Box complexes and Kronecker double coverings

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1 Introduction

A coloring of a simple graph G is to assign a color to each vertex of G so that adjacent vertices have different colors. The chromatic number of G, denoted by $\chi(G)$, is the smallest number of colors we need to color G. To compute the chromatic numbers of graphs is called the *graph coloring problem*, which has been researched for a long time in graph theory.

The first application of homotopy theory to this problem is Lovász's proof of Kneser's conjecture (see Section 2). He assigned a simplicial complex, called a neighborhood complex, to a graph and showed that the connectivity of the complex gives a lower bound for the chromatic number.

After that, several graph coloring complexes have been introduced by different authors. Box complex is one of them. It is a $\mathbb{Z}_2$-poset $B(G)$ assigned to a graph. Here we regard a poset as a topological space by its classifying space.

The purpose of this paper is a brief explanation of author's paper [14] and its background. Roughly speaking, the main result of [14] is to mention that the Kronecker double covering over G completely determines the (non-equivariant) poset structure of the box complex. The Kronecker double covering over G is the graph $K_2 \times G$. Here K_2 is the graph consisting of two vertices and one edge connecting them, and the notation "$\times$" means the categorical product. See Section 4 for details.

Section 2 and Section 3 are devoted to the background of neighborhood complexes and box complexes. For a more concrete introduction to this subject, we refer to [12] or [10].

In Section 5, we mention the statement of the result. As an application of it, we can construct graphs whose chromatic numbers are different but whose box complexes are (non-equivariantly) isomorphic.

We closed this section by giving precise definitions relating to the graph coloring problem. A graph is a pair $G = (V(G), E(G))$ consisting of a set $V(G)$ with a symmetric subset $E(G)$ of $V(G) \times V(G)$. Namely, a pair (v, w) of vertices of G is contained in

$E(G)$ if and only if its transpose (w, v) is contained in $E(G)$. Therefore our graphs are non-directed, may have loops, but have no multiple edges. A graph homomorphism is a map $f : V(G) \to V(H)$ with $(f \times f)(E(G)) \subset E(H)$. The complete graph K_n is defined by $V(K_n) = \{0, 1, \cdots, n - 1\}$ and $E(K_n) = \{(x, y) \mid x \neq y\}$. Then the chromatic number $\chi(G)$ is formulated as the number

$$\chi(G) = \inf\{n \geq 0 \mid \text{There is a graph homomorphism from } G \text{ to } K_n.\}.$$

The author would like to thank Yasuhiro Hara and Tomohiro Kawakami for inviting him to the conference "New topics on transformation groups" held at RIMS in May, 2015. This article is a summary of the talk.

2 Neighborhood complex

In this section, we shall review the definition and known results concerning with neighborhood complexes.

Let G be a graph and v a vertex of G. The neighbor $N(v)$ of G is the set of vertices of G adjacent to v. Note that if v is not looped then $N(v)$ does not contain v. The neighborhood complex $N(G)$, introduced in Lovász [11], is the abstract simplicial complex defined as follows:

- The underlying set of $N(G)$ is $V(G)$.

- A finite subset $\sigma \subset V(G)$ is a simplex if there is a vertex $v \in V(G)$ with $\sigma \subset N(v)$.

For example, the neighborhood complex of the complete graph K_n is the boundary of $(n - 1)$-simplex, and hence is homeomorphic to S^{n-2}. Let C_n denote the n-cycle graph for $n \geq 3$. If n is odd then $N(C_n)$ is the 1-sphere. $N(C_4)$ is homotopy equivalent to S^0, and $N(C_{2n})$ with $n \geq 2$ is homotoopy equivalent to $S^1 \sqcup S^1$.

For a space X, we write $\mathrm{conn}(X)$ to indicate the largest integer $n \geq -1$ such that X is n-connected. Here (-1)-connectivity means non-emptiness. If X is contractible then we regard $\mathrm{conn}(X) = +\infty$, and if X is the empty space then $\mathrm{conn}(X) = -\infty$.

