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On embedded minimal disks in convex bodies

by

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ABSTRACT. — If $A \subset \mathbb{R}^3$ is a convex body we prove the existence of an embedded minimal disk $M \subset A$ meeting ∂A orthogonally.

RÉSUMÉ. — Si $A \subset \mathbb{R}^3$ est un ensemble convexe, nous prouvons l'existence d'une sous-variété minimale $M \subset A$ du type disque, intersectant ∂A orthogonalement.

INTRODUCTION

Let A be a bounded open strictly convex subset of \mathbb{R}^3 with boundary ∂A of class C^4 .

In the present paper, we consider the free boundary value problem for minimal surfaces in A . This means that we seek a minimal surface $M \subset \bar{A}$ whose interior is contained in A and whose boundary ∂M is contained in ∂A which is stationary (for the area integral) with respect to all variations preserving the inclusion $\partial M \subset \partial A$. This implies in particular that M has to meet ∂A orthogonally.

Our result is

THEOREM. — *There exists an embedded minimal disk M in \bar{A} solving the free boundary value problem.*

Liste de mots-clés : Minimal surfaces, free boundary problems, geometric measure theory, minimaxing procedure.

Classification A. M. S. : 49 F 10, F 20, F 22, 53 A 10, 58 E 12.

Our proof has several ingredients:

a) The minimaxing methods of Pitts [P] are used to connect two distinct points on ∂A by a sequence of disks meeting ∂A transversally. We obtain a minimaxing varifold which has a certain almost minimizing property in the sense of Pitts [P] and Simon-Smith [SS].

b) The methods for minimizing among embedded surfaces of Almgren-Simon [AS] and Meeks-Simon-Yau [MSY] are used for local replacement arguments.

c) We use the (easy) extension to free boundaries of the curvature estimates for stable minimal surfaces of Schoen-Simon [SRS] for some compactness arguments.

d) The regularity at the free boundary depends on the companion paper [GJ], where Allard's regularity theorems for stationary varifolds [A1, A2] are extended to solutions of free boundary value problems.

e) Finally, Simon-Smith [SS] showed that any (regular) metric on S^3 admits a minimal embedded two dimensional sphere. Besides using many of their arguments in *a)* and *b)*, we shall make use of their paper in an essential way to show that the almost minimizing varifold produced in *a)* and shown to be an embedded minimal surface in *b)*, *d)* is actually simply connected, i. e. a disk or a collection of disks.

We remark that our arguments easily generalize to the case where the ambient space is replaced by a three-dimensional Riemannian manifold of class C^5 and A is a strictly convex ball in this manifold provided there are no minimal embedded spheres in Λ . We did not include the details, because it was already demonstrated in [P] and [MSY] how to generalize such arguments to manifolds, and also because the present paper is already long enough.

A corresponding parametric problem was recently treated by Struwe [St], using a method of Sacks-Uhlenbeck [SU]. He showed that given an embedded surface S in \mathbb{R}^3 of class C^4 , diffeomorphic to the standard sphere, there exists a parametric minimal surface $f : D \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$, where D is the unit disk with $f(\partial D) \subset S$ and meeting S orthogonally. It is not clear, however, whether his solution is embedded (at least if S is strictly convex) or at least immersed. He does not assume that S is convex, but in the general case his solution cannot be confined to lie in the interior of S . For these reasons, we believe that our result captures the physical and geometric essence of the problem better than his.

Finally, it was shown by Smyth [Sm] that if T is a tetrahedron in \mathbb{R}^3 (i. e. having a boundary formed by four planar pieces) then there exist three embedded minimal disks meeting T orthogonally. The rather explicit boundary in his problem made it possible to apply arguments of a much more elementary nature than ours.

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§1. THE EXISTENCE OF AN ALMOST MINIMIZING VARIFOLD

Terminology.

A is a bounded open strictly convex subset of \mathbb{R}^3 , $\partial A \in C^4$, $U \subset \mathbb{R}^3$ open
 $I(U, A) := \{ \psi = \{ \psi_t \}, \psi_t : \mathbb{R}^3 \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3 \text{ isotopy of class } C^1 (t \in [0, 1]),$
 $\psi_t \downarrow \mathbb{R}^3 \sim K = \text{id, for some } K \subset \subset U, \psi_t(\partial A) \subset \partial A, \psi_0 = \text{id} \}$
 $D_r := \{ x \in \mathbb{R}^2 : |x| \leq r \}$
 $\mathcal{M} := \{ \phi(D_1), \phi : D_1 \rightarrow \bar{A} \text{ injective, of class } C^2 \text{ and of maximal rank}$
 $\phi(D_1) \text{ meets } \partial A \text{ transversally} \}$
 $\tilde{\mathcal{M}} := \{ N = \overline{\text{int}_M \gamma}, M \in \mathcal{M}, \gamma \text{ piecewise } C^2 \text{ Jordan arc on } M \}$
 $|\Sigma| := \text{area}(\Sigma).$

For $\Sigma \in \mathcal{M}$, we define
 $I(\Sigma, U, A, \alpha) := \{ \psi = \{ \psi_t \}_{0 \leq t \leq 1} \in I(U, A) : |\psi_t(\Sigma)| \leq |\Sigma| + \alpha$
for all $t \in [0, 1]$ }.

Furthermore, for $\varepsilon > 0, \alpha > 0$,
 $S(U, A, \varepsilon, \alpha) := \{ \Sigma \in \mathcal{M} : \text{if } \psi \in I(U, A) \text{ with } |\psi_t(\Sigma)| \leq |\Sigma| + \alpha$
for all $t \in [0, 1]$, then $|\psi_1(\Sigma)| \geq |\Sigma| - \varepsilon \}$.

Let
 $\mathcal{U} := \left\{ (U_1, U_2) : U_i \subset \mathbb{R}^3 \text{ open, } U_i \cap A \neq \emptyset, \text{vol}(U_i \cap A) < \frac{1}{4} \text{vol } A \right.$
for $i = 1, 2 \text{ dist}(U_1, U_2) \geq \min(\text{diam } U_1, \text{diam } U_2) \}$.

