

A Certain Mad World: Psychoanalysis and the Capacity for Doubt

Timo Storck, Ceren Doğan

Abstrakt W niniejszym artykule zadano pytanie, w jaki sposób psychoanaliza może przyczynić się do zrozumienia „szalonego” świata. Autorzy proponują model dwóch ścieżek radzenia sobie z niepewną przyszłością we współczesnym polikryzysie: (I) kontro-fobiczne pseudoradzenie sobie poprzez przekształcanie rozproszonych lęków w kontrolowane przyczyny i pewniki – kosztem zaprzeczania, eksternalizacji i rozszczepienia; (II) podejście tolerujące napięcie, które uznaje lęk, niepewność i żałobę, jednocześnie kultywując emocjonalną zdolność do radzenia sobie z przyszłością. Artykuł proponuje rozróżnienie między terażniejszą przyszłością (tworzone obecnie obrazy tego, co będzie) a przyszłą terażniejszością (to, co ma nadejść, ale nie można tego jeszcze sobie wyobrazić) i wprowadza dynamiczne *avant-coup* jako zdolność do „pustego” oczekiwania, które pozostaje otwarte na to, co nieprzewidziane. Rezultatem jest psychoanalityczna podstawa umożliwiająca negatywno-utopijne podejście do otwartych przyszłości.

Słowa kluczowe społeczne nieświadome, emocjonalna otwartość na to, co

przyszłe, *avant-coup*, puste oczekiwanie, szaleństwo

Abstract This article asks what psychoanalysis can contribute to understanding a “mad” world. The authors propose a model of two pathways for dealing with an uncertain future in the contemporary polycrisis: (I) a counterphobic pseudo-coping that narrativizes diffuse anxieties into controllable causes and certainties – at the cost of denial, externalization, and splitting; (II) a tension-tolerant approach that acknowledges anxiety, uncertainty, and mourning while cultivating emotional future-capability. The paper proposes a distinction between present future (images we form now of what will be) and future present (what is to come but cannot yet be imagined), and introduces dynamic *avant-coup* as a capacity for “empty” waiting that remains open to the unforeseen. The result is a psychoanalytic groundwork for enabling a negative-utopian stance toward open futures.

Keywords social unconscious, emotional future-capability, *avant-coup*, empty waiting, madness

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■ Introduction

When we think about the potential contribution of psychoanalysis to an understanding of the “madness of the world,” the first question we must ask – even before examining whether the world and what’s in it have gone mad – is what madness actually is.

Jacques Lacan offers a well-known and complex formulation: “It should be noted that if a man who thinks he is a king is mad, a king who thinks he is a king is no less so.”¹ In Lacan, this aphorism is embedded in fundamental thoughts on the structure of the symbolic and its role in psychosis. The king who no longer knows that he *represents* something is mad because he confuses himself with something that is attributed to him.

We can use the figure of the mad king who believes he is a king in several ways and think it through further. On the one hand, we can ask where and how the symbolic is getting lost in social or political processes, which in the present context means above all where and how doubt about something or someone gets eliminated and certainty instead prevails. On the other hand, psychoanalysis must take into account that even the psychoanalyst who considers himself a psychoanalyst is mad. This means that psychoanalysis must also reflect on its relationship to the symbolic function, doubt, and certainty.

In what follows, we present a doubt-laden inquiry into the question of what psychoanalysis has to contribute to the understanding of social and political processes in the sense of a madness of the world. We will bring forward an argument that continuously casts doubt on what has already been developed, thus presenting a psychoanalytic endeavor in its own right. To this end, we will outline the methodological possibilities available to psychoanalysis for addressing social issues. We will argue that it is due to the transfer of the *method*, not the theory (at least not without further mediation), that psychoanalysis can make possible contributions. We will then consider the role of theory, and reflect on the psychoanalytic models that can offer an understanding of social issues. The focus will be on the importance of the dynamic unconscious in social processes and on the question of how to deal with anxiety. Both provide a picture of the madness of the world in terms of the loss of the symbolic. We will then deal with when and how a psychoanalytic approach itself becomes the object of psychoanalytic reflection. The trip along the “royal road” that psychoanalysis takes is marked by doubt and hesitation: by tripping. Finally, we will outline how psychoanalysis can enable a “utopian” view of the open and unknown.

and social-psychological perspectives to explore how unconscious dynamics shape social conflict and the capacity to imagine sustainable futures.

