REPRESENTATIONS OF KNOT GROUPS IN SU(2)

ERIC PAUL KLASSEN

ABSTRACT. This paper is a study of the structure of the space $R(K)$ of representations of classical knot groups into SU(2). Let $\tilde{R}(K)$ equal the set of conjugacy classes of irreducible representations.

In §I, we interpret the relations in a presentation of the knot group in terms of the geometry of SU(2); using this technique we calculate $\tilde{R}(K)$ for $K$ equal to the torus knots, twist knots, and the Whitehead link. We also determine a formula for the number of binary dihedral representations of an arbitrary knot group. We prove, using techniques introduced by Culler and Shalen, that if the dimension of $\tilde{R}(K)$ is greater than 1, then the complement in $S^3$ of a tubular neighborhood of $K$ contains closed, nonboundary parallel, incompressible surfaces. We also show how, for certain nonprime and doubled knots, $\tilde{R}(K)$ has dimension greater than one.

In §II, we calculate the Zariski tangent space, $T_p(R(K))$, for an arbitrary knot $K$, at a reducible representation $\rho$, using a technique due to Weil. We prove that for all but a finite number of the reducible representations, $\dim T_p(R(K)) = 3$. These nonexceptional representations possess neighborhoods in $R(K)$ containing only reducible representations. At the exceptional representations, which correspond to real roots of the Alexander polynomial, $\dim T_p(R(K)) = 3 + 2k$ for a positive integer $k$. In those examples analyzed in this paper, these exceptional representations can be expressed as limits of arcs of irreducible representations. We also give an interpretation of these “extra” tangent vectors as representations in the group of Euclidean isometries of the plane.

0. Introduction

This paper is a study of the space $R(K)$ of representations of the fundamental group of the complement of a knot $K$ into the Lie group SU(2). The major results are as follows: (1) a calculation of the topological type of $R(K)$ for $K$ a torus knot, a twist knot, or the Whitehead link, (2) a determination of the Zariski tangent space to $R(K)$ at a reducible representation for an arbitrary knot $K$, and (3) a proposition and some examples relating the dimension of $R(K)$ to incompressible surfaces in the complement of $K$.

While the idea of representing 3-manifold groups in SU(2) is a fairly recent one, the representation of these groups in other groups has a substantial history. We will not attempt to chronicle this history in detail, but will comment here on...
those developments which we consider most relevant to this paper: In *A quick trip through knot theory* [F, pp. 160–163], Fox analyzes cyclic and metacyclic representations of knot groups. Weil in [W], did important work on calculating the Zariski tangent space to a variety of representations into a Lie group. Riley [Ri1, Proposition 4] has exhibited specific arcs of representations of 2-bridge knot groups into SU(2). There is some overlap between Riley’s work and this thesis, since the twist knots and some of the torus knots (the ones of type (2, q)) considered here are 2-bridge knots. Using methods similar to those of Riley, Gerhard Burde [B] has computed \( \tilde{R}(K) \) for certain 2-bridge knots \( K \), including the twist knots. In particular, he independently proved Theorem 3. Culler and Shalen, in [CS], develop a beautiful relationship between curves of representations in SL(2, \( \mathbb{C} \)) and incompressible surfaces. Finally, Andrew Casson has constructed an important new invariant of homology 3-spheres using their representation spaces in SU(2) (see [AM]).

**Organization.** Let \( K \subset S^3 \) be a knot and define \( R(K) \) to be the space of representations \( \text{Hom}(\pi_1(S^3 - K), \text{SU}(2)) \). Let \( \tilde{R}(K) \) be the set of conjugacy classes of irreducible representations. (These terms will be discussed more fully in §I.A.) This paper falls naturally into two sections.

§I is devoted to a geometric understanding of the structure of \( \tilde{R}(K) \). In §I.A, some useful facts about the geometry of SU(2) are stated, and the basic objects of study are defined. In §I.B the topological type of \( \tilde{R}(K) \) is computed for \( K \) equal to a torus knot, and an application is given concerning Casson’s invariant for homology spheres constructed by \( 1/n \) surgery on the (3, 4)-torus knot. In §I.C, the topological type of \( \tilde{R}(K) \) is computed for \( K \) an \( m \)-twist knot. To perform this computation, a basic method is introduced whereby \( \tilde{R}(K) \) is identified with a certain set of geometric immersions of a polygon (which depends on the projection of the knot \( K \)) in \( S^2 \). In §I.D (Theorem 6), the topological type of \( \tilde{R}(WL) \) is computed, where WL is the Whitehead link. This computation is of use in computing \( \tilde{R}(\text{doubled knots}) \), an endeavor which is touched on in §I.F, and which will be explored more fully in a future paper (see [K]). In §I.E (Theorem 10), a formula is derived for the number of conjugacy classes of binary dihedral representations (which comprise a special class of irreducible representations into SU(2)) of an arbitrary knot group.

In §I.F (Proposition 15) we show, using results of Culler and Shalen, that if \( \tilde{R}(K) \) contains a component of dimension greater than one, then \( S^3 - \text{int}(N(K)) \) contains nonboundary parallel, closed, incompressible surfaces. We also show, by analyzing composite knots and satellite knots, that incompressible tori in a knot complement often do, in fact, lead to components of \( \tilde{R}(K) \) of dimension greater than one (Propositions 13 and 14).

§II is devoted to the computation and interpretation of the Zariski tangent space to \( R(K) \), \( T_\rho(R(K)) \), at a reducible representation \( \rho \). In §II.A, we show how to view \( R(K) \) as an algebraic set, and prove the basic lemma (Proposition 18, stated by Weil in [W, p. 151]) which makes it possible to calculate
\(T_\rho(R(K))\). In §II.B, we apply these techniques to compute \(R_\rho(R(K))\), where \(\rho\) is reducible. As a result we find (Theorem 19) that, except for a finite number (up to conjugacy) of exceptions, the reducible representations are 3-manifold points of \(R(K)\). The finite number of exceptional reducible representations, which correspond to roots of the Alexander polynomial of \(K\), have higher dimensional tangent spaces. In the case of the knots analyzed in §I, these extra, "irreducible" tangent vectors correspond to actual irreducible deformations of these reducible representations. We also show (Proposition 20) that these "irreducible" tangent vectors can be interpreted as nonabelian representations of the knot group into the group of isometries of the Euclidean plane. These Euclidean representations have been analyzed by De Rham [D].

I. Geometric computation of representation spaces

I.A. Preliminaries on \(SU(2)\) representations. We will begin by defining the two Lie groups, \(SU(2)\) and \(S^3\), with which this paper is most concerned:

\[
SU(2) = \left\{ \left( \begin{array}{cc} a & b \\ \bar{b} & \bar{a} \end{array} \right) : a, b \in \mathbb{C}, |a|^2 + |b|^2 = 1 \right\},
\]

\[
S^3 = \{\text{quaternions } q \text{ such that } |q| = 1\}.
\]

These two groups are isomorphic via the map given by

\[
\left( \begin{array}{cc} a & b \\ \bar{b} & \bar{a} \end{array} \right) \mapsto a + bj.
\]

Using this isomorphism we will refer to these groups pretty much interchangeably, though we will more often use quaternion notation.

Let \(\Gamma\) be a finitely presented group with presentation

\[
\Gamma = \{x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_n : w_1, w_2, \ldots, w_m\},
\]

where the relators \(w_i\) are words in the generators \(x_j\). Define

\[
R(\Gamma) = \text{Hom}(\Gamma, S^3),
\]

and define

\[
S(\Gamma) = \{\rho \in R(\Gamma) | \text{im}(\rho) \text{ is abelian}\}.
\]

These abelian representations are often referred to as "reducible" because a representation of any group in \(SU(2)\) is reducible if and only if it has abelian image. We give \(S^3\) its usual topology and \(\Gamma\) the discrete topology; we then give \(R(\Gamma)\) the compact-open topology.

\(S^3/\{\pm 1\} \cong SO(3)\) acts on \(R(\Gamma)\) by conjugation:

\[
(q \cdot \rho)(x) = q \rho(x) q^{-1},
\]

where \(q \in S^3\), \(x \in \Gamma\), and \(\rho \in R(\Gamma)\). It is easily verified (see, for example, [AM]), that this action is free when restricted to \(R(\Gamma) - S(\Gamma)\). Hence, define

\[
\tilde{R}(\Gamma) = (R(\Gamma) - S(\Gamma))/\text{action by } SO(3).
\]
Using the above presentation for \( \Gamma \), we can embed \( R(\Gamma) \) in \((S^3)^n\) via the map
\[
f(p) = (\rho(x_1), \ldots, \rho(x_n)).
\]
The map \( f \) is injective because the \( x_i \) generate \( \Gamma \). We now characterize the image of \( f \). Let \((\sigma_1, \sigma_2, \ldots, \sigma_n)\) be an element of \((S^3)^n\). If we substitute \( \sigma_i \) for each \( x_i \) in the word \( w_j \), then we can view each \( w_j \) as a map from \((S^3)^n\) to \( S^3 \). It follows that
\[
\text{im}(f) = \bigcap \{w_i^{-1}(1) : i = 1, \ldots, m\}.
\]
The \( w_i \) are polynomials in the ambient coordinates, so \( \text{im}(f) \) is an algebraic subset of \((S^3)^n\). We will henceforth identify \( R(\Gamma) \) with \( \text{im}(f) \). In [LM], Lubotzky and Magid show how \( R(\Gamma) \) may be given the structure of an affine algebraic scheme which is independent of the particular presentation of \( \Gamma \).

Let \( K \subset S^3 \) be a knot. To simplify notation, we write \( R(K), S(K), \) and \( \tilde{R}(K) \) instead of \( R(\pi_1(S^3 - K)), S(\pi_1(S^3 - K)), \) and \( \tilde{R}(\pi_1(S^3 - K)) \), respectively. \( R(K) \) and \( \tilde{R}(K) \) will be the main objects of study in this thesis.

Geometry of \( S^3 \). We now state (mostly without proof—see [S] for some of these computations) some basic geometric facts about the group \( S^3 \). Let \( q = a + bi + cj + dk \in S^3 \). Define \( \text{Re}(q) = a \). Assume \( q \neq \pm 1 \). We can express \( q \) in the form
\[
q = \cos \theta + \sin \theta(ai + bj + ck),
\]
where \( a^2 + b^2 + c^2 = 1 \). If we fix \( a, b, \) and \( c, \) while allowing \( \theta \in \mathbb{R} \) to vary, we obtain a subgroup \( S^1_q \) of \( S^3 \) which is isomorphic to \( S^1 \subset \mathbb{C} \). Indeed, \( S^1_{\pm t} = S^1 \subset \mathbb{C} \). Every \( q \neq \pm 1 \) is contained in a unique such circle subgroup. These subgroups are just the geodesics through 1 in \( S^3 \). Any two of these circle subgroups are conjugate to each other in \( S^3 \).

Consider the map \( \varphi : S^3 \to [-1, 1] \) given by \( \varphi(q) = \text{Re}(q) \). If \( t \neq \pm 1 \), then \( \varphi^{-1}(t) \) is a 2-sphere. We will use the notation
\[
\Sigma_t = \varphi^{-1}(t).
\]
Note that if \( q \neq \pm 1 \in S^3 \) and \( t \in (-1, 1) \), then \( S^1_q \) meets \( \Sigma_t \) in two points, and they are orthogonal at these points.

We now consider the geometric effect of conjugation in \( S^3 \). Define \( C_q : S^3 \to S^3 \) by \( C_q(w) = qwq^{-1} \). It is easily verified that \( C_q(\Sigma_t) = \Sigma_t \) for \( -1 \leq t \leq 1 \). In fact, \( C_q \) acts on \( \Sigma_t \) as a rotation by angle \( 2\theta \) about the two antipodal points where \( \Sigma_t \) is pierced by \( S^1_q \). (We are writing
\[
q = \cos \theta + \sin \theta(ai + bj + ck),
\]
where \( 0 \leq \theta \leq \pi \). The direction of this rotation is determined by which of the two intersection points is closer to \( q \) in \( S^3 \). It is a right-handed rotation about
Figure 1. Conjugation by $q$ induces a rotation by an angle of $2\theta$ on $\Sigma_i$.

this closer intersection point. It follows that the $\Sigma_i$ are precisely the conjugacy classes of $S^3$. Figure 1 illustrates these relationships in $S^3$.

