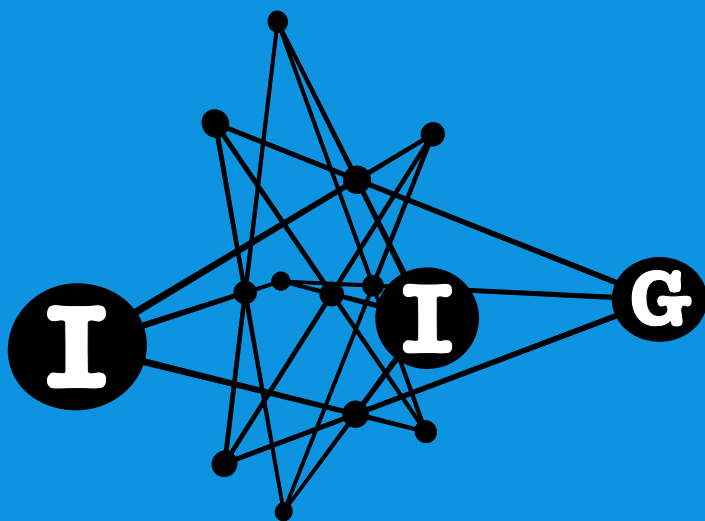


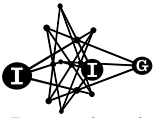
# Innovations in Incidence Geometry

Algebraic, Topological and Combinatorial



**A characterization of Clifford parallelism  
by automorphisms**

Rainer Löwen



## A characterization of Clifford parallelism by automorphisms

Rainer Löwen

Betten and Riesinger have shown that Clifford parallelism on real projective space is the only topological parallelism that is left invariant by a group of dimension at least 5. We improve the bound to 4. Examples of different parallelisms admitting a group of dimension  $\leq 3$  are known, so 3 is the “critical dimension”.

Consider  $\mathbb{R}^4$  as the quaternion skew field  $\mathbb{H}$ . Then the orthogonal group  $\mathrm{SO}(4, \mathbb{R})$  may be described as the product of two commuting copies  $\tilde{\Lambda}, \tilde{\Phi}$  of the unitary group  $\mathrm{U}(2, \mathbb{C})$ , consisting of the maps  $q \mapsto aq$  and  $q \mapsto qb$ , respectively, where  $a, b$  are quaternions of norm one and multiplication is quaternion multiplication. The intersection of the two factors is of order two, containing the map  $-\mathrm{id}$ . Thus, passing to projective space, we get  $\mathrm{PSO}(4, \mathbb{R}) = \Lambda \times \Phi$ , a direct product of two copies of  $\mathrm{SO}(3, \mathbb{R})$ . The left and right Clifford parallelisms are defined as the equivalence relations on the line space of  $\mathrm{PG}(3, \mathbb{R})$  formed by the orbits of  $\Lambda$  and  $\Phi$ , respectively.

The two Clifford parallelisms are equivalent under quaternion conjugation  $q \rightarrow \bar{q}$ ; this is immediate from their definition in view of the fact that conjugation does not change the norm and is an antiautomorphism, i.e., that  $\overline{pq} = \bar{q}\bar{p}$ . Note that both  $\Lambda$  and  $\Phi$  are transitive on the point set of projective space. Since they centralize one another, each acts transitively on the parallelism defined by the other, and the group  $\mathrm{PSO}(4, \mathbb{R})$  leaves both parallelisms invariant (we say that it consists of *automorphisms* of these parallelisms). For more information on Clifford parallels, see [Berger 1987; Klingenberg 1984; Betten and Riesinger 2012]. For generalizations to other dimensions, compare also [Tyrrell and Semple 1971].

The notion of a *topological parallelism* on real projective 3-space  $\mathrm{PG}(3, \mathbb{R})$  generalizes this example. A *spread* is a set  $\mathcal{C}$  of lines such that every point is incident with exactly one of them, and a topological parallelism may be defined

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MSC2010: 51H10, 51A15, 51M30.

Keywords: Clifford parallelism, automorphism group, topological parallelism.

as a compact set  $\Pi$  of compact spreads such that every line belongs to exactly one of them; see, e.g., [Betten and Riesinger 2014b] for details. Many examples of different topological parallelisms have been constructed in a series of papers by Betten and Riesinger, see, e.g., [Betten and Riesinger 2009].

The group  $\Sigma = \text{Aut } \Pi$  of automorphisms of a topological parallelism is a closed subgroup of the Lie group  $\text{PGL}(4, \mathbb{R})$ , hence it is a Lie group, as well. In particular, the identity component  $\Sigma^1$  is an open subgroup of  $\Sigma$  and has the same (manifold) dimension as  $\Sigma$ . We know that  $\Sigma^1$  is compact [Betten and Löwen 2017], and hence (conjugate to) a subgroup of  $\text{PSO}(4, \mathbb{R}) \cong \text{SO}(3, \mathbb{R}) \times \text{SO}(3, \mathbb{R})$ . The group  $\text{SO}(3, \mathbb{R})$  does not have any 2-dimensional closed subgroups, because its Lie algebra is  $\mathbb{R}^3$  with the vector product  $\times$  and  $x \times y$  is always orthogonal to both  $x$  and  $y$ . Moreover, the 1-dimensional closed subgroups of  $\text{SO}(3, \mathbb{R})$  form a single conjugacy class. It follows easily that there are no closed 5-dimensional subgroups of  $\text{SO}(3, \mathbb{R}) \times \text{SO}(3, \mathbb{R})$  and all 4-dimensional ones are isomorphic to  $\text{SO}(3, \mathbb{R}) \times \text{SO}(2, \mathbb{R})$ .

