

A clinical history of the field concept in North America, with some discussion of the use of the idea in Italy and South America.

Course syllabus for NYU Postdoctoral Program, July 2021

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I have called this course “A clinical history of the field concept, primarily in North America, but with some discussion of the use of the idea in Italy and South America.” The length of the title reflects the fact that, in today’s world, “field theory,” at least within psychoanalysis, often or usually refers to the work of certain Italian theorists, especially Antonino Ferro. But the field concept had other beginnings in North America, and those beginnings stretch back to the 1920s. I was trained in that long tradition, and so I came to Ferro, the Barangers, and other contemporary field writers only after I was suffused with the work of Sullivan, Fromm, and others. This course presents field theory as I absorbed it (the interpersonal/relational kind) and came upon it (later versions, primarily Bionian). The way the material is organized is, in a sense, a history of my own development as a psychoanalytic clinician and writer. The syllabus begins with the early interpersonal/relational writings and moves forward along the timeline of my own exposure to, and absorption of, these ideas. What I hope to do by examining the material this way is to provide a coherent historical account of the field concept in psychoanalysis, so that when you are finished with the course, you will have a grasp how these ideas and clinical practices grew organically from within the psychoanalytic traditions to which you yourself (the candidates) actually belong. In each set of readings, week by week, our questions will always be, “What does this material contribute to field theory and its clinical practice? Why does it make sense to describe these ideas as field theory?”

One area of psychoanalytic writing that has been highly influential on everyone in the field, including me, but that I was not able to include in the course, is the early re-evaluation of countertransference. I will lecture about this material (e.g., some of Winnicott, Margaret Little, Paul Heimann, Lucia Tower, Edith Weigert, et al), and describe its significance, but there just wasn’t room to include it. Also, at this point, the separate conception of transference and countertransference has been largely transcended by the notion of a single, unitary field created jointly by the participants. I will explain this view. Another widely influential perspective I regret not being able to cover is self psychology

(although it does come up peripherally in the work of Beebe and Lachmann). I also regret not being able to include the contribution to field thinking of the relational literature on play and improvisation (Ringstrom, Knoblauch). These latter topics, and the authors who have presented them, will be addressed in my lectures. I have also left out the entire French literature, which was the primary emphasis of my last Postdoc course. I've explained why I did that in my letter accompanying this syllabus.

The first half of each class meeting will consist of a brief lecture from me on the subject of the readings for that week and related matters, followed by discussion of the readings. In the second half of the class, one candidate will present clinical material. We will work out the schedule of these presentations during the first class meeting. (I have done this many times in Postdoc courses, and it works out fine.) For the first week, I will be the presenter. After that, each presenter will be asked to select material that bears at least some relation to that the week's readings. (Since the field is the heart of every treatment, this task should not be onerous!)

I will limit readings to two articles or chapters per week. I will mention the names of other writers students might want to read if they are interested in going further.

The syllabus follows.

Week 1: What is a field? What makes a set of ideas field theory? Is any theory of interaction a field theory? We begin with early conceptions of the field (e.g., Sullivan, Ferenczi, Fromm, Horney, Thompson), as described by modern writers looking backward.

Stern, D.B. (2015). The interpersonal field: Its place in American psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 25:388-404. Also in D.B. Stern (2015). *Relational Freedom: Emergent Properties of the Interpersonal Field*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 35-63.

Bass, A. (2001). It takes one to know one; or, Whose unconscious is it anyway? *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 11(5):683-702.

Week 2: Early psychoanalytic conceptions of the field in psychosis. Interestingly enough, the early North American field theorists did a lot of work with psychotic people, largely because that clinical field was not dominated at the time by classical psychoanalytic thinking, in which the patient, to profit from psychoanalytic treatment, needed to be capable of a transference neurosis--which psychotic people were not considered to be able to manage. Therefore you didn't necessarily have to worry about neutrality or provoking a therapeutic regression or using the couch or seeing the patient five times a week. You had the same freedom if you practiced family therapy. We will focus on Searles this week, but from this time period you might also enjoy reading Otto Will, Lewis Hill, Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, and R.D. Laing (especially *The Divided Self*). Family therapists, most of whom were systems theorists, also had this freedom:

Jay Haley, Paul Watzlawick, Don Jackson, Wynne and Singer, Salvador Minuchin, and Gregory Bateson. For the connections that existed between family therapy and interpersonal psychoanalysis at the time, see: Gartner, R.B. (1995). The relationship between interpersonal psychoanalysis and family therapy. In: Lionells, et al (eds.), *The Handbook of Interpersonal Psychoanalysis*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 793-822.

Searles, H.F. (1959). Oedipal love in the counter transference. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 40:180-190.

Ogden, T.H. (2007). Reading Harold Searles. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 88:353-369.

