CALL FOR PAPERS

Everyone today recognizes that the digital revolution has transformed our daily lives and reconfigured our reality by giving rise to new ways of writing, exchanging, circulating and storing data, just as it has created new forms of authority, economy, understanding of time and relationship to the world (Rifkin, 2001; Doueihi, 2013). But it is just as true that because it is anchored in contrasting social, political and economic environments in the North as in the South, and because it is part of "socio-histories of technologies" (Lyslof and Gay, 2003: 15) that differ from one country to another, the digital technology manifests also itself in many forms and local uses that generate their own meaning and their own context. In short, the relationship that everyone has with this global technology is necessarily situated.

This is what the "Digital cultures in West Africa: music, youth, mediations" program, funded by the ANR, questions through the prism of music and dance since 2019, and what this symposium proposes to test in other fields: what digital technology does to cultures and what cultures do with it. An understanding of this two-way movement is indeed necessary to go beyond the notion of "transfer" and the still widespread idea that this technology works in a unilateral North-South movement, despite a growing number of works in social sciences that aim to remap the digital from the countries of the South (Berrou and Mellet, 2020; De Bruijn and Van Dijk, 2012; Ithurbide and Rivron, 2018).

We thus propose to consider the digital in its dialectic as globalized tool vs cultural artifact, to account for the multiple singularities it offers, as well as the representations, logics and underlying values to which it refers. What contributes to transforming, producing or reifying the digital, in terms of openness to the world vs identitarian closure, as well as of cultural mediations vs the reification of identity distinctions, and of projections into the future vs resurgence of memory? How do the new connections produced by this technology lead to renewing, or not, the forms of commitment, support or criticism of social models?

In this new ecosystem, new figures and new professions are emerging, including those of arrangers, sound engineers, music video directors or choreographers. New prescribers are also
appearing: traditional media (radio and television, whose private channels have multiplied with cable and DTT), but above all digital media (streaming and download platforms, social media), financed by local and international private companies, associations, or religious movements. In countries where questions of infrastructure (Larkin 2013), professional training (Olivier & Pras, 2023) or digital literacy (Granjon, 2016) arise, what are the capacities for action of these individuals? The invention of new economic models (Eisenberg, 2022), “innovations through use” (Von Hippel, 2005), the creation of an “art of contingency” (Olivier, 2022), compliance with a new “industrial patronage” (De Beukelaer and Eisenberg, 2020), or even a “digital colonialism” (Kwet, 2019): what do we observe in the different digital fields?

On a more theoretical level, questioning the relationship between music, digital technology and culture in this way invites a critical re-reading of the paradigm of innovation, largely based on a Western-centric narrative. It is therefore a matter of rethinking the digital beyond a chronology of progress, to highlight the many “productive paths” (Grimaud et al., 2017) at work here and there, which testify to multiple and fruitful “alternative modernities” (Ashcroft, 2009).

This symposium, which extends the work of AFRINUM undertaken in Ivory Coast, Ghana, Mali and Senegal, finally offers an opportunity to explore a new field of research at the crossroads of Popular Music Studies, Sound Studies, Science and Technology Studies and Digital Studies. Some works already integrate this interdisciplinarity (Bates, 2016; Born, 2022; Devine & Boudreault-Fournier, 2021; Steingo & Sykes, 2019), but there is still a need to develop methodological tools suitable for analysing digital musical ecosystems in countries of the South, as well as to reflect on the place of technology in music research, which has long overlooked this question. This last observation leads to the double question that will be discussed during this symposium: how do we take digital technology into account in our work; and how does this lead to renewing our practice and our research tools?

In the field of digital studies, Africa appears both as an emerging object and as a laboratory. This symposium is all the more relevant as it gives for the first time an opportunity to present these materials and these situations, and to make them dialogue with other fields, in order to discuss an Africa which is in the world and the world in Africa.

