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# In the Darkness of This Time: Wittgenstein and Freud on Uncertainty

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## Abstract

Both Wittgenstein and Freud experienced the crisis of humanism resulting from the first and second world wars. Although they were both considered to be influential figures, they hardly investigated the ways in which people could cope with the consequences of these crises. However, Wittgenstein and Freud did suggest ways of understanding uncertainties caused by real life events, as well as by the nature of human thought processes. This article will explore the therapeutic ways of dealing with uncertainties common to both thinkers and the different concepts facilitating their methodologies. The central contention of this article is that both Wittgenstein and Freud developed a complex methodology, acknowledging the constant and unexpected changes humans have deal with, whilst also offering the possibility of defining “hinge propositions” and “language-games” which can stabilize our consciousness.

**Keywords:** Wittgenstein, Freud, uncertainty, hinge propositions, chaos, complexity, defense-mechanism, uncanny

## 1. Introduction

The relevance of philosophical and psychoanalytic thinking to existential problems.

“I make them public with misgivings. It is not impossible that it should fall to the lot of this work, in its poverty and in the darkness of this time, to bring light into one brain or another a but, of course, it is not likely”[1].

In what ways can the years in which Freud and Wittgenstein lived, brighten the darkness of our own era? This chapter will examine Freud and Wittgenstein’s main ideas about feelings of certainty or uncertainty in everyday life and at times of crisis to learn from them how to cope with uncertainty. Freud and Wittgenstein lived in pluralistic Vienna at the beginning of the 20th century, sharing the same cultural climate, an era when a multidisciplinary approach to culture was blossoming.

Though Wittgenstein was younger than Freud he could not avoid relating to him [2]. Ostensibly, Freud and Wittgenstein were involved in different fields of knowledge. However, both thinkers experienced two world wars that led to personal crises for each of them alongside the general crises that afflicted Vienna as a consequence of these wars (Although Freud died in 1939, he nonetheless experienced the consequences of the Nazi’s rise to power including the arrest of his daughter and

their escape to London in the dead of the night). Freud (1856–1939) the father of psychoanalysis, formulated the characteristics of the psyche's development and the psychoanalytic technique that facilitates coping with pathologies in the functioning of the human psyche. Wittgenstein (1889–1951) commonly accepted as having been the progenitor of the Linguistic Turn, [3] stepped beyond the boundaries of philosophy, involved himself in the social sciences and humanities and proposed a set of tools to investigate the way in which language functions in various practices. According to Wittgenstein, the need for such an investigation existed due to illusions and confusions that arise from a mistaken use of language [4].

Both thinkers dealt with a central question, namely: 'What can be said to be the connections between man and his world as they come to be expressed and accessible to us in language?' Each of them dealt with this question from a different perspective. Freud formulated the 'Reality Principle', [5] and Wittgenstein 'the picture theory' [6]. In both contexts. The external reality imposes on an individual the recognition of a situation which, at least in part, it is difficult for him to accept. This common position is an important starting point for the purpose of this article which also deals with coping with the reality of Covid 19 imposed on humanity and has created – among other things – an existential feeling of uncertainty.

The intellectual closeness between Freud and Wittgenstein applied only to Wittgenstein who considered himself to be Freud's pupil, [7] and wrote about various aspects of psychoanalysis [8]. However, especially from the 1990s onwards, much has been written in research papers about the parallels between them [9]. However, with the passage of time there has been a change of view. In the twenty-first century, it has become more common for researchers to discuss the contribution of Wittgenstein's study of language to psychoanalytic technique, than the subject of Freud's influence on Wittgenstein [10]. In this century, in which interdisciplinary research has become the accepted methodology, a further possible line of inquiry inspired by these two important thinkers can be suggested, namely: an investigation of the concept of uncertainty in the writings of Freud and Wittgenstein. Uncertainty is a major cause of difficulty in dealing with a crisis, including the crisis of Covid 19 which has affected many aspects of people's lives across the globe.

Freud addressed both personal and social epistemological processes in situations of crisis. Wittgenstein wrote his third book to suggest a way of coping with inherent uncertainty which characterizes modern thought. Ostensibly, Freud and Wittgenstein investigated uncertainty in entirely different contexts. Freud in the context of the analysis and the identification of psychic pathologies, whilst Wittgenstein carried out his investigation in the context of thought and the daily use of language. However, in both contexts, Freud and Wittgenstein examined the concept and sense of uncertainty, and proposed ways of coping. Similarly, we shall see in what follows, how Freud was aided by linguistic studies during his research and the ways in which Wittgenstein pointed to psychic states to shed further light on the philosophical content of a subject. The central argument is that there exists a significant common denominator in the approaches adopted by Freud and Wittgenstein to the subject of uncertainty. Alongside this, ideas will be presented that typify each of the thinkers and which characterize the uniqueness of coping with existential uncertainty.

## **2. Types of uncertainty according to Freud and Wittgenstein: the common denominator**

One can distinguish between two types of uncertainty shared by Freud and Wittgenstein. The first is existential uncertainty, which arises from a recognition of

a continuously changing reality and an inability prophesy the future. The second, is the uncertainty that exists in the pragmatic realm of psychoanalytic techniques and language research. This field deals with the dynamic boundaries of methodological concepts as well as changing aspects of interpreting reality.

