

Stackings and the W -cycles conjecture

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Abstract

We prove Wise's W -cycles conjecture: Consider a compact graph Γ' immersing into another graph Γ . For any immersed cycle $\Lambda : S^1 \rightarrow \Gamma$, we consider the map Λ' from the circular components \mathbb{S} of the pullback to Γ' . Unless Λ' is reducible, the degree of the covering map $\mathbb{S} \rightarrow S^1$ is bounded above by minus the Euler characteristic of Γ' . As a corollary, any finitely generated subgroup of a one-relator group has finitely generated Schur multiplier.

1 Introduction

As part of his work on the coherence of one-relator groups, Wise made a conjecture about the number of lifts of a cycle in a free group along an immersion, which we will call the *W-cycles conjecture*. If $f_1 : \Gamma_1 \looparrowright \Gamma$ and $f_2 : \Gamma_2 \looparrowright \Gamma$ are immersions of graphs, then the fibre product

$$\Gamma_1 \times_{\Gamma} \Gamma_2 = \{(x, y) \in \Gamma_1 \times \Gamma_2 \mid f_1(x) = f_2(y)\}$$

immerses into Γ_1 and Γ_2 , and is the pullback of f_1 and f_2 . An immersed loop $\Lambda : S^1 \looparrowright \Gamma$ is *primitive* if it does not factor properly through any other immersion $S^1 \looparrowright \Gamma$.

With this definition, the W -cycles conjecture can be stated as follows.

Conjecture 1 (Wise [Wis05]). *Let $\rho : \Gamma' \rightarrow \Gamma$ be an immersion of finite connected core graphs and let $\Lambda : S^1 \rightarrow \Gamma$ be a primitive immersed loop. Let \mathbb{S} be the union of the circular components of $\Gamma' \times_{\Gamma} S^1$. Then the number of components of \mathbb{S} is at most the rank of Γ' .*

The purpose of this note is to prove Wise's conjecture; indeed, we prove a stronger statement. As usual, if π is a covering map then $\deg \pi$ denotes its degree, the number of preimages of a point. An immersion of a union of circles $\Lambda : \mathbb{S} \rightarrow \Gamma$ is called *reducible* if there is an edge of Γ which is traversed at most once by Λ .

Theorem 2. *Let $\rho : \Gamma' \looparrowright \Gamma$ be an immersion of finite connected core graphs and let $\Lambda : S^1 \rightarrow \Gamma$ be a primitive immersed loop. Suppose that \mathbb{S} , the union of*

the circular components of $\Gamma' \times_{\Gamma} S^1$, is non-empty, so there is a natural covering map $\sigma : \mathbb{S} \twoheadrightarrow S^1$. Then either

$$\deg \sigma \leq -\chi(\Gamma')$$

or the pullback immersion $\Lambda' : \mathbb{S} \rightarrow \Gamma'$ is reducible.

The statement of the conjecture is a corollary of this theorem. Indeed, the inequality in the theorem is strictly stronger than the inequality in the conjecture; alternatively, in the reducible case, we may remove an edge and proceed by induction.

Wise's notion of *nonpositive immersions* provides a connection with a famous question of Baumslag [Bau74]: is every one-relator group coherent? (Recall that a group is *coherent* if every finitely generated subgroup is finitely presented.) As in the case of graphs, an immersion of cell complexes is a locally injective cellular map.

Definition 3 (Wise). A cell complex X has *nonpositive immersions*, or *NPI* if, for every immersion of compact, connected complexes $Y \twoheadrightarrow X$, either $\chi(Y) \leq 0$ or Y has trivial fundamental group.

Presentation complexes of one-relator groups with torsion do not have non-positive immersions. Let C_k be the presentation complex of $\mathbb{Z}/k\mathbb{Z}$ associated to the presentation $\langle a \mid a^k \rangle$, and for $l \mid k$, let $C_{k,l}$ be the l -fold cover of C_k .

Definition 4. A cell complex X has *not too positive immersions*, or *NTPI* if, for every immersion of compact, connected complexes $Y \twoheadrightarrow X$, Y is homotopy equivalent to a wedge of subcomplexes of $C_{k,l}$'s and a compact 2-complex $Y' \subset Y$ with $\chi(Y') \leq 0$.

For $k = 1$ this reduces to NPI, since $C_{1,l}$ is a disk. Our main theorem implies that presentation complexes associated to one-relator groups have NTPI; in particular, in the torsion-free case, they have NPI.

