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Les rencontres physiciens-mathématiciens de Strasbourg - RCP25, 1978, tome 26

<http://www.numdam.org/item?id=RCP25_1978__26__45_0>

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Spontaneous Breaking of Euclidean Invariance and Classification of Topologically Stable Defects and Configurations of Crystals and Liquid Crystals

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(Received 29 December 1977)

We show how many mesomorphic states illustrate the following general scheme: The symmetry group of an equilibrium state of Euclidean-invariant quantum statistical mechanics is a subgroup $H$ of the Euclidean group $E$ such that the orbit $E/H$ is compact. Moreover, the homotopy groups of $E/H$ yield a classification of the topologically stable defects and configurations of these ordered media. This suggests a predictive value of this scheme for yet unobserved media and for defects.

Homotopy theory has already been used explicitly by physicists for the study of topological stability of kinks,° t' Hooft—Polyakov monopoles,23 and instantons;6 it also appears that topological notions are used for the study of defects in ordered media, e.g., Burgers circuit and Volterra process, which can be related in some way to homotopy.5 Toulouse and Kléman have proposed a topological classification of defects by the homotopy groups of the "manifold of internal states" and, as an application, have predicted that vortex lines in superfluid He°—A should annihilate by pairs.5 Michel has shown6 how this classification can be related to the spontaneous symmetry breaking of the invariance group $G$ of physical laws (e.g., gauge group, Euclidean group, etc.) into a subgroup $H$, the symmetry group of the perfect medium (i.e., without deformations): The manifold of internal states of Ref. 6 is the orbit $G/H$. Several applications7—13 and extensions14,15 of these ideas have been published recently.

Here we present a synthetic classification of the possible symmetries of media with long-range order, their defects, and their configurations16 with the hope that such classification has some predictive value. The complete list of the possible global-symmetry groups $H$ of equilibrium states with spontaneously broken Euclidean symmetry has been given by Kastler et al.17: In quantum statistical mechanics if an invariant state is a mixture, it can be decomposed, in the transitive case, into an integral over an orbit $G/H$ of pure states and this orbit has to carry a finite $G$-invariant measure. When $G$ is the Euclidean group $E$, this means that the orbit $E/H$ is compact. We first recall the classification of these subgroups $H$, up to conjugation in the affine group: For instance, for $H$ discrete, one obtains all the 230 crystallographic classes predicted last century. Consider the Euclidean group $E$ given as the semidirect product $\mathbb{T} \mathbb{C} \mathbb{O}(3)$ and let $T_H = T \cap H$ be the intersection of $H$ with the group $T$ of translations. $T_H$ is an invariant subgroup of $H$; so $H$ is a subgroup of $N(T_H)$ the normalizer of $T_H$ in $E$ (i.e., $N(T_H)$ is the largest subgroup of $E$ which has $T_H$ as an invariant group). $N(T_H)$ may be written as the semidirect product $\mathbb{T} \mathbb{C} \mathbb{Q}_H$. There are then five cases to study:18:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>$T_H$</th>
<th>$Q_H$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>$R^3$</td>
<td>$O(3)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>$R^3 \times Z^2$</td>
<td>$D_{\infty a}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>$R \times Z^2$</td>
<td>Discrete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>$Z^2$</td>
<td>Discrete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>$D_{\infty a}$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In each case, the possible $H$ are all closed subgroups of $E$ such that

$$T \cap H = T_H \subset H \subset T \mathbb{C} Q_H.$$  \hspace{1cm} (1)

Below we give some known examples corresponding to each case.

**Case IV.**—This case corresponds to crystals.

**Case I.**—In this case, the largest possible proper subgroup of $E$ is $T \mathbb{C} D_{\infty a}$. This is the symmetry group of the nematics: They are constituted of aspherical, randomly distributed, but aligned, molecules; their refraction index and electric or magnetic susceptibilities are axially symmetric quadrupoles.

**Cases II and V.**—Here $N(T_H) = T \mathbb{C} D_{\infty a}$; its identity component can be written as $R^2 \mathbb{C} [R \times SO(2)]$. 

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where $R \times SO(2)$ is the group generated by the translations along an axis and the rotations about it. Figure 1 represents several possible subgroups, with either $H \cap R \neq Z$ (case II) or $H \cap R = \emptyset$ (case VI). Known classes of liquid crystals corresponding to these cases are given as follows:

**Subcase IIa. cholesterics.**—Here $H = R^2 \setminus (R \cap D^2)$, where $R$ denotes an helicoidal group (see Fig. 1(a)). The molecules are aligned in the planes orthogonal to the cholesteric axis but the azimuth of this alignment is a linear function of the axis coordinate.