**Axis 1: A music, sound and image factory**

Almost everywhere in the world, the popular music industry is experiencing major changes due to the digitization of creation and distribution media. Musicians today go to studios not only to record, but also to compose their music and shape a “sound”, before making music videos, in collaboration with dancers, choreographers and audiovisual producers. Recorded and clipped music allows them to acquire a visibility that guarantees their notoriety in a media regime. With the arrival of 3G technology and access to mobile and inexpensive digital audio equipment, studios with digital audio stations are thus becoming the "nerve center of the creative process" (Meintjes, 2012), within economies characterized by mass consumption and a rapid renewal of music. From a place of performance reproduction, the studio becomes a place of "performance production" (Stuhl, 2014) where music is repeated, composed, arranged, recorded, edited, mixed, mastered, danced and put into images on the spot. The performative dimension of music
thus fully integrates the work of the studio, which therefore constitutes a social situation in its own right.

Building on the work of Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, Trevor Pinch suggests taking into account the analysis of machines and their agency in the analysis of cultural movements (Pinch, 2005). The research undertaken within the AFRINUM project has shown that beatmakers, arrangers, sound engineers and videographers consider their machines as instruments in their own right, whose handling, subtleties and playing possibilities they have had to learn, and with which they maintain a permanent dialogue. A tool is not simply an object, but a means of expression, the use of which reflects experience and skill level; it is a producer of effects on people, even a cultural actor (Olivier & Pras, 2023; Péneau, 2023).

Proposals included in this axis could relate to:

– The figure of these sound and audiovisual professionals: their biographical journey, their methods of acquisition and transmission of digital knowledge, or their work in interaction with musicians or dancers during the different stages of production.

– Human-machine relationships: audio and visual effects, software instruments, as well as samples and presets used, the use of which is dictated by fashionable musical aesthetics, economic constraints or even imaginations of globalization or of the past. The methods of implementing these tools and resources can thus be understood as so many "ways of doing things" (de Certeau, 1980) where the distinction of aesthetics is subtly played out, between musical genres, between studios or between countries.

– Images, sounds and identity construction: how the images and sounds produced contribute to the construction of cultural, religious, gendered or even generational identities; how images and sounds carry imaginations or refer to standards of behaviour and to cultural representations; and how individuals and groups identify with and relate to them.

**Axis 2: Youth and cultural entrepreneurship**

The central use of digital tools in the production and circulation of music and dance has the effect of shifting the “knowledge-power” relationships (Foucault, 1977) from the elders to the youth. In our fields of investigation, mastery of digital technology allows digital natives to acquire their own modes of expression, to become professionals, and ultimately to take control of the ways of making and living music and dance.

This emancipation is reflected in the emergence of a new cultural entrepreneurship linked to the world of music and dance, of audiovisuals and events, in a context where music is “watched” almost more than it is listened to (Kaiser and Spanu, 2018). We are thus witnessing the creation of labels, collectives, platforms and digital media, as well as the appearance of new professions (community managers, influencers, TikTokers, etc.). These singular professional paths are articulated with unprecedented logics of individualization where the values of neoliberalism - in particular that of the auto-entrepreneur or self-entrepreneurship - are reworked and resignified in the light of issues specific to the ecosystems in which they evolve. Indeed, the cultural and socio-economic practices that are deployed with digital technology are not transformed uniformly or with the same intensity, but are part of genealogies of pre-existing
and locally-located knowledge as much as in appropriations and “captures” (Balandier, 1982) of globalized knowledge.

Communication proposals in this axis may address, without necessarily being limited to, the following issues and questions:

– Economic values: Music and dance circulate within very diverse markets, from local to global, and even respond to a non-commercial use, depending on economic issues, social logics or contrasting political situations. The acquisition of mastery by cultural entrepreneurs and economic actors, and the recomposition of the value chain(s) can be the subject of precise descriptions here. Attention may also focus on the links between old and recent social and economic practices, and their transformation with digital technology, or even on the question of the sustainability, or not, of new economic models.

