

ON TABULATING VIRTUAL STRINGS

ANDREW GIBSON

ABSTRACT. A virtual string can be defined as a closed curve on a surface modulo certain equivalence relations. Turaev defined several invariants of virtual strings which we use to produce a table of virtual strings up to 4 crossings. We discuss some progress in extending the tabulation to 5 crossings. We also provide a counter-example to a statement of Kadokami.

1. INTRODUCTION

In [7] Kauffman introduced the idea of a virtual knot by use of diagrams on the plane. A virtual knot diagram is an immersion of a circle in \mathbb{R}^2 with a finite number of self-intersections of the circle. Each self-intersection is a transverse double point which we call a crossing. There are two types of crossings. A real crossing is a crossing where one arc is specified to be over-crossing and the other under-crossing. A virtual crossing is a crossing where no over or under crossing information is specified. Each virtual crossing in a diagram is marked with a small circle. Figure 1 shows an example of such a diagram. Virtual knots can then be defined to be equivalence classes of these diagrams under a relation given by a set of diagrammatic moves based on the Reidemeister moves.

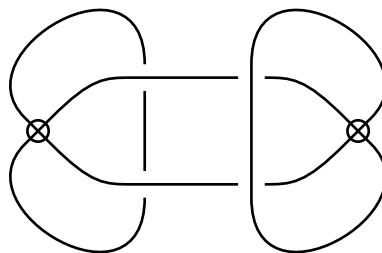


FIGURE 1. A virtual knot diagram of a virtual knot known as Kishino's knot

Carter, Kamada and Saito showed that we can consider virtual knots as equivalence classes of knot diagrams on compact oriented surfaces [1]. Here the knot

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diagrams only use real crossings. Knot diagrams are considered equivalent if they are related by a finite sequence of Reidemeister moves or stable homeomorphisms (which allow parts of the surface away from the knot to be changed).

If we take a knot diagram on a surface and flatten the crossings to double points we get a curve on the surface. We can flatten the Reidemeister moves in the same way. We can then define an equivalence relation on the flattened diagrams using these flattened Reidemeister moves and stable homeomorphisms. We define a virtual string to be an equivalence class under this relation. Definitions of the moves and of stable homeomorphism will be given in the next section. Elsewhere in the literature virtual strings are also known as projected virtual knots (for example [6]), flat knots or flat virtual knots (for example [5]), or universes of virtual knots (for example [1]).

It turns out that this ‘flattening’ operation on knot diagrams on surfaces induces a well-defined map from the set of virtual knots to the set of virtual strings. In other words, if D_1 and D_2 are knot diagrams on surfaces in the same virtual knot equivalence class, the flattened versions $\text{flat}(D_1)$ and $\text{flat}(D_2)$ are in the same virtual string equivalence class. Thus the virtual string underlying a virtual knot is an invariant of that knot and invariants of virtual strings may be used to distinguish virtual knots.

For a classical knot K it is always the case that the underlying virtual string is trivial. On the other hand, consider the knot in Figure 1, which is known as Kishino’s knot. It is known that this virtual knot is indistinguishable from the trivial virtual knot using certain virtual knot invariants like the Jones polynomial and the fundamental group. Kishino showed that it was non-trivial by calculating the Jones polynomial of the 3-parallel of the knot [8]. Another way to show its non-triviality is to show that its underlying virtual string is non-trivial. Kadokami suggested this approach in [6]. Kadokami’s proof of non-triviality of the underlying virtual string is based on another theorem in that paper for which we found a problem with the proof (we discuss this problem in Section 8). Non-triviality of the virtual string can be shown using Turaev’s primitive based matrix invariant. Turaev gave the calculation of this invariant for this virtual string in [10] although the connection with Kishino’s knot is not noted there.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows.

In the next section we give a full definition of virtual strings. In Section 3 we explain another representation of virtual strings using Turaev’s nanowords. This representation is useful for giving tables of virtual strings. In Section 4 we briefly explain some invariants of virtual strings defined by Turaev in [10].

In Sections 5 and 6 we give some details of the algorithms we used for canonicalizing the representation of primitive based matrices and for the enumeration of virtual strings. The main results of this paper appear in Section 7 where the results of our enumeration are given. In the final section we discuss a statement in a paper by Kadokami [6] and give a counter-example to it.

The contents of this paper form part of the author's thesis submitted to fulfil a requirement of the Master's course at Tokyo Institute of Technology.

2. VIRTUAL STRINGS

A *virtual string surface diagram* is a pair (S, D) , where S is a compact oriented surface and D is an immersion of an oriented circle in S . Self-intersections of the immersion should be transverse double points. We call these self-intersections *crossings*. In this paper, we only consider the case where the number of crossings is finite. Figure 2 shows an example of such a pair. Here we consider the outer region to be a disc, and so the surface S is compact and has genus 2.

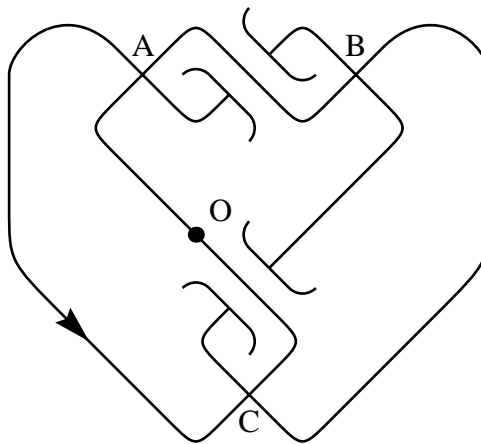


FIGURE 2. A non-trivial virtual string with orientation marked by an arrow. The point marked O and the crossing labels A , B and C will be used in Section 3.

We say that two virtual string surface diagrams (S, D) and (S', D') are *stably homeomorphic* if there is a homeomorphism mapping a regular neighbourhood of D in S to a regular neighbourhood of D' in S' preserving the orientations of the circle and the surface. Note that if we have two immersions D and D' on the same surface S such that D is isotopic to D' as a graph, (S, D) and (S, D') are stably homeomorphic. In this way we can consider isotopy of immersions as a special case of stable homeomorphism.

Figure 3 gives some moves between two virtual string surface diagrams (S, D) and (S, D') . Each side of each move shows a small area of S homeomorphic to a disc. These moves are called flattened Reidemeister moves because they are derived from the usual Reidemeister moves of knot theory (see, for example, [9] for definitions) by flattening each crossing to a double point. We sometimes call the flattened Reidemeister moves *homotopy moves*.

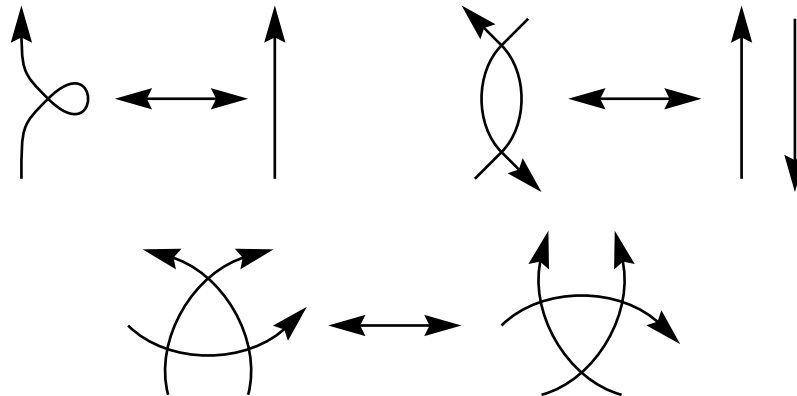


FIGURE 3. The flattened Reidemeister moves

We say two virtual string surface diagrams (S, D) and (S', D') are *homotopic* if there exists a finite sequence of stable homeomorphisms and flattened Reidemeister moves transforming one pair to the other. Clearly this relation is an equivalence relation and we call it *homotopy*. This equivalence relation is also known as *stable equivalence* [6]. We define a *virtual string* to be an equivalence class of this relation.

For any move shown in Figure 3 we can consider variants of the move by swapping the orientation of one or more arcs (and swapping the orientations of the corresponding arcs on the other side of the move). It is well known that we can derive all such variants from the moves shown in Figure 3. We showed how we can do this in [3]. This gives us a larger set of moves. Any move in this set which adds or removes a single crossing is called a 1-move. Any move in this set which adds or removes two crossings is called a 2-move. All remaining moves in the set involve three crossings and we call them 3-moves.

