

ON A RATIONALITY QUESTION IN THE GROTHENDIECK RING OF VARIETIES

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ABSTRACT. We discuss elementary rationality questions in the Grothendieck ring of varieties for the quotient of a finite dimensional vector space over a characteristic 0 field by a finite group.

1. INTRODUCTION

Let k be a field. One defines the *Grothendieck group of varieties* $K_0(\mathrm{Var}_k)$ over k [8, Definition 2.1] to be the free abelian group generated by k -schemes modulo the subgroup spanned the scissor relations

$$[X] = [X \setminus Z] + [Z]$$

where $Z \subset X$ is a closed subscheme. The product

$$[X \times_k Y] = [X] \cdot [Y]$$

for two k -schemes makes it a commutative ring, with unit $1 = [\mathrm{Spec} k]$. As the underlying topological space of the complement $X \setminus X_{\mathrm{red}}$ is empty, $[X] = [X_{\mathrm{red}}]$. This justifies the terminology “varieties” rather than “schemes”.

In characteristic 0, first examples of 0-divisors in this ring were shown to exist by Poonen [9]. He constructed two abelian varieties A, B over \mathbb{Q} such that

$$0 = ([A] - [B]) \cdot ([A] + [B]) \in K_0(\mathrm{Var}_{\mathbb{Q}})$$

but with

$$[A \otimes_{\mathbb{Q}} k] \neq [B \otimes_{\mathbb{Q}} k] \in K_0(\mathrm{Var}_k)$$

for all field extensions $\mathbb{Q} \hookrightarrow k$. The main tool to distinguish those two classes relies ultimately on a deep insight in the structure of birational morphisms, gathered in the *Weak Factorization Theorem* [1]. It implies both the presentation of $K_0(\mathrm{Var}_k)$ as the free group generated by smooth projective varieties modulo the blow up relation [2] and the isomorphism $K_0(\mathrm{Var}_k)/\langle \mathbb{L} \rangle \xrightarrow{\cong} \mathbb{Z}[SB]$ [5]. Here \mathbb{L} is the class of the affine line \mathbb{A}^1 over k , $\langle \mathbb{L} \rangle$ is the ideal spanned by it, $\mathbb{Z}[SB]$ is the free abelian group on stably birational classes of projective smooth k -varieties, endowed with the ring structure stemming from the product of varieties over k . So there are no relations in $\mathbb{Z}[SB]$ and this allows to recognize certain classes. Of

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course this does not help in understanding \mathbb{L} , and the question whether or not \mathbb{L} is a 0-divisor remains open.

Later Kollár [4] used $\mathbb{Z}[SB]$ to distinguish in characteristic 0 the $K_0(\text{Var}_k)$ -classes of non-trivial Severi-Brauer varieties from trivial ones. Rökaeus [10] and Nicaise [8], using in addition specialization of $K_0(\text{Var}_k)$ from k to finite fields, studied 0-divisors which are classes of 0-dimensional varieties, in particular those of the form $\text{Spec } K$ for a non-trivial field extension of a number field k . This indicates that one can not expect “descent”. For two k -varieties X and Y the equality

$$[X \times_k \text{Spec } K] = [Y \times_k \text{Spec } K] \in K_0(\text{Var}_K)$$

implies

$$[X] \cdot [\text{Spec } K] = [Y] \cdot [\text{Spec } K] \in K_0(\text{Var}_k).$$

However, the relation $[X] \cdot [\text{Spec } K] = [Y] \cdot [\text{Spec } K] \in K_0(\text{Var}_k)$ does not imply the equality $[X] = [Y] \in K_0(\text{Var}_k)$.

