

Carpe Diem

TEDxSalzburg, March, 2024

Ed Bayo, Curator

In this paper I would like to present “Carpe Diem”, the 2024 theme for TEDxSalzburg. With Carpe Diem we explore topics and terms such as Time, Coexistence and Mindset. With Time, we examine the *problem* of time and its effects on individuals and society. With Coexistence, we focus on the growing trend to AI and explore what it implies to coexist with other humans and machines, while understanding what it means to be human. With Mindset we explore the phenomenon of failure and success, trying to find the key to a fulfilled life. With these topics, we wish to have an open conversation on the future and help shape our community and society for the better.

From TED to TEDxSalzburg

TED’s mission is to “discover and spread ideas that spark imagination, embrace possibility and catalyze impact. Our organization is devoted to curiosity, reason, wonder and the pursuit of knowledge — without an agenda. We welcome people from every discipline and culture who seek a deeper understanding of the world and connection with others, and we invite everyone to engage with ideas and activate them in your community” (TED.com).

At TEDxSalzburg, we have translated TED’s mission into one word: “Future.” “Ideas that spark imagination”, “possibility” and “impact” all point towards the future. And the future itself also refers to a future for somebody or for people “from every discipline and culture”, who “seek a deeper understanding of the world and connection with others,” and who belong to a “community”; people that can either actively play a role in the future or passively be affected by what the future might bring.

Carpe Diem and the Future

*Be wise, and strain the wine, its measure slight,
For life is short, and time takes flight.
Even as we speak, age's hand does guide,
So seize the day, let not the future preside.¹*

Carpe Diem, is a phrase, or an aphorism that was coined by the ancient Roman poet Horace in his work “Odes”, translating as “seize the day”. I would like to explore three possible interpretations of the term Carpe Diem.

¹ Fragment of Horace’s poem XI.I, translated and rhymed by AI; original text in Latin from gutenberg.org

The first interpretation is that of Horace himself, who recommends the reader not to ask what the future might bring, but to live the moment as if there were no tomorrow. Today, this idea is commonly known as “you only live once”, or [YOLO](#). But this approach has several drawbacks, starting from very practical things like overspending or unintended consequences that ultimately [kill the future](#). YOLO can also be a proxy for a pessimistic view of tomorrow that especially concerns the Generation Z, a “[disillusioned generation](#)” that has less confidence in government, politics, the executive branch and the press, compared to prior generations². This is the Carpe Diem that carries the sad connotation of the passing of time, the wish to “[be forever young](#)” and the nostalgia that “[all good things](#)” come to an end.

A second interpretation is a more optimistic one. Carpe Diem is the urge to expect more from the future and to set goals that ultimately lead to a fulfilled life. One classical version of Carpe Diem is John Keating’s quote in the classic film “[Dead Poet Society](#)” where he urges his pupils to aspire to more than what the establishment has to offer, saying “Carpe Diem; seize the day boys, make your lives extraordinary.” This is the Carpe Diem of the gold rush, that moves individuals out of the comfort zone, that sparks hunger for adventure. Here the future is risky and uncharted but full possibilities in business, art, [education](#), [technology](#), and society as a whole.

A darker side of the Gold Rush is what appears when people get caught up in the pressure to perform, in the tendency to live in the “hamster wheel”, struggling in a day-to-day job, with the expectation to someday, perhaps, maybe, make it; it’s the dead end for many people, whether they struggle with the [impostor syndrome](#) or proliferate in the [fake-it-till-you-make-it](#) culture.

But opening up towards the future can also lead to a sense of warning. Connecting the dots today might uncover anything from blind spots to possible future [calamities](#) that need to be tackled today and now. This is a third possible interpretation of Carpe Diem that sees the threat to our planet, to our [democracies](#) and to humanity as a whole; it’s the Carpe Diem that says “the time to act is now.”

Each one of these possible interpretations of Carpe Diem (YOLO, Gold Rush, Doomsday) all have some sort of *raison d’être* and you can be more in favor of one interpretation or the other. But reality probably lies in the middle. This is why we would like to foster the conversation on the future, seen from different perspectives and explore three main topics at TEDxSalzburg 2024: the *Problem of Time*, *Coexistence* and *Mindset*.

The problem of time

The future approaches. But as the clock ticks, our bodies are also subject to the decay of time and space until, some time, our lives will be over. From childhood to adulthood to death, there are several stages of development, of intellectual activity, of biological strength, of vital energy. Navigating these phases can be challenging. The urge to prove oneself at a young age is only countered by the wish to remain forever young at later ages, or to leave behind a heritage worthy of memory. Do I get nervous when I notice the clock ticking? How do I react when I see my strengths wane or encounter younger people that have better skills, more experience or greater wealth than I do? Is it all about having more?

One thing is clear: the topic of aging is uncomfortable, which is probably why people have long searched for the key to longevity. Yet, as people, even [companies](#) today specialize in understanding how to increase one’s lifespan, or even aspire overcome death itself, some key questions remain. How

² See also WSJ, March 16, 2024, Article “Gen Z Voters Are Disillusioned” by Andrew Restuccia and Eliza Collins

do we use the limited time we have? How do we prepare for [death](#)? Is there a way to [increase our lifespan](#)? How do we find [meaning](#) within the limited time ahead of us? Is it all about performance?