We see that in the case of the Clifford parallelism,  $\Sigma^1$  is the 6-dimensional group  $\text{PSO}(4, \mathbb{R})$  that we used to define the parallelism. Betten and Riesinger [2014b] proved that no other topological parallelism has a group of dimension  $\dim \Sigma \geq 5$ . Examples of parallelisms with 1-, 2- or 3-dimensional automorphism groups are known; see [Betten and Riesinger 2014a; 2009; 2011]. Here we consider parallelisms with a 4-dimensional group.

**Theorem 1.** *Let  $\Sigma$  be the automorphism group of a topological parallelism  $\Pi$  on  $\text{PG}(3, \mathbb{R})$ . If  $\dim \Sigma \geq 4$ , then  $\Pi$  is equivalent to the Clifford parallelism.*

*Proof.* Recall that a topological parallelism  $\Pi$  is homeomorphic to the real projective plane in the Hausdorff topology on the space of compact sets of lines, and that every equivalence class is a compact spread and homeomorphic to the 2-sphere; compare [Betten and Riesinger 2014b].

The remarks preceding the theorem show that a group  $\Sigma$  of dimension at least 4 contains a 4-dimensional connected closed subgroup  $\Delta$ , and it will suffice for our proof to use this group. Further, up to equivalence, we may assume that  $\Delta = \Lambda \cdot \Gamma$ , where  $\Gamma \leq \Phi$  is the subgroup defined by restricting the factor  $b$  to be a complex number (here we use the notation of the introduction). Since  $\Lambda$  does not have any one-dimensional coset spaces, we know that  $\Lambda$  acts on  $\Pi$  either transitively or trivially. If it acts trivially, then the classes of  $\Pi$  are the  $\Lambda$ -orbits of lines, and we have the Clifford parallelism. Observe here that every  $\Lambda$ -orbit is contained in a single class, and both the orbit and the class are 2-spheres.

In what follows, assume therefore that  $\Lambda$  acts transitively on  $\Pi$ . There is only one possibility for this action, namely, the standard transitive action of  $\text{SO}(3, \mathbb{R})$  on the real projective plane. Every 2-dimensional subgroup of  $\Delta$  contains  $\Gamma$ . Hence,

there is no effective action of  $\Delta$  on the projective plane  $\Pi$ , and the kernel can only be  $\Gamma$  since the only other proper normal subgroup is  $\Lambda$ , which is transitive. If  $\mathcal{C} \in \Pi$  is any equivalence class, then the stabilizer  $\Lambda_{\mathcal{C}}$  is a product of a 1-torus and a group of order two. Hence  $\Delta_{\mathcal{C}}$  contains a 2-torus  $T$ . There is only one conjugacy class of 2-tori in  $\Delta$ , represented by the group

$$T_0 = \{\langle q \rangle \mapsto \langle aqb \rangle \mid a, b \in \mathbb{C}, |a| = |b| = 1\}.$$

Here,  $\langle q \rangle$  denotes the 1-dimensional real vector space spanned by  $q$ . We may assume that  $T = T_0$ . Write quaternions as pairs of complex numbers with multiplication  $(x, y)(u, v) = (xu - \bar{v}y, vx + y\bar{u})$ ; see 11.1 of [Salzmann et al. 1995]. Then complex numbers become pairs  $(a, 0)$ , and the elements of  $T$  are now given by

$$\langle (z, w) \rangle \mapsto \langle (azb, aw\bar{b}) \rangle.$$

The kernel of ineffectivity of  $T$  on the 2-sphere  $\mathcal{C}$  must be a 1-torus  $\Xi$ , and the elements of the kernel other than the identity cannot have eigenvalue 1 — otherwise they would be axial collineations of the translation plane defined by the spread  $\mathcal{C}$  and would act nontrivially on  $\mathcal{C}$ . There are only two subgroups of the 2-torus satisfying these conditions, given by  $b = 1$  and by  $a = 1$ , respectively. In other words, the kernel  $\Xi$  is a subgroup either of  $\Lambda$  or of  $\Phi$ . In both cases,  $\mathcal{C}$  consists of the fixed lines of  $\Xi$ . If  $\Xi \leq \Phi$ , then  $\Lambda$  permutes these lines, contrary to the transitivity of  $\Lambda$  on  $\Pi$ . If  $\Xi \leq \Lambda$ , then  $\Phi$  permutes the fixed lines, which means that  $\mathcal{C}$  is a  $\Phi$ -orbit. Now  $\Lambda$  is transitive both on  $\Pi$  and on the set of  $\Phi$ -orbits, hence  $\Pi$  equals the Clifford parallelism formed by the  $\Phi$ -orbits.  $\square$

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Received 17 Feb 2017.

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Innovations in Incidence Geometry: Algebraic, Topological and Combinatorial (ISSN pending) at Mathematical Sciences Publishers, 798 Evans Hall #3840, c/o University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720-3840 is published continuously online. Periodical rate postage paid at Berkeley, CA 94704, and additional mailing offices.

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IIG peer review and production are managed by EditFlow® from MSP.

PUBLISHED BY

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<http://msp.org/>

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2019

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