Virtual strings can be represented as planar diagrams which we call *virtual string diagrams*. Given a virtual string surface diagram (S, D) we can project D to a plane in such a way that any self-intersections of the image of D are transverse double points and there are a finite number of them. Any crossings in the image that correspond to crossings on S are called real crossings. Any other crossings in the image are called virtual crossings. We mark a virtual crossing with a small circle (see Figure 4). We can convert a planar diagram back to a virtual string surface diagram by replacing any virtual crossings with handles. Figure 5 shows this local transformation.

We can think of a virtual string diagram as a virtual knot diagram [7] where the real crossings have been ‘flattened’ to double points, removing the over and under crossing information. In the same way we can flatten the generalized Reidemeister moves of virtual knot theory [7] to get moves for virtual string diagrams (see, for example, [6]). We can define a relation on virtual string diagrams by saying

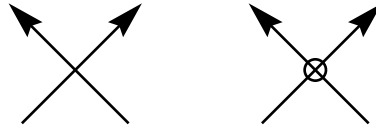


FIGURE 4. A real crossing (left) and a virtual crossing (right)

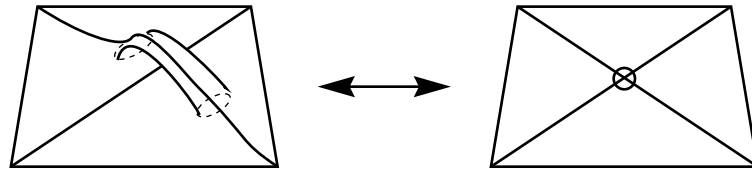


FIGURE 5. Changing surface with a hollow handle (left) to a planar diagram with a virtual crossing (right)

that two virtual strings are related if there is a finite sequence of these flattened moves transforming one diagram to the other. This relation is an equivalence relation. Following Carter, Kamada and Saito [1], Kadokami showed that the set of virtual strings is equivalent to the set of equivalence classes of virtual string diagrams under this equivalence relation [6]. This equivalence relation is also called *homotopy*.

The *crossing number* of a virtual string surface diagram is the number of crossings appearing in it. We define the *minimal crossing number* of a virtual string surface diagram (S, D) to be the minimum crossing number of all virtual string surface diagrams that are homotopic to (S, D) . Clearly this is a virtual string invariant.

3. NANOWORDS

Turaev defined the concept of a nanoword in [12]. He showed how nanowords can be used to represent virtual strings in [11]. In general we can use nanowords to represent other kinds of objects such as virtual knots but in this paper we will always use the term nanoword to mean a nanoword representing a virtual string.

A *nanoword* is a pair (w, π) where w is a Gauss word and π is a map from the letters appearing in w to the set $\{a, b\}$. Recall that a Gauss word is a finite sequence of letters where each letter that appears, appears exactly twice. We follow Turaev and write $|X|$ for $\pi(X)$ for a letter X appearing in the Gauss word w .

Given a virtual string surface diagram we construct a nanoword to represent it. We first pick some non-double point as a base point and label all the crossings. Starting at the base point we follow the curve according to its orientation. We read off the label of each crossing as we pass through it, stopping when we get back to the base point for the first time. The result is a Gauss word. For example,

the Gauss word associated with the diagram in Figure 2 with base point O is $ABCBAC$.

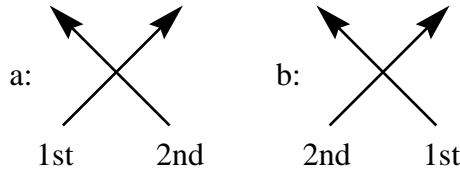


FIGURE 6. The two types of crossing

Because we have a base point, we can classify crossings into types depending on the direction which the second arc going through the crossing crosses the first. This is shown in Figure 6. In the diagram in Figure 2 the types of A and B are a and the type of C is b . This defines a map π and we write $|A| = |B| = a$ and $|C| = b$.

The Gauss word and the map together give a nanoword representing the diagram. We can write the nanoword compactly as $ABCBAC:aab$ where the types are listed in alphabetical order of the letters in the Gauss word. In other words $ABCBAC:aab = ABCBAC:|A||B||C|$. Note that a virtual string surface diagram with no double points has an empty Gauss word and the map π is a map from the empty set to $\{a, b\}$. We write this nanoword compactly as 0 .

An isomorphism between two nanowords (w_1, π_1) and (w_2, π_2) is a bijection i between the sets of letters appearing in w_1 and w_2 such that i maps the n th letter of w_1 to the n th letter of w_2 for all n and for each letter X in w_1 , $\pi_1(X)$ is equal to $\pi_2(X)$. Informally, an isomorphism is just a relabelling of the crossings.

Turaev defined the following moves for nanowords. In these move descriptions, the upper case letters A, B and C represent arbitrary individual letters. The lower case letters x, y, z and t represent arbitrary sequences of letters such that both sides of each move are Gauss words.

Shift move:

$$AxAy \longleftrightarrow xByB,$$

where A and B map to opposite types.

Homotopy move 1 (H1):

$$xAAy \longleftrightarrow xy,$$

where A maps to a or b .

Homotopy move 2 (H2):

$$xAByBAz \longleftrightarrow xyz,$$

where A and B map to opposite types.

Homotopy move 3 (H3):

$$xAByACzBCt \longleftrightarrow xBAyCAzCBt,$$

where A , B and C all map to the same type.

Turaev derived some other moves from the moves H1, H2 and H3. We quote the moves here. The proofs appear in Lemmas 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 in [12].

Homotopy move 3a (H3a)

$$xAByCAzBCt \longleftrightarrow xBAyACzCBt,$$

where A and C map to the same type and B maps to the opposite type.

Homotopy move 3b (H3b)

$$xAByCAzCBt \longleftrightarrow xBAyACzBCt,$$

where A and B map to the same type and C maps to the opposite type.

Homotopy move 3c (H3c)

$$xAByACzCBt \longleftrightarrow xBAyCAzBCt,$$

where B and C map to the same type and A maps to the opposite type.

Homotopy move 2a (H2a)

$$xAByABz \longleftrightarrow xyz,$$

where A and B map to opposite types.

Remark 3.1. The set of homotopy moves on nanowords corresponds to the flat Reidemeister moves and all possible variants of those moves derived by changing orientations of arcs. See [3] for a detailed description of the correspondence between these sets of moves.

As for moves on virtual string surface diagrams, we collectively refer to any of the moves given above involving 1, 2 or 3 letters as 1-moves, 2-moves or 3-moves respectively.

Two nanowords are said to be homotopic if there exists a finite sequence of the moves H1, H2 and H3, shift moves and isotopies starting at one nanoword and finishing at the other. This defines an equivalence relation called homotopy. Turaev proved that there is a bijection between the equivalence classes of the set of nanowords under this relation and the set of virtual strings [11]. In particular this means that homotopy invariants of nanowords are invariants of virtual strings.

4. INVARIANTS

In this section we briefly describe three invariants of virtual strings defined by Turaev in [10], the u -polynomial, primitive based matrices and coverings.

In a given nanoword α we define the linking number of two distinct letters A and B as follows. If A and B alternate in α (that is α has the form $uAvBxAyBz$ or $uBvAxByAz$) then A and B are said to be linked. In any other cases A and B are said to be unlinked. When A and B are linked, we can use the shift move to transform the nanoword α into the form $uAvBxAyBz$, where $|A|$ is a . Then, if $|B|$ is a we say that B links A positively and if $|B|$ is b we say that B links A negatively. We define $l(A, B)$ as 0 if A and B are unlinked, 1 if B links A positively and -1 if B links A negatively. We define $l(X, X)$ to be 0 for all letters X in α .

Now for a letter X in α we define

$$n(X) = \sum_{Y \in \alpha} l(X, Y).$$

Next, for k an integer greater than or equal to one, we define

$$u_k(\alpha) = \#\{X \in \alpha \mid n(X) = k\} - \#\{X \in \alpha \mid n(X) = -k\},$$

where $\#$ indicates the number of elements in the set. We then define the u -polynomial of α as

$$u_\alpha(t) = \sum_{k \geq 1} u_k(\alpha)t^k.$$

Turaev showed that the u -polynomial is a homotopy invariant of α .

