

ABSTRACT

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“Mapping Class Groups: Progress and Problems”

Roughly speaking, a mathematician thinks of a surface as a space which at least locally looks like a plane, much the way early man thought that the earth was flat. An analytic classification of surfaces was given in 1870, and the last gap in the topological version was filled in 1925, so what could possibly be left to say about them? In this talk I will introduce *mapping class groups* and describe how these algebraic objects associated to surfaces have been keeping mathematicians busy ever since.