



The hand and the keyboard: What humanity for sub-saharan Africa?

N'Doua Kouassi Clément

University of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire

Abstract

The hand here represents values and the keyboard also represents the digital in all its ramifications and components. Indeed, this contribution intends to evaluate the digital in relation to African values that scrutinize the meaning of our actions according to the values we hold. Without such an effort of critical discernment, the digital in its deployment in Africa could become hollow very quickly and insubstantial, or even lose its usefulness among the principles that are likely to guide our actions and serve as our compass. In a sociological-phenomenological approach, this reflection invites us to question, in its depth dimension, the necessity of the use of digital technology in Africa which often contrasts with our values or to give ourselves the means to appreciate the possibilities that digital technology offers or those that it prohibits. In this sense, the objective under adjacent is to rethink the digital in reference to our values so that the African man does not fall into decay.

Keywords: ethics, humanity, keyboard, hand, societal change, digital, African values

Introduction

Not a day goes by without the (digital) keyboard being at the heart of controversy within African societies in its unfortunate use. Indeed, when we come to look at the deployment of digital in sub-Saharan Africa, one thing comes to mind, namely the transformation of our life: from a traditional life to a modernized life. In this regard, the digital also changes our habits, our (African) values, namely our humanity characterized by the human warmth that we feel in physical contact with others, fraternal communion, our dignity: what should be held sacred is desacralized, our habits and customs are desecrated by their dissemination on social networks. This is the fundamental reason that leads us to question in the direction of the title "The hand and the keyboard: what humanity for sub-Saharan Africa?". In this question the hand represents our values and the keyboard the digital in all its components. However, this highlighting of our values through the constant use of digital technology only translates unease, concern and, ultimately, uprooting. Uneasiness in the face of an almost unprecedented change that affects all aspects of our lives, individual and collective. A concern expressing a disarray in the name of the human, or of a certain conception of the human rooted in our cultural practices in forms of expression which is weakened by the keyboard. It is in this sense that the digital or the keyboard reinvents our daily life, with its habitable spaces, its models of communication and its values which creates a kind of uprooting or which strongly thwarts our values considered sacred, since the keyboard bears witness to reality. of a radical change in our daily life which is rooted in our cultures. As such, is there not a questioning of our values through digital technology? This digital dimension concerns the transformation of African man into a digital object, but into a "digital object" writes M. Doueihi (2011, p.15) [7], that is to say into a digital cultural being, to the point where the loss of certain digital objects gives the impression of a loss of self. In this vein, our research question emerges as follows, what humanity for sub-Saharan Africa in the deployment of digital? In other words, how does the use of digital technology come into

competition with certain sub-Saharan African values? Moreover, in a sociologico-phenomenological approach, this reflection invites us to question, in the direction of the need for the use of digital technology in sub-Saharan Africa which often contrasts with some of our values or to give ourselves the means to appreciate the possibilities that the digital offers or those it prohibits in our tropics: not everything is acceptable with digital.

In such a sense, the underlying objective of this contribution is to rethink the digital in reference to our values, lest the digital dehumanize us. As the digital is used in our social sphere if we are careful, it risks indoctrinating us that nothing is forbidden to it. Through a sociologico-phenomenological method, an argument will be analyzed at three levels which are: The digital, a turning point for contemporary Africa, the keyboard as a modification of societal values in Africa and, ultimately, ethics on the borders of Digital: Knowing how to say no!

1. Digital, a turning point for contemporary sub-Saharan Africa!

The term turning used here can be translated here as revolution. The idea of revolution makes it possible to draw parallels with the advent of digital technology in social relations in our tropics. Indeed, digital social networks offer, since their irruption in the African social milieu, a new environment in which a new social relationship takes shape, which can be called "the digital othersphany" according to S. Vial (2014, p. 155) [19]. This word means, for him, the singular way in which the other appears to us through the digital medium, that is to say through the networked computerized devices that structure our current life in Africa. Suffice to say that no turning back is possible since digital is omnipresent everywhere. From then on, this digital mesh draws new relationships. This permanent link, from everyone to everyone and to everything, makes smartphones, tablets and PCs a real "self-extension" since we are now linked with these tools. We could even say that we have a real strong addiction to digital tools, to the point that "If I lose my smartphone or have it stolen, it's as if my

artificial heart was disconnected: all my lives are in the machine" S Vial (2014, p. 156)^[19].

