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COMBINATORIAL MAPS
AND THE FOUNDATIONS
OF
TOPOLOGICAL GRAPH
THEORY

*A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Mathematics at Massey University.*

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1991

ABSTRACT

This work develops the foundations of topological graph theory with a unified approach using combinatorial maps. (A combinatorial map is an n -regular graph endowed with proper edge colouring in n colours.) We establish some new results and some generalisations of important theorems in topological graph theory. The classification of surfaces, the imbedding distribution of a graph, the maximum genus of a graph, and MacLane's test for graph planarity are given new treatments in terms of cubic combinatorial maps. Among our new results, we give combinatorial versions of the classical theorem of topology which states that the first Betti number of a surface is the maximum number of closed curves along which one can cut without dividing the surface up into two or more components. To conclude this thesis, we provide an introduction to the algebraic properties of combinatorial maps. The homology spaces and Euler characteristic are defined, and we show how they are related.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface *i*

Notes on Figures *v*

Acknowledgements *vii*

Dedication *viii*

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

1. SETS AND FUNCTIONS	1
2. GRAPHS	3
3. ISOMORPHISM OF GRAPHS	5
4. SUBGRAPHS.....	5
5. COBOUNDARIES	6
6. CIRCUITS, TREES AND PATHS	7
7. CONTRACTION.....	9
8. CYCLE SPACES.....	9

TABLE OF CONTENTS

9. 3-GRAPHS.....	10
10. GEMS	12

Chapter II

THE CLASSIFICATION OF COMBINATORIAL SURFACES

1. INTRODUCTION.....	15
2. PREMAPS	16
3. DIPOLES	19
4. REDUCED AND UNITARY 3-GRAPHS	24
5. CANONICAL GEMS.....	37
6. CONCLUSION.....	39

Chapter III

THE BOUNDARY AND FIRST HOMOLOGY SPACES OF A 3-GRAPH

1. INTRODUCTION	41
2. THE BOUNDARY SPACE	42
3. SEMICYCLES.....	43
4. B-INDEPENDENT SETS OF B-CYCLES	45
5. LINKING THE SIDES OF SEMICYCLES.....	47
6. A CONDITION FOR A B-CYCLE TO SEPARATE.....	53
7. FUNDAMENTAL SETS OF SEMICYCLES.....	59
8. IMPLIED SEMICYCLES	60
9. 3-GRAPHS WITH JUST ONE RED-YELLOW BIGON...	63

Chapter IV

THE IMBEDDING DISTRIBUTION OF A 3-GRAPH

1. INTRODUCTION	68
2. THE GENUS AND CROSSCAP RANGES OF A 3- GRAPH	71
3. UNIPOLES AND POLES.....	72
4. REATTACHMENTS AND TWISTS.....	79
5. THE BETTI NUMBER OF A 3-GRAPH.....	85
6. PERMITTED POLE SETS	86
7. RINGS.....	92
8. ζ -MOVES.....	96
9. THE EQUIVALENCE OF CONGRUENCE AND ζ - EQUIVALENCE.....	97
10. ORIENTABLE INTERPOLATION THEOREM.....	101
11. AN UPPER BOUND ON THE MINIMUM CROSSCAP NUMBER	101
12. ARBITRARILY LARGE MINIMUM GENUS	102

Chapter V

MAXIMUM GENUS

1. INTRODUCTION	105
2. THE DEFICIENCY OF A GRAPH.....	106
3. THE DEFICIENCY OF A 3-GRAPH	106
4. SINGULAR 3-GRAPHS	107
5. ELEMENTARY 3-GRAPHS	115

TABLE OF CONTENTS

6. KHOMENKO'S THEOREM FOR 3-GRAPHS	118
7. ELEMENTARY GEMS.....	121
8. CAPS AND CROSSCAPS OF BLUE-YELLOW BIGONS	123
9. SEMI-GEMS.....	128
10. THE PRINCIPAL PARTITION.....	131
11. RELATING THE DEFICIENCIES OF GEMS AND GRAPHS	133