The second invariant we consider is the primitive based matrix invariant.

Given a virtual string Γ , we pick a virtual string surface diagram (S, D) which represents it. We label the crossings appearing in (S, D) and define G to be the set of crossing labels union a special element s . For each element g in G we define a curve which we denote g_c .

We define s_c to be the whole curve in (S, D) . Any other element g in G corresponds to a crossing X_g in (S, D) . We can always orient the crossing so that it appears as in the left of Figure 4. We then define g_c to be a curve on S parallel to the curve starting at X_g , leaving on the right hand outgoing arc, and returning to X_g on the right hand incoming arc.

We define a map b from $G \times G$ to \mathbb{Z} by using the curves we have defined. We define $b(g, h)$ to be equal to the number of real crossings for which h_c crosses g_c from right to left minus the number of real crossings for which h_c crosses g_c from left to right. This is just the homological intersection number of g_c with h_c . By the anti-symmetry in the definition it follows that b is skew-symmetric, that is $b(g, h) = -b(h, g)$ for all g and h in G . The *based matrix* of (S, D) is defined to be the triple (G, s, b) .

Two based matrices (G_1, s_1, b_1) and (G_2, s_2, b_2) are said to be *isomorphic* if there is a bijective map f from G_1 to G_2 which maps s_1 to s_2 and for which $b_1(g, h)$ equals $b_2(f(g), f(h))$ for all g and h in G_1 .

Turaev defined some moves on based matrices which allow us to derive smaller based matrices by removing one or two elements under specific conditions. A based matrix for which no moves are available is called *primitive*. By applying moves to the based matrix of virtual string surface diagram (S, D) , we can derive a primitive based matrix. Turaev proved that, up to isomorphism, this primitive based matrix is a homotopy invariant of the virtual string Γ which (S, D) represents [10].

Any invariant of the primitive based matrix of a virtual string Γ is thus an invariant of Γ . The simplest example of such an invariant is the size of the primitive based matrix. None of the moves on based matrices allows us to remove the special element s , and so all based matrices have size greater than or equal to one. We define $\rho(\Gamma)$ to be the size of the primitive based matrix of Γ minus 1. In [10], Turaev suggested some other invariants of primitive based matrices.

Turaev showed that the primitive based matrix of a virtual string determines the u -polynomial of the virtual string. In fact, the primitive based matrix invariant is stronger than the u -polynomial. Turaev showed this in [10] and it can also be seen in Section 7.

The third invariant we consider is a covering of a virtual string. For a nanoword α and a positive integer r we construct a new nanoword $\alpha^{(r)}$ by deleting all letters X in α where $n(X)$ is not equal to kr for some k in \mathbb{Z} . We call $\alpha^{(r)}$ the r -covering of α . In [10], Turaev showed that if α_1 and α_2 are homotopic nanowords then $\alpha_1^{(r)}$ and $\alpha_2^{(r)}$ must also be homotopic. This means that the r -covering of a virtual string Γ is well-defined and we write it as $\Gamma^{(r)}$. If α represents Γ , $\alpha^{(r)}$ represents $\Gamma^{(r)}$.

Remark 4.1. When r is 1, $\Gamma^{(1)}$ is equal to Γ for all virtual strings Γ . Thus in this case the operation of covering is just the identity operation.

5. CANONICAL DESCRIPTION OF PRIMITIVE BASED MATRICES

To effectively use primitive based matrices as an invariant of virtual strings we need an easy way to determine whether two primitive based matrices, P_1 and P_2 , of size n are isomorphic or not. In specific cases this may just be a simple case of observing that P_1 contains some integer x which does not appear in P_2 . However, in general, a systematic approach will be more useful.

One such approach would consist of testing all $(n - 1)!$ different bijections between the sets associated with P_1 and P_2 that map the special element in P_1 to the special element in P_2 , to see whether we have an isomorphism. One downside of this approach is that as n gets larger the number of bijections we have to consider increases exponentially. Another downside is that we have to repeat the process each time we want to compare P_2 to another based matrix.

The approach we have adopted is to find a canonical description for each based matrix. Two primitive based matrices are equivalent under isomorphism if and only if their canonical descriptions are the same. This description is easy to calculate by computer and two such descriptions are easy to compare even by hand. This section explains how the canonical description is calculated.

Let \mathcal{B}_n denote the set of equivalence classes of based matrices of size n under isomorphism. We will define an injective map ϕ from \mathcal{B}_n to \mathbb{Z}^k where k is $\frac{1}{2}n(n-1)$.

For a based matrix (G, s, b) , we can pick an ordering of the elements of G and then write b as a skew-symmetric matrix. When we write b in this way, by convention we always pick the special element s to be first in the ordering. Thus any based matrix can be written as a skew-symmetric matrix in up to $(n-1)!$ different ways.

We can define a map θ from the set of n by n skew-symmetric matrices \mathcal{S}_n to \mathbb{Z}^k as follows. Given a skew-symmetric matrix A with entries $a_{i,j}$ we map A to the k -tuple

$$(a_{2,1}, a_{3,1}, \dots, a_{n,1}, a_{3,2}, a_{4,2}, \dots, a_{n,2}, a_{4,3}, \dots, a_{n,n-1})$$

where we have listed the entries in the lower left triangular area, below the main diagonal. We list the entries in each column from top to bottom, starting from the left column. For example, if M is the skew-symmetric matrix

$$\begin{pmatrix} 0 & -1 & 2 & -1 \\ 1 & 0 & 2 & 0 \\ -2 & -2 & 0 & -1 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix},$$

then $\theta(M)$ is $(1, -2, 1, -2, 0, 1)$.

Note that given an element p in \mathbb{Z}^k we can use skew-symmetry to construct a unique skew-symmetric matrix A such that $\theta(A)$ is p . It is then easy to see that θ is a bijection.

Standard numerical order on \mathbb{Z} induces an order on \mathbb{Z}^k as follows. Assume p and q are different elements in \mathbb{Z}^k . We write p as (p_1, \dots, p_k) and q as (q_1, \dots, q_k) . We say p is less than q if there exists some i less than or equal to k such that p_i is less than q_i and for all j less than i , p_j and q_j are equal.

To get a canonical description of a based matrix we could just consider all $(n-1)!$ associated skew-symmetric matrices, take θ of each matrix and then take the minimal value in \mathbb{Z}^k . However, this means that we must consider $(n-1)!$ matrices for each based matrix. We take a different approach which, at the cost of some complexity, tries to reduce the number of matrices we have to consider. Of course, the canonical description we output depends on the approach that we take.

Our strategy is to break up the elements of the set associated with the based matrix P into equivalence classes, invariant under isomorphism, and then order

those equivalence classes in a way that is also invariant under isomorphism. Then we consider all possible permutations of elements within each equivalence class for all of the equivalence classes. If there are l such classes and the numbers of elements in each class are given by n_1, n_2, \dots, n_l then the total number of cases we consider is

$$\prod_{i=1}^l n_i!$$

which is bounded above by $(n-1)!$. In each case we get a skew-symmetric matrix A and we can calculate $\theta(A)$. We then take the minimal value of $\theta(A)$ in \mathbb{Z}^k over all the cases and set this to be $\phi(P)$. As the equivalence classes and the order on them are invariant under isomorphism and we take the minimal value over all possible cases, it is clear that $\phi(P)$ is injective. That is, if $\phi(P_1)$ equals $\phi(P_2)$, P_1 and P_2 must be isomorphic as based matrices.

We note that in the best case we may end up with equivalence classes each only containing a single element. In the worst case we may just have a single equivalence class containing all the elements.

We now define an equivalence relation on the elements in the set associated with a based matrix (G, s, b) . As by convention the element s always comes first in the matrix we just need to consider the other elements.

We use two properties of an element g in G which are invariant under isomorphism. The first property is simply the value $b(g, s)$. Considering an isomorphism f from (G, s, b) to (G', s', b') , we have

$$b(g, s) = b'(f(g), f(s)) = b'(f(g), s'),$$

which shows invariance under isomorphism.

