

**PLEASURE AND REALITY – IN PSYCHOANALYSIS AND BEYOND**  
XXXII. Conference of the Hungarian Psychoanalytical Society  
**October 9-10, 2026**

Venue: DANUBIUS HOTEL Hungária City Center, 1074, **Budapest**, Rákóczi str. 90.

Keynote speaker: **Howard B. Levine**

We would like to inform you that although the conference will be held in Hungarian, there will be English language section on both days of the conference, including a **plenary lecture by Howard Levine** as the keynote speaker, followed by a **clinical seminar** on 11 October. The Hungarian-language programs of the conference will not be translated into English. We

welcome proposals for **presentations and workshops** within the English section.

**Howard Levine's seminar:**

The clinical seminar led by H. B. Levine will take place on October 11 from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM. As the number of participants is limited, we kindly ask you to register in advance. The clinical seminar can be attended independently of the conference, or you may choose a combined ticket that provides access to both.

Abstract submission deadline: **May 15, 2026.**

**Attendance fees**

Conference registration fee

- Early bird registration fee (until July 1): **€150**
- Regular registration fee (until September 1): **€165**
- Late registration fee (after September 1/on site): **€180**

Combined conference and Howard Levine's seminar (on October 11) fee

- Early bird registration fee (until July 1): **€220**
- Regular registration fee (until September 1): **€250**
- Late registration fee (after September 1/on site): **€280**

Howard Levine's seminar fee (conference attendance not included)

- Early bird registration fee (until July 1): **€120**
- Regular registration fee (until September 1): **€150**
- Late registration fee (after September 1/on site): **€180**

**Registration:**

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdMkpPhiP\\_60bstKTVaweT\\_Cb1FmvkWJJrTIOp0eHDeQO8o7Q/viewform?usp=publish-editor](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdMkpPhiP_60bstKTVaweT_Cb1FmvkWJJrTIOp0eHDeQO8o7Q/viewform?usp=publish-editor)

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## PLEASURE AND REALITY – IN PSYCHOANALYSIS AND BEYOND

*What do you know about passing joy?  
Which thumpering on that bud ahoy.  
Sándor Weöres: Hymn to the Sun*

“*What do you know about passing joy?*” asks Sándor Weöres in his poem, and immediately answers the question: that it disappears. We can learn the same from Freud: according to his theory, in the course of a child’s psychic development the initial pleasure principle is replaced by the reality principle as an organizing force. The psyche becomes subordinated to the rule of the reality principle and is forced to postpone the satisfaction of desires. We also know about what happens to these desires: they attempt to find fulfillment through many detours and fall victim to successful or unsuccessful repressions.

However, pleasure is still necessary, since - again quoting Freud - the two criteria of mental health are the capacity for pleasure and the capacity to work.

Pleasure therefore does not disappear but is transformed, taking on new forms in relation to reality. Desire endures as a driving force—and perhaps it does not merely await satisfaction, but also serves to motivate and to provide energy for development.

Traditionally, psychoanalysis places greater emphasis on working with the negative emotional domain: on being able to face painful feelings, experiences, and destructive parts of the personality, to contain them, process them, and transform them. At the same time, much less attention is paid to the fate of positive emotions, despite the fact that the presence and strengthening of positively colored emotions is an essential part of normal development, and even the engine of it. The ability to regulate emotions does not only mean that we can tolerate our negative emotions without being carried away by them, but also that we are able to recognize, experience, and retain our positive emotions, as well as express them in relationships.

From the perspective of personal life history and development alike, the experience of pleasure and the capacity for pleasure are of key importance. For a baby to develop optimally, it is necessary for the parents and the surrounding environment to take pleasure in the child. The state of enthusiasm for the infant reinforces the attunement with the mother. Daniel Stern’s concept of vitality affects brings us closer to an understanding of emotions—and thus of pleasure. The pleasure that accompanies activity, the pleasure of function, can be observed most clearly in children. The pleasure of play is an essential condition for cognitive development, and later on, the basis of all effective learning is the pleasure experienced in the activity that acts as a kind of emotional binding agent that anchors information in memory. We can say that pleasure is the cornerstone of development, whether in the domain of social skills or of cognitive–emotional capacities.