Furthermore, if $U \subset \mathbb{R}^3$ is open, $\sigma > 0$,
 $U^\sigma := \{ x \in U : \text{dist}(x, \partial U) > \sigma \}$
 $\mathcal{U}^\sigma := \{ (U_1^\sigma, U_2^\sigma) : (U_1, U_2) \in \mathcal{U} \}$

For $V, W \in V_k(\mathbb{R}^n)$:
 $\underline{F}(V, W) = \sup \{ |V(f) - W(f)| : f \in C^{0,1}(G_k(\mathbb{R}^n)), |f| \leq 1, \text{Lip}(f) \leq 1 \}.$

DEFINITION. — A varifold $V \in V_2(A) (= \{ W \in V_2(\mathbb{R}^3) : \text{spt} \| W \| \subset \bar{A} \})$, $V \neq 0$, is called uniformly almost minimizing among disks relative to \mathcal{U}^σ , if for each $\varepsilon > 0$ there is $\alpha > 0$ and $\Sigma \in \mathcal{M}$ with $\underline{F}(V, \underline{v}(\Sigma)) < \varepsilon$ and $\Sigma \in S(U_i^\sigma, A, \varepsilon, \alpha)$ for at least one $i \in \{ 1, 2 \}$ for each $(U_1^\sigma, U_2^\sigma) \in \mathcal{U}^\sigma$. We also say, that (for this i) V is almost minimizing among disks on U_i^σ .

Note that for $\sigma_1 < \sigma_2$ the property of uniformly almost minimizing among disks relative to \mathcal{U}^{σ_1} implies the same property relative to \mathcal{U}^{σ_2} .

We also say that $V \in V_2(A)$ is almost minimizing among disks in U (U an open set) if for each $\varepsilon > 0$ there is $\alpha > 0$ and $\Sigma \in \mathcal{M}$ with $\underline{F}(V, \underline{v}(\Sigma)) < \varepsilon$ and $\Sigma \in S(U, A, \varepsilon, \alpha)$.

In this paragraph, we use the methods of [P, §4] together with their modifications by [SS] in order to obtain the existence of a varifold which is uniformly almost minimizing among disks.

Let $\Lambda \in \mathcal{M}$.

We consider the set of maps $P(\Lambda)$

$$\phi_t : \bar{A} \rightarrow \bar{A} \quad 0 \leq t \leq 1$$

with

- (1) $\phi_0(\bar{A}) = z_0, \quad \phi_1(\bar{A}) = z_1, \quad z_0, z_1 \in \partial A$
- (2) $\phi : [0, 1] \times \bar{A} \rightarrow \bar{A}, \quad (t, x) \rightarrow \phi_t(x)$ is C^1 for $t \in (0, 1)$
- (3) ϕ_t is a diffeomorphism of \bar{A} for each $t \in (0, 1)$
- (4) $A_i^1 = \bar{A}$, where we have two families $(A_i^t), \quad 0 \leq t \leq 1, \quad i = 1, 2,$ of closed subsets of \bar{A} ,

uniquely defined via

$$\begin{aligned} A_0^1 &= \{ \tau_0 \} \\ A_i^1 \cup A_i^2 &= \bar{A}, \quad A_i^1 \cap A_i^2 = \phi_i(\Lambda) \\ \partial A_i^i \cap A &= \phi_i(\Lambda) \cap A \quad (i = 1, 2) \end{aligned}$$

and

$$t \rightarrow A_t^i \text{ is continuous.}$$

Put

$$M := \inf_{P(\Lambda)} \sup_{0 \leq t \leq 1} |\phi_t(\Lambda)|$$

$$\begin{aligned} \underline{C}(\Lambda) := \{ V \in V_2(\bar{A}) : V = \lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} \underline{v}(\phi_{t_k}^k(\Lambda)), \text{ where } (\phi_{t_k}^k(\Lambda))_{k \in \mathbb{N}} \text{ is a sequence with} \\ \phi^k \in P(\Lambda), \quad t_k \in [0, 1], \quad \lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} |\phi_{t_k}^k(\Lambda)| = M = \lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} (\sup_{0 \leq t \leq 1} |\phi_t^k(\Lambda)|) \} \end{aligned}$$

$\underline{C}(\Lambda)$ is the set of critical varifolds.

It follows from the isoperimetric inequality that $M > 0$. Actually

$$M \geq \frac{1}{2} h_A \text{ vol}(A)$$

with

$$h_A = \inf \left\{ \frac{|\Sigma|}{\min(\text{vol } S_1, \text{vol } S_2)} : \Sigma \in \mathcal{M}, \quad S_1 \cup S_2 = \bar{A}, \right. \\ \left. S_1 \cap S_2 = \Sigma, \quad \partial S_1 \cap A = \partial S_2 \cap A = \Sigma \cap A \right\}.$$

LEMME 1. — *There exists $V \in \underline{C}(\Lambda)$ which is uniformly almost minimizing among disks relative to \mathcal{U}^σ for each $\sigma > 0$.*

Proof (1). — Since \underline{C} is compact relative to the topology defined by \underline{F} , and since the almost minimizing property considered here is preserved under limits in $V_2(\bar{A})$, it suffices to show that for each $\sigma > 0$, there is $V_\sigma \in \underline{C}$ which is uniformly almost minimizing among disks relative to \mathcal{U}^σ .

We suppose that this is false, i. e. that for some $\sigma > 0$ no $V \in \underline{C}$ has the required property. Then, for each $v \in \underline{C}$, there exists $\varepsilon_v > 0$ with the property that for each $\alpha > 0$ and $\Sigma \in \mathcal{M}$ with $\underline{F}(v(\Sigma), V) < \varepsilon_v$, there is $(U_1(\Sigma, \alpha, V), U_2(\Sigma, \alpha, V)) \in \mathcal{U}$ for which Σ is neither in $S(U_1^\sigma(\Sigma, \alpha, V))$ nor in $S(U_2^\sigma(\Sigma, \alpha, V))$. This means that there exist isotopies

$$\psi^i \in I(U_i^\sigma, A)$$

with

$$(5) \quad |\psi_i^i(\Sigma)| \leq |\Sigma| + \alpha$$

$$(6) \quad |\psi_1^i(\Sigma)| < |\Sigma| - \varepsilon_v$$

for $i = 1, 2$, $0 \leq t \leq 1$.

Let $N_\sigma(U) := \{W \in V_2(A) : \underline{F}(V, W) < \sigma\}$.

