

How to Live Together?
Everyday Life in Philosophical Concepts

*International conference organized by the Faculty of Arts and
Creative Industries, Budapest Metropolitan University*

11-12 September 2025

at the French Institute in Budapest

Abstracts

This year's conference continues and concludes the aims of our lecture series *How to Live Together?* In line with its spirit, we seek to offer accessible yet intellectually rigorous interpretations of expressions and concepts that are familiar to all and foundational to our social and cultural life.

The uniqueness of the conference lies in its methodological approach: it combines social science discourse analysis, philosophical interpretation, and reflections on artistic examples. The goal of the *How to Live Together?* series is to make the insights of social sciences and the arts both accessible and interpretable.

Our approach simultaneously strives to uncover selected social phenomena and clarify the often tangled and seemingly impenetrable discursive frameworks surrounding them. This is particularly important because our existential situation determines the conditions of our actions. Thus, the discourse analysis applied in our series enables us to approach our topics from a critical perspective. This critical approach is essential not only to reframe our ways of thinking but also to reshape our practical engagement with the world.

Various social science disciplines can help us not only experience but also interpret—and, when necessary, transform—the social phenomena, processes, and interpersonal relations we tend to consider mundane. Clarifying the concepts involved may contribute to overcoming the apathy and sense of helplessness increasingly prevalent among young people, and may even awaken a desire for action, participation, and responsibility. Our most important aim is to ensure that social science and artistic initiatives play a serious role in renewing the mindset of contemporary Hungarian society.

In addition to lecturers from METU, the conference will feature several prominent Hungarian experts from various disciplines, including philosophy, the arts, sociology, psychology, pedagogy, art theory, and media studies. The event aims to initiate an interdisciplinary dialogue that draws on academic knowledge while also engaging with the social, political, and cultural challenges of contemporary reality. The conference will host international participants, allowing for the interpretation of the concepts discussed not only within a local framework but also in broader European and global contexts. The keynote speakers will be Frédéric Worms, Director of the École Normale Supérieure in Paris and member of the French National Ethics Committee, as well as András Rényi, a distinguished art historian, Professor Emeritus at ELTE University, and internationally recognized scholar. Worms is a leading figure in contemporary French philosophy, whose work addresses the moral and political foundations of coexistence, the ethics of care, and issues of social responsibility. András Rényi is a leading Hungarian art historian and aesthetician whose critical writings, theoretical contributions, and teaching have profoundly shaped contemporary art theory and visual culture studies in Hungary and connected them to international discourse.

The thematic sections of the conference are organized around conceptual axes that are not only theoretically stimulating but also closely linked to current social experiences. Planned sections include: Security; Friend and Stranger; Intimacy; Art Education; Compassion and Sacrifice; Youth and Old Age.

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PROGRAM

Thursday, September 11

Morning session:

10:00 – 11:30

Keynote Lecture: Frédéric Worms

Living? Together? What do you mean?

Afternoon Sessions:

13:00 – 14:00

FRIEND – NEIGHBOR – STRANGER

Strangers among themselves. Lecture by Lóránt Kicsák (in Hungarian)

14:30 – 16:00

ART EDUCATION (English-language roundtable)

Participants: Zsuzsa Pörzsi, Anna Kerekes, Brigitta Zics, Aline Caillet, Dmitry Kharshak, Gerda Széplaky, Ádám Ulbert

16:30 – 17:30

COMPASSION

The impossibility and inevitability of compassion – sociological reflections. Lecture by Domonkos Sik (in Hungarian)

18:00 – 20:00

VICTIM (roundtable discussion with film screening, in Hungarian)

Participants: Timea Jablonczay, Máté Zombory, Júlia Vajda, Edit Zsadányi, Hedvig Turai, Lóránt Stóhr

Screening: Ítéletlenül (Tamás Almási, 1991)

Friday, September 12

Morning session:

10:00 – 11:30

Keynote Lecture: András Rényi

The Phenomenology of Everyday Blindness: Prejudice, Experience, and Understanding (in Hungarian)

