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 $N=2$  strings

by

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# On the self-dual geometry of N=2 strings

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**Abstract:** We discuss the precise relation of the open  $N=2$  string to a self-dual Yang-Mills (SDYM) system in 2+2 dimensions. In particular, we review the description of the string target space action in terms of SDYM in a “picture hyperspace” parametrised by the standard vectorial  $\mathbb{R}^{2,2}$  coordinate together with a commuting spinor of  $SO(2,2)$ . The component form contains an infinite tower of prepotentials coupled to the one representing the SDYM degree of freedom. The truncation to five fields yields a novel one-loop exact lagrangean field theory.

**1. Introduction** The relation to self-dual Yang-Mills (SDYM) of the critical open  $N=2$  string has recently been elaborated by us [1] in view of the particular picture degeneracy and global  $SO(2,2)$  properties of the physical spectrum of string states. There has been much discussion in the literature of this relationship since Ooguri and Vafa [2] first mooted the idea that the self-duality equations,

$$F_{\mu\nu} - \frac{1}{2}\epsilon_{\mu\nu}{}^{\rho\lambda}F_{\rho\lambda} = 0 , \quad (1)$$

with the field strengths taking values in the Chan-Paton Lie algebra, describe what at that stage appeared to be the single dynamical degree of freedom of the open  $N=2$  string. (We shall not give all relevant references here, referring to [1] for further references). The comparison has been based on determinations of tree-level amplitudes for the two theories, so light-cone gauge action principles for SDYM have played a central role in the discussion. In two-spinor notation, using the splitting of the  $\mathbb{R}^{2,2}$  “Lorentz algebra”,

$$so(2,2) \cong sl(2, \mathbb{R}) \oplus sl(2, \mathbb{R})' \iff x^\mu \sigma_\mu^{\alpha\dot{\beta}} = x^{\alpha\dot{\beta}} = \begin{pmatrix} x^0+x^3 & x^1+x^2 \\ x^1-x^2 & x^0-x^3 \end{pmatrix} , \quad (2)$$

the three (real) SDYM equations take the form

$$F_{\alpha\beta} \equiv \frac{1}{2} \left( \partial_{(\alpha} \dot{\gamma} A_{\beta)\dot{\gamma}} + [A_\alpha^{\dot{\gamma}}, A_{\beta\dot{\gamma}}] \right) = 0 \quad (3)$$

In components, with the spinor indices  $\alpha, \beta$  taking values  $+$  and  $-$ , we have

$$\begin{aligned} F^{++} &\equiv \partial^{+\dot{\gamma}} A_{\dot{\gamma}}^+ + \frac{1}{2}[A^{+\dot{\gamma}}, A_{\dot{\gamma}}^+] = 0 \\ F^{+-} &\equiv \frac{1}{2} \left( \partial^{+\dot{\gamma}} A_{\dot{\gamma}}^- + \partial^{-\dot{\gamma}} A_{\dot{\gamma}}^+ + [A^{+\dot{\gamma}}, A_{\dot{\gamma}}^-] \right) = 0 \\ F^{--} &\equiv \partial^{-\dot{\gamma}} A_{\dot{\gamma}}^- + \frac{1}{2}[A^{-\dot{\gamma}}, A_{\dot{\gamma}}^-] = 0 \quad . \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$

Clearly, the  $(++)$  equation affords the generalised light-cone gauge  $A_{\dot{\gamma}}^+ = 0$  in which  $F^{+-}$  becomes homogeneous. Two strategies now suggest themselves. First, resolving the (inhomogeneous)  $(--)$  equation in the Yang fashion,

$$A_{\dot{\alpha}}^- = e^{-\phi} \partial_{\dot{\alpha}}^- e^{+\phi} , \quad (5)$$

the  $(+-)$  equation describes the  $\phi$ -dynamics in the form of the (non-polynomial) Yang equation

$$\partial^{+\dot{\alpha}} (e^{-\phi} \partial_{\dot{\alpha}}^- e^{+\phi}) = 0 . \quad (6)$$