Since \underline{C} is compact relative to the topology defined by \underline{F} ,

$$(7) \quad \underline{C} \subset \bigcup_{j=1}^{n_0} N_{\varepsilon_{V_j}}(V_j)$$

for suitable $V_1, \dots, V_{n_0} \in \underline{C}$.

$$\text{Let} \quad \varepsilon_1 = \min_{1 \leq j \leq n_0} \varepsilon_{V_j}.$$

Using again a compactness argument, one easily sees that there is some $\varepsilon_2 > 0$ with the property that if $\{\phi_t\} \in P(\Lambda)$ with

$$(8) \quad \sup_{0 \leq t \leq 1} |\phi_t(\Lambda)| < M + \varepsilon_2$$

and if for some $t_0 \in [0, 1]$

$$(9) \quad |\phi_{t_0}(\Lambda)| > M - \varepsilon_2$$

then for some $j \in \{1, \dots, n\}$

$$(10) \quad \underline{v}(\phi_{t_0}(\Lambda)) \in N_{\varepsilon_{V_j}}(V_j).$$

Let Θ be a finite covering of \bar{A} by balls of radius $\sigma/4$. Then there exists a finite partition of unity $\{\theta_l, l = 1, \dots, L\}$ subordinate to Θ with

$$(11) \quad \sup_{x \in \bar{A}} \sum_{l=1}^L |D\theta_l(x)| \leq \frac{c}{\sigma}, \quad \text{where } c \text{ is an absolute constant.}$$

(1) We shall largely follow [SS].

Let

$$(12) \quad \varepsilon = \min \left(\frac{1}{4}, \varepsilon_1, \varepsilon_2, \frac{1}{2} M, \frac{1}{40(M+1)} \right).$$

Let (ϕ_t) be a path in $P(\Lambda)$ with

$$(13) \quad \sup_{0 \leq t \leq 1} |\phi_t(\Lambda)| \leq M + \frac{1}{4} \varepsilon.$$

We want to modify (ϕ_t) , using (5) and (6), to obtain a new path with

$$\sup_{0 \leq t \leq 1} |\tilde{\phi}(\Lambda)| < M$$

and hence the desired contradiction.

Using (1) and (2), for some $\delta_0 > 0$

$$(14) \quad |\phi_t(\Lambda)| < M - \varepsilon \quad \text{if} \quad 0 \leq t \leq \delta_0 \quad \text{or} \quad 1 - \delta_0 \leq t \leq 1.$$

Let

$$\kappa := \max_{\substack{0 \leq t \leq 1 \\ x \in \bar{\Lambda}}} \left\| \frac{\partial \phi}{\partial t}(t, x) \right\|.$$

We choose $\delta > 0$ having the following four properties

$$(15) \quad \delta \leq \varepsilon$$

$$(16) \quad \kappa \frac{c}{\sigma} \delta \leq \varepsilon^2 \quad (\text{cf. (11)}),$$

if $t, t' \in [\delta_0, 1 - \delta_0]$, $|t - t'| < \delta$, then

$$(17) \quad |\phi_t \circ \phi_{t'}^{-1}(x) - x| \leq \varepsilon^2 \sigma \quad \text{for all } x \in \bar{\Lambda}$$

and

$$(18) \quad \| (D\phi_t) \circ \phi_{t'}^{-1} \| \leq 1 + \varepsilon^2.$$

We note that by (18), since $\varepsilon \leq 1$, for $t, t' \in [\delta_0, 1 - \delta_0]$, $|t - t'| < \delta$

$$(19) \quad |\phi_t(\Lambda)| < (1 + 3\varepsilon^2) |\phi_{t'}(\Lambda)|.$$

We choose a partition

$$\delta_0 = t_0 < t_1 \dots < t_n = 1 - \delta_0$$

of $[\delta_0, 1 - \delta_0]$ with $|t_j - t_{j-1}| < \delta$ ($j = 1, \dots, n$).

$$\mathcal{J} := \{ t_j : |\phi_{t_j}(\Lambda)| > M - \varepsilon \}.$$

By (14), $t_0, t_n \notin \mathcal{J}$.

Since $\varepsilon \leq \varepsilon_2$, (8) and (9) are satisfied for $t_j \in \mathcal{J}$, and thus, by (10), there is $k_j \in \{ 1, \dots, n_0 \}$ with

$$\underline{v}(\phi_{t_j}(\Lambda)) \in N_{\varepsilon \vee \kappa_j}(\mathbf{V}_{k_j}).$$

Putting $\alpha = \varepsilon^2$ in (5), for each j with $t_j \in \mathcal{J}$ there is $(U_{1j}, U_{2j}) \in \mathcal{U}$ and isotopies $\psi^{ij} \in I(U_{ij}, A)$ with

$$(20) \quad |\psi_t^{ij}(\phi_{t_j}(\Lambda))| \leq |\phi_{t_j}(\Lambda)| + \varepsilon^2$$

and

$$(21) \quad |\psi_t^{ij}(\phi_{t_j}(\Lambda))| < |\phi_{t_j}(\Lambda)| - \varepsilon$$

for $i = 1, 2, 0 \leq t \leq 1$.

Let

$$\mathcal{J} = \bigcup_{k=1}^{n(\mathcal{J})} C_k,$$

where each C_k is of the form

$$C_k = \{ t_{j_k+i} \mid i = 0, 1, \dots, r_k \} \subset \mathcal{J}, t_{j_k-1} \notin \mathcal{J}, t_{j_k+r_k+1} \notin \mathcal{J}.$$

For given $k \in \{ 1, \dots, n(\mathcal{J}) \}$ we perform the modification of ϕ_t in the interval $t_{j_k-1} \leq t \leq t_{j_k+r_k+1}$. For simplicity of notation, we shall suppress the subscript k in the sequel. We thus want to construct $(\tilde{\phi}_t)$ with

$$(22) \quad |\tilde{\phi}_t(\Lambda)| \leq M - \frac{1}{2}\varepsilon \quad \text{if} \quad t_{j-1} \leq t \leq t_{j+r+1}$$

$$\text{and} \quad \tilde{\phi}_{t_{j-1}} = \phi_{t_{j-1}}, \quad \tilde{\phi}_{t_{j+r+1}} = \phi_{t_{j+r+1}}.$$

First of all

$$(23) \quad \tilde{\phi}_t = \phi_{2t-t_{j-1}} \quad \text{for} \quad t_{j-1} \leq t \leq \frac{1}{2}(t_{j-1} + t_j).$$

Since $t_{j-1} \notin \mathcal{J}$, (19) implies, in case $t_{j-1} \leq t \leq \frac{1}{2}(t_{j-1} + t_j)$,

$$(24) \quad |\phi_{2t-t_{j-1}}(\Lambda)| < M - \frac{3}{4}\varepsilon.$$

Next, let $i_0 \in \{ 1, 2 \}$ and

$$(25) \quad \tilde{\phi}_t = \psi_{\tau_1(t)}^{i_0, j} \circ \phi_{t_j}$$

with $\tau_1(t) = \frac{2t - t_j - t_{j-1}}{t_j - t_{j-1}}$ for $\frac{1}{2}(t_{j-1} + t_j) \leq t \leq t_j$.