Afternoon Sessions:

13:00 – 14:30

SECURITY (English-language presentation session)

Participants: Leonard Máriás, Tamás Ullmann, Hajnalka Somogyi, Gideon Horváth

15:00 – 16:30

INTIMACY

Finding the One: Intimacy from a Sociological and Psychotherapeutic Perspective (English-language discussion)

Participants: Ágoston Fáber, Felícia András

17:00 – 19:00

YOUTH – OLD AGE (lecture, film screening, roundtable – Hungarian-language session)

Participants: Szilvia Csanádi, Ádám Takács, Bálint Révész, Anna Nemes, Nikolett Nagy

Screening: *Granny Project* (Bálint Révész, 2017)

Living? Together? What do you Mean? Keynote Lecture by Frédéric Worms (English)

It is obvious that we are living beings. And it is obvious that no living being can live alone. Why is it the case, then, that « living together » does not seem obvious at all, but seems to be an order, a wish, and before that a problem, especially today ? And what does it tell us not only on our relationships but on life itself ? Let us be clear : « living together » is not obvious because in our relationships there is some negativity, some conflicts, and not only help and solidarity. And it brings us back to the fact that « living » itself is not obvious, but faces dangers, among which dying is the limit. Thus « living together » is not obvious, but it is all the more important and even crucial ! We have to avoid death and wars ! How can we avoid idealistic illusions but also eternal conflicts in living together ? Why does it imply the philosophy we call « critical vitalism », a philosophy not of life but of life against death under all its forms ? Such will be the goal of this presentation, in this conference, on such a vital and critical question, today.

Prof. Frédéric Worms is Director of the École Normale Supérieure Université Paris Sciences et Lettres since March 2022, Director of CIEPFC, the International Centre for Contemporary French Philosophy Studies, and the author of many publications. As a philosopher, his centers of interest are care and democracy, exploring the relationship between science and society and the dissemination of knowledge. He was a member of the French National Consultative Ethics Committee (CCNE) from 2013 to 2021.

FRIEND – NEIGHBOR – STRANGER. *Strangers Among Strangers*. Lecture by Lóránt Kicsák (Hungarian)

The aim of this lecture is to reflect on the fact that those fundamental concepts which structure, define, and direct our social existence and social reality exert a profound influence on our lives, even though their precise meaning and the characteristics of the entities they designate are often vague and elusive. Among these concepts, a particularly privileged position is held by the distinction between “us” and “them,” between those who belong to the community and those who do not. The question “*How should we live together?*” inevitably raises the issue of who this “we” is, with whom we coexist—and with whom we do not.

This distinction between the “we” and the “non-we” (they, those others, the outsiders) permeates the entirety of social existence and proves to be a structuring principle at every level of the social system. A significant burden of meaning and function rests upon this differentiation. It is therefore worth considering how uncertain society’s members themselves are about its definition, and how unreflected and unconscious they remain in its operation.

Tracing the variations of such conceptual pairs—neighbor/stranger, friend/enemy, citizen/foreigner, pure/impure, honest/criminal, and ultimately human/non-human—allows us to observe how this fundamental distinction is produced and enacted in a performative and evaluative manner across the most diverse social situations and criteria of judgment, while at the same time dispersing their ambiguous meanings throughout all layers of social life.

Our central question will thus be whether a society (a community) can exist in which classificatory distinctions and evaluative categorizations follow not the exclusive logic of “either-or,” but rather the alternative logics of “neither-nor” or even “both-and.”

ART EDUCATION. Roundtable discussion (English)

Since the Bologna agreements, the academies have become culture enterprises, each with their own budget, and every discipline wants a piece of the cake instead of creating a haven for thinking, living, and, especially, free experimentation. How do art universities get along under these circumstances?