I propose terming existential uncertainty “conceptual uncertainty” since it is derived from two facts. The first being that the world, including our own bodies, are in a continuous state of movement and change. Fact number two is that the future cannot be prophesied with any degree of certainty. All we can do is speculate as to what that future will be like. I suggest terming this uncertainty “methodological uncertainty” because it arises from the nature of psychoanalytic and linguistic inquiry. Freud and Wittgenstein demonstrated, each in his own way and in his own research, that the methodological concepts they adopted are prone to a process of continuous change.

### **3. Conceptual uncertainty according to Freud**

Freud formulated two kinds of existential conceptual uncertainty. The first is the uncertainty created because of an unforeseen eruption of human cruelty which undermines the ability to rely on human moral values. Freud described this in his article “Thoughts for the times on war and death” (1915) [11]. In this article, Freud dealt with “the disillusionment of the war” when, in its aftermath, he was forced to admit to himself that he had difficulty explaining the aggression and destructiveness that erupted in the course of the conflict on the part of people who shared a similar culture based on the values of modern humanism [12].

As a result of the total humiliation that included the world of science, people were left “without a glimmering of the future that is being shaped” [13]. The surprising depths to which humanity had sunk led to a sense of uncertainty about human nature itself. In retrospect, Freud offered explanations and a proposal to improve human future. The explanations offered by Freud with the benefit of hindsight, pointed to man’s primitive mind as a permanent infrastructure to which a person returns in certain circumstances even after gaining a higher “stage of development” [14]. The second explanation concerned the dependence of our intelligence in emotional life [15]. Meaning that emotional interest supersedes logical interest so that where there are emotional resistance human beings will act in line with the emotion of resistance rather than with wisdom. The war proved this to be the case at the level of nations rather than only in relation to individuals [16].

These two characteristics are shared by both ancient and modern man. However, with respect to modern man, Freud suggested the psychoanalytic description of the mind which sheds light on the mechanism that leads to regression as well as the capacity to cope with it. This, by offering an additional clarification of the nature of the unconscious.

According to Freud, modern man’s unconscious is problematic in three ways.

“Our unconscious is just as inaccessible to the idea of our own death, just as murderously inclined towards strangers, just as divided (that is, ambivalent) towards those we love, as was *primaeval man*” [17].

As was the case with *primeval man*, participation in war enables modern man to actualize his unconsciousness’s problematic inclinations and even compels him to do so. When war coerces a person to be a ‘hero’, it forces him to ignore the possibility of his death and be cruel to others. In the best psychoanalytic tradition, Freud suggests that modern man should deal with the repressed by creating space for thoughts about personal death. This would achieve two psychic gains. A recognition of reality

and making life bearable. Freud concluded the article by saying that “If you want to endure life, prepare yourself for death [18].

Thus, Freud dealt with the existential uncertainty which developed from coping with the First World War I, by pointing to the permanent source in a person's psyche that leads human beings to be cruel to one another. The source, Freud posited, is the inclination to regression that remains in an individual's psyche throughout his life. Uncertainty, in times of war against an enemy or a virus that spreads across the globe, awakens the inclination to regression. The solution proposed by Freud is a way of coping that characterizes the psychoanalytic world view. Awareness and coping with threatening and frightening subjects. It should be noted that there is a significant juxtaposition between the “enduring” proposed by Freud, and the nature of the “the depressive position” formulated by Melanie Klein. According to Klein, this position is the result of a fear of loss. However, it is a position that can also become a developmental achievement when there is an acceptance of such dangers as hunger and loss [19].

#### **4. Methodological uncertainty according to Freud**

The second type of conceptual uncertainty was formulated by Freud in the context of investigating the boundaries of analysis. Freud argued that total and final fulfillment of analysis cannot be reached because individual defense mechanism that resist therapy cannot be discovered entirely by the therapist. In Freud's view, even experienced analysts must return to analysis every few years because conceivably their defense mechanisms create disturbances of which they are unaware.

In his article “Analysis terminable and interminable (1937), Freud discussed the reasons why one cannot say at any point that the analysis has come to an end [20]. First, Freud returned to the three known conditions for terminating analysis [21]. One of the paper's central subjects, which subsequently enable Freud to formulate his concept of Fundamental Methodological uncertainty, was the way in which the Ego's defense mechanisms operate during analysis. When the patient's defense mechanisms resist the exposure of the contents of the Id, the therapy becomes deadlocked [22]. By its very nature, the Ego resists change and the power and depth of this resistance to change will determine the therapy's fate. In the case under study here, the defense mechanisms collide with the uncertainty embodied in the therapist's interpretations and in world events that threaten the Ego's regular tendencies. Up until now we have been discussing ideas already expressed by Freud in earlier articles. But the novelty in this article lies in the importance that Freud attributed to the individuality of the defense mechanism [23].

Freud described defense mechanisms as a universal system which, in part, is formed culturally and socially and is, as such, inherited. However, alongside this, Freud stressed the individual functioning of these mechanisms which is expressed by a choice [unconscious of course) unique to every individual and is reflected in his conduct. The difficulty of researching this choice limits the therapeutic dialog and, at times, halts it. Moreover, sometimes the patient's personal resistance cannot be in this or any other defense mechanism. Thus, in Freud's view, the obfuscation that is created makes it difficult to continue the therapy. For example, at times it is not possible to understand the patient's difficulty in transferring the libido from one object to another. Or, conversely, one cannot comprehend the ease with which the patient passes from one object to another.

