Minimal surfaces from circle patterns: Geometry from combinatorics

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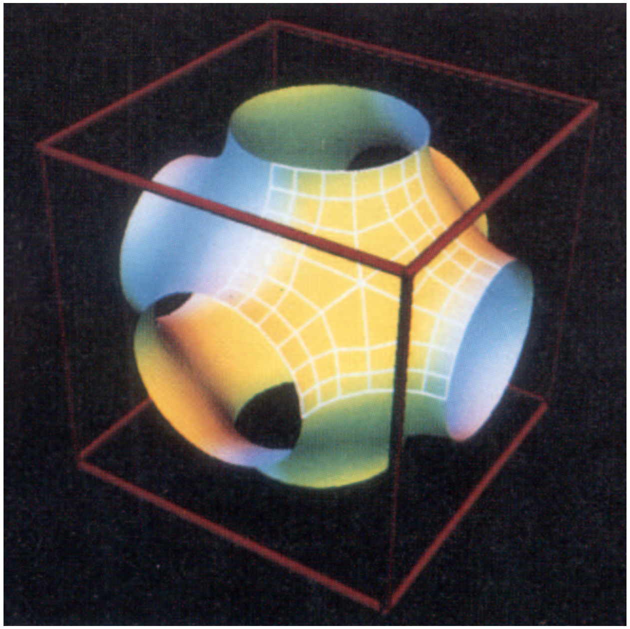
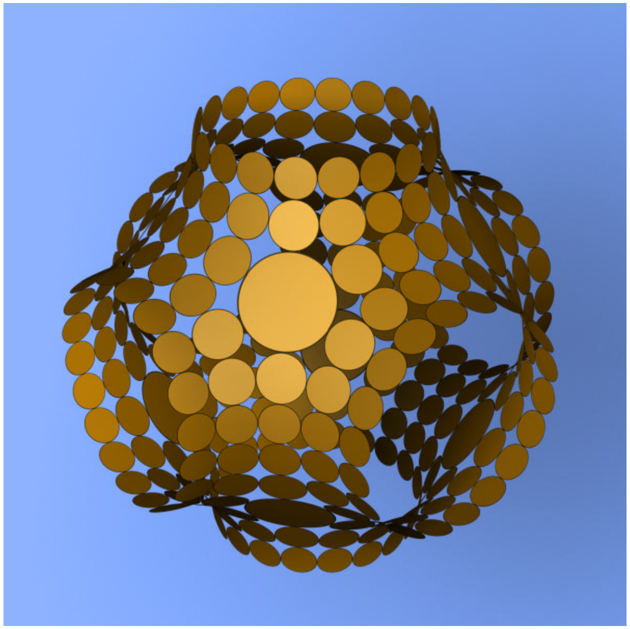
joint work with
Tim Hoffmann and Boris Springborn

Example: Schwarz' P-surface



continuous*



discrete

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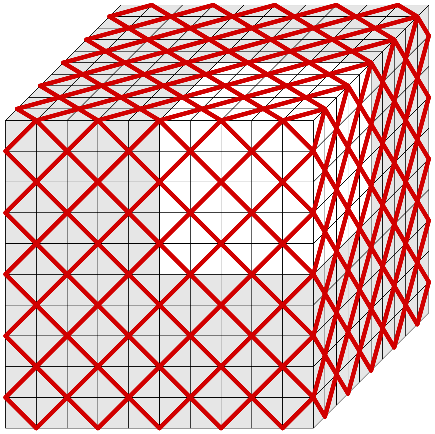
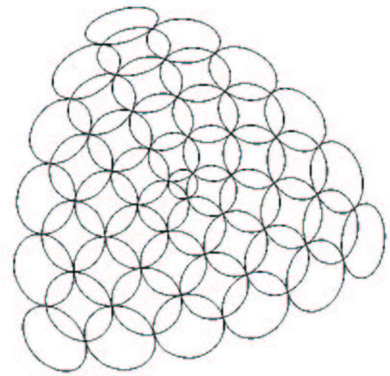
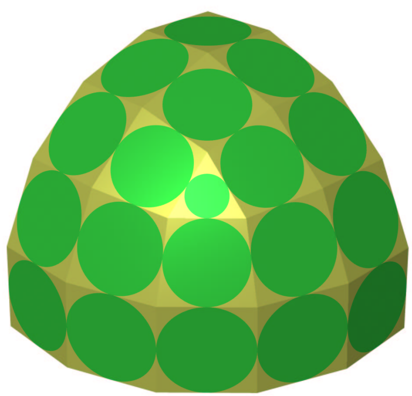
* from: Dierkes et al. *Minimal Surfaces I.* Springer 1992.



