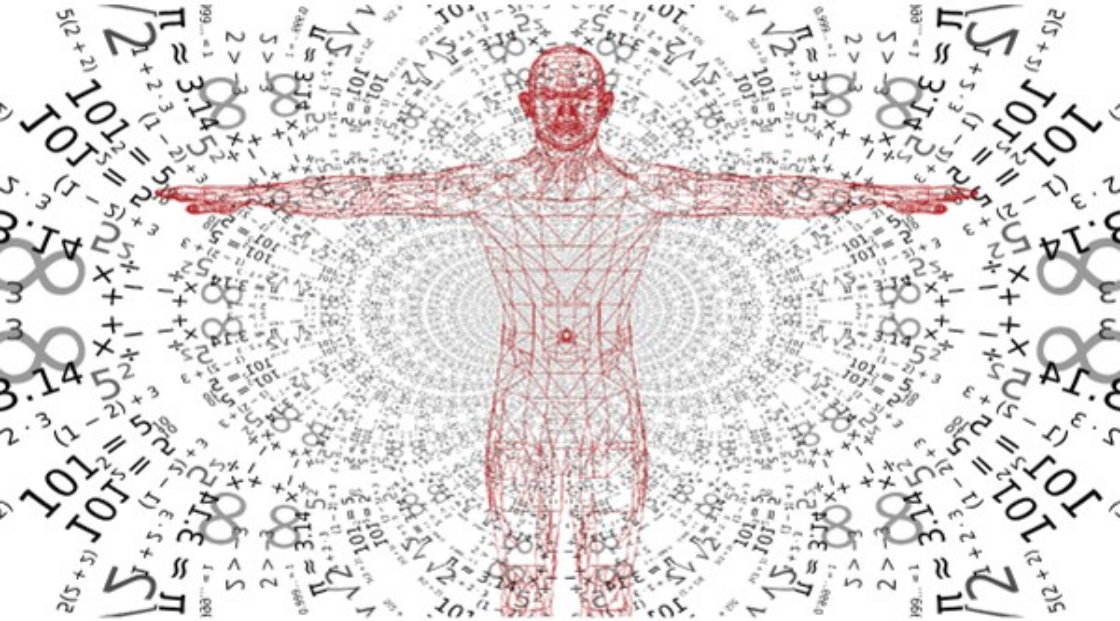
Numbers in Mind, Numbers in Motion

an introduction



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Dimensions of Psychotherapy, Dimensions of Experience

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Dr Scharff's 15 books include *The Sexual Relationship* (1982), *Refinding the Object and Reclaiming the Self* (1992), *Object Relations Theory and*

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He is the author of a number of publications including the book, *Object Relations Brief Therapy: The Relationship in Short-term Work* (1996). His most recent publication is 'The consultants as part of the drama in a family business', in *Self Hatred in Psychoanalysis: Detoxifying the Persecutory Object* (2003). Dr Stadter maintains a private practice in Bethesda, MD, that includes long-term and brief psychotherapy as well as clinical supervision and organizational consultation.

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Numbers and mathematics can be viewed as an obvious part of everyday clinical practice. Here are a few examples: the number of patients in the room or in a group, members in a family, patients in our day, in our practice; the fees we receive; the numbers of sessions in a therapy; the

frequency of sessions; the number of major transference complexes; the multiple fragmentations we come to know of a patient's psyche.

However, it is only recently that number has become an important point of reference in psychoanalytic theory. Most of Freud's writing focused on the individual, sometimes expanded to the threesome he found in his discovery of the Oedipus situation. He focused only occasionally on the twosome of the mother and infant. Analytic writing has more often focused on the two of

the analytic pair, but Freud himself did not think consciously of the number two. He had focused on time and space, especially in his description of how dreams handled these elements, but not of the flux of internal objects. His discovery of the internalization of objects in the experience of loss and in the oedipal phase led to his description of structural theory as an evolving and interacting psychic formation, but one that tended toward a self-contained system rather than a dynamic organization in open interaction with the environment.