Considering the difficult in pinpointing the form of the individual personality that is the foundation of defense mechanisms, Freud formulated his conclusion

with respect to the endlessness of analysis. He likened analysis to education and government and argued that “It almost looks as if analysis were the third of those ‘impossible’ professions in which one can be sure beforehand of achieving unsatisfying result.” [24].

Further to this it can be argued that Freud formulated a new context of uncertainty with which the therapist should be reconciled. This is a conceptual uncertainty involved in the psychoanalytic technique: it is never possible to find out in detail how the individual components of the defense mechanism work. In the context of uncertainties caused because of the corona virus, different and varied ways of coping can be seen, alongside a sharp increase in requests for psychological help. The combination of the two types of uncertainty according to Freud sharpens the difficulty of observing the collective and personal behavior of human beings and leads to the placement of the principle of uncertainty as a key principle in both the analyst and the patient’s consciousness. Moreover, towards the end of his article on the infinity of analysis, Freud formulated an idea that makes it possible to reformulate the reality principle.

“we must not forget that the analytic relationship is based on a love of truth - that is, on a recognition of reality - and that it precludes any kind of sham or deceit” [25].

Meaning that, even when reality is unbearable, the pursuit of truth underlies psychoanalytic theory and does not allow for the disregard or distortion of reality. In the two articles we have discussed, it can be seen that despite Freud’s successful and extensive experience in the study of the mind, his love of truth was the basis for placing uncertainty (theoretical and technical) in a central place in human consciousness.

## **5. Conceptual uncertainty according to Wittgenstein**

Though Wittgenstein was younger than Freud, he preceded him in formulating the notion conceptual uncertainty. In his first book, *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein formulated the boundaries of thought and expression including the place of free will.

“The freedom of the will consists in the fact that future events cannot be KNOWN now. It would only be possible for us to know them if causality were an INNER necessity--like, say, that of logical inference.” [26].

Free Will is not dependent on facts and is even based on our inability to prophesy future events. From this it follows that decisions based on prophesying the future include inherent uncertainty. This uncertainty also exists in relation to claims of the recurrence of routine and permanent natural phenomena such as sunrise [27]. The principle is that “The world is independent of my will.” [28].

A second kind of uncertainty is described in Wittgenstein’s second book “Philosophical Investigations, the best known and most influential of his works. It was published in 1953, two years after Wittgenstein’s death.

The book’s influence spread well beyond the fields of philosophy, reaching all the social sciences humanities, including psychoanalysis. In it, Wittgenstein explores the common ways in which everyday language is used, pointing to the illusions held and the mistakes made by people who attribute to grammar the possibility of creating absolute concepts or meanings that have clear boundaries.

Wittgenstein coined several methodological terms that enriched the discourse in various fields such as: language-games, patterns of life, rule, and depth-grammar. At the same time, he repeatedly returned to the idea of language’s constant dynamism, including its concepts and the possibility of unambiguous interpretation. The paragraph in which Wittgenstein formulated the essence of his claim is Section

201, in which he formulated the paradox which determines the constant uncertainty in the use of language [29].

The central paradox formulated by Wittgenstein in the book means a particular word one cannot be said to have just one firm meaning. Even when a word is used in accordance with the rule, and within a concrete pattern of life, there is no impediment to a different application of the rule and the creation of a different meaning [30].

At the end of the section, Wittgenstein re-established one of the linguistic turn's significant innovations: that the meaning of a word is, in fact, the replacement of a word with another, and not beyond that. That is, it is not possible to distinguish between a word and its meaning, but only one word can be replaced by another. The conclusion to be drawn from this move is that there is inherent uncertainty in the use of language, and that in fact one cannot be sure of the meaning or permanence of a concept in our lives. In the second part of the book, Wittgenstein clarified the precedence that reality has over concepts. This precedence illustrates the possibility of changing our concepts in line with changes [31].

Even when a person believes that his propositions are correct, and that changing them would result in a missed opportunity to examine reality, he can, according to Wittgenstein, imagine a change in the facts of nature and thus also come to terms with changing his concepts. The difficulty in changing ones beliefs, as proposed by Wittgenstein, is the basis of a fundamental question that runs like a second thread throughout this article: If reality changes, why is it so difficult for us to adapt to the fact that concepts also change? Why is there a tendency to attribute a physical quality to concepts, instead of seeing how they are used in a certain pattern of life?

In his article, "Patterns of Life: A Third Wittgenstein Concept", Michel Ter Hark discusses Wittgenstein's thoughts referred to above [32]. In answer to the question of how to cope with the difficulty of psychological "indeterminacy and uncertainty", Ter Hark showed that there are numerous manuscripts in which one can find examples of Wittgenstein's position that a concept with sharp and fixed boundaries cannot be created [33]. Ter Hark emphasized that part of Wittgenstein's revolution lies in his attempt to understand this uncertainty of our concepts which arises because of 'unharness' and 'indeterminacy' not as a defect, but as.

"...revealing the structure of psychological thought itself, he has to devote himself to investigating the facts of human nature that shape the indeterminate contours of our use of psychological concepts." [34].

