THE MODULI SPACE OF QUADRATIC RATIONAL MAPS

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1. Introduction

For each \(d \geq 2\), let \(M_d = \text{Rat}_d / \text{PSL}_2 \mathbb{C}\) denote the space of degree \(d\) rational maps \(f : \hat{\mathbb{C}} \to \hat{\mathbb{C}}\), modulo the action by conjugation of the group of Möbius transformations. The moduli space is a complex orbifold of dimension \(2d - 2\). Iteration defines a sequence of regular maps \(\Phi_n : M_d \to M_{dn}\), given by \([f] \mapsto [f^n]\), where \([f]\) denotes the conjugacy class of \(f \in \text{Rat}_d\).

The aim of this paper is to define a compactification of the moduli space which is natural from the point of view of dynamics and, in particular, one on which iteration is well defined. Two approaches to this end are presented here, one using results in geometric invariant theory and one in terms of measures of maximal entropy. In degree \(d = 2\), the two approaches are shown to be equivalent.

A formal solution. In [Si], Silverman studied a compactification \(\overline{M}_d\) of \(M_d\), for each \(d \geq 2\), by computing the stability criteria for the conjugation action of \(\text{SL}_2 \mathbb{C}\) on \(\text{Rat}_d \hookrightarrow \mathbb{P}^{2d+1}\), according to Mumford’s geometric invariant theory (GIT). The boundary points can be identified with rational maps of degree < \(d\). The iterate maps \(\Phi_n\), however, do not define regular maps from \(\overline{M}_d\) to \(\overline{M}_{dn}\) for any \(d \geq 2\) and \(n \geq 2\) (see §10).

It is possible to define a compactification of the moduli space \(M_d\) on which iteration is well defined, by resolving the indeterminacy of each rational iterate map \(\overline{M}_d \dashrightarrow \overline{M}_{dn}\) and passing to an inverse limit. Namely, we can define \(\Gamma_n\) to be the closure of \(M_d\) as it sits inside the finite product \(\overline{M}_d \times \overline{M}_{d^2} \times \cdots \times \overline{M}_{d^n}\) via the first \(n\) iterate maps \((\text{Id}, \Phi_2, \ldots, \Phi_n)\). There is a natural projection from \(\Gamma_{n+1}\) to \(\Gamma_n\) for every \(n\), so we may take the inverse limit over \(n\),

\[
\overline{M}_d = \lim \Gamma_n.
\]

The moduli space \(M_d\) is a dense open subset of \(\overline{M}_d\), where a conjugacy class \([f] \in M_d\) is identified with the sequence \(([f], [f^2], [f^3], \ldots)\) in \(\overline{M}_d\). The iterate map \(\Phi_n : M_d \to M_{dn}\) extends continuously to \(\overline{M}_d \to \overline{M}_{dn}\), by sending the sequence \(([f], [f^2], [f^3], \ldots)\) to the sequence \(([f^n], [f^{2n}], [f^{3n}], \ldots)\). It remains to understand the structure of this space and if there exists a concrete model for \(\overline{M}_d\).
Maximal measures and the barycenter. Given a rational map $f \in \text{Rat}_d$, let $\mu_f$ denote the unique probability measure on $\hat{C}$ of maximal entropy [Ly], [FLM], [Ma1]. The support of $\mu_f$ is equal to the Julia set of $f$, and the measure is invariant under iteration, $\mu_{f^n} = \mu_f$ for all $n \geq 1$. The conformal barycenter of $\mu_f$ is its hyperbolic center of mass, where the unit ball in $\mathbb{R}^3$ is chosen as a model for $\mathbb{H}^3$, and the unit sphere $S^2$ is identified with the Riemann sphere $\hat{C}$ via stereographic projection [DE] (see §).

For each conjugacy class $[f] \in M_d$, we can choose a barycentered representative $f \in \text{Rat}_d$, one such that the conformal barycenter of $\mu_f$ is at the origin in $\mathbb{R}^3$. The representative is unique up to conjugation by the compact group of rotations $SO(3) \subset \text{PSL}_2 \mathbb{C}$. If $M^1_{bc}(\hat{C})$ denotes the space of barycentered probability measures on $\hat{C}$ (with the weak-* topology), then we obtain a continuous map

$$B : M_d \to M^1_{bc}(\hat{C})/SO(3),$$

defined by $[f] \mapsto [\mu_f]$ where $SO(3)$ acts by push-forward on the space of measures (see §). Let $M^1_{bc}(\hat{C})$ denote the closure of $M^1_{bc}(\hat{C})$ in the space of all probability measures, and consider the closure of the graph of $B$ in the product of this space of measures with the GIT compactification of $M_d$,

$$\overline{M}_d = \overline{\text{Graph}(B)} \subset \overline{M}_d \times M^1_{bc}(\hat{C})/SO(3).$$

Then $\overline{M}_d$ is a compact topological space with $M_d$ as a dense open subset.

Quadratic rational maps. In degree $d = 2$, Milnor showed that the moduli space, $M_2 = \text{Rat}_2/\text{PSL}_2 \mathbb{C}$, is an orbifold with underlying complex manifold isomorphic to $\mathbb{C}^2$ [Mi, Lemma 3.1]. In the compactification $\overline{M}_2 \simeq \mathbb{P}^2$, Milnor naturally identified the boundary of $M_2$ with the family of conjugacy classes of degree 1 rational maps and one degree 0 map. In fact, Milnor’s $\overline{M}_2$ is isomorphic to the geometric invariant theory compactification in degree 2 [Si, Theorem 1.5].

The main theorem of this paper shows that the compactification $\overline{M}_2$ of $M_2$ by barycentered measures is an explicit model for the formal construction of $\overline{M}_2$ which resolves the iterate maps.

**Theorem 1.1.** The compactifications $\hat{M}_2$ and $\overline{M}_2$ of $M_2$ are canonically homeomorphic.

In other words, there is a homeomorphism $\hat{M}_2 \to \overline{M}_2$ which restricts to the identity on the moduli space $M_2$. It is not true in general that the compactifications $\hat{M}_d$ and $\overline{M}_d$ are homeomorphic for every $d \geq 2$. Examples are given in Section 11. However, for $d = 2$ we have the following corollary.

**Corollary 1.2.** The iterate maps $\Phi_n : M_2 \to M_{2^n}$ extend continuously to $\overline{M}_2 \to \overline{M}_{2^n}$ for every $n \geq 1$.

**Proof.** Let $\{[f_k]\}_{k=0}^{\infty}$ be a sequence in $M_2$ such that $[f_k] \to p \in \partial M_2 \subset \overline{M}_2$ as $k \to \infty$. By the definition of $\overline{M}_2$, there exist representatives $f_k \in \text{Rat}_2$ with barycentered measures of maximal entropy $\mu_{f_k}$ which converge weakly to a probability measure $\nu$ as $k \to \infty$. By Theorem 1.1 the point $p$ is identified with a unique point in $\partial M_2 \subset \hat{M}_2$, and therefore it has well-defined iterates $p^n \in \overline{M}_{2^n}$ for all $n \geq 1$. By the continuity of $\Phi_n : \hat{M}_2 \to \overline{M}_{2^n}$ and the iterate-invariance of the measures,
\[ \mu_f \circ f_k = \mu_{f_k}, \text{ the sequence of iterates } \Phi_n([f_k]) \text{ must converge in } \overline{M}_2^n \text{ to the point } (p^a, \nu). \]

The structure of \( \overline{M}_2 = \hat{M}_2 \). As an inverse limit construction, the space \( \hat{M}_2 \) could have very complicated structure. In fact, the boundary of \( M_2 \) in this space can be understood concretely. The first result says \( \hat{M}_2 \) cannot be embedded into any finite dimensional projective space.

**Theorem 1.3.** No finite sequence of blow-ups of \( M_2 \simeq \mathbf{P}^2 \) is enough to resolve all of the rational iterate maps \( \Phi_n : M_2 \to \overline{M}_2^n \) simultaneously.

On the other hand, the space \( \Gamma_n \), which is the closure of the graph of \( (\Phi_2, \Phi_3, \ldots, \Phi_n) \) in \( M_2 \times M_4 \times \cdots \times M_{2^n} \) has a fairly simple structure, described in Section 7. In particular, there are no ideal points in the inverse limit space \( \hat{M}_2 = \lim \Gamma_n \):

**Theorem 1.4.** Every element of \( \hat{M}_2 \subset \prod_{n=1}^\infty \overline{M}_2 \) is uniquely determined by finitely many entries.

Topologically, the boundary of \( M_2 \) in \( \hat{M}_2 \) is obtained from the boundary of \( M_2 \) in \( M_2 \simeq \mathbf{P}^2 \) by successively attaching 2-spheres at a countable collection of points in \( M_2 \), as in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Boundary of \( M_2 \) in \( \overline{M}_2 = \hat{M}_2 \).](image)

**Outline of the paper.** The notation is fixed in Section 2 and a summary of results from [De] is provided. The geometric invariant theory compactification \( \overline{M}_d \) is defined in Section 3. In Section 4 we observe that the iterate map \( M_d \to M_{d^n} \) is proper. Sections 5 and 6 are devoted to the study of iteration in degree 2, and we give the proof of Theorem 1.3. Section 7 contains a study of the structure of \( \hat{M}_2 \) and the proof of Theorem 1.4. The space of barycentered measures \( M_{bc}^2(\mathbf{C})/\text{SO}(3) \) is studied in Section 8 and the proof of Theorem 1.1 is contained in Section 9. Section 10 is devoted to a study of the iterate map \( M_d \to M_{d^n} \) in general degrees \( d \geq 2 \). Some concluding remarks about the definitions of \( \hat{M}_d \) and \( \overline{M}_d \) are given in Section 11.
Acknowledgements. The analysis of quadratic rational maps used here appeared
first in [Mi] and, in greater detail, in [Ep] where Epstein studied the structure of
hyperbolic components in $M_2$ and gave the first examples of discontinuity of the
iterate map at the boundary. In fact, as shown in Sections 5 and 6, Epstein’s
examples are the only examples which demonstrate discontinuity in degree 2. The
geometric invariant theory approach relies on the results in [Si]. The indeterminacy
of the iterate maps at the boundary of $M_d$ in $\overline{M_d}$ is analogous to the indeterminacy
at the boundary of $C^2$ in $P^2$ when iterating a complex Hénon mapping [HPV]. I
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2. Rat\(_d\) AND THE PROBABILITY MEASURES AT THE BOUNDARY

In this section, we fix notation and terminology. We state some facts about the
iterate map $\text{Rat}_d \to \text{Rat}_{d^n}$ and the measures of maximal entropy from [De].

The compactification $\overline{\text{Rat}_d}$. Let $\text{Rat}_d$ denote the space of holomorphic maps
$f : \hat{C} \to C$ of degree $d$ with the topology of uniform convergence. For each $d$, $\text{Rat}_d$
is naturally identified with the complement of a hypersurface in

$$\overline{\text{Rat}_d} = \mathbb{P}^0(\mathbb{P}^1 \times \mathbb{P}^1, \mathcal{O}(d,1)),$$

by sending $f \in \text{Rat}_d$ to the section which vanishes along the graph of $f$. The
space of rational maps $\text{Rat}_d$ is therefore a smooth, affine variety, and we obtain
an isomorphism $\overline{\text{Rat}_d} \simeq \mathbb{P}^{2d+1}$. Alternatively, each point $f \in \text{Rat}_d$ defines a map
$f : \mathbb{P}^1 \to \mathbb{P}^1$, and, in homogeneous coordinates $(z : w)$ on $\mathbb{P}^1$, it determines a pair
of degree $d$ homogeneous polynomials,

$$f(z : w) = (P(z, w) : Q(z, w)).$$

The pair $(P, Q)$ is unique up to scale, and the space of all such pairs is $\mathbb{P}^{2d+1}$, parametrized by the coefficients of $(P, Q)$. In particular,

$$\text{Rat}_d \simeq \mathbb{P}^{2d+1} \setminus V(\text{Res}),$$

where $V(\text{Res}) = \{(P, Q) : \text{Res}(P, Q) = 0\}$ is the resultant hypersurface. In $\overline{\text{Rat}_d}$,
the hypersurface $V(\text{Res})$ corresponds to the collection of all sections with reducible
zero locus.

Given a pair $(P, Q)$, the zeroes of the homogeneous polynomial $H = \gcd(P, Q)$,
as points in $\mathbb{P}^1$, will be called the holes of the associated $f \in \overline{\text{Rat}_d}$ and the multiplicity of a zero will be called the depth of the hole. Each $f \in \overline{\text{Rat}_d}$ determines
a holomorphic map

$$\hat{f} = (P/H : Q/H) : \mathbb{P}^1 \to \mathbb{P}^1$$

of degree $\leq d$. We will often write

$$f = (P : Q) = H_f \hat{f}$$

where $H_f = \gcd(P, Q)$. The holes are removable singularities for $\hat{f}$, and they
correspond to vertical components in the graph of $f$ (see Figure 2).

Coordinates on $\mathbb{P}^1$. A point $(z : w) \in \mathbb{P}^1$ will regularly be identified with $z/w \in \hat{C}$. Any distances on $\hat{C}$ will be measured in the spherical metric. A ball of radius $r$ about a point $p \in \hat{C}$ will be denoted $B(p, r)$. 

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The measure of maximal entropy. Fix $d \geq 2$. Given a rational map $f \in \text{Rat}_d$ and any smooth probability measure $\omega$ on $\hat{\mathbb{C}}$, the weak limit

$$\mu_f = \lim_{n \to \infty} \frac{1}{d^n} (f^n)^* \omega$$

exists and is independent of $\omega$. The probability measure $\mu_f$ is $f$-invariant ($f_* \mu_f = \mu_f$) and of maximal entropy ($\log d$) with support equal to the Julia set of $f$. Furthermore, for any $A \in \text{Aut}(\hat{\mathbb{C}})$, we have $\mu_{AfA^{-1}} = A_* \mu_f$ [Ly], [FLM], [Ma1]. Mañe showed that the function $f \mapsto \mu_f$ is continuous from $\text{Rat}_d$ to the space of probability measures with the weak-$*$ topology [Ma2].

Iteration on $\text{Rat}_d$. We provide here a summary of relevant definitions and statements from [De]. The main object of study in [De] is the relation between the iterate maps, $f \mapsto f^n$, extended to $\overline{\text{Rat}}_d$ and the extension of the map of maximal measures, $f \mapsto \mu_f$, to $\text{Rat}_d$.

The indeterminacy locus $I(d) \subset \overline{\text{Rat}}_d$ is the collection of $f = H_f \hat{f}$ with $\deg \hat{f} = 0$ and such that the constant value of $\hat{f}$ is a hole of $f$. It has codimension $d + 1$ in $\text{Rat}_d$. See Figure 2.

![Figure 2](https://example.com/figure2.png)

**Figure 2.** Graphs in $\mathbb{P}^1 \times \mathbb{P}^1$ of $f \in \overline{\text{Rat}}_3$: (a) $f \in \text{Rat}_3$, (b) $f = H_f \hat{f} \in \partial \text{Rat}_3$ with $\deg \hat{f} = 2$, (c) $f \in I(3)$.

**Theorem 2.1** ([De, Theorem 0.2]). The indeterminacy locus of the iterate map $\overline{\text{Rat}}_d \to \overline{\text{Rat}}_{dn}$ is $I(d)$ for all $n \geq 2$.

Consequently, any element $f = H_f \hat{f} \in \overline{\text{Rat}}_d \setminus I(d)$ has well-defined forward iterates $f^n$ for all $n \geq 2$. A direct computation yields the formula ([De, Lemma 2.2]),

$$f^n = \left( \prod_{k=0}^{n-1} (H_f \circ \hat{f}^k)^{d^{n-k-1}} \right) \hat{f}^n.$$

Atomic probability measures. For each $f \in \partial \text{Rat}_d$, we define a purely atomic probability measure $\mu_f$ which plays the role of the measure of maximal entropy. For $f = H_f \hat{f} \in \partial \text{Rat}_d$ such that $\deg \hat{f} > 0$, the measure $\mu_f$ is given by the triple sum

$$\mu_f = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{1}{d^{n+1}} \sum_{H_f(k) = 0} \sum_{\{f^*(z) = h\}} \delta_z,$$
where the middle sum is over all holes of $f$, the inner sum is over all preimages of those holes, and the outer sum is over all iterates of $\hat{f}$, all counted with multiplicity. Because the number of holes is $d - \deg \hat{f}$, it is easy to check that $\mu_f$ has total mass one. For $\deg \hat{f} = 0$, we define the probability measure by

$$
\mu_f = \frac{1}{d} \sum_{h \in H_f \cap \partial \Rat_d} \delta_h.
$$

One can define pull-back of measures by any $f \not\in I(d)$, and the measure $\mu_f$ is the unique probability measure satisfying $f^* \mu_f = d \cdot \mu_f$ [De Proposition 3.2].

**Theorem 2.2** ([De Theorem 0.1(a)]). Given any sequence $\{f_k\}$ in $\Rat_d$ converging to $f \in \partial \Rat_d \setminus I(d)$ in $\overline{\Rat_d}$, the measures of maximal entropy $\mu_{f_k}$ converge weakly to $\mu_f$.

We will use the following three lemmas throughout this text. The first two follow directly from a comparison of the formula for an iterate of $f \in \partial \Rat_d$ with the definition of $\mu_f$. For $f = H_f \hat{f} \in \overline{\Rat_d}$, let $d_h(f)$ denote the depth of $h \in \P^1$ as a hole of $f$ and let $m_h(\hat{f})$ be the multiplicity of $z = h$ as a solution to $\hat{f}(z) = \hat{f}(h)$. Note that $m_h(\hat{f}) = 1$ if and only if $h$ is not a critical point of $\hat{f}$. By convention, $m_h(\hat{f}) = 0$ for all $h$ if $\hat{f}$ is constant, and the 0-th iterate $\hat{f}^0$ is the identity map.