¹ J. Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink, Norton, London and New York 2006, p. 139.

■ On the Method

Does psychoanalysis actually have anything to contribute when it comes to social or political processes in world affairs? Or is it unjustified, even presumptuous, for psychoanalysts to claim repeatedly that they can expose the narcissistic structure of a society, the superego pathology of a social group, or the Oedipal structure of whatever else? Does this promote anything of value?

These questions can only be answered by looking at what one actually does when one applies psychoanalysis to fields other than the psychoanalytic cure. This is clearly a case of transfer or transmission: something is taken out of the psychoanalytic treatment room and applied to other areas of human life and experience, i.e., areas where the focus is not initially on the psychoanalytic dialogue or a course of treatment that usually involves two people meeting in a particular setting. This transfer, if it is academically sound, justifiable, and comprehensible (which it should be), cannot simply be one of theory. We do not apply theory (of the human psyche) to society; we do not take the psychoanalytic concept of Oedipal conflict and apply it to literature, politics, or the like. If we did, we would certainly “find” something, e.g., a particular conflict, but, as Thomä and Kächele succinctly put it: we would merely find the Easter eggs that we hid for ourselves.²

Therefore, the transfer should not be one of theory but one of method. The contribution of psychoanalysis does not lie primarily in providing theory, even if, as we will show, the concept of the dynamic unconscious, for example, can be of great use in understanding social processes. A psychoanalytic approach to society becomes valid (and can enter into dialogue with other approaches) when it is methodically guided. We do not mean to say that psychoanalysis needs a laboratory-like, experimental approach in order to be recognized as meeting academic standards; rather, we want to show that a psychoanalytic approach to social processes is possible and valuable.

This type of transfer prompts us to ask what can be taken out of the treatment room and applied in other fields. Generally speaking, the “methodological” approach in the treatment room is to make one’s own relationship with another the object of observation and reflection. Sterba spoke of a “therapeutic splitting of the ego,” i.e., the intertwining of providing a relationship and its reflection.³ Here, one draws on psychoanalytic concepts such as transference and countertransference, resistance, and many others.

Although such a reflective relationship (in light of unconscious processes involving sexuality, aggression, and narcissism) can be transferred to, and

² H. Thomä, H. Kächele, *Psychoanalytische Therapie. Forschung*, Springer, Heidelberg and Berlin 2006.

³ R. Sterba, “Das Schicksal des Ichs im therapeutischen Verfahren,” *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* no. 20 (1934): pp. 66–73.

applied in, other areas, it is methodologically questionable whether this can be done so easily. In the treatment room, we are dealing with an individual counterpart who has a history of personal relationships and a complex affective inner world. This counterpart associates freely and responds to our interpretations in a certain way (sometimes with a non-response) – is this even possible if we are not in a relationship with an individual counterpart but with a social process?

We therefore need answers to the following questions: Can we speak of transference (and countertransference) in a psychoanalytic examination of social processes? Is there an equivalent to free association in this respect? Is what psychoanalysts say about society even an interpretation?

The answers can be found in the psychoanalytic interpretation of films or works of art, as well as in psychoanalytic social criticism.⁴ Even outside the treatment room, we can enter into a psychoanalytical relationship with another person (a counterpart), but in the case of art or society, this person must and can only be understood as a “quasi-subject.” We view a work of art or a social phenomenon as if we were in an intersubjective relationship with it, as if it wanted to “intentionally” evoke what it causes in us. In this case, we can neither speak of a transference onto us, nor can our reaction be described as countertransference, but it is a quasi-relational event that can be psychoanalytically examined for its structure. Furthermore, although a work of art or a social process does not display free association but rather has a certain structure and dynamic, what comes to mind in the face of such a counterpart can be viewed as free associations, which can be reflected upon. The third critical point, the question of interpretation and its effect, can be answered in such a way that a work of art or a social process is not changed by the fact that we counter it with an interpretation; however, a psychoanalytical interpretation (*Interpretation* in German) of a work of art or social process that is made public becomes an interpretation (*Deutung* in German) in that it is uttered toward a field from which something has been excluded. Thus, some dynamic progression can become possible. We shall return to this point.