It seems to me that what Wittgenstein has proposed here is a way of dealing with the uncertainty created by an international epidemic, or a major disaster: the emotional difficulty stems from the need to change the concepts to which we are accustomed. However, if we understand the dynamic mechanism of our concepts, and accept the impossibility of setting any concept in stone, it may be easier for us to alter our concepts and adapt them to the changes that have taken place as a result of the event, however difficult that may be.

## **6. Wittgenstein from conceptual to methodological uncertainty**

"On Certainty", Wittgenstein's third and final book, was being written by him up until a few days before his death and summarizes the complexity of his worldview. In the book, Wittgenstein formulated the nature of certainty [35] along with a constant awareness of the possibility of change:

"The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift" [36].

With the help of a comparison between a river and consciousness, Wittgenstein illustrated two ideas he had already presented in his book “Philosophical Investigations”, and which are the basis of conceptual uncertainty: language is dynamic, [37] and language use has already been made within the framework of a pattern of life that must be accepted as a given. However, his main innovation in his last book was that in every pattern of life there are “hinges” without which it is impossible to think and act:

We just cannot investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put. My Life consists in my being content to accept many things [38].

The use of language for the purpose of making claims must be based on assumptions that are beyond any doubt. For example, the assumption that a thought can be formulated in a language, that speakers of that language can understand these claims, and so on. These assumptions belong to the basic logic of language use, which creates a kind of confidence, and function as “hinges”. However, immediately after claiming the need for “hinges”, Wittgenstein made the claim that he was coming to terms with many things in his life. The metaphor of the “hinges,” as Danièle Moyal-Sharrock put it, means that the part of the hinges on which knowledge turns, are not justified by the facts of nature, but “anchored in regularities of nature” [39]. Wittgenstein adopts the metaphor of the “hinges”, thereby signaling a shift from conceptual uncertainty to methodological uncertainty: the hinges represent a means that make it possible in practice to use language, although the mythology that created them may change. Like the paradox of rules, presented above from “Philosophical Investigations”, the hinges also function paradoxically as a means, on the one hand of achieving stability, and, on the other hand as a means that can change.

The conclusion so far from the discussion of uncertainty in both Freud and Wittgenstein’s writings has been that it exists on the conceptual as well as on the methodological level. Uncertainty on both levels has been described as an integral part of the nature of language and thought.

## **7. Freud and Wittgenstein on chaos and complexity and its relation to uncertainty**

Further to this conclusion, it is worth examining the similarities between conceptual and methodological uncertainty inspired by Freud and Wittgenstein, as well as theories of chaos and complexity from the 1980s onwards. On the one hand, it would appear that the seeds of theories of chaos and complexity already exist in Freud’s and Wittgenstein’s writings. Wittgenstein described language and thought in terms of complexity, and Freud used the term ‘chaos’ in two main contexts. On the other hand, neither of them conceptualized chaos nor complexity as components of the same range, that are usually considered in these theories. Therefore it is firstly necessary to clarify the principal part of theories of chaos and complexity so as to conceptualize Freud’s and Wittgenstein’s concepts of uncertainty. Secondly, I will summarize Freud and Wittgenstein’s contribution to notions of chaos and complexity. Thirdly, to emphasis the novelty of this article, it will suggest Freud and Wittgenstein’s contribution to coping with a sudden and unexpected event, while filling the existing lacuna in chaos and complexity theories.

The term “complexity” can be attributed to the revolution described by Thomas Kuhn in his influential book: *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* [40]. Influenced by Wittgenstein who resisted the possibility of a final and complete definition of any concept [41]. Kuhn coined the term “paradigm” to express the view that

scientific theories are not bound to any a priori order. The position adopted by Kuhn, is compatible with the main-stream definition of complexity:

“complexity is the awareness that nothing can be included in an exhaustive definition, as the possible observation vertexes of a single phenomenon are potentially infinite. There are no pontifical meta-psychological models” [42].

Complexity is a scientific theory that reflects the acceptance of the impossibility of limiting and defining any phenomenon, as well as an understanding that there is no theory that can completely unite or clarify all the experiences of a particular concept. Thus, this position leads to an epistemological change in the worldview, which becomes based on inherent uncertainty:

“Irreversibility and non-linearity of processes originates diversification, beauty and the complexity of the natural world, constituting the creative dynamics of very different systems: from biochemistry to meteorology, from cosmology to psychology. [...] **All this involves a radical epistemological change which makes us observe the world in terms of uncertainty**, and of the ephemeral but at the same time creative self-organization which discovers time as fundamental concept to the comprehension of the evolutive process” [43].

Uncertainty stems from the nature of processes in all aspects of life, nature, human society, and works of art. In each of the areas, the theory of complexity reveals diversity and dynamism that lead to a conceptual change accepting uncertainty as a starting-point of any scientific clarification. This kind of uncertainty, both conceptual and methodological, is also the ground [basis?] for a renewed concept of chaos.

The concept “chaos” (Chàos) originated in Greek philosophy, meaning a shapeless and disorderly situation that preceded the existence of the world. From the days of Greek philosophy and throughout Western thought, this concept was discussed in different contexts. From the 1980s, new, interdisciplinary theories developed a new scientific attitude emphasizing the chaos’s nature [quality?] of complexity, instead of its formlessness and disorder. In this spirit, Nicoletta Sala described the relationship between the two concepts as a possible point of view [perspective?] for examining any kind of system.