Using (20) and (24) for $t = \frac{1}{2}(t_{j-1} + t_j)$, (22) also holds for $\frac{1}{2}(t_{j-1} + t_j) \leq t \leq t_j$.

Now suppose inductively that $\tilde{\phi}_t$ has been defined for $t_j \leq t \leq t_l, j < l < j+r$ with

$$(26) \quad |\tilde{\phi}_t(\Lambda)| \leq M - \frac{1}{2}\varepsilon \quad \text{for} \quad t_j \leq t \leq t_l$$

and

$$(27) \quad \tilde{\phi}_{t_i} = \psi_1^{i_0 l} \circ \phi_{t_i} \quad \text{for} \quad i_0 = 1 \text{ or } 2.$$

We then want to construct $\tilde{\phi}_t$ for $t_l \leq t \leq t_{l+1}$, with (26) and (27) holding with $l + 1$ instead of l .

Since $\text{dist}(U_1, U_2) \geq \min(\text{diam } U_1, \text{diam } U_2)$ for $(U_1, U_2) \in \mathcal{U}$, we can find $U_{i_l}, U_{i', l+1}$ with

$$(28) \quad U_{i_l} \cap U_{i', l+1} = \emptyset.$$

Let
$$0 < s_1 < s_2 < \frac{1}{4}(t_{l+1} - t_l).$$

If $i = i_0$ in (28) and (27), we put

$$(29 a) \quad \tilde{\phi}_t = \psi_1^{i_l} \circ \phi_{t_l} \quad \text{for} \quad t_l \leq t \leq t_l + s_2.$$

Then, by (26) and (27), (22) is satisfied for $t_l \leq t \leq t_l + s_2$. If $i \neq i_0$, we put

$$(29 b) \quad \begin{aligned} \tilde{\phi}_t &= \psi_{(i-t_l)/s_1}^{i_l} \circ \psi_1^{i_0 l} \circ \phi_{t_l} && \text{for } t_l \leq t \leq t_l + s_1 \\ &= \psi_1^{i_l} \circ \psi_{(t_l+s_2-t)/(s_2-s_1)}^{i_0 l} \circ \phi_{t_l} && \text{for } t_l + s_1 \leq t \leq t_l + s_2. \end{aligned}$$

Since in this case

$$\text{supp } \psi^{i_l} \cap \text{supp } \psi^{i_0 l} = \emptyset,$$

where $\text{supp } \psi^{i_l} = \{x : \psi^{i_l}(x) \neq x\}$, (20) and (21) again imply (22) for this interval. Moreover

$$(30) \quad \tilde{\phi}_{t_l+s_2} = \psi_1^{i_l} \circ \phi_{t_l}.$$

We now recall the partition of unity satisfying (11). We put

$$\zeta_{ij} := 1 - \sum_l \theta_l \delta(j, l)$$

where

$$\delta(j, l) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } \text{spt } \theta_l \subset W_l \in \Theta, \quad W_l \cap U_{ij}^g \neq \emptyset \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Thus

$$(31) \quad \begin{aligned} \zeta_{ij} | U_{ij}^g &= 0, \quad \zeta_{ij} | \overline{A} \setminus U_{ij}^{g/2} = 1 \\ |D\zeta_{ij}| &\leq \frac{c}{\sigma}. \end{aligned}$$

We choose $0 < s_2 < s_3 < s_4 < s_5 < t_{l+1} - t_l$. We put

$$\beta_t^1(y) := \phi_{t_l + \zeta_{it}(y)\tau_2(t)} \circ \phi_{t_l}^{-1} \circ \psi_1^{i_l}(y)$$

with $\tau_2(t) = (t_{l+1} - t_l)(t - t_l - s_2)/(s_3 - s_2)$ for $t_l + s_2 \leq t \leq t_l + s_3$

$$\beta_t^2(y) := \phi_{t_l + \zeta_{it}(y)(t_{l+1} - t_l)} \circ \phi_{t_l}^{-1} \circ \psi_{\tau_3(t)}^{i_l}(y)$$

with $\tau_3(t) = (t_l + s_5 - t)/(s_5 - s_4)$ for $t_l + s_4 \leq t \leq t_l + s_5$

$$\beta_t^3(y) := \phi_{\tau_4(t)} \circ \phi_{t_l}^{-1}(y)$$

with $\tau_4(t) = \frac{t(t_{l+1} - t_l - s_5) - s_5(t_{l+1} - t) + \zeta_{il}(y)(t_{l+1} - t_l)(t_{l+1} - t)}{t_{l+1} - t_l - s_5}$

for $t_l + s_5 \leq t \leq t_{l+1}$

and

$$\begin{aligned} \tilde{\phi}_t &= \beta_t^1 \circ \phi_{t_l} \quad \text{for } t_l + s_2 \leq t \leq t_l + s_3 \\ &= \psi_{(t-t_l-s_3)/(s_4-s_3)}^{i',l+1} \circ \beta_{t_l+s_3}^1 \circ \phi_{t_l} \quad \text{for } t_l + s_3 \leq t \leq t_l + s_4 \\ &= \psi_1^{i',l+1} \circ \beta_t^2 \circ \phi_{t_l} \quad \text{for } t_l + s_4 \leq t \leq t_l + s_5 \\ &= \psi_1^{i',l+1} \circ \beta_t^3 \circ \phi_{t_l} \quad \text{for } t_l + s_5 \leq t \leq t_{l+1}. \end{aligned}$$

The idea behind this complicated construction is quite simple. By (28), the supports of ψ^{il} and $\psi^{i',l+1}$ are disjoint. Since by (21); we can decrease the energy by at least ε , performing a modification on U_{il} , we have some freedom for operations on $U_{i',l+1}$, still preserving (22), and vice versa.

We thus want to show that

$$(32) \quad |\phi_{\tilde{t}}(\Lambda)| \leq M - \frac{1}{2}\varepsilon \quad \text{for } t_l + s_2 \leq t \leq t_{l+1}.$$

Since the estimates on the different subintervals are rather similar (and taken from [SS] anyway), we confine ourselves here to carry out only one (typical) example, namely $t_l + s_3 \leq t \leq t_l + s_4$.