Corollary 5. *Let X be compact 2-complex with one 2-cell e^2 and suppose that the attaching map $\Lambda : S^1 \rightarrow X^{(1)}$ of e^2 is an immersion. Then X has NTPI.*

Proof. Suppose that $\rho : Y \twoheadrightarrow X$ is an immersion of a compact 2-complex Y into X . Let $\Gamma = X^{(1)}$, $\Gamma' = Y^{(1)}$, and $\Lambda' : \mathbb{S} \rightarrow \Gamma'$ be the pullback immersion, in the notation of Theorem 2. Let \mathbb{S}' be the union of the components S_1, \dots, S_m of \mathbb{S} that are realized by boundaries of 2-cells of Y . If $\chi(Y) > 0$ then $\deg(\sigma) > -\chi(\Gamma')$ and so, by Theorem 2, Λ' is reducible. That is, there is some edge e of Γ' traversed by at most one component S of \mathbb{S} .

If S isn't contained in \mathbb{S}' , we may remove the edge e and proceed by induction on the size of the one-skeleton of Y .

We may therefore suppose that S is a component of \mathbb{S}' . Suppose that Λ is realized (up to conjugacy) by a k th power w^k in $\pi_1\Gamma$, and that the covering map $S \rightarrow S^1$ has degree l . Then l divides k , and Y is homotopy equivalent to a wedge $D_{k,l} \vee Y'$, where $D_{k,l}$ is a subcomplex of $C_{k,l}$ and Y' is the subcomplex of Y with the edge e and all 2-cells attached to S removed. We now proceed by induction on the number of 2-cells of Y . \square

Wise has conjectured that, if a 2-complex X has nonpositive immersions, then its fundamental group is coherent. Although Baumslag's conjecture remains open, we do obtain a weaker statement: every finitely generated subgroup of a one-relator group has finitely generated Schur multiplier.

Corollary 6. *Let G be a one-relator group. If $H < G$ is finitely generated then*

$$\text{rank}(H_2(H, \mathbb{Z})) \leq b_1(H) - 1$$

In his proof that three-manifold groups are coherent [Sco73], Scott introduces the notion of *indecomposable covers*: If G is a finitely generated freely indecomposable group then $K \twoheadrightarrow G$ is an indecomposable cover if it doesn't factor (surjectively) through a free product. The next lemma is a straightforward consequence of the existence of indecomposable covers.

Lemma 7. *Let $G = G_1 * \cdots * G_n * \mathbb{F}_k$ be the Grushko decomposition of a finitely generated group G , with G_i freely indecomposable. There is a finitely presented group $H = H_1 * \cdots * H_n * \mathbb{F}_k$ and a surjective homomorphism $\varphi: H \twoheadrightarrow G$ such that $\varphi|_{H_i}: H_i \twoheadrightarrow G_i$ is an indecomposable cover.*

Let X be the presentation complex of a one-relator group G , and let $Y \twoheadrightarrow X$ be a covering map corresponding to a finitely generated subgroup H . By a trivial generalization of Stallings' folding technique [Sta83], there is a sequence of immersions of finite complexes obtained by first immersing a graph Y_1 in X and repeatedly adding relations and folding

$$Y_1 \twoheadrightarrow Y_2 \twoheadrightarrow \cdots \twoheadrightarrow Y_n \twoheadrightarrow \cdots \twoheadrightarrow Y$$

with the property that each immersion $Y_i \twoheadrightarrow Y_{i+1}$ induces a surjection on fundamental groups and such that $Y = \varinjlim Y_i$. If H is one-ended, by Lemma 7, we may assume that each Y_i has one-ended fundamental group and, by Corollary 5, that $\chi(Y_i) \leq 0$.

Proof of Corollary 6. Let Y and Y_i be the spaces constructed in the previous paragraph. By [Lyn50], both $H_2(G, \mathbb{Z})$ and $H_2(H, \mathbb{Z})$ are torsion-free, so it suffices to show that $b_2(Y) \leq b_1(H) - 1$. Combining Corollary 5 with Lemma 7 we may assume that H is one-ended and that $\chi(Y_i) \leq 0$. No Y_i is simply connected and so, since X has NTPI and H is one-ended, $\chi(Y_i) \leq 0$ for all i . Since homology commutes with direct limits, it follows that $\text{rank}(H_2(Y, \mathbb{Z})) \leq b_1(H) - 1$ as claimed. \square

Our proof of Theorem 2 was inspired by the proof of the following theorem of Duncan and Howie. In particular, the punch line in Lemma 13 is essentially their proof of [DH91, Lemma 3.1].