**Subcase IIb. smectic-A.**—Here $H = (r^2 \times Z) \setminus \{0\}$; the molecules are in parallel layers and are oriented perpendicularly to them (see Fig. 1(b)).

**Subcase IIc. smectic-C.**—Here $H = (r^2 \times Z_c) \setminus \{0\}$; the molecules are all aligned, but obliquely so, relative to the layers.

**Subcases IIId and V, chiral smectic-C.**—The oblique orientation of the molecules makes a constant angle with the axis orthogonal to the layers, but it turns from layer to layer by an angle $\theta$ about this axis; the two subcases correspond, respectively, to $\theta/\pi$ rational or irrational (the latter subcase is given in Fig. 1(c)).

**Case III.**—This case is illustrated by a lattice of vortex lines in a type-II superconductor in the intermediary state or by the hexagonal rod lattice of lyotropic crystals; then $H = (Z^2 \times R) \setminus \{0\}$.

One expects that other examples of mesomorphic states, corresponding to other possible subgroups $H$, will be discovered (see, for example, Ref. 11). The states which are not covered by this classification are those which do not have a global-symmetry group, either because $\kappa$ has only an ergodic action (ergodic states of Ref. 17)—e.g., in case of helimagnetic crystals or modulated crystals when the ratio of the two superposed periods is irrational—or by lack of long-range order correlations in some directions in the last case the local order cannot be preserved macroscopically, e.g., in the smectic-$B$ or $-E$ which has a hexagonal or tetragonal structure in the layers; so they are very crystal-like locally, but the order correlation disappears along the direction orthogonal to the layers.

Consider again the media with global-symmetry groups (transitive states of Ref. 17). Acting on them by the Euclidean group, one obtains the whole orbit $E/H$ of its positions. The state of a perfect medium is characterized by its position beside temperature, pressure, etc. In an imperfect medium the position varies locally; this variation defines a function $c$ valued in $E/H$ and whose domain is the volume $V$ occupied by the medium excepting the defects. If $\omega$ can be extended continuously over a defect, this defect is not topologically stable. If $\omega$ cannot be extended continuously over a defect $A$, around this defect it must belong to a nontrivial homotopy class of $E/H$. This yields the topological classification of defects: Elements of $\pi_n(E/H)$, $n = 0, 1, 2$ classify wall, line, and point defects, respectively. It may also happen that $\omega$ may be made constant over a whole sphere $S^2$ and defined everywhere inside without being homotopic to a constant; this defines a topologically stable configuration classified by the elements of $\pi_0(E/H)$.

To compute the homotopy groups $\pi_n(E/H)$, for $n > 0$, first note that they are also those of $E_0/H'$, where $E_0$ is the connected subgroup of $E$ (no reflections) and $E_0$ is the (double) universal covering of $E_0$: The kernel of the homomorphism $\tilde{\theta}: E_0 \rightarrow E_0$ is the center of $E_0$ (it is generated by the rotation of $2\pi$); finally $H' = H \cap E_0$ and $H' = \delta^{-1}(H')$. Then one can use the long exact homotopy sequence for principal fiber bundles and other basic facts of homotopy. Since $\pi_0(E_0) = 1$, $\pi_1(E_0) = 1$, and $\pi_2(E_0) = 1$, we deduce

$$\pi_n(E/H) = \pi_n(E_0/H'), \quad \pi_1(E/H) = \pi_1(E_0/H').$$

Let $H_{1}'$ be the connected subgroup of $H'$. We have to distinguish two cases:

In case (i), $H \supset SO(2)$. Then $\pi_1(H') = \pi_1[SO(2)] = \mathbb{Z} = \pi_1(E/H)$: There are point defects—this is the
case of nematics and smectic-$A$. The line defects are classified by
$$\tilde{\pi}_1(H') = H'/H'_0 = \pi_1(E/H).$$
(3)

In case (ii), $H'$ is $\text{SO}(2)$. Then $\pi_1(H') = 1 = \pi_1(E/H)$.
There are no stable point defects and
$$\pi_0(H') = H'/H'_0 = \pi_0(E/H).$$
In all cases $\pi_0(H') = \pi_0(E/H) = 1$ when $n > 1$ so that, for $n > 2$, $E/H$ and $E_0$ have the same homotopy—
that of $\text{SU}(2)$; and from Bott, $\pi_0(E/H) = Z$, which classifies the configurations of all media. We re-
call in Table I the explicit homotopy groups of all previously listed mesomorphic states. Of course,
defects are studied and should be studied from the point of view of energy stability. However,
this simple topological classification is already interesting and has some predictive power.