The second is a map m_g from \mathbb{Z} to $\mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}$. It is defined as follows

$$m_g(i) = \#\{h \in G - \{s\} \mid b(g, h) = i\}$$

where $\#$ indicates the number of elements in the set. We check how m_g behaves under the isomorphism f defined above. As f is a bijection, for each h in $G' - \{s'\}$ there exists exactly one k in $G - \{s\}$ such that $f(k)$ is h . By the definition of isomorphism we also have $b(g, k) = b'(f(g), f(k))$. Putting these together we get

$$\begin{aligned} m_{f(g)}(i) &= \#\{h \in G' - \{s'\} \mid b'(f(g), h) = i\} \\ &= \#\{k \in G - \{s\} \mid b'(f(g), f(k)) = i\} \\ &= \#\{k \in G - \{s\} \mid b(g, k) = i\} \\ &= m_g(i). \end{aligned}$$

This shows that m_g is invariant under isomorphism.

We note there are a finite number of non-zero values of $m_g(i)$. Say there are l of them. Then we can represent m_g as l pairs of the form $(i, m_g(i))$. We use the first element in each pair to sort the pairs so that i increases as we go through the list. By concatenating the pairs into a $2l$ -tuple we can summarise m_g uniquely.

As an example, suppose $m_g(2) = 1$, $m_g(-1) = 2$, $m_g(0) = 3$ and $m_g(i) = 0$ for all other values of i . Then just considering the non-zero values we get the pairs $(2, 1)$, $(-1, 2)$ and $(0, 3)$. Sorting these we get $(-1, 2)$, $(0, 3)$ and $(2, 1)$. Concatenating gives the 6-tuple $(-1, 2, 0, 3, 2, 1)$.

If $p = (p_i)$ is a k -tuple and $q = (q_i)$ is an l -tuple, we say p is less than q if there exists a j such that p_j is less than q_j and p_i equals q_i for all i less than j , or p_i equals q_i for all i less than or equal to k and k is less than l . We can then define an ordering on the maps m_g by saying m_g is less than m_h if the tuple associated with m_g is less than the tuple associated with m_h .

We define our equivalence relation on $G - \{s\}$ by saying that g and h are equivalent if and only if $b(g, s)$ is equal to $b(h, s)$ and $m_g(i)$ is equal to $m_h(i)$ for all i . We write $[g]$ for the equivalence class of g under this relation. We can then define an ordering on the equivalence classes in $G - \{s\}$ by saying that $[g]$ is less than $[h]$ if $b(g, s)$ is less than $b(h, s)$, or if $b(g, s)$ is equal to $b(h, s)$ and m_g is less than m_h .

To conclude this section we calculate ϕ of a based matrix as an example.

Example 5.1. Let (G, s, b) be a based matrix, where G is $\{s, A, B, C\}$ and the table

	s	A	B	C
s	0	-1	2	-1
A	1	0	2	0
B	-2	-2	0	-1
C	1	0	1	0

defines b .

As $b(B, s)$ is -2 and $b(A, s)$ and $b(C, s)$ are both 1, B is in a different equivalence class to A and C . In particular $[B]$ is less than $[A]$ and $[C]$.

The map m_A is given by $m_A(0) = 2$, $m_A(2) = 1$ and $m_A(i) = 0$ for all other i . We summarise this as the 4-tuple $(0, 2, 2, 1)$. The map m_C is given by $m_C(0) = 2$, $m_C(1) = 1$ and $m_C(i) = 0$ for all other i . We summarise this as the 4-tuple $(0, 2, 1, 1)$. Comparing the two tuples we see that the one for C is less than the one for A and so $[C]$ is less than $[A]$.

In this case we are able to order the letters completely. The order we get is s, B, C, A . The corresponding matrix is

$$\begin{pmatrix} 0 & 2 & -1 & -1 \\ -2 & 0 & -1 & -2 \\ 1 & 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 1 & 2 & 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix},$$

and so $\phi((G, s, b))$ is $(-2, 1, 1, 1, 2, 0)$.

6. ALGORITHM FOR ENUMERATION

For any given non-negative integer n our aim is to enumerate all distinct virtual strings with minimal crossing number equal to n . We give an algorithm to do this by using nanowords. Before explaining the algorithm we make some definitions.

An *alphabet* \mathcal{A} is a finite ordered set. We call the elements of \mathcal{A} *letters*. We call the ordering on \mathcal{A} *alphabetical order*. For use in examples below we define \mathcal{B} to be the 3 letter alphabet $\{A, B, C\}$ with the standard alphabetical order.

A Gauss word on an alphabet \mathcal{A} is a sequence of letters in \mathcal{A} where each letter of \mathcal{A} appears exactly twice. If \mathcal{A} has n letters, a Gauss word on \mathcal{A} necessarily has $2n$ letters. For example, $BBAA$ and $CACBCA$ are not Gauss words on \mathcal{B} , but $BCACBA$ is.

Note that the ordering on \mathcal{A} induces an ordering on Gauss words on \mathcal{A} . Given two Gauss words on \mathcal{A} , u and v , we compare initial sequences of letters in the words until we find the first pair of letters that differ. The order of u and v are determined by the order of the differing letters. If there is no such differing pair, u and v are the same Gauss word. As with the ordering on the letters in \mathcal{A} , we call this ordering on Gauss words *alphabetical order*. As an example, $BCACBA$ comes before $BCCABA$ and after $BCACAB$ in the alphabetical order induced by \mathcal{B} .

Two Gauss words w and x on \mathcal{A} are said to be *isomorphic* if there exists a bijection f from \mathcal{A} to itself such that x is the result of applying f letterwise to w . For example $CBAACB$ is isomorphic to $ABCCAB$ by the bijection mapping C to A , B to B and A to C . It is clear that isomorphism defines an equivalence relation on the set of Gauss words on a fixed alphabet \mathcal{A} .

We say that a Gauss word w on \mathcal{A} is *increasing* if the first occurrence of each letter of \mathcal{A} in w appears in alphabetical order. For example, on \mathcal{B} the Gauss word $ABACBC$ is increasing and the Gauss word $CACBAB$ is not.

Lemma 6.1. *Given an alphabet \mathcal{A} , every Gauss word on \mathcal{A} is isomorphic to an increasing Gauss word on \mathcal{A} .*

Proof. Assume \mathcal{A} has n letters. We write N for the set $\{1, 2, \dots, n\}$. Then the order on \mathcal{A} gives a bijection o which maps N to \mathcal{A} . For example, for \mathcal{B} , $o(1) = A$, $o(2) = B$ and $o(3) = C$.

Given a Gauss word w on \mathcal{A} , we can define a map p from N to \mathcal{A} by defining $p(i)$ to be the i th new letter in w . For example, with \mathcal{B} as above, p for the Gauss word $CACBAB$ is given by $p(1) = C$, $p(2) = A$ and $p(3) = B$.

As a Gauss word on \mathcal{A} contains all letters in \mathcal{A} , p must be surjective. As $p(i)$ is the i th new letter in the Gauss word, $p(i) = p(j)$ implies $i = j$ and so p is injective. Thus p is bijective.

We define a map f from \mathcal{A} to \mathcal{A} by setting

$$f(X) = o(p^{-1}(X)).$$

As o and p are bijections, so is f . We can thus apply f letterwise to the Gauss word w to get an isomorphic Gauss word w' . In w' the i th new letter will be

$$f(p(i)) = o(p^{-1}(p(i))) = o(i).$$

Thus the first occurrence of each letter in w' appears in alphabetical order and so w' is increasing. \square

A nanoword on \mathcal{A} is a Gauss word on \mathcal{A} with a map from \mathcal{A} to $\{a, b\}$. By Lemma 6.1 we need only deal with nanowords that have increasing Gauss words. Whenever we apply a shift move or a homotopy move to a nanoword α to get a nanoword β that does not have an increasing Gauss word, we can apply an isomorphism to β to get a nanoword with an increasing Gauss word.

As \mathcal{A} contains a finite number of letters, the set of nanowords on \mathcal{A} up to isomorphism is finite. We give an explicit calculation of its size here. If \mathcal{A} has n letters, the number of different Gauss words on \mathcal{A} is given by

$$\frac{(2n)!}{2^n}.$$

We note that each equivalence class of Gauss words on \mathcal{A} under isomorphism contains $n!$ words. This is because the order of the first occurrence of each letter of \mathcal{A} in the Gauss word determines the Gauss word within the equivalence class. Thus the number of increasing Gauss words on \mathcal{A} is

$$\frac{(2n)!}{n!2^n}.$$

The number of nanowords on \mathcal{A} with a given Gauss word is equal to the number of maps from \mathcal{A} to $\{a, b\}$. This is just 2^n . Thus the total number of nanowords on \mathcal{A} with increasing Gauss words, and thus the total number of nanowords on \mathcal{A} up to isomorphism is

$$\frac{(2n)!}{n!}.$$

We define the 3 -class of a nanoword α as the equivalence class under shift moves and 3-moves. We write $[\alpha]_3$ for the 3-class of α .