The *genus* of an element w in a free group F is the minimal number g so that $w = \prod_{i=1}^g [x_i, y_i]$ has a solution in F , or equivalently, the minimal genus of a once-holed surface mapping into a graph representing F with boundary w .

Theorem ([DH91, Corollary 5.2]). *Let w be an indivisible element in a free group F . Then the genus of w^m is at least $m/2$.*

While this work was in preparation, we learned that Helfer and Wise have also proved the W -cycles conjecture [HW14] and its generalization to staggered presentations (See Remark 18).

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2 Stackings

2.1 Computing the characteristic of a free group

By a *circle*, we mean a graph homeomorphic to S^1 .

Definition 8. Let Γ be a finite graph, let \mathbb{S} be a disjoint union of finitely many circles, and let $\Lambda: \mathbb{S} \looparrowright \Gamma$ be a map of graphs. Consider the trivial \mathbb{R} -bundle $\pi: \Gamma \times \mathbb{R} \rightarrow \Gamma$. A *stacking* is an embedding $\hat{\Lambda}: \mathbb{S} \hookrightarrow \Gamma \times \mathbb{R}$ such that $\pi\hat{\Lambda} = \Lambda$.

Although this definition is very simple, it leads to a natural way of estimating the Euler characteristic of a graph.

Let π and ι be the projections of $\Gamma \times \mathbb{R}$ to Γ and \mathbb{R} , respectively. Let

$$\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}} = \{x \in \mathbb{S} \mid \forall y \neq x (\Lambda(x) = \Lambda(y) \Rightarrow \iota(\hat{\Lambda}(x)) > \iota(\hat{\Lambda}(y)))\}$$

and

$$\mathcal{B}_{\hat{\Lambda}} = \{x \in \mathbb{S} \mid \forall y \neq x (\Lambda(x) = \Lambda(y) \Rightarrow \iota(\hat{\Lambda}(x)) < \iota(\hat{\Lambda}(y)))\}$$

Intuitively, $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$ is the set of points of $\hat{\Lambda}(\mathbb{S})$ that one sees if one looks at $\hat{\Lambda}(\mathbb{S})$ from above, and likewise $\mathcal{B}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$ is the set of points of $\hat{\Lambda}(\mathbb{S})$ that one sees from below.

Henceforth, assume that $\Lambda: \mathbb{S} \rightarrow \Gamma$ is an immersion. The stacking $\hat{\Lambda}$ is called *good* if $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$ and $\mathcal{B}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$ each meet every connected component of \mathbb{S} . For brevity, we will call a subset $s \subseteq \mathbb{S}$ an *open arc* if it is connected, simply connected, open, and a union of vertices and interiors of edges.

Lemma 9. *If Λ is an immersion then each connected component of $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$ or $\mathcal{B}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$ is either a connected component of \mathbb{S} or an open arc in \mathbb{S} .*

Proof. It suffices to prove the lemma for $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$. Let $s \subseteq \mathbb{S}$ be a connected component of $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$. It follows from the definition that s is open. Note also that if one point p in the interior of an edge e is contained in $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$ then the whole interior of e is contained in $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$. This completes the proof. \square

The next lemma characterizes reducible maps in terms of a stacking; in particular, reducibility is reduced to non-disjointness of $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$ and $\mathcal{B}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$.

Lemma 10. *If $\hat{\Lambda}$ is a stacking of an immersion $\Lambda : \mathbb{S} \rightarrow \Gamma$, then $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}} \cap \mathcal{B}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$ contains the interior of an edge if and only if Λ is reducible. If $\hat{\Lambda}$ is a good stacking and $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$ or $\mathcal{B}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$ contains a circle then $\hat{\Lambda}$ is reducible.*

Proof. The first assertion is immediate from the definitions. It suffices to prove the second assertion for $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$. Let S be a component of \mathbb{S} contained in $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$. Since \mathbb{S} is good, there is an edge e of S contained in $\mathcal{B}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$. Therefore, e is contained in both $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$ and $\mathcal{B}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$. It follows that e is traversed exactly once by $\hat{\Lambda}$, so $\hat{\Lambda}$ is reducible. \square

The final lemma of this section is completely elementary, but is the key observation in the proof. It asserts that number of open arcs in $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$ or $\mathcal{B}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$ computes the Euler characteristic of the image of Λ .