We remark that, except for the nematics, all $\pi_1(E/H)$ are non-Abelian; so isolated line defects are characterized only by conjugation classes of $\pi_1$. However, pairs of line defects correspond to conjugated pairs of $\pi_1$ elements: These line defects can coalesce but, as shown by Poenaru and Toulouse, they cannot cross each other when they correspond to noncommuting elements of $\pi_1(E/H)$. Note also that $\pi_1(E/H)$ acts nontrivially on $\pi_2(E/H)$ when the latter is $Z$. Hence for smec-
tic-$A$ we have the same situation as that described by Volovik and Mineev for nematics: The sign of isolated point defects is undefined; the relative sign of a pair of point defects may change when a line defect is moved between them. In all cases $\pi_1$ acts trivially on the configuration group $\pi_1(E/H) = Z$.

As shown in Ref. 9, $\pi_0(E/H)$ is nontrivial for
crystals when $H = H'$; then $\pi_1(E/H) = Z_2$ classifies wall defects annihilating by pairs (the twins by
recticular merhedries). The relation $H = H'$ is also true for cholesterics and chiral smectic-$C$
but these phases seem to exist only for optically active molecules (the existence of twin defects
would exist if one could observe the same phases made with racemics).

We are grateful to Professor V. Poenaru for discussions and for some help with homotopy cal-
culations.

Note added.—Since this paper has been written, new examples of thermotropic mesomorphic
phases of disklike molecules have been dis-
covered.

The topological classification of defects and configur-
ations based on homotopy as presented here
and in the quoted references is too coarse for three reasons:
(i) If the domain $\Omega = (V - \text{the defects})$ is not con-
tractive, there might be other topological ob-
structions to extending the function $\psi$ when it is homotopically trivial; they are characterized by the
cohomology of $\Omega$ valued in the $\pi$'s of $E/H$.
(ii) The continuous deformations of $\psi$ necessary to show the homotopic equivalence of two defects or configurations may require deformations of the medium beyond the elastic limit and are there-
for unphysical. The medium generally deals with this difficulty by creating new defects to which the homotopy classification applies.
(iii) A medium can eventually be submitted to the "conditions of integrability" (e.g., $\hat{H} = \nabla \times \hat{H} = 0$ for smectics or the well-known compatibility conditions of dislocation theory). This additional constraint has to be taken into account. Thom has

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**TABLE I.** List of some predicted subgroups $H$ of the Euclidean group $E$ which are symmetry groups of phases already observed in nature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>$H$</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>$\pi_1$</th>
<th>$\pi_2$</th>
<th>$\pi_1$</th>
<th>$\pi_0$</th>
<th>Ref.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>$R^3 \sqsupset D_{2d}$</td>
<td>Nematics</td>
<td>$Z$</td>
<td>$Z$</td>
<td>$Z_2$</td>
<td>$1$</td>
<td>6, 9, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ia</td>
<td>$R^2 \sqsupset (R_3 \sqsupset D_3)$</td>
<td>Cholesterol</td>
<td>$Z$</td>
<td>$1$</td>
<td>$Q_2 = D_2$</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>10, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibb</td>
<td>$(R^2 \times Z) \sqsupset D_{2d}$</td>
<td>Smectic-$A$</td>
<td>$Z$</td>
<td>$Z$</td>
<td>$Z \times Z_2$</td>
<td>$1$</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ic</td>
<td>$(R^2 \times Z) \sqsupset C_{2h}$</td>
<td>Smectic-$C$</td>
<td>$Z$</td>
<td>$Z$</td>
<td>$Z \times Z_4$</td>
<td>$1$</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IId or V</td>
<td>$(R^2 \times Z) \sqsupset C_{2v}$</td>
<td>Chiral smectic-$C$</td>
<td>$Z$</td>
<td>$Z$</td>
<td>$Z \times Z_4$</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>$(R^2 \times Z) \sqsupset D_{2h}$</td>
<td>Rod lattices</td>
<td>$Z$</td>
<td>$Z$</td>
<td>$Z \times D_4$</td>
<td>...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>$(Z^3, \mathcal{P})$</td>
<td>Crystals</td>
<td>$Z$</td>
<td>$1$</td>
<td>$\tilde{H}_0 = (Z', \mathcal{P})$</td>
<td>$Z_2$ if $P = P_3$</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These chiral phases are made only from chiral molecules, and so we should consider only $E_3$ invariance. The group $D_4 = 6 \times (2^4)$ has $4e$ elements; it is defined by the generators $r, s$ and relations $r^2 = s^4 = 1, rs = sr$; for $n = 2$, it is the quaternion group $1, -1, i, n$, where $\tau_3$ are the Pauli matrices. The symbol $(Z', \mathcal{P})$ means that $nZ^2 = P$, where $P$ is the point group of the crystal, for which $P_3$ is its subgroup without reflections and $P_0 = 6^{3+1}P_0$. |
recently made some suggestions in that direction.\textsuperscript{28}