A *type word* is a sequence of letters in the set $\{a, b\}$. By defining a to be less than b , we can define an order on type words in the same way as we defined an order on Gauss words. Given a nanoword α on \mathcal{A} , we consider each letter of \mathcal{A} in alphabetical order. For each letter we write the type of that letter in α . The concatenation of the resultant sequence of letters is defined to be the type word of a nanoword α on \mathcal{A} . For example, the type word of the nanoword $ABACBC:aab$ on \mathcal{B} is aab .

We define an order on nanowords on \mathcal{A} in the following way. We say that α is less than β if its Gauss word is less than that of β , or if the Gauss words of α and β are equal and the type word of α is less than that of β . So, for example, $ABACBC:bba$ is less than $ABCBCA:aab$ but greater than $ABACBC:aab$.

We say that a nanoword α is *alphabetically minimal* in $[\alpha]_3$ if there does not exist a nanoword β less than α such that $[\beta]_3$ is equal to $[\alpha]_3$.

We say that a nanoword is *reducible* if there exists a crossing reducing 1-move or 2-move which can be applied to the nanoword. We say that the 3-class of a nanoword α is *reducible* if there exists a reducible nanoword β such that $[\beta]_3$ is equal to $[\alpha]_3$. A nanoword or a 3-class is *irreducible* if it is not reducible.

To generate all the virtual string candidates with n crossings we first pick some ordered set of n elements \mathcal{A} . We could just use the set of integers from 1 to n . However, to display the nanowords in compact form it is useful to be able to represent each letter in the alphabet with a single character. Thus, when n is less than or equal to 26, we use the initial n letters of the 26 letter English alphabet and inherit the usual ordering.

The generating algorithm works in the following way:

1. Enumerate all increasing Gauss words on \mathcal{A} .
2. For each Gauss word in the list we consider all possible assignments of the crossing types a and b to the n letters. This gives us 2^n possible nanowords for each Gauss word.
3. For each nanoword α in the list, we generate the set of elements in equivalence class of α under shift and 3-moves.
4. If α is not alphabetically minimal in the equivalence class, we discard α and then consider the next nanoword in the list.
5. If any nanoword in the equivalence class is reducible, we discard α and then consider the next nanoword in the list.
6. Add α to the list of virtual string candidates and then consider the next nanoword in the list.

We note that Step 4 is required to prevent duplicates appearing in the list. Step 5 is required to check for minimality of the crossing number. If α is homotopic to a reducible n letter nanoword β then α is homotopic to some nanoword β' with less than n crossings. Thus the minimal crossing number of the virtual string represented by α is less than n .

We note that there are ways to optimise the algorithm. We consider two simple ways here.

Firstly we can reduce the number of nanowords that we have to consider. Let w be a Gauss word of the form $yXXz$ for some letter X and some (possibly empty) sequences of letters y and z . When we derive a nanoword α from w by assigning crossing types, no matter whether we assign type a or type b to X , α will be reducible by a 1-move. We can either avoid generating such Gauss words, or eliminate them as they are generated during Step 1.

Secondly we can make the checks in Step 4 and Step 5 as we generate the set of elements in the equivalence class of a nanoword α in Step 3. If we generate a

nanoword β that is alphabetically less than α or is reducible, we can discard α straight away. There is no need to continue calculating the 3-class.

Once we have a list of virtual string candidates for minimal crossing number n we need to determine whether they are distinct from each other and whether they are distinct from virtual string candidates of smaller minimal crossing number. One approach is to use virtual string invariants and we consider this in the next section.

7. RESULTS OF ENUMERATION

It is clear that there is a unique virtual string with 0 crossings. Methodical examination of nanowords of 1 and 2 letters shows that they are all homotopic to the trivial nanoword. Thus there are no virtual strings with minimum crossing number of 1 or 2. For 3 letters we use the algorithm to get the following two nanowords $ABACBC:aab$ and $ABACBC:abb$. We can calculate the u -polynomials of these nanowords. For the trivial virtual string the u -polynomial is 0. For $ABACBC:aab$, the u -polynomial is $2t - t^2$. For $ABACBC:abb$, the u -polynomial is $t^2 - 2t$. Thus these three nanowords are all mutually non-homotopic. Thus the number of virtual strings with minimum crossing number 3 is 2. Turaev has already pointed out this fact in [10].

When we consider virtual strings with minimum crossing number of 4 we find examples of strings that cannot be distinguished by the u -polynomial alone. For example, the nanowords $ABACBDCD:abab$ and $ABCADCBD:aaab$ have u -polynomial 0 which is the same as the trivial virtual string. However, the primitive based matrices of these two nanowords are different to each other and different to the primitive based matrix of the trivial virtual string. This implies that the virtual strings they represent are all distinct.

For minimum crossing number of 4 we used a computer to find 26 virtual string candidates. We can show that these are all distinct from each other and from the 3 virtual strings of lower minimum crossing number by using primitive based matrices. We show the results in Table 1. As far as we are aware, the total of 26 for minimum crossing number of 4 was previously unknown. We summarise the number of distinct virtual strings for minimum crossing number of 4 or less in Table 2.

We can calculate the coverings of the virtual strings in Table 1. All of the virtual strings in the table except for one have trivial r -coverings for all r other than 1. The exception is 4_{26} which is fixed under 2-covering. For r not 1 or 2 its r -coverings are also trivial.

Given a virtual string surface diagram (S, D) , we can define a virtual string surface diagram $(-S, D)$ where $-S$ is S with the orientation reversed. We can think of $(-S, D)$ as a mirror image of (S, D) . It is easy to see that if (S_1, D_1) and (S_2, D_2) are homotopic virtual string surface diagrams then $(-S_1, D_1)$ is homotopic to $(-S_2, D_2)$. Thus, for a virtual string Γ represented by a virtual