For applications of the Grothendieck ring, it is of importance to understand the class of quotients $[X/G]$ where X is a variety and G is a finite group acting on it. In [6, Lemma 5.1], Looijenga shows that if k is an algebraically closed field of characteristic 0, and if G is a finite abelian group acting linearly on a finite dimensional k -vector space V , then

$$(1.1) \quad [V/G] = \mathbb{L}^{\dim_k V} \in K_0(\text{Var}_k).$$

In fact the formula (1.1), as well as its proof, remain valid if k is any field of characteristic 0 containing the $|G|$ -th roots of 1. However the condition that G be abelian is essential, as shown by Ekedahl. Indeed, [3, Proposition 3.1, ii)] together with [3, Corollary 5.2] show that for $G \subset GL(V)$, $V \cong \mathbb{C}^n$ as in Saltman’s example [11], the class of $\lim_{m \rightarrow \infty} [V^m/G]/\mathbb{L}^{nm}$ in the completion $\widehat{K_0(\text{Var}_{\mathbb{C}})}$ of $K_0(\text{Var}_{\mathbb{C}})[\mathbb{L}^{-1}]$ by the dimension filtration, is not equal to 1. This implies in particular that for m large enough, $\mathbb{L}^{nm} \neq [V^m/G] \in K_0(\text{Var}_{\mathbb{C}})$.

In this note, we discuss possible simple generalizations of Looijenga’s formula in various ways. Our first result is the following.

Lemma 1.1. *Let G be a finite abelian group with quotient $G \rightarrow \Gamma$. Let k be a field of characteristic 0 and let $K \supset k$ be an abelian Galois extension with Galois group Γ . Assume, that the Galois action of Γ on K lifts to a k -linear action of G on a finite dimensional K -vector space V . If, for $N = \exp(G)$, all N -th roots of 1 lie in k , then (1.1) holds, i.e.*

$$[V/G] = \mathbb{L}^{\dim_K V} \in K_0(\text{Var}_k).$$

The condition that k contains the N -th roots of 1 is really necessary. In particular, if one allows the group G to act non-trivially on the ground field, the equation (1.1) is not compatible with descent to smaller ground fields.

Example 1.2. Assume $k = \mathbb{Q}$, $K = \mathbb{Q}(\sqrt{-1})$, $V = K \otimes_{\mathbb{Q}} \mathbb{Q}^2$, and let G be the subgroup of the group of \mathbb{Q} -linear automorphisms of V spanned by

$$\sigma = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & -1 \end{pmatrix} \otimes \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ -1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

where the chosen basis of K as a 2-dimensional vector space over \mathbb{Q} is $(1, \sqrt{-1})$. The group G is cyclic of order 4 and

$$\mathbb{L}^2 \neq [V/G] \in K_0(\text{Var}_{\mathbb{Q}}).$$

If $G \subset GL_k(V)$ is a finite group acting linearly on a finite dimensional vector space V over a characteristic 0 field k , then G acts semi-simply. So as a G -representation, $V = \bigoplus_i V_i \otimes T_i$, where V_i is an irreducible representation with $\text{Hom}_G(V_i, V_j) = \delta_{ij} \cdot k$, and T_i is the trivial representation of dimension m_i equal to the multiplicity of V_i in V . If G is commutative of exponent N and if the N -th roots of 1 lie in k , then $d_i = \dim_k V_i = 1$. Since V_i/G is normal and one dimensional, it is smooth. So the starting point of Looijenga's proof of (1.1) is the simple observation that there is a k -isomorphism $V_i/G \cong V_i$ of k -varieties. The proof of (1.1) then proceeds by stratifying V .

For $d_i \geq 2$, the quotient V_i/G might be singular, thus it can not be isomorphic to V_i , not even over a field extension. Nevertheless, one can show that the formula (1.1) remains true for irreducible two dimensional representations, or after stratifying, whenever all the d_i are 1 or 2 and G is a prime power order cyclic group.

Proposition 1.3. *Let k be a field of characteristic 0 and let V be a finite dimensional k -vector space. Let $G \rightarrow GL_k(V)$ be a linear representation of a finite abelian group.*

- 1) *If $\dim_k V \leq 2$, then (1.1) holds true.*
- 2) *If G is cyclic of prime power order, and if each irreducible subrepresentation V_i has $\dim(V_i) \leq 2$, then (1.1) holds true.*

The main reason for the restriction to $\dim(V_i) \leq 2$ is that in this case $\mathbb{P}(V_i) \cong \mathbb{P}_k^1$ and hence $\mathbb{P}(V_i)/G \cong \mathbb{P}_k^1$ as well. If V is an irreducible representation of dimension $d \geq 3$ a similar statement fails, and we were unable to prove the equation (1.1).