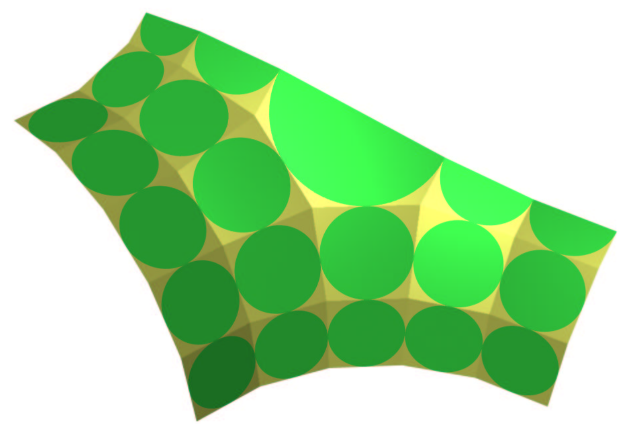
cell decomposition



circle pattern



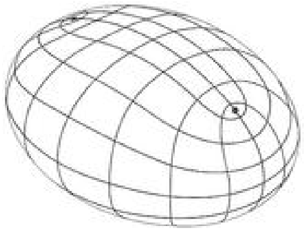
Koebe polyhedron



discrete minimal surface

Isothermic surfaces

continuous



[Hilbert/Cohn-Vossen]

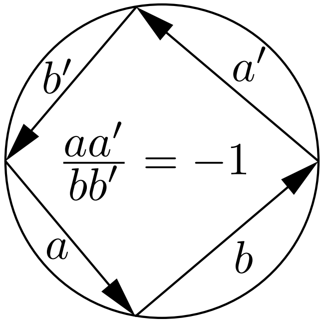
Definition. A surface in 3-space is called *isothermic* if it admits conformal curvature line coordinates.

- Definition is Moebius invariant.
- Curvature lines divide the surface into infinitesimal squares.

Examples: surfaces of revolution, quadrics, constant mean curvature surfaces, minimal surfaces.

Isothermic surfaces

discrete



Definition. A polyhedral surface in 3-space is called *discrete isothermic* if all faces are conformal squares, i. e. planar with cross ratio -1. [Bobenko/Pinkall '96]

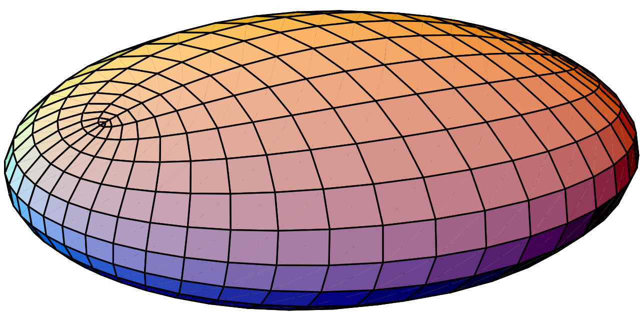
- Definition is Moebius invariant.
- 'Curvature lines' divide the surface into conformal squares.

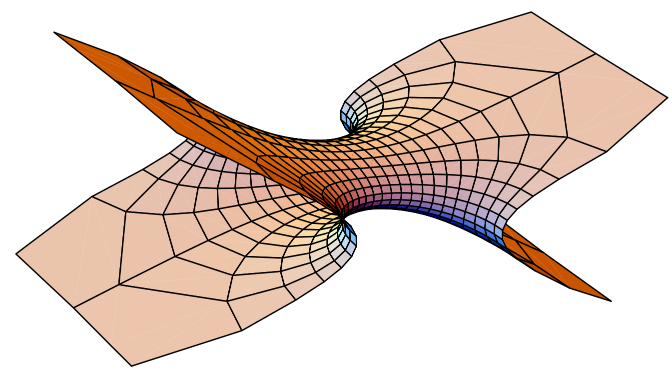
Duality for isothermic surfaces

continuous

Definition/Theorem. If $f : \mathbb{R}^2 \supset D \to \mathbb{R}^3$ is an isothermic immersion, then the *dual isothermic* immersion is defined by

$$df^* = \frac{f_x}{\|f_x\|^2}\, dx - \frac{f_y}{\|f_y\|^2}\, dy.$$

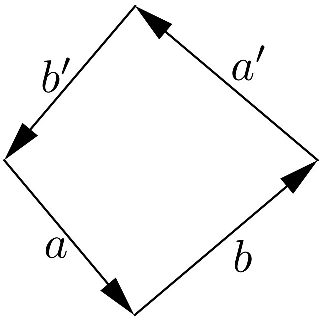




Thanks to Udo Hertrich-Jeromin for the images.

Duality for isothermic surfaces

discrete



Proposition. *Suppose* $a, b, a', b' \in \mathbb{C}$ *with*

$$a + b + a' + b' = 0 \quad \textit{and} \quad \frac{aa'}{bb'} = -1$$

and let

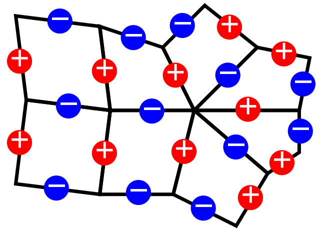
$$a^* = \frac{1}{\overline{a}}, \quad a'^* = \frac{1}{\overline{a}'}, \quad b^* = -\frac{1}{\overline{b}}, \quad b'^* = -\frac{1}{\overline{b'}}.$$

Then

$$a^* + b^* + a'^* + b'^* = 0 \quad \textit{and} \quad \frac{a^* a'^*}{b^* b'^*} = -1.$$

$$\Downarrow$$

Can define *duality for discrete isothermic surfaces* if edges may be labeled '+' and '−' appropriately.



