Once Upon A Party - An Anecdotal Investigation

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The Party Problem: An Anecdotal Investigation

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Synopsis

Mathematicians and physicists attending let-your-hair-down parties behave exactly like their own theories. They live by their theorems, they jive by their theorems. Life imitates their craft, and we must simply observe the deep truths hiding in their party-going behavior.

Obligatory Preface

It is a well-known maxim that revelries involving academics, intellectuals, and thought leaders are notoriously twisted affairs, a topologist's delight. For every Koch curve which attends every single party held in its area, there is a limiting process of Godot, who never received his invitation and kept every party waiting. There is always a Michelson or a Morley who travels faster than light and parties before one starts. Logicians like Groucho Marx never attend parties which would have them as attendees, while a Janus-faced fellow like Russell's Set attends all the parties which it does not attend. Fractal Solipsists get to party in the attractive basins of their own minds while cryptographers may spend a lifetime cracking the enigma of party-going code. A thinker like Obama can go to parties because yes, he can, but aren't there times when the party must go to Mohammed? Hugh Hefner gets a hundred free passes for every soiree but who speaks for the common mathematician, the physicist, the scientist? Do they get to attend celebrations on their own terms, as Seinfeld does, because they are masters of their own domains?

Ever since God forbade Adam and Eve from going to the original party (they still went, chaperoned by the snake and the sin(e) function), the question about the party attendance habits of cerebral luminaries has remained a riddle, lacking both hypothesis and resolution. There have been a few apocryphal anecdotes floating around in cyclostyled mimeographs addressing this lacuna: the mathematical archi-

tects of Babel getting their linguistics wrong and bringing the house down at some Bob-the-Builder party; Archimedes joining a fashion show sans sartorial accompaniments; Gauss demurring because it was not normal for mathematicians to party. But by and large, there has been no systematic collection of data for this research topic. Therefore, we shall endeavor to focus on mathematical minds and evaluate if Riemann's heroes in this complex partying affair align on a straight line or form a crooked graph.

Data Points, Hearsay, et cetera

We approach the subject with light gravitas, content on dispassionately recording that which is well-known to discern that which may not be. Our collected historical observations form the following unordered set:

- Fibonacci had a run-in with the law; apparently he was in sum kind of trouble from his last two parties.

- Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's presence was ubiquitous because he had been integrated by parties.

- Pythagoras lost his way to the party on this block amidst some of the parties on the other two blocks.

- Isaac Newton brought oranges to the party. (You thought he'd bring some other fruit? Ha! The joke's on you. How do you like them apples NOW?)

- Stefan Banach and Alfred Tarski's parties were boundless because, as you know, if you have one party, you can break it up into five groups and reassemble to have two parties of the same size.

- Zeno could not go, obviously...

- Lisa Randall was D-brane of the party, charming in her mathematical magic, mystique and mystery, an M-theory in action.

- Evoriste Galois duelled at every after-party party. What a Groupie!

- Arthur Cayley and James Joseph Sylvester were stuck in the party's Matrix, having never taken the red pill.

- Julia Robinson attended only recursively enumerable parties hosted by Diophantus because only those festivities were guaranteed to halt by sunrise.

- David Hilbert invited 23 people to the turn-of-the-century party in Hilbert Space, a location he had sublet from Banach.

- Camille Jordan could never tell whether he was inside a party or outside it.

- Juan Maldacena's hologram floated on every surface at the party.

- Wolfgang Pauli excluded most idiots at the party from his conversations, as a matter of principle.

- The Pope manned the open bar at the party, serving water as wine. Peter Higgs provided the choir to boost the Mass which Yang and Mills conducted to a strictly positive effect on the attendees. The Really Large Cardinals whom Hugh Woodin had brought along ensured that everyone remained in communion with the holy water at all times.

- Casper Wessel's feelings were hurt because the party was held on the Argand plain, at that glorious heritage building, the 'Oedipal Complex'. Sigmund Freud was present with his mother as his date.

- In bitter arguments, Leopold Kronecker kept going off on irrelevant tangents; in response, Georg Cantor went off on a transfinite diagonal.

- Benoit Mandelbrot found infinitely many dancing copies of his mini-me's in the party, scintillating in the trails of Fatou dust they left behind.

- Richard Feynman's presence at the party cannot be determined without adding up his presence at all the other parties.

- Peter Woit travelled on a shoo-string budget to the "Not-Even-Wrong" party hosted by Pauli.