In her book, *'Not for profit. Why Democracies Need the Humanities?'* Martha Nussbaum has already warned us about the radical changes occurring in what democratic societies teach the young, and the serious consequences of that to the quality of our 'living together'. *„Thirsty for national profit, nations, and their systems of education, are heedlessly discarding skills that are needed to keep democracies alive. If this trend continues, nations all over the world will soon be producing generations of useful machines, rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person's sufferings and achievements.”* She has identified these changes with the tendency that the humanities and the arts are being cut away in order to stay competitive in the global market. This is a global tendency, it happens in virtually every nation of the world. *“Indeed, what we might call the humanistic aspects of science and social science— the imaginative, creative aspect, and the aspect of rigorous critical thought—are also losing ground as nations prefer to pursue short-term profit by the cultivation of the useful and highly applied skills suited to profit-making.”*

Nussbaum raises her voice against the idea that the sole purpose of education is to work as a tool of economic growth and reminds us that economic growth does not invariably generate better quality of life. Neglect and scorn for the arts and humanities puts the quality of all our lives, and the health of our democracies, at risk.

We have invited esteemed academics from different disciplines of art education to share their experiences and ideas of the challenges they face and the solutions they find in their work. We believe that the different perspectives offered might help us imagine how the mission of art education could be redesigned to fight the unwanted effects of our contemporary neoliberal setting.

Participants:

Zsuzsanna Pörcki, Anna Kerekes, Brigitta Zics, Aline Caillet, Dmitry Kharshak, Gerda Széplaky, Ádám Ulbert

Zsuzsanna Pörcki

Philosopher and Associate Professor serving as the International and Academic Vice-Dean at the Budapest Metropolitan University, where she leads the Institute of Art and Design Theory and convenes the Design and Arts Management programs.

Anna Kerekes

Curator, artist, researcher, and educator with a PhD in Arts Studies from the University of Quebec in Montreal (2018). Since 2018, she has been Senior Curator at MO.CO. Montpellier Contemporain and lectures at the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Nîmes.

Brigitta Zics

Award-winning artist and academic whose work explores the convergence of art and science through mixed-media forms and emerging technologies. She is an Associate Professor in Digital Media Production at University College London's Knowledge Lab.

Aline Caillet

Professor of Philosophy of Art, Aesthetics, Cultural Theories, and Contemporary Art at Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Deputy Director of the École des Arts de la Sorbonne. Notable recent publication: *Les mondes de l'art à l'âge du capitalisme culturel* (2025).

Dmitry Kharshak

Dean and Associate Professor at the St. Petersburg School of Art and Design, HSE University. A research fellow and academic leader who emphasizes design education and international collaboration.

Gerda Széplaky

Associate Professor of Philosophy and Aesthetics at Eszterházy Károly Catholic University, with teaching responsibilities in general aesthetics, 20th-century art history, and visuality and film theory.

Ádám Ulbert

Budapest-based artist and doctoral researcher in the Doctoral School of the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts, lecturer at Metropolitan University Budapest. His work bridges fine art, ecology, and science fiction, and he holds an MFA from the Sandberg Instituut and a residency at the Rijksakademie.

COMPASSION

The Impossibility and Inevitability of Compassion – Reflections in the Context of Social Theory. Lecture by Domonkos Sik (Hungarian)

In this lecture, I attempt a phenomenological clarification of the nature of compassion, as well as an outline of the social constraints characteristic of late modernity. In the most general definition, compassion can be distinguished into at least three components: the perception of another's suffering (mentalization); the indirect experience of another's suffering (empathy); and the moral obligation arising from the experience of another's suffering (solidarity). There is a logical relationship among these three components in the sense that, for compassion to occur, one must first recognize the other as a sentient being (potentially experiencing negative emotions); this recognition forms the basis for inter-affectivity, that is, the (often involuntary) alignment of one's own and another's emotions; which in turn leads to active efforts to alleviate the other's suffering, partly experienced as one's own. According to classical religious and philosophical texts, and more recently to psychological and neurological theories, compassion is a universal anthropological possibility—in this sense, "inevitable."

