

# Pacific Journal of Mathematics

**QUOTIENTS OF THE SPACE OF IRRATIONALS**

ERNEST A. MICHAEL AND A. H. STONE

## QUOTIENTS OF THE SPACE OF IRRATIONALS

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**It is proved that every metric space which is a continuous image of the irrationals is also a quotient of the irrationals.**

In this paper we are concerned with the class  $\mathcal{A}$  of all those metric spaces which are continuous images of complete separable metric spaces. The members of  $\mathcal{A}$  are generally called “(absolutely) analytic sets” or “ $A$ -sets” [9] or “Souslin spaces” [5], and are known to be precisely those metric spaces which are either empty or are continuous images of the space  $P$  of irrational numbers<sup>1</sup>. Suppose, then, that  $Y \in \mathcal{A}$  and  $Y$  is nonempty. There exists a continuous surjection  $f: P \rightarrow Y$ ; how “nice” can  $f$  be taken to be? In general,  $f$  cannot be one-to-one (or  $Y$  would have to be absolutely Borel; see [9 p. 487]); nor can  $f$  be open or closed (as  $Y$  would then be an absolute  $G_\delta$ ; see 3.4 and 3.5 below). However, we shall see that  $f$  can always be chosen to be a quotient map. More precisely, we prove the following theorem.

**THEOREM 1.1.** *Every metrizable space  $Y$  which is a continuous image of  $P$  is also a quotient of  $P$  (under a different map, in general).*

Since the space  $Q$  of rational numbers is in  $\mathcal{A}$ , Theorem 1.1 has the following rather striking consequence:

**COROLLARY 1.2.** *The space of rationals is a quotient of the space of irrationals.*

The proof of Theorem 1.1 is given in the next section, after which we mention some generalizations, related results and open questions.

**2. Proof of Theorem 1.1.** The proof depends on the following characterization of  $P$ , due to Hausdorff [7].

**LEMMA 2.1.** *A space  $X$  is homeomorphic to  $P$  if and only if  $X$  is a separable metrizable 0-dimensional absolute  $G_\delta$  such that no non-empty open subset of  $X$  is compact.*

Now let  $Y$  be a metrizable space which is a continuous image of  $P$ , and let us show that  $Y$  is a quotient of  $P$ . Since  $P$  is separable,

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<sup>1</sup> While the reals are usually denoted by  $R$ , and the rationals by  $Q$  (for quotient), there seems to be no standard symbol for the irrationals. The natural choice would be  $I$ , but that has been pre-empted by the unit interval. We therefore propose  $P$ , which permits the equation  $P \cup Q = R$ , and which may be thought of as standing for psychotic (=irrational).

$Y$  has a countable base  $\{V_n: n \in N\}$ . We can choose this base, and the metric  $d$  on  $Y$ , so that  $\text{diam } V_n \rightarrow 0$ , no  $V_n$  is empty, and each  $y \in Y$  is in  $V_n$  for infinitely many  $n$  (the  $V_n$  need not all be distinct): For if  $Y$  is compact we merely choose a sequence of finite open covers whose meshes decrease to 0; if  $Y$  is not compact, we imbed it in a compact metric space  $\bar{Y}$  and give  $Y$  the metric and base it inherits from  $\bar{Y}$ .

We construct a subspace  $X$  of the plane, and a map  $f: X \rightarrow Y$ , as follows. By assumption, there is a continuous surjection  $g: P \rightarrow Y$ . Let  $X_0 = P \times \{0\}$ . For each  $n \in N$  and each integer  $j$ , let

$$A_{nj} = g^{-1}(V_n) \cap \left[ \frac{j}{n}, \frac{j+1}{n} \right],$$

and let

$$X_{nj} = A_{nj} \times \left\{ \frac{1}{n} \right\}.$$

For all  $n \in N$ , let  $J_n = \{j: A_{nj} \neq \emptyset\}$ . Finally, let

$$X = X_0 \cup \bigcup \{X_{nj}: n \in N, j \in J_n\}.$$

Note that the sets  $X_0, X_{nj}$  are all pairwise disjoint, and that each  $X_{nj}$  is open-closed in  $X$ .

Let us now define  $f: X \rightarrow Y$ . First define  $f_0: X_0 \rightarrow Y$  by  $f_0(s, 0) = g(s)$ . Next, if  $n \in N$  and  $j \in J_n$ , then  $X_{nj}$  is homeomorphic to the non-empty open subset  $A_{nj}$  of  $P$ , and hence (from Lemma 2.1) to  $P$ . But  $g^{-1}(V_n)$  is also homeomorphic to  $P$ , for the same reason. Thus, by composing  $g$  with a homeomorphism, we obtain a continuous surjection  $f_{nj}: X_{nj} \rightarrow V_n$ . We now define  $f: X \rightarrow Y$  by taking

$$f|X_0 = f_0 \quad \text{and} \quad f|X_{nj} = f_{nj}$$

for all  $n \in N$  and  $j \in J_n$ .