Theorem 2.1 (Lovász, 1978). *If a graph G is n-connected then $\chi(G)$ is greater than $n + 2$. Namely, we have $\chi(G) > \mathrm{conn}(N(G)) + 2$.*

This is a consequence of Borsuk-Ulam's theorem. The outline of the proof used box complex will be given in Section 3. Lovász used Theorem 2.1 to prove Kneser's conjecture.

Kneser's conjecture [9] asserts that if the set of k-subsets of the n-point set $X = \{0, 1, \cdots, n - 1\}$ is divided into $(n - 2k + 1)$-classes, then there are two disjoint subsets of X contained in the same class. This conjecture was translated into the following

graph coloring problem: For a pair of positive integers n, k with $n \geq 2k$, Kneser's graph $KG_{n,k}$ is the graph defined by

$$V(KG_{n,k}) = \{\sigma \subset \{0, 1, \cdots, n-1\} \mid \#\sigma = k\},$$

$$E(KG_{n,k}) = \{(\sigma, \tau) \mid \sigma \cap \tau = \emptyset\}.$$

Then Kneser's conjecture is equivalent to $\chi(KG_{n,k}) = n - 2k + 2$. (Precisely, the assertion of Kneser's conjecture is equivalent to $\chi(KG_{n,k}) \geq n - 2k + 2$. However, it is easy to show $\chi(KG_{n,k}) \leq n - 2k + 2$. In fact one can construct an $(n - 2k + 2)$-coloring of $KG_{n,k}$ by induction on n. First, since $KG_{2k,k}$ is a disjoint union of K_2's, we have that $\chi(KG_{2k,k}) = 2$. Suppose that there is a coloring $f : KG_{n,k} \to K_{n-2k+2}$. Then we have a coloring $g : KG_{n+1,k} \to K_{n-2k+3}$ defined by

$$g(\sigma) = \begin{cases} f(\sigma) & (n + 1 \notin \sigma) \\ n - 2k + 3 & (n + 1 \in \sigma). \end{cases}$$

This completes the proof of $\chi(KG_{n,k}) \leq n - 2k + 2$.)

Lovász showed the following theorem.

Theorem 2.2 (Lovász [11], 1978). *The neighborhood complex of $KG_{n,k}$ is $(n - 2k - 1)$-connected.*

Combining Theorem 2.1 and Theorem 2.2, Lovász deduced Kneser's conjecture $\chi(KG_{n,k}) = n - 2k + 2$.

As a related topic, we mention stable Kneser's graphs. A subset S of $\mathbb{Z}/n$ is *stable* if $x \in S$ implies $x + 1 \notin S$. Stable Kneser's graph $SG_{n,k}$ is defined as follows: The vertices of $SG_{n,k}$ are stable k-subsets of $\mathbb{Z}/n$, and two stable k-subsets are adjacent if they are disjoint. Clearly stable Kneser's graph $SG_{n,k}$ is a subgraph of Kneser's graph $KG_{n,k}$ and hence $\chi(SG_{n,k}) \leq \chi(KG_{n,k})$. Soon after Lovász [11], the following theorem stronger than Kneser's conjecture was proven by Schrijver [15]. Here a graph G is called *vertex critical* if every subgraph H of G with $V(H) \subsetneq V(G)$ satisfies $\chi(H) < \chi(G)$.