Minimal surfaces

- Minimal surfaces are isothermic.
- Isothermic F is minimal. $\iff$ F^* contained in a sphere. (It's the Gauss map.)

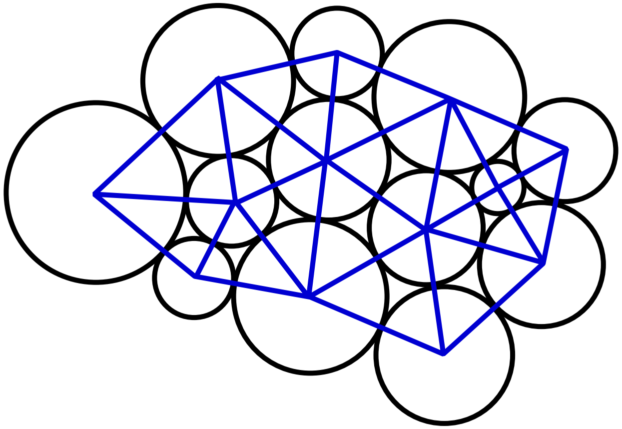
A way to construct minimal surfaces:

conformally parametrized sphere $\xrightarrow{\text{dualize}}$ minimal surface

Idea:

conformally parametrized discrete sphere $\xrightarrow{\text{dualize}}$ discrete minimal surface

Circle packings

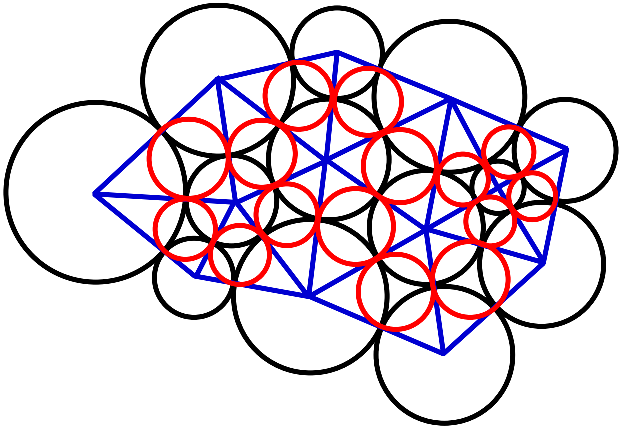


circle packing	$\longleftrightarrow$	triangulation
circles	$\longleftrightarrow$	vertices
touching circles	$\longleftrightarrow$	edges

Koebe's Theorem (1936). *To every triangulation of the sphere there corresponds a circle packing. It is unique up to Moebius transformations.*

> "Auf diesen Schließungssatz bzw. einen damit zusammenhängenden merkwürdigen Polyedersatz beabsichtige ich in einer besonderen Note zurückzukommen, die ich der Preuß. Akademie der Wissenschaften überreichen will."

Circle packings



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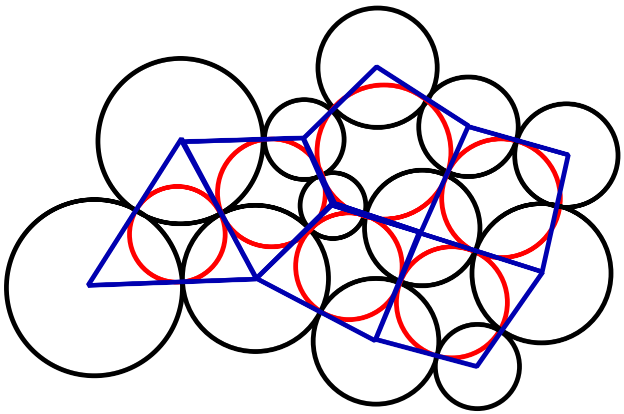
Orthogonal circle patterns



orthogonal circle pattern	$\longleftrightarrow$	polytopal cell decomposition
red circles	$\longleftrightarrow$	faces
black circles	$\longleftrightarrow$	vertices

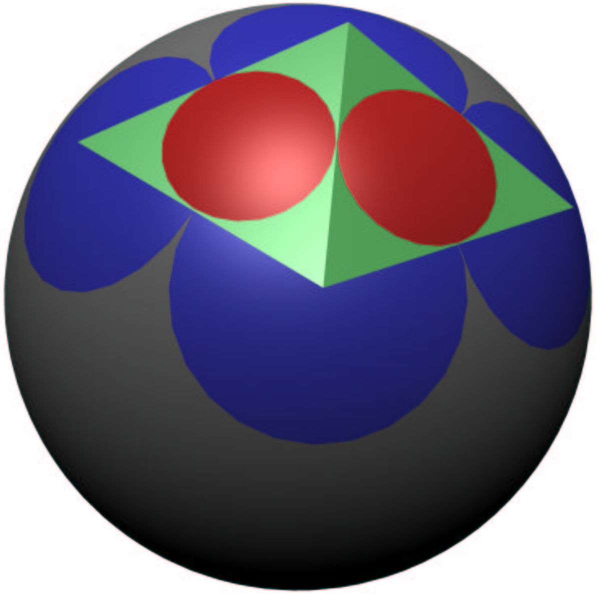
Red circles intersect black circles orthogonally.