**Lemma 2.3** ([De Lemma 1.3]). For each $f = H_f \hat{f} \in \overline{\Rat_d}$ and $z \in \overline{C}$, we have

$$
\mu_f(\{z\}) = \frac{1}{d} \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{m_z(\hat{f}^n) d_{\hat{f}^n}(z)(f)}{d^n}.
$$

**Lemma 2.4** ([De Corollary 2.3]). For each $f \in \partial \Rat_d \setminus I(d)$, the depths of the holes of the iterates of $f$ are given by

$$
d_z(f^n) = d_z(f) + \sum_{k=1}^{n-1} d_z(\hat{f}^k) m_z(\hat{f}^k) d_{\hat{f}^k}(z)(f).
$$

Therefore, the sequence $\{d_z(f^n)/d^n : n \geq 1\}$ is non-decreasing, and

$$
\mu_f(\{z\}) = \lim_{n \to \infty} \frac{d_z(f^n)}{d^n}.
$$

**Lemma 2.5** ([De Lemmas 4.1 and 4.2]). Suppose $\{f_k\}$ is a sequence in $\Rat_d$ converging to $f = H_f \hat{f} = (P : Q)$ in $\overline{\Rat_d}$.

(i) The sequence of rational maps $f_k$ converges to $\hat{f}$ locally uniformly on the complement of the holes of $f$ in $\overline{C}$, and

(ii) if $f$ has a hole at $h$ of depth $d_h$ and neither $P$ nor $Q$ is $\equiv 0$, then any neighborhood of $h$ contains at least $d_h$ zeroes and poles of $f_k$ (counted with multiplicity) for all sufficiently large $k$.

We also need some more general results on the structure of the composition map. Recall the notation from Lemma 2.3.

**Lemma 2.6.** The composition map

$$
C_{d,e} : \overline{\Rat_d} \times \overline{\Rat_e} \to \overline{\Rat_{de}},
$$

which sends a pair $(f,g)$ to the composition $f \circ g$, is continuous away from

$$
I(d,e) = \{(f,g) = (H_f \hat{f}, H_g \hat{g}) : \hat{g} \equiv c \text{ and } H_f(c) = 0\}.
$$

Furthermore, for each \((f, g) \in \Rat_d \times \Rat_c\) such that \(\deg g > 0\),

\[
d_{\nu}(f \circ g) = d \cdot d_{\nu}(g) + m_{\nu}(\hat{g}) \cdot d_{\nu}(z)(f)
\]

Proof. In the coordinates on \(\Rat_d\) and \(\Rat_c\) given by the coefficients of \(f\) and \(g\), the composition map is defined by polynomial functions, so it suffices to show that \(C_{d,e}(f,g)\) is well defined for each pair \((f,g) \notin I(d,e)\). Write \(f = (H_f P_f : H_f Q_f) = H_f \hat{f} \in \Rat_d\) and \(g = (H_g P_g : H_g Q_g) = H_g \hat{g} \in \Rat_c\). Let \(d' = \deg \hat{f}\). The composition \(f \circ g\) can be computed directly by

\[
C_{d,e}(f,g) = (H_f(H_g P_g, H_g Q_g)P_f(H_g P_g, H_g Q_g) : H_f(H_g P_g, H_g Q_g)Q_f(Q_g P_g, Q_g Q_g)) = (H_g)^{d-d'}H_f(P_g, Q_g)(H_g)^{d'}(P_f(P_g, Q_g) : Q_f(P_g, Q_g)) = (H_g)^{d}H_f(P_g, Q_g) \hat{f} \circ \hat{g}.
\]

By hypothesis, neither \(H_f(P_g, Q_g)\) nor \((H_g)^{d}\) vanishes identically and \(\hat{f} \circ \hat{g}\) is a well-defined rational map.

The formula for the depth of the holes of the composition \(f \circ g\) follows directly from the formula for \(C_{d,e}(f,g)\) above. \(\square\)

3. THE GIT STABILITY CONDITIONS

The action of \(\SL_2 \mathbb{C}\) by conjugation on \(\Rat_d\) extends to

\[
\overline{\Rat_d} = \mathbb{P}^H(\mathbb{P}^1 \times \mathbb{P}^1, O(d,1))
\]

by the diagonal action on \(\mathbb{P}^1 \times \mathbb{P}^1\). In this section we describe the stability conditions for this action according to geometric invariant theory (GIT), computed in \([S1]\). (See also \([MFK]\).) We relate this notion of stability to the atomic probability measures \(\mu_f\) for \(f \in \partial \Rat_d\), defined in \([2]\).

Silverman showed that the moduli space \(M_d = \Rat_d / \PSL_2 \mathbb{C}\) exists as a geometric quotient scheme which is affine, integral, connected, and of finite type over \(\mathbb{Z}\). Furthermore, \(\overline{M}_d\) is a geometric quotient for \(d\) even and a categorical quotient for \(d\) odd, and it is proper over \(\mathbb{Z}\) \([S1] \text{ Theorem 2.1}\). His computations led to the following proposition:

**Proposition 3.1** \((\text{[S1 Proposition 2.2]})\). A point \(f \in \overline{\Rat_d}\) is stable (respectively, semistable) for the conjugation action of \(\SL_2 \mathbb{C}\) if and only if there are no elements in the conjugacy class of \(f\) of the form

\[
(a_0 z^d + a_1 z^{d-1}w + \cdots + a_d w^d : b_0 z^d + b_1 z^{d-1}w + \cdots + b_d w^d)
\]

with \(a_i = 0\) for all \(i < (d-1)/2\) (respectively, \(i \leq (d-1)/2\) and \(b_j = 0\) for all \(j < (d+1)/2\) (respectively, \(j \leq (d+1)/2\)).

Denote the set of stable points by \(\Rat_d^s \subset \overline{\Rat_d}\) and the semistable points by \(\Rat_d^{ss}\). It follows from Proposition 3.1 that \(\Rat_d^s = \Rat_d^{ss}\) if and only if \(d\) is even. Therefore, the compact GIT quotients are defined by \(\overline{M}_d = \Rat_d^s / \PSL_2 \mathbb{C}\) for \(d\) even and \(\overline{M}_d = \Rat_d^{ss} / \PSL_2 \mathbb{C}\) for \(d\) odd. Roughly speaking, \(\Rat_d^s\) is the largest open \(\PSL_2 \mathbb{C}\)-invariant subset of \(\Rat_d\) in which all \(\PSL_2 \mathbb{C}\)-orbits are closed, and so the quotient space \(\Rat_d^s / \PSL_2 \mathbb{C}\) is Hausdorff. When \(d\) is odd, elements of \(\Rat_d^{ss}\) represent the same point in \(\overline{M}_d\) if the closures of their orbits intersect in \(\Rat_d^{ss}\). See also \([Do]\) for background on geometric invariant theory.
The stable and semistable points. The following is a reformulation of Proposition 3.1 in the language of this paper. Let \( f = H f \hat{f} \) and \( g = H_{g} \hat{g} \) be two elements in \( \text{Rat}_{d} \). Then \( f \) and \( g \) are in the same \( \text{PSL}_{2} \mathbb{C} \)-orbit if and only if there exists \( A \in \text{PSL}_{2} \mathbb{C} \) such that \( \hat{g} = AfA^{-1} \) and the holes of \( g \) are the image under \( A \) of the holes of \( f \) (and of corresponding depths). For even \( d \geq 2 \), a point \( f = H f \hat{f} \in \text{Rat}_{d} \) is stable (or semistable) if

(i) the depth of each hole is \( \leq d/2 \), and

(ii) if the depth of \( h \in \mathbb{P}^{1} \) is \( d/2 \), then \( \hat{f}(h) \neq h \).

For odd \( d \geq 3 \), a point \( f \in \text{Rat}_{d} \) is stable if

(i) the depth of each hole is \( \leq (d - 1)/2 \), and

(ii) if the depth of \( h \in \mathbb{P}^{1} \) is \( (d - 1)/2 \), then \( \hat{f}(h) \neq h \),

and \( f \in \text{Rat}_{d} \) is semistable if

(i) the depth of each hole is \( \leq (d + 1)/2 \), and

(ii) if the depth of \( h \in \mathbb{P}^{1} \) is \( (d + 1)/2 \), then \( \hat{f}(h) \neq h \).

Instability of stability. The property of stability is not generally preserved by iteration. For example, consider the point \( h = (zw : z^{2}) \in \text{Rat}_{2} \) which is stable (\( h \) has one hole at \( z = 0 \) and \( \hat{h}(z) = 1/z \)). This point \( h \) does not lie in the indeterminacy locus \( I(2) \) and therefore has a well-defined second iterate, namely,

\[
\hat{h}^{2} = (z^{3}w : z^{2}w^{2}) \in \text{Rat}_{4}.
\]

The second iterate \( \hat{h}^{2} \) coincides with the identity map away from a hole of depth 2 at \( z = 0 \) and a hole of depth 1 at \( z = \infty \). Consequently, \( \hat{h}^{2} \) is not stable.

As another example, note that any degenerate polynomial is either unstable itself or will eventually be unstable after iteration. That is, for any \( 0 < k \leq d \), consider

\[
p = (w^{k}Q(z, w) : w^{d})
\]

where \( Q \) is a homogeneous polynomial of degree \( d - k \) such that \( Q(1, 0) \neq 0 \), so that \( \hat{p}(z) \) is the polynomial \( Q(z, 1) \) and \( p \) has a hole of depth \( k \) at \( z = \infty \). The iterates of \( p \) are of the form,

\[
p^{n} = (w^{k(n-1)+k(d-k)d^{n-2}+\cdots+k(d-k)^{n-1}}Q^{n}(z, w) : w^{d^{n}}),
\]

and \( p^{n} \) is unstable for all \( n \) such that \( \deg Q^{n} = (d - k)^{n} \) is less than or equal to \( d^{n}/2 \).

For the examples just mentioned, we can compute the associated probability measures using Lemma 2.3

\[
\mu_{h} = \frac{2}{3} \delta_{0} + \frac{1}{3} \delta_{\infty}
\]

and \( \mu_{p} = \delta_{\infty} \). The following propositions show that we can read from the measures that some iterate of \( h \) and \( p \) will be unstable.

**Proposition 3.2.** Suppose \( d \) is even and \( f \notin I(d) \). Then \( f^{n} \in \text{Rat}_{dn} \) is stable for all \( n \geq 1 \) if and only if \( \mu_{f}(\{z\}) \leq 1/2 \) for all \( z \in \mathbb{P}^{1} \).

**Proof.** Let \( d_{z}(f^{n}) \) denote the depth of \( z \) as a hole of \( f^{n} \). Write \( f = H f \hat{f} \) and note that \( \hat{f}(\hat{f})(f^{n}) = f^{2n} \) (see 2). From Lemma 2.3 the hypothesis on \( \mu_{f} \) implies that \( d_{z}(f^{n}) \leq d^{n}/2 \) for all \( z \) and all \( n \geq 1 \). Suppose for some \( n \) and \( z \) we have \( d_{z}(f^{n}) = d^{n}/2 \) and \( \hat{f}^{n}(z) = z \). The depth of \( z \) as a hole of the composition \( f^{2n} = f^{n} \circ f^{n} \)
must satisfy \( d_z(f^{2n}) \geq d^n(d^n/2) + 1 > d^{2n}/2 \) by Lemma 2.4 since \( z \) is also one of the preimages of the hole at \( z \) for \( f^n \), providing a contradiction.

Conversely, suppose that \( f^n \) is stable for all \( n \). Then, in particular, \( d_z(f^n) \leq d^n/2 \) for all \( z \) and so again by Lemma 2.4, \( \mu_f(^\infty) = \lim_{n \to \infty} d_z(f^n)/d^n \) cannot exceed \( 1/2 \).

**Proposition 3.3.** Suppose \( d \) is odd and \( f \notin I(d) \). Then \( f^n \in \text{Rat}_{d^n} \) is semistable for all \( n \geq 1 \) if and only if \( \mu_f(^\infty) \leq 1/2 \) for all \( z \in \mathbb{P}^1 \). Furthermore, if \( \mu_f(^\infty) < 1/2 \) for all \( z \in \mathbb{P}^1 \), then \( f^n \) is stable for all \( n \geq 1 \).

**Proof.** Let \( d_z(f^n) \) denote the depth of \( z \) as a hole of \( f^n \), and write \( f = Hf \hat{f} \). By Lemma 2.4, \( \mu_f(^\infty) \leq 1/2 \) implies that \( d_z(f^n) \leq (d^n - 1)/2 \) for all \( n \) and \( z \). This gives the second statement immediately: \( f^n \) is semistable for all \( n \). Conversely, if \( f^n \) is semistable for all \( n \), then \( d_z(f^n) \leq (d^n + 1)/2 \) for all \( n \). But in the limit, this implies that \( \mu_f(^\infty) \leq 1/2 \).

To prove the final statement, note again that \( \mu_f(^\infty) < 1/2 \) implies that \( d_z(f^n) \leq (d^n - 1)/2 \) for all \( n \). Suppose that for some \( n \), \( d_z(f^n) = (d^n - 1)/2 \) and \( \hat{f}^n(z) = z \). Then, by Lemma 2.3 applied to \( f^n \),

\[
\mu_f(^\infty) \geq \frac{1}{d^n} \sum_{i=0}^{\infty} \frac{d^n - 1 - d}{d^n} = \frac{1}{2},
\]

which is a contradiction since \( \mu_f = \mu_f \). □

Note that the converse to the second statement of Proposition 3.3 is false. There exist odd degrees \( d \) and \( f \in \text{Rat}_d \) for which \( f^n \) is stable for all \( n \geq 1 \) but with \( \mu_f(^\infty) = 1/2 \) for some point \( z \in \mathbb{P}^1 \). Consider, for example, \( f = (z^4w : zw^4) \in \text{Rat}_5 \) which has holes at 0 and \( \infty \), each of depth 1, and \( \hat{f}(z) = z^3 \). Using Lemmas 2.3 and 2.4, it is straightforward to compute that \( \mu_f(0) = \mu_f(\infty) = 1/2 \) while the depth of each of the two holes for \( f^n \) is \((5^n - 3^n)/2 < (5^n - 1)/2\).

### 4. Properness of the iterate map on \( M_d \)

The iterate map \( \text{Rat}_d \to \text{Rat}_{d^n} \), given by \( f \mapsto f^n \), is a regular map between smooth, affine varieties. It is \( \text{PSL}_2 \mathbb{C} \)-equivariant since \( (AfA^{-1})^n = Af^nA^{-1} \) for all Möbius transformations \( A \) and all \( n \geq 1 \). Therefore it descends to a regular map on the affine moduli spaces,

\[
\Phi_n : M_d \to M_{d^n}.
\]

Iteration on \( \text{Rat}_d \) is proper (the preimage of any compact set in \( \text{Rat}_{d^n} \) is compact) if and only if the degree \( d \) is at least 2 [DI Corollary 0.3]. This implies the following.

**Proposition 4.1.** The iterate map \( \Phi_n : M_d \to M_{d^n} \) is proper for every \( d \geq 2 \) and \( n \geq 1 \).

**Proof.** If \( \{(f_k)\}_{k=0}^\infty \) is an unbounded sequence in \( M_d \), then every sequence of representatives \( f_k \in \text{Rat}_d \) is unbounded. By properness of iteration on \( \text{Rat}_d \), every sequence of iterates \( \{(f_k)^n\}_{k=0}^\infty \) is unbounded in \( \text{Rat}_{d^n} \) [DI Corollary 3]. Consequently, \( \Phi_n((f_k)) = [(f_k)^n] \) is unbounded in \( M_{d^n} \). □

Since \( M_d \) is an open dense subset of the GIT compactification \( \overline{M}_d \), the map \( \Phi_n \) defines a rational map on the closures,

\[
\Phi_n : \overline{M}_d \dashrightarrow \overline{M}_{d^n}.
\]
In Section [10] we prove that $\Phi_n$ is not regular on $\overline{M}_d$ for any $d \geq 2$ and $n \geq 2$ (Theorem [10.1]). We aim to study the indeterminacy of this rational map in the boundary of $M_d$. The following lemma begins to address the relationship between the indeterminacy of $\Phi_n$ on $\overline{M}_d$, the stability conditions in $\overline{\text{Rat}}_d$, and the indeterminacy locus $I(d) \subset \partial \overline{\text{Rat}}_d$ for the general degree $d \geq 2$.

**Lemma 4.2.** Suppose $f \in \overline{\text{Rat}}_d$ satisfies $f \notin I(d)$ and $f^n$ is stable for some $n > 1$. Then

(i) $f$ is stable, and

(ii) the iterate map $\Phi_n$ is continuous at $[f] \in \overline{M}_d$.

**Proof.** Write $f = H_f \hat{f}$. For $z \in \mathbb{P}^1$, let $d_z(f^n)$ denote the depth of $z$ as a hole of $f^n$. The sequence $\{d_z(f^n)/d^n : n \geq 1\}$ is non-decreasing by Lemma [2.4].

Suppose first that the degree $d$ is even. Stability of $f^n$ implies that $d_z(f^n) \leq d^n/2$ for all $z$, and therefore $d_z(f^k) \leq d^k/2$ for all $k \leq n$ and all $z$. If $d_z(f^n) = d^n/2$, then $\hat{f}^n(z) \neq z$, and therefore $\hat{f}(z) \neq z$ so we see that $f$ is stable. It therefore determines a well-defined point $[f]$ in $\overline{M}_d$.

If $d$ is odd, stability of $f^n$ implies that $d_z(f^n) \leq (d^n - 1)/2$ for all $z$. Therefore $d_z(f)/d \leq (d^n - 1)/2d^n < 1/2$ and so $d_z(f) \leq (d - 1)/2$ for all $z$. Furthermore, if we have $d_z(f) = (d - 1)/2$ with $\hat{f}(z) = z$, then

$$d_z(f^n) \geq d^{n-1} \sum_{k=0}^{n-1} \frac{d-1}{2d^k} = \frac{d^n - 1}{2}$$

and $\hat{f}^n(z) = z$, which contradicts stability.

Recalling that stability in $\overline{\text{Rat}}_d$ is an open condition, we see that if $[f_t]$ is a family in $\overline{M}_d$ converging to $[f]$, then there is a family of stable representatives $f_t$ converging to $f$ in $\overline{\text{Rat}}_d$. Since $f \notin I(d)$, the iterates $(f_t)^n$ converge to $f^n$ in $\overline{\text{Rat}}_{d^n}$. Also, $(f_t)^n$ must be stable for all sufficiently small $t$, and therefore the iterates of $[f_t]$ converge in $\overline{M}_{d^n}$ to $[f^n]$. Therefore, $\Phi_n$ is continuous at $[f] \in \overline{M}_d$. □

**Question.** Is the converse true, in the sense that if $f \in I(d)$ is stable, then $\Phi_n$ is indeterminate at $[f]$? Also, if $f \notin I(d)$ is stable but $f^n$ is not stable, then is $\Phi_n$ indeterminate at $[f]$?