Chapter VI

IRREDUCIBLE DOUBLE COVERED GRAPHS

1. INTRODUCTION	136
2. DOUBLE COVERS	137
3. THE DUAL OF A DOUBLE COVERED GRAPH.....	139
4. UNIFORM DOUBLE COVERED GRAPHS.....	140
5. INDEPENDENT SETS OF CYCLES	140
6. SEPARATING CYCLES	141
7. IMPLIED CYCLES.....	142
8. LINK CONTRACTION SEQUENCES.....	142
9. AN UPPER BOUND ON $h(G, D)$	145
10. GEM ENCODED DOUBLE COVERED GRAPHS.....	147
11. REFINED 3-GRAPHS.....	150
12. RED-YELLOW REDUCTIONS.....	152
13. OBTAINING DOUBLE COVERED GRAPHS FROM 3- GRAPHS.....	153

TABLE OF CONTENTS

14. RELATING THE SEPARATION PROPERTIES	154
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Chapter VII

MAC LANE'S THEOREM FOR 3-GRAPHS

1. INTRODUCTION	158
2. REFINEMENTS.....	159
3. COVERS IN 3-GRAPHS.....	163
4. BOUNDARY COVERS.....	164
5. PARTIAL CONGRUENCE AND FAITHFULNESS.....	167
6. 3-GRAPH ENCODINGS	172
7. COALESCING RED-YELLOW BIGONS	173
8. THE EXISTENCE OF SPANNING SEMICYCLE COVERS.....	176
9. MACLANE'S THEOREM.....	178

Chapter VIII

THE HOMOLOGY OF N-GRAPHS

1. INTRODUCTION	182
2. COMBINATORIAL MAPS.....	183
3. THE SPACE OF m -CHAINS.....	185
4. THE BOUNDARY MAP.....	186
5. m -CYCLES.....	186
6. m -BOUNDARIES.....	187
7. $\delta_{m-1}\delta m$ IS THE TRIVIAL MAP.....	187
8. THE EULER CHARACTERISTIC OF AN n -GRAPH ..	189
9. DIPOLES	190

TABLE OF CONTENTS

10. CANCELLATIONS AND CREATIONS OF DIPOLES	
.....	191
11. BALANCED DIPOLES	192
REFERENCES	199
INDEX	204

PREFACE

Topological graph theory is concerned with the study of graphs imbedded in surfaces. During the past two decades, graph imbeddings in surfaces have received considerable analysis by combinatorial methods. The concept that motivated this thesis is the use of a special kind of edge coloured graph, called by Lins [11] a gem, to provide such a method to model graph imbeddings. For the most part, we shall push Lins' model further by using more general edge coloured graphs, called cubic combinatorial maps, to establish some new results and some generalisations of important theorems in topological graph theory. (A cubic combinatorial map is defined as a cubic graph endowed with a proper edge colouring in three colours.) It is the use of combinatorial maps that is the unifying feature in this thesis and its development of the foundations of topological graph theory.

PREFACE

An advantage of this approach over previous attempts to combinatorialise topological graph theory is that the theorems can be easily visualized, encouraging geometric intuition. We demonstrate how this axiomatic non-topological definition of a graph imbedding means that no topological apparatus needs to be brought into play when proving theorems in topological graph theory.

Following a chapter of introductory material, Chapter II gives a simple graph theoretic proof of the classification of surfaces in terms of cubic combinatorial maps. This provides our first example of the naturalness of cubic combinatorial maps as a variation on the simplicial complex approach to topology. As in topology, we can now assign an orientability character and genus or cross cap number to a given cubic combinatorial map. This chapter also serves as an introduction to the special operation or “move” on combinatorial maps that permeates this thesis.

In [24], Stahl presents a purely combinatorial form of the Jordan curve theorem from which graph theoretical versions (for example [26]) follow as corollaries. This was later (in [13]) presented in terms of cubic combinatorial maps. Generalisations of the Jordan curve theorem abound in topology, and therefore we make progress along these lines in Chapter III by presenting a generalisation of Stahl’s work, motivated by the work in [13]. We give a combinatorial version of the theorem of topology which states

that the first Betti number of a surface is the maximum number of closed curves along which one can cut without dividing the surface up into two or more components.

