A geometric approach to D-branes in group manifolds

Sonia Stanciu

1 Spinoza Institute, Utrecht University, Leuvenlaan 4, 3508 TD Utrecht, The Netherlands
2 Theoretical Physics Group, Blackett Laboratory, Imperial College, Prince Consort Road, London SW7 2BZ, U.K.
\texttt{s.stanciu@phys.uu.nl, s.stanciu@ic.ac.uk}

Abstract: This is a brief review of some recent results on the geometric approach to symmetric D-branes in group manifolds, both twisted and untwisted. We describe the geometry of the gluing conditions and the quantisation condition in the boundary WZW model, and we illustrate this by determining the consistent twisted and untwisted D-branes in the Lie group SU\(_3\).

1 Introduction

D-branes in group manifolds have attracted a great deal of attention in recent years, as they provide an ideal laboratory for the study of D-branes in general string backgrounds. Using a variety of approaches, ranging from the algebraic techniques of BCFT to the lagrangian description based on the boundary WZW model, it has been possible to analyse in a detailed and systematic fashion what are the consistent D-brane configurations in a given group manifold and how they can be classified.

In this talk, based on [1, 2, 3, 4, 5], we present a geometric approach to the study of D-branes in group manifolds (that is, in WZW models). In Section 2 we describe how the classical geometry of these D-branes can be determined directly from the gluing conditions. In Section 3 we discuss the boundary WZW model and how it can be thought of as providing a lagrangian description of D-branes in group manifolds. In particular, we exhibit the two-form field defined on the D-brane and the quantisation conditions obtained by requiring that the path integral be well defined. Finally, in Section 4, we describe the classical and quantum moduli spaces of consistent D-brane configurations in the Lie group SU\(_3\). In particular, we show that (twisted) D-brane configurations are in one-to-one correspondence with the integrable highest weight (IHW) representations of the (twisted) affine Lie algebra \(\widehat{su}(3)_k\).

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2 Symmetric D-branes in group manifolds

The simplest and best understood class of D-brane configurations is obtained \([\mathbb{6}, \mathbb{7}, \mathbb{1}]\) as solutions of the familiar gluing conditions on the chiral currents of the WZW model

\[ J(z) = R J(\bar{z}) \quad \text{at the boundary}, \]

where \(R\) is a metric preserving Lie algebra automorphism. These gluing conditions describe symmetric D-branes, that is, configurations which preserve the maximal amount of symmetry of the bulk theory; that is, conformal invariance plus (some of) the current algebra.

Let us assume, for simplicity, that \(G\) is a compact, connected, simply-connected Lie group. A D-brane in \(G\) wraps a submanifold \(Q\) of \(G\) on which there is defined a two-form field \(\omega\). The D-submanifold \(Q\) can be determined directly from the gluing conditions (1), by using the following geometric interpretation \([\mathbb{1}]\). The boundary conditions satisfied by an open string whose end lies on \(Q\) are given by

\[ \partial g = \tilde{R}(g) \bar{\partial} g, \]

where \(\tilde{R}(g) = \rho_g R \lambda_g^{-1}\) is the point dependent matrix of boundary conditions. The tangent space to the D-brane \(T_g Q\) and its perpendicular complement \(T_g Q^\perp\) are spanned by the eigenvectors of \(\tilde{R}(g)\) corresponding to the Neumann and Dirichlet conditions, respectively.

In particular, one can show that the tangent space to the D-brane

\[ T_g Q = \text{Im}(1 + \tilde{R}(g)) , \]

is nothing but the tangent space \(T_g C_r(g)\) to a twisted conjugacy class \([\mathbb{1}, \mathbb{7}]\)

\[ C_r(h) = \{ r(g) h g^{-1} \mid g \in G \} , \]

where \(r: G \rightarrow G\) is the Lie group automorphism induced by \(R\). This shows that D-branes described by (1) wrap twisted conjugacy classes in the group manifold \(G\). In the special case \(R = 1\), one obtains \([\mathbb{6}]\) the standard conjugacy classes of \(G\).

The twisted conjugacy class \(C_r(h)\) of an element \(h\) of \(G\) is defined as the orbit of \(h\) in \(G\) under the twisted adjoint action \(\text{Ad}^r_g : g \mapsto r(g) h g^{-1}\), for any \(g\) in \(G\). Since the stabiliser of \(h\) is given, in this case, by its twisted centraliser \(Z_r(g) = \{ g \in G \mid r(g) h = h g \}\), the twisted conjugacy class \(C_r(h)\) can be described as the homogeneous space

\[ C_r(h) \cong G / Z_r(g) . \]