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2. PROOF OF LEMMA 1.1

By assumption $G \subset GL_k(V)$ lifts the action of the quotient Γ on K , hence writing

$$1 \longrightarrow H \longrightarrow G \xrightarrow{\varrho} \Gamma \longrightarrow 1,$$

one has $\sigma(\lambda \cdot v) = \gamma(\lambda) \cdot \sigma(v)$, for all $\sigma \in G$, $\gamma = \varrho(\sigma)$, for all $\lambda \in K$ and for all $v \in V$. In particular H is a subgroup of $GL_K(V)$. This defines the fiber square

$$(2.1) \quad \begin{array}{ccc} V/H & \longrightarrow & \text{Spec } K \\ \downarrow & \square & \downarrow \\ V/G & \longrightarrow & \text{Spec } k. \end{array}$$

By the rationality assumption, $\mu_N(k) \cong_k \mathbb{Z}/N$, for $N = \exp(G)$, and hence the characters of G are k -rational. So writing \hat{H} for the character group of H and $V_\chi(H)$ for the eigenspace with respect to the character χ of H , one has a fortiori the K -eigenspace decomposition

$$V = \bigoplus_{\chi \in \hat{H}} V_\chi(H).$$

Since G is commutative the subspace $V_\chi(H)$ of V is G -invariant.

Now on the geometric side, one proceeds as in Looijenga's Bourbaki lecture [6, Lemma 5.1]. Write

$$V = \prod_{\chi \in \hat{H}} V_\chi(H)$$

for the product as K -schemes. For $\{0\} = \text{Spec } K$ one sets $V_\chi^\times = V_\chi(H) \setminus \{0\}$ and defines the stratification

$$(2.2) \quad V = \bigsqcup_{I \subset \hat{H}} V_I, \quad \text{with} \quad V_I = \prod_{\chi \in I} V_\chi^\times.$$

The product in (2.2) is defined over K . The \mathbb{G}_m -fibration $V_\chi^\times \rightarrow \mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H))$ is the structure map of the geometric line bundle $\mathcal{O}_{\mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H))}(-1)$, restricted to the complement of the zero-section. It is defined over K and G -equivariant. The subgroup H acts trivially on $\mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H))$ and by multiplication with χ on the geometric fibres of $V_\chi^\times \rightarrow \mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H))$.

So for $I \subset \hat{H}$ given, the K -morphism

$$V_I \rightarrow \prod_{\chi \in I} \mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H))$$

is a G -equivariant fibration, locally trivial for the Zariski topology. The fibres are isomorphic to $\mathbb{G}_m^{\#I} \cong \prod_{\chi \in I} \mathbb{G}_{m,\chi}$, with $\mathbb{G}_{m,\chi} \cong \mathbb{G}_m$, hence

$$(2.3) \quad [V_I] = [\mathbb{G}_m^{\#I}] \cdot \prod_{\chi \in I} [\mathbb{P}_K^{r_\chi}] \quad \text{in } K_0(\text{Var}_K).$$

The action of H is trivial on $\prod_{\chi \in I} \mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H))$ and on the factor $\mathbb{G}_{m,\chi}$ of $\mathbb{G}_m^{\#I}$ the group H acts by multiplication with χ . One obtains an induced K -morphism

$$V_I/H \rightarrow \prod_{\chi \in I} \mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H))$$

which is still a Zariski locally trivial fibration with fibre

$$(2.4) \quad \mathbb{G}_m^{\#I} \cong \left(\prod_{\chi \in I} \mathbb{G}_{m,\chi} \right) / H.$$

The G -action respects the decomposition $V_I = \prod_{\chi \in I} V_\chi(H)$ and on $\mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H))$, it factors through Γ , that is one has a splitting of $\text{Aut}(\mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H))/k) \rightarrow \text{Aut}(K/k) = \Gamma$. This implies

$$\left(\prod_{\chi \in I} \mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H)) \right) / G = \left(\prod_{\chi \in I} \mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H)) \right) / \Gamma$$

as well as

$$(\mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H))/\Gamma) \otimes_k K = \mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H)).$$