We divide

$$\begin{aligned} \tilde{\phi}_t(\Lambda) &= \tilde{\phi}_t(\Lambda \cap \phi_{t_{l+1}}^{-1}(U_{i',l+1}^{\sigma/2})) \\ &\quad \cup (\tilde{\phi}_t(\Lambda \setminus \phi_{t_{l+1}}^{-1}(U_{i',l+1}^{\sigma/2})) \cap U_{il}^\sigma) \cup (\tilde{\phi}_t(\Lambda \setminus \phi_{t_{l+1}}^{-1}(U_{i',l+1}^{\sigma/2})) \setminus U_{il}^\sigma) \\ &=: \text{I} \cup \text{II} \cup \text{III} \end{aligned}$$

By (17)

$$(33) \quad \text{I} \subset U_{i',l+1}^{(\frac{1}{2}-\varepsilon^2)\sigma}$$

$$(34) \quad \text{II} \cup \text{III} \subset \overline{\text{A}} \setminus U_{i',l+1}^{(\frac{1}{2}+\varepsilon^2)\sigma}.$$

Since $\zeta_i = 1$ on $U_{i',l+1}^{(\frac{1}{2}+\varepsilon^2)\sigma}$, noting (28)

$$\text{I} = \psi_{(t-t_l-s_3)/(s_4-s_3)}^{i',l+1} \circ \phi_{t_l}^{-1}(\Lambda \cap \phi_{t_{l+1}}^{-1}(U_{i',l+1}^{\sigma/2})).$$

Thus, by (20)

$$(35) \quad |\text{I}| \leq |\phi_{t_{l+1}}(\Lambda) \cap U_{i',l+1}^{\sigma/2}| + \varepsilon^2.$$

Next

$$\begin{aligned} \text{II} &= \beta_{t_l+s_3}^1(\phi_{t_l}(\Lambda \setminus \phi_{t_{l+1}}^{-1}(U_{i',l+1}^{\sigma/2})) \cap U_{il}^\sigma) \\ &= \psi_1^{il}(\phi_{t_l}(\Lambda) \setminus \phi_{t_l} \circ \phi_{t_{l+1}}^{-1}(U_{i',l+1}^{\sigma/2})) \cap U_{il}^\sigma, \end{aligned}$$

since $\zeta_{il} = 0$ on U_{il}^σ .

With (21)

$$\begin{aligned}
 |\text{II}| &\leq |(\phi_{t_l}(\Lambda) \setminus \phi_{t_l} \circ \phi_{t_{l+1}}^{-1}(U_{i',l+1}^{\sigma/2})) \cap U_{ii}^\sigma| - \varepsilon \\
 &= |(\phi_{t_l} \circ \phi_{t_{l+1}}^{-1}) \circ \phi_{t_{l+1}}(\Lambda \setminus \phi_{t_{l+1}}^{-1}(U_{i',l+1}^{\sigma/2})) \cap U_{ii}^\sigma| - \varepsilon \\
 &\leq (1 + 3\varepsilon^2) |(\phi_{t_{l+1}}(\Lambda \setminus \phi_{t_{l+1}}^{-1}(U_{i',l+1}^{\sigma/2}))) \cap \phi_{t_{l+1}} \circ \phi_{t_l}^{-1}(U_{ii}^\sigma)| - \varepsilon \quad \text{by (19)} \\
 &\leq |(\phi_{t_{l+1}}(\Lambda) \setminus U_{i',l+1}^{\sigma/2}) \cap \phi_{t_{l+1}} \circ \phi_{t_l}^{-1}(U_{ii}^\sigma)| + 3\varepsilon^2 \left(M + \frac{1}{4} \varepsilon \right) - \varepsilon \quad \text{by (13)}
 \end{aligned}$$

Finally

$$\text{III} = \beta_{t_l+s_3}^1(\phi_{t_l}(\Lambda \setminus \phi_{t_{l+1}}^{-1}(U_{i',l+1}^{\sigma/2})) \setminus U_{ii}^\sigma).$$

Thus putting $R = (\phi_{t_l}(\Lambda) \setminus \phi_{t_l} \circ \phi_{t_{l+1}}^{-1}(U_{i',l+1}^{\sigma/2})) \setminus U_{ii}^\sigma$

$$(37) \quad |\text{III}| \leq \int_{\mathbb{R}} \|D\beta_{t_l+s_3}^1(y)\|^2 d\mathcal{H}^2(y).$$

Now, on R

$$\begin{aligned}
 D\beta_{t_l+s_3}^1(y) &= \frac{\partial \phi_\tau}{\partial \tau} \Big|_{\tau = t_l + s_3 \circ \phi_{t_l}^{-1}(y)} \cdot \\
 &\quad \cdot \langle D\zeta_{ii}(y), \cdot \rangle (t_{l+1} - t_l) + D\phi_{t_l+s_3}(\phi_{t_l}^{-1}(y)) \cdot D\phi_{t_l}^{-1}(y).
 \end{aligned}$$

Therefore, noting (31),(18), $|t_{l+1} - t_l| \leq \delta$

$$\begin{aligned}
 \|D\beta_{t_l+s_3}^1(y)\| &\leq \kappa \cdot \frac{c}{\sigma} \delta + (1 + \varepsilon^2) \\
 (38) \quad &\leq 1 + 2\varepsilon^2 \quad \text{by (16)}
 \end{aligned}$$

(37) and (38) yield

$$\begin{aligned}
 (39) \quad |\text{III}| &\leq (1 + 2\varepsilon^2) |\phi_{t_l}(\Lambda \setminus \phi_{t_{l+1}}^{-1}(U_{i',l+1}^{\sigma/2})) \setminus U_{ii}^\sigma| \\
 &\leq (1 + 2\varepsilon^2)(1 + 3\varepsilon^2) |(\phi_{t_{l+1}}(\Lambda \setminus U_{i',l+1}^{\sigma/2})) \setminus \phi_{t_{l+1}} \circ \phi_{t_l}^{-1}(U_{ii}^\sigma)|
 \end{aligned}$$

By (35), (36), (39) and (13)

$$\begin{aligned}
 |\tilde{\phi}_i(\Lambda)| &\leq |\phi_{t_{l+1}}(\Lambda)| - \varepsilon + \varepsilon^2(1 + 10M) \\
 &\leq |\phi_{t_{l+1}}(\Lambda)| - \frac{3}{4} \varepsilon \quad \text{by choice of } \varepsilon \text{ (cf. (12))} \\
 &\leq M - \frac{1}{2} \varepsilon \quad \text{by (13)}
 \end{aligned}$$

for

$$t_l + s_3 \leq t \leq t_l + s_4.$$

Handling the other subintervals in a similar way, we obtain (32). Moreover, by construction

$$(40) \quad \phi_{t_{l+1}} = \psi_1^{i',l+1} \circ \phi_{t_{l+1}}.$$

This holds for $l = j - 1, \dots, j + r - 1$. By induction likewise

$$(41) \quad |\tilde{\phi}_i(\Lambda)| \leq M - \frac{1}{2} \varepsilon \quad \text{for } t_{j-1} \leq t \leq t_{j+r}.$$

We finally put

$$\tilde{\phi}_t = \psi_{\tau_5(t)}^{i', j+r} \circ \phi_{t_{j+r}}$$

with
$$\tau_5(t) = (t_{j+r+1} + t_{j+r} - 2t)/(t_{j+r+1} - t_{j+r})$$

for
$$t_{j+r} \leq t \leq \frac{1}{2}(t_{j+r} + t_{j+r+1})$$

and

$$\tilde{\phi}_t = \phi_{2t-t_{j+r+1}} \quad \frac{1}{2}(t_{j+r} + t_{j+r+1}) \leq t \leq t_{j+r+1}.$$

By the same argument as for $t_{j-1} \leq t \leq t_j$, we see that (41) continues to hold for $t_{j+r} \leq t \leq t_{j+r+1}$.

