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Interview

The Future of Psychoanalysis at the Edge of Chaos. Interview: Joseph Dodds*, Liviu Poenaru

L'avenir de la psychanalyse au bord du chaos. Entretien : Joseph Dodds, Liviu Poenaru*

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It could be argued that psychoanalysis constitutes the “unconscious” of schizoanalysis, just as Deleuze and Guattari’s writing might be viewed as exposing the unconscious of an overly hierarchical and authoritarian psychoanalysis. To paraphrase the ecopsychological formula (. . .), this might lead us to the strange position of claiming that “psychoanalysis needs schizoanalysis, and schizoanalysis needs psychoanalysis (. . .). We could thus understand psychoanalysis itself as at times functioning as what [Deleuze and Guattari \(2003\)](#) call a rhizome, with countless connections to diverse fields from neuroscience to economics, politics to gender theory, film studies to aesthetics, and the study of organizations and groups.”.

Joseph Dodds (2011, p. 112–113).

Liviu Poenaru | Dr Joseph Dodds, I must admit that you have such a complex and, let’s say, fascinating professional and academic profile that it is almost difficult to introduce you. Let us mention at least that you are a full member of the Czech Psychoanalytical Society (International Psychoanalytical Association), a Chartered Psychologist (CPsychol), an Associate Fellow (AFBPsS) of the British Psychological Society, and a psychology lecturer at the University of New York in Prague and the Anglo-American University, teaching courses like ‘Experimental Psychology’, ‘Social Psychology’, ‘Living in Social and Political Crisis’, and ‘Psychology of Art’. Your research interests include the dialogue between psychoanalysis and neuroscience, and the application of psychological and insight into the domains of society, art, and nature. One of your main focuses is the psychology of climate change and you are the author of several articles and chapters, including the audacious and groundbreaking book *Psychoanalysis and Ecology at the Edge of Chaos: Complexity theory, Deleuze |Guattari, and psychoanalysis for a climate in crisis* ([Dodds, 2011](#), Routledge). What were your motivations for such a diverse career path?

Joseph Dodds | Thank you, Liviu, for your kind words. Perhaps one way to answer your question is that in many ways I don’t see these areas as necessarily so diverse or different. As described in the opening quote, as long as the psyche is involved, even in fields labeled as being in entirely different domains, there is a connecting thread, whether in art, society, or ecology. We might call that thread psyche. However, that does not mean we can simply apply psychoanalysis to each field ‘from the outside’, because the mind and psychoanalysis itself are transformed and enriched in each encounter. In the case of climate change, making these connections is not merely an interesting academic exercise but a matter of urgency. We will not solve this problem unless we can see how the disciplinary boundary lines that we draw are entirely artificial and that mind, society, and nature are fundamentally intertwined.

Liviu Poenaru | How do you deal with all this transversality, and why is this plurality of perspectives not present in most teachers and psychoanalysts? Do we have to be Deleuze-Guattarian or Foucauldian to occupy and assume such a rhizomatic and deconstructed position (which risks being described by a psychoanalyst as fragmented, heretical, chaotic, or schizoid)? You point it out in your book: “*Connecting the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari with psychoanalysis may seem unusual and even heretical, to both Deleuze-Guattarians and to psychoanalysts, given Deleuze and Guattari’s powerful attack on traditional Freudian and especially Lacanian approaches*” ([Dodds, 2011](#), p. 111).

Joseph Dodds | I would prefer not to put Deleuze and Guattari in place of psychoanalysis or any other model or theory. Deleuzians can be just as dogmatic as psychoanalysts. It is not about the theory but our relationship with it. ([Guattari, 1996](#), see also [Watson, 2008](#)) concept of metamodelling is helpful here. It’s not so much about accepting or rejecting any given model but of holding onto multiple frames and allowing experience (including the clinical experience) to float around and through them. Temporarily falling into the gravitational orbit of one theory or another, while maintaining enough motion to play around the edges and leap into another theoretical basin of attraction. In some ways, this is similar to Bion’s well-known statement about the analyst being without memory, desire or understanding. Of course, we need to know the theories

