the result of a dialogue. Is the aim to produce one-off performances which remix and combine existing music and competences? Or might there be an ambition to produce entirely new musical material, recordings, or broadcasts which might involve the investment of more time and resources than the relatively short timeframe of this project really allowed for.
- 4) The placement of the event at Münster in an existing concert series with an already committed audience raises the question of which kinds of audiences the NRWKS hopes to reach through these projects. Is this funding designed to reach those who are already familiar with the world music scene, or is there an ambition to reach new audiences? The latter requires a greater degree of strategic and creative planning but has the potential to be highly rewarding in cases where it is successful.

- 5) The perspectives of some of the musicians that this project was not so much about the success of the concerts as an opportunity to invest in their longer-term relationships and trajectories raises the question of the expected relationship between individual projects and longer-term trajectories both in terms of the musicians' own careers, and the broader musical scene in NRW. Are such longer-term questions sufficiently built into existing funding instruments? And how might they be taken into consideration in planning and assessment processes?

Alongside these questions there are elements which might have benefitted the process as I observed it. Longer rehearsal time would have enabled more-adventurous creative processes and would have enabled the musicians to feel confident in bringing a polished performance. Certainly, in the case of the first event, better processes of communication and coordination with the concert venues would also have helped to build up shared expectations, and to ensure the smooth running of the performance. In this sense, it helps to emphasise the importance of not simply a musical product which the musicians bring with them to perform to an audience but, rather, what Christopher Small describes as the activity of musicking:

“To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing. We might at times even extend its meaning to what the person is doing who takes the tickets at the door or the hefty men who shift the piano and the drums or the roadies who set up the instruments and carry out the sound checks or the cleaners who clean up after everyone else has gone. They, too, are all contributing to the nature of the event that is a musical performance.” (Small 1998, 9)

It is this complete set of activities and roles which come together to constitute musicking, and which together serve to make a meaningful or, even, successful event. Parts of this network of musical activity were well engaged in the event as it took place, whilst others would benefit from further thought and consideration.

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Excerpts from Interviews

Interview 1

Claudia: Also der Anfang ist eigentlich auch so entstanden, dass wir mit Sandra über dieses Thema Void gesprochen haben, weil es sie andauernd begleitet hat und auch Alhousseini Songs geschrieben hat, die Oder oder Situation hatte, die, die inspiriert haben, auch Lieder zu schreiben. Und wir haben darüber gesprochen. Und sie hatte mich gefragt Was verstehst du unter Leere, unter Void und dann auch mit Werner? Also das war lange bevor dieses Thema überhaupt auch so stand, das war schon so und dann sagt sie Ah, das ist interessant. Und dann irgendwann meldete sie sich und dann sagt sie Wir haben da schon mal drüber gesprochen. Ja, wir möchten da ein Projekt machen. So, und dann war man eher so getankt mit diesem Was bedeutet für mich Leere was? Was kann ich da mit einbringen? Und das war ja, das war interessant, weil wir auch einen Austausch hatten und wir haben auch mit mit den anderen Musikern zusammen Zoom Konferenzen gehabt und da auch noch drüber gesprochen und und überlegt was, was jeder da so macht und dann ist das. Dann hatten wir eine Zeit und jeder hat sich so ein bisschen was ausgedacht, was für ihn Leere bedeutet und das versucht auch im Gespräch erst mal zu vermitteln.

Mark: Und was hast du gesagt?

Claudia: Also für mich war dieser Moment mit dem Herzschlag die der Herzschlag, der da ist und die Leere zwischen den Schlägen, das ist so, also das hat vielleicht auch damit zu tun, dass das, dass man vielleicht Angst hat, dass das Herz nicht weiter schlagen könnte. Also diese Leere, die da entsteht, ist so wie so ein Sog dann zwischen den Herzschlägen, das hat so ein so ein Moment. Und ja, das war so meine erste Intention in dieser Richtung. Also weil es auch ein Rhythmus ist und trotzdem die Leere dazwischen ist.

...

Mark: Und bedeutet das okay, also die Gruppe hat Ideen gesammelt und dann dein Teil, also was du mitgebracht hast, ist dieses Teil über Herzschläge und so und das kommt von von dir. Und dann im Dialog mit den anderen. Also, du hast ... there's a part of it that you sort of own?

Claudia: Ja, das war interessant, weil ich habe das erzählt und gerühmt, hat erzählt, er war allein zu Haus und hat auch sein Herz gespürt und hat gemerkt Ich bin alleine. Er sagt ja, ich kann verstehen, was du meinst. Dieses Gefühl kommt dann auch, wenn der Herzschlag so geht und und sein sein Lied, was er mitgebracht hat oder seine Idee, die er mitgebracht hat, das war halt. Er hat das Akkordion damals gegriffen und gespielt. Und darum haben wir unsere beiden Ideen auch in diesem Lied auch verbunden. Wir haben das zusammen gewoben und das geht ineinander über, mit Atmung, mit Herzschlag, mit diesem Gefühl. Ich bin alleine. Ich habe vielleicht Angst. Vielleicht auch nicht. Vielleicht. Ich fühle die Leere. Das. Darum geht es. Ging es dann.