The answer is yes in degree $d = 2$, as we shall see in the following sections. What makes degree 2 particularly easy for computation is the following observation.

**Lemma 4.3.** The intersection of the semistable points with the indeterminacy locus, $\overline{\text{Rat}}^{ss}_d \cap I(d) \subset \overline{\text{Rat}}_d$, is empty if and only if $d = 2$.

**Proof.** The statement is immediate from the definition of $I(d)$ and Proposition [3.1]. □

5. THE MODULI SPACE $M_2 \simeq \mathbb{C}^2$

In this section, we collect some fundamental facts about the moduli space of quadratic rational maps, and we describe completely the indeterminacy locus of the iterate map

$$\Phi_n : \overline{M}_2 \rightarrow \overline{M}_2^n$$

which sends $[f]$ to $[f^n]$. We give the proof of Theorem [1.3].

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The analysis in this section is based on the work of Milnor and Epstein [Mi, Ep] and the isomorphism between Milnor’s compactification $\overline{M}_2 \simeq \mathbb{P}^2$ and the geometric invariant theory compactification of $M_2$ [Si, Theorem 1.5].

**The compactification $\overline{M}_2 \simeq \mathbb{P}^2$.** Every rational map $f : \mathbb{C} \to \mathbb{C}$ of degree 2 has three fixed points (solutions to $f(z) = z$), counted with multiplicity. The derivative of $f$ evaluated at a fixed point is called the **multiplier** of the fixed point. The multipliers of the fixed points are the solutions to a unique monic polynomial,

$$x^3 - \sigma_1 x^2 + \sigma_2 x - \sigma_3 = 0,$$

and the residue formula (applied to the form $dz/(z - f(z))$) implies the relation $\sigma_3 = \sigma_1 - 2$. As the multipliers are conjugacy invariant, the $\sigma_i$ define functions on the moduli space $M_2 = \text{Rat}_d/\text{PSL}_2 \mathbb{C}$. Milnor showed that the pair $(\sigma_1, \sigma_2)$ naturally parametrizes the moduli space, defining an isomorphism $M_2 \simeq \mathbb{C}^2$ [Mi, Lemma 3.1]. Consequently, a sequence $\{[f_k]\}$ is unbounded in $M_2$ if and only if some fixed point multiplier of $f_k$ tends to infinity.

The boundary of $M_2$ in the compactification $\overline{M}_2 \simeq \mathbb{P}^2$, arising naturally from Milnor’s isomorphism, corresponds to unordered triples of fixed point multipliers of the form $\{a, 1/a, \infty\}$ for $a \in \mathbb{C}$. These triples can be identified with the conjugacy classes of degree 1 maps and constant maps of the form $z \mapsto az + 1$. Indeed, under the identification of Milnor’s $\overline{M}_2$ with the GIT compactification ([Si, Theorem 1.5]), the line at infinity is parametrized in a two-to-one fashion by $a \mapsto [\Lambda_a] = [\Lambda_1/a]$ where $[\Lambda_a]$ is the class of the following points in $\text{Rat}_2$:

$$\Lambda_a(z : w) = \begin{cases} 
(az(z - w) : w(z - w)), & \text{for } a \in \mathbb{C} - \{0, 1, \infty\}, \\
((z + w)(z - w) : w(z - w)), & \text{for } a = 1, \\
(z + w)(z - w) : 0), & \text{for } a = \infty, \text{ and} \\
(0 : (z + w)(z - w)), & \text{for } a = 0.
\end{cases}$$

That is, $\Lambda_1$ is the parabolic Möbius transformation $z \mapsto z + 1$ with a hole at $z = 1$, $\Lambda_\infty$ is the constant infinity map with holes at 1 and $-1$, $\Lambda_0$ is the constant 0 with holes at 1 and $-1$, and for each $a \neq 0, 1, \infty$, $\Lambda_a$ is given by $z \mapsto az$ with hole at $z = 1$. Recall by Lemma 2.5 that any sequence in $\text{Rat}_2$ converging to $\Lambda_a$ in $\overline{M}_2$ will converge to the corresponding degree 0 or 1 map, locally uniformly on the complement of the holes of $\Lambda_a$.

In this section we prove

**Theorem 5.1.** For each $n \geq 2$, iteration defines a rational map

$$\Phi_n : \overline{M}_2 \to \overline{M}_2^n$$

with indeterminacy locus given by

$$I(\Phi_n) = \{[\Lambda_a] \in \partial M_2 : a \neq 1 \text{ and } a^q = 1 \text{ for some } 1 < q \leq n\}.$$

In particular, we have $I(\Phi_2) \subset I(\Phi_3) \subset I(\Phi_4) \cdots$.

**Proof of Theorem 5.1.** From Theorem 5.1 we know that the indeterminacy set of $\Phi_n : \overline{M}_2 \to \overline{M}_2^n$ is strictly increasing with $n$. Therefore, no finite sequence of blow-ups over points in $I(\Phi_n)$ will suffice to resolve the indeterminacy of all iterate maps simultaneously. □

For $a \in \mathbb{C}$, let $\Lambda_a \in \overline{\text{Rat}}_2$ be defined by (5.1). Checking the stability conditions of [Si] we see that each of the points $\Lambda_a$ is stable, and these elements represent all
of the stable conjugacy classes in \( \hat{\text{Rat}}_2 - \text{Rat}_2 \). Note also that \( \Lambda_a \notin I(2) \) for every \( a \in \hat{C} \) and therefore all forward iterates \( \Lambda^n \in \hat{\text{Rat}}_{2^n} \) are well defined by Theorem 2.

**Lemma 5.2.** The iterates \( \Lambda^n \in \hat{\text{Rat}}_{2^n} \) are stable for all \( n \geq 1 \) if and only if \( a \in \hat{C} \) is not a primitive \( q \)-th root of unity for any \( q \geq 2 \). For any primitive \( q \)-th root of unity \( \zeta \), the iterate \( \hat{\Lambda}^n \) is stable if and only if \( n < q \).

**Proof.** By the definition of the atomic probability measures \( \mu_{\Lambda_a} \) given in Section 2 we have

\[
\mu_{\Lambda_0} = \mu_{\Lambda_{\infty}} = \frac{1}{2} \delta_1 + \frac{1}{2} \delta_{-1},
\]

\[
\mu_{\Lambda_1} = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2^k} \delta_{1-k},
\]

and

\[
\mu_{\Lambda_a} = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2^k} \delta_{1/a^k}
\]

for all \( a \neq 0, 1, \infty \). We see immediately that \( \mu_{\Lambda_a}(\{z\}) \leq 1/2 \) for all \( z \in \mathbb{P}^1 \) if only if \( a \) is not a primitive \( q \)-th root of unity for any \( q > 1 \). By Proposition 3.2 all iterates of \( \Lambda_a \) must then be stable.

Now let \( \zeta \) be a primitive \( q \)-th root of unity for some \( q > 1 \). Writing \( \Lambda_\zeta = H_\zeta \hat{\Lambda}_\zeta \), note that \( \hat{\Lambda}_\zeta^k(z) = \zeta^k z \), so that \( \hat{\Lambda}_\zeta^k \) is the identity map. For each \( n < q \) and \( l = 0, 1, \ldots, q - 1 \), it is easy to compute from Lemma 4.4 that the depths of the holes of \( \Lambda_\zeta^n \) are given by

\[
d_{1/\zeta^l}(\Lambda_\zeta^n) = 2^{n-1-l} \leq 2^n/2,
\]

and \( 1/\zeta^l \) is not fixed by \( \hat{\Lambda}_\zeta^n \), so that \( \Lambda_\zeta^n \in \hat{\text{Rat}}_{2^n} \) is stable. On the other hand, we find that \( d_1(\Lambda_\zeta^q) = 2^{q-1} \) with \( \hat{\Lambda}_\zeta^q(1) = 1 \) so that \( \Lambda_\zeta^q \) is not stable. For each \( n > q \), \( d_1(\Lambda_\zeta^n) > 2^{q-1} \) so that \( \Lambda_\zeta^n \) is not stable. \( \square \)

**Epstein’s normal forms.** We now follow [Ep]. Suppose \( f \in \text{Rat}_2 \) has distinct fixed points at 0, \( \infty \), and 1, with multipliers \( \alpha, \beta \), and \( \gamma = (2 - \alpha - \beta)/(1 - \alpha \beta) \), respectively. Then \( f \) can be written

\[
f_{\alpha, \beta}(z) = z(1 - \alpha)z + \alpha(1 - \beta) \]
\[
\beta(1 - \alpha)z + (1 - \beta)
\]

If the two critical points of \( f \) are distinct from the fixed point at 1, then \( f \) is conjugate to

\[
F_{\gamma, \delta}(z) = \frac{\gamma z}{z^2 + \delta z + 1}
\]

for some \( \delta \in \mathbb{C} \), where \( F \) has critical points at 1 and \(-1\) and a fixed point of multiplier \( \gamma \) at 0. Interchanging the labelling of the critical points replaces \( \delta \) with \(-\delta \).

Fix \( a \in \hat{C} - \{0, 1, \infty\} \) and any continuous path \( p : (0, 1) \to M_2 \) such that \( p(t) \to [\Lambda_a] \in M_2 \) as \( t \to 0 \). For any representative of \( p(t) \) in \( \text{Rat}_2 \), the fixed points are eventually distinct, so we can label the multipliers continuously so that \( \alpha(t) \to a, \beta(t) \to 1/a \), and \( \gamma(t) \to \infty \) as \( t \to 0 \). Choose a continuous path \( \tilde{p} : (0, 1) \to \text{Rat}_2 \) so that \([\tilde{p}] = p \) and \( \tilde{p}(t) \) is normalized as in (5.2). Then \( \tilde{p}(t) \to \Lambda_a \)
in $\text{Rat}_2$ as $t \to 0$. If we also label the critical points of $\tilde{p}(t)$, then there is a unique Möbius transformation $A_t$ which transforms $\tilde{p}(t)$ into normalization (5.3). Then $A_t$ satisfies

$$(5.4) \quad A_t(z) = 1 + z \sqrt{\varepsilon(t)} + o(\sqrt{\varepsilon(t)}),$$

for an appropriate choice of the square root of $\varepsilon(t) := 1 - \alpha(t) \beta(t)$, locally uniformly for $z \in \mathbb{C}$ [Ep, §3]. See Figure 3.

**Figure 3.** Normal forms (5.2) and (5.3) and transformation $A_t$ for small $t$.  

**Iteration on $M_2$.** Fix $a \in \hat{\mathbb{C}} - \{0, 1, \infty\}$, and let $\{f_t \in \text{Rat}_2 : t \in (0, 1]\}$ be a continuous family such that $f_t \to \Lambda_a$ in $\text{Rat}_2$ as $t \to 0$. Recall the definition of the indeterminacy locus $I(2)$ in $\text{Rat}_2$ given in [2]. By Theorem 2.1, $\Lambda_a \not\in I(2)$ implies that the iterates $f_t^n$ converge in $\text{Rat}_2^n$ to

$$(5.5) \quad \Lambda_a^n = \left(\alpha^n z \prod_{i=0}^{n-1} (z - w/a^i)^{2^{n-1-i}} : w \prod_{i=0}^{n-1} (z - w/a^i)^{2^{n-1-i}} \right),$$

by [De, Lemma 2.2], and therefore

$$f_t^n(z) \to a^n z$$

as $t \to 0$, locally uniformly on $\hat{\mathbb{C}} - \{1, 1/a, 1/a^2, \ldots, 1/a^{n-1}\}$ by Lemma 2.5.

Suppose further that $a = \zeta$ is a primitive $q$-th root of unity for some $q > 1$. Then the family of $q$-th iterates $\{f_t^q\}$ converges to the identity function as $t \to 0$, locally uniformly on $\hat{\mathbb{C}} - \{1, \zeta, \ldots, \zeta^{q-1}\}$. However, Epstein showed that if we conjugate this family by a Möbius transformation satisfying (5.4), then the limit of the $q$-th iterate is a degree $2$ map with a parabolic fixed point:

**Proposition 5.3 ([Ep, Proposition 2]).** Let $\zeta$ be a primitive $q$-th root of unity for $q > 1$, and suppose that $\{f_t : t \in (0, 1]\} \subset \text{Rat}_2$ is a continuous family normalized as in (5.2) such that $\alpha(t) \to \zeta$ and $\beta(t) \to 1/\zeta$ as $t \to 0$. Suppose also that as $t \to 0$,

$$\frac{\alpha(t)^q - 1}{\sqrt{\varepsilon(t)}} \to \tau \in \hat{\mathbb{C}}.$$
for some choice of the square root of $\sqrt{\varepsilon(t) = 1 - \alpha(t)\beta(t)}$. Let $F_t = A_t^{-1}f_tA_t$ where $A_t$ satisfies (5.4) for this same choice of $\sqrt{\varepsilon(t)}$. Then

$$F_t^q(z) \rightarrow \begin{cases} G_\tau(z) = z + \tau + \frac{1}{z} & \text{for } \tau \in \mathbb{C}, \\ \infty & \text{for } \tau = \infty \end{cases}$$

as $t \to 0$, locally uniformly on $\mathbb{C}^*$.

**The $\tau^2$-value for holomorphic disks.** In order to fully understand the iterate map,

$$\Phi_n : \mathcal{M}_2 \rightarrow \mathcal{M}_{2n},$$

defined by $[f] \mapsto [f^n]$ on $M_2$, we will need to analyse in more detail the behavior of the iterates near the boundary point $\Lambda \in \text{Rat}_2$, $\zeta^q = 1$.

Fix $q \geq 2$ and $\zeta$ a primitive $q$-th root of unity. Let $\Delta : D \rightarrow \mathcal{M}_2$ be a holomorphic disk such that $\Delta(0) = [\Lambda]$. For $q \geq 3$ (so that $\zeta \neq 1/\zeta$), we can holomorphically parameterize two of the fixed point multipliers $\alpha(t) \rightarrow \zeta$ and $\beta(t) \rightarrow 1/\zeta$ as $t \to 0$ and set $\varepsilon(t) = 1 - \alpha(t)\beta(t)$. We define the value $\tau^2 \in \mathbb{C}$ for the disk $\Delta$ by

$$\tau^2(\Delta) = \lim_{t \to 0} \frac{(\alpha(t)^q - 1)^2}{\varepsilon(t)}.$$

Set $\tau^2(\Delta) = \infty$ for any $\Delta \subset \partial M_2$, since $\varepsilon(t) \equiv 0$. If we interchange the labeling of $\alpha$ and $\beta$, the $\tau^2$-value is unchanged: for any $q \geq 2$, the definition of $\varepsilon = 1 - \alpha\beta$ implies that

$$\tau^2(\Delta) = \lim_{t \to 0} \frac{(\alpha(t)^q - 1)^2}{\varepsilon(t)} = \lim_{t \to 0} \frac{(\beta(t)^q - 1)^2}{\varepsilon(t)}.$$

In the case of $q = 2$, we are not necessarily able to holomorphically label the fixed multipliers $\alpha(t)$ and $\beta(t)$, since both tend to $-1 = \zeta$ as $t \to 0$. Nevertheless, we can compute $\tau^2(\Delta)$ independent of any choice because of the equality in (5.6).

**Theorem 5.4.** Let $\zeta$ be a primitive $q$-th root of unity for some $q \geq 2$, and let $\Delta$ and $\Delta'$ be two holomorphic disks in $\mathcal{M}_2$ such that $\Delta(0) = \Delta'(0) = [\Lambda]$. Then for each $n \geq q$, we have

$$\lim_{t \to 0} \Phi_n(\Delta(t)) = \lim_{t \to 0} \Phi_n(\Delta'(t))$$

in $\mathcal{M}_{2n}$ if and only if $\tau^2(\Delta) = \tau^2(\Delta')$.

We will give the proof of Theorem 5.4 in the next section. For now, we complete the proof of Theorem 5.1 which describes the indeterminacy locus of the iterate map $\Phi_n$.

**Proof of Theorem 5.1.** Let $I(\Phi_n)$ denote the indeterminacy locus of the iterate map $\Phi_n : \mathcal{M}_2 \rightarrow \mathcal{M}_{2n}$, and consider the family $\Lambda_a \in \text{Rat}_2$ for $a \in \mathbb{C}$ defined by (5.1).

Since $\mathcal{M}_2 \simeq \mathbb{P}^2$ is smooth, it suffices to show that $\Phi_n$ is discontinuous at $[f] \in \mathcal{M}_2$ if and only if $[f] = [\Lambda_a]$ for a primitive $q$-th root of unity $\zeta$, with $1 < q \leq n$.

Suppose $a \in \mathbb{C}$ is not a primitive $q$-th root of unity. By Lemma 5.2, $\Lambda_a^n \in \text{Rat}_{2n}$ is stable for all $n \geq 1$, so that by Lemma 4.2 $[\Lambda_a] \not\in I(\Phi_n)$ for all $n \geq 1$.

Fix $q \geq 2$ and let $\zeta$ be a primitive $q$-th root of unity. By Lemma 5.2 the iterate $\Lambda_\zeta^n \in \text{Rat}_{2n}$ is stable if and only if $1 \leq n < q$, and so by Lemma 4.2 $[\Lambda_\zeta] \not\in I(\Phi_n)$ for all $n < q$.