No text on the foundations of topological graph theory would be complete without some study of the set of surfaces a given graph can be imbedded on, or more precisely the imbedding distribution of a graph. The principal objective of topological graph theory is to determine the surface of smallest genus such that a given graph imbeds in that surface. In general, this surface is difficult to find. By way of contrast, the surface of largest genus such that a given graph imbeds in that surface can be found. We define a special partition of the set of all cubic combinatorial maps, and we say that two cubic combinatorial maps that belong to the same cell are congruent. In particular, two congruent gems correspond to two possible imbeddings for a given graph. We analyse the distribution of the genus or cross cap numbers associated with the cubic combinatorial maps congruent to a given one in Chapter IV. In Chapter V, we calculate the maximum value in this distribution. This work generalises results of Khomenko [9, 10] and Xuong [32].

In [30], short proofs of three graph theoretic versions of the Jordan curve theorem are given. In the spirit of Chapter III, we generalise the version, expressed in terms of a double cover for a graph, in Chapter VI. (A double cover is a family of circuits such that each edge belongs to exactly two.). Furthermore, we show how

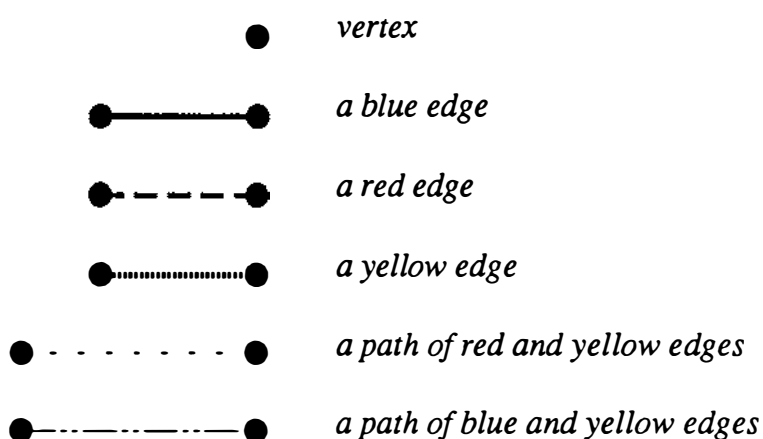
this work is related to our work on cubic combinatorial maps in Chapter III, and hence we proceed in the direction of Little and Vince in [14].

In an attempt to make a partial separation between graph theory and topology, MacLane proved that a given graph would be imbeddable on the sphere if and only if it had a certain combinatorial property. However, his characterization was proved by topological arguments. The tools introduced in Chapter VI which relate cubic combinatorial maps to double covered graphs are further applied in Chapter VII. Here we classify which cubic combinatorial maps are congruent to planar ones, where planarity is defined in terms of orientability and Euler characteristic. The classification given is a combinatorial generalisation of MacLane's test for planarity.

A more general version of the cubic combinatorial map is found by dropping the restriction of cubic graphs so as to include n -regular graphs. Of course we increase the number of colours for the edge colouring to n . To conclude this thesis, we provide an introduction to the algebraic properties of such maps. The homology spaces and Euler characteristic are defined, and we show how they are related. Furthermore, a general form of the "move" that permeates this thesis is presented, and we show how this move affects the Euler characteristic.

NOTES ON FIGURES

This thesis is mainly concerned with edge coloured graphs. Unfortunately, colour was not achievable on laser printers at our disposal. It is possible, using the postscript language, to dash curved lines and to vary the width of a line. Therefore we represent the various colours by dashing edges according to the following figure.



NOTES OF FIGURES

For labellings, we will usually use a , b or c , together with a subscript or a prime, to label *red*, *blue* and *yellow* edges respectively. A vertex will always be labelled with u , v , w , x , y or z , together with a subscript or a prime.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A NUMBER OF PEOPLE HAVE ASSISTED ME IN MANY WAYS
DURING MY DOCTORATE STUDIES.

To my supervisor, Charles Little, for his ready advice and unfailing encouragement, and for introducing me to the topic of my thesis.

To my colleagues and friends, Mark Byrne, Aroon Parshotam, John Giffin, Mike Hendy, Graeme Wake, Kee Teo, Ingrid Rinsma, Mike Steel and Mike Carter, for their comments, ideas, encouragement and friendship – particularly in the early stages of my doctorate studies.

To the University Grants Committee, for financial assistance.

DEDICATION

To
*my wife, Karyn,
my Mum and Dad,
and my brother, Alex.*

THIS THESIS WAS TYPESET ON APPLE
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