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Aptech Systems, Inc., Publishers of the GAUSS Mathematical and Statistical System, 23804 S.E. Kent-Kangley Road, Maple Valley, WA 98038, USA. Tel: (206) 432 - 7855 Fax (206) 432 - 7832 email: info@aptech.com URL: www.aptech.com

American Statistical Association: Chance Vol 8 No 1, 1995 article by KS and KW Heiner 'Tree Rings of the Northern Shawangunks' page 32 fig 2

Springer-Verlag: *Mathematica in Education and Research* Vol 4 Issue 3 1995 article by Roman E Maeder, Beatrice Amrhein and Oliver Gloor

'Illustrated Mathematics: Visualization of Mathematical Objects' page 9 fig 11, originally published as a CD ROM 'Illustrated Mathematics' by

TELOS: ISBN 978-1-85233-270-9, German edition by Birkhauser: ISBN 978-1-85233-270-9.

Mathematica in Education and Research Vol 4 Issue 3 1995 article by Richard J Gaylord and Kazume Nishidate 'Traffic Engineering with Cellular

Automata' page 35 fig 2. *Mathematica in Education and Research* Vol 5 Issue 2 1996 article by Michael Trott 'The Implicitization of a Trefoil

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Mathematica in Education and Research Vol 5 Issue 2 1996 article by Richard Gaylord and Kazume Nishidate 'Contagious Spreading' page 33 fig 1.

Mathematica in Education and Research Vol 5 Issue 2 1996 article by Joe Buhler and Stan Wagon 'Secrets of the Madelung Constant' page 50 fig 1.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Johnson, D.L. (David Lawrence), 1943-

Symmetries. - (Springer undergraduate mathematics series)

1. Symmetry

I. Title

516.1'5

ISBN 978-1-85233-270-9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Johnson, D.L.

Symmetries / D.L. Johnson

p. cm. -- (Springer undergraduate mathematics series, ISSN 1615-2085)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Additional material to this book can be downloaded from <http://extra.springer.com>.

ISBN 978-1-85233-270-9 ISBN 978-1-4471-0243-4 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-4471-0243-4

1. Symmetry groups. I. Title. II. Series.

QA174.2.J64 2001

512'.2—dc21

2001020163

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Springer Undergraduate Mathematics Series ISSN 1615-2085

ISBN 978-1-85233-270-9

<http://www.springer.co.uk>

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Originally published by Springer-Verlag London Limited in 2001

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Typesetting: Camera ready by the author, Kate MacDougall and Thomas Unger

12/3830-54321 Printed on acid-free paper SPIN 10901533

For Mrs. H

Preface

“... many eminent scholars, endowed with great geometric talent, make a point of never disclosing the simple and direct ideas that guided them, subordinating their elegant results to abstract general theories which often have no application outside the particular case in question. Geometry was becoming a study of algebraic, differential or partial differential equations, thus losing all the charm that comes from its being an art.”

H. Lebesgue, *Leçons sur les Constructions Géométriques*, Gauthier-Villars, Paris, 1949.

This book is based on lecture courses given to final-year students at the University of Nottingham and to M.Sc. students at the University of the West Indies in an attempt to reverse the process of expurgation of the geometry component from the mathematics curricula of universities. This erosion is in sharp contrast to the situation in research mathematics, where the ideas and methods of geometry enjoy ever-increasing influence and importance. In the other direction, more modern ideas have made a forceful and beneficial impact on the geometry of the ancients in many areas. Thus trigonometry has vastly clarified our concept of angle, calculus has revolutionised the study of plane curves, and group theory has become the language of symmetry.

To illustrate this last point at a fundamental level, consider the notion of congruence in plane geometry: two triangles are congruent if one can be moved onto the other so that they coincide exactly. This property is guaranteed by each of the familiar conditions SSS, SAS, SAA and RHS. So congruent triangles are just copies of the same triangle appearing in (possibly) different places. This makes it clear that congruence is an equivalence relation, whose three defining properties correspond to properties of the moves mentioned above:

- reflexivity – the identity move,
- symmetry – inverse moves,
- transitivity – composition of moves.

Thinking of these moves as transformations, for which the associative law holds automatically, we have precisely the four axioms for a group: closure, associativity, identity and inverses.

The group just described underlies and in a sense determines plane geometry. It is called the Euclidean group and occupies a dominant position in this book. Its elements are isometries, as defined in Chapter 1, and a detailed study of these occupies Chapters 2 and 4. The rather bulky Chapters 3 and 5 are intended as crash courses on the theory of groups and group presentations respectively, and both lay emphasis on groups that are semidirect products. Such groups arise in the classification of discrete subgroups of the Euclidean group in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, and corresponding tessellations (or tilings) appear in Chapter 9. Regular tessellations of the sphere are classified in Chapter 10, and tessellations of other spaces, such as the hyperbolic plane, form the subject of Chapter 11. Finally, the notions of polygon in 2-space and polyhedron in 3-space are generalised in Chapter 12 to that of a polytope in n -dimensional Euclidean space. Regular polytopes are then defined using group theory and classified in all dimensions. The classification contains some surprises in dimension 4 and is achieved by as elegant a piece of mathematics as you might imagine.

The exercises at the end of each chapter form an integral part of the book, being designed to reinforce your grasp of the material. A large majority are more or less routine, but a handful of more challenging problems are included for good measure. Solutions to most of them, or at least generous hints, are given later, and suggestions for background, alternative and further reading appear towards the end of the book.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge my gratitude to a number of people: to J.A. Green, B.H. Neumann, J.H. Conway and R.C. Lyndon for influence and guidance over the years, and likewise to John Humphreys, Bob Laxton, Jim Wiegold and Geoff Smith for valuable encouragement; to Maxine Francis, Kate MacDougall and Aaron Wilson for skilful preparation of the typescript and diagrams; to all at Springer-Verlag, especially David Anderson, Nick Wilson, Susan Hezlet, David Ireland and Karen Borthwick, for efficient handling of matters connected with production; and last but not least to the students who provided much useful feedback on my lectures.

D.L.J.

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