In this way, the psychoanalytic method (i.e., the reflective relationship with a counterpart) proves suitable for a transfer outside the consulting room. This is possible when the counterpart with whom a psychoanalytic relationship has been established can be delimited as clearly as possible. A psychoanalytic examination of political dynamics, for example, can be more easily successful if it is specifically linked to a particular public speech or media report.

⁴ T. Storck, “Spiel am Werk. Künstlerisches Arbeiten als Subjektivierung,” *Psyche – Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* no. 65 (2011): pp. 1156–78; T. Storck, *Psychoanalysis and Film*, Springer, Heidelberg and Berlin 2024; T. Storck, “Die Psychodynamik des Wartens. Eine metapsychologische Untersuchung,” *Psyche – Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* no. 78(12) (2024): pp. 1089–120.

■ Emotional Future-Capability

Irritations and the Social Unconscious

It should be noted that psychoanalysis contributes not only its method and its transfer to the examination of social processes, but also its models and possibilities for conceptualizing certain social dynamics. However, theory comes into play only secondarily (apart from the fact that the method itself cannot, of course, be free of theory) – namely where the reflective relationship has revealed certain “irritations,” in Lorenzer’s words.⁵ Lorenzer understands such irritations as moments of tension becoming apparent between manifest and latent meaning. They can be divided into gaps in understanding, affective condensations, and semantic nodal points.⁶ The tentative use of possible meanings takes place here in light of psychoanalytic theory, and conceptualizations emerge that make something comprehensible, i.e., put it into words. It is this psychoanalytic interpretation (*Interpretation*) that is then held up against an object of investigation, thus becoming an interpretation (*Deutung*) and part of a dynamic process. In this sense, a psychoanalytic process of understanding is not complete or conclusive; it requires questioning one’s own findings, which are always themselves part of a dynamic relationship.

However, doubts can also be raised here. Psychoanalytic concepts fundamentally refer to the mental processes and structures of the individual (even if something such as interpersonal defense can be described on this basis), which also means to the individual’s personal history, including their bodily history, their psychosexual or narcissistic development, the developmental history of their object relationships, and much more. It cannot therefore be postulated without further mediation that a social group has a superego pathology or something similar.

This can be demonstrated more clearly using the example of the so-called social unconscious.⁷ It is not convincing to say that a social group “has an unconscious.” It does not repress, it does not experience intrapsychic conflicts arising from desire and defense, it does not have a history of psychosexual development steeped in enigmatic messages. Erdheim therefore argues against an *unconscious of the social*, i.e., an unconscious of society. However, it must be acknowledged that members of a particular social group may be unaware of the same aspects. They are subject to the same social norms, rules, and taboos, which can lead to each member, in their own individual processes, repressing or otherwise defending against the same things in the same way for the same reasons. Erdheim therefore speaks of a *social unconscious*, meaning the

⁵ A. Lorenzer, “Tiefenhermentische Kulturanalyse,” in A. Lorenzer (ed.), *Kultur-Analysen*, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 1986.

⁶ Storck, *Psychoanalysis and Film*.

⁷ M. Erdheim, “Gesellschaftlich Unbewusstes,” *Psyche – Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* no. 67 (2013): pp. 1023–50.

unconscious that is unconscious for the individual due to and regarding social conditions.⁸

Based on this, it can be said that, for example, something about the superego is socially unconscious, or that something about each individual inner motive is socially unconscious. But at the same time, it is also a social unconscious of the individual.

In order to be able to say anything about social structures, psychoanalysis needs, not least for this reason, interdisciplinary cooperation with other academic disciplines and their methodological approaches. For it is highly doubtful that a psychoanalytic interpretation of social phenomena is in itself sufficient to understand this complex subject or to develop a conceptualization that does not require sociology, cultural studies, and many other disciplines.