Second, the (homogeneous)  $(+-)$  equation is instead fulfilled in terms of a Leznov prepotential, writing

$$A_{\dot{\alpha}}^- = \partial_{\dot{\alpha}}^+ \varphi^{--} , \quad (7)$$

which then must satisfy  $F^{--} = 0$ , tantamount to the (quadratic) Leznov equation,

$$\square \varphi^{--} - \frac{1}{2} [\partial^{+\dot{\alpha}} \varphi^{--}, \partial_{\dot{\alpha}}^+ \varphi^{--}] = 0 . \quad (8)$$

The light-cone gauge explicitly breaks the global  $SO(2, 2)$  covariance of eq. (3) to  $GL(1, \mathbb{R}) \otimes SL(2, \mathbb{R})'$ . In a Cartan-Weyl basis for  $sl(2, \mathbb{R})$  consisting of a diagonal hyperbolic generator  $L_{+-}$  and two parabolic generators  $L_{\pm\pm}$ , the unbroken  $gl(1, \mathbb{R})$  generator is  $L_{+-}$  in the Yang but  $L_{++}$  in the Leznov case.

Non-covariant action principles for (6) or (8) yield themselves using merely the prepotentials,

$$S_{\text{Yang}} = \mu^2 \int d^4x \, \text{Tr} \left\{ -\frac{1}{2} \phi \square \phi + \frac{1}{3} \phi \partial^{(+\dot{\alpha}} \phi \partial_{\dot{\alpha}}^- \phi + \mathcal{O}(\phi^4) \right\} \quad (9)$$

$$S_{\text{Leznov}} = \mu^2 \int d^4x \, \text{Tr} \left\{ -\frac{1}{2} \varphi^{--} \square \varphi^{--} + \frac{1}{6} \varphi^{--} [\partial^{+\dot{\alpha}} \varphi^{--}, \partial_{\dot{\alpha}}^+ \varphi^{--}] \right\} \quad (10)$$

with some mass scale  $\mu$ . Alternatively, Lagrange multipliers facilitate the construction of dimensionless actions, for example,

$$S_{\text{CS}} = \int d^4x \, \text{Tr} \left\{ -\varphi^{++} \square \varphi^{--} + \varphi^{++} [\partial^{+\dot{\alpha}} \varphi^{--}, \partial_{\dot{\alpha}}^+ \varphi^{--}] \right\} \quad (11)$$

which was shown to be even one-loop exact by Chalmers and Siegel [3].

The tree-level amplitudes following from these actions are extremely simple. Since we are dealing with massless fields in 2+2 dimensions, the on-shell momenta factorise,

$$k^{\alpha\dot{\beta}} k_{\alpha\dot{\beta}} = 0 \quad \Longleftrightarrow \quad k^{\alpha\dot{\beta}} = \kappa^\alpha \kappa^{\dot{\alpha}} . \quad (12)$$

The on-shell three-point functions  $A_3(k_1, k_2, k_3)$  can be read off as

$$A_3^{\text{Yang}} = f^{abc} \kappa_1^{(+)} \kappa_2^{(-)} \kappa_1^{\dot{\alpha}} \kappa_{2\dot{\alpha}} \quad , \quad A_3^{\text{Leznov}} = f^{abc} \kappa_1^{+} \kappa_2^{+} \kappa_1^{\dot{\alpha}} \kappa_{2\dot{\alpha}} \quad (13)$$

where  $\sum_i k_i = 0$  and  $f^{abc}$  are the structure constants of the gauge group. Surprisingly, the four-point Feynman diagrams sum to zero, in virtue of a quartic contact interaction in the Yang case. It is believed that all higher tree amplitudes vanish on-shell. The version of Chalmers and Siegel leads to the same tree-level amplitudes as the Leznov action, although in the former case one of the legs needs to be the multiplier field. Interestingly, this two-field theory does not allow diagrams beyond one loop. As we shall describe below, both (10) and (11) are related to the target space effective action for the open  $N=2$  string.