“Complexity can occur in natural and man-made systems, as well as in social structures and human beings. [...] A complex system is neither completely deterministic nor completely random and it exhibits both characteristics. [...] **The complexity is the most difficult area of chaos**, and it describes the complex motion and the dynamics of sensitive systems. **The chaos reveals a hidden fractal order underlying all seemingly chaotic events**” [44].

This description clearly illustrates the combination of the structural and post-structural aspects of theories of chaos and complexity. The way chaos is defined, as the hidden-ordered basis of the complex organization of each system, challenges the possibility of unexpected events. Although an event like the Covid-19 pandemic can be explained retrospectively, from a psychic perspective, this explanation is insufficient.

The study of psychoanalysis from the late 1980s welcomed theories of chaos and complexity [45]. The basis for this lies in Freud’s writings, in his description of the dream and the unconscious, as well as the nature of impulse [46]. Freud was unaware that he was ahead of his time, but it must be possible to find both concepts of chaos and complexity in the infrastructure of his thinking. Freud’s contribution to our discussion is to show that it is impossible to create direct access from the id and from the unconscious to the conscious and ordinary language.

Rather than using the term “chaos”, Wittgenstein used the adjective “complex” when describing the action of language. The main cause of this complexity, in Wittgenstein’s view is that “Language disguises thought”, and therefore mistakes

and disruptions are created in the use of language (which create methodological uncertainties). The key to solving this is in social agreements how to use the language correctly:

“Man possesses the ability to construct languages capable of expressing every sense, without having any idea how each word has meaning or what its meaning is. [...] **Everyday language is a part of the human organism and is no less complicated than it.** [...] Language disguises thought. [...] The tacit conventions on which the understanding of everyday language depends are **enormously complicated**” [47].

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein already presented the complexity of language as well as the complexity of the conventions of everyday language. Two separate levels of consciousness participate in the mechanism of creating sense: the universal grammar, independent of human influence and decision, and social agreements, independent of individual choice. Nevertheless, we use language instinctively, being unaware not only of its complexity, but also of the gap between its “outward form” and our thought. In this manner, Wittgenstein initiated the wave of theories of complexity concerning the relationships between language and thought.

These two distinctions, about the complexity of language and the importance of consent, also appear as key arguments in Wittgenstein’s late thinking:

“It is not only agreement in definitions, but also (odd as it may sound) agreement in judgements that is required for communication by means of language. This seems to abolish logic but does not do so” [48].

Just as Wittgenstein emphasized the importance of social agreements in his early and later work, so he also pointed to the logical basis of grammar, which allows for a ratio of pictoriality between language and the world:

“The agreement, the harmony, between thought and reality consists in this: that if I say falsely that something is red, then all the same, it is red that it isn’t.” [49].

Language can be used in a false way, but Wittgenstein claimed a statement that is not obvious in the postmodern era: there may be a correlation between the use of language and facts in the world. Naturally, there may be a discrepancy as we saw above. However, it is key to the understanding not only of ordinary use of language, but also of a sudden crisis. In conclusion, Freud and Wittgenstein’s joint contribution to contemporary theories of chaos and complexity lies in their presentation the mental system as one of complexity that stems from the difficulty of bridging the gap between two types of consciousness: the unconscious way in which we dream, and even use language, which creates mistakes and disagreements (in which there is a chaotic dimension). Conversely, when consent is reached language can be used effectively, and human suffering becomes easier to bear.

However, this uncertainty is part of a proper examination of reality, and it does not involve dealing with a surprising change that cannot be predicted. Thus, in the final stage of the article, I would like to offer a discussion of uncertainty embodied in the concept of **The Uncanny** which expresses an experience of sudden and unexpected uncertainty. Freud and Wittgenstein both related to the concept of **The Uncanny**, its clarification with their help may assist in coping with the experience.

## **8. The Uncanny as methodological uncertainty according to Freud and Wittgenstein**

If, inspired by Wittgenstein, we relate to a pattern of life as a given in the framework of which certainty exists, then if the form of life radically changes, as it did during the Covid 19 pandemic, that certainty is also undermined. Such a situation not only exposes the relativity of certainty, since it is dependent on the permanence

of the pattern of life, but also creates an experience of ambivalence: on the one hand, patterns of life such as the daily routine, the division of time between work and home, are disturbed. Added to that, are worries about one's health and livelihood. These create an experience of ambiguousness and anxiety. On the other hand, there remain hinges from the previous form of life, whose reality creates difficulty in verbalizing reality and defining its nature.

In their writings, Freud and Wittgenstein tried to discover how psychic experiences that cause distress are verbalized. Each of them also wondered in their own way, how a person gets caught up in an experience of ambiguousness and the difficulty he has in verbalizing what he feels. Wittgenstein's assertion that interpretation involves the substitution of one word by another, facilitates the substitution of 'uncertainty' by 'The Uncanny', a concept shared by Freud and Wittgenstein, and one which may be helpful in shedding light on the experience. Both were interested in this experience in the context of daily life, and which is also highly relevant to the period in which we now live, when the pandemic caused by Covid 19 is phenomenon that can be monitored both empirically and rationally. In what follows, I will show that although in his 1919 article which he devoted to the subject of the Uncanny [50]. Freud focused on the aspects involved in the creation of literature, he also sought to link his conclusions to the actual reality rather than limiting it to the realm of literary research.

