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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 CRAC Alsace from November 2021 to February 2022.

Conversation with Deena Abdelwahed, DJ, compositor, productor and singer. This conversation took place in October 2022.

Benjamin Seror: Last year, I was lucky enough to attend a performance by Deena Abdelwahed called Club'baret, organized by Mophradat at the Kaaitheater in Brussels as part of the Read the room Festival. In this performance, Deena Abdelwahed's staging and music attempted to blend the art of cabaret and the space of the nightclub in the same space-time, and it was, I have to say, one of my most luminous experiences as a spectator—not quite a concert, but a space where present time felt even more present than usual, without being suspended. A few months after this performance, which I often think back on, I caught up with Deena Abdelwahed for a conversation that guided us through a walk home from a night at the club, thinking about what one has on their mind in that moment.

Hello Deena.

Deena Abdelwahed: Hello.

B.S.: I'm delighted to be having this conversation with you today. Could you perhaps start by introducing yourself?

D.A.: My name is Deena Abdelwahed. I'm Tunisian and I've been living in France for six years I think. I'm an electronic music composer and DJ. I don't know what else to say. I've been doing this work for a long, long time and it's my only job. That's it, I think.

B.S.: It's plenty already.

D.A.: Right.

B.S.: What interests me in this conversation is to reflect with several authors and researchers on the question of how we use music, especially in relation to what we do with our feelings. The world is full of very strong feelings and experiences that are sometimes violent, sometimes direct, sometimes gentle, and in this world, we also listen to an enormous amount of music to help us, I feel, process what's happening to us. So I have a very simple question: do you listen to music? What do you listen to?

D.A.: Sometimes I listen to music critically as part of my work as a DJ. But I also listen in leisure mode, when it's music I like a lot and which, how shall I put it, isn't necessarily related to what I do as a profession, i.e. DJ or make music. In other words, I sometimes listen to jazz or stuff like that, even though I don't play jazz as a DJ or anything. I have two poles, let's say.

B.S.: Right, between something more professional, i.e. music intended for DJ sets, and music more for listening. Just out of curiosity, how do you listen to music? Do you have a specific place where you listen, or do you listen while you're out and about?

D.A.: Well, for example, I have a speaker system at home that's connected to the Internet. When I wake up in the morning, the first thing I do is put on one of my favorite internet radio stations like NTS or Nooz. It's kind of like TV channels, watching what's new.

B.S.: On TV.

D.A.: Like TV, but it's radio... In such a way that it's not too interesting, so it's something like background music but still nice. Sometimes it'll be *dub reggae*, other times *ambient* music, but I don't really pay attention to who made it. Anyway, it's really to wake me up and to "dress up" the atmosphere of my house a bit. To cut the silence a little. And then, once I've got motivation or energy, I listen to mixes, DJ sets that have been recorded on the internet, and I look to see who's done the latest DJ mix that I could listen to, so I can listen to the latest stuff, get in the mood too. And when I'm in the mood for a specific genre, I put on DJ sets instead. Then, sometimes, when I'm traveling, or when I'm on a plane, I don't do it very often but I'll put on stuff I liked when I was a teenager or very young. Pop stuff anyway. Sometimes it's just for fun, *100%* for fun, just to feel good, when I don't have any ideas, when I'm not really in

the mood to criticize or intellectualize or whatever, I just put on something stupid that I know, that I know the lyrics to. On my AirPods. I look at record labels and artists and see what I like, what's going to help me during my DJ sets once I'm on the dance-floor or for the radio shows I'm working on, or something that inspires me, something I like, that I listen to again and again because I like it a lot, which can then help me compose music. In any case, I put on something that can be a source of inspiration. A dashboard. A mood board, right? That's what my relationship is like.

B.S.: Do you spend a lot of time looking for music? Or does the music come to you when you're listening to the radio? Do you also have very deliberate moments in your search?

D.A.: Both.

B.S.: Okay.

D.A.: Really, both. That is to say, either when I put on the radio or someone else's mix. I usually do two things at once, music accompanies me. When there's something I'm interested in, I pause it and see who did it and make a note of it, and then I go back. And sometimes... Most of the time I do go on Bandcamp and look at the new stuff. It's like my Facebook.

B.S.: Do you have hundreds of tabs open on your computer?

D.A.: I used to, but now I can channel myself! I've found my own way, my own rhythm.