Theorem. *To every polytopal cell decomposition of the sphere there corresponds an orthogonal circle pattern. It is unique up to Moebius transformations.*

Schramm '92 (more general result).

Brightwell/Scheinerman '93 (proof à la Thurston).

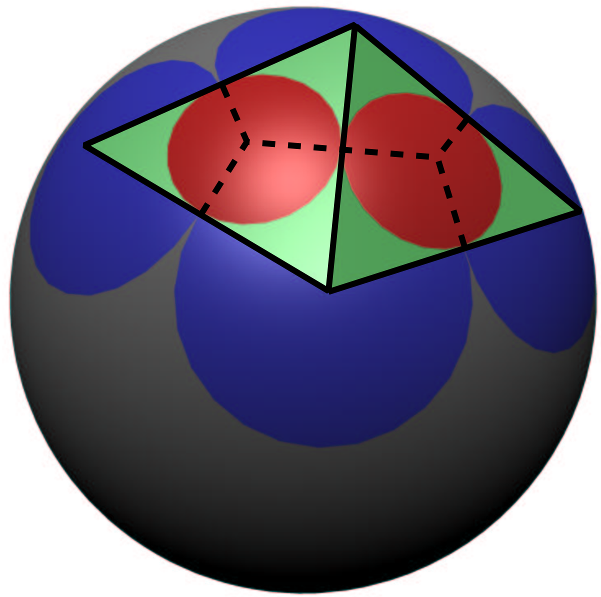
Koebe polyhedra

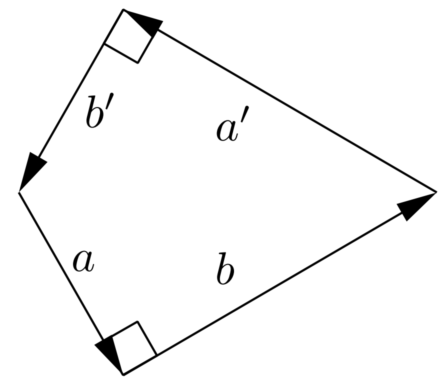


Theorem. *Every polytopal cell decomposition of the sphere can be realized by a polyhedron with edges tangent to the sphere. This realization is unique up to projective transformations which fix the sphere.*

There is a simultaneous representation of the dual cell decomposition with orthogonanally intersecting edges.

Koebe polyhedra





$$\frac{aa'}{bb'} = -1$$

Theorem. *Every polytopal cell decomposition of the sphere can be realized by a polyhedron with edges tangent to the sphere. This realization is unique up to projective transformations which fix the sphere.*

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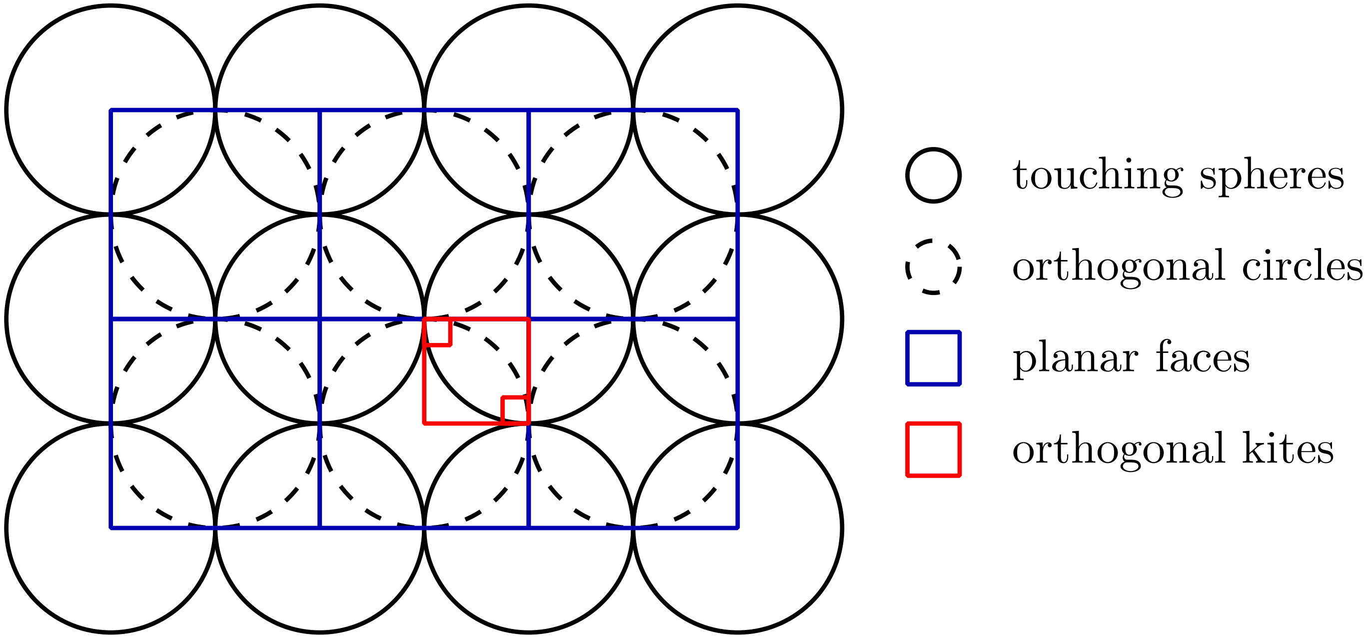
S-isothermic discrete surfaces*