**2.  $N=2$  Open Strings** The spectrum of world-sheet fields in the NSR formulation of  $N=2$  strings consists of the 2d  $N=2$  supergravity multiplet, whose conformal gauge fixing produces the standard set of  $N=2$  superconformal ghosts, plus  $N=2$  matter fields  $(X^{\alpha\dot{\beta}}, \Psi^{\alpha\dot{\beta}})$ . The computation of open string amplitudes requires the evaluation of correlation functions for appropriate choices of physical external states on Riemann surfaces with handles, boundaries, punctures, and a harmonic  $U(1)$  gauge field background with instantons. The result is to be integrated over the moduli of the Riemann surface and the  $U(1)$  gauge field, and finally one is to sum over the topologies labelled by the Euler and  $U(1)$  instanton numbers. The relative cohomology of the BRST operator determines the string external states, which are annihilated by the commuting  $N=2$  Virasoro and the anticommuting  $N=2$  antighost zero modes. The resulting spectrum has the following quantum numbers:

- total ghost number  $u \in \mathbb{Z}$
- target space momentum  $k^{\alpha\dot{\beta}}$
- total picture  $\pi \in \mathbb{Z}$
- picture twist  $\Delta \in \mathbb{R}$
- $gl(1, \mathbb{R}) \oplus sl(2, \mathbb{R})'$  quantum numbers  $m, (j', m')$

These quantum numbers are however redundant, since they have interrelationships:  $k \cdot k = 0$  (i.e.  $k^{\alpha\dot{\beta}} = \kappa^\alpha \kappa^{\dot{\beta}}$ ),  $u - \pi = 1$ ,  $j' = m' = 0$ , and  $m$  runs in integral steps from  $-j$  to  $+j$ , where  $j := \frac{\pi}{2} + 1$ . The physical spectrum consists of just one  $SL(2, \mathbb{R})'$  singlet for each value of  $\pi$ ,  $\Delta$ , and  $(\kappa, \dot{\kappa})$ . There is still a certain redundancy, since the pictures  $(\pi \geq \pi_0, \Delta)$  can be reached from  $(\pi_0, 0)$  by applying spectral flow  $\mathcal{S}$  and picture raising  $\mathcal{P}^\alpha$ , which commute with the BRST operator and effect the mappings

$$(\pi, \Delta) \xrightarrow{\mathcal{S}(\rho)} (\pi, \Delta + 2\rho) \quad , \quad (\pi, \Delta) \xrightarrow{\mathcal{P}^\alpha} (\pi + 1, \Delta) \quad (14)$$

with  $\rho \in \mathbb{R}$ . Because the string path integral integrates over the twists of the  $U(1)$  gauge bundle, it averages over the spectral flow orbits. The  $\mathcal{S}$ -equivalent states therefore ought to be identified and we may choose the  $\Delta=0$  representative. Picture lowering can also be constructed, except on zero-momentum states. In essence, all

physical states (with  $k \neq 0$ ) can be generated starting from the canonical picture  $\pi = -2$  (i.e.  $j=0$ ), and the result is symmetric under the ‘‘Poincaré duality’’  $\pi \xrightarrow{*} -4 - 2\pi$  (i.e.  $j \xrightarrow{*} -j$ ):

$$\begin{array}{c|cccccccccc}
\pi & \cdots & -5 & -4 & -3 & -2 & -1 & 0 & +1 & \cdots \\
j & \cdots & -\frac{3}{2} & -1 & -\frac{1}{2} & 0 & +\frac{1}{2} & +1 & +\frac{3}{2} & \cdots \\
\hline
\text{states} & \cdots & |\alpha\beta\gamma\rangle^* & |\alpha\beta\rangle^* & |\alpha\rangle^* & | \rangle & |\alpha\rangle & |\alpha\beta\rangle & |\alpha\beta\gamma\rangle & \cdots
\end{array} \quad . \quad (15)$$

The states form  $SL(2, \mathbb{R})$  tensors of rank  $2|j|$  (spin  $|j|$ ), because the picture-raising operator  $\mathcal{P}^\alpha$  carries a spinor index. There is no contradiction with the above statement of unit multiplicity, since all states in a given  $SL(2, \mathbb{R})$  multiplet are related to each other, albeit in a non-local fashion. The open spinor indices are just carried by normalisation factors multilinear in  $\kappa^\alpha$ , with  $\mathcal{P}^\alpha$  increasing the spin by  $\frac{1}{2}$ :

$$\mathcal{P}^{\alpha_1} \mathcal{P}^{\alpha_2} \dots \mathcal{P}^{\alpha_{2j}} |(0); k\rangle = |\alpha_1 \alpha_2 \dots \alpha_{2j}; k\rangle \propto \kappa^{\alpha_1} \kappa^{\alpha_2} \dots \kappa^{\alpha_{2j}} |(j); k\rangle \quad . \quad (16)$$