B.S.: And do you have—it's also a question of perspective—do you have any musical training? Did you learn music or did you learn by doing?

D.A.: I learned by making music by myself on the computer. No, I didn't have any academic training in music or anything like that.

B.S.: Right. So, one of the questions that interests me a lot in this research is what we do with music. We listen to music, we're always wearing our headphones in the spaces we go into. I really like this idea of traveling to a job interview while listening to super pissed-off music and arriving furious at the interview. It's the way that music can help us

get into spaces we'd find hard to get into. But there's also this question that I find interesting: you can spend your day in the library reading, thinking about issues of emancipation and then you go home, and what happens on the way back is just as decisive as what you've been reading, i.e. your own gestures are just as important. What happens when you come back from a nightclub, where your mind is full of music? What happens then? I don't know if that's a very clear question.

D.A.: Yes, yes, yes. Do you want me to answer specifically relating to the club?

B.S.: Sure.

D.A.: Personally, when I'm in the audience, let's say I try to be on two stages because for example before I was seriously into music and all that, before, in Tunis, there was a kind of feeling of appreciation that I've just listened to something new, if ever it was a good concert or good club music or what have you. Appreciation, in other words, that there's a lot going on in the world, that it's exciting, that it's motivating. The fact that I'm coming home having gained something, I could apply this to other things in my life, i.e. at work, with my friends, which gives me hope. As opposed to, for example, when I go to a club and it's just music to get people dancing stupidly, well for me that's not it. I could dance with my friends and all that, but when I get home I go "oh what a waste". I get this feeling a little bit...

B.S.: That we just danced?

D.A.: That's it. And that's more or less what pushed me into making music. Music that's in search of something more, music that's new. Most of the performances back in Tunis were stuff we already knew more or less. Going there was a safe bet, knowing that everyone would dance and be united or belong to the mass. But I didn't find it very stimulating that a DJ had to play hits for us to feel united. So that's what made me want to make new, more sophisticated music and all that. To offer this desire to belong, being part of a public acknowledged by sound, without it needing to be hits. It's rare that I'm in the audience, professionally as a musician, maybe when I'm really drunk or whatever, with friends, or when it's music that's not in the same spectrum as what I play, then I have a different opinion. But in any case, I always have a critical eye. In other words, when I get home, I'm like - X did it

right - U didn't do it right - ah how come X did that? Why did it work for him and not for me? A critical attitude. Professional.

B.S.: We spoke a few days ago. You told me about your journey from being a jazz singer to going into the club world. And you told me about the moment you discovered amplified music. You said that there was something very material in the amplification itself, in what happens in the speakers, in the sound, in the fact that it's very loud in space. Can you tell me a bit more about that, about this specificity and what happened through this discovery?

D.A.: In terms of amplified music, I think that it fills the space so much, it's so heavy, it's so present, that sometimes you don't even need to see where the source is located in order to appreciate the music. I mean, for example, the guitarists or the people on stage and all that. It's rare that you ignore what's happening on stage in order to appreciate it. I found this very powerful, very meaningful. And what also attracted me to amplified music, or electronic dance music, was the variety of genres, and sonically it's all very different. The fact that it's very flexible as music, as sounds, and that you can do anything with it. You can always dress it up, dress the space up with the speakers, you know, I think it's much more material than jazz or rock or whatever.

B.S.: So this relationship with performance is important, the idea that we forget ourselves in the sound rather than watching what's happening on stage?

D.A.: Yes, for me it is. As someone who's a dancer, who actually wants to dance.

B.S.: Ok, so this attention isn't about a body watching what's happening on stage, it's on stage that the action is but the action is turned back towards you—as a dancer you're the center of this activity?

D.A.: Yes, that's right. It's really about wanting to share something between me and my friends who came along.

B.S.: Do you go clubbing a lot? Do you go dancing? In your professional life, is it important for you to go to clubs as an audience member and listen to other people?

D.A.: Yes, it's important! I'd love to do it more, I really would, but I can't for health reasons, mental overload, and time constraints.

B.S.: Right, because it means staying out late at night.

D.A.: Yes, that's right. I can't do that anymore. And above all, you have to feel good and have some self-confidence to be able to go out there and let go a bit and be more open. It's no use if you don't do that. I don't agree, for example, with going to a club if you've had a bad day.