Theorem 2.3 (Schrijver [15], 1978). *Stable Kneser's graph $SG_{n,k}$ is vertex critical and $\chi(SG_{n,k}) = n - 2k + 2$.*

The homotopy types of neighborhood complexes of stable Kneser's graphs were determined:

Theorem 2.4 (Björner-Longueville [2] 2003). *The neighborhood complex of $SG_{n,k}$ is homotopy equivalent to the $(n - 2k)$-sphere.*

3 Box complex

A partially ordered set is called a poset, for short. The order complex $\Delta(P)$ of P is the simplicial complex whose simplices are finite chains in P. It is known that the classifying space of P is naturally homeomorphic to the geometric realization of $\Delta(P)$. In this article, the classifying space of a poset P is denoted by $|P|$. For a simplicial complex K, we write FK to mean the face poset of K. Then the triangulation determined by $|FK|$ is the barycentric subdivision of $|K|$ and hence they are homeomorphic.

The box complex of a graph is a $\mathbb{Z}_2$-space assigned to a graph. There are similar constructions as follows. For more detailed research, refer to [5], [13], or [18].

(1) Let G be a finite graph. Consider the antitone map $\nu : FN(G) \to FN(G)$ defined by $\nu(\sigma) = \{v \in V(G) \mid \sigma \subset N(v)\}$. (In the definition of ν, we use the assumption that G is finite.) The Lovász complex $L(G)$ is the induced subset of $FN(G)$ consisting of simplices $\sigma \in N(G)$ with $\nu^2(\sigma) = \sigma$. Then the restriction of ν to $L(G)$ determines the involution of $L(G)$. This complex was introduced by Lovász [11] in the proof of Kneser's conjecture, and detailed research on it is found in Walker [17].

For a graph homomorphism $f : G \to H$, we have a $\mathbb{Z}_2$-map $L(f) : L(G) \to L(H)$ defined by $L(f)(\sigma) = \nu^2(f(\sigma))$ (note that $\nu^3 = \nu$). For a composable graph homomorphisms g and f, one can see $L(g) \circ L(f) \simeq_{\mathbb{Z}_2} L(g \circ f)$. However, $L(g) \circ L(f) \neq L(g \circ f)$ in general.

(2) Let G be a graph. The complex $B(G)$ is the subcomplex of $N(G) * N(G)$ whose simplices are $\sigma * \tau$ for simplices $\sigma, \tau \in N(G)$ with $\sigma \times \tau \subset E(G)$. The involution of $B(G)$ is obviously defined. A graph homomorphism $f : G \to H$ gives rise to a $\mathbb{Z}_2$-map $B(f) : B(G) \to B(H)$ and it satisfies $B(g \circ f) = B(g) \circ B(f)$.

(3) Let G be a graph. The complex $\mathrm{Bip}(G)$ is the poset

$$\{(\sigma, \tau) \mid \sigma \text{ and } \tau \text{ are non-empty subsets of } G \text{ with } \sigma \times \tau \subset E(G).\}$$

ordered by $(\sigma, \tau) \leq (\sigma', \tau') \Leftrightarrow \sigma \subset \sigma'$ and $\tau \subset \tau'$. The involution of $\mathrm{Bip}(G)$ is defined by the correspondence $(\sigma, \tau) \leftrightarrow (\tau, \sigma)$, and a graph homomorphism $f : G \to H$ induces a $\mathbb{Z}_2$-map $\mathrm{Bip}(f) : \mathrm{Bip}(G) \to \mathrm{Bip}(H)$, $(\sigma, \tau) \mapsto (f(\sigma), f(\tau))$. This complex is isomorphic to the Hom complex $\mathrm{Hom}(K_2, G)$, which was investigated in Babson-Kozlov [1].

In the reference, authors usually called the complex $B(G)$ the box complex.[1]

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[1] In Section 5 we call $\mathrm{Bip}(G)$ the box complex of G since there is no appropriate term indicating the complex $\mathrm{Bip}(G)$.

Theorem 3.1 (Csorba et al [5], Živaljević [18]). *The above constructions of $\mathbb{Z}_2$-spaces are naturally $\mathbb{Z}_2$-homotopy equivalent. Moreover, they are naturally homotopy equivalent to neighborhood complexes*

A fundamental result of the box complex is the following theorem. Here we consider the k-sphere S^k as a $\mathbb{Z}_2$-space by its antipodal map. For its proof, we refer to [1], [12], or [10] for example.