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and study the classics in psychoanalysis. Theories and schools are like attractors or homes (*oikos*, ecology), giving us a sense of safety as well as insight. Perhaps for some, leaving such homes, even for a brief foray to explore the surrounding landscape, can feel frightening (like the paranoid mole in [Kafka's \(1992\)](#) short story 'The Burrow'). In my own case, despite my interest in different ideas, I'm still probably spending more time in an object relation's way of thinking than any other psychoanalyst. The key is to try to hold them loosely in the background while remaining as open as you can to the experience, and to keep in mind that in the end, they are models of reality, not reality itself. All models, however useful and beautiful, can only ever be partial. I certainly would not wish to reject the old 'schools'. There is very much richness in the psychoanalytic (and philosophical) tradition. It is all too easy to reject the past as 'old-fashioned'. I have recently been rereading Jung, for example. I will also be giving a talk in Budapest for the Psychoanalytic Summer School this August (I hope in person by then, but it may need to be online; still, it is hard to predict the future these days!). I am looking forward to engaging deeper with Ferenczi than I have until now (in a similar way that I tried with Otto Fenichel for the Prague Fenichel conference a couple of years ago; [Dodds, 2019](#)). What would a Ferenczian ecopsychanalysis look like? I am not sure... but I am curious to find out.

Liviu Poenaru | Like Deleuze and Guattari, you never stop defending the thesis that world is chaos: *For all its chaos, because of all its chaos, the world is still a place of wonder, and we can only hope that we find ways of staying in it at least a little while longer. The nonlinearity and chaos of nature, and the forms of thinking required to sustain our relationship with it beyond the limited horizons of our experience, are both frightening and liberating. Yet, despite the anxiety, guilt and terror that climate change forces us to face, this moment of crisis can also offer us an opportunity for a more open vision of ourselves, as subjects, as societies, and as a species among the interconnected life systems of the Earth.* ([Dodds, 2011](#), p. 200–201). How does a psychoanalyst like you, situated "at the edge of chaos", with a cross-disciplinary and multiplicity/complexity-based approach, works clinically in the current context of the crises we are going through? How do you communicate to a patient that she/he is determined by a mother-daddy-baby oedipal configuration and by early childhood experiences and by a wide range of environmental, social, political or economic factors? Can this be included in the formulation of an interpretation of subjective and unconscious dynamics? It seems to me that transdisciplinary research must be clearly differentiated from transdisciplinary clinical work and that there are little theoretical findings in psychoanalysis for the latter. This means that there is a real epistemic vacuum on this issue that threatens the paradigm of a psychoanalysis that, if we caricature a little, is traditionally concerned with the transference and free associations of the patient and not with the political and epistemological positions of the analyst. As a clinician, I am particularly interested in knowing how we operate during the clinical session, specifically how- once one of the numerous (chaotic) elements available has been selected- to formulate and verbalize an interpretation in the presence of the patient taking into consideration transversal and multiple views and not only a hypothetical oedipal or pre-oedipal configuration that would have determined the chosen item.

Joseph Dodds | There is really a lot to this question. Let me start with the chaos part before moving onto the clinical practice and then the wider world beyond our consulting rooms. Firstly, I'm using chaos in a specific sense derived from chaos theory, non-linear dynamical systems, and complexity theory. At first, the complexity approach seems, well, complex. Nevertheless, the further one goes into it, the more it allows seemingly disparate and separate phenomena to be understood, as the ways complex dynamic systems change shows remarkable similarities across wide-ranging fields. I generally read

Deleuze and Guattari through a complexity lens. The edge of chaos is then a highly productive place, between deadening rigidity, entombment, and the terror of a purely chaotic state where no structure can form for long enough before flying off in all directions. Chaos in the sense of moving away from a rigidifying structure can be very creative, partly by allowing new emergent structures to form. So form and chaos are not opposed but deeply related.

The clinical question is harder to answer. I would say for me, this is still 'in process', I am unsure how these ideas have affected the way I work in practice. The sense of how dynamics of change work in complex systems I indeed find helpful in working through the chaos (and the immobilities) inherent in any session. No matter how many theories or models you come armed with, the session's reality always escapes it. In this sense, I often prefer even the stricter psychoanalytic approaches that still link to clinical experience than supposedly more radical philosophical positions that are divorced from clinical work and all that it teaches us. Drawing on [Freud's \(1905\)](#) model of jokes and the comic, the patient and the unconscious always undermines any pretension to certainty and authority on the psyche that we as 'experts' might try to claim. I also differentiate dynamic processes in analysis such as transference and free association, from models such as the Oedipus complex. The former are linked to ways of working, of allowing anything to be said without restriction, and following the dynamics where they lead; the latter are explanatory models which attempt to frame that process into explanatory theories. In a way comparable to how Deleuze and Guattari deal with various binaries, I am aware that this distinction is artificial and that there is more of a continuum (and each concept has aspects that function in one way or another or something in between). Nonetheless, for me, the core value of psychoanalysis is in the dynamic process and a way of being with and listening to another with attunement and empathy, while creating a space (internally and in the relation) for reflection, without either participant having a clear idea where it is going, forming something new through emergence. The specific explanatory theories (such as the depressive position or the Oedipus complex) are also valuable, but perhaps less so.