B.S.: Can't we go to the club like we go to the cinema, just to see something new? It's funny, that's a question I'd never thought about, because when I was doing_, for a long time I was doing improvised performances: I'd get up on stage and tell stories, which is a type of performance that also requires you to feel quite zen or a little prepared. I mean, it's a very stressful exercise, but above all it's something that can't be rehearsed because there has to be an audience, people have to be available to listen to the story. And so I've always found that in the field of visual arts it's a distinctive practice in the sense that you need, in my practice I need an audience to be able to work, whereas a painter is in his or her studio, they just need to have their brushes and canvas. To make sculptures it's the same thing. As a result, I've always wondered about the performances I do: how do you go about making a sketch, or how do you go about trying things out? This is the first time I've thought about this: as a DJ or club musician, how do we prepare ourselves, because we don't have a club to rehearse in, we need the night, we need a public...

D.A.: It takes a lot of imagination, I think. It's really about being as realistic as possible with your imagination when preparing the sets. What I used to do—now I'm getting more comfortable—is pre-record a set and put it in my AirPods and close my eyes and imagine that I'm playing in front of people or that I'm on a dance-floor and I'm dancing. And see, hear. It's really about creating a kind of immersive imagination like that, to get an idea, at least.

B.S.: When you play, do you have a persona, do you project yourself? Do you have a way of being distant from yourself? Or are you super-focused, really into the music? Is there something going on on stage? Are people watching you or are you trying to make them forget you? Where are you in the club?

D.A.: It depends on the venue. If it's in a club or if it's at a festival with a huge stage in front of thousands of people. Yeah, it's not the same thing. And it's always really down to the promoter, I think, how they've set up the stage. In Crete, the stage was in the middle of everything, so everyone was dancing around it.

B.S.: A festival where you just played.

D.A.: Yeah, it's called "Nature Loves Courage". It's actually in a club, but the stage is really... there was like a shower head, and it's really a bit of a ballroom. So I realized that whatever I did, I mustn't show that I'm too concentrated, that 20% of my performance came not just from the music, but from the fact that I was there.

B.S.: And the audience has to feel that?

D.A.: Yes, we're really at the center.

B.S.: You have to perform it.

D.A.: Yes, so even though I was comfortable because I'm experienced and it's kind of my own audience, it's not easy for others, it can be very intimidating for other DJs, and even for other performers. But I really like it in a club, for example, when the DJ booth, as we call it, is secluded. It's a classic New York thing. Because that way, I'm watching and I'm trying to get them to stop watching me and concentrate on their friends and the dancing. That's really ideal.

B.S.: Right. You were talking about the speakers earlier. Is that the first thing you look at when you walk into a club, where the speakers are? Is that important?

D.A.: More or less. It's important but it's not the first thing I look at. The first thing I look at is the location of the stage in relation to the audience. And then the speakers, that's the technical part that I'll check afterwards with the stage manager. For the performance itself, it's really about the layout of the club or the festival.

B.S.: When you're playing, do you have any specific requirements about where you stand in relation to the audience? Do you ask about it, or does it really depend on the venue?

D.A.: Ah, it depends, it depends on the venue. Not all venues have this flexibility. When it's a live presentation, yes. When I do a live concert, these details are even part of my technical specifications sometimes. But when I'm DJing, no, because sometimes the architecture is what it is and I don't have much choice. But if I have the choice and if the show is demanding for me, I could ask, for example, that I bring my set-up closer to the audience, that I be on the same level, not higher up. It also depends on how I feel. Do I feel good, not tired, immersed…

B.S.: A few months ago I was lucky enough to see your show in Brussels, which was called *@lub'baret*, a mix between the words cabaret and club.

D.A.: *@lub'baret.*

B.S.: I read it, but I didn't know how to say it! *@lubaret, @lubarette*. And there was precisely this question about the relationship with the public. First, I'd like to say that it was great. I'm a big fan of this performance.

D.A.: Thank you.

B.S.: It was a really beautiful moment to witness. It was set up in a way that it was you playing, with a singer and a dancer. And there was something very moving about the balance between club and cabaret. You were saying something earlier about the club, the idea of "we're here, we're dancing", and I always have the impression that the club is a space without temporality, that there's no real present time, it's a suspended moment, things start to stretch out. If it was a great night, you can't remember when you started or when you stopped dancing. You just danced. Whereas cabaret has something that's really the opposite, in present time, with the music that's played live, there's something that's really important about the present. And there was something very sensitive there, between the dancing, and also your presence was very... we felt that you were there, that you were listening and performing the music. You were very spirited. It was very, very intense. A feeling of being present in that space that I found very strong. Can you tell us a little bit about this set-up and how you got to this space between club and cabaret?