In this respect, the approach taken here should be understood as psychoanalytic groundwork for an interdisciplinary endeavor – namely understanding what has gone mad in the world.

The World in Polycrisis

It seems appropriate for us to claim that the world is in a state of polycrisis – not so much in a delineable state, however, but rather in a constantly and profoundly changing dynamic, in which the basic coordinates of our understanding of the world and our navigation within it are called into question. We see climate change and the resulting changes in human and non-human habitats. It cannot be overlooked that this has also recently affected the foundations of life in the so-called Global North. Wars and other military and diplomatic conflicts further contribute to the polycrisis, as does, on a more microsocial level, everything that has been broadly categorized as group-focused enmity, including misogyny, transphobia, homophobia, racism, xenophobia, and violence against religious groups, to name just a few examples.

We believe that these processes arise with particular intensity from fear in the face of a fundamentally changing world, and that they intensify fears both among those who perpetrate violence and those who are its victims. We believe that a model can be developed that allows for different ways of dealing with fears and uncertainties in the face of an uncertain future. This can be called a dynamically unknown insofar as the uncertain future has an impact on us even though we hardly know what kind of impact that is.

Assuming that the future is at stake in view of the current polycrisis, it can then be assumed that fears, uncertainties, and the necessary mourning processes will emerge. Life on Earth will not continue as it has done so far (an

⁸ S. Zepf and D. Seel, *Psychoanalyse und das gesellschaftlich Unbewusste*, Psychosozial, Gießen 2020.

apocalypse as the revelation of the imminent end of the world as we know it). On a small scale, this is evident in the concrete form of our lifestyles or in extreme weather events. Although fundamental consequences can be drawn from this, such as reducing individual air travel, and that these actions are relevant and important, they cannot hide the fact that complete preparation, especially of a social nature, is not possible, and that the course of future events cannot be predicted with certainty or controlled in advance.

Here, we can refer to the distinction between the present future and the future present.⁹ The present future refers to all the images we currently have of what will be. To put it bluntly, we form images of *the future*, realistic and unrealistic, often dystopian. The idea of a future life in ruins, a popular dystopian topos in film and literature, is an example of a present future: an image we form now of what will be. This is to be contrasted with the future present, about which we know nothing and cannot form any images. This refers to what will one day be the present. All the images we form of it are not this future present, but again “merely” a present future – images of the future in the current present, which we ultimately cannot let go of in our imagination.

Apocalyptic imagination is then, in a sense, an attempt to “domesticate” the future present by converting it into a manageable present future. In religious, political, or cultural narratives, “the end” is not simply an unknowable rupture but provides a certain scene: destruction as punishment, renewal as reward, or the decisive intervention of a savior. In psychoanalytic terms, such narrativizations operate defensively. They replace the unbearable state of not knowing what is to come with imagery that can (seemingly) be foreseen, prepared for, and – at least in fantasy – mastered. Yet this mastery is often a form of psychic foreclosure: what cannot be pictured is precisely what is most alive in the future present.

Consistently following the future present, exposing oneself to it without knowing what it will be, is related to the capacity for “empty waiting,”¹⁰ the possibility of dwelling in the present and a type of waiting that is not waiting for *something* to happen or pass, but rather some form of passive stance.¹¹ However, this form of waiting is not resignation; rather, it is the active maintenance of a psychic capacity through which the unpredicted can appear. Against the counterphobic impulse to name, localize, and eliminate the source of anxiety, empty waiting opens up the space for an encounter with what exceeds present categories of thought – a radical openness.

This means that exposing oneself to an uncertain future, about which one knows only, apocalyptically, that something will no longer be, requires a capacity

⁹ T. Storck, *Krisen auf der Couch. Aufgaben der Psychoanalyse in apokalyptischen Zeiten*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 2025 (the distinction is loosely based on Sartre).

¹⁰ Storck, “Die Psychodynamik des Wartens.”

¹¹ L. Baraitser, *Enduring Time*, Bloomsbury, New York and London 2017.

to endure anxiety and uncertainty. Two pathways can be distinguished here – one counterphobic, one tension-tolerant.

