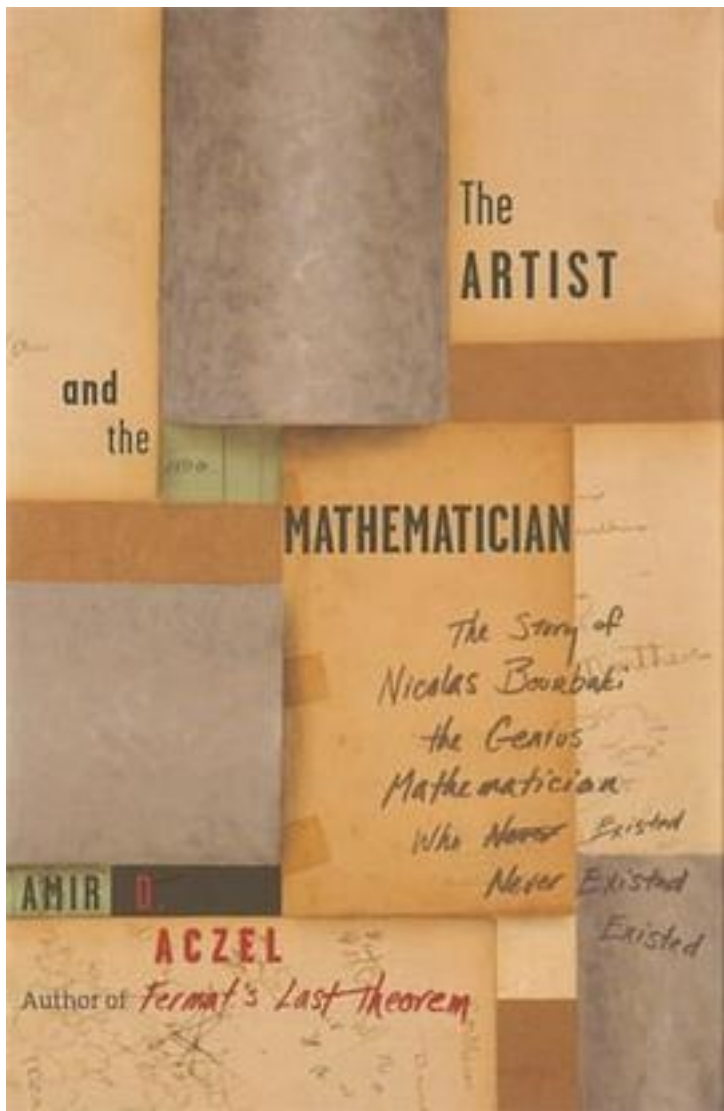


The Artist and the Mathematician



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Nicolas Bourbaki, whose mathematical publications began to appear in the late 1930s and continued to be published through most of the twentieth century, was a direct product as well as a major force behind an important revolution that took place in the early decades of the twentieth century that completely changed Western culture. Pure mathematics, the area of Bourbaki's work, seems on the surface to be an abstract field of human study with no direct connection with the real world. In reality, however, it is closely intertwined with the general culture that surrounds it. Major developments in mathematics have often followed important trends in popular culture; developments in mathematics have acted as harbingers of change in the surrounding human culture. The seeds of change, the beginnings of the revolution that swept the Western world in the early decades of the twentieth century — both in mathematics and in other areas — were sown late in the previous century. This is the story both of Bourbaki and the world that created him in that time. It is the story of an elaborate intellectual joke — because Bourbaki, one of the foremost mathematicians of his day — never existed.

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