D.A.: I did a lot of research on that. Actually, this project is quite philosophical. It's like when you ask the question, "What is beauty?

What's danceable and what isn't? What speaks to us? What doesn't speak to us?" There were lots and lots of questions, and above all, how can I put it, that's why in Europe you have to think twice before playing something in front of an audience, because you also have to know which audience you're talking to. So it worked, I think in Brussels, because the majority of the audience was of Arab origin, or Arab even, and they knew, they understood... We had the same, we had similar references. And I think the fact that they knew and were familiar with these references—although presented and reworked and reappropriated in a different way—, this triggered a bit of a charge, an excitement, a wow factor. I can kind of understand it, but not completely. It's really something that's presented differently, but for once it's not copy and paste, it's not Arab rock, it's not Palestinian rap. It's full of references, but they're not in the conventional order we're used to. I think this way of playing music came from the club world, from club culture in general. In other words, I played in a UK, American, Brazilian style and all that, I essentially copied or was inspired by how these cultures were able to really take a reference and reappropriate it or really do anything, explode it, do anything with it, without being too intellectual or abstract. Indeed, everything was calculated. I did nothing abstractly, just to see what happens or just for the sake of it. I deviated from that, I didn't want that. I didn't want to convey an image, or a message, or I don't know what. I really wanted to play with the references that the public had and I just distorted those in a way that I was less familiar with before, that I only knew in other types of music or cultures, lots of other cultures. I think it's always a question of impression. You get an impression. And so I took this phrase seriously, this way of thinking; technically it was difficult and I had to do a lot of research and spend time consulting with my academic musician friends like Hayem and Khaled Lathet. Listening and re-listening to the original references, Egyptian, Tunisian and all that, and then returning to what I do. It wasn't spontaneous at all. Even if it may have looked spontaneous. Maybe the spontaneity is just in the arrangement, i.e. when do I launch this part of the music I've composed, and then that part. That aspect was improvised, but it wasn't completely improvised, it really depended on the audience and it depended above all on the two people who were with me on stage, i.e. the singer and the performer, seeing what kind of energy they had, how many times they counted, so one two three four, one two three four.

B.S.: Okay.

D.A.: We tried things out. It's not rigid, but it's not exactly open or free either.

B.S.: Yeah, so there was a lot of work involved in writing the songs beforehand, and that's what the research was all about.

D.A.: Yes.

B.S.: And when you talk about references?

D.A.: No, sorry I mean that things were slow because there have been quite a few people who more or less tried to modernize these musical references and that's the problem. So they ended up stagnating because this motivation, well it's not what I wanted to do, and so all this work by other composers from Arab countries or elsewhere, they just had in mind this idea of "modernization" which for me is a false note. That's not really it.

B.S.: Okay, so what's it all about? You mentioned consultations, did you have people listen to the tracks as you were writing them?

D.A.: Yes.

B.S.: Was the reference point to see whether people would dance? Or was it to discuss it? What was the purpose of these consultations?

D.A.: It was usually in the studio. I would show the skeleton and how it's going to sound and all that. For me, the way to make people dance is, if it makes me dance first, that's the ultimate indicator. If I can imagine myself dancing to it, that's great. I'm the guinea pig. And then with the consultants, my consultant friends, I check with them whether I've made the same mistakes as the composers or producers of electronic music when they wanted to modernize the piece. I'm really careful not to run into the same problems. Because sometimes I can't even tell. Like when I can hear that, yes, it reminds me a bit of *Acid Arab* or something like that. Even though I like them a lot, I like their music a lot, I have a different approach. I'm looking at what else there is to change, what else there is to explore, what else there is to create.

B.S.: Yes, okay. So if it's not about modernizing, what is it? Can you put a word to it, because you also used the word philosophy, philosophical

research, so there's a question of, well, what does it move in the spectators? What happens when we're together in this place, during the Mophradat festival in Brussels—what happened to the audience that day? At the Kaaitheater.