Lemma 11. *Let $\hat{\Lambda} : \mathbb{S} \rightarrow \Gamma \times \mathbb{R}$ be a stacking of a surjective immersion $\Lambda : \mathbb{S} \rightarrow \Gamma$. The number of open arcs in $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$ or $\mathcal{B}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$ is equal to $-\chi(\Gamma)$.*

Proof. As usual, it suffices to prove the lemma for $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$. Let x be a vertex of Γ of valence $v(x)$. Because Λ is surjective, exactly $v - 2$ edges incident at x are covered by open arcs of $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$ that end at x . Therefore, the number of open arcs is

$$\frac{1}{2} \sum_{x \in V(\Gamma)} (v(x) - 2)$$

which is easily seen to be $-\chi(\Gamma)$. \square

2.2 Computing the characteristic of a subgroup

As in the previous section, Γ is a finite graph, $\Lambda : \mathbb{S} \rightarrow \Gamma$ is an immersion and $\hat{\Lambda} : \mathbb{S} \rightarrow \Gamma \times \mathbb{R}$ is a stacking. Consider now an immersion of finite graphs $\rho : \Gamma' \rightarrow \Gamma$, and let \mathbb{S}' be the circular components of the fibre product $\mathbb{S} \times_{\Gamma} \Gamma'$, which is equipped with a map $\sigma : \mathbb{S}' \rightarrow \mathbb{S}$ and an immersion $\Lambda' : \mathbb{S}' \rightarrow \Gamma'$. Note that if \mathbb{S}' is non-empty then σ is a covering map. In order to prove Theorem 2, we would like to estimate the characteristic of Γ' in terms of $\hat{\Lambda}$.

The stacking $\hat{\Lambda}$ of Λ naturally pulls back to a stacking $\hat{\Lambda}'$ of Λ' . More precisely, there is a natural isomorphism

$$(\Gamma \times \mathbb{R}) \times_{\Gamma} \Gamma' \cong \Gamma' \times \mathbb{R}$$

and the universal property of the fibre bundle defines a map $\hat{\Lambda}' : \mathbb{S}' \rightarrow \Gamma' \times \mathbb{R}$, so we have the following commutative diagram.

$$\begin{array}{ccccc}
 & & \Gamma' \times \mathbb{R} & \xrightarrow{\hat{\rho}} & \Gamma \times \mathbb{R} \\
 & \nearrow \hat{\Lambda}' & \downarrow \pi' & & \nearrow \hat{\Lambda} \\
 \mathbb{S}' & \xrightarrow{\sigma} & \mathbb{S} & & \downarrow \pi \\
 & \searrow \Lambda' & \downarrow \rho & & \downarrow \Lambda \\
 & & \Gamma' & \xrightarrow{\rho} & \Gamma
 \end{array}$$

Lemma 12. *If $\hat{\Lambda}$ is a stacking then $\hat{\Lambda}'$ is also a stacking. Furthermore, if $\hat{\Lambda}$ is good then $\hat{\Lambda}'$ is also good.*

Proof. The proof of the first assertion is a diagram chase, which we leave as an exercise to the reader. The second assertion follows immediately from the observation that $\sigma^{-1}(\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}}) \subseteq \mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}'}$ and $\sigma^{-1}(\mathcal{B}_{\hat{\Lambda}}) \subseteq \mathcal{B}_{\hat{\Lambda}'}$. \square

The final lemma in this section estimates the Euler characteristic of Γ' using a stacking of the pullback immersion Λ' . Since all finitely generated subgroups of free groups can be realized by immersions of finite graphs, this can be thought of as an estimate for the rank of a subgroup of a free group; this point of view motivates the title of this subsection.

Lemma 13. *If $\hat{\Lambda}$ is a good stacking then either $\Lambda' : \mathbb{S}' \rightarrow \Gamma'$ is reducible or*

$$-\chi(\Lambda'(\mathbb{S}')) \geq \deg \sigma$$

Proof. Suppose Λ' is not reducible; in particular, Λ' is surjective.

Let e be an edge in $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$ and consider its $\deg \sigma$ preimages $\{e'_j\}$. Since Λ' is not reducible, no component of $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}'}$ is a circle, by Lemma 10, and so every e'_j is contained in an open arc of $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}'}$.