However, for the modern subject conceived as an individual, the simultaneous presence of these three components is by no means self-evident. It is equally possible that the suffering of others is obscured by social modes of perception (the public construction of suffering), that the perceived suffering of others is not experienced (indifference), or that the moral imperative to alleviate another's suffering does not result in concrete action (systems of justice lacking solidarity). The development of modern social systems has created particular "moral economies" in which the other may appear as an object, indifference may become normalized, and solidarity becomes conditional upon social circumstances. These factors constrict the space of possibility for compassion, both individually and collectively. In such cases, compassion becomes "impossible," leading to atomized, isolated life situations.

In the final section of the lecture, I explore the specific tensions and social disturbances that arise from the fact that compassion is simultaneously an inevitable anthropological trait and structurally thwarted under contemporary conditions. Critical theories addressing mental disorders and solidarity provide points of reference for this analysis.

Domonkos Sik is a sociologist and philosopher, and a lecturer at ELTE Faculty of Social Sciences (ELTE-TáTK). His research focuses on civic culture and mental disorders, primarily through the lens of critical theory and phenomenology. His most recent monographs are *Empty Suffering* (Routledge, 2021) and *Salvaging Modernity* (Brill, 2025).

VICTIM. Roundtable discussion with film screening (Hungarian)

In contemporary social thought, the concepts of victimhood and solidarity emerge within increasingly complex frameworks. They are closely tied to the evolution of memory politics and the validity of trauma theories, while also shaping the language, reception, and ethics of artistic representation. Why do we perceive the weakening of international solidarity? Has the dominance of the victim's moral position indeed exerted a paralyzing effect on social visions? What major social and political debates, fault lines, and shifting tendencies characterize the linguistic and cultural constructions of victimhood and trauma in current political identity and memory discourses?

The inclusion of compassion and victimhood plays a key role in the cultural mechanisms of modern and contemporary artistic representations as well. Films, visual artworks, and literary works not only provide a space for speech for those who have suffered war (and other) traumas—the subordinated subjects of violence incapable of communication—but also turn the active interpretation of the audience into a form of solidarity. Different approaches highlight the diverse semantic fields of these concepts, while also pointing to the fact that victimhood is not merely passive suffering but a complex cultural construction whose interpretation raises new political and ethical questions.

The **Victim** roundtable brings together leading scholars from sociology, psychology, literary studies, film, and visual arts to explore the changing contexts, interpretive frameworks, and applicability of the concepts of compassion and victimhood.

Participants of the roundtable discussion:

- **Máté Zombory, PhD**, Associate Professor, Institute of Sociology, ELTE, and Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Sociology, Centre for Social Sciences (ELKH). His research focuses on the historical sociology of transnational cultural memory, the Cold War history of Holocaust documentation (with special attention to the work of journalist and writer Jenő Lévai), and the history and memory of international antifascism. Recent publication: *Trauma Society: A Historical-Sociological Critique of Memory Politics* (2019).
- **Prof. Júlia Vajda, DSc**, Professor, ELTE Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Sociology, and lecturer at ORZSE, Department of Social Work and Social Sciences. Her areas of expertise include the narrative identity of Holocaust survivors, qualitative research methods, narrative interviews in historical studies, the narrative identity of psychiatric patients, and Jewish identity in the second generation of Holocaust survivors. Recent publication: *There and Then... Stories of Survival from the Shoah* (2020).
- **Edit Zsadányi, PhD**, Associate Professor, Institute of Hungarian Literature and Cultural Studies, ELTE, and Senior Research Fellow. Her research interests include narrative theory, feminist criticism, cultural studies, and 20th–21st century Hungarian literature, with a special focus on women writers. Recent book: *Does the Subaltern Speak? The Storytelling of the Vulnerable in 20th–21st Century Literary Works* (2025).
- **Hedvig Turai, PhD**, independent art historian and art critic. Her research focuses on gender roles, the Holocaust, and memory in contemporary art. She is co-editor (with Edit Sasvári and Sándor Hornyik) and contributor to *Beyond Double Talk: Art in Hungary 1956–1980* (2018). Forthcoming book: *Spaces of Meaning: Holocaust Memory in Contemporary Art*.