D.A.: I think that what I'm actually doing is looking at all Arab dance music, traditional dance music, folk music in any case, from one country to another: the *groove*, or what makes the crowd dance, is not the same for every country or, quite simply, it's not the same for every musical genre or situation or whatever. So, sometimes there's a bit of a religious aspect, when we're talking about Gnawa music for example, or just a wedding, or a social thing. And then each time, apart from the rhythms, we can take the rhythms and copy them onto Ableton [software] and change them with a machine, an 808 drum machine, which is what I'm trying to say by modernizing—well, I'm not the only one who says that, others too. I understood that sometimes it could work, sometimes people could reference and act on this music as if it were a group in their neighborhood in Cairo, making music in a folk way. But sometimes it's not enough just to copy the rhythm, you also need the ambience, the sound, the percussion, what they use as a tool for percussion: there are darbukas [goblet drum], there are tablas, there are dofias, things I don't know. There's a reason behind the fact that, for example, Tunisian music, dancing Tunisian music, can't do the same thing as Egyptian Maqsoum music. A keyboard player can't do a one-man show. I say Tunisian music is not the same thing because for Tunisian dance music, even today, whenever you bring someone to make music, there are at least four people because you need at least three just for the percussion, to have this "brapa" [Deena describes the sound of percussion].

B.S.: To achieve this wall of sound.

D.A.: That's right, to have that *groove* that makes us Tunisians dance, or that makes the *groove* specific, that makes the specificity of where the hips... they depend on the kind of rhythm. And I actually understand that Egyptian music is older and more sophisticated and all that, it's very easy, and that's why it's kind of the dominant music in Arab pop music, it's the Egyptian dance rhythm, because you can do it with any sound. A piano sound or a drum-machine sound, a percussion, a kick-drum, a conventional European drum kit... We manage to understand it—that's what Maqsoum is.

B.S.: Yes, there's this idea in Egyptian cabarets that the orchestra has slowly been replaced by a single person.

D.A.: There you go.

B.S.: Who does all the instruments, and it's always someone who plays the orchestra.

D.A.: Right. Yeah, so I think it's philosophical to ask who makes you dance, what makes you dance? What? Where? Why yes? Why not? I really had to find inspiration, maybe through imitating old sounds, though not in a technical way. It's about the whole environment and not only the use of percussion. The idea is not to duplicate [old sounds] in an ideal way but to reappropriate the whole spirit of it. Okay, I know what gets people's hips moving in Tunisia with four guys playing the darbuka drum. I know that, but how can I do the same thing, with what kind of calculation and why? It's all a bit manipulative, really. How do you manipulate people's brains? Without going too far. Yes?

B.S.: Music has a physicality that makes us move, but it's also a social setting, because the nightclub, the club, the cabaret or the wedding in Tunisia, has very little to do with going to a club in Paris at three in the morning and waiting in line to pay an entrance fee. These occasions are very different. So how does that fit in with the question of how we perceive what makes us dance, this social gathering?

D.A.: I think that, actually, weddings in Tunisia don't make me dance. Clubs, on the other hand, do. I think that to be able to share these moments and let loose and dance, it's really important that we at least share the same opinion, mentality, with the people around us. That is to say, for example, there are quite a few times, at an aperitif with the Tunisian diaspora here, we put on dance music and I love dancing with them. Dancing to the most folk music possible, I really let myself go. On the other hand, for my brother's wedding for example, it's not spontaneous, I danced because it's my brother's wedding but otherwise it's impossible, I've never danced at a wedding. I've never felt like dancing at a wedding. I've never felt like it, although the music was really great, it was very danceable. On the contrary, I even tried to ask what kind of music it is and all that, so I can keep it with me. Then one time I'm with my friends at an aperitif or something, and we play this

music I know and I can dance with them, so I think that beyond the music, people are very, very, very important.

B.S.: Okay.

D.A.: I mean, if I were ever in a club in Paris, if there were a lot of faces that I wasn't too comfortable with, then I wouldn't dance.

B.S.: The dancing won't happen in these moments. So this social dimension is important. Can you talk about roles: for this particular setup [in Brussels] there was a dancer on stage and I find that quite interesting because (it was very beautiful) he had an absolutely incredible shoulder movement. I haven't dared move my shoulders since I saw him perform. You've been talking about situations in which you're more in a state of oblivion, that is to say that music can create a space in which, as a citizen, you suddenly start to ramble and become nothing more than a dancing body, and here there was this slightly different relationship because there was this body on stage dancing, and there was something that I found very peculiar, which was that for most of the performance he was seated and he was also watching you and the singer.