I.B. Torus knots. Let $(r, s)$ be any pair of positive, relatively prime integers. Let $K_{r,s}$ denote the $(r, s)$-torus knot in $S^3$.

Theorem 1. $\tilde{R}(K_{r,s})$ is the disjoint union of $(r - 1)(s - 1)/2$ open arcs.

Proof. In this proof, we assume that $r$ and $s$ are odd. The case of $r$ or $s$ even is handled by the same method. $Y = \pi_1(S^3 - K_{r,s})$ has a presentation of the form

$$Y = \{x, y | x = y^r\}.$$

Since we are considering classes of nonabelian representations, we consider only representations $\rho$ such that $[\rho(x), \rho(y)] \neq 1$. It follows that $\rho(x) \neq \pm1 \neq \rho(y)$, and that $\rho(x)$ and $\rho(y)$ lie in distinct circle subgroups $S^1_{\rho(x)}$ and $S^1_{\rho(y)}$, which we denote simply by $S^1_x$ and $S^1_y$. We know that

$$\rho(x)^r = \rho(y)^s \in S^1_x \cap S^1_y = \{\pm1\}. \quad (*)$$

Consider the case $\rho(x)^r = \rho(y)^s = +1$. It follows that

$$\rho(x) \in \{q | q^r = 1, q \neq 1\} = \bigcup \{\Sigma_{t_x} : t_x \in A\},$$

where $A = \{\cos(2\pi/r), \cos(4\pi/r), \ldots, \cos((r - 1)\pi/r)\}$. This gives $(r - 1)/2$ possible conjugacy classes for $\rho(x)$. Since $s$ is odd as well, there are $(s - 1)/2$ possible conjugacy classes for $\rho(y)$. When we choose conjugacy classes $\Sigma_{t_x}$ for $\rho(x)$ and $\Sigma_{t_y}$ for $\rho(y)$ we constrain these images to lie in two concentric $2$-spheres centered at $1$ in $S^3$. (They are concentric with respect to geodesic radii emanating from $1 \in S^3$.) The only remaining conjugacy invariant for the pair $(\rho(x), \rho(y))$ is the angle $\alpha$ between the shortest geodesic from $1$ to $\rho(x)$.
Figure 2. The angular invariant $\alpha$ for pairs $(\rho(x), \rho(y))$

and the shortest geodesic from 1 to $\rho(y)$. This is because conjugation of $\rho$ induces the "same" rotation on $\Sigma_{tx}$ and $\Sigma_{ty}$.

If $\alpha = 0$ or $\alpha = \pi$, then $\rho$ is abelian. This leaves an open arc (corresponding to $0 < \alpha < \pi$) of conjugacy classes of nonabelian representations for each pair of conjugacy classes $(\Sigma_{tx}, \Sigma_{ty})$ for $(\rho(x), \rho(y))$. It follows that there are $(r-1)(s-1)/4$ open arcs of classes of representations for which $\rho(x)^r = \rho(y)^s = 1$. A similar computation yields another $(r-1)(s-1)/4$ open arcs of classes of representations satisfying $\rho(x)^r = \rho(y)^s = -1$. The theorem follows. \(\Box\)

Let $M_n$ be the homology 3-sphere obtained by a Dehn surgery of type $1/n$ on $K_{3,4}$. (For conventions regarding Dehn surgery on knots, see Rolfsen [Ro, pp. 258-259].) Let

$$\tilde{R}(M_n) = \text{Hom}(\pi_1(M_n), S^3)/\text{conjugacy in } S^3.$$ 

Proposition 2. The cardinality of $\tilde{R}(M_n)$ is equal to $|10n|$.

Note. Casson's invariant for homology 3-spheres, $\lambda(M^3)$, is defined to be $1/2$ the algebraic intersection number of two manifolds whose geometric intersection is $\tilde{R}(M^3)$. Hence, for a given homology 3-sphere $M^3$ it is natural to ask the question: does $|\lambda(M^3)| = \text{card}(\tilde{R}(M^3))/2$? The above proposition answers this question affirmatively for those homology 3-spheres obtained by Dehn surgery on $K_{3,4}$, since $
 \lambda(M_n) = n\Delta'(K_{3,4}) = n\Delta''_{K_{3,4}}(1) = 5n$. $(\Delta_{K_{3,4}}(t)$ is the Alexander polynomial normalized so that the coefficient of $t^k$ is the same as the coefficient of $t^{-k}$ for each value of $k$. See [AM] for details of this computation.) In [BN], Boyer and Nicas carry out this calculation for homology 3-spheres obtained from surgery on $(2, q)$-torus knots, and find agreement there, also, between $|\lambda(M^3)|$ and $\text{card}(\tilde{R}(M^3))/2$.

Added in proof. The author has learned that Fintushel and Stern have recently shown that for all Seifert-fibered homology spheres $M^3$ with three exceptional
fibers, 
\[ \lambda(M^3) = \frac{1}{4} \text{card}(\hat{R}(M^3)). \]

This class of homology spheres includes those obtained by surgery on torus knots. Their proof uses Floer's recent reformulation of Casson's \( \lambda \)-invariant in terms of gauge theory.

**Proof of Proposition 2.** In this proof, we shall assume that \( n > 0 \). The case \( n < 0 \) is handled in the same way, and is omitted.

The group \( \Gamma = \pi_1(S^3 - K_{3,4}) \) has presentation
\[ \Gamma = \langle x, y : x^3 = y^4 \rangle. \]

In \( \Gamma \), a meridian can be represented by \( \mu = xy^{-1} \), and a longitude by \( \lambda = x^3(xy^{-1})^{-12} \). To obtain \( \pi_1(M_n) \), we adjoin the relation \( \mu \lambda^n = 1 \) to our presentation of \( \Gamma \). In terms of \( x \) and \( y \), this relation takes the form
\[ (xy^{-1})[x^3(xy^{-1})^{-12}]^n = 1. \]

In order to obtain the cardinality of \( \hat{R}(M_n) \), we now count the classes of representations \( [\rho] \in \hat{R}(K_{3,4}) \) which satisfy this additional relation. (Note that if an element \( \rho \) of \( R(K_{3,4}) \) takes a relator to 1 in \( S^3 \), then so does any conjugate of \( \rho \).)

If \( [\rho] \in \hat{R}(K_{3,4}) \), then \( \rho(x)^3 = \rho(y)^4 = \pm 1 \). We consider first the case \( \rho(x)^3 = \rho(y)^4 = +1 \). In this case we must have \( (\rho(x), \rho(y)) \in X_{1/2} \times X_0 \). (This is because these sets contain the only nontrivial 3rd and 4th roots of 1 in \( S^3 \).) To satisfy the additional relation, we insist in addition that
\[ \rho(xy^{-1})[\rho(x)^3 \rho(xy^{-1})^{-12}]^n = 1, \]
i.e., that \( \rho(xy^{-1})^{1-12n} = 1 \). Thus \( \rho(xy^{-1}) \) must be a \((12n-1)\)th root of 1. Assume, by conjugation, that \( \rho(y) = -i \), so that \( \rho(y^{-1}) = i \). As \( \rho(x) \) takes values in the 2-sphere \( \Sigma_{-1/2} \), we see that \( \rho(xy^{-1}) = \rho(x)i \) takes values in the round but nonlatitudinal 2-sphere \( (\Sigma_{-1/2})i \).

Let \( Q_{12n-1} = \{ \sigma \in S^3 : \sigma^{12n-1} = 1 \} \). Then we may write \( Q_{12n-1} = \bigcup \{ \Sigma_t : t = \cos(2\pi k/(12n - 1)), k = 0, 1, \ldots, 6n - 1 \} \). Note that \( (\Sigma_{-1/2})i \cap Q_{12n-1} \) is a disjoint union of circles, at most one of these circles lying in any latitudinal 2-sphere. The conjugacy classes of representations \( \rho \) in \( \hat{R}(M_n) \) are in one-to-one correspondence to the conjugacy classes (under simultaneous conjugation by an element of \( S^1 \)) of pairs
\[ (\rho(x), \rho(y)) \in \Sigma_{-1/2} \times \{-i\} \]
satisfying \( (\rho(x)\rho(y)^{-1})^{12n-1} = 1 \). The number of conjugacy classes of these pairs is equal to the number of circles in \( Q_{12n-1} \cap (\Sigma_{-1/2})i \). The number of these circles is, in turn, equal to the number of \((12n-1)\)th roots of 1 of the
form $e^{i\theta}$, where $\pi/6 < \theta < 5\pi/6$. Thus we need simply to calculate the number of integers $k$ satisfying the condition

$$\pi/6 < 2\pi k/(12n - 1) < 5\pi/6.$$ 

An easy computation shows that there are precisely $4n$ such integers. Thus we have $4n$ classes of representations of $\pi_1(M_n)$ satisfying $\rho(x)^3 = \rho(y)^4 = 1$.

We now consider the case $\rho(x)^3 = \rho(y)^4 = -1$. In this case we must have $\rho(x) \in \Sigma_{1/2}$ and $\rho(y) \in \Sigma_{(1/\sqrt{2})} \cup \Sigma_{(-1/\sqrt{2})}$. After performing computations analogous to those in the first case, we find $3n$ classes of representations coming from

$$(\rho(x), \rho(y)) \in \Sigma_{1/2} \times \Sigma_{(1/\sqrt{2})},$$

and another $3n$ classes coming from

$$(\rho(x), \rho(y)) \in \Sigma_{1/2} \times \Sigma_{(-1/\sqrt{2})}.$$ 

Thus we obtain a total of $4n + 3n + 3n = 10n$ classes of representations of $\pi_1(M_n)$ in $S^3$. 

Note. The three sets of representations considered in this proof come from the three separate arcs of representations that make up $\tilde{R}(K_{3,4})$.

I.C. $m$-twist knots. The $m$-twist knot $K_m$ is the knot whose projection is shown in Figure 3.

In this section we calculate the topological type of the representation space of the $m$-twist knot $(m = 1, 2, 3, \ldots)$.

Theorem 3. $\tilde{R}(K_m)$ is the disjoint union of $[m/2]$ circles and, if $m$ is odd, one open arc.

![Figure 3. The $m$-twist knot $K_m$](image-url)
Proof. We prove the theorem for the case in which \( m \) is even. The computations are completely analogous when \( m \) is odd. Define \( n \) by \( m = 2n - 2 \).

Using the pictured Wirtinger generators, we write:

\[
\Gamma = \pi_1(K_m) = \{x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_{2n}| x_2^{-1} x_1 x_2 = x_3, x_3 x_2 x_3^{-1} = x_4, x_4^{-1} x_3 x_4 = x_5, \ldots, x_{2n-1} x_{2n-2} x_{2n-1}^{-1} = x_{2n}, x_{2n}^{-1} x_1 x_{2n} = x_2\}.
\]

Notational convention. Suppose \( \rho: \Gamma \to S^3 \) is a nonabelian representation. Since the \( \rho(x_i) \) are all conjugate to each other, they all lie in a common latitudinal \( \Sigma_t \). From now on we will use \( x_i \) both for the generators of \( \Gamma \), and for their images in \( \Sigma_t \) under \( \rho \). For \( 1 \leq i \leq 2n - 1 \), connect \( x_i \) to \( x_{i+1} \) in \( \Sigma_t \) by the shorter geodesic connecting them. (We will soon see that \( x_i \) and \( x_{i+1} \) are not antipodal, hence this procedure is not ambiguous.) This gives rise to a geodesic immersion of the following polygon, \( P_m \), in \( \Sigma_t \):

This immersion satisfies the following metric constraints:

(A) \( d(x_1, x_{i+1}) = d(x_{i+1}, x_{i+2}) \).
(B) \( \angle x_i x_{i+1} x_{i+2} = -\angle x_{i+1} x_{i+2} x_{i+3} \).
(C) \( d(x_2, x_{2n}) = d(x_1, x_{2n}) \).
Because $\rho$ is nonabelian, the angles in condition (B) are well defined and nonzero.

