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Flavors of Geometry is a volume of lectures on four geometrically influenced fields of mathematics that have experienced great development in recent years.

Growing out of a series of introductory lectures given at the Mathematical Sciences Research Institute in January 1995 and January 1996, the book presents chapters on hyperbolic geometry, dynamics in several complex variables, convex geometry, and volume estimation, by masters in their respective fields. Each lecture begins with a discussion of elementary concepts, examines the highlights of the field, and concludes with a look at more advanced material. The style and presentation of the chapters are clear and accessible, and most of the lectures are richly illustrated. Bibliographies and indexes are included to encourage further reading on the topics discussed.

These lectures are an excellent starting place for graduate students and will also interest researchers wanting a “flavor” of new developments in geometry.

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Flavors of Geometry

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The Mathematical Sciences Research Institute wishes to acknowledge
support by the National Science Foundation.

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521620482

© Mathematical Sciences Research Institute 1997

First published 1997

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-62048-2 hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-62962-1 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2008

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Preface

... βούλεσθ', εἶπεν, ἐπεὶ λόγοι περὶ θεῶν γεγόνασιν, ἐν τοῖς Πλάτωνος γενεθλίοις αὐτὸν Πλάτωνα κοινωνὸν παραλάβωμεν, ἐπισκεψάμενοι τίνα λαβῶν γνώμην ἀπεφήνατ' αἰεὶ γεωμετρεῖν τὸν θεόν; εἴ γε δὴ θετέον εἶναι τὴν ἀπόφασιν ταύτην Πλάτωνος.

Ἐμοῦ δὲ ταῦτ' εἰπόντος ὡς γέγραπται μὲν ἐν οὐδενὶ σαφῶς τῶν ἐκείνου βιβλίων, ἔχει δὲ πίστιν ἰκανὴν καὶ τοῦ πλατωνικοῦ χαρακτήρος ἐστὶν ...

— Plutarch, *Quaest. Conv.* VIII.2, in his *Moralia*

God is always doing geometry. What Plato meant by this is no clearer now than it was in the first century A.D., when the dinner conversation quoted above (which I'm about to paraphrase) took place. Diogenianus, one of the guests, recalls that it is Plato's birthday and proposes to "bring him into the conversation" by debating the meaning of this nugget—"if indeed the statement is Plato's." Plutarch, who knew a lot about such things, replies that although the quote does not appear explicitly in any of Plato's books, it is well enough attested, and it is in character.

There follow the opinions of the three remaining guests, and finally that of Plutarch. Drastically abridged, they are:

- Geometry focuses the mind on the abstract rather than on the sensorial.
- Geometry is divine in that "geometric proportion ... befits a moderate oligarchy or a lawful monarchy ... it distributes to each according to his worth," whereas arithmetic proportion is egalitarian.
- The essence of geometry is boundaries, so God does geometry when he bounds matter to create.
- Geometry intervenes when proportion and measure and number are used to order chaotic nature.

Although encompassing, these are not entirely persuasive explanations; make of them what you will. I bring them up largely for fun, but also to illustrate the breadth of interpretation that the notion of geometry has traditionally enjoyed,

and so to defend my choice of title for this volume. One might consider also Klein's definition in his Erlangen program. And, while the study of complex dynamics in one or more variables involves tools from analysis, topology, and so on, a large part of the motivation is geometric: we want to understand the qualitative and spatial behavior of orbits.

* * *

This book is based on introductory lecture series that took place at MSRI in 1995 and 1996, aimed at graduate students and mathematicians in all fields.

The first series of lectures ran from January 9 to 20, 1995, as a prelude to the Spring 1995 program in Complex Dynamics and Hyperbolic Geometry. It consisted of three courses of five lectures each:

- *Hyperbolic Geometry* by James Cannon;
- *Conformal Dynamics on the Riemann Sphere* by John Hubbard;
- *Complex Dynamics in Several Variables* by John Smillie.

Of these, the first and last are included in this volume; notes for Smillie's lectures (pp. 117–150) were written by Gregory Buzzard, and those for Cannon's lectures (pp. 59–115) primarily by him, with the help of Bill Floyd, Richard Kenyon, and Walter Parry.

The second series of lectures ran from January 29 to February 9, 1996, in conjunction with the Spring 1996 program on Convex Geometry and Geometric Functional Analysis. Four courses of 3–4 lectures each were offered:

- *Classical Convex Geometry* by Keith Ball;
- *Concentration of Measure in Geometry* by Gideon Schechtman;
- *Spherical Sections of Octahedra* by Joram Lindenstrauss;
- *Random Methods for Volume Computation* by Béla Bollobás.

Keith Ball kindly agreed to merge the first three courses into one set of notes (pp. 1–58), so that Schechtman's and Lindenstrauss's material is now, after considerable transmutation, integrated with the more basic material of Ball's lectures. Bollobás wrote up his own lectures (pp. 151–182).

I've arranged the four contributions from easier to harder, but relative difficulty depends somewhat on one's background, so you should browse. Each set of notes starts with elementary concepts, proceeds through highlights of the field, and concludes with a taste of advanced material. Some math undergraduates will find most of Ball's and Cannon's contributions, and at least the beginning of the others, perfectly accessible.

For ease of reference I have supplied an index for each set of notes. Any shortcomings the indexes may have are to be blamed on me, not on the authors.

Silvio Levy
 Berkeley, February 1997

Note on MSRI Programs

The introductory courses and workshops that gave rise to this book were part of the plan, advanced by the MSRI directorate during the last several years, of intensifying the Institute's effectiveness and outreach by means other than research in core mathematics (which nonetheless remains the center of our activities). Some others among these outreach efforts:

- Conversations between Researchers and Teachers, a series of presentations and discussions bringing together two groups that rarely mix: high-school math teachers and research mathematicians.
- A conference on math visualization, one on The Future of Mathematical Communication, and one on The Future of Mathematical Education at Research Universities.
- The Fermat Fest, which explained to a lay public of 1000 the meaning and basic ideas of Fermat's Last Theorem.
- Numbers in Action, another event for the general public focusing on number theory.
- A program for broadcasting talks on the MBone (the Internet multicast backbone) and for helping other sites obtain access to the MBone.
- The Conference for African American Researchers and the Julia Robinson Celebration of Women in Mathematics Conference.
- Research workshops and programs on nontraditional topics, such as financial mathematics and combinatorial game theory.

Details about these events and programs, as well as most other MSRI activities, can be found at <http://www.msri.org>.