From this one deduces

$$\begin{aligned} \left(\prod_{\chi \in I} \mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H)) \right) / \Gamma &= \left(\prod_{K, \chi \in I} ((\mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H))/\Gamma) \otimes_k K) \right) / \Gamma = \\ &= \left(\prod_{k, \chi \in I} (\mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H))/\Gamma) \right) \otimes_k K / \Gamma = \prod_{k, \chi \in I} (\mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H))/\Gamma). \end{aligned}$$

Here we underline by the lower indices K, k where we took the fiber products. Remark that $\mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H))/\Gamma$ is a k -form of $\mathbb{P}_k^{r_\chi}$ for $r_\chi = \dim_K V_\chi(H) - 1$.

The fiber square (2.1) is the composite of two fibre squares

$$(2.5) \quad \begin{array}{ccccc} V_I/H & \longrightarrow & \prod_{\chi \in I} \mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H)) & \longrightarrow & \text{Spec } K \\ \downarrow & & \square & & \downarrow \\ V_I/G & \longrightarrow & \prod_{\chi \in I} (\mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H))/\Gamma) & \longrightarrow & \text{Spec } k. \end{array}$$

Claim 2.1. The k -form $\mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H))/\Gamma$ of $\mathbb{P}_k^{r_\chi}$ is split, the k -morphism

$$V_I/G \rightarrow \prod_{\chi \in I} \mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H))/\Gamma$$

is a $\mathbb{G}_m^{\#I}$ -fibration, locally trivial for the Zariski topology, and hence

$$[V_I/G] = [\mathbb{G}_m^{\#I}] \cdot \prod_{\chi \in I} [\mathbb{P}_k^{r_\chi}] \quad \text{in } K_0(\text{Var}_k).$$

Proof. By assumption k contains the N -th roots of 1 for $N = \exp(G)$ and hence the characters $\chi \in \hat{H}$ are defined over k .

Then $V_\chi(H)$, regarded as a k -vector space, has a G -eigenvector v . The line $\langle v \rangle_K$ defines a point $c \in \mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H))(K)$. Since the action of G on $K(c) = K$ factors through the Galois action of Γ on $K(c)$, the image of c lies in $(\mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H)))/G(k)$.

In addition, in (2.4) the action of H on $\prod_{\chi \in I} \mathbb{G}_{m,\chi}$ is given by multiplication with χ , hence it is defined over k . Then $[\prod_{\chi \in I} \mathbb{G}_{m,\chi}]/H$ is obtained by base extension from a k -variety, isomorphic to $\mathbb{G}_m^{\#I}$.

Using that the left hand side of (2.5) is a fibre product and that

$$V_I/H \rightarrow \prod_{\chi \in I} \mathbb{P}(V_\chi(H))$$

is Zariski locally trivial with fibre $[\prod_{\chi \in I} \mathbb{G}_{m,\chi}]/H$ this implies the second assertion in Claim 2.1. \square

$$\text{By (2.2) and (2.3) } [V/G] = \sum_{I \subset \hat{H}} \left([\mathbb{G}_m^{\#I}] \cdot \prod_{\chi \in I} [\mathbb{P}_k^{r_\chi}] \right).$$

This decomposition just depends on the dimensions $r_\chi + 1$ of the subspaces $V_\chi(H)$. So if W_χ denotes any k -vectorspace of this dimension and $W = \bigoplus_{\chi \in \hat{H}} W_\chi$, one finds in $K_0(\text{Var}_k)$

$$\mathbb{L}^{\dim_K V} = \mathbb{L}^{\dim_k W} = \sum_{I \subset \hat{H}} \prod_{\chi \in I} [W_\chi^\times] = \sum_{I \subset \hat{H}} \left([\mathbb{G}_m^{\#I}] \cdot \prod_{\chi \in I} [\mathbb{P}_k^{r_\chi}] \right) = [V/G].$$