What is the fate of pleasure in therapies? If we look at the negative side of the scale, patients are likely to come to therapy because of much sorrow, difficulty, and lack of pleasure, and

throughout the therapeutic process we will jointly struggle with countless negative feelings. However development also requires mutually experienced positive feelings: the pleasure of connection that may have never been experienced before, the safety of being seen, and the pleasure taken in development itself despite the difficulty of change. It is an important theoretical and technical question: how can we support the strengthening of a patient's positive emotions so this does not become a defense and does not cover up the more difficult feelings? We cannot forget the therapist's side either: the pleasure of our profession, the desire to help, and the limits of that desire. In our psychotherapeutic work, we can be creatively, playfully, and productively present in Winnicott's potential space – or we are heading towards this – while working for and with the patient, we ourselves also seek vitality and aliveness.

There is an increasing amount of research on the brain's reward systems. Researchers have identified four chemicals often called "happiness hormones" (dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, endorphins) - each of which regulates the experience of pleasure in a different area. Neurobiological research has confirmed a phenomenon long known in psychoanalysis that the quality of attachment fundamentally determines emotional and mental development.

The question of pleasure, however, arises not only on an individual and therapeutic level, but also in broader social contexts. The emotional climate of a community, and the presence or absence of a basic sense of security, significantly influence which emotions come to dominate. Where the experience of safety is damaged, fear becomes the organizing force, and with it projections, longing to escape, scapegoating, and a turning away from reality intensify. The imbalance between the pleasure principle and the reality principle has consequences not only at an individual level, but at the level of the society as well.

The contemporary cultural trends and consumer society often create the illusion that achieving happiness is the goal of life, one that can be reached through countless instant solutions (we can easily become young, beautiful, and wealthy). It is as if the pleasure principle were being glorified, while negative feelings are denied.

What can psychoanalysis offer in this world, whose path is long, demanding, and leads through countless difficult feelings? Perhaps precisely the capacity for pleasure, which is born not from maintaining illusions, but from dismantling them. It is a pleasure that arises from enduring reality, from connecting, and from undertaking psychic work.

## **Suggested Thematic Areas for Speakers**

### *Early Relational and Developmental Perspectives*

- The pleasure of attunement and the pain of misattunement: the formation of the false self
- The capacity for pleasure: innate or developable?
- Resilience, affect regulation, and ego development
- The role of positive affects in the development of mentalization
- Functional pleasure, vitality affects (Stern), and developmental pleasure
- The capacity to hold pain and pleasure together in development

### *Clinical Questions, Therapeutic Experiences*

- The vicissitudes of positive and negative transference and countertransference
- The disavowal of negative affects and positive affects as defenses (idealization, manic defenses)
- When the patient is “doing better” but not recovering
- Pleasureless reality and unrealistic pleasure
- Shared pleasure in the therapeutic development
- Winnicott’s potential space as a space of pleasure and creativity
- Addictions: the pursuit of pleasure through the denial of reality
- The difference between \*jouissance\* and happiness
- The pleasure of work and achievement
- Happiness as a moral obligation
- When feelings become experience: tolerating affects as psychic work in the thinking of Bion and Howard B. Levine
- Pleasure and emptiness: the paradox of affective desolation

### *Groups, Society and Culture*

- The ideology of happiness: trends and psychic normativity
- Group experience and the capacity for pleasure: identity and roles
- The pleasure of belonging and the pain of exclusion
- Two statements by Mérei: “one does not always have to come out well” and “we travel in pleasure” – a contradiction?
- Collective denial and manic modes of social functioning
- Projective processes and scapegoating as “substitutes for pleasure”

### *Symbolic, Aesthetic, and Cultural Forms of Pleasure*

- Paradise and hell as metaphors
- Aesthetic pleasure
- The pleasure of seduction and of being seduced
- Pleasure and ambivalence in symbolic space
- Creativity and play as sources of pleasure
- The history and geography of pleasure: ethological, cultural, and anthropological perspectives

### *Interdisciplinary Connections*

- Antonio Damasio: the neurobiology of emotions
- Reward systems and attachment
- Dialogue between neurobiology and psychoanalytic affect theory
- Cognitive science and pleasure