In terms of how clinical practice connects to the broader society and ecology in my work (or for psychoanalysts in general), in many ways, I think this time forces us to see these connections and live them in our work. Prior to the pandemic, I suppose some of the differences in my way of working may have been relatively subtle. Perhaps I listened more closely to patients describing their relations to animals or their experience of the nonhuman world than more traditional psychoanalysis. I am probably less likely to assume such relations are only a substitute for or transference from human relations but to see them as having primary importance on their own (and being objects of projection). I hope a good analyst could follow such material where it leads and not too quickly reduce it to an Oedipal interpretation. On the latter, it is important to emphasize, though that for me the problem with Oedipus is not that it is not true but that it is too restrictive if it's assumed to be the whole truth. It is indeed true that familial dynamics are repeated outside the home in people's relation to other people, organizations, society, pets, and nature itself. It does not really help us much just to deny this. However, it is essential to realize that the connections run in multiple directions, from outside in as well as inside out, and in all kinds of transversal horizontal directions. I think that was key in [Deleuze and Guattari's \(1986\)](#) book on Kafka¹. Kafka enters into Oedipus in order to multiply and connect to wider social machines.

¹ Incidentally, their book on Kafka was my first introduction to Deleuze and Guattari. I would be researching for a Masters paper on psychoanalysis of Kafka and their book came up. I think it is still a great way to introduce yourself to Deleuze and Guattari's thought. Coming as it does between *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, it is a valuable transitional moment in their thought and applies key ideas to a specific and fascinating area. It was undoubtedly utterly unlike any other approach to Kafka I had previously seen.

In a simple example, someone's relation to a dog in childhood can affect their human relationship in later life, just as much as the other way round. While we project the human world onto nature, we also take the nonhuman inside us in various ways, including our dreams and fantasies. Specific places often structure fantasy; the flow is in both (all) directions. An animal in a dream can represent both the personal (individual meaning derived from personal experiences and fantasies) and cultural/mythic (collective meaning, expressing something from and for the social rather than the individual, as both group analytic and Jungian perspectives have emphasized). Alternatively, we can also think of the animals entering our dream from nature, the world coming inside (Dodds, 2012). There is no reason for us to stop at the human. Guattari, 2005 *three ecologies* is a useful concept here, more as a shorthand for keeping the different levels (mental ecology, social ecology, natural ecology) in mind at once as constantly interacting. We could of course either add more ecologies (chemical, digital, technological. . .) or just view things as a single ecology. However, I think it is important not to get too lost in these wider connections and remember in the end we are dealing with this particular person at this particular time in our consulting room, who does indeed have connections that go off in all directions, but they come together here, now, in this room, together in interaction with myself (and all the complex webs from which I arise).

In terms of our world today, I would say this kind of thinking is becoming increasingly hard to ignore (see Dodds, 2020). Firstly, the pandemic forces us to see, in a straightforward way, how nonhuman nature affects and impacts us: that we cannot bracket off our individual life or even human life from these broader concerns. We are forced to see just how fragile and temporary our social systems are. We can see how a tiny, microscopic virus blown out in a sneeze in China can shut down the Venice carnival. These ideas are no longer abstract but concrete parts of our experience. Timothy Morton talks in terms of an 'ontological upgrade', which he optimistically believes we are now going through (or at the very least we need to go through if we are to survive). Therapists and patients both share much of the same fear, anger, depression at life in lockdown. We've all been forced to change our clinical practice to allow online sessions (many traditional analysts were very opposed to this in principle before) so even the cosy world of therapy cannot be safely sealed off from the wider world. Furthermore, we feel wider and wider psycho-social breakdowns, paranoia (I have had at least one patient flirting with Q-anon ideas), depression which cannot be located 'in' particular individuals but is part of the social web, all are part of our emotional response to the threat of a collapsing world. I explore this also in a recent article on Climate Anxiety (Dodds, 2021, forthcoming), where I argue that such anxiety is not something to be isolated in individuals and then 'cured' (although, of course it is our duty to help our patients process all kinds of feelings in therapy), but rather the critical question is why are more of us not anxious given the threat that we face?