This finishes the proof of Lemma 1.1. \square

3. VERIFICATION OF THE PROPERTIES IN EXAMPLE 1.2

In the standard basis e_1, e_2 of \mathbb{Q}^2 and the basis $(1, \sqrt{-1})$ of K/\mathbb{Q} , we write

$$\sigma : (x_1 + \sqrt{-1}y_1)e_1 + (x_2 + \sqrt{-1}y_2)e_2 \mapsto (-x_1 + \sqrt{-1}y_1)e_2 + (x_2 - \sqrt{-1}y_2)e_1,$$

As σ is \mathbb{Q} -linear, it leaves the origin of V invariant, thus acts on $V^\times = V \setminus \{0\}$. One has $\sigma^2 = -\text{Id}$ and this defines the extension

$$0 \longrightarrow H := \langle \sigma^2 \rangle \longrightarrow G \longrightarrow \Gamma := \langle \gamma \rangle \longrightarrow 0$$

$$\text{with } \Gamma = \langle \gamma \rangle \cong \mathbb{Z}/2 = \text{Aut}(\mathbb{Q}(\sqrt{-1})/\mathbb{Q}), \quad \text{and } \gamma(\sqrt{-1}) = -\sqrt{-1}.$$

Thus one has the fiber square

$$\begin{array}{ccc} V/H & \longrightarrow & \text{Spec } K \\ \downarrow & \square & \downarrow \\ V/G & \longrightarrow & \text{Spec } \mathbb{Q} \end{array}$$

The \mathbb{G}_m -bundle $V^\times \rightarrow \mathbb{P}_K^1$ is compatible with the G -action. The subgroup H acts trivially on \mathbb{P}_K^1 while σ acts via

$$\bar{\sigma} : (x_1 + \sqrt{-1}y_1 : x_2 + \sqrt{-1}y_2) \mapsto (x_2 - \sqrt{-1}y_2 : -x_1 + \sqrt{-1}y_1).$$

This yields the fiber squares

$$\begin{array}{ccccc} V^\times/H & \longrightarrow & \mathbb{P}_K^1 & \longrightarrow & \text{Spec } K \\ \downarrow & \square & \downarrow \pi & \square & \downarrow \\ V^\times/G & \longrightarrow & \mathbb{P}_K^1/G & \longrightarrow & \text{Spec } \mathbb{Q} \end{array}$$

Claim 3.1. \mathbb{P}_K^1/G is a genus 0 curve over \mathbb{Q} without a rational point.

Proof. Indeed, a rational point is a fixpoint of \mathbb{P}_K^1 under $\bar{\sigma}$. But the equation for a fixpoint is precisely

$$x_1^2 + y_1^2 + x_2^2 + y_2^2 = 0, \quad \text{with } (x_1, x_2, y_1, y_2) \neq (0, 0, 0, 0).$$

So over \mathbb{Q} there are no solutions. □

Corollary 3.2. $\mathbb{L}^2 \neq [V/G] \in K_0(\text{Var}_{\mathbb{Q}})$.

Proof. The origin $x_1 = x_2 = y_1 = y_2 = 0$ in V is a fixpoint under G . Thus

$$[V/G] = [V^\times/G] + [\text{Spec } \mathbb{Q}].$$

On the other hand, as we have seen in Claim 2.1 $V^\times/G \rightarrow \mathbb{P}_K^1/G$ is a locally trivial \mathbb{G}_m bundle.

Here the trivialization can be written down explicitly: V^\times is the total space of the \mathbb{G}_m -bundle to the invertible sheaf $\mathcal{O}_{\mathbb{P}_K^1}(-1)$, while $V^\times/H \rightarrow \mathbb{P}_K^1$ is the total space of the \mathbb{G}_m -bundle to the invertible sheaf $\mathcal{O}_{\mathbb{P}_K^1}(-2) = \pi^*\mathcal{L}$, where $\mathcal{L} \in \text{Pic}(\mathbb{P}_K^1/G)$. So $V^\times/G \rightarrow \mathbb{P}_K^1/G$ is the \mathbb{G}_m -bundle to the invertible sheaf \mathcal{L} .