The physics of Freud's day—and especially of his scientific youth in which the early models were formed—did not deal with the complex dynamics of interacting entities. Even Einstein's theory of relativity, which became available in Freud's maturity, did not influence his developing models. Twentieth-century physics did not become available as a metaphor for psychological interaction until Fairbairn (Scharff and Birtles 1994) applied the theory of relativity to the interdependence of mental structure and content in the 1950s. Dynamic

thinking about mental function and the interactions of transference and countertransference were already in evolution, but Fairbairn's application gave a new model from the physical sciences to that emerging understanding.

A comparable shift of paradigm is currently occurring. New models of science, derived from physics and mathematics in the study of chaos and string theories, give new ways of seeing complexity and uncertainty in the physical universe and in the

psychological realm. As clinicians become newly aware of the role of complex and almost indefinable subtlety of interaction, there is a need for new models of mind and of minds in interaction.

The chapters in Part III explore several aspects of the way close examination of number expands our understanding of intrapsychic dynamics. We begin with James Poulton's study of the paradox of one-person and two-person psychology. Working with the ideas of Bollas,

Loewald and Lacan, he argues there is greater richness in meaning if the paradox is maintained rather than being resolved in favor of one side or the other. We are simultaneously a single autonomous entity, and are constituted through relation to the other, a two-in-one and a one-in-two. Carl Bagnini's chapter on supervision expands our vision to the number three, not in the ordinary oedipal use of the number three, but in the clinical supervisory relationship. He first notes the important, frequently examined, aspects of the supervisee/ therapist's

difficult role conflict and the parallel process often enacted between the two pairs of patient-therapist and supervisee-supervisor. Bagnini then maintains that attention to group process and 'the triadic field' of supervision provides a richer level for understanding the complex dynamics involved. His extended vignette demonstrates triadic influences including the impact of the patient's internal world on that of the supervisor and the supervisor's 'presence' in the therapy.

Christopher Bollas's chapter on the number four expands our vision to the realm of the family. His use of numbers to indicate levels expands the use of mathematics to indicate a level of magnitude, not only about the interaction indicated by the number, but also about the level of complexity the individual psyche has to compute in considering object relations in the family. Interestingly, in his chapter Bollas writes, 'It will be seen, naturally, that a psychoanalytic numerology bears no relation to mathematics proper.' In the context of

Scharff and Scharff's Chapter 16 on chaos theory, and Scharff and Cooper's Chapters 14 and 15 on numbers we can see that an advanced conception of numbers does actually allow Bollas's sophisticated psychoanalytic theorizing to become compatible with modern mathematics, both through the application of complex numbers, and through the view of dynamic strange attractors that explains how several states of mind relate simultaneously to each other.

Finally, Hope Cooper and I (DES) offer a pair of chapters that deal with numbers in a wholly new way. Chapter 14 describes a system of notation that abstracts object relations to their numerical qualities in order to study the internal dynamics in a simpler way, to observe the dynamics of internal object relations stripped of their idiosyncrasies. While this takes away the richness of the particulars of the objects, it adds to our capacity to see the objects in direct and fluctuating relation to each other. Chapter 15 extends this thinking in two ways.

First, we explore the mind's capacity to hold numbers greater than six or seven dynamically in mind, drawing on the work of Bion and Matte-Blanco to describe a model of the reduction of psychic understanding of large numbers to smaller ones more easily held in mind. Second, we propose that internal numbers are always in a kind of motion that represents the mind's continuous process of dynamic transformation. As this ongoing transformation takes place, it forms a geometry of inner space and time that represents dimensions beyond the four

usual ones of three spatial dimensions plus time. Time and space, we contend, are frequently represented in dreams and other 'primary process' psychic productions, but in ways that represent higher, more complex dimensions of psychic organization. In this way, this part closes by drawing together the themes of time, space and number as fundamentally interrelated, and paves the way to Part IV's application of these themes to understanding normal and pathological states of mind that unfold in the treatment process.

The chapters in this section on number, taken together, demonstrate that mathematics offers a fruitful vehicle for the study of some of the most complex organizations and dynamics both of the individual psyche and of minds in interaction—of mutual influence, of dynamic oscillation between complex organizations of mind, and of psychological interaction in families and groups and in therapy.

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Table of Contents