– Dynamics of professionalization and recognition: Despite the dynamism of this new audiovisual culture, artists and studio professionals, dancers and music video choreographers, still suffer from a lack of recognition, while some are forced to perform very diverse activities, in and out of the field, to earn a living. In this context, we will consider how the digital allows artists and studio professionals to become “entrepreneurs of their notoriety” (Beuscart, 2008) and to develop new visibility strategies. If one utilizes tools from the economic models of the GAFAM, which make it possible to articulate relational networks and socializing promotional practices with the public, is this enough to develop an international career?

**Axis 3: Cultural mediations and returns to context(s)**

This third axis discusses the widespread idea that digital technology, by allowing a globalized circulation of content, establishes social ties, or even creates larger communities. But what is happening in Africa, where a large number of countries are in crisis – political and security crises, identity crises, postcolonial crisis, religious crisis – and where the perimeter of States is most often restricted? In this “revenge of contexts” (Olivier de Sardan, 2021) which provokes changes, reforms and sometimes revolutions, what does the accelerated development of digital tools and the sharing of audio and visual content produce: an openness to the world, new globalized imaginaries, or, conversely, a specificity of local cultures, strengthening of conservatism, and a return to nationalism?

In terms of temporalities, digital technology arouses as many projections into the future as it does examples of a resurgence of memory, which result in the re-editing and rediscovery of musical recordings and film sequences linked to key periods of the past. How do these sounds and images from the past constitute creative resources for musicians and music video producers? How is this past selected, reworked, even manipulated in the light of contemporary issues? How is it combined with globalized content to perform in these contexts?

In Africa, most cultural industries operate on a local or regional scale. However, they are in demand by the GAFAM and international telephone operators who are counting on a “digital transformation” coupled with economic growth in these countries. How, by integrating the local music economy into their strategy of conquering markets, do GAFAM and telephone operators become actors of social change and the dissemination of cultures, or even establish privileged partnerships with States up to supplement in their cultural policies?
A number of themes can be presented in this axis, including:

– The cultural agency of the digital: Considered as an agent of mediation work that creates symbolic and political entities, how does digital technology contribute to negotiating and renegotiating the place of cultural signifiers within States, but also within cultural industries? What influences can the “digital revolution” have on the ways of thinking about others and about oneself through music and dance? Does it give more agency to artists, but also to the public, and to young people in particular who are the main consumers of music and dance?

– The development of streaming platforms: In 2022, music streaming accounted for 67% of total global music sales revenue and the platforms had around 618 million users. Despite criticism of the creation of platforms and the new cultural hegemonies they engender, the realities are often more complex and raise questions about local re-anchoring in terms of content, formats and partnerships, as well as about the rise of new local and regional streaming companies.

**Bibliographical References**


Doueihi Milad, 2013, *Qu’est-ce que le numérique?*, Paris : PUF.


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ORGANISATION

Call for papers

Abstracts must be submitted to the scientific committee in French or English. Abstracts should be between 250 and 300 words in length, including a title and an indication of the desired thematic axis focus.

Abstracts should be accompanied by a short biography indicating surname, first name, title and/or position, institution, country and e-mail address.

Abstracts and biographical notes should be sent by e-mail before October 15, 2023, to: afrinumsymposium2024@gmail.com

Symposium venue

Auditorium 150
Campus Condorcet
Cours des Humanités
93322 AUBERVILLIERS

Calendar

- Call for papers: July 7, 2023
- Receipt of paper proposals: October 15, 2023
- Selection of papers by the scientific committee: December 15, 2023
- Finalization of program (panels, lectures, round tables, master-classes, concerts): February 1, 2024
- AFRINUM symposium: March 25, 26 and 27, 2024
- West African Electronic Music Master Class and Coupé-Décalé Choreography Master Class: March 28 and 29, 2024

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