Mark: Also wie übersetzt man so eine Idee in in Musik? Also es ist so Du beginnst mit dem Rhythmus und dann beginnt jemand ein bisschen zu improvisieren oder wie?

Claudia: Wir fangen erst mal mit der Leere an und dann geht es. Geht es so, dass also wir haben es so gemacht, dass das jeder seine Idee, die er hat, zu dem Thema vorgestellt hat, so dass das wir und die anderen dann dazu kamen und und dann versucht haben, sich dareinzufühlen, was derjenige vielleicht meinen könnte. Und hinterher gab es dann auch noch mal ein Gespräch, so wo er sagt, das fand ich gut, da fühlte ich genau das, das war das was, was ich da empfunden habe. Und das ist auch jetzt noch die, dieses Gespräch, auch was wir vorhin hatten, was ich da gesungen habe. Entweder es kommt manchmal, dass einer von unseren Musikern sagt, das war mir da zu viel da, das hat meine...mein Gefühl für diese Leere in dem Moment gestört. So, und da achten wir halt auch schon drauf, dass wir da ineinander gleiten und ja, Platz lassen.

...

Mark: Also hast du, also kommst du mit festem Melodien, Rhythmen, Ideen, Akkorden oder es ist einfach diese Art von okay hören, reagieren spüren, was Atmosphäre dieser Art von...

Claudia: Beides. Also, ich habe sowohl das, dass ich mich in die anderen wieder hinein fühle, als als dass ich auch eine Idee hatte von einem Song mit einem Song Text, einen kurzen Text, aber also wir bleiben auf diesen Pattern, also auf. Also es ist ein Teil von einem Song von mir, den ich da mit rein bringe, aber es wird ganz anders beantwortet von den anderen Musikern und da geht es halt wirklich darum, um den Gedanken, was was geschieht, wenn ich sterbe, ist da nichts oder was ist dann so? Und dann kommt also darum bleiben wir in diesen, in diesem Vers und die anderen kommen dazu. Und da spiele ich Gitarre und singe auch diesen Vers und leite es ein bisschen, also damit es nicht wegfiegt. So und und genauso machen die anderen das auch und ich versuche mich da rein zu finden, was die anderen machen und ich habe Freiraum auch was zu gestalten und aber ich möchte auch nicht zu viel besetzen. Das ist das ist genau dieses, was wir gerade erarbeiten.

...

Mark: Also du sagst, es gab ein Lied, dann es gab diese Transformationen, also was, was war das Lied ursprünglich und was ist sie jetzt geworden? Was ist passiert?

Claudia: Es ist. Das ist das Interessante, dass dieses Lied der Jean aufgegriffen hat und gesagt hat Du redest über Tod, aber für mich ist Tod nicht leer. Für mich ist Tod nicht Trauer, für mich ist Tod. Also, wenn jemand stirbt, machen wir ein großes Fest und dann geht es in einen Rhythmus und dann gibt es, geht es in etwas Neues. Und das ist das Schöne, was aus meinem Lied, aus meiner Idee dann durch unsere Zusammenarbeit zusammen entstanden ist, dass wir in einen Rhythmus gehen, in ein, ich sag mal, positiven Beerdigung, Rhythmus. Also das ist ein sehr traditioneller Rhythmus, der da ist, den wir dann aufgreifen und ja, das ist...

...

Mark: Und in, also in der Dynamik hier in der Gruppe. Also was findest du einfach und was findest du schwierig? Also man merkt schon ein bisschen, wo es ein bisschen Spannung gibt, aber es scheint ihr seid ja ganz freundlich ganz offen zueinander. Also was, was ist einfach zu machen und was, was? Wo kämpfst du ein bisschen so einen Platz zu finden oder zu kommunizieren oder so?

Claudia: Ja, es ist manchmal von der von der Kommunikation ist es einfach von den. Von der von den drei verschiedenen Sprachen. Das ist schon sehr schwierig. Also wir hatten vorhin einmal diesen Song, wo ich gesagt habe, ja, sollen wir jetzt das alles in einer Tonart spielen, weil einer hat gesagt, das ist egal, wir können auch alle durcheinander spielen. Das wünsche ich mir sogar für dieses Lied. So habe ich das am Anfang verstanden. Das ist aber reine sprachliche Kommunikation, die da durcheinander geht. Also wenn ich verstehe, was was derjenige meint, dann bin ich nicht so, dass ich sage Nee, das will ich jetzt nicht mehr. Wir haben mal so und so gesagt, sondern ich gucke Ah, okay, er hat das jetzt so gemeint. Ich versuche dann nachzuempfinden und gehe dann rein, so wie ich vorhin gesagt, okay, dann bleibe ich bei dem bei der Mundharmonika, nur auf diesem Ton und dann ist es für die anderen auch klarer und schöner und es fließt mehr.

...

Mark: Also hast du das Gefühl, du beginnst die Werte von den anderen ein bisschen besser zu zu verstehen jetzt als am Anfang?

Claudia: Ob das die Werte sind?

Mark: Also vielleicht ist werte das falsche Wort, also beginnst du, die andere Menschen besser zu verstehen?