With Carpe Diem, we wish to begin an open conversation on the problem of time and seek different approaches and insights that can shed light onto this challenging topic.

Coexistence

Humans are social beings, we support each other, we use each other's goods. Even a person living alone in a forest cabin will have some sort of object that was created by another person or have an idea they learned from somebody else. Coexistence defines humanity. But is everybody coexisting in harmony? Isn't our present and future more accurately determined by war, divisions, hate-speech, [cancel culture](#), turmoil, and existential threats? What does it mean to coexist?

But there is also a coexistence of humans and nature. We coexist with the universe and we can have a positive or negative impact on our planet. The history of our planet cannot be explained without the term "coexistence". Now, with the rise of AI, is our understanding of coexistence going to change? Can we speak of coexistence with machines? And now that machines are increasingly capable of performing activities that, until recently, only humans could perform, one deep question arises: what does it actually mean to be human?

In the context of Carpe Diem, we would like to explore the meaning of coexistence in order to better understand who we are and what it means to be human.

Mindset

Mindset is more than just a buzzword; it describes the interaction of human capabilities to configure a certain way of approaching reality. Your mindset can either give you a negative, pessimistic approach to the future, or it can give you wings to tackle the future with energy and optimism. Your mindset will also impact the way you see the world and solve problems. A certain mindset can make you feel like the last generation of the planet or the [first generation](#); it can lead you to point your finger or [seek harmony](#).

What does it mean to be successful? What can we learn from failure? What is the key to a fulfilled life? How can creativity help shape a better tomorrow?

With Carpe Diem, we would like to understand how to hack into our mindset and be better equipped for a future full of possibilities.

TEDxSalzburg 2024

At TEDxSalzburg 2024 Carpe Diem is our journey through some of the most pressing topics that humanity faces today. I invite you to join this engaging conversation; and am I also curious to see what ideas you might want to share with us, to help shape our society for the better and pave the way for future generations.

Web-References

All Good Things (Come to an End) - Wikipedia. Song. Retrieved March 19, 2024, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_Good_Things_\(Come_to_an_End\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_Good_Things_(Come_to_an_End))

Andrew Restuccia and Eliza Collins, Article "Gen Z Voters Are Disillusioned", The Wall Street Journal, March 16, 2024

Are We the Last Generation or the First Sustainable One? - TED Talk. Retrieved March 19, 2024, from https://www.ted.com/talks/hannah_ritchie_are_we_the_last_generation_or_the_first_sustainable_one

Cox, E. (Year, Month Day). What is Imposter Syndrome and How Can You Combat It? TED Talk. Retrieved March 19, 2024, from https://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_cox_what_is_imposter_syndrome_and_how_can_you_combat_it

Cuddy, A. (Year, Month Day). Your Body Language May Shape Who You Are. TED Talk Transcript. Retrieved March 19, 2024, from https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_may_shape_who_you_are/transcript

Forever Young (Alphaville song) - Wikipedia. Song. Retrieved March 19, 2024, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forever_Young_\(Alphaville_song\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forever_Young_(Alphaville_song))

Gen Z Voters Are Disillusioned. Article. The Wall Street Journal. Retrieved March 19, 2024, from https://www.wsj.com/podcasts/google-news-update/why-gen-z-voters-are-americas-most-disillusioned/0dd3991f-e327-469f-adb2-70625f5c34df?mod=Searchresults_pos3&page=1

Horace, Odes, Fragment XI.I. Retrieved March 19, 2024, from <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/9646/pg9646-images.html>

How AI Could Save, Not Destroy, Education - TED Talk. Retrieved March 19, 2024, from https://www.ted.com/talks/sal_khan_how_ai_could_save_not_destroy_education?language=en

Pritchard, R. (Year, Month Day). Why YOLO is Killing Our Futures. Article. LinkedIn. Retrieved March 19, 2024, from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/why-yolo-killing-our-futures-rebecca-pritchard/>

The Inside Story of ChatGPT's Astonishing Potential - TED Talk. Retrieved March 19, 2024, from https://www.ted.com/talks/greg_brockman_the_inside_story_of_chatgpt_s_astonishing_potential?language=en

The Next Global Superpower Isn't Who You Think (Transcript) - TED Talk. Retrieved March 19, 2024, from https://www.ted.com/talks/ian_bremmer_the_next_global_superpower_isn_t_who_you_think/transcript?referrer=playlist-the_most_popular_ted_talks_of_2023&autoplay=true

The Transformative Power of Classical Music - TED Talk. Retrieved March 19, 2024, from https://www.ted.com/talks/benjamin_zander_the_transformative_power_of_classical_music

The Urgent Risks of Runaway AI and What to Do About Them - TED Talk. Retrieved March 19, 2024, from https://www.ted.com/talks/gary_marcus_the_urgent_risks_of_runaway_ai_and_what_to_do_about_them?language=en

Tomorrow - TED Talk. Retrieved March 19, 2024, from https://www.ted.com/talks/alua_arthur_why_thinking_about_death_helps_you_live_a_better_life

YOLO (aphorism) - Wikipedia. Retrieved March 19, 2024, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YOLO_\(aphorism\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YOLO_(aphorism))