Inspired by Freud's article, Nicholas Royle [51], devoted an entire book to an interdisciplinary discussion of the concept, and in another book in which he discusses the concept in the context of literary research, he concluded that:

"The uncanny can be described as the thoughts and feelings which may arise on those occasions when the homely becomes unhomely, when the familiar becomes unfamiliar or the unfamiliar becomes strangely familiar. Alternatively, the uncanny is [...] – that which 'ought to have remained... secret and hidden but has come to light" [52].

The uncanny, as being a confusion between the familiar and the unfamiliar, and as something that should remain hidden, is appropriate for the construction of a literary text, especially a detective or horror story. However, this definition leaves the uncanny as a literary ploy but does not allude to its cause, nor does it include any guidance as to how one deals with the experience. On the other hand, Freud in his discussion of the concept, offered his opinion on the 'before' and 'after' encounter with the uncanny.

In the first place it should be noted that Freud used this title throughout his writings, and not just in an article devoted to its discussion. For example, in his book "Dream Interpretation", Freud often mentions a sense of uncertainty in the context of dream interpretation. Uncertainty can arise because of partial recollection of the components of the dream, the patient's disagreement with the interpretation offered by the analyst, and because of difficulty in creating an integration between the dream's components. To connect dream-thoughts to construct a dream-situation, Freud proposed a technique that dispels uncertainty:

"In analyzing a dream, if an uncertainty can be resolved into an 'either-or', we must replace it for purposes of interpretation by an 'and' and take each of the apparent alternatives as an independent starting-point for a series of associations" [53].

Freud proposed a grammatical guideline for solving the interpretive complication, and even adopted, as did Wittgenstein. To this end Freud suggested replacing a dichotomous interpretation with an interpretation that contain two starting points. Namely, it leads to a softening of the perception of reality and of its sense of finality.

Freud also used this concept in the context of 'omnipotence of thoughts', a phrase suggested to Freud by one of his patients, who tended to attribute magical power to his thoughts [54]. In the same context, Freud noted that we

sometimes attribute an “uncanny” quality” even when we are able to use our rational judgment [55].

This sense of independence of thought is also at the heart of Freud’s article on the threatened. Freud disagreed with Jentsch, the psychiatrist who preceded him and wrote an essay on the threatened. Jentsch focused on the threatened as intellectual uncertainty and Freud disagreed with him [56]. Freud suggested focusing on two key components of the experience: doubleness and a compulsion to repeat. “Intellectual uncertainty,” [57] according to Freud, means that a person sees something or someone and is unable to identify it or them. This uncertainty, in Jentsch’s view, originates in the cognitive system which is why he termed it thus. Freud, however, disagreed with him, arguing that it was a different kind of uncertainty that originates in the defense mechanism which hides early and primary anxiety stemming from castration anxiety in childhood. In the framework of the mental process of protection, a person sees a different image, that conceals the original nature of anxiety. In this instance, Freud described the link between repressed anxiety and the uncanny as a symbolic connection and argued that there is no necessary connection between the nature of anxiety and the nature of the uncanny, but that the repressed anxiety constitutes the uncanny [58]. Which is to say, that repressed anxiety turns any given state into the uncanny. In another case, when a person encounters the “secret nature of the uncanny”, there is no symbolic copy, but only something familiar that seems Unheimlich:

“this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression” [59].

Freud expanded the understanding of the threatened beyond its function as a literary ploy, to incorporate an experience indicative of early anxiety. In our case, it can be inferred that the greater the pool of repressed anxieties in the mind, so the uncertainty that arises because of an external event will create an uncanny experience. Could an uncanny experience be related to a mechanism other than repressed anxiety that is transformed into the uncanny, or anxiety that arises and creates a sense of being thrown out of home?

Wittgenstein suggested another aspect of the uncanny experience:

“But can’t I imagine that people around me are automata, lack consciousness, even though they behave in the same way as usual? [...] the idea is perhaps a little uncanny. But just try to hang on to this idea during your ordinary intercourse with others - in the street, say! Say to yourself, for example: “The children over there are mere automata; all their liveliness is mere automatism.” And you will either find these words becoming quite empty; or you will produce in yourself uncanny feeling” [60].

The only section in Wittgenstein’s book “Philosophical Investigations” in which he discusses the experience of the uncanny, depicts a combined experience of uncertainty and the uncanny. Wittgenstein describes a situation in which a person experiences human he observes as laborers working mechanically and automatically. That is, he fails to make the analogy between himself and them, and to attribute to them an inner world, feelings, and thoughts, but only actions that appear to be inhuman. Although many scholars have discussed the uncertainty in Wittgenstein’s writings regarding what is happening to an-other, the above citation shows the opposite: the (temporary, apparently) inability to see the individual humanity, and the vision of another person as an automaton, creates in the observer an experience of uncanniness. Moreover, in this section, Wittgenstein goes beyond the routine boundaries of certainty within a pattern of life and focuses on an experience that can be universal, a sense of alienation that creates discomfort. One can combine Freud and Wittgenstein’s thoughts about the uncanny and argue that

this experience stems from an outburst of repressed anxiety which creates a sense of loneliness, strangeness and alienation, and a difficulty in seeing vitality and humanity in other human beings.