Liviu Poenaru | The term "ecocide" is increasingly present in the media, political discourse, and research. It refers to criminalized human activity that violates the principles of a species' environmental well-being (including humans). Seen from this angle, can it be said that we receive *ecocidal individuals* in our consulting rooms? I mean, we treat people who often share with us the stories of their activities, their travels, their leisure time, their consumption of objects, and so forth. We can deduce a certain degree of pollution from their lifestyle. Indeed, this can be interpreted in terms of internal object relations, drives, anxieties, oedipal configurations, as psychoanalysis usually does. I consider that this viewpoint is indispensable in a psychoanalytical approach, and you offer in your book an immense and fascinating spectrum of reflections concerning the psychoanalysis-environ-

ment-climate articulation. As for the approach to the *ecocidal subject* – if we admit it as such – we are aware of psychoanalysis' difficulties in adopting a forensic angle, which is incompatible with its perspective and thus puts the analyst in an uncomfortable posture. However, in forensic psychiatry, it is accepted that the individual has committed a crime and that a therapeutic indication is necessary. In contrast, in the case of the *ecocidal individual*, it is impossible to address the "crime", which is generally denied/misunderstood by the patient for various reasons (social consensus, culture, policies) and therefore unapproachable by the analyst in the clinical session. Do you think it is possible to treat this particular gap in therapy?

Joseph Dodds | A fascinating question, which I suppose has several levels to it. The first is the broader point that psychoanalysts, I believe, should adopt the basic ecopsychological point, which is that just as in therapy, we look for destructive patterns in a person's relationship with themselves, with others, and with society; we should include nature as well. In ecopsychological terms, we need to reframe 'mental health as if the whole world mattered' (Roszak, Kanner, Gomes, & Brown, 1995). This needs to be part of a broader shift in our societies and in the fields of psychology and psychotherapy, and it is developing relatively slowly, but things are definitely improving compared to when I started this work a couple of decades ago. Searles (1972) looks at many psychological meanings of pollution in his excellent text, *'Unconscious Processes in Relation to Environmental Problems'*. Things like these should be studied, explored and worked on like anything else in analysis. The 'real' and the 'symbolic' pollution are both important. I suppose you mean that the uncomfortable position is whether we as analysts should take sides and what that would mean for our neutrality (Hanna Segal's 1987 response to this question about the nuclear problem is still really helpful here). I think there's a difference in whether we do this inside or outside the consulting room. Often, patients are pretty good at guessing our positions (it is not only transference) and not only because they may have read something we have written outside the sessions. But I do think we must not impose our own values on those we work with, but we can help them question their own positions, whatever they are (including if they have reached some closer to our own).

Perhaps we need to explore whether we are dealing with *ecocidal individuals* or with individual expressions of an *ecocidal society*. Of course, if there is overt cruelty such as torture towards animals, this would be more clearly recognized as pathological by the wider society, but more 'normal' and socially acceptable (and less conscious or intentional) ways of damaging the environment are much harder. What can we do if it is not recognized as a crime? By the individual or the wider society? In some ways, this is related to psychopaths who do not view what they do as bad, for them, it is acceptable. How do we work with such people? Can we sustain love which, on some level, needs to exist between patient and therapist in the face of this? How much are our psychoanalytic societies and lives also ecocidal? These are all difficult questions. In general, I do not think they are unapproachable in the psychoanalytic session. Any compulsive behaviour or belief can be explored, even those that are more consistent with broader social norms. Part of the power of Freud's method is just this, everything can be questioned. Even if we arrive at a normative position (or even a 'good' one, whatever that would mean), how we arrive there is important and can help shed meaning on ourselves, our lives and our world.

