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The Emotional Last Mile: a reflection on music and how it affects us. A program conceived by Benjamin Seror as an extension of his solo exhibition Fascination that ran at @RD@ Alsace from November 2021 to February 2022.

Introduction by Benjamin Seror, recorded in November 2023.

Hi, my name is Benjamin Seror. At the end of 2021, I had the chance to present my most recent musical work in an exhibition at the art center @RD@ Alsace, in Altkirch. Prior to this, as an author and a visual artist, I was mostly telling improvised stories in public, hoping that they would be really funny, which, thank god, they usually were. At the beginning of this project for @RD@ Alsace, I described it to Elfi Turpin, curator of the show and director of the art center, as a collection of sad songs, which turned out to be true if you follow the names of the songs I then wrote for the project: *Stresssss*, *Depressing Times*, or *Second Earth*, just to name a few.

The focus on music as a visual artist came at a specific moment when I felt the need to take a fresh look at my own tools at a time when the art world was being shaken between the bulldozers of private money influx and the disengagement of the public sphere. For a while, at least for me, it became quite blurry what could be done with art, with the one I was making and more generally with the system and the art scene I was participating in.

It is also around this time that I started listening to Anne Sylvestre, the amazing Anne Sylvestre. I first heard her thanks to a radio program on the French national station, by randomly tuning in when she snapped at the host on a question about the strength and the courage it took Barbara, a French singer of her generation, to impose on the music industry of her time the fact that she was the writer and the composer of her own songs and I immediately loved her sharp tone. This was followed by some of my favorite kind of evenings, surfing from file to file on the internet, listening to her songs, until I stopped on one of the most moving and overwhelming songs of her body of work. The song is called *Douce Mélodie* (*Sweet Home*) and talks very directly about sexual

aggression and we can hear towards the end of the song Anne Sylvestre say “it has to stop, we have to be able to find peace” with such hostility in her voice that I’ve never heard before, so much so that I still remember to this day how deep was the shiver that went down my spine when I heard those words, as I’m sure, anybody who has heard it necessarily remembers.

I then stopped listening, stopped surfing, and stayed silent for a while. And I started thinking, revisiting moments of my own life, remembering stories I’ve been told by my loved ones and also more distant stories I’ve heard. I thought again and again and regularly about that feeling that evening, about the song and the shiver. I think this feeling is what I call the last mile, or the last emotional mile and I would like to explain a little more what I mean by that.

In terms of mobility, or transportation planning, the last mile refers to the distance that is left between your home and the last leg of your trip you can take using public transportation. It would be the distance between your home and the train station if you live in the countryside or on the outskirts of a city. This last mile has an important impact on global transportation because, if it’s too difficult to get through, one might be quickly discouraged and find it easier to switch to their personal vehicle instead of using public transportation. What I find important here is the notion of threshold between public and private space. Along that last mile, it’s very clear how you gradually shift from public to private spaces once you leave the train station, which in theory is a space that belongs to everyone. As you walk, you leave the station, walk through an avenue that turns into a street that turns into an alley that turns into a garden or a hallway, a staircase. These spaces are less and less shared and more and more private or at least shared with less people.

And I think that songs help us along that trajectory. In the introduction to her book, *Living a Feminist Life*^{*}, Sara Ahmed talks about bringing theory back home after a day’s work, as a kind of homework we should practice every day to better understand how days spent trying to think and understand the world around us translate into concrete gestures that directly affect our lives and the way we manage our relationships and our emotions. I think that songs are tools to guide this homework, tools to guide us through the last mile where theories—those that

* Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 2017. Duke University Press.

belong to everyone—slowly turn into sensitive facts that resonate in our own lives and our own personal memories.

The shivers can come from Anne Sylvestre, OMD, Pet Shop Boys, Ahmed Mounib, Amy Winehouse, New Order, Chiwoniso Maraire and many many many more. What is interesting here is that it's a very personal thing. There is a split between what is commonly shared and what is personal and I think that art or songs or at least authors and artists I find interesting show an ability to bring theory close to us and help translate it into gestures and help me to act on my own scale and affect my immediate environment.

In the context of that show at @Rd@ Alsace, I found this idea of the last emotional mile an interesting one and grew the curiosity to share it with other authors in order to start a conversation on the topic—too rare in my opinion—on the specific role that emotions play in their own practices. I didn't know personally all the persons I talked with beforehand, but their writing, music and research have been truly inspiring and it was such a pleasure to meet and share ideas and I would like to thank them all as well as the R22 team and the amazing @Rd@ Alsace team with whom it's been such a joy to work with all along these years. I would like to thank you all for having carried the project, allowing to record and broadcast these specific voices.

—Benjamin Seror, November 2023.

The Emotional Last Mile was mixed by Victor Donati (R22), transcribed by Héloïse Prax and translated by Thomas Patier.