Now suppose $n \geq q$. By Theorem 5.4 it suffices to show there exist holomorphic disks $\Delta$ and $\Delta'$ in $\mathcal{M}_2$ such that $\Delta(0) = \Delta'(0) = [\Lambda_\zeta]$ and $\tau^2(\Delta) \neq \tau^2(\Delta')$. Define
$f_t \in \text{Rat}_2$ by normal form (5.2) with $\alpha(t) = \zeta + t$ and $\beta(t) = 1/\zeta + 2t$. Then it is easy to compute that $\tau^2(\Delta) = 0$ for $\Delta(t) = [f_t]$. On the other hand, $\tau^2(\Delta') = \infty$ for any disk $\Delta' \subset \partial M_2$. \hfill $\square$

6. The iterate map in degree 2

Fix $q \geq 2$ and let $\zeta$ be a primitive $q$-th root of unity. Let $\Lambda_\zeta \in \text{Rat}_2$ be defined by equation (6.1). In this section, we prove Theorem 5.4 that the limiting values of the iterate map $\Phi_n : M_2 \to M_{2n}$ on a holomorphic disk passing through $[\Lambda_\zeta]$ depend only on the $\tau^2$-value of the disk. We treat the cases of $\tau^2 \in \mathbb{C}$ and $\tau^2 = \infty$ separately (Propositions 6.1 and 6.4).

Proposition 6.1. Fix $q > 1$ and $\zeta$ a primitive $q$-th root of unity. Suppose that $\{f_t : t \in (0, 1]\} \subset \text{Rat}_2$ is a continuous family, normalized as in (5.2), such that $\alpha(t) \to \zeta$, $\beta(t) \to 1/\zeta$, and $(\alpha(t)^q - 1)/\sqrt{\varepsilon(t)} \to \tau \in \mathbb{C}$, for some choice of $\sqrt{\varepsilon(t)}$ as $t \to 0$. Let $A_t \in \text{Aut} \hat{\mathbb{C}}$ satisfy (5.4) for this choice of $\sqrt{\varepsilon(t)}$. Then the $n$-th iterate of $F_t = A_t^{-1}f_t A_t$ converges in $\text{Rat}_{2n}$ as $t \to 0$ to the following:

$$F_{q, \tau, n} = \begin{cases} (z^{2^q - 1}w^{2^n - 1} : 0) & \text{for } 1 \leq n < q, \\ (z^{2^q - 1}w^{2^n - 1} : z^{2^{q - 1}w^{2^{n - 1}}} & \text{for } n = q, \\ F_{q, \tau, (n \mod q)} \circ (F_{q, \tau, q})^{[n/q]} & \text{for } n > q, \end{cases}$$

where $F_{q, \tau, 0}$ is the identity map.

Recall that by Proposition 5.3 the $q$-th iterate of $F_t$ converges to $G_\tau(z) = z + \tau + 1/z$, locally uniformly on $\mathbb{C}^*$. By Proposition 6.1 (together with Lemma 6.5), $F_t^n(z) \to \infty$ as $t \to 0$ locally uniformly on the complement of a finite set in $\hat{\mathbb{C}}$ for all $n$ which are not multiples of $q$, and for every $n = mq$, $F_t^{mq}(z) \to G_\tau^m(z)$ as $t \to 0$ locally uniformly on the complement of a finite set in $\hat{\mathbb{C}}$.

Lemma 6.2 ([Ep] §4, (17)]). Fix $a \in \mathbb{C} - \{0, 1, \infty\}$ and suppose that $\{f_t : t \in (0, 1]\} \subset \text{Rat}_2$ is a continuous family normalized as in (5.2), such that $f_t \to \Lambda_a$ in $\text{Rat}_2$ as $t \to 0$. Let $\varepsilon(t) = 1 - \alpha(t)\beta(t)$ and let $z : (0, 1] \to \mathbb{C}$ be a continuous path. Then

$$\frac{f_t(z(t))}{z(t)} = \begin{cases} \alpha(t) + o(1) & \text{if } \varepsilon(t) = o(z(t) - 1), \\ \alpha(t) + o(\sqrt{\varepsilon(t)}) & \text{if } \sqrt{\varepsilon(t)} = o(z(t) - 1), \end{cases}$$

as $t \to 0$.

Proof of Proposition 6.1. For each fixed $z \in \mathbb{C}^*$, we have $\varepsilon(t) = o(A_t(z) - 1)$ and therefore, by Lemma 6.2

$$f_t(A_t(z))/A_t(z) = \alpha(t) + o(1).$$

In particular, $f_t(A_t(z)) \to \zeta$, locally uniformly on $\mathbb{C}^*$. Since $\zeta \neq 1$, we obtain

$$F_t(z) = A_t^{-1}f_t A_t(z) \to \infty,$$

locally uniformly in $\mathbb{C}^*$. By induction we find that $\varepsilon(t) = o(f_t^{p-1}(A_t(z)) - 1)$ for each $1 \leq n \leq q$, so that

$$f_t^n(A_t(z)) = \alpha(t)f_t^{p-1}(A_t(z)) + o(1) \to \zeta^n$$

as $t \to 0$. Consequently, $F_t^n(z) \to \infty$ locally uniformly in $\mathbb{C}^*$ for each $n < q$.

It follows that for each $n < q$, the limit of $F_t^n$ exists in $\text{Rat}_{2n}$ as $t \to 0$: by Lemma 2.5(ii) it must be of the form $F_{q, \tau, n} = (z^kw^l : 0)$ for non-negative integers $k$ and $l$ such that $k + l = 2^n$ because the convergence of $F_t^n(z) \to \infty$ is uniform away
from 0 and ∞. To determine \( k \) and \( l \), it suffices (again by Lemma 2.3) to count the preimages of 0 by \( F^n_t \) near both 0 and ∞.

Fix \( n < q \). The iterate \( f^n_t \to A^q_t \) is \( A^q_t \) near \( A^q_t \) as \( t \to 0 \), where \( A^q_t \) is given by equation (6.5.4), and Lemma 2.6 implies that \( f^n_t(z) \to z^n z \) as \( t \to 0 \), locally uniformly on \( C \). Therefore, for all sufficiently small \( t \), there is exactly one preimage by \( f^n_t \) of \( z = 1 \) very close to \( z = 1 / 3z \). Fix small disks \( D_1 \subset D_2 \) around \( z = 1 \). Counting the depths of the holes outside the disk \( D_1 \), Lemma 2.5 implies that there are exactly \( 2^n-1 \) preimages of \( z = 1 \) by \( f^n_t \) in \( C - D_1 \) for sufficiently small \( t \). Thus, for \( F^n_t = A^{-1}_t f^n_t A_t \), there are exactly \( 2^n-1 \) preimages of 0 in \( A^{-1}_t(C - D_1) \) for sufficiently small \( t \). Therefore the depth of \( z = \infty \) for \( F^n_t \) is at least \( 2^n-1 \).

On the other hand, let \( D_0 \) be any disk around \( z = 0 \). As in the argument to show (6.7), \( f^n_t(D_1 - A_t(D_0)) \subset \zeta^n D_2 \) for all sufficiently small \( t \) (and \( n < q \)). Therefore, \( F^n_t \to \infty \) uniformly on \( A^{-1}_t(D_1) - D_0 \), so that \( F^n_t \) has at most \( 2^n-1 \) preimages of 0 outside \( D_0 \) for small \( t \). Therefore, the depth of \( F^n_t \) at \( \infty \) is exactly \( 2^n-1 \), and we can conclude that

\[
F^n_t = (z^{2^n-1} w^{2^n-1} : 0).
\]

Now suppose \( n = q \). Since \( F^n_t(z) \to G_t(z) = z + \tau + 1/z \) locally uniformly in \( C^* \) by Proposition 5.3, the limit of \( F^n_t \) must exist in \( \mathbb{R}^2 \) and be of the form

\[
F^n_t = (z^{2} w(z^2 + \tau z w + w^2) : z^{2l} w^{2l+1}) \text{ for integers } k \text{ and } l \text{ with } k + l = 2q - 2.
\]

To compute \( k \) and \( l \), we will count preimages of \( z = \infty \) for sufficiently small \( t \). Without loss of generality, we may assume that \( A_t \) fixes \( \infty \) for all \( t \). As before, let \( D_0 \) be a disk centered at \( z = 0 \) and let \( D_1 \) be a small disk around \( z = 1 \). Because the depths of the holes of \( A^q_t \), we find that there are exactly \( 2^n-1 \) preimages of \( \infty \) by \( f^n_t \) in \( C - D_1 \) for all sufficiently small \( t \) (\( 2^n-1 \) - 1 of them accumulate on the \( q \)-th roots of unity and one preimage is at \( \infty \)). Also, from (6.7) when \( n = q \), there are no preimages of \( \infty \) by \( f^n_t \) in \( D_1 - A_t(D_0) \). Therefore, \( F^n_t \) has exactly \( 2^n-1 \) preimages of \( \infty \) in \( C - D_0 \) for all sufficiently small \( t \). Consequently, \( F^n_t \) has a hole of depth exactly \( 2^n-1 \) at \( \infty \), and therefore,

\[
F^n_t = (z^{2^n-1} w^{2^n-1} (z^2 + \tau z w + w^2) : z^{2^n-1} w^{2^n-1}).
\]

Finally we need to compute the limits of \( F^n_t \) in \( \mathbb{R}^2 \) for every \( n > q \). Write \( n = k + m \) for integers \( 0 \leq k < q \) and \( m > 0 \). For \( k = 0 \) the desired form follows immediately from Theorem 2.1 since \( F^n_t \notin I(2^n) \). For \( k > 0 \), the result follows from Lemma 2.6 since \( F^n_t = F^k_t \circ F^m_t \).

**Lemma 6.3.** For \( q \geq 2 \) and \( \tau \in C \), let \( \{F_t\} \) be a family of rational maps as in Proposition 6.1. Then the measures \( \mu_{F_t} \) converge weakly to \( \mu_{F_q, \tau, q} \) as \( t \to 0 \). Furthermore, \( \mu_{F_{q, \tau, q}}(\{z\}) < 1/2 \) for all \( z \in C \).

**Proof.** The convergence of the measures follows immediately from Theorem 2.2 because \( F_{q, \tau, q} \notin I(2^n) \). Let \( \mu_{\tau} = \mu_{F_{q, \tau, q}} \) as defined in Section 2. By Lemma 2.3, we can compute the values of \( \mu_{\tau} \),

\[
\mu_{\tau}(\{\infty\}) = \mu_{\tau}(\{0\}) = \frac{2^{q-1} - 1}{2^q} - \frac{1}{2^q} \sum_{l=0}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2^{ql}} = \frac{2^{q-1} - 1}{2^q - 1} < \frac{1}{2}.
\]

Then, for any point \( p \in C^* \), we have

\[
\mu_{\tau}(\{p\}) \leq 1 - \mu_{\tau}(\{0\}) - \mu_{\tau}(\{\infty\}) = \frac{1}{2^q - 1} < \frac{1}{2}.
\]
Proposition 6.4. Fix $q > 1$ and $\zeta$ a primitive $q$-th root of unity. Suppose that
\{f_t : t \in (0, 1]\} \subset \text{Rat}_2$ is a continuous family of rational maps normalized as in
(5.2), such that $\alpha(t) \to \zeta$, $\beta(t) \to 1/\zeta$, and $(\alpha(t)^q - 1)/\sqrt{\epsilon(t)} \to \infty$ as $t \to 0$.
Conjugating by $A_t(z) = 1 + z(\alpha(t)^q - 1) \in \text{Aut} \mathcal{C}$, the iterates of $P_t = A_t^{-1} f_t A_t$
converge in $\text{Rat}_{2^n}$ as $t \to 0$ to the following:
\[
P_{q,n} = \begin{cases} 
(z^{2^{n-1}} w^{2^{n-1}} : 0) & \text{for } 1 \leq n < q, \\
(z^{2^{n-1}} w^{2^{n-1}+1}(z + w) : z^{2^{n-1}} w^{2^{n-1}}) & \text{for } n = q, \\
(P_{q,n \mod q} \circ (P_{q,q})^{\lfloor n/q \rfloor}, & \text{for } n > q,
\end{cases}
\]
where $P_{q,0}$ is the identity map.

In particular, Lemma 2.5 implies that $P_{q,n}(z) = A_t^{-1} f_t A_t(z) \to \infty$ as $t \to 0$, locally
uniformly on the complement of a finite set in $\mathcal{C}$, for all $n$ which are not multiples of
$q$, and $P_{q,n}(z) \to z + m$ as $t \to 0$, locally uniformly on $\mathcal{C} - \{0, -1, -2, \ldots, -m+1, \infty\}$
for every $m \geq 1$.

Proof. The proof is similar to the proof of Proposition 6.1. For fixed $z \in \mathcal{C}^*$, we
have $A_t(z) = 1 + z(\alpha(t)^q - 1)$, and so $\sqrt{\epsilon(t)} = o(A_t(z) - 1)$. By Lemma 6.2
\[
\frac{f_t(A_t(z))}{A_t(z)} = \alpha(t) + o(\sqrt{\epsilon(t)}).
\]
In particular, $f_t(A_t(z)) \to \zeta$, locally uniformly in $\mathcal{C}^*$. Thus $\sqrt{\epsilon(t)} = o(f_t(A_t(z)) - 1)$
also and so
\[
\frac{f_t^2(A_t(z))}{f_t(A_t(z))} = \alpha(t) + o(\sqrt{\epsilon(t)}).
\]
By induction, we have
\[
(6.8) \quad \frac{f_t^n(A_t(z))}{A_t(z)} = \prod_{i=1}^{q} \frac{f_t^{n-1}(A_t(z))}{f_t^{n-1}(A_t(z))} = \alpha(t)^q + o(\sqrt{\epsilon(t)}),
\]
and we conclude that
\[
P_t^n(z) = A_t^{-1} f_t^n A_t(z) = \frac{\alpha(t)^q - 1}{\alpha(t)^q - 1} + \frac{\alpha(t)^{q}(\alpha(t)^q - 1)z}{\alpha(t)^q - 1} + \frac{o(\sqrt{\epsilon(t)})}{\alpha(t)^q - 1} \to z + 1
\]
as $t \to 0$ and that $P_t^n(z) \to \infty$ for each $n < q$ as $t \to 0$, locally uniformly on $\mathcal{C}^*$.

It remains to determine the limit of the iterates of $P_t$ in $\text{Rat}_{2^n}$. Fix $n < q$. The proof that $P_t^n \to P_{q,n}$ in $\text{Rat}_{2^n}$ is identical to the proof of Proposition 6.1 in the case $n < q$, and we omit it.

Let $n = q$. Since $P_t^q(z) \to z + 1$ locally uniformly on $\mathcal{C}^*$, Lemma 2.6 implies that
the limit of $P_t^q$ must exist in $\text{Rat}_{2^n}$ and be of the form $P_{q,q} = (z^k w^{l+1} : z^k w^{l+1})$
for integers $k$ and $l$ such that $k + l = 2^q - 1$. As in the proof of Proposition 6.1, the
convergence of $f_t^q \to A_t^q \in \text{Rat}_{2^n}$ and the estimate on $f_t^q(A_t(z))$ in (6.8) imply
that $P_t^q$ will have exactly $2^{q-1}$ preimages of $\infty$ near $\infty$ for all sufficiently small $t$.
Therefore, $l + 1 = 2^{q-1}$ and $P_{q,q}$ will have a hole of depth $2^{q-1} - 1$ at $\infty$.

For each $n > q$, the formula for $P_{q,n}$ follows from Lemma 2.6. \qed
Stability of the iterates. Recall the criteria for GIT stability of points in $\overline{\text{Rat}}_{2^n}$ given in Section 3. For each $n \geq 2$, define $F_{q,\tau,n}$ and $P_{q,n}$ in $\overline{\text{Rat}}_{2^n}$ as in Propositions 6.1 and 6.4. The following lemma shows that $F_{q,\tau,n}$ and $P_{q,n}$ define points in $\overline{\text{Rat}}_{2^n}$ if and only if $n \geq q$.

**Lemma 6.5.** Let $\zeta$ be a primitive $q$-th root of unity for $q \geq 2$ and fix $\tau \in \mathbb{C}$. Then each of $F_{q,\tau,n}$ and $P_{q,n} \in \overline{\text{Rat}}_{2^n}$ is stable if and only if $n \geq q$.

Proof. For $n < q$, $F_{q,\tau,n} = P_{q,n} = (z^{2^{n-1}} w^{2^{n-1}} : 0)$ has a hole of depth $2^{n-1} = 2^n/2$ at $\infty$, and the associated rational map of lower degree is the constant $\infty$. Thus, $F_{q,\tau,n} = P_{q,n}$ is not stable.

Fix $\tau \in \mathbb{C}$. Note that $F_{q,\tau,q} \notin I(2^q)$, so it has well-defined forward iterates. By Lemma 3.3, the measure $\mu_\tau = \mu_{F_{q,\tau,q}}$ has no atoms of mass $\geq 1/2$, and therefore $F_{q,\tau,q}$ and all its forward iterates $F_{q,\tau,qm}$ are stable by Proposition 3.2.

Fix integers $0 < k < q$ and $m \geq 1$. Lemma 2.4 allows us to compute the depths of $0$ and $\infty$ as holes of $F_{q,\tau,qm}$:

$$d_0(F_{q,\tau,qm}) = d_\infty(F_{q,\tau,qm}) = 2^m \left( \frac{2^q - 1}{2^q} \sum_{l=0}^{m-1} \frac{1}{2^q} \right) = \frac{2^{q-1} - 1}{2^q} (2^m - 1).$$

With Lemma 2.6 we can compute the depths of the holes of $F_{q,\tau,k+mq}$:

$$d_0(F_{q,\tau,k+mq}) = d_\infty(F_{q,\tau,k+mq}) = 2^k \frac{2^q - 1}{2^q} (2^m - 1) + 2^{k-1}\left( \frac{2^q - 1}{2^q} \sum_{l=0}^{m-1} \frac{1}{2^q} \right) = \frac{2^{k+mq}}{2}.$$ 

and therefore for any $z \neq 0, \infty$,

$$d_z(F_{q,\tau,k+mq}) \leq 2^{k+mq} - 2d_0(F_{q,\tau,k+mq}) \leq 2^{k+mq}/(2^q - 1).$$

This implies that $F_{q,\tau,k+mq}$ is stable.

Now consider $P_{q,q} = (z^{2^{q-1}} w^{2^{q-1}} : z^{2^{q-1}} w^{2^{q-1}})$. By the definition of the measure $\mu_{P_{q,q}}$,

$$\mu_{P_{q,q}} = \frac{1}{2q} \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} \frac{2^q - 1}{2^q} \delta_{-k} + \frac{1}{2q} \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} \frac{2^q - 1}{2^q} \delta_{+k} = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2q} \delta_{-k} + \frac{2^q - 1}{2q} \delta_{+k}.$$ 

By Proposition 5.3 $P_{mq}$ is stable for all $m \geq 1$.