Theorem 3.2. *The box complex of the complete graph K_n is $\mathbb{Z}_2$-homotopy equivalent to the $(n-1)$-sphere S^{n-2} for $n \geq 1$.*

For a $\mathbb{Z}_2$-space X, set

$$\mathrm{ind}(X) = \inf\{k \geq -1 \mid \text{There is a } \mathbb{Z}_2\text{-map from } X \text{ to } S^k\}.$$

Note that if there is a graph homomorphism from G to K_n then there is a $\mathbb{Z}_2$-map from $B(G)$ to $B(K_n) = S^{n-2}$. Therefore we have the following.

Corollary 3.3. $\chi(G) \geq \mathrm{ind}(B(G)) + 2$.

To deduce Theorem 2.1, it suffices to show $\mathrm{conn}(X) + 1 \leq \mathrm{ind}(X)$. Note that if the $\mathbb{Z}_2$-space X is k-connected then there is a $\mathbb{Z}_2$-map from S^{k+1} to X. Suppose $\mathrm{ind}(X) = m$ and let $X \to S^m$ be a $\mathbb{Z}_2$-map. Then there is a $\mathbb{Z}_2$-map from $S^{k+1} \to S^m$. Then Borsuk-Ulam's theorem implies $k + 1 \leq m$. Therefore we have $\mathrm{conn}(X) + 1 \leq \mathrm{ind}(X)$.

The difference between the inequality of Corollary 3.3 can be arbitrarily bad. In fact Walker [17] showed that for a positive integer n, there is a finite graph G whose box complex is $\mathbb{Z}_2$-homotopy equivalent to a 1-dimensional $\mathbb{Z}_2$-CW-complex (and hence $\mathrm{ind}(B(G)) \leq 1$) but $\chi(G) \geq n$.

By the definition of $SG_{n,k}$ (see Section 2), the dihedral group D_{2n} with order $2n$ acts on $SG_{n,k}$ in an obvious way, and Braun [3] showed that the automorphism group of $SG_{n,k}$ coincides with D_{2n}. Theorem 2.4 and Theorem 3.1 imply that $B(SG_{n,k})$ is homotopy equivalent to S^{n-2k}. Therefore $B(SG_{n,k})$ is a $\mathbb{Z}_2 \times D_{2n}$-space, and its topology was investigated by Schultz [16].

4 Kronecker double covering

Let G, H be graphs. The (Kronecker) product $G \times H$ is the graph defined by

$$V(G \times H) = V(G) \times V(H),$$

$$E(G \times H) = \{((x,y),(x',y')) \mid (x,x') \in E(G), \ (y,y') \in E(H)\}.$$

Then one can show that $G \times H$ is the categorical product in the category of graphs.

A graph homomorphism $p : G \to H$ is a covering if $p|_{N(v)} : N(v) \to N(p(v))$ is bijective. The Kronecker double covering is the second projection $K_2 \times G \to G$, $(a, v) \mapsto v$.

Here we give a brief review of the theory of Kronecker double coverings. Perhaps, the following formulation using 2-colored graphs might be first appeared in [14], but was essentially obtained by other authors, see [8] for example.

A 2-colored graph is a pair (X, ε) consisting of a graph X with a 2-coloring $\varepsilon : X \to K_2$. A graph homomorphism $f : X \to Y$ between 2-colored graphs are 2-colored if $\varepsilon_Y \circ f = \varepsilon_X$. We write $\mathcal{G}_{/K_2}$ to indicate the category of 2-colored graphs whose morphisms are 2-colored homomorphisms.