Putting

$$\tilde{\phi}_t = \phi_t \quad \text{for } t \notin \bigcup_{k=1}^{n(\mathcal{J})} [j_k - 1, j_k + r_k + 1]$$

(19) then implies that (41) also holds for those t . Hence $\tilde{\phi}_t$ is defined on $[0, 1]$ and satisfies

$$(42) \quad |\tilde{\phi}_t(\Lambda)| \leq M - \frac{1}{2} \varepsilon \quad \text{for } 0 \leq t \leq 1.$$

Since by definition of \mathcal{U} , we only performed modification on sets with volume less than a quarter of the volume of \bar{A} , we see that $(\tilde{\phi}_t)$ also satisfies condition (4) (observe that we made sure that (40) holds at every step of the construction, so $(\tilde{\phi}_t)$ never deviated enough from (ϕ_t) to become a path with $A_1^1 = \{z_1\}$.) We then smooth out $(\tilde{\phi}_t)$ to get a C^1 -path $(\tilde{\tilde{\phi}}_t)$ with

$$|\tilde{\tilde{\phi}}_t(\Lambda)| \leq M - \frac{1}{4} \varepsilon \quad \text{for } 0 \leq t \leq 1.$$

Thus, we have obtained the desired contradiction finishing the proof.

q. e. d.

COROLLARY 1. — a) *There is at most one point $x \in \bar{A}$ at which V is not almost minimizing among disks.*

b) *For each $x \in \bar{A}$ there is some $r = r(x) > 0$ with the property that V is almost minimizing among disks in $B(x, r) \setminus \{x\}$.*

Proof. — a) If the almost minimizing property would fail at x_1 and x_2 ($x_1 \neq x_2$), we take r_1, r_2 with

$$r_1 + r_2 \leq \frac{1}{2} |x_1 - x_2|$$

$$\text{vol}(B(x_i, r_i)) < \frac{1}{4} \text{vol}(\bar{A})$$

in Lemma 1 to obtain a contradiction.

b) If V is not almost minimizing in $\overset{\circ}{B}(x, r) := U_1$ for all $r \leq r_0(x)$, then it is almost minimizing in $U_2 := \overset{\circ}{B}(x, r_0) \setminus B(x, 4r)$ for all $r \leq \frac{1}{4}r_0$ by Lemma 1, hence in $\overset{\circ}{B}(x, r_0) \setminus \{x\}$. q. e. d.

§ 2. MINIMIZING SEQUENCES OF SURFACES AT FREE BOUNDARIES

We extend the methods of [AS] and [MSY] to free boundary value problems using the regularity theorem of [GJ].

Let $U \subset \mathbb{R}^3$ be open, of class C^2 , and let $\partial U \cap A$ be simply connected. Let $M \in \mathcal{M}$ intersect ∂U transversally and

$$\partial M \cap A \cap U = \emptyset.$$

Let Λ be a component of $M \setminus (M \cap U)$ with

$$\partial M \cap A \cap \Lambda = \emptyset.$$

Then there exist $F \subset \partial U \cap A$ and $C \subset \bar{A} \setminus U$ with

- (1) $\partial F \cap A = \Lambda \cap \partial U \cap A$
- (2) $\partial C \cap A = \Lambda \cup F$
- (3) $\text{vol } C \leq c_0 \mathcal{H}^2(\Lambda \cup F)^{3/2}$.

The constant c_0 depends only on ∂A . This easily follows from the isoperimetric inequality.

We also define for U as above and $t \geq 0$,

- if $\pi : \mathbb{R}^3 \setminus U \rightarrow \partial U$ denotes the nearest point projection,
- $$R(t) := \{x \in \mathbb{R}^3 \setminus U : \text{dist}(x, \partial U) = t, \pi(x) \in \partial U \cap A\}$$
- $$U'(t) := \bigcup_{0 \leq s \leq t} R(s)$$
- $$U_t := \{x \in U : \text{dist}(x, \partial U) \geq t\}.$$

LEMMA 1. — *Let U be an open subset of \mathbb{R}^3 with a convex boundary ∂U of class C^2 . Suppose on ∂U the following isoperimetric inequality holds:*

If λ is a system of Jordan curves in $\partial U \cap A$ dividing $\partial U \cap A$ into two (not necessarily connected) components E_1, E_2 , then

$$\min(\mathcal{H}^2(E_1), \mathcal{H}^2(E_2)) \leq \beta(\text{length } \lambda)^2$$

for some $\beta > 0$.

Suppose

$$T > c_1 \mathcal{H}^2(\partial U \cap A)^{\frac{1}{2}}$$

with

$$c_1 = \max\left(\frac{3}{16}c_0, 2\beta^{\frac{1}{2}}\right)$$

and

$$U'(T) \subset A.$$

Let

$$\theta > 0$$

and let $M \in \mathcal{M}$ intersect ∂U transversally. Suppose $\partial M \cap A$ is not contained in any set C satisfying (2), (3) where Λ is a component of $M \setminus (M \cap U)$ with $\partial M \cap A \cap \Lambda = \emptyset$ and $F \subset \partial U \cap A$ satisfies (1).