The NSR formulation of  $N=2$  strings introduces a complex structure in the target space, which explicitly breaks  $SO(2, 2) \rightarrow GL(1, \mathbb{R}) \otimes SL(2, \mathbb{R})'$ . Individual pieces of an  $n$ -point amplitude are only  $SL(2, \mathbb{R})'$  invariant, and contributions from the  $M$ -instanton  $U(1)$  background carry a  $gl(1, \mathbb{R})$  weight equal to  $M$ . Surprisingly, the path integral measure constrains the instanton sum to  $|M| \leq J \equiv n-2$  at tree level. Moreover, the weight factors built from the string coupling  $e$  and the instanton angle  $\theta$  conspire to restore  $SO(2, 2)$  invariance of the instanton sum if  $\sqrt{e}(\cos \frac{\theta}{2}, \sin \frac{\theta}{2})$  is assumed to transform as an  $SL(2, \mathbb{R})$  spinor! This spinor simply parametrises the choices of complex structure, and it may be Lorentz-rotated to  $(1, 0)$ . Henceforth we shall remain in such a frame where  $e=1$  and  $\theta=0$ . It has the virtue that only the highest  $SL(2, \mathbb{R})$  weights  $m_i=j_i$ ,  $i=1, \dots, n$ , occur and only the maximal instanton number sector,  $M=J$ , contributes.

The tree-level open string on-shell amplitudes may then be found to be

$$A_3^{\text{string}} = f^{abc} \kappa_1^+ \kappa_2^+ \kappa_1^{\dot{\alpha}} \kappa_2^{\dot{\alpha}} = A_3^{\text{Leznov}} \quad (17)$$

$$A_4^{\text{string}} \propto \kappa_1^+ \kappa_2^+ \kappa_3^+ \kappa_4^+ (\dot{\kappa}_1 \cdot \dot{\kappa}_2 \dot{\kappa}_3 \cdot \dot{\kappa}_4 t + \dot{\kappa}_2 \cdot \dot{\kappa}_3 \dot{\kappa}_4 \cdot \dot{\kappa}_1 s) = 0 \quad (18)$$

$$A_{n>4}^{\text{string}} = 0 \quad . \quad (19)$$

They are independent of the external  $SL(2, \mathbb{R})$  spins  $j_i$ , as long as  $\sum_{i=1}^n j_i = J \equiv n-2$ . Clearly, the Leznov version (13) of SDYM is reproduced. However, a covariant description needs to take the entire tower of states in (15) into account.

**3. Target Space Actions** Physical string states correspond to target space (background) fields, whose on-shell dynamics is determined by the string scattering amplitudes. In particular, the string three-point functions directly yield cubic terms in the effective target space action. In the present case, the correspondence reads

$$|+ \dots +\rangle \longleftrightarrow \varphi^{--\dots-} \quad (j \geq 0) \quad , \quad |-\dots -\rangle^* \longleftrightarrow \varphi^{++\dots+} \quad (j < 0) \quad (20)$$

and we denote the fields by  $\varphi_j$ . Then, the target space effective action for the infinite tower  $\{\varphi_j\}$  is

$$\begin{aligned} S_\infty &= \int d^4x \operatorname{Tr} \left\{ -\frac{1}{2} \sum_{j \in \mathbb{Z}/2} \varphi_{(-j)} \square \varphi_{(+j)} + \frac{1}{3} \sum_{j_1+j_2+j_3=1} \varphi_{(j_1)} \left[ \partial^{+\dot{\alpha}} \varphi_{(j_2)} , \partial^+_{\dot{\alpha}} \varphi_{(j_3)} \right] \right\} \\ &= \int d^4x \operatorname{Tr} \left\{ -\frac{1}{2} \Phi^{--} \square \Phi^{--} + \frac{1}{6} \Phi^{--} \left[ \partial^{+\dot{\alpha}} \Phi^{--} , \partial^+_{\dot{\alpha}} \Phi^{--} \right] \right\}_{\eta^4} \end{aligned} \quad (21)$$