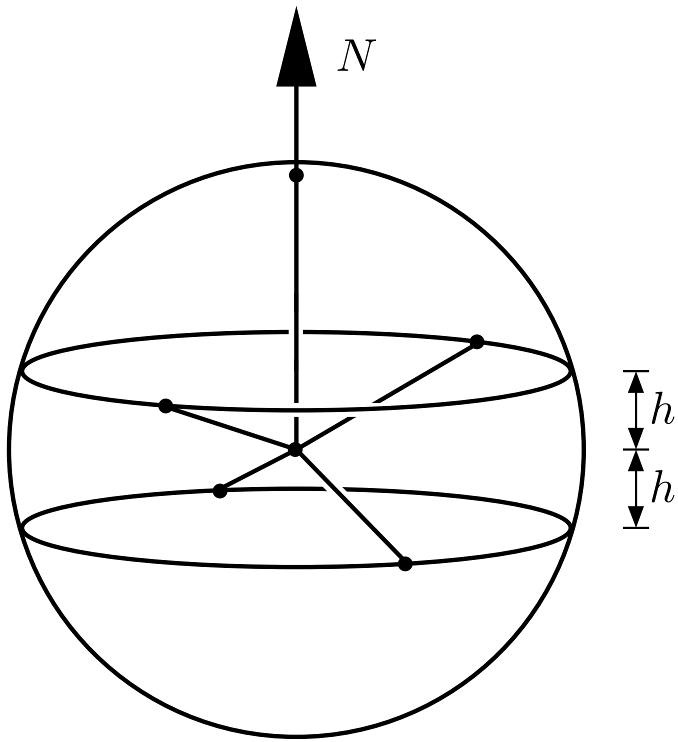


The dual of an S-isothermic surface is S-isothermic.

* [Bobenko/Pinkall '99]

Discrete minimal surfaces

Definition. *Discrete minimal* $\Longleftrightarrow \begin{cases} \text{S-isothermic,} \\ \text{extra condition at centers of spheres:} \end{cases}$



An S-isothermic surface is minimal if and only if its dual is a Koebe polyhedron.

