Letter from the editor

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Who is talked about in this issue of the *Lettera Matematica International Edition*? The people, mathematicians and non, that appear here—with their teaching, their work, or (simply?) their ideas—provide a measure of how tied we are to concrete work, not only to the general development of the discipline, but also to its points of reference, and the methods and inventions of its protagonists. Along with the cultural conquests of mathematics and the sectors that relate to it, the *Lettera* has always been careful to give proper emphasis to processes and their creators. ‘Who and in what way?’ is the question that systematically flanks ‘What was done?’. There is no other way it can be for a journal that was born as an expression of a group of historians of mathematics, and which later—rather quickly—extended to all forms of culture that connect to our subject: the determining figures, or those in any case influential in both research and teaching are the hinges on which the narration of the facts generally hangs.

So here we arrive to vol. 2, no. 3, with a list of outstanding figures through whose stories the reader can read, as though holding them up to a light, a part of our discipline’s development. There is a fond portrait by Franco

Lorenzoni of Emma Castelnuovo, who passed away at the age of 100, her innovative teaching methods and her sense of beauty in mathematics. There are accounts of two figures, each a forerunner in his or her own field, who have in common the distance from, if not the indifference of, the academic community: Angelo Vulpiani writes about Lewis Fry Richardson, a visionary scientist and pacifist who introduced many methods on which modern meteorology is based and who was ahead of his times with the idea of fractals; Irene Polo Bianco writes about Alicia Boole Stott (daughter of the famous George Boole, one of the founders of modern logic), often thought of as an ‘amateur mathematician’ but who was a great success with her contributions to four-dimensional geometry. There are also discussions of works of other famous figures and their commitment in different areas. Gian Italo Bischi interviews Giuseppe Mussardo about his documentaries, including one about Bruno Pontecorvo, one of the most illustrious physicists of the twentieth century, who took a precise political stand. Daniela Palma dedicated an article to the report by the mathematician Vannevar Bush, scientific advisor to the President of the United States who, at the end of the second world war, testified presciently that public support for basic research was a requirement for achieving a genuine prospective for economic development. Other figures present here are more strictly tied to mathematics: Anne Marie Marmier writes about the omnipresent Bourbaki coming to grips with the problems of teaching reform in France, and Davide Bondoni presents the logician Ernst Schröder in the role of a forerunner in algebraic structures. You will find these together with other articles: a report on the art of concentrating information by Stefano Leonesi, and the third and final instalment of a long essay on elementary particles by Giulio Maltese, our collaborator and friend who sadly passed away recently.

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Liliana Curcio warns us to watch out for Ptolemy's error (but it wasn't all his fault), while Graziano Cavallini reminds us not to forget about mathematics in psychology. Happy reading!

Translated from the Italian by Kim Williams.

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revisable information in complex systems. He was one of the first in Italy to introduce topics related to fuzzy systems, giving the start, together with Aldo de Luca, to the theory of fuzziness measures. He has analysed several of the epistemological problems that arise in this context and, more recently, the relationship between scientific research and economic development. His publications include *Imagination and Rigor* (Springer, 2006), *Contro il declino* (co-authored with Pietro Greco, Codice edizioni, 2007), *Memoria e Progetto* (co-edited with Pietro Greco, Edizioni GEM, 2010).