where we have introduced a “picture hyperfield”,

$$\Phi^{--}(x, \eta^-) = \sum_j (\eta^-)^{2j} \varphi_{1-j}(x) \quad , \quad (22)$$

depending on an extra commuting coordinate  $\eta^-$ , and we project the Lagrangean onto the part quartic in  $\eta$ . It is remarkable that the action (21) has the Leznov form in terms of the hyperfield. It not only reproduces all (tree-level) string three-point functions (17) but also yields vanishing four- and probably higher-point functions for the same reason that the Leznov action (10) does. Picture raising induces a dual action on the component fields,

$$Q^+ : \quad \varphi_j \longrightarrow (3-2j) \varphi_{j-\frac{1}{2}} \quad , \quad (23)$$

which is nothing but the  $\eta^-$  derivative on the hyperfield!

Three successive truncations to a finite number of fields are possible. First, keeping only  $\{\varphi_{-1}, \varphi_{-\frac{1}{2}}, \varphi_0, \varphi_{+\frac{1}{2}}, \varphi_{+1}\}$ , a consistent five-field model ensues, viz.,

$$\begin{aligned} S_5 &= \int d^4x \operatorname{Tr} \left\{ \frac{1}{2} \partial^{+\dot{\alpha}} \varphi \partial^-_{\dot{\alpha}} \varphi + \partial^{+\dot{\alpha}} \varphi^+ \partial^-_{\dot{\alpha}} \varphi^- + \partial^{+\dot{\alpha}} \varphi^{++} \partial^-_{\dot{\alpha}} \varphi^{--} \right. \\ &\quad + \frac{1}{2} \varphi [\partial^{+\dot{\alpha}} \varphi^-, \partial^+_{\dot{\alpha}} \varphi^-] + \frac{1}{2} \varphi^{--} [\partial^{+\dot{\alpha}} \varphi, \partial^+_{\dot{\alpha}} \varphi] \\ &\quad \left. + \varphi^{--} [\partial^{+\dot{\alpha}} \varphi^+, \partial^+_{\dot{\alpha}} \varphi^-] + \frac{1}{2} \varphi^{++} [\partial^{+\dot{\alpha}} \varphi^{--}, \partial^+_{\dot{\alpha}} \varphi^{--}] \right\} \quad . \end{aligned} \quad (24)$$

Second, eliminating also the fermions leaves us with three fields. Third, we may in addition kill  $\varphi_0$  as well, resulting in the two-field model of Chalmers and Siegel [3]! All truncations share the one-loop exactness mentioned before.

**4. Self-Duality in Hyperspace** The infinite tower of higher-spin fields which arise from the picture degeneracy parametrise simply SDYM in a hyperspace with coordinates  $\{x^{\alpha\dot{\alpha}}, \eta^\alpha, \bar{\eta}^{\dot{\alpha}}\}$ , with  $\eta$  and  $\bar{\eta}$  commuting spinors. This commutative variant of superspace exhibits a  $\mathbb{Z}_2$ -graded Lie-algebra variant of the super-Poincaré algebra (i.e. with all anti-commutators replaced by commutators). So the covariant target space symmetry is effectively the extension of the  $\mathbb{R}^{2,2}$  Poincaré algebra by two Grassmann-even spinorial generators squaring to a translation, i.e.,  $[Q_{\dot{\alpha}}, Q_\alpha] = P_{\alpha\dot{\alpha}}$  (see [1] for details). Hyperspace self-duality allows compact expression in a chiral subspace independent of the  $\bar{\eta}$  coordinates. In terms of chiral subspace gauge-covariant

derivatives  $\mathcal{D}_\alpha = \partial_\alpha + A_\alpha(x, \eta)$  and  $\mathcal{D}_{\alpha\dot{\alpha}} = \partial_{\alpha\dot{\alpha}} + A_{\alpha\dot{\alpha}}(x, \eta)$ , the self-duality conditions take the simple form

$$[\mathcal{D}_\alpha, \mathcal{D}_\beta] = \epsilon_{\alpha\beta} F \quad , \quad [\mathcal{D}_\alpha, \mathcal{D}_{\beta\dot{\beta}}] = \epsilon_{\alpha\beta} F_{\dot{\beta}} \quad , \quad [\mathcal{D}_{\alpha\dot{\alpha}}, \mathcal{D}_{\beta\dot{\beta}}] = \epsilon_{\alpha\beta} F_{\dot{\alpha}\dot{\beta}} \quad . \quad (25)$$