If $-\chi(\Gamma') < \deg \sigma$ then, by Lemma 11 and the pigeonhole principle, two distinct preimages e'_i and e'_j are contained in the same open arc A . But then, for any f an edge of \mathbb{S} contained in $\mathcal{B}_{\hat{\Lambda}}$ (which again exists because $\hat{\Lambda}$ is good), A also contains an edge f' that maps to f . Therefore, $\mathcal{A}_{\hat{\Lambda}'} \cap \mathcal{B}_{\hat{\Lambda}'}$ contains f' , and so Λ' is reducible by Lemma 10. See Figure 1. \square

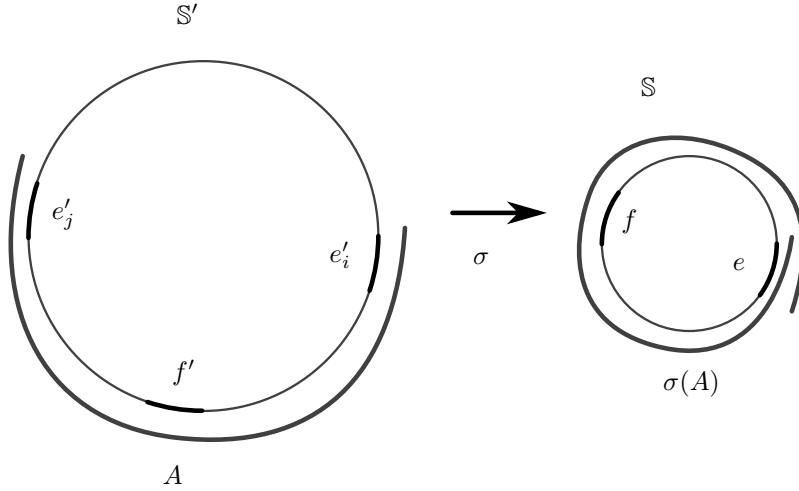


Figure 1: If $-\chi(\Gamma')$ is smaller than the sum of the degrees then Λ' is reducible.

3 A tower argument

In order to apply Lemma 13 to prove Theorem 2, we need to prove that stackings exist. The proof here employs a *cyclic tower argument* of the kind used by Brodskiĭ and Howie to prove that one-relator groups are right-orderable and locally indicable [Bro80, How82].

Definition 14. Let X be a complex. A *(cyclic) tower* is the composition of a finite sequence of maps

$$X_0 \twoheadrightarrow X_1 \twoheadrightarrow \dots \twoheadrightarrow X_n = X$$

such that each map $X_i \twoheadrightarrow X_{i+1}$ is either an inclusion of a subcomplex or a covering map (resp. a normal covering map with infinite cyclic deck group).

One can argue by induction with towers because of the following lemma of Howie (building on ideas of Papakyriakopoulos and Stallings) [How81].

Lemma 15. *Let $Y \rightarrow X$ be cellular map of compact complexes. Then there exists a maximal (cyclic) tower map $X' \twoheadrightarrow X$ such that $Y \rightarrow X$ lifts to a map $Y \rightarrow X'$.*

As in the previous sections let Γ be a graph. To apply a cyclic tower argument, one needs to know that the phenomena of interest are preserved by cyclic coverings. In our case, that control is provided by the following lemma.

Lemma 16. *Consider an infinite cyclic cover of a graph Γ . Then there is an embedding $\tilde{\Gamma} \times \mathbb{R} \hookrightarrow \Gamma \times \mathbb{R}$ such that the diagram*

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \tilde{\Gamma} \times \mathbb{R} & \xrightarrow{\tilde{\pi}} & \tilde{\Gamma} \\ \downarrow & & \downarrow \\ \Gamma \times \mathbb{R} & \xrightarrow{\pi} & \Gamma \end{array}$$

commutes where, as usual π and $\tilde{\pi}$ denote coordinate projections onto Γ and $\tilde{\Gamma}$ respectively. (Note that the embedding $\tilde{\Gamma} \times \mathbb{R} \hookrightarrow \Gamma \times \mathbb{R}$ is usually not natural with respect to the coordinate projections onto \mathbb{R} .)

Proof. Elements g of the group $\pi_1\Gamma$ act by deck transformations $x \mapsto gx$ on the covering space $\tilde{\Gamma}$. The infinite cyclic covering $\tilde{\Gamma} \rightarrow \Gamma$ also defines a homomorphism $\pi_1\tilde{\Gamma} \rightarrow \mathbb{Z}$, which in turn allows elements g of $\pi_1\Gamma$ to act by translation on \mathbb{R} .