Fix integers $0 < k < q$ and $m \geq 1$. Lemma 2.4 allows us to compute the depths of the holes of $P_{q,qm}$: $d_0(P_{q,qm}) = 2^{qm-1}$, $d_z(P_{q,qm}) \leq 2^{q-2}$ for all $z \neq 0, \infty$, and

$$d_\infty(P_{q,qm}) = \frac{2^{qm}}{2q} \sum_{l=0}^{m-1} \frac{2^{q-1} - 1}{2^q} = \frac{2^q - 1}{2q} (2^m - 1).$$

Therefore, by Lemma 2.6

$$d_\infty(P_{q,k+qm}) = 2^k \frac{2^q - 1}{2^q - 1} (2^m - 1) + 2^{k-1} < 2^{k+qm}/2,$$

$$d_0(P_{q,k+qm}) = 2^{k+qm}/2,$$ and

$$d_z(P_{q,k+qm}) \leq 2^{q+km}(1/4 + 1/2^{q+km}) < 2^{k+qm}/2$$

for all $z \neq 0, \infty$. Observing that $P_{q,k+qm}(0) \neq 0$, we see that $P_{q,k+qm}$ is stable. \hfill $\square$
A non-constant map from \( \hat{\mathcal{C}} \) to the boundary of \( \mathcal{M}_{2n} \). Recall the definitions of \( F_{q,\tau,n} \) and \( F_{q,n} \) from Propositions 6.3 and 6.4. The next two lemmas show that there are regular maps of degree 2 from \( \mathbb{P}^1 \) to the boundary of \( \mathcal{M}_{2n} \) parameterized by the families \( F_{q,\tau,n} \) for each \( q \leq n \).

**Lemma 6.6.** Fix integers \( n \geq q \geq 2 \) and \( \sigma, \tau \in \mathbb{C} \). The following are equivalent:

(i) \( [F_{q,\tau,n}] = [F_{q,\sigma,n}] \) in \( \mathcal{M}_{2n} \),

(ii) \( \mu_{F_{q,\tau,n}} = A_\tau \mu_{F_{q,\sigma,n}} \) for some \( A \in \text{Aut} \hat{\mathcal{C}} \), and

(iii) \( \sigma = \pm \tau \).

Furthermore, \( [F_{q,n}] \neq [F_{q,\tau,n}] \) for all \( \tau \in \mathbb{C} \).

**Proof.** Write \( n = k + qm \) for integers \( 0 \leq k < q \) and \( m > 0 \), and let \( \mu_\tau = \mu_{F_{q,\tau,n}} \). Define \( A \in \text{Aut} \hat{\mathcal{C}} \) by \( A(z : w) = (-z : w) \), and note that \( AF_{q,\tau,q}A^{-1} = F_{q,-\tau,q} \).

Therefore,

\[
AF_{q,\tau,qm}A^{-1} = (\pm z^{k+1}w^{-1} : 0) = F_{q,\tau,k} \quad \text{and is independent of } \tau,
\]

so that \( [F_{q,\tau,qm}] = [F_{q,-\tau,qm}] \) and \( \mu_\tau = A_\tau \mu_{-\tau} \). For \( k \geq 1 \), note that \( AF_{q,\tau,k}A^{-1} = (\pm z^{k+1}w^{-1} : 0) = F_{q,\tau,k} \), and therefore, \( [F_{q,\tau,n}] = [F_{q,-\tau,n}] \). This proves that (iii) implies both (i) and (ii).

To see that (i) implies (iii), note that for each \( \tau \in \mathcal{C} \) and \( n \geq q \), the points 0 and \( \infty \) in \( \mathcal{C} \) are distinguished by their depths as holes of \( F_{q,\tau,n} \); as computed in the previous lemma, the depth at 0 is the same as the depth at \( \infty \) and greater than at any other point. The two preimages of 0 by the degree 2 map \( z + \tau + 1/z \) are also distinguished: if \( n = q \), then they are sent to 0 by the dynamics, and if \( n > q \), they are distinguished by their depths which can be computed with Lemma 2.6.

Therefore, if \( F_{q,\tau,n} \) and \( F_{q,\sigma,n} \) are equivalent, the cross-ratio of these four points must coincide.

The preimages of 0 by \( z + \tau + 1/z \) lie at the points

\[ p_\pm := \frac{1}{2}(-\tau \pm \sqrt{\tau^2 - 4}). \]

We compute the cross-ratio \( \chi \), normalized so that

\[ \chi(0, \infty, 1, z) = z. \]

Then

\[ \chi(\tau) := \chi(0, \infty, p_+, p_-) = p_-/p_+ = \frac{1}{4} \left( \tau + \sqrt{\tau^2 - 4} \right)^2. \]

Notice that reversing the labeling of \( p_+ \) and \( p_- \) or of 0 and \( \infty \) gives \( 1/\chi(\tau) = \chi(-\tau) \), and so the natural invariant to consider is

\[ \chi(\tau) + 1/\chi(\tau), \]

and this is what we will compute. We find

\[ \chi + 1/\chi = \tau^2 - 2. \]

Therefore, if \( F_{q,\tau,n} \) and \( F_{q,\sigma,n} \) are equivalent, we must have \( \tau^2 - 2 = \sigma^2 - 2 \), and therefore, \( \sigma = \pm \tau \).

The proof that (ii) implies (iii) is similar: the (unordered) pairs of points \( \{0, \infty\} \) and \( \{p_+, p_-\} \) are distinguished by their masses, as can be computed with Lemma 2.3. If (ii) holds, the cross-ratio of these four points must coincide for \( \tau \) and for \( \sigma \).

As seen above, this implies that \( \sigma = \pm \tau \).
Finally, in the proof of Lemma 6.3 we showed that \( d_0(P_{q,n}) = 2^n - 1 \) which is strictly greater than the depth of any hole for \( F_{q,\tau,n} \). Therefore, \( [F_{q,\tau,n}] \neq [P_{q,n}] \).

Lemma 6.7. For each \( n \geq q \geq 2 \), \( [F_{q,\tau,n}] \to [P_{q,n}] \) in \( \overline{M}_2^n \) as \( \tau \to \infty \).

Proof. Write \( n = k + mq \) for integers \( 0 \leq k < q \) and \( m \geq 1 \). Recall the definitions

\[
F_{q,\tau,q} := (z^{2^{q-1}w^{2^{q-1}-1}(z^2 + \tau zw + w^2) : z^{2^{q-1}w^{2^{q-1}}}) \in \text{Rat}_2^n
\]

and

\[
P_{q,q} := (z^{2^{q-1}w^{2^{q-1}-1}(z + w) : z^{2^{q-1}w^{2^{q-1}}}) \in \text{Rat}_2^n.
\]

For each \( \tau \in C^* \), define \( A_\tau \in \text{Aut} \hat{C} \) by

\[
A_\tau(z : w) = (\tau^{-1}(z + w) : w).
\]

Then

\[
A_\tau F_{q,\tau,q} \tau^{-1} = (\tau^{2^{q-1}w^{2^{q-1}-1}}(z^2 + \tau zw + w^2) + O(\tau^{2^{q-1}w^{2^{q-1}}}) : \tau^{2^{q-1}w^{2^{q-1}}})
\]

and therefore \( A_\tau F_{q,\tau,q} \tau^{-1} \to P_{q,q} \) in \( \text{Rat}_2^n \) as \( \tau \to \infty \). By the regularity of the iterate maps near \( P_{q,q} \), we have also that \( A_\tau F_{q,\tau,q} \tau^{-1} \to P_{q,q}^n \) = \( P_{q,qm} \) in \( \text{Rat}_2^{2m} \) as \( \tau \to \infty \). Note also that for \( 1 \leq k < q \),

\[
A_\tau F_{q,\tau,k} \tau^{-1} = (\tau^{-1}(\tau z - w)^{2^{k-1}w^{2^{k-1}} : 0}) \to P_{q,k} = (z^{2^{k-1}w^{2^{k-1}} : 0})
\]

in \( \text{Rat}_2^k \) as \( \tau \to \infty \). Therefore, by the continuity of the composition map (Lemma 2.6),

\[
A_\tau F_{q,\tau,k} \tau^{-1} \to A_\tau F_{q,\tau,q} \tau^{-1} \to P_{q,k} P_{q,qm} = P_{q,qm}
\]

in \( \text{Rat}_2^n \) as \( \tau \to \infty \). Since each of these elements in \( \text{Rat}_2^n \) is stable by Lemma 6.3, we can conclude that \( [F_{q,\tau,n}] \to [P_{q,n}] \) in \( \overline{M}_2^n \) as \( \tau \to \infty \).

The iterate map \( \Phi_n \). We are now ready to prove Theorem 6.4. However, with all the notation of this section in place, we can state a more specific result about the limiting values of the iterate map \( \Phi_n : M_2 \to M_2^n \). Recall the definition of the \( \tau^2 \)-value of a holomorphic disk in \( M_2 \), given just before the statement of Theorem 6.4. For integers \( n \geq q \geq 2 \) and \( \tau \in C \), let \( F_{q,\tau,n} \in \text{Rat}_2^n \) be defined as in Proposition 6.1 and let \( P_{q,n} \in \text{Rat}_2^n \) be defined as in Proposition 6.4.

Proposition 6.8. Fix integers \( n \geq q \geq 2 \) and let \( \zeta \) be a primitive \( q \)-th root of unity. Let \( \Delta : D \to \overline{M}_2 \) be a holomorphic disk such that \( \Delta(0) = [\Lambda_\zeta] \). If \( \tau^2(\Delta) = \infty \), then \( \Phi_n(\Delta(t)) \to [P_{q,n}] \) in \( \overline{M}_2^n \) as \( t \to 0 \). If \( \tau \) is a square root of \( \tau^2(\Delta) \in C \), then \( \Phi_n(\Delta(t)) \to [F_{q,\tau,n}] \) as \( t \to 0 \).

Proof. Suppose that \( \Delta \subset \partial M_2 \). Then by definition, \( \tau^2(\Delta) = \infty \). For any real path \( p : [0,1] \to D \) such that \( p(0) = 0 \), choose a continuous lift of \( \Delta(p(t)) \) to \( \Lambda_{a(t)} \in \text{Rat}_2 \) so that \( \Delta(p(t)) = [\Lambda_{a(t)}] \) and \( a(t) \to \zeta \) as \( t \to 0 \). Define \( A_t \in \text{Aut} \hat{C} \) by \( A_t(z,w) = ((a(t))^q - 1)z + w : w) \). Using formula (5.4) for the iterates of \( \Lambda_{a(t)} \), we can compute directly that \( P_{q,n}^t = A_t^{-1} \Lambda_{a(t)}^n A_t \in \text{Rat}_2^n \), is given by

\[
(z^{2^{n-1}(a(t)^q - 1)z + (a(t)^q - 1)w} \prod_{i=1}^{n-1}((a(t)^q - 1)z + w(1 - 1/a(t)^i))^{2^{n-1-i-1}}) : (a(t)^q - 1)z^{2^{n-1}}w \prod_{i=1}^{n-1}((a(t)^q - 1)z + w(1 - 1/a(t)^i))^{2^{n-1-i-1}}
\]

For each \( n \leq q \), we see immediately that \( P_{q,n}^t \) converges in \( \text{Rat}_2^n \) to \( P_{q,n} \) as \( t \to 0 \), where \( P_{q,n} \) is defined in Proposition 6.4. Lemma 2.6 then implies that \( P_{q,n}^t \to P_{q,n} \)
as \( t \to 0 \) for all \( n \geq q \). By Lemma 6.3, the point \( P_{q,n} \in \overline{\text{Mat}_{2^n}} \) is stable (in the sense of GIT) and so defines a conjugacy class in \( \overline{M}_{2^n} \). Consequently,

\[
\lim_{t \to 0} \Phi_n(\Delta(t)) = [P_{q,n}].
\]

If \( \Delta \not\subseteq \partial M_2 \), but \( \tau^2(\Delta) = \infty \), then by Proposition 6.4,

\[
\lim_{t \to 0} \Phi_n(\Delta(t)) = [P_{q,n}].
\]

For \( \tau^2(\Delta) \in \mathbb{C} \), let \( \tau \in \mathbb{C} \) be a square root of \( \tau^2(\Delta) \). Then by Proposition 6.1,

\[
\lim_{t \to 0} \Phi_n(\Delta(t)) = [F_{q,\tau,n}].
\]

**Proof of Theorem 5.4.** By Lemma 6.6, the conjugacy classes \([P_{q,n}]\) and \([F_{q,\tau,n}]\) are all distinct in \( \overline{M}_{2^n} \) when \( n \geq q \). Therefore, the theorem is an immediate corollary of Proposition 6.8. \( \square \)

### 7. The blow-ups of \( \overline{M}_2 \)

Let \( \Phi_n \) denote the \( n \)-th iterate map \( M_2 \to M_{2^n} \), and let \( \Gamma_n \) denote the closure of the image of \( M_2 \) in the product in \( \overline{M}_2 \times \overline{M}_4 \times \cdots \overline{M}_{2^n} \) via the embedding \((\text{Id}, \Phi_2, \ldots, \Phi_n)\). Let \( \pi_n : \Gamma_n \to \Gamma_{n-1} \) be the projection to the first \( n-1 \) factors. In this section we study the structure of the pair \((\Gamma_n, \pi_n)\) for each \( n \geq 2 \), and we give the proof of Theorem 7.1.

Note that the composition \( \pi_2 \pi_3 \cdots \pi_n : \Gamma_n \to \overline{M}_2 \) is an isomorphism away from the finite indeterminacy set \( I(\Phi_n) \subset \overline{M}_2 \), described explicitly in Theorem 5.1. The projection of \( \Gamma_n \) to the \( n \)-th factor \( \overline{M}_{2^n} \) is a regular extension of \( \Phi_n \).

**The model for \( \Gamma_n \).** First, let \( p_2 : B_2 \to \overline{M}_2 \simeq \mathbb{P}^2 \) denote the standard blow-up of \( \mathbb{P}^2 \) at the unique point in \( I(\Phi_2) \). That is, \( B_2 \) is the closure of the graph of \( \mathbb{P}^2 \dashrightarrow \mathbb{P}^1 \) given by \((x : y : z) \mapsto (x : y)\), with the coordinates chosen so that \( I(\Phi_2) = \{(0 : 0 : 1)\}\), and \( p_2 \) is the projection to the first factor. Inductively define \( p_n : B_n \to B_{n-1} \) to be a blow-up of \( B_{n-1} \) at each point of \( I(\Phi_n) - I(\Phi_{n-1}) \), which in local coordinates is given by the blow-up of \( \mathbb{C}^2 \) along the ideal \((x^2, y)\) where the axis \( \{y = 0\} \) represents the boundary of \( M_2 \). That is, \( B_n \) is locally isomorphic to the closure of the graph of the map \( \mathbb{C}^2 \dashrightarrow \mathbb{P}^1 \) given by \((x, y) \mapsto (x^2 : y)\), over each point in \( I(\Phi_n) - I(\Phi_2) \).

We find

**Theorem 7.1.** For each \( n \geq 2 \), there is a regular homeomorphism \( h_n : B_n \to \Gamma_n \) such that \( \pi_n \circ h_n = p_n \).

In particular, the homeomorphism \( h_n \) restricts to the identity on the dense open subset \( M_2 \). Note that \( B_n \) has a regular double point over each point of \( I(\Phi_n) - I(\Phi_2) \), and therefore, \( \Gamma_n \) is singular for all \( n \geq 3 \). It would be interesting to know if \( \Gamma_n \) and \( B_n \) are in fact isomorphic. This would follow, for example, if \( \Gamma_n \) were known to be normal.

Recall that \( M_2 \) is defined to be the inverse limit of the system \( \pi_n : \Gamma_n \to \Gamma_{n-1} \). The following immediate corollary to Theorem 7.1 implies that the boundary of \( M_2 \) in \( \overline{M}_2 \) looks (topologically) like the drawing of Figure 1.

**Corollary 7.2.** The inverse limit space \( \hat{M}_2 \) is naturally homeomorphic to the inverse limit \( \hat{B} \) of the system \( p_n : B_n \to B_{n-1} \).
We are now able to prove Theorem 1.4 which states that any element in \( \hat{M}_2 \subset \prod_{n=1}^{\infty} \overline{M}_{2^n} \) is determined by finitely many entries.

**Proof of Theorem 1.4.** Let \( x = (x_1, x_2, x_3, \ldots) \) denote a point in \( \hat{M}_2 \). Suppose first that \( x_1 \notin I(\Phi_n) \) for any \( n \geq 2 \). Then every iterate map \( \Phi_n \) is regular at \( x_1 \) so that it has well-defined iterates \( x_n \in \overline{M}_{2^n} \) for all \( n \). Consequently the sequence \( x \) is determined by the single entry \( x_1 \).

Now suppose that \( x_1 \in \overline{M}_2 \) is in \( I(\Phi_n) \) for some \( n \geq 2 \), and let \( N \) be the minimal such \( n \). The claim is that \( x \) is uniquely determined by \( (x_1, \ldots, x_N) \).