3 The boundary WZW model

The boundary WZW \([\mathbb{8}, \mathbb{4}, \mathbb{8}]\) model can be thought of as a lagrangian description for D-branes in group manifolds. In this framework, a D-brane is described by a submanifold \(\iota: Q \rightarrow G\) together with a two-form \(\omega\) on \(Q\) such that \(\iota^* H = d \omega\), where \(H = 1/6 \langle \theta, [\theta, [\theta, \theta] \rangle\) denotes the three-form field on the target group manifold, \(\theta\) is the left-invariant Maurer-Cartan one-form on \(G\), and \(\langle -, -\rangle\) is an invariant metric on the Lie algebra \(g\) of \(G\). The classical dynamics of an open string whose end lies on this D-brane is governed by the action

\[ I = \int_{\Sigma} \langle g^{-1} \partial g, g^{-1} \bar{\partial} g \rangle + \int_M H - \int_D \omega , \]
where $M$ is a 3-dimensional submanifold of $G$ with boundary $\partial M = g(\Sigma) + D$, and $D$ is a 2-dimensional submanifold of $Q$. There exists a homological obstruction to the existence of $M$ which is measured by the relative homology class of $g(\Sigma)$ in $H_2(G, Q)$.

The action of the boundary WZW model is constructed as a natural generalisation of the standard WZW action; in particular, it is invariant under the infinite-dimensional symmetry group generated by the transformations

$$g(z, \bar{z}) \mapsto \Omega(z) g(z, \bar{z}) \Omega(\bar{z})^{-1}.$$  

(4)

The parameters $\Omega(z)$ and $\bar{\Omega}(\bar{z})$ of these transformations satisfy $\bar{\partial} \Omega = \partial \bar{\Omega} = 0$ and are such that (4) preserves the worldsheet boundary $g(\Sigma) \subset \mathcal{C}_r$; this latter property is encoded in the condition $\Omega(z) = r \cdot \bar{\Omega}(\bar{z})$, at the boundary $\partial \Sigma$. In terms of the conserved chiral currents $J(z)$ and $\bar{J}(\bar{z})$, this gives rise to the gluing conditions (1).

The two-form field $\omega$ is uniquely determined by the symmetry requirement (4), being given (see also [6, 9] for the case $R = \text{BD}$) by

$$\omega = -\frac{1}{2} \langle g^{-1} dg , \frac{1}{1 - \text{Ad} g^{-1} R} g^{-1} dg \rangle.$$  

(5)

One can easily check that the right hand side is well defined on the twisted conjugacy class $\mathcal{C}_r$, and that (5) defines a field which satisfies $d\omega = \iota^* H$.

In the case of the standard WZW model, we recall that the cancellation of the global worldsheet anomaly imposes that the period of the three-form field $H$ over any 3-cycle in $H_3(G)$ be quantised, that is $[H]/2\pi \in H^3(G, \mathbb{Z})$. Similarly, in the case of the boundary WZW model, the condition that the path integral be single valued (that is, that it not depend on the choice of $M$) imposes that the global worldsheet anomaly vanish, which translates into

$$\int_N H - \int_{\partial N} \omega \in 2\pi \mathbb{Z},$$  

(6)

for any relative 3-cycle $(N, \partial N)$ in $H_3(G, \mathbb{C})$. In other words, $[(H, \omega)]/2\pi$ must define a class in $H^3(G, \mathbb{C}_r; \mathbb{Z})$.

4 Example: Symmetric D-branes in $SU_3$

Let us now apply the formalism described in the previous sections in order to determine the consistent symmetric D-branes in $SU_3$, for which we have two distinct classes of solutions: untwisted branes, characterised by $r = 1$, and twisted branes, defined by $r = \tau$, where $\tau$ is the Dynkin diagram automorphism of $SU_3$.

4.1 Untwisted branes

Conjugacy classes in a group $G$ are parametrised by the maximal torus $T$ of $G$, modulo the Weyl group. Standard group theory tells us that the classical moduli space of D-branes in $SU_3$, denoted here by $\mathcal{M}_{cl}(SU_3, 1)$, which is the same as the space of conjugacy classes of $SU_3$, can be identified with the fundamental domain of the extended Weyl group in the Cartan subalgebra $\mathfrak{t}$, which is given by the (solid) equilateral triangle

$$\mathcal{M}_{cl}(SU_3, 1) = \{ X \in \mathfrak{t} \mid 0 \leq \alpha_i(X) \leq 1 \ , \ i = 1, 2, 3 \},$$  

(7)
where $\alpha_1$, $\alpha_2$ and $\alpha_3 = \alpha_1 + \alpha_2$ are the positive roots of SU$_3$. The interior points in $\mathcal{M}_{cl}$ are regular, and give rise to 6-dimensional conjugacy classes of the form SU$_3$/U$_1^2$. If we now consider an element $X$ in $t$ which belongs to one of the edges of $\mathcal{M}_{cl}$, this describes an element $h = \exp(X)$ in the maximal torus of SU$_3$, whose centraliser includes a SU$_2^i$ subgroup, for some $i$. Thus the boundary points belonging to the three edges are singular, giving rise to 4-dimensional conjugacy classes of the form SU$_3$/SU$_2^i$. Finally, the three vertices corresponding to the three central elements of SU$_3$ describe point-like D-branes of the form SU$_3$/SU$_3$. We thus obtain the space of classical symmetric D-branes represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Moduli space of conjugacy classes of SU$_3$