Jacobi identities yield the equations

$$\mathcal{D}_\alpha \dot{F}_{\dot{\alpha}\dot{\beta}} = 0 \quad , \quad \mathcal{D}_\alpha \dot{F}_{\dot{\alpha}} = 0 \quad , \quad \mathcal{D}_{\alpha\dot{\alpha}} F = \mathcal{D}_\alpha F_{\dot{\alpha}} \quad . \quad (26)$$

The first two are respectively the Yang-Mills and Dirac equations for a SDYM multiplet, and the third implies the scalar field equation  $\mathcal{D}^2 F = [F^{\dot{\alpha}}, F_{\dot{\alpha}}]$ . All chiral hyperfields have  $\eta$  expansions, e.g.

$$A_\alpha(x, \eta) = A_\alpha(x) + \eta^\beta A_{\alpha\beta}(x) + \eta^\beta \eta^\gamma A_{\alpha\beta\gamma}(x) + \dots \quad . \quad (27)$$

Choosing the light-cone gauge,  $A^+ = 0 = A^+_{\dot{\alpha}}$ , we note that all fields are defined in terms of a generalised Leznov prepotential,

$$A^- = \partial^+ \Phi^{--} \quad , \quad A^-_{\dot{\alpha}} = \partial^+_{\dot{\alpha}} \Phi^{--} \quad , \quad (28)$$

$$F = \partial^+ \partial^+ \Phi^{--} \quad , \quad F_{\dot{\alpha}} = \partial^+ \partial^+_{\dot{\alpha}} \Phi^{--} \quad , \quad F_{\dot{\alpha}\dot{\beta}} = \partial^+_{\dot{\alpha}} \partial^+_{\dot{\beta}} \Phi^{--} \quad . \quad (29)$$

Since  $\partial^-$  does not occur in the above, all fields are determined by the chiral ( $\eta^+$ -independent) part of  $\Phi^{--}$ . The dynamics is determined by the remaining constraints

$$[\mathcal{D}^-_{\dot{\alpha}}, \mathcal{D}^-_{\dot{\beta}}] = 0 \quad \text{and} \quad [\mathcal{D}^-, \mathcal{D}^-_{\dot{\beta}}] = 0 \quad , \quad (30)$$

where the former equation is precisely the Leznov equation for  $\Phi^{--}$ . Choosing this to be chiral,  $\Phi^{--} = \Phi^{--}(x, \eta^-)$ , allows identification with (22), with action given by (21). The second equation above then merely determines the  $\eta^-$  dependence of  $\Phi^{--}$ .

The restricted system of five fields (24) has the  $SO(2, 2)$ -invariant action

$$S_5^{\text{inv}} = \int d^4x \text{Tr} \left\{ \frac{1}{4} g^{\alpha\beta} F_{\alpha\beta} + \frac{1}{3} \chi^\alpha \mathcal{D}_{\alpha\dot{\alpha}} F^{\dot{\alpha}} + \frac{1}{8} \mathcal{D}^{\alpha\dot{\alpha}} F \mathcal{D}_{\alpha\dot{\alpha}} F + \frac{1}{2} F [F^{\dot{\alpha}}, F_{\dot{\alpha}}] \right\} \quad (31)$$

where  $g^{\alpha\beta}$  and  $\chi^\alpha$  are (propagating) multiplier fields for  $A_{\alpha\dot{\alpha}}$  and  $F_{\dot{\alpha}}$ , respectively. The similarity with  $N=4$  supersymmetric SDYM [4] is evident, however with commuting single-multiplicity fermions replacing multiplicity 4 anticommuting ones.

To conclude, we note that theories of  $N=2$  closed as well as  $N=(2, 1)$  heterotic strings are also intimately related to self-dual geometry and our covariant hyperspace description generalises to both these cases.

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