Indeed, let \( y_N \) be the point in \( B_N \) identified with \( (x_1, \ldots, x_N) \in \Gamma_N \) via the homeomorphism of Theorem 5.1. By the definition of \( B_n \) for each \( n \geq N \), the composition of projections \( p_{n+1} \circ \cdots \circ p_n : B_n \to B_N \) is an isomorphism near \( y_N \). Consequently, for every \( n \geq N \), there is a unique point \( y_n \in B_n \) associated to \( y_N \) such that \( p_{n+1}(y_{n+1}) = y_n \). Again using Theorem 7.1 we find that \( (x_1, \ldots, x_n) \) is determined by \( (x_1, \ldots, x_N) \) for every \( n \geq N \), proving the claim. \( \square \)

**Proof of Theorem 1.1.** For each \( a \in \hat{C} \), let \( \Lambda_a \in \text{Rat}_2 \) be defined by \( [b] \). Recall from Theorem 11 that the indeterminacy locus of \( \Phi_n \) in \( \overline{M}_2 \) is the finite set

\[ I(\Phi_n) = \{ [\Lambda] : \zeta \neq 1 \text{ and } \zeta^q = 1 \text{ for some } q \leq n \}. \]

For each \( q \leq n \) and primitive \( q \)-th root of unity \( \zeta \), there exists a regular homeomorphism from \( \mathbb{P}^1 \) to the fiber of the composition \( \pi_2 \circ \pi_3 \circ \cdots \circ \pi_n : \Gamma_n \to \overline{M}_2 \) determined by \( [\Lambda] \) in local coordinates, the map is given by

\[ \tau^2 \mapsto ([\Lambda], [\Lambda^2], \ldots, [\Lambda^{q-1}], [F_{q,r,q}], \ldots, [F_{q,r,n}]) \in \Gamma_n, \]

where \( \tau \) is either square root of \( \tau^2 \in \mathbb{C} \), and

\[ \infty \mapsto ([\Lambda], [\Lambda^2], \ldots, [\Lambda^{q-1}], [P_{q,r,q}], \ldots, [P_{q,r,n}]) \in \Gamma_n. \]

That this map is well defined follows from Proposition 6.8. Injectivity follows from Lemma 6.6 and continuity follows from Lemma 6.7. The fiber is not necessarily isomorphic to \( \mathbb{P}^1 \), as it might have a singularity at the image of \( \infty \).

To compare \( \Gamma_n \) with \( B_n \), consider the composition of projections \( q_n = p_2 \circ p_3 \circ \cdots \circ p_n : B_n \to \overline{M}_2 \). Observe that the exceptional fiber of \( q_n : B_n \to \overline{M}_2 \) over \( [\Lambda_{-1}] \) is a \( \mathbb{P}^1 \), corresponding to the family of lines in \( \overline{M}_2 \) passing through the point \( [\Lambda_{-1}] \), and the exceptional fibers over all other points in \( I(\Phi_n) \) are each a \( \mathbb{P}^1 \) in correspondence with a family of conics in \( \overline{M}_2 \) passing through \( [\Lambda] \) which are tangent to \( \partial \overline{M}_2 \).

Let \( \zeta \) be a primitive \( q \)-th root of unity, \( q \geq 2 \). Suppose that \( \Delta : \mathbb{D} \to \overline{M}_2 \) is a holomorphic disk in \( \overline{M}_2 \) such that \( \Delta(0) = [\Lambda] \). From Theorem 5.1 we see that the limiting value of the iterates, \( \Phi_n(\Delta(t)) \) as \( t \to 0 \), depends precisely on the limiting value

\[ \lim_{t \to 0} \frac{(\alpha(t)^q - 1)^2}{\varepsilon(t)} = \tau^2(\Delta) \in \hat{C}. \]

It suffices to put the exceptional fiber of \( B_n \), as a family of lines or conics through \( [\Lambda] \), in correspondence with the parameter \( \tau^2 \). Indeed, we will consider limits of the iterate map along a given line or conic passing through \( [\Lambda] \) and compute the corresponding value of \( \tau^2 \). We will treat the cases \( q = 2 \) and \( q > 2 \) separately.
Coordinates on \(\overline{M}_2\). Choose coordinates \((x_1 : x_2 : x_3)\) on \(\overline{M}_2 \simeq \mathbb{P}^2\) so that when \(x_3 = 1\), we have Milnor’s coordinates \(x_1 = \sigma_1\) and \(x_2 = \sigma_2\) on \(M_2 \simeq \mathbb{C}^2\). In these coordinates, the boundary of \(M_2\) is parameterized by \([A_a] = (1 : a + 1/a : 0)\) for \(a \in \hat{C}\).

Case \(q = 2\). Let \(\zeta = -1\), so that \([A_c] = (1 : -2 : 0) \in \overline{M}_2\). The exceptional fiber of \(B_n\) over \([A_c]\) is the fiber of the projectivized tangent bundle of \(\mathbb{P}^2\) at \([A_c]\) and can be identified with the family of lines

\[L_{(a:b)} = \{(x_1 : x_2 : x_3) : 2bx_1 + ax_2 - ax_3 = 0\},\]

for \((a : b) \in \mathbb{P}^1\). Each line can be parametrized near \([A_c]\) by

\[t \mapsto (1 : -2 + at : bt) =: f_t \in \overline{M}_2,\]

for \(t \in D\), so that \(f_0 = [A_c]\).

First suppose that \(b = 0\) and set \(a = 1\). Then \(f_t = (1 : -2 + t : 0)\) is in \(\partial M_2\) for all \(t \in D\). By definition, this direction of approach corresponds to the parameter \(\tau^2 = \infty\).

Now assume that \(b \neq 0\). For each \(t \neq 0\), we can write

\[f_t = (\sigma_1(t) : \sigma_2(t) : 1) = (1/bt : (-2 + at)/bt : 1),\]

so that the fixed point multipliers, \(\alpha = \alpha(a, b, t)\), \(\beta = \beta(a, b, t)\), and \(\gamma = \gamma(a, b, t)\), are the three roots of the equation

\[bt^3 x^3 - x^2 + (at - 2)x + 2bt - 1 = 0.\]

By construction, there are exactly two solutions which approach \(\zeta = -1\) as \(t \to 0\) and one solution tending to \(\infty\). Label them so that \(\gamma \to \infty\) and \(\alpha + \beta \to -2\). While we cannot label \(\alpha\) and \(\beta\) individually for all \(t \in D\), we aim to find an expression for \((\alpha^2 - 1)^2\) as a function of \(t\), by using the relations

1. \(\alpha + \beta + \gamma = \frac{2}{bt}\),
2. \(\alpha \beta + \alpha \gamma + \beta \gamma = \frac{a}{b} - \frac{2}{bt}\), and
3. \(\alpha \beta \gamma = \frac{a}{b^2} - 2\).

It follows from (i) that the meromorphic function \(\gamma(t)\) can be expressed as

\[\gamma(t) = \frac{1}{bt} + 2 + c_1 t + O(t^2),\]

for some constant \(c_1\), and

\[(\alpha + \beta)(t) = -2 - c_1 t + O(t^2).\]

Expressions (ii) and (iii) allow us to compute all of the coefficients in the expansion of \(\gamma\) in terms of \(a\) and \(b\), but we need only \(c_1\).

Expressing \(\gamma^{-1}\) as a power series in \(t\), we obtain

\[\gamma^{-1} = bt(1 + 2bt + O(t^2))^{-1} = bt(1 - 2bt + O(t^2)),\]

and therefore, (iii) implies that

\[\alpha \beta = -\gamma^{-1}(2 - 1/bt) = 1 - 4bt + O(t^2).\]

On the other hand, it follows from (ii) that

\[\alpha \beta = -\gamma(\alpha + \beta) + \frac{a}{b} - \frac{2}{bt} = \frac{a}{b} + \frac{c_1}{b} + 4 + O(t),\]
and we can solve for $c_1$ to obtain $c_1 = -3b - a$. Therefore, we can write 
\[ \alpha + \beta = -2 + (3b + a)t + O(t^2). \]

Let us note that $\alpha$ and $\beta$ are the roots of the equation 
\[ x^2 - (\alpha + \beta)x + \alpha \beta = x^2 - (-2 + (3b + a)t + O(t^2))x + (1 - 4bt + O(t^2)) = 0. \]

According to the quadratic formula, $\alpha$ has the form 
\[ \alpha = -1 + \frac{1}{2}(a + 3b)t + O(t^2) \pm \frac{1}{2}\sqrt{4(b-a)t + O(t^2)}, \]

and therefore 
\[ (\alpha^2 - 1)^2 = 4(b-a)t + o(t). \]

Finally, we are able to compute 
\[ \tau^2 = \lim_{t \to 0} \frac{(\alpha(t)^2 - 1)^2}{1 - \alpha(t)\beta(t)} = \frac{b-a}{b}. \]

Consequently, the parameter $\tau^2 \in \mathbb{C}$ is in one-to-one correspondence with the family of lines $L(a:b)$ for $(a : b) \in \mathbb{P}^1$. This completes the case of $q = 2$.

**Case** $q > 2$. Let $\zeta$ be a primitive $q$-th root of unity. The exceptional fiber of $B_n$ over $[\Lambda] = (1 : \zeta + 1/\zeta : 0)$ can be identified with the family of conics 
\[ C_{(a^2:b^2)} = \{(x_1 : x_2 : x_3) : a^2x_1x_3 - b^2(x_2 - (\zeta + 1/\zeta)x_1)^2 = 0\}, \]

parameterized in a two-to-one fashion by $(a : b) \in \mathbb{P}^1$, each tangent at $[\Lambda]$ to the boundary $\partial M_2$. The curve $C_{(a^2:b^2)}$ can be parameterized near $[\Lambda]$ by 
\[ t \mapsto f_t = (1 : (\zeta + 1/\zeta) + at : b^2t^2) \in \overline{\mathcal{M}}_2. \]

First suppose that $b = 0$ and set $a = 1$. Then $f_t = (1 : \zeta + 1/\zeta + t : 0)$ is in $\partial M_2$ for all $t \in D$. This direction of approach corresponds to the parameter $\tau^2 = \infty$.

Now assume that $b \neq 0$, so that for each $t \neq 0$, we can write 
\[ f_t = (\sigma_1(t) : \sigma_2(t) : 1) = (1/b^2t^2 : (at + \zeta + 1/\zeta)/b^2t^2 : 1). \]

The fixed point multipliers, $\alpha = \alpha(a,b,t)$, $\beta = \beta(a,b,t)$, and $\gamma = \gamma(a,b,t)$, are the three roots of the equation 
\[ b^2t^2x^3 - x^2 + (at + \zeta + 1/\zeta)x + 2B^2t^2 - 1 = 0. \]

To compute the value of $\tau^2$, we use the same analysis as in the case of $q = 2$. The difference is that all three of the multipliers can be labelled as meromorphic functions of $t$ such that $\alpha \to \zeta$, $\beta \to 1/\zeta$, and $\gamma \to \infty$ as $t \to 0$. Computing the first few terms in the power series for $\alpha$ and $\beta$ leads to 
\[ \tau^2 = \lim_{t \to 0} \frac{(\alpha(t)^2 - 1)^2}{1 - \alpha(t)\beta(t)} = \frac{-q^2a^2\zeta^3}{b^2(\zeta^2 - 1)(\zeta - 1)^2}. \]

Therefore, the parameter $\tau^2 \in \mathbb{C}$ is in one-to-one correspondence with the family of conics $C_{(a^2:b^2)}$, and this completes the proof of Theorem \[\Box\]
8. The space of barycentered measures

In this section, we study the space of barycentered probability measures on the Riemann sphere and its quotient by the group of rotations \( \text{SO}(3) \).

Let \( M^1(\hat{\mathbb{C}}) \) denote the space of probability measures on the Riemann sphere, with the weak-* topology. Identify \( \hat{\mathbb{C}} \) with the unit sphere \( S^2 \subset \mathbb{R}^3 \) by stereographic projection, and let the unit ball in \( \mathbb{R}^3 \) be taken as a model for hyperbolic space \( \mathbb{H}^3 \). Recall that the group of Möbius transformations \( \text{Aut} \hat{\mathbb{C}} \simeq \text{PSL}_2 \mathbb{C} \) is also the group of orientation preserving isometries of \( \mathbb{H}^3 \).

The Euclidean center of mass of a probability measure \( \mu \) on \( S^2 \) is given by

\[
E(\mu) = \int_{S^2} \zeta \, d\mu(\zeta).
\]

Given \( \mu \in M^1(\hat{\mathbb{C}}) \) such that \( \mu(\{z\}) < 1/2 \) for all \( z \in \hat{\mathbb{C}} \), the conformal barycenter \( C(\mu) \in \mathbb{H}^3 \) is uniquely determined by the following two properties [DE]:

1. \( C(\mu) = 0 \) in \( \mathbb{R}^3 \) if and only if \( E(\mu) = 0 \), and
2. \( \text{C}(A_*\mu) = A(\text{C}(\mu)) \) for all \( A \in \text{Aut} \hat{\mathbb{C}} \simeq \text{Isom}^+ \mathbb{H}^3 \).

The barycenter is a continuous function on the space of probability measures such that \( \mu(\{z\}) < 1/2 \) for all \( z \in \hat{\mathbb{C}} \), and it is undefined if \( \mu \) has an atom of mass \( \geq 1/2 \).

A measure \( \mu \) is said to be barycentered if \( C(\mu) = 0 \).

Let \( M^1_{bc}(\hat{\mathbb{C}}) \subset M^1(\hat{\mathbb{C}}) \) denote the subspace of barycentered measures. It is invariant under the action of the compact group of rotations \( \text{SO}(3) \subset \text{PSL}_2 \mathbb{C} \), the stabilizer of the origin in \( \mathbb{R}^3 \). Let \( M^1_{bc}(\mathbb{C}) \) denote the closure of \( M^1_{bc}(\hat{\mathbb{C}}) \) in \( M^1(\hat{\mathbb{C}}) \).

We will consider the quotient topological spaces \( M^1_{bc}(\hat{\mathbb{C}})/\text{SO}(3) \subset M^1_{bc}(\hat{\mathbb{C}})/\text{SO}(3) \).

**Theorem 8.1.** The quotient space \( M^1_{bc}(\hat{\mathbb{C}})/\text{SO}(3) \) is a locally compact Hausdorff topological space, with the topology induced by the weak topology on \( M^1(\hat{\mathbb{C}}) \). The quotient space \( M^1_{bc}(\mathbb{C})/\text{SO}(3) \) is the one-point compactification of \( M^1_{bc}(\mathbb{C})/\text{SO}(3) \).

This first lemma will imply that the quotient of \( M^1_{bc}(\hat{\mathbb{C}}) \) is Hausdorff.

**Lemma 8.2.** Suppose \( \{\mu_k\} \) and \( \{\nu_k\} \) are sequences in \( M^1_{bc}(\hat{\mathbb{C}}) \) such that \( \nu_k = g_k*\mu_k \) for a sequence of automorphisms \( g_k \in \text{SO}(3) \). If \( \mu_k \rightharpoonup \mu \) and \( \nu_k \rightharpoonup \nu \) weakly, then \( \nu = g_*\mu \) for some \( g \in \text{SO}(3) \).

**Proof.** Let \( \varphi \) be a continuous function on \( \hat{\mathbb{C}} \). Passing to a subsequence if necessary, we can assume that \( g_k \rightharpoonup g \) in \( \text{SO}(3) \). Then \( \varphi \circ g_k \) converges uniformly to \( \varphi \circ g \). Therefore, the quantity

\[
\left| \int (\varphi \circ g_k) \mu - \int (\varphi \circ g) \mu \right|
\]

can be made as small as desired for sufficiently large \( k \) uniformly over all probability measures \( \mu \). This estimate together with weak convergence of \( \mu_k \rightharpoonup \mu \) shows that

\[
\left| \int (\varphi \circ g_k) \mu_k - \int (\varphi \circ g) \mu \right|
\]

can be made arbitrarily small as \( k \to \infty \). Since this holds for every \( \varphi \), we conclude that \( g_k_*\mu_k \rightharpoonup g_*\mu \) weakly. On the other hand, \( \nu_k = g_k_*\mu_k \rightharpoonup \nu \) weakly, so \( \nu = g_*\mu \). □
With the identification of $\hat{\mathcal{C}}$ and the unit sphere in $\mathbb{R}^3$, note that the antipode of a point $a \in \mathcal{C}$ is $-1/a$. The following lemma shows what happens to an unbounded sequence in $M^1_{bc}(\hat{\mathcal{C}})$.

**Lemma 8.3.** Let $\mu_k$ be a sequence of barycentered measures such that $\mu_k \to \mu$ weakly. Then either $\mu$ is barycentered or

$$\mu = \frac{1}{2} \delta_a + \frac{1}{2} \delta_{-1/a}.$$ 

**Proof.** Suppose first that $\mu(\{z\}) < 1/2$ for all $z \in \hat{\mathcal{C}}$. Then the barycenter of $\mu$ is well defined. It follows from the continuity of the barycenter that $\mu$ is barycentered. Now suppose there is a point $a \in \mathcal{C}$ such that $\mu(\{a\}) \geq 1/2$. Then by weak convergence, there exists a sequence $\varepsilon_k \to 0$ and $r_k \to 0$ such that

$$\mu_k(B(a, r_k)) \geq \frac{1}{2} - \varepsilon_k.$$ 

Without loss of generality, we may assume that $a = (1, 0, 0)$ in $\mathbb{R}^3$. Then $-1/a = (-1, 0, 0)$. It suffices to show that for each fixed $r > 0$, there is a sequence $\delta_k \to 0$ so that

$$\mu_k(B(-1/a, r)) \geq 1/2 - \delta_k.$$ 

Then the limiting measure $\mu$ must satisfy

$$\mu(\{a\}) = \mu(B(-1/a, r)) = 1/2,$$

for all $r > 0$. Letting $r \to 0$, we see that $\mu(\{-1/a\}) = 1/2$.

