

Numberphile

Videos
about
numbers
& stuff

WEBSITE REVIEW by Rajkishore Patnaik

In Darren Aronofsky-directed 1998 surrealist psychological thriller *Pi*, the leading character Maximillian Cohen mutters to himself: “Restate my assumptions: One, Mathematics is the language of nature. Two, everything around us can be represented and understood through numbers. Three: If you graph the numbers of any system, patterns emerge. Therefore, there are patterns everywhere in nature. Evidence: The cycling of disease epidemics; the waxing and waning of caribou populations; sun spot cycles; the rise and fall of the Nile. So, what about the stock market? The universe of numbers that represents the global economy. Millions of hands at work, billions of minds.... A vast network, screaming with life... My hypothesis: Within the stock market, there is a pattern as well... Right in front of me... hiding behind the numbers. Always has been.”

To me, the website ‘Numberphile’ represents Cohen’s mutterings. Perhaps, when the celebrated mathematics professor and BBC presenter Marcus Du Sautoy introduces himself as a ‘pattern finder’ he was enunciating Numberphile’s mission statement.

Don’t be unimpressed by this rather dull homepage of the website www.numberphile.com:



Started late in November 2011, it is a clickable page for one of the most popular YouTube channels that has over 320,900 subscribers around the world. This website, of an Australian video journalist Brady Haran, made numbers ever so seductive. He says his aim is to make videos for every number from “1 to ∞ ” (hey Brady! ∞ is not a number!) Peppered with the passion of leading practitioners of mathematical art & craft including Professors Phil Moriarty, James Grime, Roger Bowley, Alex Bellos (of *Alex’s Adventures in Numberland* fame) among others, Numberphile is a whiff of fresh air that helps you enjoy patterns, see connections and find absorbing trivia for coffee break discussions.

Not restricted to just the interestingness of a number, the videos delve deeper into its evolution (<http://bit.ly/VChvn6>), etymology (<http://bit.ly/Km81p3>) and existence (<http://bit.ly/K5GngC>)

Sample this: the videos span across themes like googol to dyscalculia to Rubik cubes to number card tricks to Usain Bolt to Enigma code to Nepal’s flag to Batman equation to Olympic rings to Kaprekar; and, before I forget, Ramanujan’s taxicab numbers.

My favorite of course is *Sounds of Pi* video (<http://bit.ly/zSkuuK>) that was hosted to celebrate World π Day (there are 4 dedications for π from this channel). It talks about my favorite science populariser Richard Feynman. What does Feynman have to do with the near mythical π ? Watch it for yourself. The duration of the video is 6.28 min. The numeric coincidence is *not* intentional.

As I am writing this, Brady has a Nelson’s Number of Numberphile videos on the YouTube. Hey, how come he hasn’t talked about this number as it also has a bit of crick-eting trivia associated with it?

RAJKISHORE is a science communicator and math enthusiast who taught mathematics and coordinated the sciences and global perspectives at the Blue Mountains School, Ooty. At present he works at the Educational Technology and Design team at Azim Premji University where, in addition to his professional duties, he follows his interest in digital curation.