Pathway I: Counterphobic Pseudo-Coping

The counterphobic approach to an unknown future entails the recognition and acknowledgment of anxieties; however, these anxieties are diverted, channeled, and stoked. They are supposedly made manageable by developing a narrative in which a concrete problem is said to be the cause of anxieties, and which is then overcome, for example, by a political figure building a wall to keep out immigrants. Much more diffuse anxieties of an uncertain (planetary, ecological, but of course also economic) future are diverted to an area where they can supposedly be made to disappear. This comes at the price of denial, externalization, division, and, last but not least, violence.

Here, the aim is to avoid exposing oneself to an uncertain future in the sense of a future present. Looking to the future reveals itself to be the mere projection of a (possibly) distorted past. Something is to be preserved, to be as it was before. Here, we can speak of a static regression: the way back does not serve to advance in a back-and-forth movement of subjective or collective temporality, but rather, in the future, only the past is rediscovered and preserved. Thus, what is offered is a way of pseudo-coping with crises.

This is mad in the sense that even where it is impossible to know what is coming, a certainty is created. Doubt and uncertainty are eliminated. In addition, in some cases, political decision-makers no longer have the symbolic function of an office or position but rather that of the mad king, who no longer knows that he represents something but believes himself to be a king. Instead of emotional support, supposed certainty (including the belief that certain anxieties will be eliminated and that the past can be found again in the future) functions as a structure for dealing with uncertainty.

Pathway II: Tolerating Anxiety

The second way of dealing with an uncertain future is one that tolerates tension. Anxiety, uncertainty, or the necessary work of mourning can be acknowledged and endured on the basis of something that can be described as the experience of surrounding objects. It remains preconscious that it is fundamentally possible, even in crises or states of not knowing, to hold and not eliminate the idea that what one does not know could also be something good, or that it will be possible to respond to what is to come. This can be called emotional future-capability, in relation to Bion's term of negative capability.

In a psychoanalytic model, this can be connected to the capacity for dynamic *avant-coup*.¹² *Avant-coup* refers to a certain element in the subjective experience of time.¹³ Psychoanalysis describes *après-coup* as a process in which a “later” event makes an “earlier” event mentally representable in the first place.¹⁴ This means something different to the mere fact that one sometimes only understands what something was about “in retrospect.” Rather, *après-coup* refers specifically to the fact that something is effective, but becomes part of experience only through a later event that is connected to it in some way (this plays a particularly important role in the question of the representability of traumatic events, but is also part of the general theory of temporality in psychoanalysis). In particular, *avant-coup* then refers to the diffuse state of being forward-looking between the “first,” “earlier” event and the “second,” “later” event that has not yet occurred. *Avant-coup* is a state of tense anticipation. This can now be applied specifically to expectations about the future and to the field of futures literacy: dynamic *avant-coup* means looking at what is to come in a tense and tension-tolerant way, knowing that something is coming.

Also, the tension-tolerant pathway in dealing with the dynamically unknown of an uncertain future relates to the need for a dialogical approach toward events not in line with what one expected – and individuals or groups that do not share one’s view. It can be argued that psychoanalysis is able to make an important contribution to social processes by providing a mindset for dialogical-different ways of entering social and collective relationships.

■ The Psychoanalyst Who Believes Himself to Be a Psychoanalyst

This results in a psychoanalytic model of future anxieties, and in two ways of dealing with them: a counterphobic and a tension-tolerant approach. But doesn’t establishing this model mean that, as a psychoanalyst, one believes oneself to be a psychoanalyst?¹⁵

To consider oneself a psychoanalyst in a non-symbolic way, i.e., to absolutize a function as part of one’s identity, could mean different things: for example, to take a model as a certainty, as something complete that leaves no questions unanswered, to ignore the limits of its validity, or to overlook the necessity of including interdisciplinary perspectives.

In relation to the model developed above of the two pathways for dealing with uncertainty in the face of an unknowable future for which there are no

¹² M. Parsons, *Lebendigkeit in der Psychoanalyse*, Psychosozial, Gießen 2022.

¹³ T. Storck.

“Vorträglichkeit. Konzeptuelle Bestimmung und Beitrag der Psychoanalyse zur Futures Literacy,” *Psyche – Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* no. 79(8) (2025): pp. 635–65.