Suppose, upon passing to a subsequence if necessary, that there is a $\delta > 0$ such that

$$\mu_k(B(\hat{a}, r)) \leq 1/2 - \delta$$

for all $k$. Let $\zeta_x$ denote the $x$-coordinate of a vector $\zeta \in S^2$. Since the measures $\mu_k$ are barycentered, the Euclidean center of mass of $\mu_k$ is at the origin, and therefore,

$$0 = \int_{\mathcal{C}} \zeta_x \mu_k(\zeta) = \int_{B(\hat{a}, r_k)} \zeta_x \mu_k(\zeta) + \int_{B(-\hat{a}, r_k)} \zeta_x \mu_k(\zeta) + \int_{B(\hat{a}, r)} \zeta_x \mu_k(\zeta) \geq (1/2 - \varepsilon_k)(\cos \pi r_k) + (\delta + \varepsilon_k)(- \cos \pi r) - (1/2 - \delta) = \delta(1 - \cos \pi r) + (1/2)(\cos \pi r - 1) - \varepsilon_k(\cos \pi r + \cos \pi r).$$

For sufficiently large $k$, the final line is positive, which is a contradiction. \qed

**Proof of Theorem 8.1** That the quotient $M^1_{bc}(\hat{\mathcal{C}})/\text{SO}(3)$ is Hausdorff follows from Lemma 8.2. Local compactness of the metrizable space $M^1_{bc}(\hat{\mathcal{C}})$ and the fact that the SO(3)-orbits are compact implies that $M^1_{bc}(\hat{\mathcal{C}})/\text{SO}(3)$ is also locally compact. Suppose $\mu_k$ is an unbounded sequence in $M^1_{bc}(\hat{\mathcal{C}})$ such that $\mu_k \to \nu$ weakly in $M^1(\hat{\mathcal{C}})$. By Lemma 8.3, $\nu = \frac{1}{2} \delta_a + \frac{1}{2} \delta_{-1/a}$ for an antipodal pair $(a, -1/a)$. Under the action of SO(3) on $M^1(\hat{\mathcal{C}})$, all such $\nu$ are equivalent. \qed

**The point at infinity.** We will refer to the point at infinity of $\overline{M^1_{bc}(\hat{\mathcal{C}})}/\text{SO}(3)$ simply by $\infty$. One way to detect if a sequence of probability measures is converging to $\infty$ in $\overline{M^1_{bc}(\hat{\mathcal{C}})}/\text{SO}(3)$ is to find a sequence of “separating annuli”, annuli of growing modulus such that half of the measure lies on one side of the annulus and half on the other. By classical arguments, at least one complementary component of the annulus must shrink to a point.
Lemma 8.4. Suppose \( \{ \mu_k \} \) is a sequence of barycentered probability measures on \( C \) such that \( \mu_k \to \nu \) weakly and \( \Lambda_k \) is a sequence of round annuli such that
\begin{enumerate}
  \item \( \text{mod } \Lambda_k \to \infty \text{ as } k \to \infty \), and
  \item there is a sequence \( \epsilon_k \to 0 \) such that \( \mu_k(D_k) \geq 1/2 - \epsilon_k \) for each of the complementary disks \( D_k \) of \( \Lambda_k \).
\end{enumerate}
Then \( \nu = \infty \) in \( M^1_{bc}(C)/SO(3) \).

Proof. By condition (1), some subsequence of the closed disks \( D_k \) is converging to a point in the Hausdorff topology, say \( D_k \to \{ a \} \). Then for any \( r > 0 \), we have
\[ \nu(B(a, r)) \geq \lim_{k \to \infty} \mu_k(D_k) \geq 1/2. \]
This holds for all \( r > 0 \), and therefore \( \nu(\{ a \}) \geq 1/2 \), so by Lemma 8.3 \( \mu_k \to \infty \) in \( M^1_{bc}(C)/SO(3) \). \( \square \)

9. The Homeomorphism \( \hat{M}_2 \to \overline{M}_2 \)

In this section we give the proof of Theorem \( 1.1 \) which states that the compactification of \( M_2 \) by barycentered measures and the inverse limit space which resolves the iterate maps on \( \overline{M}_2 \) are the same. We begin by studying the properties of
\[ B : M_2 \to M^1_{bc}(\hat{C})/SO(3), \]
which sends a conjugacy class \([f]\) to the maximal measure \( \mu_f \) of a barycentered representative.

Lemma 9.1. The map \( B : M_2 \to M^1_{bc}(\hat{C})/SO(3) \) is well defined and continuous.

Proof. For every \( f \in \text{Rat}_2 \), the measure of maximal entropy \( \mu_f \) is non-atomic \([\text{Ly}]\), \([\text{FLM}]\). Therefore, it has a well-defined barycenter in \( H^3 \). The group of orientation-preserving isometries of \( H^3 \) acts transitively, and for every \( A \in \text{Aut}(\hat{C}) \),
\[ \mu_A \cdot \mu_f = \mu_f. \]
Therefore, there exists an automorphism \( A \in \text{Aut}(\hat{C}) \) such that \( \mu_A \cdot \mu_f \) is barycentered. Consequently, for every conjugacy class \([f]\) in \( M_2 \), there exists a representative \( f \) with barycentered maximal measure. Now suppose \( \mu_f \) is barycentered. For \( A \not\in \text{SO}(3) \), the stabilizer in \( \text{Isom}^+ H^3 \) of the origin in \( \mathbb{R}^3 \), the measure \( A \cdot \mu_f \) is not barycentered. Therefore, the map \( B \) which sends \([f]\) to the class of a barycentered measure \([\mu_f]\) \( \in M^1_{bc}(\hat{C})/SO(3) \) is well defined. Finally, the map \( f \mapsto \mu_f \) is continuous from \( \text{Rat}_2 \) with the topology of uniform convergence to \( M^1(\hat{C}) \) with the weak-* topology \([\text{Ma2}]\). The barycenter operation is also continuous, and therefore \( B \) is continuous. \( \square \)

Recall that the boundary of \( M_2 \) in \( \overline{M}_2 \simeq \mathbb{P}^2 \) is parameterized by the family of conjugacy classes \([\Lambda_a]\) = \([\Lambda_1/a]\) for \( a \in \hat{C} \), where \( \Lambda_a \in \text{Rat}_2 \) is defined in \([\text{B1}]\).

Proposition 9.2. Suppose \([f_k]\) is a sequence in \( M_2 \) such that \([f_k] \to [\Lambda_a]\) in \( \overline{M}_2 \) as \( k \to \infty \), where \( a \) is not a root of unity. Then \( B([f_k]) \to \infty \) in \( M^1_{bc}(\hat{C})/SO(3) \) as \( k \to \infty \).

Proof. First suppose that \( a \) is neither 0 nor \( \infty \). There is a sequence of representatives \( f_k \in \text{Rat}_2 \) such that \( f_k \to \Lambda_a \) in \( \text{Rat}_2 \), so that \( \mu_{f_k} \to \mu_{\Lambda_a} \) weakly by Theorem 7.2. Let \( \mu_a = \mu_{\Lambda_a} \). By definition,
\[ \mu_a = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2^n} A/f_a^n. \]
Since $a$ is not a root of unity, we have $\mu_a(\{z\}) \leq 1/2$ for all $z \in \hat{C}$, and there exists a point $p \in \hat{C}$ such that $\mu_a(\{p\}) = 1/2$.

Fix $\varepsilon > 0$ and choose $r = r(\varepsilon) > 0$ so that

$$\mu_a(\hat{C} - B(p, r)) \geq 1/2 - 2\varepsilon.$$  

By weak convergence of the measures $\mu_k \to \mu_a$, there exists an integer $N(\varepsilon)$ such that

$$\mu_k(\hat{C} - B(p, r)) \geq 1/2 - \varepsilon$$

and

$$\mu_k(B(p, r^2)) \geq 1/2 - \varepsilon$$

for all $k \geq N(\varepsilon)$. We can assume that $r(\varepsilon) \to 0$ and $N(\varepsilon) \to \infty$ as $\varepsilon \to 0$.

Rephrasing, given $k$, we can let $\varepsilon_k$ be the smallest $\varepsilon$ such that $k \geq N(\varepsilon)$, and set $r_k = r(\varepsilon_k)$. Then as $k \to \infty$, we have $r_k \to 0$. Consequently, the annulus $B(p, r_k) - B(p, r_k^2)$ has $\mu_k$-measure $< 2\varepsilon_k$ and modulus $\to \infty$ as $k \to \infty$.

Now suppose that $g_k \in \text{Aut} \hat{C}$ is chosen so that $g_k \ast \mu_k$ is barycentered. Let $A_k = g_k(B(p, r_k) - B(p, r_k^2))$, so that mod $A_k \to \infty$. If $\nu$ is any subsequential limit of the measures $g_k \ast \mu_k$, then Lemma 8.4 implies that $\nu = \infty$ in $\hat{M}_{bc}^1(\hat{C})/SO(3)$.

Finally, suppose that $a = 0$ or $a = \infty$. Then the probability measure associated to $\Lambda_a \in \text{Rat}_2$ is

$$\mu_{\Lambda_a} = \frac{1}{2} \delta_1 + \frac{1}{2} \delta_{-1},$$

and $\mu_k \to \mu_{\Lambda_a}$ weakly. Therefore, for any $r > 0$, any annulus of the form $\hat{C} - (B(1, r) \cup B(-1, r))$ will have $\mu_k$-measure tending to 0 as $k \to \infty$. By Lemma 8.4, the maximal measures of the barycentered representatives of $[\hat{f}_k]$ must tend to infinity in $\hat{M}_{bc}^1(\hat{C})/SO(3)$. □

Let $\zeta$ be a primitive $q$-th root of unity for some $q \geq 2$. Recall that by Theorem 6.1, the limiting value of the iterate map $\Phi_a$ near $[\Lambda_\zeta] \in \partial M_2$ depends on the direction of approach, and the $n$-th iterate can be computed in terms of a parameter $\tau^2 \in \hat{C}$. The limiting barycentered measure depends on the limit of the iterates. The key observation is that the measures associated to the GIT stable limits of the $q$-th iterates (in $\text{Rat}_2$) have well-defined barycenters. Recall the definitions of $F_{q, \tau, q}$ and $P_{q, \tau, q}$ from Propositions 6.1 and [8.4].

**Proposition 9.3.** Fix $q \geq 2$ and $\zeta$ a primitive $q$-th root of unity. Let $[\hat{f}_k]$ be a sequence in $M_2$ converging to $[\Lambda_\zeta]$ in $\overline{M}_2$ as $k \to \infty$ such that the $q$-th iterates $[\hat{f}_k^q]$ converge in $\overline{M}_{2q}$ to either (i) $[P_{q, \tau, q}]$ or (ii) $[F_{q, \tau, q}]$ for some $\tau \in \hat{C}$. Then in case (i), $B([\hat{f}_k]) \to \infty$ in $\hat{M}_{bc}^1(\hat{C})/SO(3)$ as $k \to \infty$. In case (ii), $\lim_{k \to \infty} B([\hat{f}_k])$ is equivalent (in $\text{PSL}_2\hat{C}$) to the measure $\mu_{P_{q, \tau, q}}$.

**Proof.** In case (i), there exist representatives $f_k \in \text{Rat}_2$ such that the iterates $f_k^q$ converge in $\text{Rat}_2$ to $P_{q, \tau, q}$ as $k \to \infty$. Since $P_{q, \tau, q} \not\in I(2q)$, Theorem 2.2 implies that the measures $\mu_{f_k}$ converge weakly to

$$\mu_{P_{q, \tau, q}} = \frac{1}{2q} \sum_{j=0}^{2q-1} \frac{2^{q-1}}{2q} \delta_j + \frac{1}{2q} \sum_{j=0}^{2q-1} \frac{2^{q-1} - 1}{2q} \delta_\infty = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{j=0}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2q} \delta_j + \frac{2^{q-1} - 1}{2q - 1} \delta_\infty$$

as $k \to \infty$. Notice that $\mu_{P_{q, \tau, q}}(\{0\}) = 1/2$.  

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Therefore, there exists a family of annuli $A_k$ separating $z = 0$ from the other points in the support of the measure $\mu_{F_{q,\tau,q}}$ such that mod $A_k \to \infty$ as $k \to \infty$ and the $\mu_{f_k}$-measure of each complementary component of $A_k$ tends to $1/2$ as $k \to \infty$. Choose a sequence $g_k \in \text{Aut} \hat{\mathbb{C}}$ so that each $g_k \ast \mu_{f_k}$ is barycentered. Then $g_k \ast \mu_{f_k}$ and the annuli $g_k(A_k)$ satisfy the hypotheses of Lemma 6.4 which shows that $g_k \ast \mu_{f_k} \to \infty$ in $\overline{M}_{bc}^1(\mathbb{C})/\text{SO}(3)$.

In case (ii), there exist representatives $f_k \in \text{Rat}_2$ such that the iterates $f_k^n$ converge in $\text{Rat}_2$ to $F_{q,\tau,q}$ as $k \to \infty$. Since $F_{q,\tau,q}$ is not in $I(2^q)$, Theorem 6.2 implies that the measures $\mu_{f_k}$ converge weakly to $\mu_{F_{q,\tau,q}}$ as $k \to \infty$. Note that $\mu_{F_{q,\tau,q}}(\{z\}) < 1/2$ for all $z \in \hat{\mathbb{C}}$ by Lemma 6.3. Therefore, $\mu_{F_{q,\tau,q}}$ has a well-defined barycenter. By continuity of the barycenter, we can choose a sequence $g_k \in \text{Aut}(\mathbb{C})$ such that $g_k \ast \mu_{f_k}$ is barycentered for all $k$ and $g_k \to g \in \text{Aut}(\mathbb{C})$ with $g \ast \mu_{F_{q,\tau,q}}$ barycentered. Therefore, $B([f_k])$ converges in $\overline{M}_{bc}^1(\mathbb{C})/\text{SO}(3)$ to a measure which is equivalent (in $\text{Aut}(\mathbb{C})$) to $\mu_{F_{q,\tau,q}}$ as $k \to \infty$. \hfill \Box

Proof of Theorem 1.1. Recall the definitions of $\overline{M}_2$, $\hat{M}_2$, and $\overline{M}_2$ given in Section II. We aim to show that the embedding of $M_2$ into $M_2 \times \overline{M}_{bc}^1(\mathbb{C})/\text{SO}(3)$ via the graph of $B([f]) = [\mu_f]$ (for a barycentered representative) extends to a homeomorphism

$$h : \hat{M}_2 \to \overline{M}_2 \subset M_2 \times \overline{M}_{bc}^1(\mathbb{C})/\text{SO}(3).$$

Since $\hat{M}_2$ is compact and $\overline{M}_2$ is Hausdorff, it suffices to show that $h$ is continuous and bijective. Furthermore, since the image of $h$ contains a dense open subset in $\overline{M}_2$, namely $M_2$ itself, it suffices to show only continuity and injectivity.

Let $x = (x_1, x_2, \ldots)$ be a boundary point of $M_2$ in $\overline{M}_2 \subset \prod_{n=1}^{\infty} \overline{M}_2$. Suppose first that $x_1 = [\Lambda_a]$ where $a$ is not a primitive $q$-th root of unity for any $q \geq 2$. Then by Theorem 5.1 $x_n = [\Lambda^n_q]$ for every $n \geq 2$. That is to say, there is a unique point in $\overline{M}_2$ which projects to $x_1$ in $\overline{M}_2$. By Proposition 9.2 $h$ extends continuously to $x$ with $h(x) = ([\Lambda_a], \infty) \in M_2 \times \overline{M}_{bc}^1(\mathbb{C})/\text{SO}(3)$, and we see that $h(x) \in \overline{M}_2$ has $x$ as its unique preimage.

Now suppose that $x_1 \in I(\Phi_n)$ for some $n \geq 2$. Then by Theorem 6.1 there is a $q \leq n$ and a primitive $q$-th root of unity $\zeta$ such that $x_1 = [\Lambda_{\zeta}]$. From Proposition 9.8 the $q$-th entry $x_q$ in the sequence $x$ must be either (i) $[P_{q,\zeta}]$ or (ii) of the form $[F_{q,\tau,q}]$ for some $\tau \in \mathbb{C}$, and all further entries $x_n$ for $n > q$ are determined by $x_q$. That is to say, there is a unique point in $\overline{M}_2$ which projects to $(x_1, \ldots, x_q)$ under the projection to the first $q$ factors. Let $[f_k]$ be any sequence in $M_2$ such that $[f_k] \to x$ in $\overline{M}_2$ as $k \to \infty$. By Proposition 9.3 $h$ extends continuously to $x$ with $h(x) = ([\Lambda_{\zeta}], \infty)$ in case (i) and $h(x) = ([\Lambda_{\zeta}], g \ast \mu_{F_{q,\tau,q}})$ for some $g \in \text{Aut} \mathbb{C}$ in case (ii). Furthermore, we see that $h(x) \in \overline{M}_2$ has $x$ as its unique preimage by Lemma 6.6. \hfill \Box

10. Higher degrees

Recall the definitions of $\overline{M}_d$, $\hat{M}_d$, and $\overline{M}_d$ given in Section II. In this section, we show that the inverse limit space $\hat{M}_d$ and the compactification by barycentered measures $\overline{M}_d$ are not homeomorphic for $d \geq 5$. The examples come from [De] 5]. We also prove the following theorem.
Theorem 10.1. The iterate map $\Phi_n : M_d \to M_{dn}$ does not extend continuously to a map from $\overline{M}_d$ to $\overline{M}_{dn}$ for any $d \geq 2$ and $n \geq 2$.

The examples used to show discontinuity at the GIT boundary of $M_d$ are also from [De, §5]. In fact, they are a generalization of Epstein’s examples, seen in Proposition 5.3 ([Ep, Proposition 2]). The idea is to find unbounded families in $\Rat_d$ such that the critical points are always at $2d − 2$ given points and such that these critical points are distinct from the holes which develop in the limit.

The second iterate. We give first a complete proof of Theorem 10.1 for the case of the second iterate, $n = 2$.

Fix $d \geq 2$. Let $P(z,w)$ be a homogeneous polynomial of degree $d − 1$ with distinct roots in $\mathbb{P}^1$ which is monic as a polynomial in $z$ and such that $P(0,1) \neq 0$ and $P(1,0) \neq 0$. Let

$$g = (wP(z,w) : 0) \in \overline{\Rat}_d.$$ 

Then $g$ has a hole at $\infty$ of depth 1 and holes of depth 1 at each of the roots of $P$. The lower degree map $\hat{g}$ is the constant $\infty$ map, so we see that $g \in I(d)$. The point $g$ is GIT stable for all $d \geq 4$, semistable for $d = 3$, and unstable for $d = 2$.

Consider the family of rational maps given by

$$g_{a,t} = (atz^d + wP(z,w) : tz^d),$$

for $a \in \mathbb{C}$ and $t \in \mathbb{D}^*$. This family converges to $g$ in $\overline{\Rat}_d$ as $t \to 0$ for every $a \in \mathbb{C}$. In [De, §5], it was computed that the second iterates of the family $g_{a,t}$ converge as $t \to 0$ to

$$f_a = (w^{d-1}P^{d-1}(aw + z^d) : w^dP^d) \in \overline{\Rat}_d.$$ 

In the notation $f_a = H_a \hat{f}_a$, we have $H_a = w^{d-1}P^{d-1}$ for all $a \in \mathbb{C}$ and

$$\hat{f}_a = (awP(z,w) + z^d : wP(z,w)) \in \overline{\Rat}_d.$$ 

The point $f_a$ has holes at $\infty$ and the roots of $P$, each of depth $d − 1$. Note that $f_a$ is not in $I(d^2)$.