Claudia: Auf jeden Fall. Ja. Ja. Ja. Also, ich kann das immer besser einsortieren, was wem wichtig ist, wer welcher Musiker auf was besonders Wert legt, auf Timing, auf Tonart, auf gemeinsamen Anfang auf lass es laufen. Also das. Das ist halt, glaube ich, der wichtige Prozess, wo wir halt gerade so auch zusammenkommen und das versuchen in einen schönen, bunt gewebten Teppich mit vielen Punkten. Und das ist vielleicht kein Muster, aber dann entsteht ein Muster. Also ja, dass das doch ich denke schon, dass dieses Treffen mir hilft, von anderen Menschen andere Werte oder andere Sachen besser zu verstehen. Auf jeden Fall.

Mark: Du hast mich gefragt, ob ich verstehe, was was Void bedeutet in dieser Musik und was die die Reise ist durch diese Lieder und so, also kannst du mir ein bisschen erklären, was es bedeutet, was diese Reise ist, das wir das wir machen.

Claudia: Also diese Reise, die wir machen. Es ist also für mich, das sage ich jetzt mal, vielleicht, da wird es auch viele Unterschiede geben. Wir reisen durch die Emotion der einzelnen Musiker, die das Wie, wie die Void verstehen. Also dadurch reisen wir und wir finden Übergänge von allen zusammen, um in die nächste Emotion des anderen zu kommen. Und das ist nachher ein gewebtes Paket. Also das gehört nachher alles zusammen. Jeder bringt seine Färbung mit rein und es wird ein gemeinsames und es ist jetzt geht jetzt nicht darum, dass wir möglichst viel Platz lassen, damit die Leute hören Ah, da ist jetzt Leere. Ne, also es ist so wie wie Alhousseini sagt, man hat ein Glas auf den Tisch stehen, man guckt rein, das Glas ist leer, aber es ist trotzdem was da. So, und das finde ich auch ein schönes Beispiel.

Mark: Und um was sind diese unterschiedlichen Emotionen von den.

Claudia: Das ist auch spannend. Also für mich ist es dieser Moment des Soges, vielleicht also dieses Fallen in die Leere. Für den Nächsten ist es ist es der der weite Blick ins Leere in der Wüste dieses wo, wo kein Geräusch ist. Der, der Zum Beispiel Alhousseini versucht, uns so quasi in diese Meditation da hinein zu bringen. Es wiederholt sich immer wieder und man wird immer ruhiger und es geht immer mehr in die Richtung. So dann geht es, geht es weiter in dieses Hochzeits Lied was der gru mitgebracht hat. Das hat auch ein traditionelles und aber ich denke das erklären die besser alles einzeln selbst noch mal, aber es sind viele Emotionen dabei. Für den einen ist es Freude, es ist Platz. Ich kann mich jetzt entfalten, für den anderen ist es Angst gewesen. Und wie bin ich damit umgegangen? Für den anderen ist was kommt da also dieser Sog, ins Leere zu fallen, also wie der Tod, was ist da leerer? Und wiederum dieses gibt es ein Nichts überhaupt? Das sich zu überlegen Was, was ist denn nichts? So, das ist so... Ja

Interview 2

Werner: ich mache für mein Leben gerne Musik und Musik, finde ich, ist halt nicht nur, wenn man es alleine macht, sondern mit anderen zusammen spricht. Diese diese Sprache, die auch tatsächlich kulturübergreifend und Grenzen übergreifend ist. Ich konnte solo Konzerte machen,

finde ich aber langweilig. Es ist viel schöner mit anderen Leuten sich zu treffen und sich auszutauschen. Und eine wirkliche Bereicherung im Leben war immer zu schauen, was gibt es tatsächlich in anderen Kultur Bereichen weiter weg? Zu meinen Studentenzeiten habe ich halt indische Musik gehört oder bin über Jean McLaughlin und Ravi Shankar eben ein Teil dieser Sachen dran gekommen. Und ja, im Laufe der Jahre kam dann eben noch viele, viele andere Länder und Geschichten dazu in Bonn. Claudia ist auch Teil davon, aber das Kultur Klügel Orchester, wo wir jemanden aus dem Irak, aus Syrien, aus Brasilien, aus Serbien aus und wir spielen und lernen Lieder aus diesen Kulturen, die dort mal Hits waren oder sind. Und letztes Jahr, als wir mit mit Alhouss und Sandra zusammengekommen sind, das war so eine ziemlich dröge Zeit. Covid hat mich erlaubt, wirklich das Bonn spielt und die sind nach Bonn gezogen und es hat auch nicht wirklich Gelegenheit gegeben Leute zu treffen. Hat uns ein Freund zusammengebracht und meinte auch da könntet euch wahrscheinlich gut verstehen. Und dann haben wir mal ein Abendessen gemacht und herausgefunden Ja, tatsächlich, lass uns jammen, lass uns afrikanische Lieder lernen, lasst uns unsere Lieder zeigen. Und da ist dann schnell letztes Jahr ein Projekt draus geboren worden, wo wir zwei Wochen im Münsterland unterwegs waren. Und ja, in dem Sinne ist das jetzt einfach nur eine Fortsetzung des Abenteuers mit neuen Dimensionen. Jean aus Benin dazu zu haben oder oder. Girum aus aus Addis Abeba. Tolle Geschichte.

