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## **Conference report**

### **Let's Meet Tomorrow Before the End of Our Time**

#### **Hybrid conference**

**On-site: Trafo Centre for Contemporary Art, Szczecin, Poland**

**Virtual: Academy of Art, Szczecin, Poland; Tunghai University,**

**Taichung, Taiwan; Central University of Ecuador, Quito, Ecuador**

**24–28 May 2021**



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The International students' symposium, *Let's Meet Tomorrow Before the End of Our Time*, consummated a long-term art research collaboration aimed at developing ways of being together and cooperating in the Anthropocene crisis, especially through digital media. The collaboration started in February of 2020 and soon needed to be reshaped to meet pandemic restrictions. Initially, it involved the participation of teachers and students from Poland, Taiwan, and Ecuador; later, it was joined by students from Kenya, Singapore, South Africa, the Netherlands, and South Korea. The primary channel of communication for the international group was digital media and, as a result, narrowed the subject of joint research on building interpersonal relations and community experience in the virtual environment. The conference's main aim was to reflect on the social and artistic experiments

conducted during the collaboration and develop a theoretical background to interpret them. Another objective was to evaluate the social protocols for virtual relationship building that were elaborated during experiments. It also sought to discuss the educational dimension of experiments and consider if they could be developed into an arts-based teaching method.

The conference was attended by 62 teachers and students from all the countries involved in the artistic research collaboration. It included lectures, project presentations, artist talks, panel discussions, and art performances.

To enhance interpretation of art research collaboration, the keynote lectures delivered at *Let's Meet Tomorrow Before the End of Our Time* discussed theoretical issues connected with communication, relationship building, and methods for augmenting common space. Mathabo Khau, in her keynote lectures, “One Love: The Importance of Practising Transcultural, Translingual and Transgeographical Collaboration to Heal the World” and “We All Stand Together’: Collaborative and Participatory Practices for a Sustainable Future!” emphasised the affective dimension of any collective action for setting its objectives and selecting a proper methodology for cooperating. In the first, she developed a set of solid arguments for advancing exchange across cultural, language, geographical differences by referring to her research and teaching practices. In the second, she discussed participatory visual methodologies, especially with instruments such as cellphilms (made by cellphones without editing), photovoice (photographs to address sensitive issues), and drawings and collages (to objectify the troubling issues). All these instruments were developed to address issues pertinent to life in a particular social environment. Khau also presented the idea of research as a tool for social change and intervention based on providing the participants with a safe space for expression and a total sense of ownership over the process.

Cultural difference was one of the two most challenging issues in connecting, relationship building, and being together virtually. This was addressed in a keynote lecture, “About Cultural Differences,” by Meysis Carmenati González. Starting from the historical background of Hobbesian ideas of individualism, enlightenment’s claims for universalism and equality, social Darwinism of the 19th century, and 20th-century neoliberalism, she presented a theoretical framework for understanding cultural differences, referring to the sociology of culture, cultural studies, anti-colonial narratives, and epistemologies of the South. She rejected multiculturalism as a neoliberal form of erasing cultural differences to reflect on how differences are historically created.

The limitations of digital communication was the other source of difficulties in art research collaboration. Cheng-yu Pan analysed it in his keynote lecture, “An Analysis of the Symposium Activities With the Use of Digital Tools,” in which he developed a theory of communication based on Paul Virilio’s idea of shifting the “entrance/exit” paradigm, meaning displacement of the border between inner and outer space. In a recent reformulation of the paradigm, the personal computer screen became an entrance/exit point. The shift—enhanced by the pandemic—radically reshaped the mechanisms of communication. Pan’s central claim was that instead of trying to recreate traditional forms of social relations in the virtual sphere, one should instead invent specific forms of socialising through new but still undeveloped communication technology.

The participants’ reflections on the art research collaboration were introduced by Karolina Breguła, who initiated both the collaboration and the conference. In her lecture, “Instructions for How To Be Together,” she focused on the cooperation and teaching methods invented for the collaboration. Called instructions, they involved activities in small groups with members from different countries. They aimed to practise connecting and relationship building with digital technologies through joint

exercises (like “sharing” food across screens). Breguła also reflected on difficulties and failures met in the process of collaboration.

Eileen Legaspi Ramirez in “Making a Stir,” analysed the art research collaboration, starting from the initial idea of the whole endeavour, which was the influence of the Anthropocene on social life. Referring to Alana Jelinek’s (2020) concept of artistic research, she stressed that collaboration was a genuine social experiment within which specific contextual knowledge was created. She also discussed how this knowledge might be used in art teaching.

Project presentations provided rich research materials documenting the course of exercises. They illustrated how participants created a sense of community through digital technologies despite language barriers, cultural differences, and distant time zones. The most efficient methods to overcome these difficulties were cooperation on artistic activities like joint—and still remote—performing, filmmaking, and exhibition making. The exercises developed into practices of mutual learning and methods of changing social patterns.

The conference, *Let’s Meet Tomorrow Before the End of Our Time*, contributed significantly to inventing new protocols for education, art research and creation, and social connectivity through digital technologies. It provided knowledge on how to use a virtual environment to reshape behavioural patterns and enhance creative processes of learning, cooperation, and action.

## References

Jelinek, A. (2020). *Between discipline and a hard place: The value of contemporary art*. Bloomsbury Academic.