Lemma 10.2. For each $d \geq 2$, the conjugacy classes $[g_{a,t}]$ converge in $\overline{M}_d$ as $t \to 0$ to a boundary point independent of $a \in \mathbb{C}$.

Proof. For each $d > 2$, the point $g \in \overline{\Rat}_d$ is stable or semistable and therefore determines a unique point $[g] \in \overline{M}_d$. Convergence of $g_{a,t}$ to $g$ in $\overline{\Rat}_d$ as $t \to 0$ implies that $[g_{a,t}] \to [g]$ in $\overline{M}_d$ as $t \to 0$ for every $a \in \mathbb{C}$.

For $d = 2$, however, the point $g$ is unstable, so it does not represent a point in $\overline{M}_2$. Conjugating the family $g_{a,t}$ by $A_i(z) = t^{1/2}z$, we obtain new representatives,

$$A_i g_{a,t} A_i^{-1} = (at^{1/2}z^2 + wP(z,t^{1/2}w) : z^2),$$

which converge as $t \to 0$ to

$$h = (zw : z^2).$$

This point $h$ is stable, since it agrees with the lower degree map $\hat{h}(z) = 1/z$ away from a hole of depth 1 at $z = 0$ which is not fixed by $\hat{h}$. Therefore, $[g_{a,t}] \to [h]$ in $\overline{M}_2$ as $t \to 0$ for every $a \in \mathbb{C}$. \hfill $\square$

Lemma 10.3. For each $d \geq 2$,

(i) $f_a \in \overline{\Rat}_d$ is stable for all $a \in \mathbb{C}$, and

(ii) the map $\mathbb{C} \to \overline{M}_d^*$ given by $a \mapsto [f_a]$ is non-constant.
Proof. From the definition of $f_a$, we see that each hole has depth $d - 1$ and $d - 1 = (d^2 - 1)/(d + 1) < (d^2 - 1)/2$ for all $d \geq 2$. This proves (i). Consequently, $[f_a] = [f_a]$ in $\bar{M}_{d^2}$ if and only if $f_a$ and $f_b$ are conjugate by an element of $\text{PSL}_2 \mathbb{C}$.

Now suppose that $d > 2$. Any conjugacy between $f_a$ and $f_b$ for $a \neq b$ must preserve the holes at $\infty$ and the roots of $P$ and conjugate $f_a$ to $f_b$. There are at least three holes since the degree of $P$ is $d - 1$ with distinct roots. On the other hand, the finite fixed points of $f_a$ are the $d - 1$ solutions to $z^d - zP(z, 1) + aP(z, 1) = 0$, and so the set of fixed points varies with $a \in \mathbb{C}$. The cross-ratio of three of the holes with a moving fixed point must then vary with $a \in \mathbb{C}$, and this proves that not all $f_a$ are conjugate.

For $d = 2$, note that a conjugacy between $f_a$ and $f_b$ must preserve the holes and also send the critical points of $f_a$ to the critical points of $f_b$. It can be computed directly that if $P(z, 1) = z - \alpha$, the critical points of $f_a$ are at $z = 0$ and $z = 2\alpha$, independent of $a \in \mathbb{C}$. Together with the root $\alpha$ of $P$ and the point at $\infty$, there are four marked points which must be permuted by any conjugacy. Moreover, the finite fixed point of $f_a$ is at $z = a\alpha/(a + \alpha)$, so the cross-ratio of $0, \alpha, \infty$ and the finite fixed point depends on $a \in \mathbb{C}$. We conclude that not all $f_a$ are conjugate, and the lemma is proved.

\begin{corollary}
The second iterate map $\Phi_2 : M_d \to M_{d^2}$ does not extend continuously to $\bar{M}_d$.
\end{corollary}

Proof. This is immediate from Lemmas 10.2 and 10.3.

\begin{lemma}
For each $d \geq 2$, $n \geq 2$, and $a \in \mathbb{C}$, the limit of the iterates $(g_{a, t})^n \in \text{Rat}_{d^n}$ as $t \to 0$ is stable.
\end{lemma}

Proof. Let $n$ be an even integer. We have seen that the second iterates of $g_{a, t}$ converge to $f_a \in \text{Rat}_{d^2}$ as $t \to 0$. The $n$-th iterates of the family $g_{a, t}$ will converge to $(f_a)^{n/2}$ as $t \to 0$ by the continuity of the $n/2$-th iterate map at $f_a \not\in I(d^2)$. In [De] §5, it was computed that $\mu_{f_a}(\{\infty\}) = 1/(d + 1)$ (or it follows from Lemma 2.3). The roots of $P$ are simple and are each mapped to $\infty$ by $f_a$ with multiplicity 1, so Lemma 2.3 implies that $\mu_{f_a}(\{\alpha\}) = 1/(d + 1)$ for each root $\alpha$ of $P$. Since $\mu_{f_a}$ is a probability measure, any other point of $\mathbb{P}^1$ must have mass $\leq 1/(d + 1)$.

By Propositions 3.2 and 3.3 we see that every iterate of $f_a$ must be GIT stable. Therefore, all even iterates of the family $g_{a, t}$ have a stable limit as $t \to 0$.

Now let $n \geq 3$ be an odd integer. Lemma 2.6 implies that the composition map $\mathcal{C}_{d, d^{n-1}}$ is continuous at the pair $(g_a, (f_a)^{(n-1)/2})$. Consequently, the $n$-th iterates of $g_{a, t}$ converge to the point $g \circ (f_a)^{(n-1)/2}$ as $t \to 0$. The iterate formula of [De, Lemma 2.2] (see also 2) shows that

$$(f_a)^{(n-1)/2} = \prod_{k=0}^{n-1} \left( H_a \circ f_a^k \right)^{d^{k-1+(n-1)/2}} (f_a)^{(n-1)/2}.$$ 

It will be useful to write $(f_a)^{(n-1)/2}$ in terms of its coordinate functions $(f_a^{(n-1)/2}, f_a^{(n-1)/2})$ so that we can compute the composition $g \circ (f_a)^{(n-1)/2}$. Indeed, substituting the coordinate functions for this iterate of $f_a$ into the formula for $g$, we
obtain
\[
g \circ (f_a)^{(n-1)/2} = \left( \prod_{k=0}^{n-1} \left( H_a \circ \hat{f}_a^k \right) d^{-k+(n-1)/2} \hat{f}_a^{(n-1)/2} P(\hat{f}_a^{(n-1)/2} : 0) \right),
\]

where we have factored out all appearances of $H_a$. Notice, in particular, that
the expression involving $H_a$ appears as the $d$-th power of the same expression in
$(f_a)^{(n-1)/2}$. The estimates on $\mu_{f_a}$ given in the previous paragraph together with
Lemma 2.4 imply that the depth of any point for $(f_a)^k$ is no greater than $d^k/(d+1)$.
Therefore, the depths of the holes of the composition $g \circ (f_a)^{(n-1)/2}$ at $\infty$ or at
the roots of $P$ will not exceed \( d(d^n-1/2+1) \), where the added 1 comes from each
of these holes being a simple zero of $\hat{f}_a^{(n-1)/2}$. Notice that this bound is $< d^n/2$
for all even $d$ and $< (d^n - 1)/2$ for all odd $d$. Therefore the holes at $\infty$ and the roots
of $P$ do not violate the stability criteria.

For any other point in $\mathbb{P}^1$, we know from the above that its depth as a hole of
$(f_a)^{(n-1)/2}$ is no more than $d^{n-1}/(d+1)$; its depth as a hole of this composition
cannot then exceed $d^n/(d+1) + d^{(n-1)/2}$, where the second term is the degree of
$(\hat{f}_a)^{(n-1)/2}$. This upper bound on the depth is less than $d^n/2$ except when $d = 2$
and $n = 3$. In this special case, it is easy to check that the point $g \circ f_a \in \overline{\text{Rat}_d}$
haves depth 3 at $\infty$ and the root of $P$, and it has a hole of depth at most 2 at
any other point. It follows that the composition $g \circ (f_a)^{(n-1)/2}$ is always stable. \( \square \)

Proof of Theorem 10.1. Let $f_{a,n} \in \overline{\text{Rat}_d}$ denote the limit of the iterates $(g_{a,t})^n$ as
$t \to 0$. By Lemma 10.5, $f_{a,n}$ is stable for all $n \geq 2$ and all $a \in \mathcal{C}$, and therefore
it determines a unique point $[f_{a,n}]$ in $\overline{\mathcal{M}}_{d^n}$. Furthermore, stability implies that
$[f_{a,n}] = [f_{b,n}]$ if and only if $f_{a,n}$ and $f_{b,n}$ are conjugate.

From Lemma 10.2, the family $[g_{a,t}]$ converges in $\overline{\mathcal{M}}_d$ as $t \to 0$ to a point independent
of $a \in \mathcal{C}$, for every $d \geq 2$. Lemma 10.3 implies that $a \mapsto [f_{a,2}]$ is non-constant.
To conclude the proof, we need to show that $a \mapsto [f_{a,n}] \in \overline{\mathcal{M}}_{d^n}$ is non-constant for
all $n \geq 2$.

Suppose first that $n$ is even. Any conjugacy between $f_{a,n}$ and $f_{b,n}$ for $a \neq b$ must
preserve the holes and conjugate $\hat{f}_a^{n/2}$ to $\hat{f}_b^{n/2}$. In particular, it must preserve the
critical points of $\hat{f}_a$, located at the $2d-2$ solutions to $dP(z,1)z^{d-1} = P(z,1)z^d = 0$,
independent of $a \in \mathcal{C}$. Together with the hole at $\infty$, these give at least three marked
points to be permuted by a conjugacy. On the other hand, the finite fixed points of $\hat{f}_a$ are the $d-1$ solutions to $z^d - zP(z,1) + aP(z,1) = 0$, and the set of these will vary with $a \in \mathcal{C}$.
Consequently, the cross-ratio of three of the marked points with a moving fixed point of $\hat{f}_a$ also varies with $a \in \mathcal{C}$, so not all $f_{a,n}$ are conjugate.

Now suppose that $n \geq 3$ is odd. Any conjugacy between $f_{a,n}$ and $f_{b,n}$ must
preserve holes of the same depth. The formula for $f_{a,n} = g \circ f_a^{(n-1)/2}$, given in the
proof of Lemma 10.5, shows that for each $d > 2$, there are at least three holes at
$\infty$ and the roots of $P$ which are of the same depth and do not depend on $a \in \mathcal{C}$.
If $a$ is a root of $P$, then the preimages of $\alpha$ by $\hat{f}_a$ are also holes of $f_{a,n}$ and do
depend on $a \in \mathcal{C}$. Therefore, the cross-ratio of $\infty$ with two roots of $P$ and a moving
preimage of $\alpha$ must vary with $a \in \mathcal{C}$, and so not all $f_{a,n}$ are conjugate. For $d = 2$,
if $P(z,1) = z - \alpha$, note that the cross-ratio of the holes at $\infty$ and $\alpha$ with the pair
of preimages of $a$ by $\hat{f}_a$ is given by

$$\chi(a) = \frac{a + a + \sqrt{(a - a)^2 + 4a(a - a)}}{a + a - \sqrt{(a - a)^2 + 4a(a - a)}}$$

which depends on $a \in \mathbb{C}$. Therefore, not all $f_{a,n}$ are conjugate. □

The spaces $\hat{M}_d$ and $\overline{M}_d$. We conclude by demonstrating that there cannot exist a continuous map $\overline{M}_d \to \hat{M}_d$ which restricts to the identity on $M_d$, for any $d \geq 5$.

The following examples are from Example 5.2 of [De]. Fix $d \geq 5$. Let $P = P(z,w)$ be a homogeneous polynomial of degree $d - 2$ with distinct roots such that $P(0,1) \neq 0$, $P(1,0) \neq 0$, and $P$ is monic as a polynomial in $z$. Let $g = (w^2P(z,w) : 0)$. Then $g \in I(d)$ is stable for all $d \geq 6$ and semistable for $d = 5$ since the depth at $\infty$ is $2 < d/2$. Therefore $g$ defines a unique point $[g]$ in $\overline{M}_d$.

For each $a \in \mathbb{C}$ and $t \in [0,1)$, consider the family

$$h_{a,t} = (atz^d + w^2P(z,w) : tz^d) \in \mathrm{Rat}_d,$$

so that $h_{a,t} \to g$ in $\mathrm{Rat}_d$ as $t \to 0$, and therefore $[h_{a,t}] \to [g]$ in $\overline{M}_d$ for every $a \in \mathbb{C}$. Computing second iterates and taking a limit as $t \to 0$, we obtain,

$$\langle h_{a,t} \rangle^2 \to h_a := (aw^{2d}P(z,w)^d : w^{2d}P(z,w)^d) \in \mathrm{Rat}_{d^2}.$$

Note that $h_a$ is stable for all $a \in \mathbb{C}$ and all $d \geq 5$ since the depth at $\infty$ is $2d < d^2/2$. Therefore each $h_a$ determines a point $[h_a] \in \overline{M}_{d^2}$ and $[h_a] = [h_b]$ if and only if they lie in the same $\mathrm{PSL}_2 \mathbb{C}$-orbit. Write $h_a = H_a \hat{f}_a$. Since $P$ has at least three distinct roots and the constant $\hat{f}_a \equiv a$ depends on $a$, we see that only finitely many of the conjugacy classes $[h_a]$ can coincide.

For each $a \in \mathbb{C}$ such that $P(a,1) \neq 0$, the point $h_a$ is not in $I(d^2)$. Therefore, the measures $\mu_{h_{a,t}}$ converge weakly as $t \to 0$ to

$$\mu_{h_a} = \frac{2}{d} \delta_{\infty} + \frac{1}{d} \sum_{P(z,1) = 0} \delta_z,$$

a measure which is independent of $a$. The measure $\mu_{h_a}$ has no atoms of mass $\geq 1/2$, and so it has a well-defined barycenter. Let $\mu = A_* \mu_{h_a}$ be a barycentered measure for some $A \in \mathrm{PSL}_2 \mathbb{C}$. Consequently, for every $a \in \mathbb{C}$ such that $P(a,1) \neq 0$, the family $[h_{a,t}]$ converges in $\overline{M}_d$ as $t \to 0$ to the pair $([g],\mu) \in \overline{M}_d \times \overline{M}^1_{bc}(\mathbb{C})/\mathrm{SO}(3)$. On the other hand, the limits of $[h_{a,t}]$ as $t \to 0$ in $M_d$ depend on $a \in \mathbb{C}$ since the second iterates have distinct limits in $\overline{M}_{d^2}$.

**Question.** Does there exist a continuous projection $\hat{M}_d \to \overline{M}_d$ restricting to the identity on $M_d$ for all $d \geq 2$? That is, do the GIT stable limits of an unbounded sequence in $M_d$ (and all its iterates) determine the limiting barycentered measure of maximal entropy?

11. Final remarks

The choices made in the definitions of $\hat{M}_d$ and $\overline{M}_d$ reflect the following desirable properties in degree $2$. A compactification $X$ of the moduli space of quadratic rational maps should satisfy the following:

- iteration is well-defined on $X$,
- there exists a projection from $X$ to Milnor’s $\overline{M}_2 \simeq \mathbb{P}^2$,
there exists a projection from $X$ to the space of barycentered measures $M_{bc}^2(\hat{\mathbb{C}})/\text{SO}(3)$.

The second condition ensures that there is a projection of the boundary of $M_2$ to the moduli spaces $M_1 \sqcup M_0$, as the conjugacy classes of lower-degree maps arise naturally as limits of degenerating families in $M_2$. The third condition about the barycentered measures reflects the geometry of the rational maps. Each rational map $f$ (together with its measure of maximal entropy) determines a hermitian metric on the tangent bundle of $\hat{\mathbb{C}}$, up to scale, with curvature equal to $4\pi \mu_f$. Conjugate rational maps define isometric spheres (when the scale is fixed). See, for example, [De, §6]. Given an unbounded family in $M_2$ and the associated family of metrics on $\hat{\mathbb{C}}$, the choice of barycentered representatives corresponds to fixing the diameter of the spheres when taking limits in the Gromov-Hausdorff topology. In this language, it would follow from the propositions of §9 that the limiting metrics at the boundary of $M_2$ are isometric to either (i) compact convex polyhedra (with countably many vertices) or (ii) “needles” (where the curvature is concentrated at two points).

Finally, much can be said about the dynamical properties of unbounded families in $M_2$, particularly when restricted to a given hyperbolic component. It would be interesting to understand better the explicit examples given in Section 6 which appeared first in [Ep].

**Example.** Suppose $\{f_t : t \in (0,1]\}$ is a family of quadratic rational maps with $f_1(z) = z^2 - 1$ and such that

(i) the critical points of $f_t$ are at 0 and $\infty$ for all $t \in (0,1]$,

(ii) the critical point at 0 is in a cycle $0 \mapsto -1 \mapsto 0$ for all $t$, and

(iii) there is an attracting fixed point of multiplier $\alpha(t) \to -1$ as $t \to 0$.

Then this family is contained in the hyperbolic component of $f_1$. Recall that the Julia set of $f_1$ is the basilica. The family $f_t$ can be expressed as

$$f_t(z) = \frac{z^2 - 1}{c(t)z^2 + 1},$$

for a function $c$ with $c(1) = 0$. It can be computed directly that the triple of fixed point multipliers of $f_t$ tends to $\{\infty, -1, -1\}$ as $c(t)$ descends from 0 to $-1$. In the limit, the second iterate of $f_t$ converges to $-2z^2/(z^2 + 1)$ locally uniformly on $\hat{\mathbb{C}} - \{-1, 1\}$, which is conjugate to $G_{-1}(z) = z - 1 + 1/z$ and to the polynomial $z^2 + 1/4$ with a parabolic fixed point. It follows that the $\tau^2$-value (as defined before the statement of Theorem 5.4) for this family is equal to 1.

The Julia sets of $f_t$ appear to converge (in the Hausdorff topology) to the cauliflower Julia set of $z^2 + 1/4$. The divergence of this family $[f_t]$ in $M_2$ is an illustration of the obstruction to mating the polynomial $f_1$ with the root-point of the 1/2-limb of the Mandelbrot (this limb is its own conjugate).

**References**


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