To complete the proof, we shall show that  $X$  is homeomorphic to  $P$ , and that  $f$  is a quotient map. Again we use Lemma 2.1. Clearly  $X$  is separable metric. It is 0-dimensional by the sum theorem; and each nonempty open subset of  $X$  has a closed subset homeomorphic to  $P$ , and so cannot be compact. We have only to show that  $X$  is  $G_\delta$  in a complete metric space. Now  $P$  has a complete metric; hence so has  $P \times \{0, 1, 1/2, 1/3, \dots\}$ , and  $X$  is obtained from the latter space by removing a closed set from each  $P \times \{1/n\}$ . Thus  $X$  is homeomorphic to  $P$ .

To show that  $f$  is continuous, it suffices to check continuity at each  $(s_0, 0) \in X_0$ , since continuity at points of  $X_{nj}$  is obvious. Suppose that  $V$  is the  $\varepsilon$ -neighborhood of  $f(s_0, 0) = g(s_0)$  in  $Y$ . Let  $W$  be the  $\varepsilon/2$ -neighborhood of  $g(s_0)$  in  $Y$ , and pick  $n_0 \in N$  so that  $\text{diam } V_n < \varepsilon/2$

whenever  $n \geq n_0$ . Let

$$U = X \cap \left( g^{-1}(W) \times \left[ 0, \frac{1}{n_0} \right] \right),$$

If  $(s, 0) \in U$ , then

$$f(s, 0) = g(s) \in W \subset V.$$

If  $(s, 1/n) \in U$ , then  $g(s) \in W$ ,  $g(s) \in V_n$  and  $n \geq n_0$ , so that

$$\begin{aligned} d\left(f\left(s, \frac{1}{n}\right), g(s_0)\right) &\leq d\left(f\left(s, \frac{1}{n}\right), g(s)\right) + d(g(s), g(s_0)) \\ &< \frac{1}{2}\varepsilon + \frac{1}{2}\varepsilon = \varepsilon, \end{aligned}$$

and again  $f(s, 1/n) \in V$ . Thus  $f(U) \subset V$ , and  $f$  is continuous.

To show that  $f$  is a quotient map, we prove the following slightly stronger result (which actually implies that  $f$  is “bi-quotient” in the sense of [13]): If  $y \in Y$ , then there is an element  $x \in f^{-1}(y)$  such that  $f(U)$  is a neighborhood of  $y$  in  $Y$  whenever  $U$  is a neighborhood of  $x$  in  $X$ .

In fact, we have only to choose  $x = (s, 0)$  in  $f^{-1}(y) \cap X_0$  (that is,  $s \in g^{-1}(y)$ ). There are arbitrarily large values of  $n$  for which  $y \in V_n$ , and for each such  $n$  there is a unique  $j_n \in J_n$  such that  $s \in A_{nj_n}$ ; moreover, if  $n$  is large enough then  $X_{nj_n} \subset U$  so that

$$y \in V_n = f(X_{nj_n}) \subset f(U).$$

That completes the proof.

### 3. Some related results and problems.

3.1. By a similar, though more elaborate, argument one can prove Theorem 1.1 if the hypothesis that  $Y$  is (necessarily separable) metric is replaced by the slightly weaker hypothesis that  $Y$  has a countable base. (In effect,  $Y$  need not be assumed regular.)

3.2. It would *not* suffice, in Theorem 1.1, to assume that  $Y$  is *first* countable (instead of metrizable). There exists a continuous image of  $P$  which is first countable, regular  $T_1$  and Lindelöf (hence paracompact), but which is not a quotient of any separable metric space; see [12, Example 12.1 and Corollary 11.5]. However, we don't know whether a regular  $T_1$  space which is a continuous image of  $P$  and which is also a quotient of some separable metric space (such quotients are characterized in [12, Cor. 11.5]) is always a quotient of  $P$ .

3.3. Theorem 1.1 and its proof can be generalized to nonseparable metric spaces. If  $B(m)$  denotes the "Baire space" of order  $m$  (i.e., the product of  $\aleph_0$  discrete spaces each of cardinality  $m$ ), then every metrizable space which is a continuous image of  $B(m)$  is also a quotient of  $B(m)$ . When  $m = \aleph_0$ , this is precisely Theorem 1.1. The generalization uses a characterization of  $B(m)$  similar to Lemma 2.1 (see [15, p. 6]).

3.4. A nonempty separable metric space  $Y$  is the image of  $P$  under an *open* continuous map if and only if  $Y$  has a complete metric (or equivalently is an absolute  $G_\delta$ ). "Only if" follows from a theorem of Hausdorff [6] asserting that every metrizable image of a complete metric space under a continuous open map has a complete metric. "If" was proved by Arhangel'skii [2, Corollary 4.7].

3.5. The assertion in 3.4 also holds if "open" is replaced by "*closed*". "Only if" now follows from a theorem of Vainštein [16] asserting that every metrizable image of a complete metric space under a closed continuous map has a complete metric. "If" is a recent result of R. Engelking [4]; he shows, more generally, that every nonempty complete metric space of weight  $m$  is the image of  $B(m)$  under closed a continuous map.