ID	Nanoword	$u(t)$	ρ	Based matrix
0 ₁	0	0	0	0
3 ₁	ABACBC:aab	$-t^2 + 2t$	3	-2, 1, 1, 1, 2, 0
3 ₂	ABACBC:abb	$t^2 - 2t$	3	-1, -1, 2, 0, 2, 1
4 ₁	ABABCDCD:aaaa	0	4	-1, -1, 1, 1, 0, 1, 0, 0, 1, 0
4 ₂	ABABCDCD:aabb	0	4	-1, -1, 1, 1, -1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1
4 ₃	ABABCDCD:bbbb	0	4	-1, -1, 1, 1, 0, 1, 2, 2, 1, 0
4 ₄	ABACBDCD:aaaa	0	4	-1, 0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 0, -1, 1, 1
4 ₅	ABACBDCD:aaab	$-t^2 + 2t$	4	-2, 0, 1, 1, 1, 2, 1, 1, 1, 1
4 ₆	ABACBDCD:aaba	$-t^2 + 2t$	4	-2, 0, 1, 1, 2, 1, 1, 1, 0, 0
4 ₇	ABACBDCD:abaa	$t^2 - 2t$	4	-1, -1, 0, 2, 0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 2
4 ₈	ABACBDCD:abab	0	4	-1, 0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 1, 0, 0, 0
4 ₉	ABACBDCD:abba	0	4	-2, -1, 1, 2, 0, 1, 3, 0, 1, 0
4 ₁₀	ABACBDCD:abbb	$t^2 - 2t$	4	-1, -1, 0, 2, -1, 0, 2, 0, 1, 1
4 ₁₁	ABACBDCD:baaa	$t^2 - 2t$	4	-1, -1, 0, 2, -1, 1, 2, 1, 1, 1
4 ₁₂	ABACBDCD:baab	0	4	-2, -1, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, 2, 1
4 ₁₃	ABACBDCD:baba	0	4	-1, 0, 0, 1, 0, 0, 1, 0, 1, 1
4 ₁₄	ABACBDCD:babb	$t^2 - 2t$	4	-1, -1, 0, 2, 0, 1, 2, 0, 2, 0
4 ₁₅	ABACBDCD:bbab	$-t^2 + 2t$	4	-2, 0, 1, 1, 0, 2, 2, 1, 0, 0
4 ₁₆	ABACBDCD:bbba	$-t^2 + 2t$	4	-2, 0, 1, 1, 1, 2, 1, 0, 0, 1
4 ₁₇	ABACBDCD:bbbb	0	4	-1, 0, 0, 1, 0, 0, 2, 1, 0, 0
4 ₁₈	ABACDBCD:aabb	$-t^3 + t^2 + t$	4	-3, 0, 1, 2, 2, 1, 3, 0, 1, 0
4 ₁₉	ABACDBCD:abbb	$t^3 - t^2 - t$	4	-2, -1, 0, 3, 0, 1, 3, 0, 1, 2
4 ₂₀	ABACDBCD:baaa	$t^3 - t^2 - t$	4	-2, -1, 0, 3, 1, 1, 2, 1, 3, 1
4 ₂₁	ABACDBCD:baaa	$-t^3 + t^2 + t$	4	-3, 0, 1, 2, 1, 3, 2, 1, 1, 1
4 ₂₂	ABACDBCD:aabb	$-t^3 + 3t$	4	-3, 1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 3, 0, 0, 0
4 ₂₃	ABACDBCD:abbb	$t^3 - 3t$	4	-1, -1, -1, 3, 0, 0, 3, 0, 2, 1
4 ₂₄	ABCADBCD:aaab	$-t^3 + 2t^2 - t$	4	-3, -1, 2, 2, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 0
4 ₂₅	ABCADBCD:abbb	$t^3 - 2t^2 + t$	4	-2, -2, 1, 3, 0, 2, 3, 1, 2, 1
4 ₂₆	ABCADBCD:aaab	0	4	-2, -2, 2, 2, 0, 2, 3, 1, 2, 0

TABLE 1. Virtual strings up to 4 crossings

Crossings	Number
0	1
1	0
2	0
3	2
4	26

TABLE 2. Numbers of virtual strings

string surface diagram (S, D) , we can define the mirror of Γ to be the virtual

string represented by $(-S, D)$. We write this virtual string $\bar{\Gamma}$. As swapping the orientation on a surface twice gets us back to the original surface, this reflection operation is an involution. Thus $\bar{\bar{\Gamma}}$ is Γ .

Similarly, given a virtual string surface diagram (S, D) , we write $-D$ to denote D with its orientation reversed. We then define $(S, -D)$ to be the inverse of (S, D) . Again, this operation is well-defined under homotopy. Thus, for a virtual string Γ represented by (S, D) , we can define the inverse of Γ , $-\Gamma$, to be the virtual string represented by $(S, -D)$. As the inverse of $(S, -D)$ is (S, D) , $-(-\Gamma)$ is Γ .

The two operations, reflection and inversion, are commutative. We can compose these two operations to get the mirror inverse of Γ , written $-\bar{\Gamma}$.

Given a nanoword α representing a virtual string Γ it is easy to calculate nanowords representing $-\Gamma$, $\bar{\Gamma}$ and $-\bar{\Gamma}$. Swapping the type of each letter in α derives a new nanoword $\text{swap}(\alpha)$ which represents $\bar{\Gamma}$. We define $-\alpha$ to be the nanoword given by reversing the order of the letters in the Gauss word of α and swapping the types of the letters. Then $-\alpha$ represents $-\Gamma$ and $-\text{swap}(\alpha)$ represents $-\bar{\Gamma}$.

Usually, when tables of classical knots are given, reflections and inversions of knots are considered to be the same knot type. It is therefore natural to define an unoriented equivalence of virtual strings where Γ , $-\Gamma$, $\bar{\Gamma}$ and $-\bar{\Gamma}$ are considered to be the same. Table 3 lists distinct virtual strings under this unoriented equivalence and indicates which virtual strings from Table 1 are derived under the operations of reflection, inversion and reflected inversion. Under this kind of equivalence there is 1 virtual string with no crossings, 1 virtual string with minimal crossing number 3 and 11 virtual strings with minimal crossing number 4.

We note that the homotopy types of some virtual strings are unchanged under some operations. We call a virtual string Γ *invertible* if Γ is homotopic to $-\Gamma$ and *noninvertible* if it is not. We call a virtual string Γ *amphicheiral* if Γ is homotopic to $\bar{\Gamma}$ or $-\bar{\Gamma}$ and *chiral* if it is not. A virtual string Γ which is homotopic to $\bar{\Gamma}$ is called *positive amphicheiral* (sometimes written *+amphicheiral*). A virtual string Γ which is homotopic to $-\bar{\Gamma}$ is called *negative amphicheiral* (sometimes written *-amphicheiral*). If a virtual string Γ is amphicheiral and invertible we call it *fully amphicheiral*.

We can thus classify virtual strings into five different types depending on their behaviour under the three operations, reflection, inversion and reflected inversion. This classification is summarised in Table 4. Note that the list is complete because if two different operations do not change the homotopy type of the virtual string, the third operation cannot either. We remark that symmetries of classical knots also can be classified into five different types depending on whether the knot is equivalent or not to its mirror image, inversion or the mirror image of its inversion. This is discussed in a paper by Hoste, Thistlethwaite and Weeks [4]. We have

Virtual String	Mirror	Inverse	Mirror-Inverse	Symmetry Type
0	=	=	=	a
3 ₁	=	3 ₂	3 ₂	+
4 ₁	4 ₃	4 ₃	=	-
4 ₂	=	=	=	a
4 ₄	4 ₁₇	4 ₁₇	=	-
4 ₅	4 ₁₆	4 ₁₀	4 ₁₁	c
4 ₆	4 ₁₅	4 ₁₄	4 ₇	c
4 ₈	4 ₁₃	=	4 ₁₃	i
4 ₉	4 ₁₂	4 ₁₂	=	-
4 ₁₈	4 ₂₁	4 ₂₀	4 ₁₉	c
4 ₂₂	=	4 ₂₃	4 ₂₃	+
4 ₂₄	=	4 ₂₅	4 ₂₅	+
4 ₂₆	=	=	=	a

TABLE 3. Virtual strings under reflection and inversion. Here ‘=’ means the homotopy type of the virtual string is unchanged by the operation.

used their terminology to describe these symmetry types and Table 4 is based on a table from their paper.

Virtual strings of all five types do actually exist. The final column in Table 3 indicates the type of each virtual string.

Type	Unchanged Under	Description
c	None	Chiral, noninvertible
i	Inversion only	Chiral, invertible
+	Reflection only	+Amphicheiral, noninvertible
-	Inverted reflection only	-Amphicheiral, noninvertible
a	All	Amphicheiral, invertible

TABLE 4. Classification of virtual strings by their behaviour under reflection, inversion and reflected inversion.

When we consider virtual strings with minimum crossing number of 5, primitive based matrices are no longer enough to distinguish distinct virtual strings. We now give an example of a pair of virtual strings having minimum crossing number 5 which cannot be distinguished by their primitive based matrices. We show that they are different by considering their 2-coverings.

We write α for the the nanoword $ABACBDEDCE:baabb$ and β for the nanoword $ABACDECDBE:bbaaa$. The primitive based matrices for these two nanowords are isomorphic. As the u -polynomial is derived from the primitive based matrix, the u -polynomials for α and β are equal. In fact, $u_\alpha(t) = u_\beta(t) = 0$.

We will now calculate the 2-covering of α and β . In each case we will remove letters X for which $n(X)$ is odd.

For α we have $n(A) = -1, n(B) = 2, n(C) = -2, n(D) = 1$ and $n(E) = 0$. We remove the letters A and D to get $BCBECE:aab$ which represents $\alpha^{(2)}$. It is then easy to calculate that the u -polynomial of $\alpha^{(2)}$ is $-t^2 + 2t$. Thus $\alpha^{(2)}$ is non-trivial. In fact, since the nanoword we obtained only has 3 letters we can use Table 1 to identify $\alpha^{(2)}$ as the virtual string 3_1 .