Liviu Poenaru | In the book *Climate Crisis, Psychoanalysis, and Radical Ethics* (Donna M. Orange, 2017) we can read this: "Let us admit it upfront. Organized psychoanalysis holds a deplorable record in the face of moral emergencies. Our lack of civil courage has been stunning. In addition to the examples of Freud in the 1930s and of the

self-absorbed British Society, we may consider the extensive collaboration of German psychoanalysts with the Nazi regime (...) and the silence of organized psychoanalysis in the face of the U.S. resort to torture in the aftermath of the 9–11 attacks. Psychoanalyst Stephen Reiser, a true hero, has led the efforts to find out just how extensively involved were psychologists, with the blessing of the American Psychological Association (to which thousands of us psychoanalysts belong, and from which a few resigned in protest) in the Bush torture programs. A very few other psychoanalysts have been seriously concerned since before 2008 (...). We now know that leaders of the APA collaborated with the CIA and the Department of Defense to plan and justify torture of our fellow human beings for many years, while members actually helped to do it. The ethical corruption ran deeper, and more extensively, than almost anyone imagined. Most of us remained indifferent, or what is morally equivalent, silent. Once again, however, we face a crisis arguably equivalent in scale to that generated by Hitler (Orange, 2017, p. 59)." How do you comment Donna Orange's (necessary) radical position?

Joseph Dodds | Powerful words, and important. Perhaps the keyword is 'organized'. I would not want to sweep away the long and powerful stream of critical psychoanalysis, often marginalized by the mainstream. To be fair, I am not sure the American Psychological Association's involvement with the horrendous torture programmes is the fault of organized psychoanalysis in particular (I may well be wrong here, I do not know enough about whether the American Psychoanalytical Association was involved too). Psychoanalysis is rather marginal in most national psychological associations, and many see us as something of an ancient relic. There is certainly no excuse at all for what happened. As Orange states (as indeed Hanna Segal in the article referenced earlier), it is not only about active involvement but also silence in the face of atrocity that matters. Clearly, on a range of topics over its long history, most analysts have been, like most people (the book 'Hitler's Willing Executioners' is chilling in this regard, Goldhagen, 1997), nowhere near as engaged as they could or should have been. Many, or perhaps most of those who celebrate people like Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela today, would have attacked them as terrorists at the time.

However, I do believe that alongside the deplorable failings Orange describes, there has also been a long history of radical psychoanalysts (some of whom later switched to a greater conformism, like Fenichel after he emigrates to the United States). Books such as 'Freud's Free Clinics' (Danto, 2005) explore the interwar radicalism which Freud seemed himself open to, while 'Death of a Jewish Science' looks at many psychoanalysts who remained engaged and committed to fighting the atrocity of fascism that was engulfing the world, as well as those who collaborated or looked away. In addition to this, of course, we can consider the Frankfurt School and people like Reich, Fanon, Horney, Laing, Guattari and other critical psychoanalytic writing on racism, gender, ecology and politics etc. A robust critical tradition does exist as a stream within psychoanalysis. One of my early academic teachers in psychoanalysis was Robert M. Young, 1992, from whom I learned a lot about these radical cross-currents within psychoanalysis. Indeed, we should take from Orange's indictment of organized psychoanalysis, a powerful lesson against complacency, and a warning about how social power works psychologically and that our own chosen groups are in no way exempt. Just because we believe we have some insights into the mind, it does not mean we are necessarily any less prone to being captured by the power of ideology, social norms, authoritarianism, dangerous, charismatic leaders, scapegoating, and intergroup conflict and splitting. We only have to look at our experience of our psychoanalytical societies to see this is the case (Danto, 2005).

However, it is essential not to make a simple divide between good, engaged psychoanalysts and corrupt and collusive bad ones.

Often, they coexist together in the same person. In communist Czechoslovakia, analysts had to practice in the 'underground', secretly training and seeing patients, providing in their sessions at least a space of relative freedom without the more expansive totalitarian space, always in danger of being discovered. However, it was only after the Velvet Revolution that it became clear (see the writings of Michel Sebek, 1996, on the 'totalitarian object') that it was not simply a case of 'bad state' vs 'good people'. The totalitarian structure was inside people as much as outside and was recreated again and again after 'freedom' had been gained in numerous ways (including within psychoanalytic organizations itself and many other 'micro-totalitarianisms'). During the regime, the same person fighting against it in one role might be enforcing its rules in another. To take another example, Otto Fenichel combined both a radical social position with an orthodox psychoanalytic theory, and later, a more orthodox social position at least in public after immigration to the U.S. (Jacoby, 1986; Dodds, 2019). Freud indeed contains both radical and authoritarian tendencies.