¹⁴ J. Laplanche, *Après-Coup*, UIT Books, New York 2017.

¹⁵ S. Žižek, *Surplus-Enjoyment: A Guide For The Non-Perplexed*, Bloomsbury, London 2022, p. 112f.

images, one could ask specifically when and how it reaches its limits. Isn't it too simplistic to assume that a group of people is incapable of dealing with anxieties about the future and therefore resorts to violence? Might that not also be too accusatory? And anyway, isn't there a fundamental paradox in explaining social and political processes of division using a model that differentiates between two pathways and presents one of them as appropriate, thus itself performing a division? One could argue that the model presented here is itself divisive and dichotomizing.

On the one hand, this points to the need for a methodologically guided and interdisciplinary approach. The limits of psychoanalysis lie where a model must be tested, and other academic disciplines need to be included. On the other hand, it also points to the place of doubt within a psychoanalytic approach. In other words, a psychoanalytic conceptualization must itself be able to become the subject of psychoanalytic scrutiny. This necessity touches the very heart of psychoanalytic epistemology. A psychoanalytic conceptualization, whether of an individual symptom or a social dynamic, must remain open to becoming the object of its own analytic reflection. This means resisting the temptation to take one's own models as conclusive, to identify uncritically with the role of the one who "knows," or to elevate a theoretical position into a fixed identity category. The moment psychoanalysts cease to question the grounds and scope of their interpretations, they risk moving into a non-symbolic identification with their function, similar to the mad king who confuses the role he occupies with his very being ("I am the king"). Doubt, in this sense, is not a weakness, but the safeguard that keeps psychoanalysis from collapsing into dogma, ensuring that it remains a practice of ongoing questioning – of the other, of the world, and of itself.

Perhaps the best-known example of the question of certainty in psychoanalysis is the validity of an interpretation (*Deutung*) in clinical psychoanalytic work. In "Constructions in Analysis," Freud notes that the analysand's "yes" or "no" in response to an interpretation is of little use as long as it stands alone.¹⁶ The mere acceptance or rejection of an interpretation and its content is of no use to psychoanalytic understanding; rather, it is a question of what effect an interpretation has on the further process: Do new insights follow previously ward-off affects? The interpretation becomes valid due to how things proceed afterward.

In a post-Freudian fashion, this has led to conceptualizations of interpretation (*Deutung*) in the direction of "process interpretation"¹⁷ or "unsaturated interpretation."¹⁸ In contrast to "content interpretation," process interpretation

¹⁶ S. Freud, "Konstruktionen in der Analyse," in *S. Freud Schriften zur Behandlungstechnik*, S. Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 2000, pp. 393–406.

¹⁷ R. Plassmann, "Die Technik der Prozessdeutung," *Forum der Psychoanalyse* no. 32 (2016): pp. 443–60.

¹⁸ H. Will, "Wie ungesättigte Deutungen entstehen," *Psyche – Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* no. 72 (2018): pp. 374–96.

focuses on processes of mental experience as the object of interpretive work. Unlike saturated interpretation, unsaturated interpretation leaves something open. It does not formulate a possible insight, but allows for a response based on insight and thus dynamizes the process. The openness of interpretations then functions less as an absence of knowledge than as an invitation to further psychic work, both within the analytic dyad and by analogy in the social sphere. By avoiding closure, saturated interpretations preserve the tension necessary for transformation, allowing the analytic process to remain responsive to what has not yet (and could not yet have) been thought or articulated.

Psychoanalytic understanding, it can be concluded, is dynamic and open-ended. A psychoanalytic model that is intended to help make social processes comprehensible should therefore also take into account that testing the model may yield other insights.