...

Mark: Also Void, Leere. Also hat das für dich schon Bedeutung gehabt oder war das ein neben Ding? Also es ist spannend Musik mit anderen Menschen zu machen un wenn wir das über Void machen, mache ich mit und lerne.

Werner: Auf eine bestimmte Art und Weise, war es ein Trigger auf eine andere Art und Weise, weiß ich dem Wort gar nicht so viel Bedeutung bei. Also Void oder Leere ist ein abstrakter Begriff und bei uns mäandert das auch so zu Projekt Definitions Zeit ein bisschen hin und her. Plötzlich hieß es mal Silence. Silence ist eine ganz klare Sache. Da ist dann Ruhe und dann gibt es nachher wieder nach. Es gibt ne Pause, was man auch hat, Start und Stopp oder dann dazwischen ist kein Geräusch. Das ist dann Silence. Aber Void als als Leere ist tatsächlich für mich eher ein abstrakter, philosophischer Begriff. Der, der versucht im Kontrast zu bilden zu dem, was ist, was es alles gibt, sodass man das dann bewusster wahrnehmen kann. Und, selbst also für mich ist selbst der Kosmos oder der Weltraum halt überhaupt an keiner Stelle leer. Da

ist überall Wärme, Strahlung, Materie, alles Mögliche. Wenn man so nach oben guckt nachts, dann denkt man alles leer. Ja, ja, ja. Und in dem Sinne hat immer das Gegenteil von Leere eine ganz bestimmte Bedeutung. Und auch das ist sehr lustig, hier rauszu..., rauszuhören. Welche Lieder zu dem Thema dann assoziiert werden. Manchmal ist es ein Es ist ein Lied, das nach einer Beerdigung gespielt wird, wo dann die Leere gefeiert wird, weil die Seele Platz hat und das Universum neuen Raum schaffen kann. Manchmal ist es was trauriges und so hat jeder jeder seinen, seine andere. Eigentlich ist es die Interpretation des Gegenteils von Leere mitgebracht. Klar, man assoziiert es mit Leere, aber man benutzt dann dieses Nichts, um es mit etwas zu füllen. Und das, das Füllen kann sehr verschieden sein.

...

Mark: Was hast du getan? Was gab es?

Werner: Ich habe. Ich habe drei offene Ideen vorgeschlagen. Eins ist ein. Ein Lied, wo ich einen kompositorischen Rahmen geschaffen habe. Also es gibt ein Metrum, das sehr langsam ist und aus dem Nichts heraus ein Stück beginnt. Es gibt eine bestimmte Akkordfolge, auf der dann ein ganzer Klangkosmos aufgebaut werden kann. Ein anderer Vorschlag war, ein sehr altes Stück aus Simbabwe zu nehmen, das für mich die Geschichte ist das war dort, Oder wird erzählt, dass erst die Mutter aller Lieder. Vorher gab es nichts. Die Leere da plötzlich gibt es das erste Lied und alle anderen Lieder stammen davon ab. Und der dritte Vorschlag, den ich hatte, war eine völlige Improvisation, nämlich wenn man mit mir, mit einem, mit einer Zuhörerschaft im Raum ist. Du bist nicht alleine auf der Bühne, also ohne Zuhörer ist das ja alles mit der Kunst nichts. Und oft wissen das die Zuhörer gar nicht so zu schätzen oder merken das gar nicht, wie viel Energie sie eigentlich ausstrahlen. Und die Idee war halt Dann fragen wir mal nach einem Ton, da hat einer einen Ton und kann dann gerade mal singen oder piepen oder pfeifen. Und wenn man einen Ton hat, wiederholt man den. Und dann fragt man nach einem zweiten Ton, kommt ein zweiter Ton, fragt man nach einem dritten Ton, kommt ein dritter Ton. Das ist dann typischerweise genug. Und du als Musikerloge wirst ja auch schon vermuten, da kommt was, Pentatonisches raus. Und dann, ja dann bildet man aus diesen drei Tönen halt eine Improvisation, einen kleinen Rhythmus dazu und lässt es in der Kommunikation auf der Bühne zu einem Stück wachsen. Das waren so meine drei Ideen. Einmal eine konkrete Komposition oder ein altes Folklore Stück oder eine komplette Improvisation.

...

Mark: Also Claudia hat viel über Gefühle und Emotionen gesprochen. Du sprichst mehr über Strukturen und Formen, glaube ich. Also es ist einfach so, dass das da ist, ein bisschen der Schwerpunkt ist.

Werner: Zum Schluss ist es, wenn man die Musik macht oder wenn man die Musik hört, die Freude, die man damit verbindet. Und das ist. Aber ich glaube, das ist die Bottom Line. Deswegen machen wir das alle. Ja. Und da würde ich mich jetzt auch dazuzählen. Aber das hätte ich jetzt auf deine Frage nicht als erstes beschrieben, weil erst mal magst du die, die musikalische Substanz haben oder wissen, wo welche Ideen dahinter stecken. Und da ist höchstens der, der der Zirkelschluss zum Anfang Ich mache Musik für mein Leben gerne und das ist, das mache ich eben auch immer gerne wieder.

