

Re: Out-of-print math books: An Update

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- *From:* Bill Dubuque <wgd@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* 07 Oct 2008 18:10:27 -0400
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Bart Goddard <goddardbe@xxxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

Bill Dubuque <wgd@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

I think most mathematicians are far more interested in the beauty of mathematical objects than they are in the beauty of the physical objects representing them

Which is why they're not in a mad rush to hunt down every vague thread remotely related to whatever they're working on. You can't enjoy the beauty of mathematics when it's whizzing by at 90 megas/sec. The beauty is in the enjoyment of learning and discovery. You're skipping that part. Yes, you can get to the top of the mountain and enjoy the view quickly and easily by gunning your Harley up the trail. But the view at the top is only a small part of the hike.

Why do you think that, and how is it related to this thread?

By the way, if you want a glimpse of some "sensual" mathematics, I highly recommend John Conway's book: *The Sensual (Quadratic) Form*. Below is an excerpt from Richard K. Guy's informative review [1].

I am proud that during my service on the Hedrick Lecturers Committee, we secured the services, along with those of Sir Michael Atiyah and Ron Graham, of John Horton Conway. The lectures had to be heard, seen, felt, smelled and tasted in order to appreciate them fully, but now we have the next best thing, a written (and thankfully expanded) record.

If you know nothing about quadratic forms, or if you are an expert, you should read this book. There is no shortage of books on quadratic forms [1,2,3,5,6,7,9,10,12], so something unusual is needed to excuse another. As we have come to expect, Conway provides us with the unusual. He gives us new insights, insounds, inscents; he puts us in touch while writing tastefully. To do justice to it, we would need to copy out the whole book.

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I content myself with describing one item, Conway's river, and leave you to read about conorms and vonorms, Farey fractions and $PSL_2(\mathbb{Z})$, isospectral lattices (why you cannot hear their shape), gluing, the little Methuselah form, the fifteen theorem, the quadratic form as a bouquet of flowers – each flower from a finite field, and much more, in this remarkably informative yet concise little book. [...]

—Bill Dubuque

[1]

<http://journals.cms.math.ca/cgi-bin/vault/public/view/CRUXv26n3/body/PDF/page147-150.pdf?file=page147-150>

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