Consider the diagonal action of $\pi_1\Gamma$ on $\tilde{\Gamma} \times \mathbb{R}$. The quotient is homeomorphic to $\Gamma \times \mathbb{R}$. Let $X = \tilde{\Gamma} \times (-1/2, 1/2) \subset \tilde{\Gamma} \times \mathbb{R}$. Distinct translates of X are disjoint, and so the map $X \hookrightarrow \tilde{\Gamma} \times \mathbb{R}$ descends to an embedding $X \hookrightarrow \Gamma \times \mathbb{R}$. Any choice of homeomorphism $(-1/2, 1/2) \cong \mathbb{R}$ identifies X with $\tilde{\Gamma} \times \mathbb{R}$. It is straightforward to check that the claimed diagram commutes. \square

We are now ready to prove that stackings exist. A very simple example of a stacking is illustrated in Figure 2.

Lemma 17. *Any primitive immersion $\Lambda: S^1 \rightarrow \Gamma$ has a stacking*

$$\hat{\Lambda}: S^1 \rightarrow \Gamma \times \mathbb{R}$$

Proof. Let $\Gamma_0 \looparrowright \Gamma_1 \looparrowright \dots \looparrowright \Gamma_m = \Gamma$ be a maximal cyclic tower lifting of Λ , and let $\Lambda_n: S^1 \rightarrow \Gamma_n$ be the lift of Λ to Γ_n . Note that Γ_0 is a circle and Λ_0 is a finite-to-one covering map. Since Λ is primitive, it follows that Λ_0 is a homeomorphism and hence trivially stackable.

Proceeding by induction on n , let $\hat{\Lambda}_{n-1}: S^1 \hookrightarrow \Gamma_{n-1} \times \mathbb{R}$ be a stacking of Λ_{n-1} . If $\Gamma_{n-1} \rightarrow \Gamma_n$ is an inclusion of subgraphs then it extends naturally to an inclusion $i: \Gamma_{n-1} \times \mathbb{R} \hookrightarrow \Gamma_n \times \mathbb{R}$, and so $\hat{\Lambda} = i \circ \hat{\Lambda}_{n-1}$ is a stacking.

Suppose therefore that $\Gamma_{n-1} \rightarrow \Gamma_n$ is an infinite cyclic covering map. Let $i: \Gamma_{n-1} \times \mathbb{R} \rightarrow \Gamma_n \times \mathbb{R}$ be the embedding provided by Lemma 16. Then $\hat{\Lambda}_n = i \circ \hat{\Lambda}_{n-1}$ is an embedding $S^1 \hookrightarrow \Gamma_n \times \mathbb{R}$, and a simple diagram chase confirms that $\hat{\Lambda}_n$ is a lift of Λ_n . This completes the proof. \square

Remark 18. Note that any stacking of a map of a single circle is automatically good. Lemma 17 (also implicit in [HW14]) holds for graphs and immersions associated to staggered presentations.

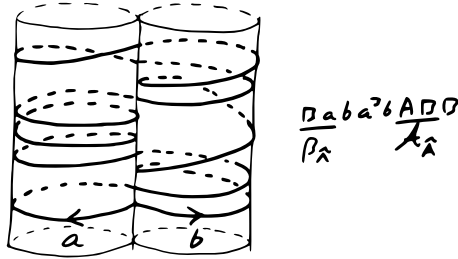


Figure 2: A stacking of the word $Baba^3bABB$.

Let $L = \langle x_1, \dots, x_n \mid w \rangle$ be a one-relator group, where w is a cyclically reduced nonperiodic word $w = x_{i_1} \cdots x_{i_m}$ in the x_i . Duncan and Howie use right-orderability of L to assign heights to the (distinct, by [How82, Corollary 3.4]) elements $a_0 = 1$, $a_j = x_{i_1} \cdots x_{i_j}$, $j < m$, in L in the same way we use the embedding $\hat{\Lambda}$ to find open arcs which remain above (\mathcal{A}) or below (\mathcal{B}) every point of S^1 with the same image in Γ . Lemma 17 is equivalent to the existence of a right-invariant pre-order on L which distinguishes between the elements a_j . Lemma 17 is also closely related to the main theorem of [Far76].

Our main theorem is now a quick consequence of Lemmas 13 and 17.

Proof of Theorem 2. Let Γ , Γ' , etc., be as in Theorem 2, and let $\hat{\Lambda}$ be the stacking provided by Lemma 17. Since S^1 is connected, the stacking $\hat{\Lambda}$ is auto-

matically good. By hypothesis Λ' is not reducible, and therefore by Lemma 13, $-\chi(\Gamma') \geq -\chi(\Lambda'(\mathbb{S}')) \geq \deg \sigma$ as claimed. \square

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