- **Lóránt Stóhr, PhD**, film historian and critic, Associate Professor at the University of Theatre and Film Arts, Budapest. His areas of expertise include melodrama, documentary film, contemporary cinema, and the representation of social and psychological phenomena in film. Recent publication: *Subjectivity, Presence, Narrative: A Paradigm Shift in Contemporary Hungarian Documentary Film* (2020).
- **Dr. Tímea Jablonczay**, literary historian and cultural researcher, is a lecturer at the Institute of Art and Design Theory at METU and at the Jewish Theological Seminary – University of Jewish Studies. Her research interests include the history of Holocaust remembrance, perspectives of transcultural memory studies, transnational and minority literatures, narrative theories, media culture, and image theory. Her most recent studies have been published on Holocaust remembrance in the 1960s within the cultural public sphere, forgotten female Holocaust memory, and the reconstruction of the literary career of Erzsébet Szenes.

Screening: Ítéletlenül (Tamás Almási, 1991)

The Phenomenology of Everyday Blindness: Prejudice, Experience, and Understanding. Keynote Lecture by András Rényi (in Hungarian)

In this lecture, I will explore a problem that arises in my own practice when evaluating and interpreting artworks—but one whose relevance extends far beyond the concerns of critics, art historians, or aestheticians. I approach the aesthetic experience of artworks as a particular instance of human experience more generally. For this reason, although I will draw on examples from my own field, I hope that my reflections may also resonate across other areas and contexts addressed at this conference.

As a starting point, I will consider a biblical story: the miraculous encounter between the risen Jesus and the disciples on the road to Emmaus. I will then examine several artistic interpretations of this episode, notably works by Caravaggio and Rembrandt, focusing on how each artist either misreads or grasps the deeper evangelical meaning of the events.

Why do the disciples fail to recognize the Master at first, and what must happen for them to finally perceive him? And perhaps we, as viewers, are in some ways “blind” to the paintings ourselves—can we recognize when great art draws our attention to the narrowness of our own perspective or the limitations of our everyday assumptions?

András Rényi is an art historian and aesthete, Emeritus Professor of Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), lecturer at METU. His research focuses on the history and theory of art, interpretation, and hermeneutics, with particular attention to Rembrandt, Caravaggio, and modern and contemporary art.

SECURITY. English-speaking lecture-session

Over the past 25 years, security has gradually become an increasingly prominent keyword in political discourse, framed primarily by narratives offered by right-wing populist rhetoric. Amid successive local and global crises—climate change, economic recessions, wars, migration—the promise of protection has become a key tool for gaining and maintaining power. Questions of what and whom these systems protect, from what and from whom, what constitutes a threat, who is the enemy, what is the price of security, and who pays it reveal the true face of contemporary power structures.

This panel highlights the significance of the concept of security in interpreting both societal and personal challenges through three perspectives. From the perspective of contemporary art, it reflects on the 2025 OFF-Biennále Budapest, presenting case studies offered by art that reveal the multiple ways in which the theme of security emerges. From the philosophical perspective, it examines everyday security-related problems that cannot be adequately understood through ordinary or psychological concepts, thereby requiring philosophical analysis. Finally, from the perspective of social research and sociology, it addresses how the current state of society generates uncertainties and questions related to security.

Participants:

Leonárd Máriás – Philosopher and lecturer at Budapest Metropolitan University, with research interests in philosophical practice and ethics.

Tamás Ullmann – Professor at the ELTE Institute of Philosophy and member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA). He earned his doctorate at the Sorbonne in 2001 and has been an MTA member since 2015. His main research areas include 20th-century philosophy, phenomenology and psychoanalysis, French philosophy, and critical social philosophy.

Hajnalka Somogyi – Contemporary art curator and director of OFF-Biennále Budapest, lecturer at METU. She studied art history at ELTE and trained as a curator at Bard College. Previously, she curated exhibitions at Trafó Gallery and Ludwig Museum.

Gideon Horváth – Hungarian-French interdisciplinary visual artist, trained in Paris and based in Budapest. He primarily works with sculptural installations and frequently engages with broad social and ecological issues in his work.