Define $\text{imm}_*(P_m, \Sigma_0)$ to be the set of those geodesic immersions of $P_m$ in $\Sigma_0$ which satisfy (A), (B), and (C).

**Proposition 4.** There is a one-to-one correspondence between $\text{imm}_*(P_m, \Sigma_0)$ and $R(\Gamma) - S(\Gamma)$ (i.e., nonabelian representations).

**Proof.** Given a nonabelian representation $\rho$, the corresponding immersion is obtained by first connecting the points $x_i$ and $x_{i+1}$ of $\Sigma_t$ by the shortest geodesic of $\Sigma_t$ between them. There is no ambiguity; $x_i$ and $x_{i+1}$ cannot be antipodal. If they were, it would be impossible to satisfy the additional requirement

$$d(x_1, x_{2n}) = d(x_2, x_{2n}),$$

which is implied by the last relation. Now project $\Sigma_t$ onto $\Sigma_0$ along the geodesics connecting +1 to -1 in $S^3$. This composition is the desired immersion. The fact that it satisfies the metric constraints (A), (B), and (C) is a consequence of the geometry of conjugation in $S^3$ discussed in §I.A.

Suppose, conversely, that we are given such an immersion $P_m \to \Sigma_0$. We then use projection along geodesics to map $\Sigma_0$ onto $\Sigma_t$, where

$$t = \cos(\frac{1}{2} \angle x_3 x_2 x_1).$$

By the geometry discussed in §I.A, it follows that we have a representation $\rho: \Gamma \to S^3$ as soon as we verify the following lemma.

**Lemma 5.** If $P_{2n-2}$ is immersed satisfying conditions (A), (B), and (C) in $\Sigma_0$, then it also satisfies

$$\angle x_2 x_{2n} x_1 = \angle x_{2n-2} x_{2n-1} x_{2n}.$$

**Proof of Lemma 5.** In this proof, "$X = Y$" means that $X$ is related to $Y$ by an orientation-preserving isometry of $\Sigma_0$, where $X$ and $Y$ are any geometric figures. "$X = -Y$" means they are related by an orientation-reversing isometry.

By symmetry, it is clear that

$$\Delta x_{2n-1} x_{2n} x_2 = -\Delta x_{2n-2} x_{2n-1} x_1.$$

Hence,

$$\angle x_{2n-1} x_{2n} x_2 = -\angle x_{2n-2} x_{2n-1} x_1.$$
By isosceles triangles,
\[ \angle x_1 x_{2n} x_{2n-1} = -\angle x_1 x_{2n-1} x_{2n}. \]
Adding these equations gives
\[ \angle x_1 x_{2n} x_2 = \angle x_{2n} x_{2n-1} x_{2n-2}, \]
which completes the proof of the lemma and of the proposition.

Continuing with the proof of Theorem 3, we will now give a canonical way
to choose a representative of each oriented congruence class in \( \text{imm}_* (P_m, \Sigma_0) \).
By elementary geometry (using symmetry), the midpoints of \( x_1 x_2, x_2 x_3, \ldots, x_{2n-1} x_{2n} \) all lie on and, in fact, determine a great circle in \( \Sigma_0 \). Consider the
directed geodesic path \( \sigma \) that traces from midpoint \( x_{1/2} \) to midpoint \( x_{2} \) to \( \cdots \) to midpoint \( x_{2n-1} x_{2n} \) (possibly traversing the great circle several times).
Rotate the immersion so that \( \sigma \) lies on the \( ij \)-equator, midpoint \( x_{n/2} \) lies
at \( i \), and \( \sigma \) runs in the direction \( \{i \rightarrow j \rightarrow -i\} \). This prescription uniquely
determines a representative of each oriented congruence class, and we shall say
the resulting immersion is in “standard position”.

Consider the coordinate system:
\[ \mathbb{R} \times (-\pi/2, \pi/2) \to \Sigma_0 \]
given by
\[ (\theta, \alpha) \to \cos \alpha (\cos \theta i + \sin \theta j) + \sin \alpha k. \]
Assuming our immersion is in standard position, we can pull it back to the
\( \theta \alpha \)-plane to obtain the graph pictured in Figure 6.

We write \( i-j-k \) coordinates for some of these points in terms of the spherical
coordinates \( \alpha_0 \) and \( \theta_0 \):
\[
\begin{align*}
x_1 &= \cos(-\alpha_0) [\cos((1-2n)\theta_0) i + \sin((1-2n)\theta_0) j] + \sin(-\alpha_0) k, \\
x_2 &= \cos(\alpha_0) [\cos((3-2n)\theta_0) i + \sin((3-2n)\theta_0) j] + \sin(\alpha_0) k, \\
x_{2n} &= \cos(\alpha_0) [\cos((2n-1)\theta_0) i + \sin((2n-1)\theta_0) j] + \sin(\alpha_0) k.
\end{align*}
\]
Let \( \langle , \rangle \) denote the usual inner product on \( \mathbb{R}^3 = \mathbb{R}i + \mathbb{R}j + \mathbb{R}k \). Then for
points \( x, y \) on \( \Sigma_0 \), we have \( \langle x, y \rangle = \cos(\text{dist}(x, y)) \). Since \( 0 \leq \text{dist}(x, y) \leq \pi \), the inner product \( \langle x, y \rangle \) gives an unambiguous measure of distance. The
immersion of \( P_m \) pulled back in Figure 6 automatically satisfies conditions A and B. We may assume that \(-\pi/2 < \alpha_0 < \pi/2\) and that \(0 \leq \theta_0 \leq \pi/2\) (by the use of shortest geodesics in constructing the immersion and the fact that \(x_n\) and \(x_{n+1}\) are not antipodal). We now calculate the conditions imposed on \((\theta_0, \alpha_0)\) by condition C. Using the above formulae we compute:

\[
\begin{align*}
\langle x_1, x_{2n} \rangle &= \cos^2 \alpha_0 \cos((4n - 2)\theta_0) - \sin^2 \alpha_0, \\
\langle x_2, x_{2n} \rangle &= \cos^2 \alpha_0 \cos((4n - 4)\theta_0) + \sin^2 \alpha_0.
\end{align*}
\]

Setting these equal, we obtain

\[
(*) \quad 2 \tan^2 \alpha_0 = \cos((2n - 1)\theta') - \cos((2n - 2)\theta'),
\]

where \(\theta' = 2\theta_0\) (hence we allow \(0 \leq \theta' \leq \pi\)).

Given a value of \(\theta'\) for which the right-hand side (RHS) of \((*)\) is greater than zero, we obtain two different allowable values of \(\alpha_0\), and hence two allowable immersions. When RHS\((*) = 0\), we obtain \(\alpha_0 = 0\), hence a single allowable immersion. If RHS\((*) < 0\), there is no solution. When we examine the right-hand side we find that RHS\((*) \geq 0\) for values of \(\theta'\) in \((n - 1)\) closed subarcs of \([0, \pi]\). RHS\((*) = 0\) precisely at the endpoints of these subarcs. Thus for each closed subarc we have two arcs of immersions, and they share endpoints, as shown in Figure 7.

Since each of these immersions corresponds to a distinct conjugacy class of representations, we find that, topologically,

\[\hat{R}(K_m) = n - 1 \text{ disjoint circles},\]

as was to be proved. \(\square\)

Away from the points where \(\alpha_0 = 0\), we can smoothly parametrize \(\hat{R}(K_m)\) using \(\theta'\) as a parameter, because the derivative with respect to \(\alpha_0\) of LHS\((*)\) is nonzero. When \(\alpha_0 = 0\), the derivative with respect to \(\theta'\) of RHS\((*)\) is nonzero and, hence, near those points we may smoothly parametrize \(\hat{R}(K_m)\) using \(\alpha_0\) as a parameter. It follows that under this embedding in \(\alpha_0\theta'-\text{space}, \hat{R}(K_m)\) is a smooth 1-manifold.

I.D. The Whitehead link. The Whitehead link (WL) is the two-component link in \(S^3\) with the projection shown in Figure 8.
Figure 8. The Whitehead link WL

Using the pictured Wirtinger generators, its fundamental group is presented as follows:

\[ \pi_1(S^3 - WL) = \{ x_1, x_2, x_3, y_1, y_2 \mid x_3 x_1 x_3^{-1} = x_2, \]
\[ \quad y_1 x_2 y_1^{-1} = x_3, \]
\[ \quad y_2^{-1} x_2 y_2 = x_1, \]
\[ \quad x_2 y_2 x_2^{-1} = y_1, \]
\[ \quad x_1 y_2 x_1^{-1} = y_1 \} . \]

Theorem 6. \( \tilde{R}(WL) \) is a punctured \( S^1 \times S^1 \).

The proof of Theorem 6 will occupy the rest of this section. Let \( \rho : \pi_1(S^3 - WL) \to S^3 \) be a representation.

Lemma 7. (a) \( [\rho(x_1), \rho(y_1)] = 1 \) \( \iff \rho \) is abelian.
(b) \( \rho(y_1) = \rho(y_2) \) \( \iff \rho \) is abelian.

Proof of Lemma. (a) \( (\leftarrow) \) is obvious, so assume \( [\rho(x_1), \rho(y_1)] = 1 \). Then, by the relations, \( \rho(y_1) = \rho(y_2) \) and \( \rho(x_1) = \rho(x_2) = \rho(x_3) \), so \( \rho \) is abelian.
(b) Clearly, \( [\rho(x_1), \rho(y_1)] = 1 \) \( \iff \rho(y_1) = \rho(y_2) \). Then, by (a), the lemma is proved. \( \square \)

We use the fact that the conjugacy classes in \( S^3 \) are precisely the latitudinal 2-spheres \( \Sigma_t \) of constant real part \( t \). Since \( y_1 \) and \( y_2 \) are conjugate, \( \rho(y_1) \) and \( \rho(y_2) \) lie in a single latitudinal 2-sphere. \( \rho(x_1), \rho(x_2), \) and \( \rho(x_3) \) also lie in a single latitudinal 2-sphere.

We now examine the set of nonabelian representations, \( \rho \). Up to conjugacy, \( \rho(y_1) \) and \( \rho(y_2) \) are determined by two real parameters: their real part \( t \) (the same for both), and their angular separation within the latitudinal 2-sphere \( \Sigma_t \). We use one-half this separation as our second parameter \( \alpha \).

1st parameter: \(-1 < t < 1\).
2nd parameter: \(0 < \alpha \leq \pi/2\).

Note. We exclude \( t = \pm 1 \) and \( \alpha = 0 \), because these would result in abelian representations by Lemma 7.
Case 1. $\alpha = \pi/2$. In this case $\rho(y_1)$ and $\rho(y_2)$ are antipodal in their latitudinal 2-sphere. Since $x_1 y_2 x_1^{-1} = y_1$, we see that conjugation by $\rho(x_1)$ must correspond to rotation by $180^\circ$. It follows that $\rho(x_1)$ (and, hence, all $\rho(x_1)$) must lie in the equatorial 2-sphere $\Sigma_0$. We may assume (by conjugation) that

$$\rho(x_1) = \cos \theta - \sin \theta k, \quad \rho(x_2) = \cos \theta + \sin \theta k,$$

where $t = \cos \theta$ and $0 < \theta < \pi$. Since $x_1 y_2 x_1^{-1} = y_1$, $\rho(x_1)$ must lie in the ij-equator of $\Sigma_0$. Thus we may assume (by conjugation) that $\rho(x_1) = i$. Now, the relations $y_2^{-1} x_3 y_2 = x_1$ and $y_1 x_2 y_1^{-1} = x_3$ determine the positions of the $\rho(x_i)$, as pictured in Figure 9.