- Max Zorn, normally well-ordered in his affairs, vacillated maximally in his di-lemma of attending a choice of soirees.

- Alan Guth and Andrei Linde kept inflating giant balloons at the party using canisters of false vacuum. Dangerous business.

- No one knew the exact location and time of Werner Heisenberg's party but it is highly probable that he partied amorously with his wife and mistress, the eternally adjoint conjugal variables.

- Maryam Mirzakhani disrupted the homomorphic, male-only Fields-Medal Party held at Teichmuller Drive. Even the Ayatollah approved of this hyperbolic behavior. (Jocelyn Bell was not as lucky. She brought the Little Green Man as her date to the Nobel Party and was ignored by sexist xenophobes on the Committee.)

- Pierre de Fermat did not go because the party was too small for his style of expression.

- Felix Klein took "BYOB" seriously and brought his own bottle, wearing four dimensional shoes, to boot! Poor man stayed sober all night, wandering around in shoelaces which remained untied. Had the party-protocol managers in knots.

- Niels Bohr was given a few complementarity passes to attend. While not a party person, he chose to go as an observer, because "parties do not exist in the absence of observation". "When no one looks, no one does," he kept muttering.

- The Badly-Written-Recursion-Function arrived at the Rock Concert without its interrupt subroutines and found its true calling stuck in the concert program stuck in the concert program stuck in the concert program... Its well-written cousin bootstrapped itself to the festivities.

- William Rowan Hamilton did not attend because his Hamiltonian refused to commute (the two are not on speaking terms and remain non-commutative to this day). Niels Henrik had better luck with his Abelian group.

- Classical Physics arrived dressed up as a Pirate. Its high energy, high-frequency dance was such an ultraviolet catastrophe that Quantum Physics made it walk the Planck.

- Christian Doppler was unable to join because he had to work the red shift. Vladimir Lenin and Karl Marx did not attend for the same reason, different continent.

- The left-handed Madame Chien-Shiung Wu misread the invitation and thought she was being asked to manage the Par(i)ty. (She broke the mirror and it took CPT police to restore order.)

- Enrico Fermi stole the backs of all the invitation envelopes from the party. Something to do with neutron bomb calculations, apparently.

- Renata Kallosh hired Rube Goldberg to be the chef at the party; Rube ended up creating an incredibly complicated menu offering 10^{500} inedible items, all borrowed from Eugenio Calabi and Shing-Tung Yau's kitchen. Very unprincipally anti-anthropic, if you ask us.

- Julian Schwinger's magnetic personality overwhelmed most of the electronics at the party. As one critic put it, "Most physicists show people how to party; Julian Schwinger arrives to show that only he can party."

- The party orchestra featured the Princeton String Quartet.

- Alan Turing could not stop partying. Halting Problem.

- Henri Poincaré could not go because the party was on the edge of the hyperbolic disk. He does not regret it, though, for the party and the invitation will recur infinitely often.

- G.H. Hardy and John Edensor Littlewood needed only one invitation card.

- John Baez blogged a live culinary class at the party, brilliantly explaining the intricate art of spinning up foam in higher-dimensional glass and chopping up baby onions, quater-onions and oct-onions.

- John Conway and Simon Norton were official suppliers of liquor. Conway's ego was sated only after the moonshine they provided for inebriation lasted 196,883 monster-sized parties.

- Ada Lovelace's claim to be the first person to attend a digital gala does not compute with some party historians.

- One can never predict if the Law of Excluded Middle will attend a party or it will not, but we feel that L.E.J. Brouwer's excessive criticism of this behavior is nonconstructive and even illogical.

- Erwin Schródinger attended the Jack-in-the-box party but his cat sent regrets. Radiation poisoning.

- Ernst Zermelo and Abraham Fraenkel went to 9 parties, wearing a choice of monochromatic socks from Bertrand Russell's infinite wardrobe.

- Hipparchus could not attend. His boat was sabotaged on its way and sank. Hardy lamented the fact that Hipparchus did not take the precaution of sending a postcard to his colleague claiming to have proved Riemann's Conjecture.

- Paul Erdős thought it was a costume party and went in dressed up as the Supreme Fascist. Serious he was, too, ready to throw The Book at any miscreant breaking party rules.