One concludes

$$[V/G] - [\text{Spec } \mathbb{Q}] = [V^\times/G] = [\mathbb{G}_m] \cdot [\mathbb{P}_K^1/G] \in K_0(\text{Var}_{\mathbb{Q}}).$$

On the other hand, one also has

$$\mathbb{L}^2 - [\text{Spec } \mathbb{Q}] = [\mathbb{A}_{\mathbb{Q}}^2 \setminus \{0\}] = [\mathbb{G}_m] \cdot [\mathbb{P}_{\mathbb{Q}}^1] \in K_0(\text{Var}_{\mathbb{Q}}).$$

If $[V/G]$ was equal to \mathbb{L}^2 in $K_0(\text{Var}_{\mathbb{Q}})$, then one would have the relation $[V^\times/G] = [\mathbb{A}_{\mathbb{Q}}^2 \setminus \{0\}]$ in $K_0(\text{Var}_{\mathbb{Q}})$, thus the relation

$$\Phi([V^\times/G]) = -\Phi([\mathbb{P}_K^1/G]) = \Phi([\mathbb{A}_{\mathbb{Q}}^2 \setminus \{0\}]) = -\Phi([\mathbb{P}_{\mathbb{Q}}^1]) \quad \text{in } \mathbb{Z}[SB],$$

where $\Phi : K_0(\text{Var}_{\mathbb{Q}}) \rightarrow \mathbb{Z}[SB]$ maps the class $[X]$ of a smooth projective \mathbb{Q} -variety X to its stably birational equivalence class.

This however contradicts Claim 3.1, as the existence of a rational point is compatible with the stably birational equivalence on smooth projective varieties over any infinite field k .

For sake of completeness let us recall the proof of this well known fact. If $\tau : V \dashrightarrow W$ is a birational map between two smooth projective varieties, and τ is well defined near $v \in V(k)$, then $\tau(v)$ is well defined and lies in $W(k)$. Else one blows up v . This yields an exceptional divisor $\mathbb{P}^{\dim_k V - 1}$. Since τ is well defined outside of codimension ≥ 2 , and since k is infinite, there are rational points on the exceptional divisor on which τ is defined and one repeats the argument. \square

4. PROOF OF PROPOSITION 1.3

We first show 1). If V has k -dimension ≤ 2 , we write the G -equivariant stratification $V = \{0\} \sqcup V^\times$. Furthermore, the projection $V^\times \rightarrow \mathbb{P}(V)$ is G -equivariant as well. Looijenga's argument shows here

$$[V^\times/G] = [\mathbb{G}_m] \cdot [\mathbb{P}(V)/G] \in K_0(\text{Var}_k).$$

On the other hand, either

$$\mathbb{P}(V) = \text{Spec } k = \mathbb{P}(V)/G \quad \text{or} \quad \mathbb{P}(V)/G \cong_k \mathbb{P}_k^1 \cong_k \mathbb{P}(V).$$

Adding up, one finds $[V/G] = \mathbb{L}^2 \in K_0(\text{Var}_k)$.

We now show 2). Instead of the decomposition $V = \bigoplus_{i=1}^r V_i \otimes T_i$ of V as a direct sums of irreducible G representations, considered in the introduction, we will drop the condition that $\text{Hom}_G(V_i, V_j) = \delta_{ij} \cdot k$ and choose a decomposition $V = \bigoplus_{i=1}^m V_i$ as a direct sum of irreducible representations. As usual we consider V as a variety and write

$$(4.1) \quad V = \prod_{i=1}^m V_i.$$

The monodromy group, that is the image of G in $GL_k(V)$ is still a p -order cyclic group. So we may assume

$$(4.2) \quad G \subset GL_k(V)$$

in the discussion.

Claim 4.1. There is a direct factor V_i of (4.1) such that $G \subset GL_k(V_i)$.