D.A.: Aya?

B.S.: Yes, he was watching the performers, he was watching Aya and you too, and so there was a staging of seeing, of watching, that I found quite interesting. Is this something you've done before, having dancers like this on stage?

D.A.: No, that was new. I wanted to experiment, honestly. Because apart from the musical side, the cabaret aspect wasn't there. Cabaret usually has more of a visual side than a musical one, with its kitschy decor, *extravaganza* and performers. It's focused on visuals. I didn't want to imitate that, and neither did the music. Plus _.

B.S.: The *extravaganza* side, the decorative aspect?

D.A.: There you go. I couldn't translate or convert it like I did with the music and I didn't have the time. I didn't have any ideas, frankly, because I'm not a visual artist. I didn't want to do some kind of cliché, I wanted it to feel even more honest. So that's why I wanted to try and

involve a performer or a dancer and I gave him these instructions: it's going to be a cabaret, it's all about our stage, and we don't care about anything else. Me, I'm going to play for you, Aya is going to sing for you, and you, you're our audience.

B.S.: Okay. He was there to watch you.

D.A.: To watch us, that's all. And we were there to play for him.

B.S.: So it was his role to bring in the swirls, the decoration and the whole slightly fake, overplayed cabaret feel. It was his role to carry it all on his shoulders.

D.A.: Well, let's just say that since he knew, since he had an idea of what cabaret is, I think I disregarded all that and went straight to asking why is cabaret so visually *extravaganza*? It's about the audience, and so I brought in the audience as a single entity, who, through him, could see the essence of why it's *extravaganza*.

B.S.: There's a dimension that I find really interesting, because you said "manipulation" and "sincerity" in the same sentence, and it's really interesting because they're very strong opposites. I know that these are things that I manipulate a lot in my artistic practice, because to be sincere is a construction. You always have to make a big deal of things, and it's never sincere to be sincere, and that's why I have this reference—I often talk about it with my students—Dalida, who has this way of always being completely constructed, of always being at the top of her game. Every emotion is intense, like a stab in the heart.

D.A.: Yes.

B.S.: When she sings *Je suis malade*, for example, she has these gestures that accompany the song. And I really like this space between the tools that we use to be sincere (it's manipulation) and the fact that we're also there to help the audience transport themselves elsewhere, to think about other things. I find that really interesting. And to have this person who was there, who was sometimes from the back looking at you, he had this way of being, it's like he wasn't necessarily in the same club we were in.

D.A.: That's right.

B.S.: That's interesting. Does this ambivalence between sincerity and manipulation mean anything to you?

D.A.: No, but yes definitely, because it's... how can I put it, it's abstraction, abstraction several times over. I mean, the thing is, when you're in the theater—I've never done theater, but I imagine that in theater, you can't say to someone, "Be sincere!" Well, sure. How can I put it. It doubles the work. It's already about being on stage and then leaving the stage. It's really double, it's like taking a photo in a mirror. From an angle. I don't know how to put it. It's important for me because with today's technological tools and modernity, there is more and more innovation, creation, media, contexts. We can no longer see or be touched by what's going on inside us. And that's why I'm a bit sad about all the social networking and photo-shooting and all that. Because it's obvious that the references of what it means to be honest or what it means to be spontaneous have all been turned upside down. The laws of interpretation of what it means to be spontaneous... Like is this really honest or is it really sexy, or is it really attractive, is it good music or whatever. It's all changing and I see that and I get lost in it.

B.S.: How do you see the moment when we're swallowed up by the dance floor, because it's like we have no other choice, because the music is so catchy: is that a rare moment of sincerity compared to other moments in our lives when we're constantly judging, or looking at things through filters?

D.A.: Yes, because the activity, the simplest reaction, I'd say, without intellectualizing or anything, is to dance, to dance. It's just dancing, imitating whoever's on stage, in relation to the shoulders.

B.S.: Well, this is not very radio-friendly, but as we're talking right now we're actually both moving our heads. Because I'm imagining this movement that I find very natural, to be listening to something that's so loud that there's no... not loud in volume but there's certain music that's impossible to resist.

D.A.: Right. And there's reasons why we can't resist. In other words, we all have our own references for what we can and can't resist when we hear music. I understand that it isn't a question of where you're from or what language you speak, unfortunately. Well not unfortunately but it's actually a sociocultural question. For example, my best friend is a fan

of metal and hard rock, so that might happen with some rock music phrase or something, it could do that to her.