Thus for each of these antipodal positions of $(\rho(y_1), \rho(y_2))$ we obtain precisely one class of representations:

$$\rho(y_1) = \cos \theta - \sin \theta k, \quad \rho(y_2) = \cos \theta + \sin \theta k,$$

$$\rho(x_1) = i, \quad \rho(x_2) = \cos 2\theta i + \sin 2\theta j,$$

$$\rho(x_3) = \cos 4\theta i + \sin 4\theta j.$$

It is easy to verify that these images satisfy the relations.

Case 2. $0 < \alpha < \pi/2$. By conjugation, assume $\rho(y_1)$ and $\rho(y_2)$ are in the following standard position:

$$\rho(y_1) = t + (1 - t^2)^{1/2} (\cos \alpha i - \sin \alpha k),$$

$$\rho(y_2) = t + (1 - t^2)^{1/2} (\cos \alpha i + \sin \alpha k).$$

The following lemma gives information about the positions of the $\rho(x_i)$ in Case 2.

**Lemma 8.** Let $\rho$ be a nonabelian representation such that $(\rho(y_1), \rho(y_2))$ are in the above standard position, and $0 < \alpha < \pi/2$. Then there exist $\theta$, $\beta$, and...
Figure 10. The points $\rho(x_i)$ and $\rho(x_j)$, as given in Lemma 8, projected onto $\Sigma_0$

$\gamma$ such that

$$\rho(x_1) = \cos \theta + \sin \theta (\cos \beta i + \sin \beta j),$$
$$\rho(x_2) = \cos \theta + \sin \theta (-\cos \beta i + \sin \beta j),$$
$$\rho(x_3) = \cos \theta + \sin \theta (\cos \gamma j + \sin \gamma k).$$

Before continuing with the proof of this lemma, please consider Figure 10, a diagram of the relative positions of these points. In making this diagram, we have projected the images of all the generators onto $\Sigma_0$ along the geodesics connecting $+1$ to $-1$ in $S^3$. This enables us to see the images of all the generators on a single 2-sphere. We will refer to the images of the generators under this projection by the symbols $x_i$ and $y_i$.

Proof of Lemma 8. The relations $x_1y_2x_1^{-1} = y_1$ and $x_2y_2x_2^{-1} = y_1$ imply that $x_1$ and $x_2$ are each equidistant from $y_1$ and $y_2$; hence $\tilde{x_1}$ and $\tilde{x_2}$ both lie on the $ij$-equator. We also know that the angle of rotation about $\tilde{x_1}$ taking $\tilde{y_2}$ to $\tilde{y_1}$ is equal to the angle of rotation about $\tilde{x_2}$ taking $\tilde{y_2}$ to $\tilde{y_1}$. (This is because $\rho(x_1)$ and $\rho(x_2)$ both lie in the same latitudinal 2-sphere.) Once we have fixed $\tilde{x_1}$, this leaves only two possibilities for $\tilde{x_2}$. Either

(i) $\tilde{x_1} = \tilde{x_2}$, or

(ii) $\tilde{x_2}$ is obtained from $\tilde{x_1}$ by reflecting through the $jk$-plane (i.e., changing the sign of its $i$-coordinate, as asserted in the lemma). Note that if we reflected $\tilde{x_1}$ through the $ik$-plane, we would get an angle of rotation of opposite sign.

We need to show that (ii) holds. If $\beta = \pm \pi/2$, then (i) and (ii) coincide, so assume $\beta \neq \pm \pi/2$. Suppose that (i) holds, so $\rho(x_1) = \rho(x_2)$. Then, since $x_3x_1x_3^{-1} = x_2$, we conclude that $x_3$ commutes with $x_1$. It follows that $\tilde{x_3} = \pm \tilde{x_1}$ ($\rho(x_3) = \rho(x_1)\pm 1$). If $\rho(x_3) = \rho(x_1)$, then $\rho(x_1)$ commutes with $\rho(y_1)$,
so $\rho$ is abelian by Lemma 7, giving a contradiction. If $\tilde{x}_3 = -\tilde{x}_1$, please consider Figure 11. This figure is an planar projection of $\Sigma_0$ along the $j$-axis. The equation $y_2x_3y_2^{-1} = x_1$ implies that $\tilde{x}_1$ is obtained from $\tilde{x}_3$ by a rotation about $\tilde{y}_2$. However, a rotation about $\tilde{y}_2$ must keep $\tilde{x}_3$ on the circle $C$ (seen from the side as a line in the figure), which cannot intersect $\tilde{x}_1$! So we again have a contradiction. This eliminates possibility (i) above, and establishes that $\rho(x_1)$ and $\rho(x_2)$ are as claimed in Lemma 8.

All that remains is to show that $\tilde{x}_3$ lies on the $jk$-equator. If $\beta \neq \pm \pi/2$, then, since $x_3x_1x_3^{-1} = x_2$, $\tilde{x}_3$ is equidistant from $\tilde{x}_1$ and $\tilde{x}_2$; hence, $\tilde{x}_3$ is on the $jk$-equator. If $\beta = \pm \pi/2$, then $\tilde{x}_1 = \tilde{x}_2 = \pm j$, so $\rho(x_3)$ commutes with $\rho(x_1)$. It follows that $\tilde{x}_3 = \pm \tilde{x}_1$, so $\tilde{x}_3$ is on the $jk$-equator. This completes the proof of Lemma 8.

Using Lemma 8, we can associate to each nonabelian $\rho$ such that $\rho(y_1) \neq \rho(y_2)^{-1}$ (i.e., in Case 2, above), a well-defined triple $(\alpha, \beta, \gamma)$, where $0 < \alpha < \pi/2$ and $\beta, \gamma \in \mathbb{R}/2\pi\mathbb{Z}$. Note that for $\rho(y_1) = \rho(y_2)^{-1}$ (i.e., in Case 1), we can also represent $\rho$ by $(\alpha, \beta, \gamma)$ as in Lemma 8, with $\alpha = \pi/2$. However, instead of getting a well-defined triple, we get a choice of two possible triples, one with $\gamma = 0$ and one with $\gamma = \pi$. This is the only ambiguity. Thus we can identify $\tilde{R}(WL)$ with a subset of $\alpha\beta\gamma$-space, with identifications corresponding to the ambiguity in Case 1. We just need a simple criterion for deciding which triples $(\alpha, \beta, \gamma)$ correspond to representations. First, note that for $(\alpha, \beta, \gamma)$ to correspond with a representation, we must have either

(i) $\beta \in [-\pi/2, \pi/2]$ and $\gamma \in [0, \pi]$, or
(ii) $\beta \in [\pi/2, 3\pi/2]$ and $\gamma \in [-\pi, 0]$.

This can be seen from Figure 10. The fact that $\tilde{x}_1$ is related to $\tilde{x}_3$ by a rotation about $\tilde{y}_2$ implies that (i) or (ii) holds.
Thus, our representations are to be sought in the union of two boxes: 

$$(\alpha, \beta, \gamma) \in B_1 \cup B_2,$$

where

$$B_1 = (0, \pi/2] \times [-\pi/2, \pi/2] \times [0, \pi],$$

$$B_2 = (0, \pi/2] \times [\pi/2, 3\pi/2] \times [-\pi, 0].$$

**Lemma 9.** If $$(\alpha, \beta, \gamma) \in B_1 \cup B_2,$$ then $$(\alpha, \beta, \gamma)$$ corresponds to a representation

$$\Rightarrow \cos \alpha \cos \beta = \sin \alpha \sin \gamma.$$  

**Proof.** (1) $d(y_2, x_1) = d(y_2, x_3) \Rightarrow (2) \quad \langle y_2, x_1 \rangle = \langle y_2, x_3 \rangle$, because these points lie on the unit 2-sphere. ($\langle , \rangle$ is the usual inner product on $\mathbb{R}^3$.) When we write out (2) using the formulae in Lemma 8, we obtain precisely

$$\cos \alpha \cos \beta = \sin \alpha \sin \gamma.$$  

It follows immediately from $y_2x_1y_2^{-1} = x_3$ that this condition is necessary. For sufficiency, assume we have $$(\alpha, \beta, \gamma)$$ satisfying

$$\cos \alpha \cos \beta = \sin \alpha \sin \gamma.$$  

Then the angle of rotation about $y_2$ taking $\tilde{x}_3$ to $\tilde{x}_1$ determines the real part of the $\rho(y_i)$, and the angle of rotation about $x_3$ taking $\tilde{x}_1$ to $\tilde{x}_2$ determines the real part of the $\rho(x_i)$. It then follows from elementary geometric arguments that all the relations are satisfied, so we have a representation. This completes the proof of Lemma 9. □

We now set about analyzing the set of triples satisfying

$$\cos \alpha \cos \beta = \sin \alpha \sin \gamma.$$  

It is easy to verify that this equation defines smooth surfaces (in fact, discs) in $B_1$ and $B_2$. These surfaces in $\alpha \beta \gamma$-space are pictured in Figure 13. (Note that in order to allow a clear view of the boundaries of the surfaces, the perspective
in these diagrams is somewhat distorted, so that the front face of each $B_i$ is drawn smaller than the rear face. The $\gamma$-axis is intended to point out of the page, and the arrows on the ends of the coordinate axes point in the direction of higher coordinate values.)

When we take the union of these two surfaces, while making the indicated identifications of their boundaries, we obtain $\tilde{R}(WL)$. It is left to the reader to verify that the resulting complex is a punctured torus. This completes the proof of the theorem. □

The meaning of the markings on the subarcs of the boundaries of the above discs is as follows:

---

These points correspond to abelian representations, hence are excluded.

---

These identifications are a consequence of the ambiguity in assigning a triple to a representation in Case 1 above.

---

These identifications are a consequence of equality (mod 2\pi) for $\beta$ and for $\gamma$.

**Figure 13.** Two surfaces whose union (with identifications) is $\tilde{R}(WL)$
I.E. Binary dihedral representations. Define the binary dihedral group $N \subset S^3$ by $N = S_A^1 \cup S_B^1$, where

$$S_A^1 = \{ a + bi : a^2 + b^2 = 1 \}$$

and

$$S_B^1 = \{ cj + dk : c^2 + d^2 = 1 \}.$$

Topologically, $N$ is the disjoint union of two circles. $S_A^1$ is a subgroup of $N$ of index 2. Let $K \subset S^3$ be a knot. Let $\Gamma = \pi_1(S^3 - K)$ have Wirtinger presentation

$$\Gamma = \langle x_1, \ldots, x_n : (x_i x_j^{-1} x_i^{-1} x_j) = x_{i+1}, \ 1 \leq i \leq n - 1 \rangle,$$

where $e_i = \pm 1$ for all $i$. The following theorem is the main result of this section.

**Theorem 10.** The number of conjugacy classes of nonabelian homomorphisms $\Gamma \to N$ is equal to

$$\frac{|\Delta_K(-1)| - 1}{2},$$

where $\Delta_K(t)$ is the Alexander polynomial of $K$.

Note that $\Delta_K(-1)$ is always an odd integer (see, for example, Rolfsen [Ro, p. 213]).

**Corollary 11.** If $|\Delta_K(-1)| \neq 1$, then there exist nonabelian representations of $\pi_1(S^3 - K)$ into $N \subset S^3$.

As an example the torus knots of type $(p, q)$, where $p$ and $q$ are both odd, are knots without nonabelian representations into $N$. The groups of these torus knots do, however, have nonabelian representations into $S^3$.

**Proof of Theorem 10.** The idea of this proof is closely related to the study of metacyclic representations in Fox [F, pp. 160–163].