## **9. Conclusion**

The discussion of Freud and Wittgenstein's concept of uncertainty revealed two main types of uncertainty which are intermittently activated in their investigations in key contexts. The central argument, that uncertainty is in-built into the recognition of a constant process of change (of the world, of language, and of self-awareness), leads to a deeper understanding of psychoanalytic methodology and of language research, both of which include concepts that cannot be defined conclusively. Additionally, during a significant traumatic event, the ability to contain, bear and come to terms with constant uncertainty is undermined, creating an experience of uncanniness. This experience transcends the constant acceptance of uncertainty, in which repressed anxieties are released, and the ability to feel empathy and see the humanity in other humans is impaired. Dealing with outbursts of anxiety can be ameliorated with the help of the philosophical-psychoanalytic examination proposed above, by the possibility of action based on the hinges, which human beings can examine and re-establish, and with the aid of free will based on exactly the same uncertainty pointed to by Freud and Wittgenstein.

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- [1] Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*. 4th ed., ed. P. M. S. Hacker and J. Schulte, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and J. Schulte. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, p. 4.
- [2] "...though psychoanalysis was not a major theme of Wittgenstein's work, it was a theme that Wittgenstein could not leave alone, Edward Harcourt, "Wittgenstein and Psychoanalysis", in John Hyman and Hans-Johann Glock (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2017), pp. 651-66
- [3] See for example Gustav Bergmann's article, in which he coined the term "the linguistic turn" and attributed the revolution to Wittgenstein's book: (Bergmann, "Logical positivism, language, and the reconstruction of metaphysics", in Rorty, R. (ed.). *The linguistic turn*. (The University of Chicago press, 1967: 63-71, p. 63.
- [4] "A simile that has been absorbed into the forms of our language produces a false appearance which disquiets us" (Wittgenstein 2009, &112); "The confusions which occupy us arise when language is, as it were, idling, not when it is doing work" (Wittgenstein 2009, &132)
- [5] "The first example of the pleasure principle being inhibited in this way is a familiar one which occurs with regularity. We know that the pleasure principle is proper to a primary method of working on the part of the mental apparatus, but that, from the point of view of the self-preservation of the organism among the difficulties of the external world, it is from the very outset inefficient and even highly dangerous. Under the influence of the ego's instincts of self-preservation, the pleasure principle is replaced by the reality principle. This latter principle does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure, but it nevertheless demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure" (Freud, S. "Beyond the pleasure principle", in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Trans. and ed. James Strachey. New York: W. W. Norton, 1976, p. 3717).
- [6] "We picture facts to ourselves. A picture presents a situation in logical space, the existence and non-existence of states of affairs. A picture is a model of reality. In a picture objects have the elements of the picture corresponding to them" (Wittgenstein, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, & 2.1 – 2.13)
- [7] "Freud was one of the few authors he thought worth reading. He would speak of himself-at the period of these discussions-as 'a disciple of Freud' and 'a follower of Freud' (Quoted by Rush Rhees, in Wittgenstein, L. *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*. ed. Cyril Barret (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 41.
- [8] Wittgenstein, *ibid*
- [9] See for example: Heaton, J. *The Talking Cure: Wittgenstein's Therapeutic Method for Psychotherapy*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010; Heaton, J. *Wittgenstein and Psychotherapy: From Paradox to Wonder*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014, Harcourt, E. "Wittgenstein and Psychoanalysis", in John Hyman and Hans-Johann Glock (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2017), pp. 651-66.

[10] From a philosophical point of view one can agree with Edward Harcourt's determination that "'psychoanalysis was not a major theme of Wittgenstein's work" (in "Wittgenstein and Psychoanalysis", in John Hyman and Hans-Johann Glock (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Wittgenstein*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2017), pp. 651-66.

[11] Freud 1976, pp. 3066-3092.

[12] Freud, *ibid*, p. 3067.

[13] *Ibid*.

[14] "This extraordinary plasticity of mental developments is not unrestricted as regards direction; it may be described as a special capacity for involution - for regression - since it may well happen that a later and higher stage of development, once abandoned, cannot be reached again. But the primitive stages can always be re-established; the primitive mind is, in the fullest meaning of the word, imperishable" (Freud, *ibid*, p. 3077).

[15] Freud, *ibid*, p, 3079.

[16] Freud, *ibid*, p, 3080.

[17] Freud, *ibid*, p, 3092.

[18] Freud, *ibid*.

[19] "The depressive position [...] is stimulated and reinforced by the 'loss of the loved object' which the baby experiences over and over again when the mother's breast is taken away from it, and this loss reaches its climax during weaning. Sándor Radó has pointed out that 'the deepest fixation-point in the depressive disposition is to be found in the situation of threatened loss of love (Freud), more especially in the hunger situation of the suckling baby" (Klein, M. (1935). "a contribution to the psychogenesis of manic- depressive states". (*Int. J. Psycho-anal.*, 16:145-174, p. 171).

[20] Freud, *The Complete Psychological Works*, pp. 5014-5047.