Proof. Since a p -power order cyclic group G contains a unique p -order cyclic subgroup $C(G)$, if $\{1\} \neq K_i := \text{Ker}(G \rightarrow GL_k(V_i))$, then $C(G) = C(K_i) \subset K_i$. We conclude by (4.2). \square

We now change the notation: we set $U = V_i$ and $W = \bigoplus_{j \neq i} V_j$ with V_i constructed in Claim 4.1. So $V = U \oplus W$ equivariantly. We assume that the dimension of U is 2. If this is 1, the argument simplifies enormously and we don't detail. We define the G -equivariant stratifications

$$(4.3) \quad \begin{aligned} U &= \{0\} \sqcup D^\times \sqcup U^{(2)} \\ V &= (\{0\} \times_k W) \sqcup (D^\times \times_k W) \sqcup (U^{(2)} \times_k W). \end{aligned}$$

The strata are defined as follows. Write $\langle \sigma \rangle = G$. Let $F(T) \in k[T]$ be the minimal polynomial of σ as a linear map on U . Since U is irreducible, $F(T)$ is also the characteristic polynomial of σ on U . This defines the quadratic extension

$$(4.4) \quad K = k[T]/(F(T)).$$

The linear map $\sigma \otimes K \in GL(U \otimes K)$ has two conjugate eigenlines and

$$D = \{0\} \sqcup D^\times \subset U$$

is the k -irreducible curve defined by the union of the two lines. Further

$$U^{(2)} = U \setminus D.$$

By definition, G acts fixpoint free on $U^{(2)}$.

Claim 4.2. $[(U^{(2)} \times_k W)/G] = [(U^{(2)}/G) \times_k W] = [U^{(2)}/G] \cdot [W] \in K_0(\text{Var}_k)$.

Proof. One has the G -equivariant projection $q : (U^{(2)} \times_k W)/G \rightarrow U^{(2)}/G$. Since $G \subset GL_k(U)$, for all points $x \in U^{(2)}$ with residue field $\kappa(x) \supset k$, one has $q^{-1}(x) \cong_{\kappa(x)} W \otimes_k \kappa(x)$. By construction, one has a fiber square

$$(4.5) \quad \begin{array}{ccc} U^{(2)} \times_k W & \longrightarrow & (U^{(2)} \times_k W)/G \\ \downarrow & \square & \downarrow q \\ U^{(2)} & \longrightarrow & U^{(2)}/G. \end{array}$$

Since $U^{(2)} \rightarrow U^{(2)}/G$ is étale, q defines a local system in $H_{\text{ét}}^1(U^{(2)}/G, G_W)$ where G_W is the image of G in $GL_k(W)$. Then $(U^{(2)} \times_k W)/G$ is the total space of the torsor in $H_{\text{ét}}^1(U^{(2)}/G, GL_k(W))$ induced by $G_W \hookrightarrow GL_k(W)$. By flat descent [7, Lemma 4.10],

$$H_{\text{ét}}^1(U^{(2)}/G, GL_k(W)) = H_{\text{Zar}}^1(U^{(2)}/G, GL_k(W)).$$

Thus $(U^{(2)} \times_k W)/G \xrightarrow{q} U^{(2)}/G$, as the total space of a vector bundle, is Zariski locally trivial. We conclude

$$(4.6) \quad [(U^{(2)} \times_k W)/G] = [U^{(2)}/G] \cdot [W] \in K_0(\text{Var}_k).$$

□

So using (4.3) and Claim 4.2, we see

$$(4.7) \quad [V] - [V/G] = ([W] - [W/G]) + ([D^\times \times_k W] - [(D^\times \times_k W)/G]) + ([U^{(2)}] - [U^{(2)}/G]) \cdot [W].$$

The curve D^\times is k -irreducible, but splits over K . Therefore $K \subset H^0(D^\times, \mathcal{O})$ is the algebraic closure of k and thus G acts on K .

Claim 4.3. The action of G on $\text{Spec } K$ is trivial.

Proof. After the choice of a cyclic vector, σ is the matrix $\begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ b & a \end{pmatrix}$ with $a, b \in k$.