In addition, the relationship with the other that unfolds through the channel of the Internet is so unprecedented at the phenomenological level that it has long seemed surreal, as evidenced very early in the use of the term "avatar".

To refer to the representation of a user on the Internet or in video games. It is true that before the digital age, it had never been possible to have this experience: "live without speaking and without seeing each other" S. Vial (2014, p. 154)^[19], as is the case now is extraordinary in our traditional villages. This modernization from real life in Africa to virtual life has replaced our old modes of communication, namely post office box letters with this endless wait to know if the recipient has received it or not.

This expectation has been revolutionized by the intrusion of digital technology which has conquered all living space. In many ways, as Huyghe (2022, p. 9)^[10] would say, "we are even from another world" with the keyboard. The various digital practices including SMS, tweets, exchanges on Facebook, are made in a paradoxical way which mixes "presence and absence" on Skype, for example, the other is there without being there and which introduces a new way of experience what the presence of the other interlocutor can be. And more and more, we are familiarizing ourselves with it in our most remote regions. From the moment we have accepted the invasion of digital in our homes, it goes without saying that this new way of relating to others by e-mail means that, "for many of us, digital now part of the routine of daily life" (Vial 2014, p. 155)^[19]. For example, in recent years we have also learned to dialogue daily on social networks with our friends, our contacts, our circles and, today, this new form of social link to the detriment of the physical link is naturalizing; as if it were natural. Thus the virtual becomes natural. Similarly, dating sites are becoming more and more popular places for romantic encounters, allowing those who want to take advantage of them to escape the artifices of the traditional social mechanisms of encounters, where it is necessary to move physically to go to the one you are courting with all possible sarcasm.

These diverse practices show that the relationship with the other in its most varied forms is already a reality that has been restructured, at the phenomenological and sociological level, by digital devices. Thus, the keyboard is the new matrix of social ties in all its forms. Thanks to him, online friendship provides one of the best illustrations of this. We can no longer conceive of friendship today as reserved for offline experiences. What the Facebook experiment, through social networks, has introduced is not only an attempt to connect individuals with each other for social and commercial purposes; beyond its "marketing uses" (S.Vial 2014, p. 155)^[19], which are unprecedented and to which the analysis is usually happy to limit itself (confidentiality, resale of data, etc.), there is a real value of the concept of friendship conveyed by digital technology.

Although, thanks to him, the side of friendship has been extended to a whole variety of relationships that might not have deserved this name in our traditional societies in the past. Nevertheless, in fact, digital technology has introduced a new dimension of relationality into minds and practices. Should we see in this an impoverishment of friendship or, on the contrary, as we believe, an enrichment? If we hadn't widely experienced all kinds of friendly and less friendly

relationships on Facebook for several years, and more broadly on the Internet, we wouldn't be able to say the same thing. But for us, as for millions of individuals, the results are clear and obvious: all these people with whom we exchange ideas, we joke, we debate, we discover each other have points in common. Friends whose meeting is different from the traditional friendly meeting, but friends all the same, in a broadened and extended sense. From this point of view, Facebook must be seen as an invitation, through practice, to rethink the theory of friendship. Friendship has never been so broad and rich, lively and powerful, as in the age of digital social networks. To this end, Aristotle (1966, p. 300) said in *Ethics to Nicomache*, about friendship that it is "the foundation of the bond of cities". This is all the more true because no one doubts it.

In this perspective, Aristotle will distinguish three kinds of friendship which are friendship by pleasure, by interest and by virtue. Even if these three elements envelop the concept of friendship, but, writes J. Ricot (2003, p. 34)^[17], that "the friendship which will hold more attention in the eyes of Aristotle is that based on virtue». Because it is from friendship by virtue that values such as solidarity, mutual aid, happiness, etc. arise. Which establishes and consolidates the strong links in the city.