By working out the quantisation conditions (6) one obtains that the quantum moduli space $\mathcal{M}_q(SU_3, \mathbb{I})$ of D-branes in SU$_3$ at level $k$ is given by

$$\mathcal{M}_q(SU_3, \mathbb{I}) = \{X \in h \mid k\alpha_i(X) \in \mathbb{Z}, \ 0 \leq k\alpha_i(X) \leq k, \ i = 1, 2, 3\},$$

which proves [9] that the set of consistent symmetric D-brane configurations at level $k$ is in one-to-one correspondence with the set of IHW representations of the corresponding affine Lie algebra $\hat{su}(3)^{(1)}$.

The space of untwisted D-brane configurations in SU$_3$ for the first few values of the level $k$ is represented in Figure 2. At a given level $k$ we have 3 point-like, $3(k-1)$ 4-dimensional and $\frac{1}{2}(k-1)(k-2)$ 6-dimensional symmetric D-branes. We also see that the 4-dimensional conjugacy classes are characterised by quantum numbers $(\lambda_1, \lambda_2)$ with either one of the $\lambda$’s being equal to zero or $\lambda_1 + \lambda_2 = k$; the point-like conjugacy classes are described by (0,0), (0,k), (k,0). In particular, the lower-dimensional conjugacy classes dominate the spectrum of D-branes until $k = 9$.

Figure 2: Quantum moduli space for SU$_3$ for lowest values of the level $k$. 
4.2 Twisted branes

Let us now turn to the case of twisted branes. Twisted conjugacy classes are parametrised by the maximal torus $T^\tau$ of the fixed point subgroup $SU^\tau_3 \cong SO_3$, modulo the twisted Weyl group $W^\tau$ of $SU_3$. In order to understand $W^\tau$ and determine the space of twisted conjugacy classes, one needs to make an incursion [12, 13] into the theory of non-connected Lie groups. One obtains [4] in this fashion a nice description of the classical moduli space of twisted branes in $SU_3$ in terms of the classical moduli space of untwisted branes in $SU^\tau_3$. More precisely, we have

$$M_{cl}(SU_3, \tau) = \left\{ X \in t^\tau \mid 0 \leq \bar{\alpha}(X) \leq \frac{1}{4} \right\},$$

(9)

where $\bar{\alpha} = \frac{1}{2}(\alpha_1 + \alpha_2)$ is the root of $SU^\tau_3$.

Figure 3: Moduli space of twisted conjugacy classes of $SU_3$

The resulting space of classical twisted D-branes in $SU_3$ is described in Figure 3. The point $\bar{\alpha}(X) = 0$ is singular in $SO_3$ and $\tau$-singular (see [4]) in $SU_3$, giving rise to a 5-dimensional twisted D-brane of the form $SU_3/\text{SO}_3$. The other endpoint $4\bar{\alpha}(X) = 1$ is regular in $SO_3$, but $\tau$-singular in $SU_3$. The corresponding twisted class is also 5-dimensional, but has the form $SU_3/\text{SU}_2$. Finally, the interior points are $\tau$-regular and give rise to 7-dimensional twisted conjugacy classes of the form $SU_3/\text{SO}_2$. Notice that in this case we have that the dimension of the twisted conjugacy classes is always odd, due to the fact that the difference between the ranks of $SU_3$ and $SO_3$ is odd.

Figure 4: Quantum moduli space for $\tau$-twisted D-branes in $SU_3$ at level $k$ (black circles) compared with that of $SU^\tau_3 \cong SO_3$ (white circles) at level $4k$.

If we now impose the condition (8) for the cancellation of the global worldsheet anomaly, we obtain that the quantum moduli space of twisted D-branes in $SU_3$ is given
The states corresponding to the first few values of the level are represented in Figure 4. At a given odd level $k$ we have $\frac{1}{2}(k - 1)$ 7-dimensional and one 5-dimensional branes, whereas for $k$ even we have $(\frac{1}{2}k - 1)$ 7-dimensional and two 5-dimensional branes.

A careful comparison of the quantisation conditions (3) for the twisted branes with the spectrum [11] of IHW representations of the twisted affine Lie algebra $\hat{\mathfrak{su}}(3)_{(2)}$ reveals [4] that the admissible twisted D-brane configurations in $\text{SU}_3$ are in one-to-one correspondence with the IHW representations of the corresponding twisted affine Lie algebra $\hat{\mathfrak{su}}(3)_{(2)}$.

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