Mark: Und wie findest du hier das Prozess, zusammen zu arbeiten und zusammen etwas zu entwickeln?

Werner: Sehr konstruktiv. Also in der Kürze der Zeit gibt es viel zu besprechen, viel auszuprobieren. Die verschiedenen Sprachen sind schon eine Barriere, die verschiedenen Herangehensweisen, alles aus dem Kopf machen oder alles aufschreiben. Oder wer erinnert sich woran? Manchmal lustig, manchmal herausfordernd. Aber ich glaube, das ist ganz normale Gruppendynamik. Und insgesamt jeder von uns hatte zwischendurch auch Zeit, mit jedem anderen auch mal persönlich Kontakt aufzunehmen.

Mark: Wie würdest du beschreiben, was wir jetzt für ein Stück Musik haben in dieser Stunde? Was haben wir jetzt? Was ist es?

Werner: Das, was jetzt als. Als gesamte Musik Stunde herauskommt? Als gesamtes Programm? Das ist die Frage. Es ist eine. Eine Collage aus neuen Ideen, aus folklore stücken. Jeder Teil hat tatsächlich eine Assoziation zu dem Begriff Leere, oft in ganz verschiedener Art und Weise, manchmal in gleicher Art und Weise. Also zum Beispiel Claudias Lied, das sie mitgebracht hat was erzählt. Was ist denn, wenn ich einmal nicht mehr da bin, wenn ich gestorben bin, wo bin

ich dann? wird ein, sagen wir mal europäischer Akkord getragener Song mit einer Melodie geht über in ein Percussions Stück, mit einer auch mit einem sprach dialog, der sehr sehr rhythmisch ist, der genau die gleiche situation aufgreift, nämlich jemand, der beerdigt wurde, nicht mehr da ist. Diese Leere wird jetzt gefeiert. Auf der einen Seite, das ist die Frage, was ist was... Wo geht denn die Seele hin? Und auf der anderen Seite wird das aufgefangen durch. Ja, da ist jetzt Platz. Es meint dasselbe. Die Musiken sind völlig unterschiedlich, und wir haben sie zusammengebracht. Es gibt einen Übergang und. Und die Sinnhaftigkeit erschließt sich halt nicht völlig, wenn man das jetzt nicht erklärt.

Mark: Okay. Also diese Dynamik zusammenzuarbeiten. Also, was ist? Was ist schwer? Was ist einfach? Also merkst du, was für die anderen Musiker wichtig ist, was die für Werte haben, also diese Dynamik? Also wie hat das für dich funktioniert?

Werner: Ähm, ja. Jeder Mann lernt jeden Musiker hier kennen und merkt, was ihm wichtig ist und was nicht so wichtig ist. Also ein Musiker, für den ist es wichtig, dass die Tonalität übereinstimmt, wenn man Übergänge hat oder dass der Puls und das Metrum ineinander übergeht und man nicht irgendwie Sachen überlagert Obwohl man ja ausfaden und einfaden könnte. Das Schöne ist aber das, dass wir in vielen kleinen Feedback runden, das auch immer zur Sprache bringen, sodass wir voneinander wissen Oh, das ist Jean wichtig, das ist Girum wichtig, das ist Alhousseini wichtig. Oder wenn jemandem was wichtig ist, kann jemand anders auch sagen Ja, das macht mir jetzt nicht so Sorgen. Aber wir sind gerade in einem Lernprozess, das kriegen wir schon hin.

Mark: Und hat das mehr mit unterschiedlichen Kulturen und Hintergründen zu tun? Oder einfach, dass es ein guter von unterschiedlichsten Menschen ist?

Werner: Halbe halbe. Manchmal merkst du wirklich, dass das einfach nur der Charakter ist, der das ein Bedürfnis ist. Und dann gibt es aber auch so kulturelle Unterschiede. Mir fällt jetzt gerade nur ein, wenn wenn Jean ein Ende anzählt, dann zählt er 1234 und dann ist Schluss. Während wir hier, also wir, sage ich mal, ich als für mich jetzt mal gerade als Europäer, wenn wir ein Ende auch mit den Fingern anzeigen, dann fangen wir mit vier an und dann mit drei und dann mit zwei und eins und dann ist Schluss. Also so Sachen, die, die einem eigentlich in Fleisch und Blut

übergegangen sind, wenn man mit anderen Leuten zusammen spielt, funktionieren hier nur bedingt, weil andere Leute haben andere Konzepte. Und das ist glaube ich schon Kultur bedingt.

Interview 3

(Please note that I have not included transcriptions of the French parts of the interviews, only their translation by Sandra. This is due to my own lack of knowledge of French).

Mark: Aber ich. Es wäre gut, wahrscheinlich über den Anfang vom Projekt zu sprechen und dieses Thema von Erwartungen und warum also die zwei Teilnehmern überhaupt was war, ja was war die Gründe, so ein Projekt machen zu wollen? Und was für Erwartungen haben Sie mitgebracht?