Then there exists $\tilde{M} \in \mathcal{M}$ with

$$\begin{aligned}\partial \tilde{M} \cap A &= \partial M \cap A \\ \tilde{M} \setminus (\tilde{M} \cap U) &\subset M \setminus (M \cap U) \\ \tilde{M} \cap U_\theta &\subset M \cap U_\theta\end{aligned}$$

\tilde{M} intersects ∂U transversally

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{H}^2(\tilde{M}) + \mathcal{H}^2((M \setminus \tilde{M}) \cap U_\theta) &\leq \mathcal{H}^2(M) \\ \tilde{M} \cap U &= \bigcup_{j=1}^k N_j \quad \text{where } N_j \in \mathcal{M}.\end{aligned}$$

If in addition

$$\mathcal{H}^2(M) \leq \mathcal{H}^2(P) + \varepsilon \quad \text{for any } P \in \mathcal{M} \quad \text{with } \partial P \cap A = \partial M \cap A$$

then there $\varepsilon_1, \dots, \varepsilon_n \geq 0$ with $\sum_{j=1}^k \varepsilon_j \leq \varepsilon$ and

$$\mathcal{H}^2(N_j) \leq \mathcal{H}^2(P_j) + \varepsilon_j \quad \text{for any } P_j \in \mathcal{M} \quad \text{with } \partial P_j \cap A = \partial M_j \cap A$$

($j = 1, \dots, k$).

Proof. — We can proceed as in [AS; p. 457 ff.] once we have demonstrated the following claim:

If Λ , F and C are as above (in particular satisfying (1)-(3)) then

$$\mathcal{H}^2(F) < \mathcal{H}^2(\Lambda).$$

We achieve this as follows.

Since ∂U is convex, $\mathcal{H}^2(R(t))$ is monotonically increasing in t , and, by assumption

$$R(t) \subset A \quad \text{for } 0 \leq t \leq T.$$

If Λ intersects $R(t)$ transversally (which is the case for almost all t by Sard's lemma), it divides $R(t)$ into two (not necessarily connected) sets $F(t)$, $F'(t)$.

We label them in such a way that they depend continuously on t and

$$F(0) = F$$

w. l. o. g.

$$(4) \quad \mathcal{H}^2(\Lambda) < \mathcal{H}^2(\partial U \cap A)$$

and hence

$$\text{vol } C \leq 3c_0 \mathcal{H}^2(\partial U \cap A)^{3/2}.$$

The coarea formula then yields

$$\int_{T/4}^{T/2} \mathcal{H}^2(F(t)) dt \leq 3c_0 \mathcal{H}^2(\partial U \cap A)^{3/2}.$$

Hence, by assumption on T , there exists $t_0 \in \left[\frac{T}{4}, \frac{T}{2} \right]$ with

$$(5) \quad \mathcal{H}^2(F(t_0)) \leq \frac{1}{4} \mathcal{H}^2(\partial U \cap A) \leq \frac{1}{2} \mathcal{H}^2(R(t_0)).$$

We put

$$E(t) := \Lambda \cap U'(t).$$

Since ∂U is convex, $\Delta \text{ dist}(\cdot, U) \geq 0$ on $\mathbb{R}^3 \setminus U$. Thus, from the divergence theorem, if ν denotes the unit normal vector field of Λ ,

$$\mathcal{H}^2(F(t_1)) - \mathcal{H}^2(F(t_2)) \leq \int_{E(t_2) \setminus E(t_1)} |\langle \nu, \text{grad dist}(\cdot, U) \rangle|$$

for $0 \leq t_1 < t_2 \leq T$.

Therefore

$$(6) \quad \mathcal{H}^2(F(t_1)) - \mathcal{H}^2(F(t_2)) \leq \mathcal{H}^2(\bar{E}(t_2)) - \mathcal{H}^2(E(t_1)),$$

and if $E(t_2) \neq E(t_1)$, we even have strict inequality. In particular the claim follows if $\mathcal{H}^2(F(t_2)) = 0$ for some $t_2 \in \left[\frac{T}{2}, T \right]$, noting $\mathcal{H}^2(\bar{E}(t_2)) \leq \mathcal{H}^2(\Lambda)$. In general, we have at least

$$(7) \quad \mathcal{H}^2(F) - \mathcal{H}^2(\bar{E}(t)) < \mathcal{H}^2(F(t))$$

for $0 < t \leq T$.

(5) implies that we can also assume

$$(8) \quad \mathcal{H}^2(F) \leq \frac{1}{2} \mathcal{H}^2(\partial U \cap A),$$

because, if not, we take $U'(t_0) \cup U$, $F(t_0)$ (note (5)), $A(T) := A \cap U'(T)$, and $\Lambda \cap A(T)$ instead of U , F , A , Λ resp., show that (with the arguments below)

$$\mathcal{H}^2(F(t_0)) < \mathcal{H}^2(\Lambda \cap A(T))$$

and apply the divergence theorem to show that

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{H}^2(\mathbf{F}) &< \mathcal{H}^2(\mathbf{F}(t_0)) + \mathcal{H}^2(\bar{\mathbf{E}}(t_0)) \\ &< \mathcal{H}^2(\Lambda),\end{aligned}$$

thus demonstrating the claim.

Therefore, assuming (8), we can assume as well

$$\mathcal{H}^2(\Lambda) \leq \frac{1}{2} \mathcal{H}^2(\partial\mathbf{U} \cap \mathbf{A}).$$

Assuming this and using (5), we obtain from (6) ($t_1 = t$, $t_2 = t_0$)

$$\mathcal{H}^2(\mathbf{F}(t)) \leq \frac{3}{4} \mathcal{H}^2(\partial\mathbf{U} \cap \mathbf{A}) \leq \frac{3}{4} \mathcal{H}^2(\mathbf{R}(t))$$

for $0 \leq t \leq \frac{\mathbf{T}}{4}$.

Hence, from the isoperimetric inequality on $\mathbf{R}(t)$

$$\mathcal{H}^2(\mathbf{F}(t)) \leq 4\beta (\text{length}(\Lambda \cap \mathbf{R}(t)))^2 = 4\beta \left(\frac{d}{dt} \mathcal{H}^2(\mathbf{E}(t)) \right)^2$$

for almost all $t \in \left[0, \frac{\mathbf{T}}{4} \right]$.