Suppose $\rho : \Gamma \to N$ has nonabelian image. Since the $x_i$ are all conjugate, and since $S_A^1$ is normal in $N$, we know that either all the $\rho(x_i)$ are contained in $S_A^1$ or all are contained in $S_B^1$. If $\{ \rho(x_i) \}$ is contained in $S_A^1$ then $\rho$ is abelian, so assume $\{ \rho(x_i) \}$ is contained in $S_B^1$. Each element of $S_B^1$ can be expressed as

$$e^{i\theta} j = \cos \theta j + \sin \theta k$$

for some $\theta \in \mathbb{R}/2\pi\mathbb{Z}$. Any two elements of $S_B^1$ are conjugate in $N$ because

$$e^{i\alpha} (e^{i\theta} j) e^{-i\alpha} = e^{i(\theta + 2\alpha)} j.$$

Hence, by conjugation, we can assume that $\rho(x_n) = j$. For each $i$, $1 \leq i \leq n$, define $\theta_i \in \mathbb{R}/2\pi\mathbb{Z}$ by $\rho(x_i) = e^{i\theta_i} j$. 

To see what conditions are imposed on the $\theta_i$ by the relations in our presentation for $\Gamma$, we substitute this expression for $p(x_i)$ into those relations. The result is the following system of linear equations over $\mathbb{R}/2\pi\mathbb{Z}$ for the $\theta_i$:

$$\theta_i + \theta_{i+1} - 2\theta_j = 0,$$

where $1 \leq i \leq n - 1$ and $\theta_n = 0$. It follows that the set of $n$-tuples

$$(\theta_1, \theta_2, \ldots, \theta_{n-1}, 0) \in (\mathbb{R}/2\pi\mathbb{Z})^n$$

satisfying this system of equations is in one-to-one correspondence with the set $J$ of representations of $\Gamma$ into $N$ taking $x_n$ to $j$. In the $i$th row of the $(n-1) \times n$ matrix corresponding to this system, we have the following nonzero entries:

$$\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{column} : & i & i+1 & j_i \\
\text{entry} : & 1 & 1 & -2
\end{array}$$

We wish to count the set of solutions to this system over $\mathbb{R}/2\pi\mathbb{Z}$ having $\theta_n = 0$; thus we may drop the last column of the matrix. The $i$th row of the resulting matrix, which we call $A$, is the same, up to sign, as the $i$th row of $A_K(-1)$, where $A_K(t)$ is obtained from the Alexander matrix corresponding to our original group presentation by removing its last column. Since

$$\det A = \pm A_K(-1)$$

is always an odd integer, we know $A$ is nonsingular.

Think of $A$ as a linear transformation $\mathbb{R}^{n-1} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^{n-1}$. The number of solutions mod $2\pi\mathbb{Z}$ is equal to

$$\begin{align*}
\text{card}\{ & A^{-1}(2\pi\mathbb{Z}^{n-1})/(2\pi\mathbb{Z}^{n-1}) \\
= & \text{card}\{(2\pi\mathbb{Z}^{n-1})/A(2\pi\mathbb{Z}^{n-1})\} \\
= & \text{card}(\mathbb{Z}^{n-1}/A(\mathbb{Z}^{n-1})) = |\det(A)| = |A_K(-1)|.
\end{align*}$$

There is precisely one abelian representation taking $x_n \rightarrow j$, namely, the one taking all $x_i \rightarrow j$. Each nonabelian representation in $J$ has precisely one distinct conjugate in $J$; the one obtained from conjugating by $j$. It follows that the number of conjugacy classes of nonabelian representations is $|A_K(-1)| - 1)/2$. This completes the proof of Theorem 10.  

**I.F. Incompressible surfaces and dim$(\overline{R}(K))$.** In this section we explore the relationship between incompressible surfaces in knot complements, and higher dimensional components in $\overline{R}(K)$. We begin by using composite and doubled knots to show how incompressible annuli and tori can lead to components of $\overline{R}(K)$ whose dimension is greater than one. A proposition is then proved which states that a component of $\overline{R}(K)$ whose dimension is greater than one always leads to closed, nonboundary parallel, incompressible surfaces in the complement of $K$.
Composite knots. Let $K \subset S^3$ be a knot, and let $\mu \in \pi_1(S^3 - K)$ be a group element corresponding to a meridian of $K$. Define $\varphi_K : \hat{R}(K) \to [-1, 1]$ by $\varphi_K([\rho]) = \text{Re}(\rho(\mu))$. Define $\hat{R}_i(K) = \varphi_K^{-1}(t) = \{[\rho] : \rho(\mu) \in \Sigma_i\}$.

Let $K_1$ and $K_2$ be oriented knots in $S^3$, and let $K = K_1 \# K_2$ denote their connected sum. Let $\mu_i \in \pi_i(S^3 - K_i)$, $i = 1, 2$, be meridians of these knots. Van Kampen’s theorem allows us to express $\pi_1(S^3 - K)$ as a free product with amalgamation

$$\pi_1(S^3 - K) = \pi_1(S^3 - K_1) \ast_f \pi_1(S^3 - K_2),$$

where the amalgamating homomorphism $f : \langle \mu_1 \rangle \to \langle \mu_2 \rangle$ is given by $f(\mu_1) = \mu_2$. Let $\mu = \mu_1 = \mu_2 \in \pi_1(S^3 - K)$ be a meridian of $K$. The following proposition expresses $\hat{R}_i(K)$ in terms of $\hat{R}_i(K_1)$ and $\hat{R}_i(K_2)$.

**Proposition 12.** $\hat{R}_i(K) = X_1 \cup X_2 \cup X_{12}$ (a disjoint union), where

$$X_1 \cong \hat{R}_i(K_1), \quad X_2 \cong \hat{R}_i(K_2),$$

and there is a surjective map

$$\psi : X_{12} \to \hat{R}_i(K_1) \times \hat{R}_i(K_2)$$

with the property that $\psi^{-1}([\rho_1], [\rho_2])$ is a circle for all $[\rho_1] \in \hat{R}_i(K_1)$ and $[\rho_2] \in \hat{R}_i(K_2)$.

**Proof.** The intuitive idea behind this proof is that the circles which make up $X_{12}$ are obtained by pivoting representations of $\pi_1(S^3 - K_2)$ about representations of $\pi_1(S^3 - K_1)$ using conjugation in $S^3$.

Suppose $\rho \in R(K)$ is nonabelian. Define $\rho_i \in R(K_i)$ by $\rho_i = \rho|\pi_i(S^3 - K_i)$ for $i = 1, 2$. We then write $\rho = \rho_1 * \rho_2$. Conversely, given $\rho_1 \in R(K_1)$ and $\rho_2 \in R(K_2)$, we can form $\rho = \rho_1 * \rho_2$ if and only if $\rho_1(\mu_1) = \rho_2(\mu_2)$. Now define

$$X_1 = \{[\rho_1 * \rho_2] \in \hat{R}_i(K) : \rho_2 \text{ is abelian}\},$$

$$X_2 = \{[\rho_1 * \rho_2] \in \hat{R}_i(K) : \rho_1 \text{ is abelian}\},$$

and

$$X_{12} = \{[\rho_1 * \rho_2] \in \hat{R}_i(K) : \rho_1 \text{ and } \rho_2 \text{ are nonabelian}\}.$$  

Clearly, $X_1 \cup X_2 \cup X_{12}$ is a disjoint union.

**Note.** If $\rho_1$ and $\rho_2$ are both abelian, then so is $\rho_1 * \rho_2$. However, we are assuming $\rho_1 * \rho_2$ is nonabelian, so it follows that either $\rho_1$ or $\rho_2$ is nonabelian.

Given $\rho_1$ with $[\rho_1] \in \hat{R}_i(K_1)$, there is a unique abelian representation $\rho_2 : \pi_i(S^3 - K_2) \to S^3$ satisfying $\rho_1(\mu_1) = \rho_2(\mu_2)$. It follows that $X_1$ is homeomorphic to $\hat{R}_i(K_1)$ and, by the same argument, that $X_2$ is homeomorphic to $\hat{R}_i(K_2)$.
Define the map $\psi: X_{12} \to \hat{R}_i(K_1) \times \hat{R}_i(K_2)$ by

$\psi([\rho_1, \rho_2]) = ([\rho_1], [\rho_2])$.

One easily checks that $\psi$ is well defined. To see that $\psi$ is surjective, observe that if $([\rho_1], [\rho_2]) \in \hat{R}_i(K_1) \times \hat{R}_i(K_2)$, then there exists $\sigma \in S^3$ such that $\sigma \rho_2(\mu_2)\sigma^{-1} = \rho_1(\mu_1)$. Hence $\psi([\rho_1, (\sigma \rho_2 \sigma^{-1})]) = ([\rho_1], [\rho_2])$.

To see that point inverses under $\psi$ are circles, note that the set of all cosets $[\tau] \in S^3/\{\pm 1\}$ satisfying $\tau \rho_2(\mu_2)\tau^{-1} = \rho_1(\mu_1)$ is a coset of the circle subgroup containing $[\rho_2(\mu_2)] \in S^3/\{\pm 1\}$ and is, therefore, a circle. Since $S^3/\{\pm 1\}$ acts freely on the nonabelian representations, this implies that $\psi^{-1}([\rho_1], [\rho_2])$ is a circle. □

If $t \in \text{im}(\varphi_{K_1}) \cap \text{im}(\varphi_{K_2})$ then, by the previous proposition, $\dim(\hat{R}_i(K)) \geq 1$. Suppose, in addition, that $[\rho_1] \in \varphi_{K_1}^{-1}(t)$ is a regular point of $\varphi_{K_1}$. By this, we mean that we can find a smooth arc $A_1$ in $\hat{R}(K_1)$ containing $[\rho_1]$ such that the derivative at $[\rho_1]$ of $\varphi_{K_1} |_{A_1}$ is nonzero. Suppose that $[\rho_2] \in \varphi_{K_2}^{-1}(t)$ is a regular point of $\varphi_{K_2}$ in the same sense. Assume, by restricting to smaller arcs if necessary, that the derivative of $\varphi_{K_i} |_{A_i}$ is nonzero for $i = 1, 2$. Define

$$D = \{([\rho_1], [\rho_2]) \in A_1 \times A_2 | \varphi_{K_i} [\rho_1] = \varphi_{K_i} [\rho_2] \},$$

a smooth arc in $A_1 \times A_2$. Then $\psi: \psi^{-1}(D) \to D$ is a submersion, and since $\psi^{-1}([\rho_1], [\rho_2])$ is a circle, it follows that $\psi^{-1}(D)$ is 2-dimensional. The preceding discussion proves the following proposition.

**Proposition 13.** Let $K_1$ and $K_2$ be two knots in $S^3$. Suppose $[\rho_1] \in \hat{R}(K_1)$ and $[\rho_2] \in \hat{R}(K_2)$ are regular points of $\varphi_{K_1}$ and $\varphi_{K_2}$, respectively, and that $\varphi_{K_1} [\rho_1] = \varphi_{K_2} [\rho_2]$. Then $[\rho_1, \rho_2]$ is contained in a 2-dimensional component of $\hat{R}(K_1 \# K_2)$.

In fact, using Proposition 12, together with a knowledge of $\hat{R}(K_1)$ and $\hat{R}(K_2)$, we can form an accurate picture of $\hat{R}(K_1 \# K_2)$. We illustrate this in the following two examples.

![Figure 14. The representation space of the connected sum of the trefoil and figure 8 knots](https://www.ams.org/journal-terms-of-use)
Example 1. Let $K_1$ be the trefoil knot and $K_2$ the figure eight knot. (In the notation of §I.C, $K_2$ is the 2-twist knot.) In Figure 14, we have diagrammed $\hat{R}(K_1)$ and $\hat{R}(K_2)$.

In Figure 14, each representation space is pictured in such a way that the vertical coordinate is $t = \text{Re}(\rho(\mu))$. From our pictures of $\hat{R}(K_1)$ and $\hat{R}(K_2)$, we deduce the pictures of $\hat{R}(K_1 \# K_2)$ as follows. For each value of $t$, use Proposition 12 to construct $\hat{R}(K_1 \# K_2)$ from $\hat{R}(K_1)$ and $\hat{R}(K_2)$. Then piece together these level sets to obtain $\hat{R}(K_1 \# K_2)$. (Figure 14 is inaccurate inasmuch as each meridian curve of the torus component should be horizontal, i.e., should correspond to a fixed value of $t$.)