How to construct the discrete anlogue of a continuous minimal surface

continuous minimal surface

$\Downarrow$

image of curvature lines under Gauss-map

$\Downarrow$

cell decomposition of (a branched cover of) the sphere

$\Downarrow$

orthogonal circle pattern

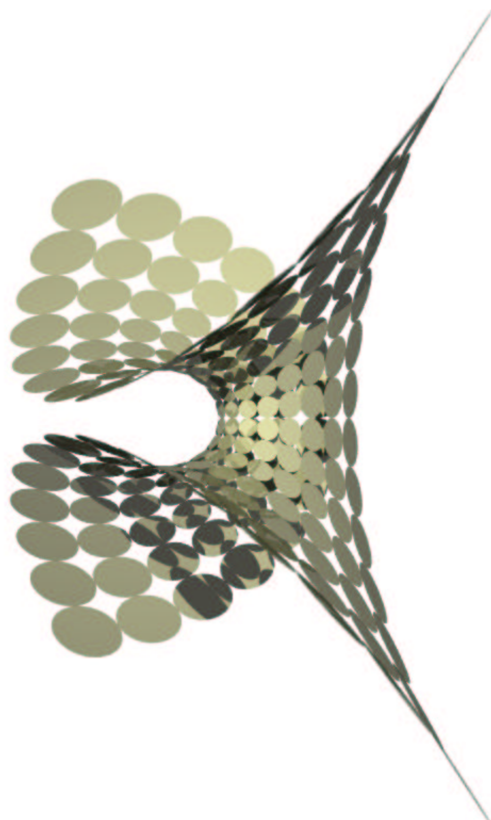
$\Downarrow$

Koebe polyhedron

$\Downarrow$

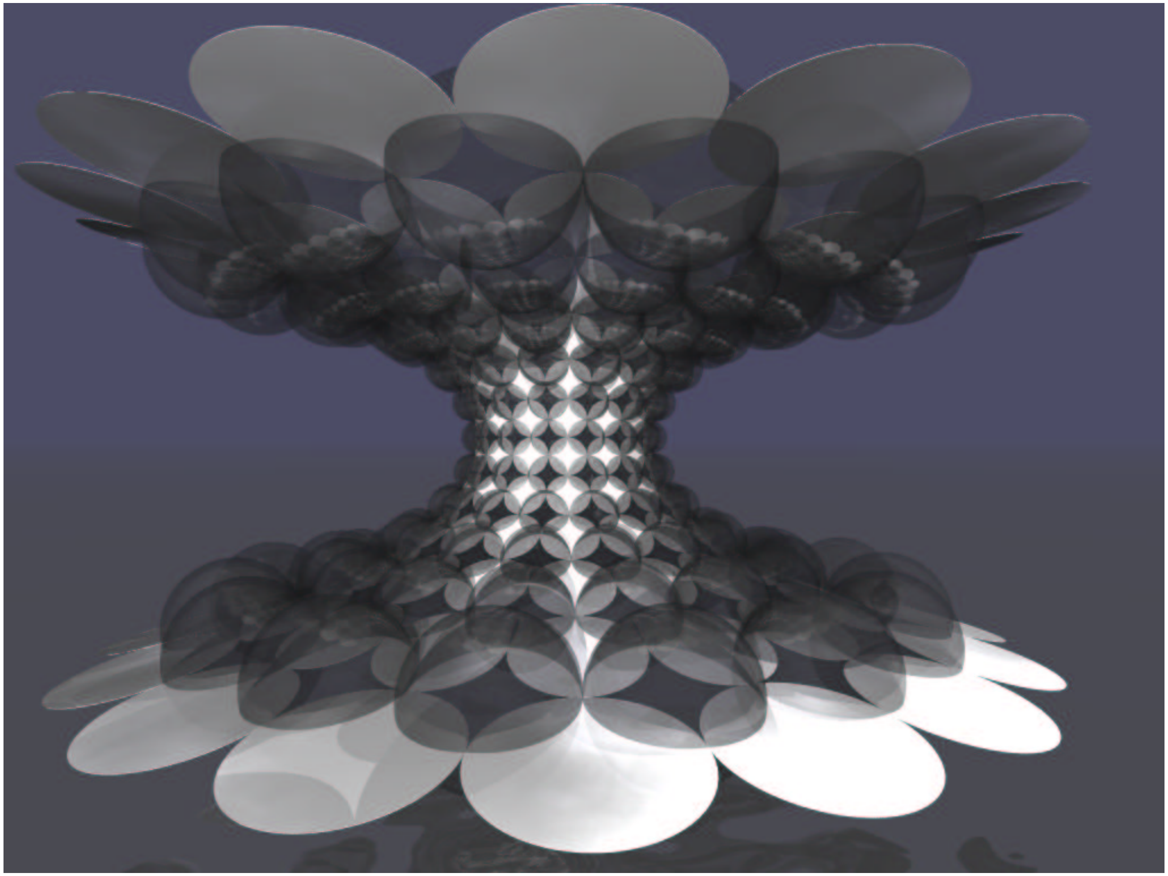
discrete minimal surface

Pictures



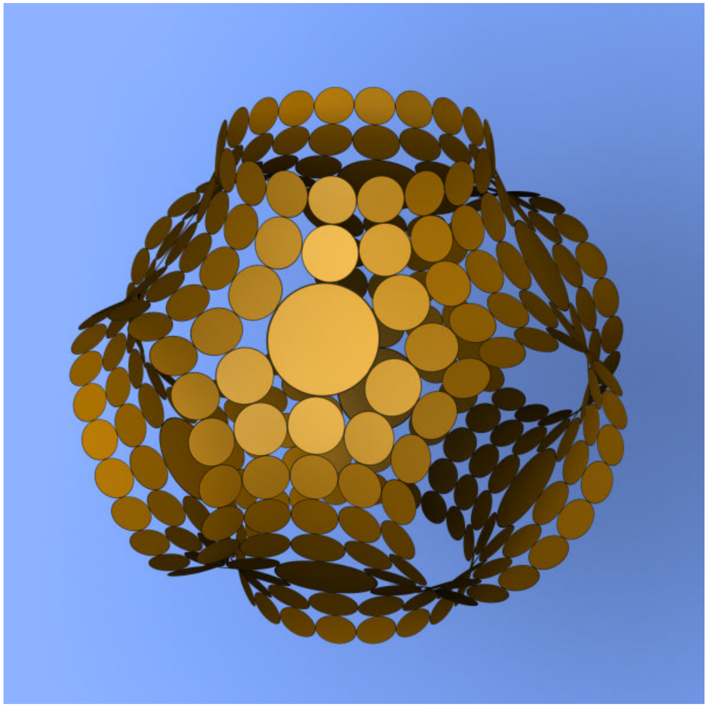
Enneper's surface

Pictures

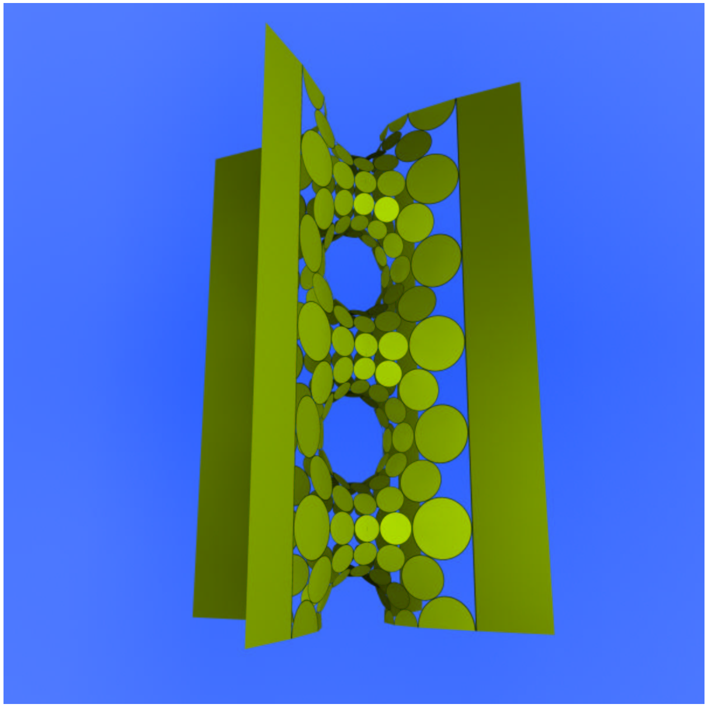


Catenoid

Pictures



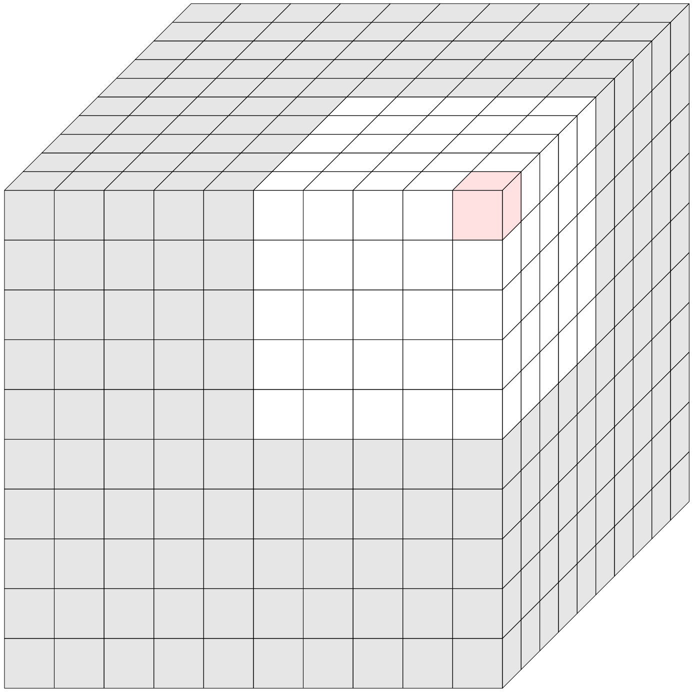
Schwarz P

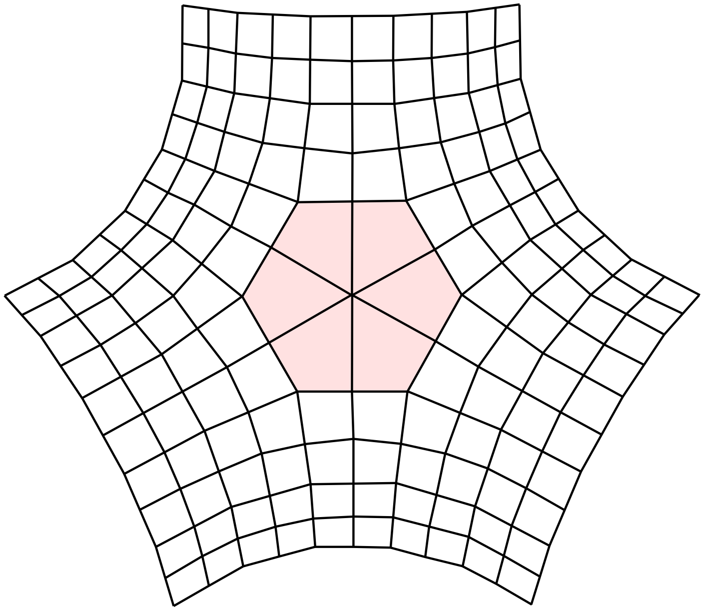


Scherk tower

The combinatorics of singularities

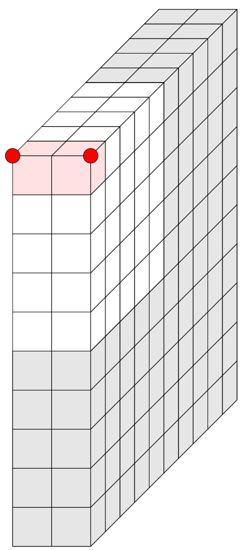