For that reason, the difference between interpretation and meaning should also be taken into account in psychoanalytic social criticism. This distinction can be outlined more clearly in German. An interpretation (*Interpretation*) is the result of an understanding approach: something incomprehensible is made comprehensible by tentatively assigning meanings to it. This describes hermeneutics, which Laplanche has highlighted as problematic for psychoanalysis, since hermeneutics and understanding are concerned with the synthesis of a good gestalt of understanding.¹⁹ On the one hand, understanding in psychoanalytic hermeneutics must therefore be methodologically set aside as non-understanding, which makes psychoanalytic hermeneutics a negative hermeneutics.²⁰ On the other hand, it has been pointed out that the practice of interpretation (*Deutung*) concerns yet another area. Interpretation in the sense of *Interpretation* means finding and applying meanings. This is in fact an important part of what a psychoanalyst does – namely when he or she listens to and conceptualizes. But interpretation in the sense of *Deutung* does not mean merely telling the analysand what one has conceptualized; that would be little different from conveying one's own insights to him or her; rather, interpretation in the sense of *Deutung* refers to a verbal communication that – often process-related, unsaturated – in the truest sense of the word “addresses something.” Or, as Lacan put it, it is there to make waves.²¹

This distinction between *Interpretation* and *Deutung* proves useful for psychoanalytic social criticism. For here, too, it is a matter of conceptualization, of model-building in the sense developed above, i.e., of a specific *Interpretation*. And at the same time, it is a matter of proving its worth – of confronting this interpretation with the area in which it suspects unconscious dynamics and

¹⁹ J. Laplanche, “Die Psychoanalyse als Anti-Hermeneutik,” *Psyche – Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* no. 52 (1998): pp. 605–17.

²⁰ T. Storck (ed.), *Zur Negation der psychoanalytischen Hermeneutik*, Psychosozial, Gießen 2012.

²¹ J. Lacan, “Réponses à des étudiants en philosophie sur l'objet de la psychanalyse,” *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* no. 3 (1996): pp. 5–13.

excluded elements, whereby, since it can be responded to, it becomes an interpretation in the sense of *Deutung* and (re-)energizes a process.

Therefore, it is not so bad to be a psychoanalyst when you are psychoanalyst temporarily. Being a psychoanalyst is not a representative office like that of a king, but it is about representing a symbolic function, which means, for example, taking something as an object of observation. Yet this symbolic function of being a psychoanalyst is lost when there is no doubt left and the process of understanding has become static. Walking the royal road to the unconscious, as Freud describes the interpretation of dreams,²² is a trip that involves tripping – not a straight path along the royal road (on which one considers oneself a psychoanalyst-king), but one with stumbling and detours.

■ Psychoanalysis of the Future

We conclude our examination of the role of psychoanalysis in an investigation of the madness of the world by emphasizing the importance of an open future. We have argued that psychoanalysis has a method of reflective relatedness to contribute to the investigation of social and political processes. We have discussed at what point theory comes into play in the sense of conceptualization, and exemplified this by presenting a model of two pathways for dealing with an uncertain future. One pathway is counterphobic, in which anxieties are diverted, channeled, stirred up, and supposedly eliminated. The second pathway is tension-tolerant, in which anxieties, uncertainty, and necessary mourning processes are acknowledged. Here, we proposed a distinction between a present future (where images of something can emerge) and a future present (which cannot be imagined because it still lies ahead), and discussed the concept of dynamic avant-coup. In all of this, we have ultimately emphasized the necessary role of doubt, which ensures that a psychoanalyst does not consider him or herself a psychoanalyst in the sense that certainty makes a process of understanding static.

The ability to adopt an attitude of dynamic avant-coup now allows us to relate to an uncertain future. The present future may be characterized by dystopian or utopian images. We can imagine a future, in the present, marked by destruction, ruin, and the demise of the existing order: what we know is still there, only destroyed. We can also imagine a future in which crises have been overcome and downfalls averted. Both are within the scope of what we have called the present future.

²² S. Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*, S. Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 2000.

To relate oneself to the future present without turning it back into the present future (i.e., without depicting it dystopically or utopically) means to engage in negative utopian thinking. It means relating to a future that is unknown and yet to come. This is based on dynamic *avant-coup*, and means being able to respond to what will come. This can be called negative utopian insofar as it is about hope and trust, but precisely at the points where it is uncertain about what will come.

We hope we have contributed to proposing a psychoanalytical reflection on whether the world has gone mad, what is wrong with it, and why. Now, let's go on a trip.

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