Example 2. $K = K_{5,2} \# K_{3,2}$ (where $K_{p,q}$ is a $(p, q)$-torus knot).

In studying Figure 15, recall that the endpoints of the arcs of nonabelian representations in $\hat{R}(K_{5,2})$ and $\hat{R}(K_{3,2})$ correspond to abelian representations. For this reason, for example, as $t \to \cos(\pi/6)^-$, the family of circles corresponding to $X_{12}$ approaches a single point of $R_1$. This results in the existence of singular points (i.e., nonmanifold points) in $\hat{R}(K_{5,2} \# K_{3,2})$.

**Figure 15.** The representation space of the connected sum of two torus knots

Doubled knots. Let $L$ be the knot contained in the solid torus $V$ pictured in Figure 16. Let $\mu$ and $\lambda$ be the oriented meridian and longitude curves in $\partial V$ pictured in Figure 16.

Let $K \subset S^3$ be a knot, and $N(K)$ a closed tubular neighborhood of $K$ in $S^3$. Let $\mu$ and $\lambda$ in $\partial N(K)$ represent an oriented meridian and a preferred longitude of $K \subset S^3$. If $n$ is an integer, there exists a homeomorphism $\phi_n : \partial N(K) \to \partial V$ satisfying $\phi_n(\mu) = \overline{\mu}$ and $\phi_n(\lambda) = \overline{\lambda} + n\overline{\mu}$, where, as usual, we are also letting $\mu$, $\lambda$, etc., represent their corresponding fundamental group elements. These properties determine $\phi_n$ up to isotopy. $[S^3 - \text{int}(N(K))] \cup V$ is homeomorphic to $S^3$. Hence, we may think of $L$ as a knot $K_n$ in this 3-sphere; we will refer to $K_n$ as the $n$-twisted double of $K$.  

---

License or copyright restrictions may apply to redistribution; see https://www.ams.org/journal-terms-of-use
From the construction described above, it is clear that the complement of the $n$-twisted double of $K$ can be expressed as

$$S^3 - K_n = [S^3 - \text{int}(N(K))] \cup \varphi_n [V - L].$$

By Van Kampen’s theorem, we may express $\pi_1(S^3 - K_n)$ as a free product with amalgamation:

$$\pi_1(S^3 - K_n) = \pi_1(S^3 - \text{int}(N(K))) *_{\varphi_n} \pi_1(V - L).$$

We now show that, generically, $R(K_n)$ has 2-dimensional components. Observe that $V - L \cong S^3 - \text{WL}$, where $\text{WL}$ is the Whitehead link, defined in §1.D. It follows that each representation $\rho \in R(K_n)$ can be expressed in the form $\rho = \rho_1 * \rho_2$, where $\rho_1 \in R(K), \rho_2 \in R(\text{WL})$, and they satisfy

$$\rho_1(\mu) = \rho_2(\varphi_n(\mu)) \quad \text{and} \quad \rho_1(\lambda) = \rho_2(\varphi_n(\lambda)).$$

Define $\tilde{A} = \{(x, y) \in S^3 \times S^3 : [x, y] = 1\}$. $S^3$ acts by conjugation on $\tilde{A}$. Let $A = \tilde{A}/(\text{action by } S^3)$. Since

$$A \cong S^1 \times S^1/(x, y) \sim (\bar{x}, \bar{y}),$$

$A$ is a 2-dimensional orbifold. We now define maps $q_1 : \tilde{R}(K) \rightarrow A$ by $q_1([\rho]) = [\rho(\mu), \rho(\lambda)]$, and $q_2 : \tilde{R}(\text{WL}) \rightarrow A$, by $q_2([\rho]) = [\rho(\varphi_n(\mu)), \rho(\varphi_n(\lambda))]$. Let $[\rho_1] \in \tilde{R}(K)$ and $[\rho_2] \in \tilde{R}(\text{WL})$. We can form $[\rho_1 * \rho_2] \in \tilde{R}(K_n)$ if and only if $q_1[\rho_1] = q_2[\rho_2]$.

We have used computations involving $\tilde{R}(\text{WL})$, as computed in §1.D, to show that $q_2$ is a submersion on the complement of a set of measure zero in $\tilde{R}(\text{WL})$. We will omit these computations from the present paper, and will present them, instead, in a forthcoming paper on doubled knots. (See [K].)

Now suppose, as for the examples computed in §§1.B and 1.C, that $\tilde{R}(K)$ is a 1-manifold. Then, generically, one expects $q_1^{-1}(\text{im } \rho_2)$ to contain 1-dimensional submanifolds of $\tilde{R}(K)$. Let $M \subset q_1^{-1}(\text{im } \rho_2)$ be such a submanifold. By

**Figure 16. The knot $L$ in the solid torus $V$**
definition, for each $\rho_1 \in M$, there exists a $\rho_2 \in \hat{R}(WL)$ such that $q_1[\rho_1] = q_2[\rho_2]$. By conjugating $\rho_2$ by an element of $S^3$, we may assume that $\rho_1(\mu) = \rho_2(\varphi_n(\mu))$ and $\rho_1(\lambda) = \rho_2(\varphi_n(\lambda))$. For each such pair ($[\rho_1], [\rho_2]$), we can form a circle of classes in $\hat{R}(K_n)$ of the form $[\rho_1 \ast (\sigma \rho_2 \sigma^{-1})]$, where $\sigma$ varies in the circle subgroup containing $\rho_1(\mu)$ and $\rho_1(\lambda)$. Since $\hat{R}(K_n)$ contains such a circle for each point in the 1-manifold $M$, it follows that for this generic case $\hat{R}(K_n)$ contains 2-dimensional components. Thus we have the following proposition.

**Proposition 14.** Let $K \subset S^3$ be a knot. Suppose that $\dim \hat{R}(K) > 1$. Then, subject to the genericity assumption in the preceding paragraph, $\dim \hat{R}(K_n) \geq 2$. □

We have carried out this computation for $K_n = the$ untwisted double of the trefoil, and in this case $\hat{R}(K_n) = the$ union of four tori. For more information, see [K].

A proposition relating higher-dimensional components of $\hat{R}(K)$ to incompressible surfaces. Thus far in this section we have seen that if $K$ is a composite or a doubled knot, $\hat{R}(K)$ generally contains components of dimension greater than one. Note that these two types of knots are examples of nontrivial satellite knots, which we define to be knots whose complements contain nonboundary parallel incompressible tori. We now prove a partial converse to Propositions 13 and 14.

**Proposition 15.** Let $K \subset S^3$ be a knot and $N(K)$ a closed tubular neighborhood of $K$ in $S^3$. If $\hat{R}(K)$ contains a component of dimension greater than or equal to two, then $S^3 - \text{int}(N(K))$ contains a nonempty system of closed, nonboundary parallel, incompressible surfaces.

**Proof.** This proposition, the proof of which will occupy the rest of this section, is a direct consequence of results in Culler and Shalen's paper *Varieties of representations and splittings of 3-manifolds* [CS], and we shall follow their notation as much as possible. Define $X(S^3 - K)$ to be the set of characters of representations of $\pi_1(S^3 - K)$ in $SL(2, \mathbb{C})$. Culler and Shalen show that $X(S^3 - K)$ can be given the structure of a complex affine algebraic set. Its ambient coordinates are given by $\{\chi(g_i)\}$, where $\chi \in X(S^3 - K)$ is a character and $\{g_i\}$ is a finite subset of $\pi_1(S^3 - K)$. Because $SU(2)$ is a subgroup of $SL(2, \mathbb{C})$, there is an obvious map

$$t: R(K) \to X(S^3 - K),$$

which associates to each representation the corresponding character. We claim that this map induces an injection, which we call $\hat{t}$:

$$\hat{t}: \hat{R}(K) \to X(S^3 - K).$$

This claim will follow from the following two facts:
(1) Two irreducible representations in $\text{SL}(2, \mathbb{C})$ are conjugate if and only if they correspond to the same character.

(2) If two irreducible (i.e., nonabelian) representations in $\text{SU}(2)$ are conjugate by an element of $\text{SL}(2, \mathbb{C})$, then they are conjugate by an element of $\text{SU}(2)$.

Culler and Shalen prove (1) [CS, Proposition 1.5.2].

Proof of (2). Let $\rho_1, \rho_2 : \Gamma \to \text{SU}(2)$ be two nonabelian representations and suppose that $A\rho_1 A^{-1} = \rho_2$, where $A \in \text{SL}(2, \mathbb{C})$. Assume that $A$ is not in $\text{SU}(2)$. Think of the elements of $\text{SL}(2, \mathbb{C})$ as acting on hyperbolic 3-space, $H^3$, via the double cover $\text{SL}(2, \mathbb{C}) \to \text{PSL}(2, \mathbb{C})$. Then $\text{SU}(2)$ is just the subgroup of $\text{SL}(2, \mathbb{C})$ fixing a particular point $p \in H^3$. Since $\rho_1(Y)$ fixes $p$, $\rho_2(Y)A\rho_1(Y)A^{-1}$ fixes $A(p)$. Since $A$ is not in $\text{SU}(2)$, $A(p) \neq p$. Since $\rho_2(\Gamma) \in \text{SU}(2)$ fixes two distinct points, $p$ and $A(p)$, it fixes an entire hyperbolic line. It follows that $\rho_2(\Gamma)$ is abelian, a contradiction that implies that our assumption that $A$ is not in $\text{SU}(2)$ was false. \(\square\)

Having proven the claim, we identify $\hat{R}(K)$ with a subset of $X(S^3 - K)$ via the map $i$. Since traces of elements of $\text{SU}(2)$ are real, $\hat{R}(K)$ is made up of real points of $X(S^3 - K)$.

Lemma 16. If $\hat{R}(K)$ has a component of real dimension greater than or equal to two, then $X(S^3 - K)$ has a component of complex dimension greater than or equal to two.

Proof. Let $V$ be a component of $\hat{R}(K)$ such that $\dim_{\mathbb{R}}(V) \geq 2$. Let $[\rho] \in V$ be a regular (i.e., nonsingular) point. Then there is a map $f : \mathbb{R}^2 \to V$, given by a power series, which is an embedding near 0 (i.e., its first partials are nonzero), and which satisfies $f(0) = [\rho]$. Since the power series for $f$ formally satisfies the polynomials defining $X(S^3 - K)$, we may extend $f$ to a function $\mathbb{C}^2 \to X(S^3 - K)$ given by the same power series. This extension, which we also call $f$, is also locally an embedding, since its first partials are nonzero. It follows that $[\rho]$ is contained in a component of $X(S^3 - K)$ of complex dimension greater than or equal to two. \(\square\)

Hatcher, in [H], proves that only a finite number of isotopy classes of simple closed curves in $\partial N(K)$ can occur as boundary components of properly embedded incompressible surfaces in $S^3 - \text{int}(N(K))$. We may conclude that there exists a simple closed curve $\gamma$ in $\partial N(K)$ which does not occur as one of the boundary components of any incompressible surface. We use $\gamma$ to denote the corresponding element of $\pi_1(S^3 - \text{int}(N(K)))$, as well. Let $\tilde{V} \subset X(S^3 - K)$ denote a component with $\dim_{\mathbb{C}}(\tilde{V}) \geq 2$ (which we have just shown to exist). Define $I_\gamma : \tilde{V} \to \mathbb{C}$ by $I_\gamma(\chi) = \chi(\gamma)$. Let $C \subset \tilde{V}$ be a complex affine curve on which $I_\gamma$ is constant. Let $\tilde{C}$ be a desingularized projective curve with function field isomorphic to that of $C$ (see [CS] for details). Let $\tilde{x}$ be an ideal point.
of $\tilde{C}$. Since $I_\gamma$ is constant on $C$, the corresponding function $\tilde{I}_\gamma$ on $\tilde{C}$ does not have a pole at $\tilde{x}$. It follows from Theorems 2.2.1 and 2.3.1 of [CS] that we can associate to $\tilde{x}$ a nonempty system $\Sigma = S_1 \cup \cdots \cup S_n$ of properly embedded, nonboundary parallel, incompressible surfaces in $S^3 - \text{int}(N(K))$ such that $\gamma \cap \Sigma = \emptyset$. Since any boundary circles of $S_i$ must be disjoint from $\gamma$, they must be parallel to and, hence, in the same isotopy class as $\gamma$. Since this contradicts the choice of $\gamma$ not to be a boundary curve, we conclude that $\Sigma$ is a system of closed incompressible surfaces, completing the proof of Proposition 15. \qed

II. TANGENT SPACE COMPUTATIONS

II.A. The Zariski tangent space to $R(\Gamma)$. Let $\Gamma$ be a finitely presented group with presentation

$$\Gamma = \{ x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_n : w_1, w_2, \ldots, w_m \}. $$

In this section we set up a framework (due to Weil [W]) for computing the Zariski tangent space to $R(\Gamma)$ at a particular representation $\rho$.

