

The Fourth Dimension

state of mind



David E. Scharff
Michael Stadter

Dimensions of Psychotherapy, Dimensions of Experience

**The fourth
dimension: state
of mind**

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About the Authors

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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*

Practice (1995), and *Fairbairn: Then and Now* (1998). He has also written 50 articles and chapters and is widely sought as a lecturer on the topics of family and couple theory, object relations theory, and sexual development, disorders and their treatment. He maintains a private practice in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy in Chevy Chase, MD.

Michael Stadter, PhD is a clinical psychologist and a member of the faculty and Board of Directors of the International Psychotherapy Institute (formerly the International Institute of Object Relations Therapy) in Chevy Chase, MD. He is also Clinical Psychologist-in-Residence in the Department of Psychology at American University in Washington, DC, and on the faculty of the Washington School of Psychiatry.

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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*David E. Scharff and Michael
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As editors, we experienced an ambivalent state of mind in the process of making the decision to include a part on ‘states of mind’ in this volume. This is familiar territory. All analytic writing is about one or another aspect of state of mind, so why here? On the other hand, the culmination of thinking represented throughout this book is the

application of the basic elements of psychotherapy to the questions posed in this Part IV. Can an examination of number, space and time as basic dimensions lead to an increase in our understanding of them as elements of and metaphors for development and pathology? Similarly, can we examine how states of mind organize and integrate the basic dimensions of number, time and space? The state of mind of each participant in individual, group or family therapy influences the total interactional field, and, in turn, the total field influences each involved

person. The complexity of such dynamic involvement is beyond calculation, drawing as it does on the multiple aspects of personality within each individual, and the essentially unpredictable influence of the sum of their conjoined and interacting personalities.

The four chapters in this part demonstrate this organization and integration in different ways. The first by Jill Scharff and myself (DES) is grounded in mathematics and physics. It also bridges Chapter 15 on numbers

in motion as a model of mind that ended the last section. Chapter 16 in this part explores the use of chaos theory to explain processes of alternation between non-integration and integration that characterize normal development, that show how we can understand alternation of states of mind in a patient, and that provide the ordinary oscillation between periods of knowing and not knowing in psychotherapy. In that way, this chapter forms the bridge between the aspect of this book based in the more literal aspects of time, space and

number, and their use as something crossing the ambiguous area between literal model for mental and interpersonal processes and their use as metaphor. Jill Scharff and I see chaos theory as offering a fundamentally new psychoanalytic paradigm, grounded in information processing and complexity, in juxtaposition to the original ephemeral clarities of psychoanalysis based on the physics of the nineteenth century. We propose that mental states in development and in therapy move in and out of recognizable pattern, and

that there are long periods of time in all modalities of therapy when it is not possible or advisable to try to know too much.

The chapter by Sheila Hill deals with psychological space and the mental organizations that characterize traumatically sequestered space. She traces the history of thinking about the boundaries of inner and outer space of the mind, the way that intense early injury drives individuals to construct walls and boundaries that are designed to limit their continuing vulnerability

to the outer transactional world, and the ways in which these second skin or psychic retreat constructions limit access in treatment. Through her case vignettes, she gives ample illustration of the kind of mental organization that takes over in pathologically limited situations, inhibiting the normal processes that are more chaotically in flux in the service of the continual adaptation and variety that characterize psychological health.

The third chapter explores two states of self: a state of complete

fulfillment unbounded by time or space and a state of self-experience and development that comes from interaction with and awareness of limits and loss. Charles Ashbach uses the paradigm of Being and Becoming. He begins by noting the philosophical roots of these ideas. He then connects Being and Becoming with Bion's work, especially the concept of 'O' (origins) and extends it. Offering a clinical example, he illustrates transference/countertransference issues that arise. Ashbach ends his chapter with a discussion of the implications

for therapists as they face their own narcissistic issues and he cites Bion's advice to avoid promoting a 'cozy' therapeutic relationship which obscures the fundamental aloneness of both therapist and patient.

In the final chapter of the book, Theodore Jacobs provides both a retrospective and an update of his own innovative work on countertransference, extending his thinking into the way mental states play out in the body and in the analyst's mental processing of the

surface trappings of the patient's clothes and behaviors. This line of attention culminates in Jacobs' attention to enactments—those inevitable, valuable and often embarrassing interactional constructions that can show the therapist deep and abiding patterns that patients are unable to show verbally. This level of analytic understanding most illustrates the transformation of the elements of time, space and number into deep and strong patterns of co-constructed behavior that influence and are influenced by

abiding mental states. These sweep therapist and patient alike into living things out that, only in this way, become accessible to new understanding. Here paradoxical elements of the everyday come to life in new ways that deepen our understanding of unconscious life.

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