We all contain something of a Trump in our various forms of denial on climate change even while we are struggling against it. Robert M. Young acknowledged his acism (derived from growing up in Texas during a period of a very active KKK) despite politically and in his psychoanalytic writings fighting against it (Young, 1992). In pointing this out, I am trying to be aware of the splits that are all too easy to make and realize that the danger is inside us and out there. I am certainly not suggesting that means pulling back from activism. We need it more than ever, and I certainly follow Orange's call for organized psychoanalysis to step up and engage with the great dangers we currently face. However, whether organized psychoanalysis does this or not, we all can do what we can individually, together in organizations such as the Climate Psychology Alliance, in universities and other institutions, and in wider social structures.

Liviu Poenaru | For an analyst like you, driven by Deleuze/Guattari or Foucault's views, psychotherapy can be understood as a form of social control. How does this critical perspective change your clinical work? For if we start from the premise that preparing our patients to be fit for productivity means handing them over to new forms of violence. It also means that we are accomplices to a political power that offers us privileges.

Joseph Dodds | For me, this is a crucial issue for psychoanalysis. Our role should not be to decide how a patient should live, what values they should have, or what goals to strive for. One of the genuine joys in the work is to regularly encounter people who deal with life in a fundamentally different way to the 'normal', or to myself. It is pretty humbling to be constantly reminded that many assumptions about people we all make, mostly unconsciously, can be wrong and regularly contradicted by the wonderfully unique individuals who share their innermost thoughts and feelings with us. Mainly as I see people from all over the world (I primarily work with foreigners living in Prague who speak English better than Czech, which means they are from almost every country other than Czech). I am often genuinely amazed at the different ways to approach the worlds that are possible, and even when these attempts go wrong, our job is to help them with their task of living in the world, not to turn them into versions of ourselves. In some cases that path may lead them into more common ways of living if they choose. In other times they can find something genuinely new. Many face dilemmas. If they begin to question fundamental aspects of their world and society and their job or role within that world, it can cause real problems. It would be easier to forget their critical insights and go back to the same life as before; it certainly is often more profitable. Our commitment is not to any particular social power but to the truth of each person we work with. It is not our job to tell people how to solve their problems of life, but to help

people see them more clearly and help them find their path. Freud's idea of overdetermination is often helpful. It may well be that someone's rebellion against social authority is in part against the authority of their father, but it does not mean they do not also have rational and justifiable reasons to rebel against that social authority (see [Fromm, 2003](#)). We need to always keep in mind just how much power we can have in our patients' lives and their inner world and the tremendous responsibility involved in the transference and analyst–patient relationship. With all power comes privilege and potential abuse. We have many temptations in our work to try to enact that power, whether as agents of social control, for sexual pleasure, or narcissistic power fantasies, or even out of genuine concern to help our patients live better lives ('rescue fantasies' can be among the most damaging; see [Berman, 2001](#)). The analyst's ethical commitment is paramount and is perhaps the single most crucial element of our work. That ethical commitment is focused on the clinical encounter but extends to our engagement with our psychoanalytic societies and the wider world.

Liviu Poenaru | As suggested before, we have learned in our psychoanalysis training that it is necessary to remain focused only on internal drives and not on environmental issues. In your book ([Dodds, 2011](#)) you also start from the premise that psychoanalysis is a "psychology without ecology", which means that it does not consider the ecosystems with which individuals interact. How do we treat, in a clinical setting, the permanent external propaganda and the violence of a digital environment which exploits, day and night, our potentialities, weaknesses, defence mechanisms, cognitive biases, emotions, and behaviours? It seems that it is similar when we treat an abused woman whose posture can be interpreted as a form of masochism or as an expression of the violence of patriarchal domination. Are we not exposing the patient to iatrogenic effects if we remain neutral and silent (or complicit, or ignorant) about these factors, which are now well known in the scientific and critical fields? Is it the dark side of psychoanalysis?