Let $g$ be the Lie algebra of $S^3$. If $q \in S^3$, recall that $C_q : S^3 \to S^3$ is given by $C_q(\sigma) = q \sigma q^{-1}$. Let $(dC_q)_1$ denote the differential of $C_q$ at the point $1 \in S^3$. Define $\text{Ad} : S^3 \to \text{Aut}(g)$ by

$$\text{Ad}(q)(z) = (dC_q)_1(z) \quad \text{for} \quad z \in g.$$ 

If $\rho \in R(\Gamma)$, define $\bar{\rho} : \Gamma \to \text{Aut}(g)$ by

$$\bar{\rho}(x)(z) = \text{Ad}(\rho(x))(z), \quad x \in \Gamma, \ z \in g.$$ 

$\bar{\rho}$ is known as the adjoint representation to $\rho$.

Lubotzky and Magid [LM, p. 62] show that we may calculate the scheme-theoretic Zariski tangent space, $T_\rho R(\Gamma)$, to $R(\Gamma)$ at a representation $\rho$, by the formula

$$T_\rho R(\Gamma) = \bigcap \{ \ker(dw_i)_\rho : i = 1, \ldots, m \}. $$

(In this formula, we are thinking of $R(\Gamma)$ as a subset of $(S^3)^n$, by identifying $\rho$ with the point $(\rho(x_1), \ldots, \rho(x_n))$ in $(S^3)^n$. The words $w_i$ are being considered as maps from $(S^3)^n$ to $S^3$, as discussed in §I.A.) We shall need an algorithm for computing this tangent space. The formula (Proposition 18) that we derive appears in Weil [W, p. 151], and is also derived by Lubotzky and Magid in [LM]. For convenience, a slightly different derivation is included here.

We begin by sharpening our notation. Define

$$q_i : (S^3)^n \to S^3$$

to be projection on the $i$th factor, for $i = 1, \ldots, n$. Define

$$q_i^{-1} : (S^3)^n \to S^3$$
to be $q_i$ followed by inversion in the group $S^3$. Suppose we are given a word $w$ in the $n$ letters $\{x_1, \ldots, x_n\}$,

$$w = x_{j_1}^{e_1} \cdots x_{j_k}^{e_k},$$

where $e_i = \pm 1$ and $1 \leq j_i \leq n$, for $i = 1, \ldots, k$. The corresponding map $w: (S^3)^n \to S^3$ is then given by the product

$$w = q_{j_1}^{e_1} q_{j_2}^{e_2} \cdots q_{j_k}^{e_k}.$$

$S^3$ acts on its own tangent bundle from the left and from the right by translation. We indicate this action by the appropriate juxtaposition $\sigma v$ or $v \sigma$, where $v \in T_{*} S^3$ and $\sigma \in S^3$. Let

$$\sigma = (\sigma_1, \ldots, \sigma_n) \in (S^3)^n.$$

We wish to compute the composition

$$g^n \to T_{\sigma}((S^3)^n) \to T_{w(\sigma)}(S^3) \to g,$$

where the first and last maps are right translations, and the middle map is $d w_\sigma$. For the purpose of the following lemma, we will denote this composition by $d \tilde{w}_\sigma$; thereafter, by abuse of notation, we will always denote it simply $d w_\sigma$.

**Lemma 17.** Let $z = (z_1, \ldots, z_n) \in g^n$. Then

$$d \tilde{w}_\sigma(z) = \sum_{i=1}^{k} y_i(z_{j_i}),$$

where, for each $i$,

$$y_i = \text{Ad}(\sigma_{j_i} \cdots \sigma_{j_{i-1}}) \in \text{Aut}(g) \quad \text{if } e_i = 1,$$

or

$$y_i = - \text{Ad}(\sigma_{j_i} \cdots \sigma_{j_j}) \in \text{Aut}(g) \quad \text{if } e_i = -1.$$

**Proof.** Let $v = (v_1, v_2, \ldots, v_n) \in T_{\sigma}((S^3)^n) = T_{\sigma} S^3 \times \cdots \times T_{\sigma} S^3$. We assume the basic facts (true in any Lie group)

(i) $(d q_{i})_{\sigma}(v) = v_i$, and

(ii) $(d q_{i}^{-1})_{\sigma}(v) = - v_i^{-1} \sigma_i^{-1} \sigma_i^{-1}.$

By the product rule,

$$d w_\sigma(v) = \sum_{i=1}^{k} \sigma_{j_1}^{e_1} \cdots \sigma_{j_{i-1}}^{e_{i-1}} (d q_{j_i}^{e_i})_{\sigma}(v) \sigma_{j_{i+1}}^{e_{i+1}} \cdots \sigma_{j_k}^{e_k}.$$

We then compute

$$d \tilde{w}_\sigma(z) = (d w_\sigma(z \sigma)) w(\sigma)^{-1}$$

$$(\ast) = \sum_{i=1}^{k} \sigma_{j_1}^{e_1} \cdots \sigma_{j_{i-1}}^{e_{i-1}} (d q_{j_i}^{e_i})_{\sigma}(z \sigma) \sigma_{j_{i+1}}^{e_{i+1}} \cdots \sigma_{j_k}^{e_k} w(\sigma)^{-1}.$$
Using facts (i) and (ii), and the fact that

\[ w(\sigma)^{-1} = \sigma_{j_k}^{-\epsilon_k} \cdots \sigma_{j_1}^{-\epsilon_1} , \]

the expression (*) simplifies to the statement in the lemma. □

Suppose \( \rho \in R(\Gamma) \), and \( w = x_1^{\epsilon_1} \cdots x_k^{\epsilon_k} \) is one of the relations in our presentation of \( \Gamma \). Then the coordinates of \( \rho \) in \((S^3)^n\) are \( (\rho(x_1), \ldots, \rho(x_n)) \). The following proposition, which is an immediate consequence of Lemma 17, enables us to compute \( T_\rho(R(\Gamma)) \).

**Proposition 18.** Let \( z = (z_1, z_2, \ldots, z_n) \) be an element of \( g^n \). Then

\[ d w_\rho(z) = \sum_{i=1}^{k} u_i(z_{j_i}) , \]

where, for each \( i \),

\[ u_i = \tilde{\rho}(x_1^{\epsilon_1} \cdots x_{j_{i-1}}^{\epsilon_{j_{i-1}}}) \in \text{Aut}(g) \quad \text{if} \ \epsilon_i = 1 , \]

or

\[ u_i = -\tilde{\rho}(x_1^{\epsilon_1} \cdots x_{j_{i-1}}^{\epsilon_{j_{i-1}}}) \in \text{Aut}(g) \quad \text{if} \ \epsilon_i = -1 . \]

This proposition enables us to express \( T_\rho(R(\Gamma)) \) as the space of solutions to a specific system of linear equations, i.e., as the null space of a specific matrix.

**Note.** As Weil [W] and others have observed, this is the same system of equations that defines the space of 1-cocycles of \( \Gamma \) with coefficients in \( g \), which is viewed as a \( \Gamma \)-module via \( \tilde{\rho} \).

**II.B. The tangent space at an abelian representation.** Let \( K \subset S^3 \) be a knot. Recall that \( S(K) \) denotes the space of abelian representations. The main result of this section is the following theorem.

**Theorem 19.** Let \( \rho \in R(K) \) be an abelian representation. Let \( \mu \in \pi_1(S^3 - K) \) be a meridian of \( K \). Assume (by conjugation in \( S^3 \)) that \( \rho(\mu) \in \mathbb{C} \). Let \( \Delta_K(t) \) be the Alexander polynomial of \( K \). Then:

(i) If \( \Delta_K(\rho(\mu)^2) \neq 0 \), then \( \dim T_\rho(R(K)) = 3 \) and a sufficiently small neighborhood of \( \rho \) in \( R(K) \) consists entirely of points of the 3-manifold \( S(K) \).

(ii) If \( \Delta_K(\rho(\mu)^2) = 0 \), then

\[ \dim T_\rho(R(K)) = 3 + 2 \dim_{\mathbb{C}}(\ker A_K(\rho(\mu)^2)) , \]

where \( A_K(t) \) is obtained from an Alexander matrix of \( K \) by deleting a column, and has the property that \( \Delta_K(t) = \det(A_K(t)) \).

**Note.** This theorem has been discovered independently by Steve Boyer jointly with Andrew Nicas, and also by Charles Frohman. However, we know of no reference for it in the literature.
Proof of Theorem 19. Let $\Gamma = \pi_1(S^3 - K)$. Then $\Gamma$ has a Wirtinger presentation of the form

$$\Gamma = \{x_1, \ldots, x_n : w_1, \ldots, w_{n-1}\}.$$ 

The relators $w_i$ are words in the $x_j$ of the form

$$w_i = (x_j)^{\varepsilon_i}x_i(x_{i+1})^{-1},$$

where $\varepsilon_i = \pm 1$ and $j_i \in \{1, 2, \ldots, n\}$ for each $i = 1, \ldots, n - 1$. Let $W : (S^3)^n \to (S^3)^{n-1}$ be the function whose $i$th component is $w_i$. Then

$$T_\rho(R(K)) = \ker(dW_\rho : g^n \to g^{n-1}) = \bigcap\{\ker(dw_i) : i = 1, \ldots, n\}.$$ 

Using Proposition 18, we now calculate $(dw_i)\rho$ as follows: If $\varepsilon_i = 1$, then

$$(dw_i)\rho(z_1, \ldots, z_n) = z_{j_i} + \hat{\rho}(x_{j_i})z_i - \hat{\rho}(x_{j_i}x_{i+1})z_{j_i} - \hat{\rho}(x_{j_i}x_i^{-1}(x_{i+1})^{-1})z_{i+1}$$

$$(\text{using the relations for } \Gamma)\hat{\rho}(x_{j_i})z_i - z_{i+1} + (I - \hat{\rho}(x_{i+1}))z_{j_i},$$

where $(z_1, \ldots, z_n) \in g^n$. If $\varepsilon_i = -1$, then we obtain

$$(dw_i)\rho(z_1, \ldots, z_n) = \hat{\rho}(x_{j_i}^{-1})z_i - z_{i+1} + (\hat{\rho}(x_{j_i}x_i^{-1}) - \hat{\rho}(x_{j_i}^{-1}))z_{j_i}.$$ 

Since $\rho$ is abelian we may assume, by conjugation, that

$$\rho(x_1) = \cdots = \rho(x_n) = e^{i\theta}.$$

Using $\{i, j, k\}$ as a basis for $g$, an easy computation shows that

$$\hat{\rho}(x_1) = \cdots = \hat{\rho}(x_n) = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & \cos 2\theta & -\sin 2\theta \\ 0 & \sin 2\theta & \cos 2\theta \end{pmatrix}.$$ 

We denote this matrix by $T$.