An odd involution of a 2-colored graph (X, ε) is a graph homomorphism $\tau : X \to X$ such that $\tau^2 = \mathrm{id}$ and $\varepsilon(\tau(x)) \neq \varepsilon(x)$ for all $x \in V(X)$. Define the category $\mathcal{G}_{/K_2}^{odd}$ as follows:

- An object of $\mathcal{G}_{/K_2}^{odd}$ is a triple (X, ε, τ) such that τ is an odd involution of a 2-colored graph (X, ε).

- A morphism from $(X, \varepsilon_X, \tau_X)$ to $(Y, \varepsilon_Y, \tau_Y)$ is a 2-colored homomorphism $f : X \to Y$ with $\tau_Y \circ f = f \circ \tau_X$.

Let $\mathcal{G}$ denote the category of graphs. Let G be a graph. The Kronecker double covering $K_2 \times G$ over G is regarded as an object of $\mathcal{G}_{/K_2}^{odd}$ as follows: The 2-coloring of $K_2 \times G$ is the first projection $K_2 \times G \to K_2$, $(a, v) \mapsto a$. The odd involution of $K_2 \times G$ is $(0, v) \leftrightarrow (1, v)$. Thus Kronecker double covering gives a functor from the category $\mathcal{G}$ of graphs to $\mathcal{G}_{/K_2}^{odd}$.

Lemma 4.1. *The functor*
$$K_2 \times - : \mathcal{G} \to \mathcal{G}_{/K_2}^{odd}$$
is an equivalence of categories.

Note that an involution τ of a graph G is identified with a $\mathbb{Z}_2$-action on G. We write G/τ to indicate the orbit space with respect to this action. The quasi-inverse of $K_2 \times - : \mathcal{G} \to \mathcal{G}_{/K_2}^{odd}$ is the quotient $(X, \tau, \varepsilon) \mapsto X/\tau$.

5 Results

In this section we assume that the term "box complex" means the $\mathbb{Z}_2$-poset $\mathrm{Bip}(G)$ introduced in (3) in the beginning of Section 3, and *we write $B(G)$ instead of* $\mathrm{Bip}(G)$. A principal result of [14] is the following. Let X be a 2-colored graph.

Theorem 5.1 (M. [14]). *Let G, H be graphs having no isolated vertices. Then the following hold.*

(1) The box complexes $B(G)$ and $B(H)$ are isomorphic as posets if and only if their Kronecker double coverings $K_2 \times G$ and $K_2 \times H$ are isomorphic as graphs.

(2) The box complexes $B(G)$ and $B(H)$ are isomorphic as $\mathbb{Z}_2$-posets if and only if they are isomorphic.

Here we give the "if" part of Theorem 4.2.(1). Define the *box complex for 2-colored graphs* to be the induced subposet

$$B_{/K_2}(X) = \{(\sigma, \sigma') \in B(G) \mid \sigma \subset \varepsilon_X^{-1}(0) \text{ and } \sigma' \subset \varepsilon_X^{-1}(1)\}$$

of the usual box complex $B(X)$. The box complex $B_{/K_2}$ for 2-colored graphs gives a functor from the category $\mathcal{G}_{/K_2}$ of 2-colored graphs to the category $\mathcal{P}$ of posets, and it is easy to show that $B(G) \cong B_{/K_2}(K_2 \times G)$ as posets. Therefore if $K_2 \times G \cong K_2 \times H$ then

$$B(G) \cong B(K_2 \times G) \cong B(K_2 \times H) \cong B(H)$$

and hence we have the "if" part of Theorem 4.2.(1).

The "only if" part is due to the following lemma whose proof is a little complicated.