[21] First, that the patient shall no longer be suffering from his symptoms and shall have overcome his anxieties and his inhibitions; and secondly, that the analyst shall judge that so much repressed material has been made conscious, so much that was unintelligible has been explained, and so much internal resistance conquered, that there is no need to fear a repetition of the pathological processes concerned" (Freud, *ibid*, p. 5018).

[22] "The therapeutic effect depends on making conscious what is repressed, in the widest sense of the word, in the id. We prepare the way for this making conscious by interpretations and constructions, but we have interpreted only for ourselves not for the patient so long as the ego holds on to its earlier defenses and does not give up its resistances. Now these resistances, although they belong to the ego, are nevertheless unconscious and in some sense separated off within the ego. [...] The ego ceases to support our efforts at uncovering the id; it opposes them, disobeys the fundamental rule of analysis, and allows no further derivatives of the repressed to emerge" (Freud, *ibid*, p. 5035).

[23] Freud, *ibid*, p. 5036.

[24] Freud, *ibid*, p. 5037.

[25] Freud, *ibid*, p. 5042.

[26] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* & 5.1362 (emphasis in the original text, D.L.).

[27] "It is a hypothesis that the sun will rise tomorrow: and this means that we do not know whether it will rise. There is no compulsion making one thing happen because another has happened. The only necessity that exists is logical necessity. The whole modern conception of the world is founded on the illusion

that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena" (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* & 6.36311-6.371).

[28] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* & 6.373.

[29] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, & 201.

[30] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, & 201.

[31] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, part II, & 366.

[32] Ter Hark, *ibid*, in Moyal-Sharrock, D. *The Third Wittgenstein: The Post-Investigations Works*. Ashgate: Routledge, 2004: 125-144, p. 130.

[33] Ter Hark, *ibid*.

[34] Ter Hark, *ibid*, p. 131.

[35] I make assertions about reality, assertions which have different degrees of assurance. How does the degree of assurance come out? What consequences has it? We may be dealing, for example, with the certainty of memory, or again of perception. I may be sure of something, but still know what test might convince me of error. [...] I should alter my opinion, and this would not mean I lost all faith in judging" (Wittgenstein, L. *On Certainty*. Ed. G.E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, Translated by Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1975, & 66)

[36] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, & 97.

[37] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, & 23.

[38] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, & 341-343.

[39] "Realism, but Not Empiricism: Wittgenstein versus Searle", Moyal-Sharrock, D. in *A Wittgensteinian*

*Perspective on the Use of Conceptual Analysis in Psychology*. Edited by T. P. Racine and K. L. Slaney Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013: 153 – 171, p. 166.

[40] Kuhn, T. *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

[41] Kuhn, *ibid*: 44-45.

[42] Lenti, G. *Psychoanalysis and Complexity*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc, 2014, , p. 33.

[43] *Ibid*, p. 56 (my emphasis, D.L.).

[44] Sala, N. "Chaos and complexity in arts and architecture". In: *Chaos and Complexity Research Compendium*. Eds. F. Orsucci and N. Sala. Nova Science Publishers, Inc, 2011: 199-206, 200 (my emphasis, D.L.).

[45] See for example: Moran, M. "Chaos theory and psychoanalysis: the fluidic nature of the mind". *International Review of Psychoanalysis* 18, 1991: 211-221; Spruiell, V. "Deterministic chaos and the sciences of complexity: psychoanalysis in the midst of a general scientific revolution". *Journal of American Psychoanalysis Association* 41, 1993: 3-44; Levinson, E. A. "The uses of disorders: Chaos theory and psychoanalysis". *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 30 (1), 1994: 5-24; Kincanon, E. Powel, W. "chaotic analysis in psychology and psychoanalysis". *The Journal of Psychology* 129, 1995: 495-505.

[46] Freud, S. *The Complete Psychological Works*. p. 4683.

[47] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, & 4.002

[48] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, & 242.

[49] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, & 429.

[50] Bennett & Royle accepted the agreed definition of the term but related

it to literary texts. Later on, Bennet & Royle defined the term thus: "Uncanny: an adjective made especially rich for literary studies by Freud's essay 'The Uncanny' (1919), 'uncanny' means not simply weird, spooky or strange, but entails some disturbance of our Glossary 145 sense of what is familiar and unfamiliar. It has to do with a suggestion (but not conviction) of something supernatural going on" (Bennett, A. & Royle, N. *The thing called literature*. New-York: Routledge, 2015, pp. 145-146).

[51] Royle, N. *The Uncanny*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.

[52] Bennett, A. & Royle, N. *An introduction to literature criticism and theory*. Pearson Longman, 2005 p. 38.

[53] Freud, S. "The interpretation of dreams", *The Complete Psychological Works*. p. 1067.

[54] Freud, S. *The Complete Psychological Works*. p. 2729.

[55] Freud, *ibid*, emphasis originally, D.L.

[56] Jentsch did not get beyond this relation of the uncanny to the novel and unfamiliar. He ascribes the essential factor in the production of the feeling of uncanniness to intellectual uncertainty; so that the uncanny would always, as it were, be something one does not know one's way about in" (Freud, *ibid*, p. 3677).

[57] Freud, *ibid*, p. 3691.

[58] Freud, *ibid*, p. 3692

[59] Freud, *ibid*.

[60] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, & 420.