Schwarz P

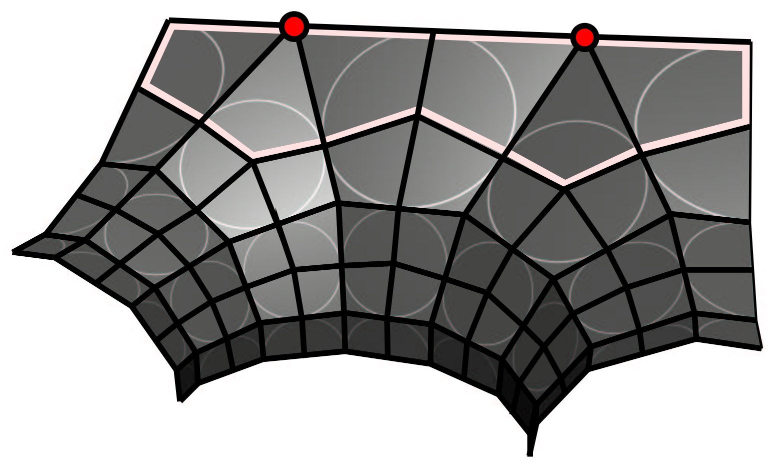


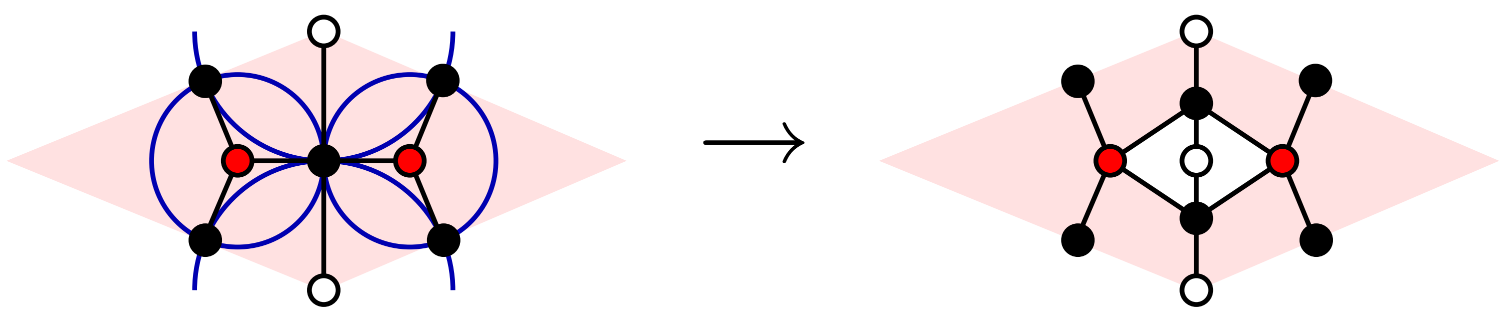


The combinatorics of singularities

Scherk







Constructing orthogonal circle patterns

unknowns:

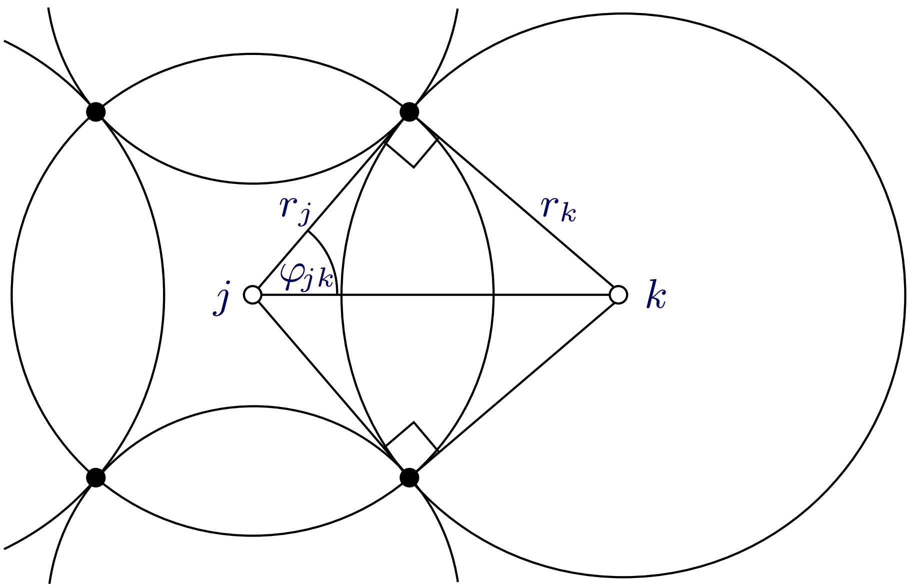
radii r

closure condition:

$$\forall j : \sum_{\text{neighbors } k} 2\varphi_{jk} = 2\pi,$$

where

$$\varphi_{jk} = \arctan \frac{r_k}{r_j}$$



How to solve the closure equations for the radii?

Constructing orthogonal circle patterns

change of variables: $r = e^{\rho}$

minimize the convex function

$$S(\rho) = \sum_{j \circ\!-\!\circ k} \Big(\operatorname{Im} \operatorname{Li}_2\big(ie^{\rho_k - \rho_j}\big) + \operatorname{Im} \operatorname{Li}_2\big(ie^{\rho_j - \rho_k}\big) - \frac{\pi}{2}(\rho_j + \rho_k) \Big) + 2\pi \sum_{\circ j} \rho_j$$

dilogarithm function: $\operatorname{Li}_2(z) = \frac{z}{1^2} + \frac{z^2}{2^2} + \frac{z^3}{3^2} + \dots$

Explicit formula, no contraints, easy to compute (!)

Convexity $\Rightarrow$ uniqueness. Existence more delicate.

[A. Bobenko, B. Springborn. Variational principles for circle patterns and Koebe's theorem. (2002) `arXiv:math.GT/0203250`]

Other methods:

- Adjust, iteratively, each radius such that neighboring circles fit [Thurston]. Implemented in Stephenson's `circlepack` for packings.
- Other variational principles [Colin de Verdière '91, Brägger '92, Rivin '94, Leibon '01]

A discrete Delaunay surface made out of circles

(made by Tim Hoffmann)

Danke.