Joseph Dodds | In my writings (e.g. [Dodds, 2011, 2012, 2019](#)) I tried to explore the directions of interactions between the psyche and the nonhuman. In one direction stands nature, and we feel both drawn towards merger and horror and revulsion at this possibility that we then try to reinforce the boundary, often violently. Simultaneously, we face technology, an immortal techno-god; we also feel both desire for merger (both an omnipotent fantasy of power, and its opposite, to let our selves go in the digital stream) and horror against this. Wolfman and Cyborg are also both related to the uncanny. When I think about widening psychoanalysis to the broader world, this has to include trying to make sense then of our increasingly digital existence. The coronavirus forces both on us. We are more aware of the power of nonhuman nature (the virus) and how fragile human systems are embedded in the wider ecological frame, but simultaneously we have witnessed an acceleration of our becoming-cyborg, with more and more of our lives now conducted online, by necessity. Psychoanalysts need to engage with this if we want to understand even our patients' most basic things. As portrayed on social media, people's digital selves take on increasing roles in our mental life, especially today. Whether we feel hostility or excitement towards where we are going (or anything else in between), we need to think psychoanalytically, which means critically.

The internet provides a new way of research (what would Freud with his fascination with sexuality and perversion have done with the ability to explore sexual fantasies in internet pornography?) and is affecting what the mind is in important ways that we are only just beginning to understand. The stratification of the mind into layers is flattened out online, as we are always only a click away from the most extreme forms of sex and violence, and our children know how to find this and get around any blocks we put there better than us. Unfortunately, the speed of these changes

may well be outstripping our ability to make sense of it. Most psychoanalysts still haven't even started digesting Sherry Turkle's book 'Life on the Screen', yet technology and digital culture have already moved way beyond it. We can usefully apply psychoanalytic understandings of groups to the splitting and paranoid-schizoid world of collective identities online and offline. However, now we are faced with another factor amplifying and triggering many of our worse tendencies, as the seemingly all-powerful algorithms threaten to dissolve further our sense of agency. In a couple of my classes, I have been looking at, for about 15 years, the psychology of the internet and digital culture, and I am struck by how fast everything is changing, how quickly my own understanding from lived experience online is already a barely remembered archaic relic from a bygone era for younger people. In these classes, I learn as much from my students as vice versa (as in analysis). I think crucial work needs to be done on linking an understanding of the algorithms with psychoanalytic understandings of the unconscious of individuals and groups in the online world. Schizoanalytic approaches can be very beneficial here. Indeed, as analysts in the consulting room, we need to listen to our patients' lives and experiences in the electronic sphere as much as anything else. There is a genuine risk that significant aspects of our patients' lives remain split off from what they share with us, existing in another dimension we know nothing of, especially if they feel their analyst has no idea at all about this world.

Liviu Poenaru | Why would a transversal "at the edge of chaos" psychoanalysis lose its essence, and how could its essence be defined at today's ecoresponsible time?

Joseph Dodds | By essence, it seems to suggest something solid or eternal. Perhaps the 'essence' of transversal psychoanalysis is precisely the flux, process, becoming rather than an essence. The world keeps moving, the psyche keeps moving, and we need to stay open to the world in its myriad directions, which though changing, still does flow through some recognizable forms. While we cannot assume this will remain so, in all the dramatic changes of our culture, there is still something recognizably human, even when being human does change with different settings, processes, assemblages, connections and historical developments. We still read Shakespeare today and Sophocles, so perhaps despite all the world's changes some familiarity remains. The changes we are going through now seem frightening, but we have been through many in the past after all. We must be open to the possibility that where we are going now is something radically new. In other words, will people be able to read Shakespeare, or Freud for that matter, in a way that would make any sense to them, and does this matter? Will there still be humans in the future, or will we have gone down with the sinking ecological ship of climate change, driven to extinction by the next pandemic, lost in the merger with the computers, or destroyed ourselves in the old-fashioned way of war? As long as there is a psyche, the ability to reflect, and to connect to others, there can be psychoanalysis. The dynamic process that emerges in the relation between minds may remain, even if some of the maps of the territory that emerges from the encounter will need to be continuously updated. Psychoanalysis, of any form, needs to be transversal if it is to make sense of itself and the world it finds itself in; and it needs to engage in that world, as participant as well as observer, working alongside others in the common struggle against an uninhabitable Earth.

Liviu Poenaru | Thank you very much, Joseph Dodds, for having accepted to share with *In Analysis* your transversal universe, which, in my view, is vital for a psychoanalysis in tune with an unprecedented contemporary environment.

Disclosure of interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interest.

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