Lemma 5.2. *Suppose that X and Y are 2-colored graphs having no isolated vertices. Let $f : B_{/K_2}(X) \to B_{/K_2}(Y)$ be an isomorphism of posets. Then there is a unique 2-colored isomorphism $\hat{f} : X \to Y$ which induces f.*

Then Theorem 4.2.(2) is obtained as follows. Let G and H be graphs. It is clear that $G \cong H$ implies $B(G) \cong B(H)$ as $\mathbb{Z}_2$-posets. On the other hand, suppose that $f : B(G) \to B(H)$ is an isomorphism of $\mathbb{Z}_2$-posets. Since $B_{/K_2}(K_2 \times G) \cong B_{/K_2}(K_2 \times H)$, we have an isomorphism $\hat{f} : K_2 \times G \to K_2 \times H$ of 2-colored graphs which induces f. Then $\hat{f}$ commutes with their odd involutions, so we have that $K_2 \times G \cong K_2 \times H$ as objects in $\mathcal{G}_{/K_2}^{odd}$. Therefore Theorem 4.2.(2) follows.

As an application of Theorem 5.1, we can construct graphs G, H with $B(G) \cong B(H)$ as posets but $\chi(G) \neq \chi(H)$.

Example 5.3. Consider the two graphs G and H depicted in Figure 1. Then their Kronecker double coverings $K_2 \times G$ and $K_2 \times H$ are isomorphic to the bipartite graph X depicted in Figure 2.
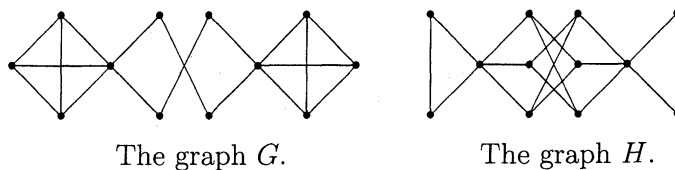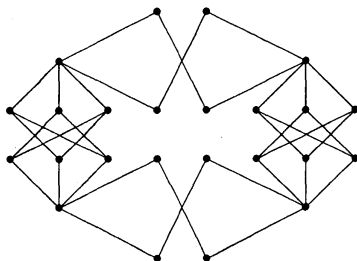
The graph G.   The graph H.

Figure 1.

The graph X.

Figure 2.

To see this, consider two involutions τ_h and τ_v of X defined as follows. τ_h is the reflection in the central horizontal line of Figure 2, and τ_h is the reflection in the central vertical line of Figure 2. Then they are odd involutions of X and the quotient is $X/\tau_h = G$ and $X/\tau_v = H$. Therefore we have $K_2 \times G \cong X \cong K_2 \times H$.

It is easy to see that $\chi(G) = 4$ and $\chi(H) = 3$. Therefore we have $B(G) \cong B(H)$ as posets but $\chi(G) \neq \chi(H)$. Note that X consists of two $K_2 \times K_3$ and two $K_2 \times K_4$. Generalizing this construction, we have that for a pair (n, m) of integers greater than 1, there are graphs G, H such that $K_2 \times G \cong K_2 \times H$ (and hence $B(G) \cong B(H)$ as posets) but $\chi(G) = n$ and $\chi(H) = m$.

Therefore to determine the chromatic number from $B(G)$, we need to consider the equivariant topology of $B(G)$. On the other hand, Theorem 4.1.(2) implies that if $B(G) \cong B(H)$ as $\mathbb{Z}_2$-posets then $G \cong H$ and hence $\chi(G) = \chi(H)$. Thus we consider the following problem:

Question 5.4. *Is there a $\mathbb{Z}_2$-topological invariant of a box complex equivalent to the chromatic number $\chi(G)$?*

If we replace "$\mathbb{Z}_2$-topological invariant" to "$\mathbb{Z}_2$-homotopy invariant" in the above, then the following example given by Walker [17] is a counterexample.
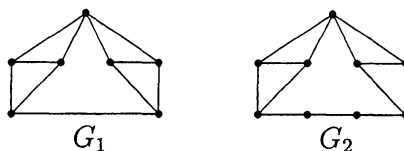
Figure 3.

In fact $\chi(G_1) = 3$ and $\chi(G_2) = 4$, but their Lovász complexes (see (1) in the beginning of Section 3) are $\mathbb{Z}_2$-homeomorphic.

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