[French - Allhousseini]

Sandra (translating): Also warum. Das ist jetzt die Frage. Warum. Er hat generell festgestellt, dass bei vielen Dingen die Menschen, die gehen nicht wirklich in die Tiefe, bei Themen. Und das war ein Ansinnen, mit diesem Projekt in die Tiefe zu gehen.

[French - Allhousseini]

Sandra (translating): Deshalb hat er dann gedacht, er sucht Leute, mit denen er sich vorstellen kann, die auch Lust haben, ein Thema zu erarbeiten. Und danach hat er die einzelnen Musiker ausgesucht. Also auch Musiker, wo er dachte Na, die sind auch offen, um was Neues auszuprobieren.

Mark: Okay, also Musiker, die du schon ein bisschen kennst oder?

[French - Allhousseini]

Sandra (translating): Also, er kennt alle Musiker. Mit Jean arbeitet er seit acht Jahren zusammen und mit Girum, Girum kennt er seit 2005 und seit 2017 arbeiten Sie an einem gemeinsamen Projekt immer wieder. Und Johannes? Mit Johannes hat er auch vor einigen Jahren ein Projekt zusammen gemacht. Also er kennt er aus Berlin und Werner und Claudia kennt er seit letztem Jahr auch. Und sie haben auch schon einiges zusammen gemacht.

Mark: Okay, dann wäre es richtig zu sagen, es gab bestehende Beziehungen und es war du hattest Lust, einfach tiefer in ihn diese Dynamik in dieser Beziehung zu zu gehen.

Sandra: das Thema, also das Thema zu erarbeiten.

Mark: Also hat mehr mit Themen oder mit Beziehungen zu tun?

[French - Allhousseini]

Sandra (translating): Also es geht eben nicht in erster Linie darum, die Beziehungen zu verstärken, weil er sagte er hat ja schon gute Beziehungen zu allen. Also dafür braucht er das Projekt nicht, sondern es geht mehr darum, um das gemeinsame Erarbeiten und eigentlich dieses die Vielfalt zu zeigen und das verknüpfen und zu zeigen. Leere also wo man sagt, da ist nichts, da ist ganz viel. Und das zu zeigen mit mit den verschiedenen anderen. Vielleicht, wenn ich noch etwas dazu sagen darf, weil ich will das zusammen konzipiert haben, was wichtig ist, denke ich, ist auch dieser Gedanke. Er kennt ja alle, aber die jetzt untereinander wieder zu vernetzen, also nicht diese Beziehung von ihm zu den Einzelnen zu verstärken, sondern hier neue Beziehungen auch zu schaffen.

Mark: Und du sagst immer zeigen, also bedeutet das ja ein Publikum, das so sein, ein bestimmtes Publikum oder.

[French - Allhousseini]

Sandra (translating): Seine Target Group sozusagen, ist die ganze Welt nicht nur ein kleines Publikum.

Mark: Aha, okay, aber da das die ganze Welt besucht, nicht das Konzert.

Sandra (translating): Aber es sind ja gestandene Musiker. Also der Outreach ist nicht das Konzert, sondern der Outreach ist ja, die machen was. Man spricht über sie, weil sie das Projekt machen ... Das ist schon nachhaltig gedacht. Also auch für die Finanzierung und auch für die Geldgeber ist es das ist nicht so einfach, nur mal ein Projekt, damit man mal wieder ein Konzert macht, sondern das ist etwas, was auch Spuren hinterlässt und Wirkung hat und entfalten wird.

[French - Jean]

Sandra (translating): Es ist wie eine Kommunion, sagt er. Für ihn ist die Musik das Leben und das Leben ist Musik. Also die beiden Dinge verknüpfen sich oder sind miteinander verwoben. Und so, so ist es für ihn mit der Musik... Es gibt keine Grenzen bei der Musik. Egal ob du aus Afrika, Europa, China oder sonst wo kommst. Sobald der ein oder andere ein Instrument in den Händen hält, in den Händen hält und man zusammen spielt, ist man wie eine Familie.

[French - Jean]

Sandra (translating): Also, er nimmt an diesem Projekt teil, weil er Alhousseini kennt. Weil Sie schon seit vielen Jahren zusammenarbeiten. Weil die Alhousseini immer auch anruft, um etwas gemeinsam zu machen. Und das macht er gerne. Und außerdem sagt er bei dem Thema Das hat ihn interessiert. Er hat gedacht Oh, das ist ein gutes Projekt. Ich kann auch neue Leute kennenlernen, neue Musiker. Und außerdem ist das Thema so, dass ich da auch meinen Platz finde und mich auch einbringen kann.

[French - Jean]

Sandra (translating): Für ihn ist das Projekt sehr wichtig, weil es auch nutzen kann, um die Vielfalt der afrikanischen Percussions Instrumente hier mit einzubringen. Er sagt Wenn man an afrikanische Percussion denkt, dann denkt man immer an Jimbei. Alle kennen Jimbei, aber in Wirklichkeit gibt es viel, viel viel, viel mehr andere Instrumente und deshalb ist er froh, dass er jetzt hier auch die andere Percussion zeigen kann.

...