3.6. It can be shown, by methods similar to those in § 2, that a space  $Y$  will be the image of  $P$  under a continuous map which is *both* open and closed, if and only if  $Y$  has a complete metric, is separable and zero-dimensional, and has the further property that each nonempty open compact subset has an isolated point (or, equivalently, no open subset of  $Y$  is homeomorphic to the Cantor set).

3.7. A continuous map  $f: X \rightarrow Y$  is called *compact-covering* if each compact subset of  $Y$  is the image of some compact subset of  $X$ . For a continuous surjection  $f$  of a complete metric space  $X$  onto a metric space  $Y$ , it is known that if  $f$  is open or closed it is compact-covering, and if  $f$  is compact-covering it is a quotient map (see [12, Lemma 11.2], [3, § 2 Proposition 18], and [1, Theorem 15] or [11, Corollary 1.2]). We have seen that in Theorem 1.1 the quotient map cannot in general be chosen open or closed; can it always be chosen so that it is compact-covering? As we shall see, the answer is "no". In fact, we conjecture that  $Y$  (assumed nonempty separable metric) is a compact-covering image of  $P$  if and only if  $Y$  has a complete metric. "If" of course follows from 3.4 or 3.5 and can also be proved directly. In the other direction, it is not hard to show that  $Y$  (assumed nonempty separable metric) is the image of  $P$  under a compact-covering

map if and only if the space  $\mathcal{K}(Y)$  of nonempty compact subsets of  $Y$ , equipped with the Hausdorff metric, is analytic. Now Hurewicz has shown that  $\mathcal{K}(\mathbb{Q})$  is *not* analytic (in [8]; a simpler proof is in [10]). Thus, if  $Y$  is a compact-covering image of  $P$ , it always has the following properties: It is analytic, and contains no closed (or  $G_\delta$ ) subset homeomorphic to the space  $\mathbb{Q}$  of rational numbers. These properties suggest that  $Y$  ought to be an absolute  $G_\delta$ , but unfortunately they do not suffice to prove it; Gödel and Novikov [14] have shown that it is (relatively) consistent with the usual axioms of set theory to suppose the contrary<sup>2</sup>. Thus our conjecture remains open.

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# Pacific Journal of Mathematics

Vol. 28, No. 3

May, 1969

Jon F. Carlson, <i>Automorphisms of groups of similitudes over <math>F_3</math></i> .....	485
W. Wistar (William) Comfort, Neil Hindman and Stelios A. Negrepointis, <i><math>F'</math>-spaces and their product with <math>P</math>-spaces</i> .....	489
Archie Gail Gibson, <i>Triples of operator-valued functions related to the unit circle</i> .....	503
David Saul Gillman, <i>Free curves in <math>E^3</math></i> .....	533
E. A. Heard and James Howard Wells, <i>An interpolation problem for subalgebras of <math>H^\infty</math></i> .....	543
Albert Emerson Hurd, <i>A uniqueness theorem for weak solutions of symmetric quasilinear hyperbolic systems</i> .....	555
E. W. Johnson and J. P. Lediaev, <i>Representable distributive Noether lattices</i> .....	561
David G. Kendall, <i>Incidence matrices, interval graphs and seriation in archeology</i> .....	565
Robert Leroy Kruse, <i>On the join of subnormal elements in a lattice</i> .....	571
D. B. Lahiri, <i>Some restricted partition functions; Congruences modulo 3</i> ....	575
Norman D. Lane and Kamla Devi Singh, <i>Strong cyclic, parabolic and conical differentiability</i> .....	583
William Franklin Lucas, <i>Games with unique solutions that are nonconvex</i> .....	599
Eugene A. Maier, <i>Representation of real numbers by generalized geometric series</i> .....	603
Daniel Paul Maki, <i>A note on recursively defined orthogonal polynomials</i> ....	611
Mark Mandelker, <i><math>F'</math>-spaces and <math>z</math>-embedded subspaces</i> .....	615
James R. McLaughlin and Justin Jesse Price, <i>Comparison of Haar series with gaps with trigonometric series</i> .....	623
Ernest A. Michael and A. H. Stone, <i>Quotients of the space of irrationals</i> ....	629
William H. Mills and Neal Zierler, <i>On a conjecture of Golomb</i> .....	635
J. N. Pandey, <i>An extension of Haimo's form of Hankel convolutions</i> .....	641
Terence John Reed, <i>On the boundary correspondence of quasiconformal mappings of domains bounded by quasicircles</i> .....	653
Haskell Paul Rosenthal, <i>A characterization of the linear sets satisfying Herz's criterion</i> .....	663
George Thomas Sallee, <i>The maximal set of constant width in a lattice</i> .....	669
I. H. Sheth, <i>On normaloid operators</i> .....	675
James D. Stasheff, <i>Torsion in BBSO</i> .....	677
Billy Joe Thorne, <i><math>A - P</math> congruences on Baer semigroups</i> .....	681
Robert Breckenridge Warfield, Jr., <i>Purity and algebraic compactness for modules</i> .....	699
Joseph Zaks, <i>On minimal complexes</i> .....	721