- Annie Jump Cannon was the official cartographer of parties and catalogued thousands of them into seven elegant categories. In unbridled admiration, a sexist astronomer exclaimed at one of the gatherings, "Oh! Be A Fine Girl Kiss Me Right Now, Smack!" and was promptly smacked down by the gallant Edward Pickering.

- Stephen Smale was banned from all topological parties because he continually, even if smoothly, kept turning them inside out. And he kept using donuts as coffee cups.

- J.J. Thompson stole the plum pudding from the party kitchen.

- Johannes Kepler and Thomas Hales found the optimal, if exhaustive, method of packing the most number of rotund party-goers in a ball-room.

- Plato held his psychedelic chiaroscuro in a cave, an intense affair of light and shadows, of truth, lies and beauty. Only those in perfect form were invited.

- An unidentified mathematician brought the party down with his superb pole dancing. Authorities are trying to establish his identity using the fingerprint residue he left behind (Johann Bernoulli offered this cryptic clue: *"tanquam ex ungue leonem* - we recognize the lion by his claw." However, we believe this is mistaken Cauchery.)

- Pythagoras, who frowned at all irrational behavior, did not approve of Frederick Lindemann, who was caught organizing transcendental meditation sessions in search of the essence of Pi-in-the-Sky. (Murray Gell-Mann was more pragmatic and down-to-earth, scheduling Buddhist meditation sessions to rid people of quarky hangovers with his Eightfold Way.)

- Emmy Noether's liberal side confided to Hilbert that most of the parties "are rather like the bathing establishments, suffused with the moving spirit of cemeteries and hence, too conservative."

- Paul Dirac was the strangest man at the party, highly localized in a corner, rooted to a single spot. So was Brouwer; a fixed-point fixture.

- Euclid skipped the first four extended line-dance parties and went straight to the fifth one hosted by Nicolai Lobachevsky and János Bolyai in a parallel universe.

- Robert Brown took a random walk to reach the party. He never arrived. Albert Einstein, with his entourage of general and special relatives, explained Brown's meanderings to the attendees.

- Andrey Markov, for the life of him, could never remember his escapades at all the parties he attended. Every party was a revelation for him, without memory. (On the other hand, Jorge Luis Borges' friend, Funes, remembered every detail).

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- Kurt Gödel did not attend any party. The parties were incomplete without him.

- Srinivasa Ramanujan had a vision about Goddess Namagiri's party in a divine Freudian dream.

- Carl Sagan suffered from cosmic boredom. That's what happens once you've attended billions and billions of star-studded parties.

- No aliens — other than the Hungarians — showed up for the party even though they should already have been here. Enrico Fermi is still trying to figure that paradox out.

- Hugh Everett III suffered a split-personality in such matters because everytime he attended a party, the universe split into two and his quantum doppelganger in the other universe stayed home. All quite beside the point, really...

- August Ferdinand Möbius was blind-sided. His card was missing the invitation side.

- Guglielmo Marconi participated remotely.

- Galileo's inquisitors did not have to go anywhere since the party revolved around them.

- Stephen Hawking's virtual party was heavily guarded by an event horizon. The only nonlossy information Leonard Susskind could obtain was that the party's firewall was unbreachable.

- Henrietta Leavitt discovered that a special class of ethanol-fueled parties underwent periodic increase and decrease in size. This pulsating inequilibrium was traced to drunkards falling out at an (un)steady rate, replaced by fresh partygoers. The party's intrinsic supply of alcohol was a key variable, leading to the Anti-Leavitt Rule: The higher the alcoholic luminosity, the shorter the period of fluctuation.

- John Nash maintained his equilibrium at every party and participated in every game . . . even those in theory.

- John Wheeler waited with Godot for a long time. His ride took geons and geons to arrive.

- **Feel free to add your own to the comments section of this article!**

Final Words - A Remaining Puzzle

Far Rockaway, New York, is inhabited by two types of people: Party-Crashers and Wet Blankets. Party-Crashers are utter knaves who always lie and never miss a revelry. Wet Blankets have boring knights since they always tell the truth and never attend any celebration. One day, you meet three inhabitants of Far Rockaway: Raymond Smullyan, Inspector Craig, and Philosopher Tao. Raymond Smullyan says, "Inspector Craig is a Party Crasher". Inspector Craig says, "It is false that Philosopher Tao is a Party Crasher." Philosopher Tao claims, "Either I am a Wet Blanket or Raymond Smullyan is a Wet Blanket.". Was Raymond Smullyan a party to the "This Party Needs No Party" party?