Mark: okay und dieses Thema. Also Leere und void, wie immer wir das das nennen, also das kam aus einem Dialog, oder? Also dein Name steht auf dem Antrag. War das deine Idee? Und wo kommt dieses Idee her?

[French - Allhousseini]

Sandra (translating): Also wir haben kurz gestritten, weil ich habe gesagt, eigentlich kann ich das auch beantworten. Und wo ist jetzt das Ownership an dieser Idee? Und er sagt nicht, Ich sag das jetzt, weil es seine Idee. Für Alhousseini ist es einfach etwas, was er immer wieder festgestellt hat. Die unterschiedliche Wahrnehmung, wenn Menschen in die Wüste kommen und besuchen diese vor allem aus Europa, zum Beispiel auch aus anderen afrikanischen Ländern. Diese Feststellung. Oh, die Wüste, da ist nichts. Auch die Angst vor der Wüste. Und er sagt Das ist doch überhaupt nicht leer. Diese Wüste, die ist so voll. Weil seine Wahrnehmung ist eben und mit dem Leben, was er dort fühlt und geführt hat und wie er aufgewachsen ist, das ist Fülle und nicht Leere. Und deshalb, das war so sein Ansatz, ich habe gesagt, dass es zu diesem Projekt gekommen ist. Das ist viel im Dialog, also wir führen viel interkulturelle Dialoge, weil wir sehr unterschiedliche Ansätze haben und ich aber andererseits das Leben in der Wüste sehr gut kenne. Und das ist so aus so einem Dialog entstanden, da etwas darüber zu machen, weil das Thema Leere für mich auch sehr, sehr wichtig ist, auf eine ganz andere Art, aber dadurch, dass wir beide uns schon seit Jahrzehnten für kulturellen Dialog und auch für für kulturelles Erbe einsetzen und überhaupt also auch Musik und Kultur im Rahmen von Entwicklung betrachten, war das für uns so eine Möglichkeit, da auch so neuen Akzent zu setzen und auch das Ganze auf ein philosophisches, auf eine philosophische Ebene zu heben. Das war sehr mein Ansatz für mich, sehr philosophisch das Thema und das ist deshalb ist es so entstanden, dieser Ansatz.

Sandra: So the question now is actually well for you? If the songs, like actually what we just discussed. So he's asking how to, what, what kind or where's the perception of the void in this project now or in this music or in your songs

[French - Allhousseini]

Sandra (translating): it's actually for him, it's the lyrics in his song [...] So he talks in one of the songs he talks about the life that has been in this space and the space where he is there has been life before. And this is not there anymore. So he it's about this, there was something and it's not there anymore. So actually, the topic is in his lyrics. [French]

Girum: To get to that, but I think is first of all the Void is, the more and more I get into it what I understand is it's more a personal experience. My void is not Sandra's Void and Sandra's Void is not Alhous's void – each one of us have different things because we come from different walks of life, different childhood experiences, and so on. So the more we practice and so on. I'm getting to a point where my own void is being served there. Through that we hope that it enlightens other people's voids also through through the music, and so on. With this music, it's really pushing me to get into my childhood and be sincerely there. And in so doing

...

Girum: So. Thinking about it, sort of understanding that it didn't just start with this project. It was maybe it was meant to be because since I started to collaborate with Alhous I was kind of also understanding his, not exactly his void, but that it's subjective, what he calls space what I call emptiness, what he calls emptiness what Jean calls emptiness and Sandra calls emptiness, is different things, there's no, defining that can be subjective, but musically translated, maybe this experience might help you understand also how this translates musically – starting to play with Alhous since 2018, I can, there was this struggle with me because I'm quite used to structured music, playing a lot of pop music, guitar jazz music where after the singer sings, something happens, after the solo immediately, a drum roll happens and then there's the cut. So there's always that aspect, when I started to play with Alhous I do a solo and the fact that I finished my solo is not a good reason for him to say to come in. So I expect him to, to do something, because I have already done my curve. And his, he comfortably groups, maybe for as long as I did the solo,

even for a space that is like, wow. And from time to time I started getting used to it. But at one point, as part of the tour when we were discussing, I came to understanding him better because my space and my understanding of the space within music isn't his, for him, his childhood, he spent a lot of time in the desert behind camels where he has no reference points. He only ate when he was hungry not because it's 12 o'clock, he he slept not because it was night but when his body asked, so there is no urgency sense of urgency sense of that to him. So actually, it was a dialogue of life more than... it wasn't just music only, it was more than that. So this is the significance of the this collaboration with Alhous that I have. And I'm getting into his space, I'm getting into his void and he's getting into my void as well. So there is a balance somewhere there. And that is also musically reflecting here as well. But it's just that there are more people with their own voids also.

Girum: So his way of playing his freedom, my way of playing was also freedom from a different angle. So without understanding his life and childhood, his own void, his concept about space, emptiness, his gaps and so on. It wouldn't have been possible to collaborate at that level and also understand him. So I mean, the playing techniques, music theory and other things, arrangements become secondary in this case. So this is first of all, heart to heart, communication and communication from each other's ground, then my void would only be a personal thing then, so growing up I'm the last one of six siblings. Most of them grown up when I was born, my immediate elder brother is nine years and a half, almost 10 years older than I was, and the rest of them are like one year, two year apart so they could play together. And I was a little baby I could never play with them. By the time I was four or five years old, they were teenagers and they were out of the home, they would be immediately highly bored to play with me. So there was this loneliness. The only friends I had was the cat, the dog, accordion and a bit later the guitar. And the the accordion was something else because I was almost at that time I really play but I had no choice. So I used to engage with it.