This synthesis suggests new types of problems (for instance, at phase transitions).


\textsuperscript{2}Yu. S. Tyupkin, V. A. Fateev, and A. S. Shvarts, Pis'ma Zh. Eksp. Teor. Fiz. 21, 91 (1975) [JETP Lett. 21, 42 (1975)].

\textsuperscript{3}M. I. Monastyrskii and A. M. Perelomov, Pis'ma Zh. Eksp. Teor. Fiz. 21, 94 (1975) [JETP Lett. 21, 43 (1975)].


\textsuperscript{7}We disagree with D. Rogula, in Trends in Application of Pure Mathematics to Mechanics, edited by G. Fichera (Pitman, New York, 1976), concerning his point of view for the homotopic classification of crystal defects.

\textsuperscript{8}L. Michel, in Proceedings of the Sixth International Colloquium Group Theoretical Methods in Physics, Tübingen, Germany, 1977 (to be published).


\textsuperscript{10}G. E. Volovik and V. P. Mineev, “Study of singularities in ordered systems by homotopic topology methods” (to be published).


\textsuperscript{15}A. T. Garel, “Boundary conditions for textures and defects” (to be published).

\textsuperscript{16}D. Finkelstein has coined the name \textit{kinks} for non-singular topologically stable configurations. The term of \textit{texture} has been introduced by P. W. Anderson and G. Toulouse, Phys. Rev. Lett. 38, 508 (1977), to denote non-singular non-topologically-stable configurations (e.g., $S = 1$ lines in the nematics, 4$\pi$ rotation lines in superfluid He\textsuperscript{3}-A phase). There is at the present time some laxity in terminology, in that physicists tend to call textures what Finkelstein called \textit{kinks}. We propose to use “configuration,” because the words \textit{kinks} and \textit{textures} have both been used extensively for a long time with a precise meaning in the physics of dislocations (a \textit{kink} being a special type of accident on a line of dislocation and a \textit{texture} being an extensive word to connote an assembly of defects in, e.g., J. Friedel, \textit{Dislocations} (Pergamon, Oxford, 1964)).


\textsuperscript{18}R and $Z$ are, respectively, the additive group of the real numbers and the integers. For the other groups we use the notation of L. D. Landau and E. M. Lifshitz, \textit{Quantum Mechanics} (Pergamon, New York, 1977), 3rd ed., Chap. 12.

\textsuperscript{19}U. Essmann and H. Träuble, Phys. Lett. 24A, 256 (1967). This pattern was predicted by A. A. Abrikosov, Zh. Eksp. Teor. Fiz. 32, 1442 (1957) [JETP Lett. 5, 1174 (1957)] but with a square lattice, while the observed hexagonal one was proposed by W. M. Kleiner, L. M. Roth, and S. H. Autler, Phys. Rev. 133A, 1226 (1964).


\textsuperscript{22}The topological space of a semi-direct product of groups is a topological product of the group spaces. In such a product we can omit contractible factors $R^n$ since their homotopy is trivial and the homotopy groups of a topological product are direct products of the homotopy groups of the factors.


\textsuperscript{26}C. Chandrasekhar, B. K. Sadashiva, and K. A. Surekha, Pramana 9, 471 (1977). They claim that this phase formed by a benzene-hexa-$\pi$-alkanoate belongs to case III of Table I: $(R \times Z^2)iD_A$.

\textsuperscript{27}J. Billard, J. C. Dubois, Nguyen Huu Tinh, and A. Zann, in Proceedings of the European Congress on Smectics, Madonna di Campiglio, January, 1978 (unpublished). They have observed the phase of some hexa-$\pi$-oxytriphenylene and they do not exclude the possibility that it could be a nematic with symmetry group $R \subset D_A$.

\textsuperscript{28}R. Thom, to be published.