For β we have $n(A) = 1, n(B) = -2, n(C) = 2, n(D) = 0$ and $n(E) = -1$. We remove the letters A and E to get $BCDCDB:baa$ which represents $\beta^{(2)}$. Calculating the u -polynomial of $\beta^{(2)}$, we find that it is 0. Using Table 1 it is clear $\beta^{(2)}$ is trivial. Thus $\alpha^{(2)}$ and $\beta^{(2)}$ are not homotopic and this implies that α and β are not homotopic either.

Nanoword	Based matrix	2-covering
ABACBDECDE:abbbb	$-2, -1, 0, 1, 2, -1, 1, 1, 3, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0$	0
ABACDECEBD:aaaba	$-2, -1, 0, 1, 2, -1, 1, 1, 3, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0$	3_2
ABACBDEDCE:aaaab	$-2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 0, 1, 1, 3, 0, 0, 1, 1, 1, -1$	3_1
ABACDECEBD:aabbb	$-2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 0, 1, 1, 3, 0, 0, 1, 1, 1, -1$	0
ABACBDEDCE:baabb	$-2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 1, 1, 2, 1, 1, 2, 2, 0, 1, 2$	3_1
ABACDECEBD:bbaaa	$-2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 1, 1, 2, 1, 1, 2, 2, 0, 1, 2$	0
ABACBDECDE:baaaa	$-2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 2, 1, 2, 1, 0, 2, 2, 1, 1, 1$	0
ABACDECEBD:baabb	$-2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 2, 1, 2, 1, 0, 2, 2, 1, 1, 1$	3_2

TABLE 5. Pairs of virtual strings with 5 crossings that can be distinguished by coverings but not by their primitive based matrices.

In fact, for virtual strings of 5 crossings, including the example given above, there are four pairs of virtual strings which have the same primitive based matrices but can be distinguished by coverings. We list them in Table 5.

In our enumeration of virtual strings with 5 crossings we discovered 8 pairs and a triplet of nanowords which cannot be distinguished by the u -polynomial, primitive based matrices or coverings. We list these nanowords in Table 6. All the nanowords in the list have trivial u -polynomial and trivial r -covering for any r other than 1. Of course, it is possible that each pair or triplet of nanowords are actually homotopic to each other, in which case it would be no surprise that their invariants are identical. However, we have not yet found a sequence of homotopy moves relating any pair of nanowords in the list. It is also possible that there is another invariant we can use to distinguish the nanowords. For example, we

Nanoword	ρ	Based matrix
ABABCDCD:aabb	4	-1, -1, 1, 1, -1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1
ABABCDCDE:bbaba	4	-1, -1, 1, 1, -1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1
ABABCDCDE:aabab	4	-1, -1, 1, 1, -1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1
ABABCDCD:aaaa	4	-1, -1, 1, 1, 0, 1, 0, 0, 1, 0
ABABCDCDE:aaaba	4	-1, -1, 1, 1, 0, 1, 0, 0, 1, 0
ABABCDCD:bbbb	4	-1, -1, 1, 1, 0, 1, 2, 2, 1, 0
ABABCDCDE:bbbab	4	-1, -1, 1, 1, 0, 1, 2, 2, 1, 0
ABACBDCD:bbbb	4	-1, 0, 0, 1, 0, 0, 2, 1, 0, 0
ABACBDCDE:babab	4	-1, 0, 0, 1, 0, 0, 2, 1, 0, 0
ABACBDCD:aaaa	4	-1, 0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 0, -1, 1, 1
ABACBDCDE:ababa	4	-1, 0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 0, -1, 1, 1
ABACBDCD:abba	4	-2, -1, 1, 2, 0, 1, 3, 0, 1, 0
ABCADBECDE:bbbb	4	-2, -1, 1, 2, 0, 1, 3, 0, 1, 0
ABACBDCD:baab	4	-2, -1, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, 2, 1
ABCADBECDE:aaaa	4	-2, -1, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, 2, 1
ABACDBDECE:abbab	5	-1, -1, 0, 1, 1, -1, 0, 1, 1, 0, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1
ABACDBECED:ababb	5	-1, -1, 0, 1, 1, -1, 0, 1, 1, 0, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1
ABACDBDECE:abaab	5	-1, -1, 0, 1, 1, -1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 0, 0, 1
ABACDBECED:babaa	5	-1, -1, 0, 1, 1, -1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 0, 0, 1

TABLE 6. Groups of nanowords with 5 letters that cannot be distinguished by primitive based matrices or coverings. It is an open question as to whether they are homotopic to each other within each group.

have not considered the invariants derived from Weyl algebras defined by Fenn and Turaev in [2].

8. KADOKAMI'S STATEMENT

We defined a virtual string surface diagram as an oriented circle immersed in a surface with self-intersections limited to transverse double points. We can generalize this definition by allowing multiple oriented circles to be immersed in the plane. For a natural number n we define an n -component virtual string surface diagram to be a pair (S, D) where S is a surface and D is the immersion of n oriented circles immersed in S with self-intersections limited to transverse

double points. In this section we just consider virtual string surface diagrams with a finite number of double points. As before we can define an equivalence relation on such diagrams by stable homeomorphisms and homotopy moves. We define an n -component virtual string to be an equivalence class of such diagrams under this equivalence relation. Note that, since applying stable homeomorphisms or homotopy moves to an n -component virtual string surface diagram does not change the number of components, the number of components is invariant under this equivalence relation.

We note that, just as for the single component case, we can also define n -component virtual strings via planar diagrams of n curves where virtual crossings are permitted. There is also a representation for n -component virtual string diagrams which corresponds to the nanoword representation. Details of this representation can be found in [11].

From now on, in this section we will simply write *diagram* to mean a virtual string surface diagram with one or more components.

Given a diagram (S, D) , we can cut out the regular neighbourhood $N(D)$ of D in S . As S is oriented, $N(D)$ is an oriented surface with one or more boundaries. To each boundary of $N(D)$ we attach a disk. The result is an oriented surface S' in which D is embedded. Then (S', D) is a diagram which is stably homeomorphic to (S, D) . The surface S' is called the *canonical surface* for D . This surface has the minimum genus over all surfaces on which D can be drawn without needing virtual crossings. The construction of this surface is well known. For example, it is mentioned in [6] and [10].

We note that if there is a 1-move, 3-move or crossing reducing 2-move that can be made on a diagram (S, D) , the move can also be made on the diagram (S', D) where S' is the canonical surface for D . This is because the moves can be drawn on the plane without requiring virtual crossings. In some cases a crossing introducing 2-move necessitates adding a handle to the surface. Kadokami explains this further in [6].

We say that two diagrams are in the same *3-class* if they are related by a finite sequence of 3-moves and stable homeomorphisms.

We say that a diagram is *reducible* if it is stably homeomorphic to a diagram to which we can apply a crossing reducing 1-move or 2-move. We say that a diagram is *reduced* if it is not reducible and it is not in the same 3-class as a reducible diagram.

In [6], Kadokami makes the following statement (his Theorem 3.8) which we paraphrase to use terminology from this paper.

Statement 8.1. *For any n , two reduced homotopic n -component diagrams are in the same 3-class.*

In the case where n is 1 we can interpret this as follows. If α and β are nanowords representing the same virtual string and both nanowords are in irreducible 3-classes, α and β are in the same irreducible 3-class. In other words,

Statement 8.2. *A virtual string is represented by a unique irreducible 3-class.*

If true, Statement 8.2 would imply that all nanowords generated in the computer enumeration of virtual string candidates are in fact distinct. This is because the computer enumeration searches for irreducible 3-classes and only outputs the minimal nanoword in each such class. The statement implies that we can complete the enumeration without having to calculate invariants. The statement also implies that to discover whether two nanowords α and β are homotopic, it is enough to find the corresponding irreducible 3-class in each case and compare them. Nanowords α and β are homotopic if and only if their irreducible 3-classes are the same.