...

Sandra (translating Jean): for him it's very personal story as well, this void sorry. So he relates to his story relates actually to his father who has passed away and the father said before to his family to his children. Don't think that I've gone when I will pass away... I am always with you ... and if you call me I will be there with you ... you will all feel that I'm here ... So in their culture actually when somebody dies it's it's not empty and they do, they celebrate and they they will

sing and they filled the void actually ... so it's it was a secret for him but now he's sharing his secret with us, this way now of contributing the song's also an homage and a commemoration of his father now dealing with the song ... so it's it's a traditional song and he is interpreting the song and really relates the song to his father and he says it's also this is for his father because he always wanted to bring his father here to Europe and just to show him and this did not happen. So today he's here with another family and he's just remembering and it's like as his father is now here with him

...

Mark: the kind of conversation we're having now is very different from the conversation I was hearing earlier today, earlier today was about tonality. It was about structure, it was about solos these personal experiences and this process of playing music, are they deeply connected? Are you experiencing the things you are telling me now as you're in that room playing together? Or is that sort of part of this conversation that happens around the music?

Girum: Yes, both happen. I mean, at the end of the day, we also have to play music. But there are times that we sit down and, of course, discussed the ideas. Also with Sandra. Not necessarily playing music, but so that we are on the same page, and so that the pieces that we bringing the compositions, the pieces that we bring to the table are of such significance. And, for instance, if you take the piece that since you attended our rehearsal, that starts that we start with singing with Claudia, the lyrics have the significance of the void to her and she, you know perhaps you can explain it and it was also explained. And it goes into the painting traditional dancing - we have to cleverly mix that music, you know, in a way that it makes sense. Also, musically, we can't expect in the audience everyone to understand the void. Whether somebody is ready to understand at that level, or not, we should, it should be ready for everyone. Somebody in the audience can maybe see it, not care about the void, and might just enjoy the music. Not necessarily understand it also, but feel it, and leave. So music has to be also there for all kinds of ears, and all kinds of people ready with anything. So with people who are ready to resonate at any level, it's there, for people to listen half of it and interpret it their own way it's there.

Sandra: I think what is important because you're mentioning structures and stuff, and tonalities, and all the also arrangements about arrangements. I think this is what Jean was just mentioning at the beginning, that there are two approaches to such a project, you can take it as a, I would say, as a work in progress, and just coming together and meet up and somehow and improvisation and like to improvise. Or you take it in a way that you want to produce a

performance and bring things together and also bring it in a way that it's digestible for an audience. I think this is not a request of the project. We could have just sit here for four days and just jam and then improvise on stage and having a kind of a dialogue and let people share this experience. I think we decided to do it the other way and maybe this is also because especially these three musicians here they they're playing together they're performing together, they have a certain standing as well and that's the way they use to work in collaborations and they they like oriented to have kind of a certain standard I would say. So I think this is actually the approach that we took not to keep it kind of an improvisation

...

Mark: How would each of you describe what it is that you've now come up with this this 60 minute thing what what is it is? it is it... I don't want to put words into your mouth. What What is this 60 minute musical thing you know how what is important about it and what what does it do?

[French - Jean]

Sandra (translating...): the the 60 minutes show the variety of what is void what can void be, and the variety between him being from benin and or Niger or Ethiopia or Germany that there's different approaches and the 60 minutes show this very there very different approaches

Mark: For you?

[French - Alhousseini]

Sandra (translating...): So for him, this 60 minutes show that though there are very different approaches, they can all come together and be together.

Girum: For me, I think this whole experience will eventually I believe will bring a better self of myself a better version of myself in that as I have my void in maybe in the form of gaps in the form of abilities that I don't know in the form of realities and so on. People have different ones as well. So musically, I'm trying to find my space into his voice into other people's void too. So this is also about life like life, how it is and when we walk, we experience different ways of chemistry and communication with people. But we should be very compassionate to humankind, in general, because we all have our voids, our different experiences different in a positive way, in every way. So musically by being patient, I mean, in this experience is not always how I would like to play as a guitar player I'm playing, I want to impress people, maybe it's a natural thing as a musician, but that's not what I'm doing. I'm trying to serve the situation and play music. Just

like that it's a reflection of life, also, what we're doing there. And I think that experience is helping me be a better version of what I aspire to be.

Sandra: What is important here, is as well, the very beautiful surrounding here. And I mean, you were talking about [french], but for me, it's also We're here now at this beautiful place. And we spent a couple of days together, we have side talks we had so interesting talks, and maybe hooked on this topic hooked on what we have to do. But new things just developing. You had your ideas, we had many interesting talks about new projects. So this is it's not only the 60 minutes product, I would say. It gives us an opportunity to discover each other much, much more