Also, it is clear that it is now possible to extend the concept of friend well beyond the traditional circle of relatives. In other words, the presence of the other through digital mediation introduces "an extension or expansion", (Yvon le Scanff, 2022, p. 69)^[20], of the encounter that transgresses borders. On this point, there is no contradiction between informational being and otherness: it is perhaps even quite the contrary. Because it is the networked informational being that gives us, if not to say offers us, in the noble sense, a new phenomenological form of presence, like the telephone in the past. In fact, today there are a tremendous amount of additional opportunities to meet the other, and whatever the quality of this meeting, it always depends on the interested parties rather than the digital one which makes it possible. All things considered, the experience leads us to consider that this presence of the other by digital means is really a presence of the other man. It is indeed others that I am given to meet through digital technology in our contemporary Africa. Because, if the digital object offers the (technical) possibility of an encounter with the other, it is incapable on its own of generating an encounter. It is the subject who chooses, by voluntarily pairing up with the digital object, to make this occurrence "an effective reality", Hegel (1966, p. 17)^[9], of the encounter with the other. This is why Internet dating, whether romantic, friendly or professional, "works" only for subjects who have accepted a priori that it could work "for real". Only those who believe a priori in the possible truth of meeting others in digital access to the possibility of meeting digitally. Therefore, the phenomenotechnical mediation of alterity is a living reality with the digital. In other words, digital allows us to weave our web everywhere, "eliminating" borders in order to meet others. Thus we can note that digital has been a turning point in contemporary Africa, to the point of modifying certain habits in meetings. However, this change is not smooth, because its unfortunate use disabuses certain social practices in Africa: Hence the keyboard as a modification of societal values in Africa.

2. The keyboard as a modification of societal values in sub-Saharan Africa

To build a dwelling, it must first be founded. The foundation here is to establish the merits of this title. It is a question of showing that the introduction of digital technology in Africa has modified some of our values, in particular the life of a couple, the desacralization of the sacred, the loss of the sense of our dignity and the human warmth that we feel in physical contact.

In addition, some conflicts and couple problems depend in part on the misuse of digital technology (social networks, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc.) which sometimes undermines cohesion in the home. Better, the various causes of this conflict in the couple are the lack of communication. One of the members is constantly glued to his smartphone surfing the networks with friends who are so distant that he no longer pays attention to the other who shares the marital bed. Indeed, the abuse of the keyboard causes in some individuals a lack of interest in their partner, a decline in communication. Closer to the distant than to the closer", namely the one who is hundreds of kilometers away, than the one who is right next to us. Thus, this attitude is one of the causes of divorces in our Africa; because the spouse, rightly or wrongly, accuses the other spouse of infidelity, since no special attention is given to him for the benefit of the one who is equidistant. In this sense, the life of a couple is becalmed due to the problems linked to the absence of the other. Of course, this generates significant difficulties in household life.

Moreover, digital technology has disorganized the domestic environment and modified the ecology of the home, particularly in the relational dynamics of its actors. The introduction of these connected devices, sometimes experienced as an intrusion by one of the members of the couple, upsets conjugality. As such, we could also consider mobile devices as vectors of increased individualization within the couple. The process of individualization within society is certainly not a new phenomenon, but the proliferation of connected devices seems to have accelerated the process in the African societal space. So this experience of being-together but "at a distance is undoubtedly one of the most paradoxical dimensions of our digital condition" writes P-A Chardel, (2022, p. 15) ^[5]. Digital technology favors the increase of the autonomy of the partners on the communication level in the home. This privatization of communication within the couple had already been initiated with the mobile phone in the 1990s. However, this individualization can be felt as isolation by the partner, especially when the other is not within earshot or of gaze, which raises the question of territorialization and the fragmentation of spaces which causes distance within the home. This attitude will be denounced by P-A. Chardel, (2022, p.15) ^[5], when he states that "many interactions lead us more and more to live or work remotely but separately". While what makes the specificity of the African man is the non-virtual proximity, the community life and, also the solidarity or even the compassion in a physical way followed by the hugs and the physical sympathy that we show to others. However, as for the digital, it confronts us at the same time with the idea that the common is itself to be reinvented, by the creation of space which takes into

account virtualization and the irreplaceable nature of physical and bodily exchanges.

If we start from the principle that it is therefore common practices that create a conjugal zone within the home, then the fact of living together in the same physical space, touching each other and practicing activities in common are essential conditions. To build and consolidate the stability of the couple, even at the risk of losing the meaning of love. In addition, common practices and ordinary communications are essential for the stability of relationships and the construction of one's own identity by the individual. This zone is nourished by social times such as meals, sleeping together with caresses, etc. However, these social times are undermined by the use that some individuals make of keyboards. With the introduction of multiple devices, several changes are observable within our space.