Week 3: “You can’t not interact”: The appearance of the modern interpersonal/relational understanding of the field concept--Levenson, Wolstein, Tauber, Gill, Ehrenberg. We will focus on Levenson. If you have a chance to read the Hoffman article, it’s good on the appearance of the modern North American conception of the field. But you will come across that article in other courses, and so I did not make it one of the two papers I’m actually asking you to read. Consider it optional. Also optional is Ehrenberg’s book, or the article of the same name from 1974.

Levenson, E.A. (1988). The pursuit of the particular—On the psychoanalytic inquiry. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 24:1-16.

Foehl, J.C. (2008). Follow the fox: Edgar A. Levenson’s pursuit of psychoanalytic process. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 77(4):1231-1268.

Hoffman, I.Z. (1983). The patient as the interpreter of the analyst’s experience. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 19: 389-422. Also in Hoffman’s book, *Ritual and Spontaneity in the Psychoanalytic Process* and in the Mitchell/Aron edited volume, *Relational Psychoanalysis: The Emergence of a Tradition*.

Ehrenberg, D.B. (1992). *The Intimate Edge: Extending the Reach of Psychoanalytic Interaction*. New York: Norton.

Week 4: Constructivism and the field. I highly recommend that you read both papers by Hoffman, since the second is a later statement of his views that is focused around clinical material. The Mitchell chapter is a very clear introduction to constructivism in psychoanalysis, and has historical importance. But I am actually requesting only that you read the first two papers--mine and Hoffman’s.

Stern, D.B. (1983). Unformulated experience: From familiar chaos to creative disorder. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 19, 71-99. A longer version appears in my

book *Unformulated Experience*, and the original article appears in the Mitchell/Aron edited volume, *Relational Psychoanalysis: The Emergence of a Tradition*.

Hoffman, I.Z. (1992). Some practical implications of a social-constructivist view of the psychoanalytic situation. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 2(3):287-304.

Hoffman, I.Z. (1994). Dialectical thinking and therapeutic action in the psychoanalytic process. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 63:187-218.

Mitchell, S.A. (1993). "The analytic situation." In: *Hope and Dread in Psychoanalysis*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 13-94.

Week 5: Mother-infant studies and the field. Daniel Stern, Beebe, Lachmann, Sander, Tronick. We will focus less on the details of mother-infant studies themselves than on the implications of this research for the organization of dyads, the capacity for mutual regulation, and the nature of the analytic field. Consider the Tronick piece optional but recommended.

Beebe, B. and Lachmann, F.M. (1998). Co-constructing inner and relational processes. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 15(4):480-516.

Lachmann, F.M. and Beebe, B. (1996). Chapter 7 The contribution of self- and mutual regulation to therapeutic action. *Progress in Self Psychology*, 12:123-140.

Tronick, E.Z. (2003). "Of course all relationships are unique". *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 23(3):473-491.

Week 6: Nonlinear dynamic systems theory and the field: The Boston Change Process Study Group. The third piece, which is a commentary I wrote on the second paper, is optional. Other significant contributors to this subject in the contemporary literature include L. Sander and R. Galatzer-Levy.

D.N. Stern, L.W. Sander, J.P. Nahum, A.M. Harrison, K. Lyons-Ruth, A.C. Morgan, N. Brunschweiler-Stern, E.Z. Tronick (1998) Non-interpretive mechanisms in psychoanalytic therapy: The 'something more' than interpretation. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 79:903-921.

Boston Change Process Study Group (2013). Enactment and the emergence of new relational organization. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 61(4):727-749.

Stern, D.B. Appendix: A comparison of the roles of the verbal and the nonverbal in the theory of unformulated experience and the work of the Boston Change Process Study Group. In: *The Infinity of the Unsaid: Unformulated Experience, Language, and the Nonverbal*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 157-167.

Week 7: Conceptions of the third. The Aron article is optional.

Benjamin, J. (2004/2017). Beyond doer and done to: An intersubjective view of thirdness. In: *Beyond Doer and Done To: Recognition Theory*,

Intersubjectivity, and the Third. New York and London: Routledge, pp. 21-48. This paper also appears in the *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* in 2004, do it is available on PEP. But the version from her book is clearer.

Ogden, T.H. (1994). The analytic third: Working with intersubjective clinical facts. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 75:3-19

Aron, L. (2006). Analytic impasse and the third. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 87(2):349-368.

Week 8: Othering, particularly systemic racism, as continuous, unconscious, constitutive influence on the shape taken by the field. Holmes's piece is a commentary on Moss, so I'm asking you to read both of them plus either the Hart or the Rao. We will decide which of these as we approach the week.

Rao, J.M. (2021). Observations on the use of the N-word in psychoanalytic conferences. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 69 (2):315-341.

Moss, D. (2021). On having whiteness. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 69 (2):355-371.

Holmes, D.E. (2021). Challenges and opportunities in becoming one's own self: Commentary on Moss. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 69 (2):373-380.

