



NATURE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Conference SIPP/ISSP 2025

**25-27 of June,
University of Essex**

**29 of June, Freud
Museum London**

More info: www.sipp-ispp.com

contact: sipp2025@gmail.com

SIPP-ISPP

International Society of Psychoanalysis and Philosophy

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What drives us? Or where are we being driven towards? In times of climate catastrophe, emboldened fascism and genocides, the psychoanalytic subject comes under scrutiny as we examine its possibilities of relationality. Oftentimes, it is in negativity, aggressivity and conflict that psychoanalytic discourses veer away from flattened-out political discourses that rely, mostly, in conscious moral sutures to imagine conditions of living together. Whilst foundational texts of our discipline rely on separation and alterity as necessary means of individuation, long-standing Feminist, Decolonial and Ecological scholarship are critical in their engagement with the psychoanalytic subject when it comes to its horizons of forms of sustaining liveable life, human and otherwise. Grappling with current crises, their deadliness and tragedy, we wonder if it is all, in the end, just 'human nature'? Can philosophical enquiry of the psychoanalytic point towards novel entanglements of the question of nature, culture, 'civilization' and language? May we find some precious clues also in less canonical, or marginal, minor psychoanalytic texts, and praxes? And who can afford, if anyone, to ignore the necessity of reconfiguring nature, bios, and the promises of symbolic mediation in the 21st century?

Freud, in the mid-1890s, in search of a psychological theory of the aetiology of the neuroses distanced himself radically from predecessors that had grounded their clinical work in theories of formative drives, natural instincts and degeneracy. At that point, it seemed clear that psychoanalysis would be able to establish its clinical practice and its metapsychology without depending on references to nature. The seduction theory is a theory of culturally embedded trauma with typical culturally informed characteristics Freud will eventually associate and structure in the Oedipus complex. Freudian psychoanalysis starts by introducing an anthropological difference between the psychic life of human beings organized, developed, and disturbed in a cultural context on the one hand, and the instinctual lives of other organic life forms in a natural habitat, on the other. This difference appears to be confirmed in writings such as *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Here, civilization is seen as a process through which humanity moves away from nature, controlling it, domesticating it, and exploiting it. In Freud's anthropological thought, nature is the other of culture, and animality the other of humanity. What characterizes civilization is a control over nature and the repression of drives, that is to say a control on the animal part of humanity which would be the free expression of its drives. This repression of drives is the cause of neuroses. And yet, elsewhere in Freudian thought nature is not the other of culture, animality not the other of humanity. There are interesting differences to be questioned about the status of nature in Freudian thought.

The introduction of the concept of the drives in *Three Essays* reestablishes inquiries into nature of/in human nature as characterized by forces, energies, pressure, urges,

tendencies, principles, and functions that interfere with and pre-determine psychic life. Freud's phylogenetic speculations and the bioanalytical project with Ferenczi culminate in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Thalassa*. These are texts in which drive, repetition and trauma are conceptualized relative to the origin and vicissitudes of all organic life. In such texts there is a radical continuity between nature and culture, protist and complex multicellular organism, animal, and human being. Thus, we can see that for Freud the continuity between humans and non-humans corresponds to a biological point of view, while the discontinuity between humans and non-humans corresponds to a civilizational point of view.

On the other hand, a whole series of psychoanalytic approaches are sustained by placing references to Symbolic and language at their centre, something that can be seen as sustaining a rupture between nature and culture. Even here, however, the centralization of the reference to language does not fail to imply the need to think about the way in which it positions itself in face of nature and the ways in which something that resists and returns to the same place needs to be named "Real." In Lacanian psychoanalysis, certain distances are no doubt mobilized between the Symbolic and the register of nature. But is it not necessary to think about the modalities of this distance? What Real is imposed by the environmental catastrophe? Recognizing discontents in/of nature seems to demand thinking on what subjective turns we make when re-asking the question of how to live, which is also the question of how to die.

Repression of the drive and death drive have been put forward by Freud in an attempt to explain the discontents in/of civilization. What concepts should be mobilized for conceptualizing the discontents in/of nature? In a contemporary context of discussions of global warming and its consequences, the loss of biodiversity and the extinction of certain species, and large-scale pollution, psychoanalysis is again confronted with the fundamental question of its own metapsychology. This concerns the question of anthropological difference, and the domain and limitations of clinical practice and theory. It also concerns psychoanalytic conceptuality, notably the status of concepts and theoretical constructs that are derived from the sciences – physics, biology, and chemistry.

In this year's SIPP-ISSP conference, we invite colleagues to contribute with philosophical and psychoanalytic reflections that seek to explore, deconstruct as well as reimagine the relation between nature and culture, or better, natures, cultures and beyond. We are interested in discussions that consider human life, non-human life, and the biosphere in relation to ethics, politics, and ontology, whilst holding on to an unconscious and drives as the fundamental psychoanalytic shibboleth. Equally, we are interested in reflecting on the consequences (epistemological, political, and material) of ignoring the forces of catastrophe in our field, considering who and what pays the price for a reliance on the artificial split between nature and culture.

We welcome papers and panel submissions in dialogue with the following themes, but not only:

Psychoanalysis and the Pluriverse
Freudian Biology in the 21st Century
Relationality and Affect
Eco-anxiety
Destruction and the drives
Ethnopschoanalysis
Real and nature
Human nature
Instinct x drive
Dreaming
Psychoanalytical anthropologies
Psychoanalysis, humans and non-humans
Ecological guilt
Anthropocene and anthropocentrism
Psychoanalysis beyond nature and culture
Feminism on nature
Decolonial thoughts on nature
Philosophy of nature
Nature in geopolitics
Phylogenesis in psychoanalysis

A 250-words abstract should be sent to sipp2025@gmail.com , by February 7th, 2025.