For example, the too long prolonged absence in a place, the day when you set foot, the hugs, with the greeting by shaking hands, this human warmth which characterizes African societies, this fervor creates in you a certain emotion that the digital technology cannot replace us in Africa. This is why traditional Africa stood out from other continents This is why H. Bergson (2008, p. 54) ^[4] pointed out that each gesture posed towards us which creates joy in us gives us "particular emotions. Is it not this emotion that Senghor ^[18] was talking about when he asserted that emotion is Negro and that reason is Hellenic? All things considered, for Senghor, traditional Africa is essentially characterized by emotions, which is one of its specificities.

Moreover, many testimonies against digital regret that the computer "steals" their time. Indeed, activities of the email type do not support co-presence "poorly", thus the connected individual tends to isolate himself cognitively or spatially, he no longer pays attention to others, except that at his keyboard.

An analytical reading of messages, photos posted on social networks show the desacralization of the sacred. Without context, the bodies of the deceased who have passed from life to death are exposed on social networks: What indignity! Whereas ancient Africa is characterized by secrecy, confidentiality and giving respect to the dead. Better still, in traditional Africa, not everyone is called upon to see the bodies of the disappeared and it is these practices that rocked our childhood, but with the introduction of digital technology which gives things a certain visibility, these practices are considered outdated. At this level, let us parody J. Anouilh (1942, p. 100) ^[1] by commenting on a key idea in his work entitled Antigone, when the latter was refused the right to cover her brother with sand by King Creon whose body putrefied in the public square.

However Antigone, in all discretion, went and covered her brother with sand. This perseverance of Antigone testifies that every man who is dead is a bearer of dignity. At this level, let's listen to a gripping passage from Levinas that reminds us of the other who died. For E. Levinas (2002, p. 121) ^[14] "the death of the other affects me more than mine". Isn't that what B. Pascal (1966, p.119) ^[15] seems to be expressing when he said that "all our dignity therefore resides in thought". This is why the advent of digital technology must take into account this essential dimension of man, or even exclude certain aspects of human life.

Another upheaval caused by the intrusion of digital technology in our African societies is the abolition of spatio-temporal borders, since with digital technology we can

communicate with friends spread over the surface of the globe and the ubiquitous potentiality allowed by devices which question the notions of presence/absence. Indeed, the individual who communicates with someone else on the Internet is certainly physically there in space, but is he really present? No ! Whereas in traditional Africa, the presence among one's own is fundamental. Because, the physical presence with ours makes it possible to commune, to soak up their news: This is Africa. To deal with this phenomenon, S. Turkle, (2015, p.33) will introduce the concept of "connected presence", since the latter is not physically present, it is a virtual and remote presence characterized by exchanges short but frequent calls, etc. All these upheavals seem to indicate that digital has reconfigured certain values and the way of life of Africans. Thus the new sociability or sociality, provided by the keyboard, seems to come from "being together" but separately. In such a case, wouldn't it be interesting to think about digital in its ethical dimension that could fit with our traditional values? Hence the title ethics at the edge of the digital world: knowing how to say no!

3. Ethics at the edge of the Digital: knowing how to say no!

What does this title convey? Indeed, ethics at the edge of the digital world: knowing how to say no! Makes it clear that not everything is acceptable through digital technology. In other words, the digital user must know that not everything has to be on the digital: in a word, on the web. This should contribute to thinking about an ethic that could circumscribe the use of digital technology. To put it figuratively, reading a digital file on a computer is done through the movement of the head from top to bottom. The meaning of this parable, which could appear as an anecdote, should challenge the digital user. This movement of the head calls for a no which is inscribed within the keyboard. If we are careful, the digital risk of leading us (Africans) to the depths of the abyss. This means that a standard must mark out the use of digital, otherwise it risks precipitating the African man towards the end of the abyss. As such, ethics must be summoned to the heart of digital technology to avoid certain attitudes that detract from its essence.

Moreover, some use digital technology, especially social networks, to undermine the dignity of others. Indeed, a certain category of individuals who call themselves "influencers", a nickname they have given themselves, use social networks to discredit and denigrate those whose beliefs they do not share, even to throw turpitudes and reproaches on him in order to deliver him up to popular vengeance; claiming it's buzz. What is this Buzz that undermines the dignity of our fellow human beings? While doing so is a serious violation of the dignity of the other. This is why E. Kant "1994, p.136)^[11] invites us not to "see the other as a means but an end in itself". In other words, for Kant, every man is the bearer of an even less marketable value called dignity which gives him his humanity.