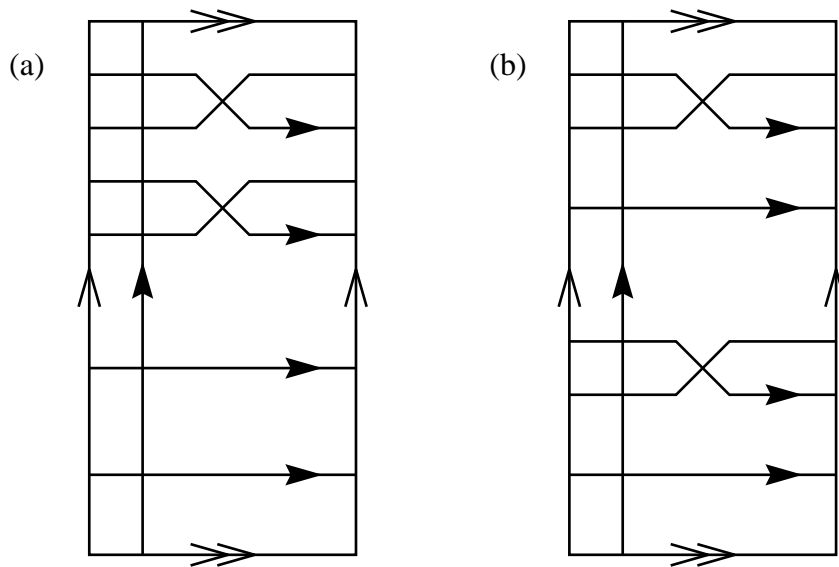


FIGURE 7. A pair of five component diagrams each drawn on a torus. In each case the torus is formed by identifying opposite edges of the rectangle according to the arrows.

Unfortunately, there is a problem. We have found a counter-example for the multiple component case. We have the following proposition.

Proposition 8.3. *The two diagrams in Figure 7 form a counter-example to Statement 8.1.*

Proof. To show that this is indeed a counter-example we must first check that the two diagrams are not isomorphic. That is, we need to establish that the diagrams are actually distinct. Secondly, we should check that the diagrams are homotopic. Thirdly, we need to show that the two diagrams are reduced. Together these show that the two diagrams satisfy the conditions of Statement 8.1. If the statement is true then the diagrams should be related by a sequence of 3-moves. We will

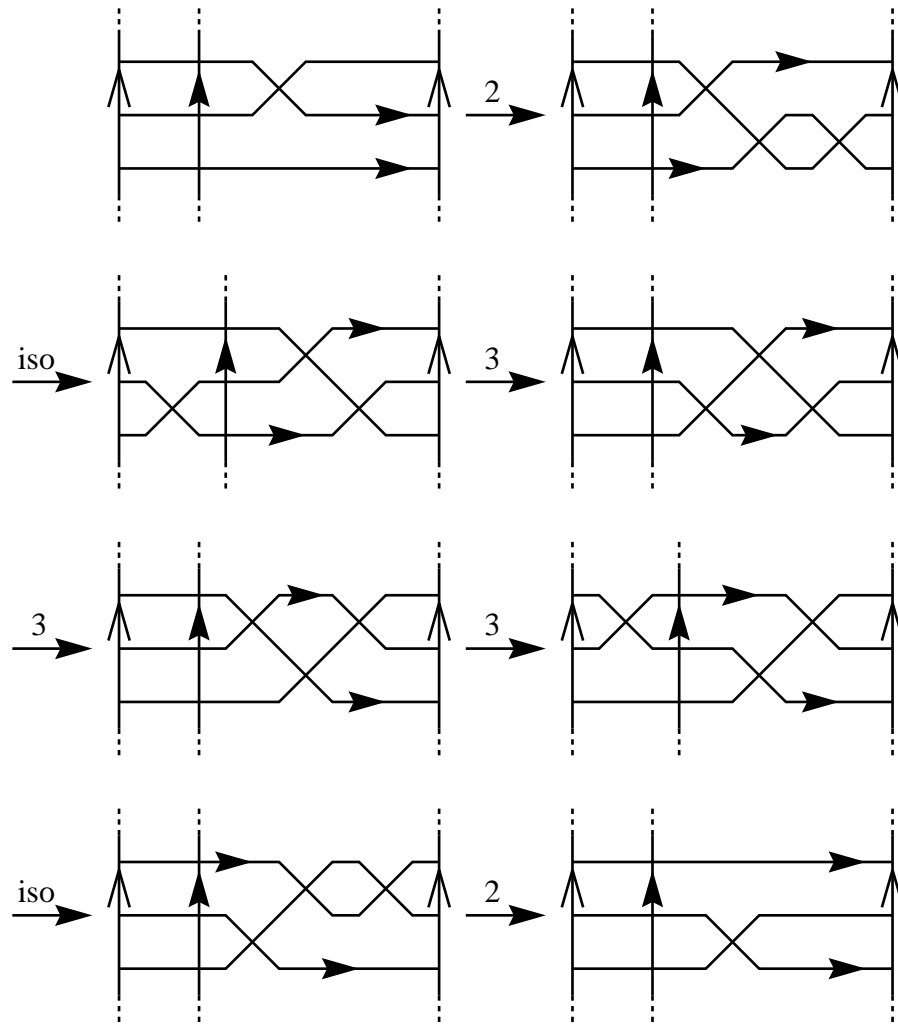


FIGURE 8. A sequence of homotopy moves showing how to swap the positions of two components. In each diagram the left and right edges are identified to make a cylinder. Labels on the arrows between the diagrams indicate which kind of move was used. Here ‘iso’ means isotopy achieved by pushing a crossing across the identified edges.

show that this is not the case by showing that the two diagrams are in different 3-classes.

To check that there is not an isomorphism between the two diagrams we consider the vertical component in each diagram. It is the only component that intersects with all the other components in each diagram. We now note that in each diagram there are exactly two components with which the vertical component intersects only once. We consider the two points of intersection between

these three components. Notice that in Figure 7(a) these two points are joined by an edge. This property is preserved under isomorphism. However, in Figure 7(b) the two points are not joined by an edge. So there cannot be an isomorphism between the two diagrams and they are indeed distinct.

The sequence of diagrams in Figure 8 show how these two diagrams are related by a sequence of homotopy moves. Thus the two diagrams are homotopic. Note that in this sequence we have to use a 2-move to temporarily increase the number of crossings and later another 2-move to reduce them again.

Both diagrams in Figure 7 are drawn on their canonical surfaces. In each diagram the curves divide the surface up into regions. For each region we can count the number of edges. If there was a 1-move available we would be able to find a monogon. If there was a 2-move available we would be able to find a bigon. It is easy to check that there are no monogons or bigons in either diagram. Thus both diagrams are irreducible. To verify that they are both reduced we must now consider their 3-classes.

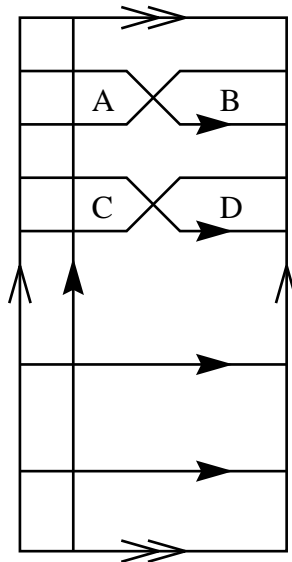


FIGURE 9. The diagram from Figure 7(a) with triangular regions labelled.

To find possible 3-moves on a diagram we can look for triangular regions on the canonical surface. There must be a triangular region on the surface for each possible 3-move. Figure 9 shows the diagram in Figure 7(a) with all the triangular regions labelled. There are four such regions which means there are four 3-moves available. However, we note that if we make the 3-move associated with any of the regions we get a diagram which is isotopic to the diagram we started with. Thus the 3-class of the diagram in Figure 7(a) just contains a single diagram. It is easy to check that the same thing is true for the diagram in Figure 7(b).

Thus both diagrams are reduced. As the diagrams are not isomorphic, it is clear from the preceding paragraph that the two diagrams are in different 3-classes. Thus the two diagrams are indeed a counter-example to Statement 8.1. \square

As yet, we have not found a counter-example for the single component case. However, we note that if any pair of nanowords in Table 6 were shown to be homotopic, the pair would be a counter-example.

As the proof in Kadokami's paper considers only the general case of n components and we have given a counter-example to Statement 8.1, it is clear that there is a problem with the proof. It is still possible that Statement 8.2 is true, but we can not use it until it has been proved. We hope to consider this problem further in the future.

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DEPARTMENT OF MATHEMATICS,
 TOKYO INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY,
 OH-OKAYAMA, MEGURO, TOKYO 152-8551, JAPAN
E-mail address: gibson@math.titech.ac.jp