The curve D^\times is k -affine. Its affine ring is

$$H^0(D^\times, \mathcal{O}) = k[X, Y, \frac{1}{X}] / \langle f(X, Y) \rangle$$

where the homogeneous polynomial $f(X, Y) = Y^2 - aXY - bX^2$ defines the irreducible polynomial $F(T) = T^2 - aT - b$ yielding the k -quadratic extension K . The inclusion of $K \subset H^0(D^\times, \mathcal{O})$ is k -linear and defined by $T \mapsto \frac{Y}{X}$. Furthermore, $\sigma(X) = Y$, $\sigma(Y) = bX + aY$, thus

$$\sigma(T) = \frac{\sigma(Y)}{\sigma(X)} = \frac{bX + aY}{Y} = \frac{b}{T} + a = T.$$

□

We can now analyze the second difference in (4.7). One has the G -equivariant fiber product

$$\begin{array}{ccc} D^\times \times_k W & \longrightarrow & \text{Spec } K \times_k W \\ \downarrow & \square & \downarrow \\ D^\times & \longrightarrow & \text{Spec } K. \end{array}$$

Since $D^\times = \text{Spec } K \times_k \mathbb{G}_m$, the morphism $D^\times \times_k W \rightarrow \text{Spec } K \times_k W$ is a G -equivariant Zariski locally trivial \mathbb{G}_m -fibration. We first deduce

$$[D^\times \times_k W] = [\mathbb{G}_m] \cdot [\text{Spec } K] \cdot [W].$$

From the induced fiber square

$$\begin{array}{ccc} (D^\times \times_k W)/G & \longrightarrow & (\text{Spec } K \times_k W)/G \\ \downarrow & \square & \downarrow \\ (D^\times)/G & \longrightarrow & (\text{Spec } K)/G = \text{Spec } K \end{array}$$

and $(D^\times)/G = (\text{Spec } K \times_k \mathbb{G}_m)/G = \text{Spec } K \times_k (\mathbb{G}_m/G) = \text{Spec } K \times_k \mathbb{G}_m$, we deduce that $(D^\times \times_k W)/G \rightarrow (\text{Spec } K \times_k W)/G$ is a Zariski locally trivial \mathbb{G}_m -fibration, and thus

$$[(D^\times \times_k W)/G] = [\mathbb{G}_m] \cdot [\text{Spec } K] \cdot [W/G].$$

We conclude

$$(4.8) \quad [D^\times \times_k W] - [(D^\times \times_k W)/G] = [\mathbb{G}_m] \cdot [\text{Spec } K] \cdot ([W] - [W/G]).$$

We now analyze the third difference in (4.7). One has a G -equivariant projection $U^\times = U \setminus \{0\} \rightarrow \mathbb{P}(U)$. Here is D^\times the inverse image of a K -valued point $\text{Spec } K \rightarrow \mathbb{P}(U)$. On the complement, it yields the G -equivariant fibration $U^{(2)} \rightarrow \mathbb{P}(U) \setminus \text{Spec } K$, which is a \mathbb{G}_m -bundle. So

$$[U^{(2)}] = [\mathbb{G}_m] \cdot ([\mathbb{P}(U)] - [\text{Spec } K]).$$

Since $\mathbb{P}(U)/G$ is k -isomorphic to \mathbb{P}_k^1 , the group G acts trivially on $\text{Spec } K$, and $U^{(2)}/G \rightarrow (\mathbb{P}(U) \setminus \text{Spec } K)/G$ is a \mathbb{G}_m -bundle, one has

$$(4.9) \quad [U^{(2)}/G] = [\mathbb{G}_m] \cdot ([\mathbb{P}(U)/G] - [\text{Spec } K]) = \\ [\mathbb{G}_m] \cdot ([\mathbb{P}(U)] - [\text{Spec } K]) = [U^{(2)}] \in K_0(\text{Var}_k).$$

Summing up, (4.7) reads

$$(4.10) \quad [V] - [V/G] = (1 + [\mathbb{G}_m] \cdot [\text{Spec } K]) \cdot ([W] - [W/G]).$$

Now W has one less irreducible factor than V . We argue by induction on the number of irreducible factors, applying 1) to start the induction. This finishes the proof. \square

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