It must be recognized that our current lifestyles suggest that the dark side of digital networks prevails far too much over us. This therefore motivates the need to produce a critical approach to our digital practices; since the hyper-connection becomes a very strong characteristic of our life in Africa. However, this, knowing that it is not a question of anathematizing digital technologies as if they formed a system in their own right, nor of embarking on the path of

"some technophobia", (Chardel 2022, p. 94)^[5], which would make no sense. On the other hand, it is fundamental to seek the way in which our lives are likely to be influenced by what makes possible digital technologies; in this sense, such an effort should lead us to develop a framework of interpretation that can reframe the overflow of the digital and return to the anthropological reality of man. In this regard, in *De l'existence à l'existent* by Levinas (1973, p.125) made us aware of the fact that the profound "change that is taking place in modern civilization is that the tool not only prolongs the man's hand to allow him to reach what he does not reach, but he allows him to reach it more quickly". To put it another way, we see how today such impatience invests, and even contaminates, a large part of our life by modifying it, especially at a time when digital technologies are available to the world, especially Africa. But this is not without setbacks or without consequences, because we get used to diffusing in most of our behavior a technical model. Yet this is where "perhaps the yawning void of a certain nonsense opens up", (Ricœur, 1955, p. 351)^[16], of the digital that makes us lose our bearings and values.

Obviously, the more our social and professional spaces are invested by digital innovations, the more we must be very attentive to the virtues of proximity and recognition, to the detriment of virtual proximities and recognition. It is a question of assuming an awareness and stepping back at a time when praise for digital is becoming more and more growing. Because a fusion of horizons is impossible, something the keyboard tries to do. As expressed in this regard by Gadamer (1900-2002)^[8], if it were possible to reduce communication to a pure and simple transfer of information and if a material fusion of horizons was not required then in our time of Internet and networks, physical contact and the sharing of space and experience would have become superfluous: "But this is not the case, and nothing indicates so far that it will be" (Gadamer, 1998, p. 43)^[8]. At this level, the sources of an ethics of proximity can be reinvested today, in particular at a time when we encounter particularly intense phenomena of disruption (fracture, rupture).

In fact, one of the characteristics of physical proximity is that it is contradictory to being able to keep a distance from the other. Indeed, physical proximity generates more respect and attention than indifference towards our fellow human beings. So, we can easily be indifferent to the fate of others at a distance as digital technology recommends, which is much more difficult in physical proximity as this is always a sensitive experience. Thus, "the face-to-face has something irreplaceable in the experience of others" P-A Chardel, 2022, p. 71)^[5]. By addressing the other not virtually but physically, I expose myself to the risk "specific to any real interlocution" writes E. Levinas (1992, p. 70)^[13].

It is essentially through this that the ethical relationship emerges, as E. Levinas has masterfully shown. For him, it is in speech that I become in a way for the other, that I am truly dispossessed of my sufficiency, that I become for others in the obligation to respond to the other while answering for him. Thus, it is through the living word that the ethical relationship is established, through the face-to-face meeting which commits me to projecting myself outside of myself. And when E. Levinas (1992, p. 70)^[13] writes that "in the expression of the face, the being who manifests himself attends his own expression and therefore appeals to me". We can hear the idea that I am and that I

only give meaning to my actions to the strict extent that I am involved in a close relationship, not virtual, but physical and sensitive.

In this way, E. Levinas warned us against this latent risk of the loss of physical proximity in favor of virtual proximity. Echoing these concerns, Z. Bauman (2019, p. 99) ^[3] noted how everyone is able to “do their little informational cooking”. With digital, all you have to do is be connected to have access to all the information without having to travel.

In view of the above, an important challenge for the future of our societies would be to learn to better identify the new spaces of social innovation and practices that are emerging with the digital transformation. Hence the ethics at the edge of digital to better guide it.

Conclusion

Ultimately, we can remember that many opportunities and tensions have been felt in the African societal space since digital technologies have invaded our lives. However, the metamorphosis by the keyboard made to coexistence in Africa requires to stay as close as possible to the ambivalences which are inherent to it, this in order to better understand the deployment of digital which often contrasts with our values and which is ethically more sustainable in Africa. sub-Saharan. Moreover, it is for us to open the way to an evaluation of the use without measurement of digital technology which sometimes undermines, in our eyes, the humanity of sub-Saharan Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa must reconcile its values and the reasoned use of digital technology to learn to live better.

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