Hart, A. (2019). The discriminatory gesture: A psychoanalytic consideration of posttraumatic reactions to incidents of racial discrimination. *Psychoanalytic Social Work* 26:5-24.

Week 9: The field in dissociation theory, 1: Developmental trauma, the creation of self-states, and the structuring of mind.

Bromberg, P.M. (2008). Shrinking the tsunami. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 44(3):329-350.

Bromberg, P.M. (2000). Bringing in the dreamer. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 36(4):685-705.

Week 10: The field in dissociation theory, 2: Enactment and relational freedom.

Stern, D.B. (2004). The eye sees itself: Dissociation, enactment, and the achievement of conflict. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 40, 197-237. Also in my book *Partners in Thought: Working with Unformulated Experience, Dissociation, and Enactment*.

Stern, D.B. (2013). Relational freedom and therapeutic action. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 61: 227-255. Also in my book *Relational Freedom: Emergent Properties of the Interpersonal Field*.

Week 11: Freedom in the field and the witnessing it allows. Winnicott, Alvarez, Poland, Stern, theories of "vitalization." Read the two pieces by

me, and if you can do it, the wonderful article by Poland. I added the Buber because it's a piece I love. It's beautiful and compelling on the matter of human relatedness.

Stern, D.B. (2009). Partners in thought: A clinical process theory of narrative. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 78:701-731.

Stern, D.B. (in press). On coming into possession of oneself: Witnessing and the formulation of experience.

Poland, W.S. (2000). The analyst's witnessing and otherness. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*. 48: 17-34.

Buber, M. (1950). Distance and relation. A.D. Biemann, Ed., *The Martin Buber Reader*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. 206-213.

Week 12: The English independent (e.g., Winnicott Balint) influence on relational field theory. Ghent, Davies, Grossmark, Benjamin, Director. Read the first two articles, by Davies and Grossmark, the rest if you can. Ghent's paper is one of the foundational articles of relational thinking, but I assume you're reading it elsewhere, so I've made it optional.

Davies, J.M. (2004). Whose bad objects are we anyway? Repetition and our elusive love affair with evil. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 14:711-732.

Grossmark, R. (2016). Psychoanalytic companionship. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 26: 698-712.

Ghent, E. (1990). Masochism, submission, surrender: Masochism as a perversion of surrender. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 26: 108-135.

Director, L. (2016). The analyst as catalyst: Cultivating mind in the shadow of neglect. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 26(6):685-69

Week 13: How do Klein and Bion figure into field theory? Read the Ogden paper on Bion first. Read Bion himself if you can. Then read Ogden's clinical article, "Dreaming the Analytic Session." If you aren't familiar with his work, it will feel very dense. Ogden's work is always inspired by Bion, among others, although it is also always very much his own. "Dreaming the Analytic Session" is a good example of both points. I might have chosen any one of many papers by Ogden. I added Mitchell's piece because Klein, of course, who was Bion's analyst, inspired Bion's understanding of projective identification, which is the primary feature of Bion's thought represented in the Bionian field theory of Ferro, Ogden, and others. Mitchell's piece is written with his usual extraordinary clarity. If you have a chance to get to it, it will also be useful next week.

Bion, W.R. (1962). A theory of thinking. In: *Second Thoughts: Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis*. New York: Aronson, 1967, pp. 110-119.

Ogden, T.H. (2004). An introduction to the reading of Bion. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 85(2):285-300.

Ogden, T.H. (2017). Dreaming the analytic session: A clinical essay. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 86(1):1-20

Mitchell, S.A. (1995). Interaction in the Kleinian and interpersonal traditions. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 31: 65-90.

Week 14: The (Kleinian) analytic field in South America.

Baranger, M. & Baranger, W. (2008). The analytic situation as a dynamic field. (First published in Spanish in 1961-1962). *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, (2008) 89:795–826.

Stern, D.B. (2015). Field theory in psychoanalysis, Part 1: comparing Harry Stack Sullivan and Madeleine and Willy Baranger. In: *Relational Freedom: Emergent Properties of the Interpersonal Field*. New York: Routledge, pp. Also appears in *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*—just look up the article in PEP. But the version in the book is better.

Week 14: The (Bionian) analytic field in Italy. The use of Bion by Ferro and Civitarese. The third article, by me, is optional.

Ferro, A. (2009). Transformations in dreaming and characters in the psychoanalytic field. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 90(2):209-230.

Stern, D.B. (2015). Field theory in psychoanalysis, Part 2: comparing Bionian field theory and contemporary interpersonal/relational psychoanalysis. In: *Relational Freedom: Emergent Properties of the Interpersonal Field*. New York: Routledge, pp. Again, you can find the original version of this paper in *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, and therefore on PEP—but the book version is better and a little longer.

Stern, D.B. (2020). Field theory and the dream sense: Continuing the comparison of interpersonal/relational theory and Bionian field theory. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 30:538-553.