$dW_\rho : g^n \to g^{n-1}$ is described by an $(n - 1) \times n$ matrix $A_\rho$ with entries in $\text{GL}(g) = \text{GL}(3, \mathbb{R})$, the $i$th row of $A_\rho$ being $(dw_i)\rho$. Thus, if $\varepsilon_i = 1$, the $i$th row of $A_\rho$ is given by

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>column number</th>
<th>$i$</th>
<th>$i + 1$</th>
<th>$j_i$</th>
<th>$j_i$</th>
<th>$j_i$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>entry</td>
<td>$T$</td>
<td>$-1$</td>
<td>$I - T$</td>
<td>$I - T$</td>
<td>$I - T$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

with all other entries in this row equal to zero. If $\varepsilon_i = -1$, the $i$th row of $A_\rho$ is given by

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>column number</th>
<th>$i$</th>
<th>$i + 1$</th>
<th>$j_i$</th>
<th>$j_i$</th>
<th>$j_i$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>entry</td>
<td>$T^{-1}$</td>
<td>$-1$</td>
<td>$I - T^{-1}$</td>
<td>$I - T^{-1}$</td>
<td>$I - T^{-1}$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

with all other entries equal to zero. Note that $A_\rho$ is just the Alexander matrix, as computed from the same projection as our original Wirtinger presentation, only with the real number 1 and the variable $t$ replaced by the $3 \times 3$ matrices $I$ and $T$. 

License or copyright restrictions may apply to redistribution; see https://www.ams.org/journal-terms-of-use
Since the sum of the columns of $A_\rho$ is zero, the kernel of $dW_\rho$ contains all vectors of the form $(z, \ldots, z) \in g^n$, i.e., the diagonal $\Delta(g^n)$. This reflects the fact that

$$\Delta(g^n) = T_\rho(\Delta(S^3)^n),$$

while

$$\Delta(S^3)^n = S(K) \subset R(K)$$

is precisely the set of abelian representations.

Let us now examine $\ker(A_\rho)/\Delta(g^n)$. Define

$$L_\rho = \{(z_1, \ldots, z_{n-1}, 0) \in \ker(A_\rho)\}.$$

We then have $L_\rho \cong \ker(A_\rho)/\Delta(g^n)$ by the inclusion composed with the quotient

$$L_\rho \rightarrow \ker(A_\rho) \rightarrow \ker(A_\rho)/\Delta(g^n).$$

Observe that $L_\rho$ is just the kernel of the matrix obtained by removing the last column from $A_\rho$. This matrix, which we call $\tilde{A}_\rho$, is an $(n-1) \times (n-1)$ matrix with entries in $GL(3, \mathbb{R})$, or a $3(n-1) \times 3(n-1)$ matrix with entries in $\mathbb{R}$. If $i < n - 1$ and $e_i = 1$, the $i$th row of $\tilde{A}_\rho$ becomes:

$$\begin{array}{cccccc}
        & i & i+1 & j_i \\
\hline
1 & 0 & 0 & -1 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & \cos 2\theta & -\sin 2\theta & 0 & 0 & 1 - \cos 2\theta & \sin 2\theta \\
0 & \sin 2\theta & \cos 2\theta & 0 & 0 & -1 & 0 - \sin 2\theta & 1 - \cos 2\theta \\
\end{array}$$

The other entries in this row are equal to zero. If $e_i = -1$, the $i$th row is similar, and the following discussion applies to both. The entry in column $j_i$ is, of course, omitted if $j_i = n$. Row $n - 1$ is similar, but without the entry in column $i + 1$.

Suppose the null space of $\tilde{A}_\rho$ contains a vector with transpose $(a_1, b_1, c_1, \ldots, a_{n-1}, b_{n-1}, c_{n-1})$. (We are writing this vector as a vector in $\mathbb{R}^{3(n-1)} \cong g^{n-1}$ using the basis $\{i, j, k\}$ for each copy of $g$.) Row $i$ of $\tilde{A}_\rho$, for $i < n - 1$, tells us that $a_i = a_{i+1}$. Row $n - 1$ tells us that $a_{n-1} = 0$. So we know that

$$a_1 = \cdots = a_{n-1} = 0.$$

Now consider the $(n-1) \times (n-1)$ matrix over $\mathbb{C}$ obtained from $\tilde{A}_\rho$ by replacing $I$ by $1$ and $T$ by $\cos 2\theta + i \sin 2\theta$, in each of the nonzero entries $-I$, $I - T$, etc. Denote this matrix by $\tilde{A}'$. Note that $\tilde{A}'$ is just the Alexander matrix with $e^{2\theta i}$ substituted for $t$, and the last column removed. It is immediate that the vector with transpose $(0, b_1, c_1, 0, b_2, c_2, \ldots, 0, b_{n-1}, c_{n-1})$ is in the null space of $\tilde{A}_\rho$ if and only if the vector with transpose

$$(b_1 + ic_1, \ldots, b_{n-1} + ic_{n-1})$$
is in the nullspace of $\bar{A}$. Note that the latter nullspace is a vector space over $\mathbb{C}$. It follows that
\[ \dim_{\mathbb{R}} L_\rho = \dim_{\mathbb{R}} (\ker(\bar{A})) = 2 \dim_{\mathbb{C}} (\ker \bar{A}). \]
Since $\bar{A} = A_K(\rho(\mu)^2)$, it follows that
\[ \dim T_\rho(R(K)) = 3 + \dim L_\rho = 3 + 2 \dim_{\mathbb{C}} (\ker A_K(\rho(\mu)^2)), \]
which proves part (ii) of the theorem.

If $\Delta_K(\rho(\mu)^2) \neq 0$, then $\bar{A}$ is nonsingular, so $\dim T_\rho(R(K)) = 3$. Since this means that $dW_\rho$ has maximal rank, it follows that $R(K)$ is a 3-manifold in a small neighborhood of $\rho$. Since $S(K) \subset R(K)$ is a 3-manifold containing $\rho$, this small neighborhood must consist only of abelian representations. This proves part (i) of the theorem. $\square$

In the cases of the torus and twist knots analyzed in §I of this thesis, those abelian representations $\rho$ for which $\dim T_\rho R(K) > 3$, i.e., those for which $\Delta_K(\rho(\mu)^2) = 0$, are precisely those abelian representations which can be expressed as limits of arcs of nonabelian representations. The above theorem implies that, for an arbitrary knot, abelian representations $\rho$ satisfying $\Delta_K(\rho(\mu)^2) = 0$ are the only abelian representations which could possibly be expressible as limits of nonabelian representations. The question of whether these singular (i.e., $\Delta_K(\rho(\mu)^2) = 0$) abelian representations can always be expressed as limits of nonabelian representations is a question of when infinitesimal deformations can be realized by actual deformations. It has now been proven (see [FK]) that if $\rho$ is an abelian representation and $\rho(\mu)^2$ is a simple root of $\Delta_K$, then $\rho$ is a limit of an arc of nonabelian representations.

$T_\rho(R(K))$ and Euclidean isometries. We will now give an interpretation of the tangent space at an abelian representation in terms of Euclidean representations of $\Gamma$. Define $\text{Isom}_+(\mathbb{C})$ to be the set of orientation-preserving Euclidean isometries of $\mathbb{C}$. These are the maps of the form $u \to au + b$, where $a$ and $b$ are elements of $\mathbb{C}$ and $|a| = 1$. The conjugacy classes in this group are of three types: $\{\text{Id}_\mathbb{C}\}$, $X_r$ ($r$ a positive real), and $Y_a$ ($a \in S^1$, $a \neq 1$), where
\[ X_r = \{u \to u + b : |b| = r\} \]
and
\[ Y_a = \{u \to au + b : b \in \mathbb{C}\}. \]
Consider a homomorphism $\phi : \Gamma \to \text{Isom}_+(\mathbb{C})$.

Since the generators $x_i$ are conjugate to each other, their images
\[ \phi(x_i)(u) = au + (b_i + ic_i) \]
all have the same multiplicative factor $a$. Fixing $a$, we consider the set of representations of the form $\phi(x_i) = (u \to au + (b_i + ic_i))$. Suppose, in addition,
we impose the condition that $\varphi(x_n)$ fixes the origin, i.e., that $b_n + ic_n = 0$. De Rham [D, pp. 188–189] shows that the set of $(n - 1)$-tuples

$$(b_1 + ic_1, b_2 + ic_2, \ldots, b_{n-1} + ic_{n-1})$$

making $\varphi$ a homomorphism is precisely the null-space of the matrix $A_K(a)$. (As above, $A_K(t)$ is obtained by removing the $n$th column from the Alexander matrix associated with the Wirtinger presentation of $\Gamma$ used in the above proof.) It follows that we can identify these Euclidean representations with certain tangent vectors.

To make this precise, let $\rho \in R(\mathbb{K})$ be an abelian representation. Assume, by conjugation, that $\rho(\mu) \in \mathbb{C}$. Recall the subspace $L_\rho \subset T_\rho(R(\mathbb{K}))$ defined in the last proof. Define a map

$$f_\rho : L_\rho \rightarrow \text{Hom}(\Gamma, \text{Isom}_+^{\mathbb{C}})$$

given by

$$(0, b_1, c_1, \ldots, 0, b_{n-1}, c_{n-1}, 0, 0, 0) \rightarrow \varphi,$$

where $\varphi(x)(u) = \rho(\mu)^2 u + (b_i + ic_i)$. De Rham’s result with $a = \rho(\mu)^2$ combines with the proof of Theorem 19 to prove the following proposition.

**Proposition 20.** $f_\rho$ induces an isomorphism $L_\rho \cong \{\varphi \in \text{Hom}(\Gamma, \text{Isom}_+^{\mathbb{C}}) : \varphi$ has multiplicative factor equal to $\rho(\mu)^2$, and $\varphi(x_n)$ fixes the origin in $\mathbb{C}\}$. □

To conclude, we give a geometric interpretation of this isomorphism. Recall from §I.C that one can associate to a representation of $\Gamma$ in $S^3$ a geodesic image in $S^2$ of a certain polygon $P_K$, whose vertices correspond to the generators of $\Gamma$. This image must also satisfy certain geometric constraints imposed by the relations between the $x_i$. Let $v \in L_\rho$ be a Zariski tangent vector which is actually tangent to an arc of representations, say $\rho_s$. We are assuming that $\rho_0 = \rho$ is abelian, while the other $\rho_s$ are not necessarily abelian. As $s$ approaches 0, the vertices of the corresponding images of $P_K$ in $S^2$ approach a single point. But as the diameter of the image of $P_K$ in $S^2$ approaches 0, that image more and more closely approximates a Euclidean image of $P_K$. After multiplying by an appropriate scaling factor we can see that the spherical images of $P_K$ actually approach a Euclidean image satisfying the same geometric constraints. This Euclidean image, in turn, corresponds to a representation of $\Gamma$ in $\text{Isom}_+^{\mathbb{C}}$, by letting the images of the vertices correspond to the centers of rotation of the images of the generators of $\Gamma$. This gives us a geometric interpretation of the map $f_\rho$, for those vectors which are realizable by arcs of representations.

Let $\rho \in R(\mathbb{K})$ be an abelian representation with $\rho(\mu) \in \mathbb{C}$. A corollary of this discussion is the following:

**Proposition 21.** $\dim T_\rho(R(\mathbb{K})) > 3$ if and only if there exists a nonabelian representation of $\Gamma$ in $\text{Isom}_+^{\mathbb{C}}$ which takes the generators $x_i$ to rotations of angle $\arg(\rho(\mu)^2)$. □
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper was prepared as a Ph.D. thesis at Cornell University. I wish to thank my advisor Marshall Cohen for his invaluable teaching and supervision. For their helpful conversations and correspondence, I also thank Steven Boyer, Gerhard Burde, Charles Frohman, Allen Hatcher, Larry Lok, Andrew Nicas, and Robert Riley.

Finally, I thank the Cornell University mathematics department and particularly the topology faculty for arranging financial support during my graduate study.

REFERENCES