INTIMACY. Finding the One. intimacy from a Sociological and Psychotherapeutic Perspective. Roundtable discussion (English)

During the roundtable discussion, we will explore the question of whether “the one” truly exists. We aim to approach this topic in a broader context and review how our practices of marriage and partner-seeking have evolved over the past centuries: how the foundational pillars that once supported marriage have disappeared, how the limited marriage market has first transformed into a dating market and then into a sexual market, and how the pursuit of individual happiness has become a more decisive expectation than ever before.

By examining the topic from both psychotherapeutic and sociological perspectives, we will consider the expectations individuals place on their partners and relationships, the challenges they experience in forming intimate connections, and the societal norms, expectations, and myths that shape our intimate lives. Given that partner-seeking is increasingly taking place online, we will also address the roles and risks of dating apps and social media.

Participants in the discussion:

Felícia András, clinical and mental health psychologist, psychotherapist

Ágoston Fáber, sociologist, literary translator

YOUTH – OLD AGE. Lecture, Film Screening, and Roundtable Discussion, in Hungarian

This session addresses our relationship to old age, aging, and the elderly. Ádám Takács's lecture approaches the topic through the problem of time, followed by the screening of Bálint Révész's film *Granny Project*, which foregrounds intergenerational relations. The screening will be followed by a roundtable discussion with Nikolett Nagy, curator of the exhibition *Youth – Old Age* and former METU student, visual artist Anna Nemes, philosopher Ádám Takács, and filmmaker Bálint Révész, connecting to the questions raised by the lecture, the film, and the exhibition.

Lecture:

Ádám Takács: Time and Aging (Abstract) – 20 minutes

The lecture situates the question of youth and old age within the European philosophical problem of time. It argues that the roots of the social challenges of aging lie in the tension between the differing temporalities of body and soul, and that potential solutions must also be sought on this level.

Film Screening:

Granny Project (Hungarian-English documentary, 2017, dir. Bálint Révész) – 90 minutes

Roundtable Participants:

Nikolett Nagy Colette – Curator and visual artist, graduate of METU. Through contemporary art she explores social and personal issues, with a focus on female roles, the passage of time, and the theme of youth and old age. She also researches the sociology of art collecting and the aesthetics of possession. Her exhibitions place emphasis on teaching visual culture and developing audiences' artistic sensitivity.

Anna Nemes – Graduated as a painter from the Hungarian University of Fine Arts in 2014, and later trained as an art therapist. She has worked with juvenile offenders in correctional institutions, and in 2024 launched an interdisciplinary research project (*Violence of Freedom*) in New York with the ACAX fellowship. Currently a doctoral researcher at HUFA, she examines the relationship between philosophy and art through the concept of abjection. Her work has been widely exhibited across Europe, Canada, and the USA, and she is represented by Várfok Gallery (HU) and Galerie Isabelle Lesmeister (DE). Her co-directed film *Gentle* premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, and her first essay documentary *Beauty of the Beast* was shown at Sheffield DocFest (UK) in 2022.

Bálint Révész – Producer and director, founder of the London-based Gallivant Film and Budapest's Kontra distribution platform. His debut feature *Granny Project* deals with intergenerational relations and the subjective experience of twentieth-century history, winning awards at Dok Leipzig, Hot Docs Canada, and Taiwan IDFF, as well as prizes from Hungarian film critics. His later documentary *KIX*, co-

produced by HBO Max and Arte France, received numerous international awards, including Best Documentary at TIFF and Zagrebdox, as well as critics' awards at GoEast and Zagrebdox.

Ádám Takács – Philosopher and intellectual historian, associate professor at METU's Institute of Art and Design Theory. Formerly assistant professor at ELTE (2009–2025) and visiting professor at the University of Alberta (2021–2024). He earned his doctorate at EHESS Paris and has taught and conducted research in France, Romania, Hong Kong, and the USA. His interests include contemporary French philosophy, phenomenology, Marxist traditions, and the history of modern European thought.