B.S.: Trigger something.

D.A.: Well, it could make her dance like that. And me as well, when I hear music that's really classical but has a bit of an African *groove*, compound, I move my shoulders for Moroccan music, for example. As soon as there's something we can identify that we like a lot, that's dear to us, or that's intimate for us, that we like, we can project it anywhere. So, for example, it's like language: let's say we're in Japan, we hear someone who speaks Chinese in Japan and someone who speaks Italian, we'll be more *aha* towards the Italian because we know French. It's like we're more... there's a similarity or I understand more, we're closer to that Italian who's in Japan rather than to the Chinese because he's very far away. The performer, even if he isn't Arab, he's Belgian of Arab descent and although he doesn't speak Arabic, he has a few snippets, a few clichés he knows, a few things he likes from his mother when she danced, things like that and so on. Well, I was able to reach this performer on stage because I was able to unearth the code to be able to talk to him unconsciously. It should not be too direct. Because when it's direct...

B.S.: Yes, that's what it means to ask someone to be sincere. I love how this describes the idea that certain music pierces us... No, it's a weird word, goes through us and has this automatic way of setting us in motion and awakening something, music has a way of _. I don't know, it could work in the supermarket or on the bus, where all of a sudden it crosses the space and it stops us because we recognize it. We listen to the music all of a sudden and I find this interesting, what you're describing of being in a dance space with an audience, with people, and all of a sudden feeling at ease or authorized to be sincerely in the process and therefore immersed in the dance. It's really interesting. It's great.

We're coming to the end of this interview, and I just wanted to ask you a few more questions, which we discussed quite a while ago. You talked a bit about this at the beginning, the fact that one of the ambivalences of the club is that it takes place very late at night. What do you think about when you come home from DJing and dancing? How do you feel? What do you think about on the way home from the club? And then, the

other question is more general, or more sociological. What does it mean, the fact that a DJ's work is at night, and how do you see yourself in society as someone whose job takes place at night?

D.A.: For the first question, what I feel once I've finished the club depends on how the night went, on the other DJs or other artists who were on the same stage that night. But I think what I feel most of all is that I hope I've brought something to this audience, I hope they've managed to dance even if it's not tracks they necessarily knew. I think about that, and then on a personal level I think about how much sleep do I have left, I'm tired, and so to go to the second question, it's perfect to segue to the second question. I think the notion of what it means to be rebellious in a society has been overdone. I think it's become so trivialized that I feel like it's more rebellious to go clubbing during the day. It's more hardcore or it's more sincere, it's more fanatical I think, when someone goes to a club at three or four o'clock in the afternoon and dances all the same. So then he comes home safe and sound at eleven, noon, midnight. Really, really. It's a bit like fashion, for example. That is to say, there's a fashion for example where it's cool to be an outsider, where it's cool to have ripped jeans and all that. And then that becomes the norm and what's cool and outsider and specific is to wear bankers' pants for example... It always turns like that, it's crazy. I find that now in our era, the norm is to go out at night and come home at six in the morning. What's actually special, what makes someone rebellious, or what really makes someone... in the world of electronic music, is that he doesn't mind, on the contrary, i.e. he's not going to wait to go out and have an aperitif, pick up friends, get a bit drunk, before going and listening to his DJ. And actually be able to dance.

B.S.: I really like the idea of going to the club in the middle of the day, so that it's more linked to our daily lives and we can go to the club during lunch break, come back and continue our working day. It would be so great, it would make the working day so much more complete.

D.A.: Yes, much more practical. Because I find, okay I understand where electronic music comes from, especially in Europe, it's really a clique of people who are, how can I put it, they're against the system, they don't have a job, they live any way they want, and that's their choice and all that. But, for example, when I see techno and house in the United States, it's on the streets, it's in the neighborhoods and it's for everyone, it's during the day. It's an event, it's a community event that

remains social but without having to be, wanting to be, or appearing to be against the system. Delinquent, extremist in fact, that's what it is. I think that, in Europe in any case, the era of techno and clubs selling this idea that "if you go out at night, you're very original", well I don't think it works anymore.

B.S.: Ok. Great, thanks a lot Deena.

D.A.: Thank you Benjamin.

—Interview with Deena Abdelwahed, recorded in October 2022.

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