With (7)

$$\mathcal{H}^2(\mathbf{F}) - \mathcal{H}^2(\mathbf{E}(t)) \leq 4\beta \left(\frac{d}{dt} (\mathcal{H}^2(\mathbf{F}) - \mathcal{H}^2(\mathbf{E}(t))) \right)^2$$

for almost all $t \in \left[0, \frac{\mathbf{T}}{4} \right]$, and since this expression is monotonically decreasing and $\mathcal{H}^2(\mathbf{E}(0)) = 0$

$$\mathcal{H}^2(\mathbf{F})^{\frac{1}{2}} - \left(\mathcal{H}^2(\mathbf{F}) - \mathcal{H}^2\left(\mathbf{E}\left(\frac{\mathbf{T}}{4}\right)\right) \right)^{\frac{1}{2}} \geq \frac{\mathbf{T}}{4\beta^{\frac{1}{2}}},$$

provided

$$\mathcal{H}^2(\mathbf{F}) > \mathcal{H}^2\left(\mathbf{E}\left(\frac{\mathbf{T}}{4}\right)\right).$$

This implies (noting (8))

$$\mathbf{T} \leq 2\beta^{\frac{1}{2}} \mathcal{H}^2(\partial\mathbf{U} \cap \mathbf{A})^{\frac{1}{2}},$$

contradicting the choice of \mathbf{T} . Hence

$$\mathcal{H}^2(\mathbf{F}) \leq \mathcal{H}^2\left(\mathbf{E}\left(\frac{\mathbf{T}}{4}\right)\right).$$

Now either $\mathcal{H}^2\left(F\left(\frac{T}{2}\right)\right) = 0$ which case however was already treated after (6), or

$$\mathcal{H}^2\left(E\left(\frac{T}{4}\right)\right) < \mathcal{H}^2\left(E\left(\frac{T}{2}\right)\right)$$

whence the claim follows again, noting $\mathcal{H}^2\left(E\left(\frac{T}{2}\right)\right) \leq \mathcal{H}^2(\Lambda)$. q. e. d.

LEMMA 2 (Boundary filigree).

Assumptions.

$\{Y_t\}_{t \in [0,1]}$ increasing family of convex sets where each Y_t satisfies the assumptions of the set U of Lemma 1.

$Y_t = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^3 : f(x) < t\}$, $t > 0$, where $f : \mathbb{R}^3 \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^+$ is C^2 on $\mathbb{R}^3 \sim \bar{Y}_0$, $Df \neq 0$ on $Y_1 \sim \bar{Y}_0$,

$$\sup_{Y_1 \sim \bar{Y}_0} |Df| \leq c_1$$

$\exists c_2 > 0$, $\forall \Gamma_1, \Gamma_1$ C^2 Jordan arc in $\partial Y_t, \partial \Gamma_1 \subset \partial A$,

Γ_1 in ∂Y_t homotopic with fixed endpoints to an arc $\Gamma \subset \partial A$

$$\exists E \subset \partial Y_t : \partial E \subset \Gamma_1 \cup (\partial A \cap \partial Y_t)$$

$$(11) \quad \mathcal{H}^2(E) \leq c_2(\mathcal{H}^1(\Gamma_1))^2$$

$M \subset \bar{U}$, $M \in \mathcal{M}$, $\forall t \in (0, 1) : \partial M \cap A$ is not contained in any set C satisfying (2), (3)

$\exists \varepsilon > 0 : \forall \psi \in I(U, A) :$

$$(12) \quad \mathcal{H}^2(M) \leq \mathcal{H}^2(\psi_1(M)) + \varepsilon.$$

Conclusion:

If $t_0 = 1 - 2c_1\sqrt{c_2} \cdot \sqrt{\mathcal{H}^2(M \cap Y_1)} > 0$ then

$$(13) \quad \mathcal{H}^2(M \cap Y_{t_0}) \leq 2\varepsilon.$$

Proof. — By Sard’s Lemma, M intersects ∂Y_t transversally for almost every $t \in (0, 1)$, and by assumption $M \subset \bar{A}$ and M meets ∂A transversally. In particular, $\text{int } M \cap \partial A = \emptyset$. Thus, we can apply Lemma 1 and get \tilde{M} with

$$(14) \quad \begin{aligned} \mathcal{H}^2(\tilde{M}) &\leq \mathcal{H}^2(M) \\ \tilde{M} \cap \partial Y_t &\subset M \cap \partial Y_t \end{aligned}$$

$$(15) \quad \begin{aligned} \tilde{M} \cap \bar{Y}_t &= \bigcup_{j=1}^k N_j, & N_j &\in \mathcal{M} \\ \mathcal{H}^2(N_j) &\leq \mathcal{H}^2(N) + \varepsilon_j & \forall N &= \psi_1(N_j) \end{aligned}$$

$$(16) \quad \sum_{j=1}^k \varepsilon_j \leq \varepsilon \quad \psi \in I(U, A)$$

(and not only $N_j \in \tilde{\mathcal{M}}$ as in [AS], p. 457).

Let $\Gamma_j : \partial N_j \cap \partial Y_t$. Take $E \subset \partial Y_t$, $\partial E \subset \Gamma_1 \cup (\partial A \cap \partial Y_t)$, for which (11) holds.

By (15)

$$(17) \quad \mathcal{H}^2(N_j) < \mathcal{H}^2(E) + \varepsilon_j.$$

From (11) and (17)

$$\mathcal{H}^2(N_j) \leq c_2(\mathcal{H}^1(N_j \cap \partial Y_t))^2 + \varepsilon_j.$$

Using (16)

$$\mathcal{H}^2(\tilde{M} \cap Y_t) \leq c_2(\mathcal{H}^1(\tilde{M} \cap \partial Y_t))^2 + \varepsilon,$$

and using (14)

$$\mathcal{H}^2(\tilde{M} \cap Y_t) \leq c_2(\mathcal{H}^1(M \cap \partial Y_t))^2 + \varepsilon$$

and using (12),

$$(18) \quad \mathcal{H}^2(M \cap Y_t) \leq c_2(\mathcal{H}^1(M \cap \partial Y_t))^2 + 2\varepsilon$$

w. l. o. g.

$$\mathcal{H}^2(M \cap Y_1) > 2\varepsilon$$

$$t_1 := \inf \{ t : \mathcal{H}^2(M \cap Y_t) > 2\varepsilon \}$$

$$g(t) := \mathcal{H}^2(M \cap Y_t) - 2\varepsilon \quad \text{for } t \in [t_1, 1].$$

Using the coarea formula, (18) yields

$$(19) \quad g(t) \leq c_1^2 c_2 (g'(t))^2 \quad \text{a. a. } t \in [t_1, 1].$$

Since g is increasing, the result easily follows from integrating (19).

THEOREM 1. — Suppose $S \in \mathcal{M}$, (ψ^k) sequence in $I(U, A)$,

$$\lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} \text{area}(\psi_1^k(S)) = \inf \{ \text{area}(\psi_1(S)) : \psi \in I(U, A) \},$$

$$W = \lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} \underline{v}(\psi_1^k(S)) \in V_2(\mathbb{R}^3)$$

exists in the varifold sense.

Then V is an integral varifold, and

$$(20) \quad W \llcorner U \cap \bar{A} \times G(3, 2) = n \underline{v}(M)$$

where M is a stable embedded minimal surface in $U \cap \bar{A}$ with $\partial M \cap U \subset \partial A$, and M meets ∂A orthogonally.

Proof. — As in [AS], p. 463, we see using the boundary filigree lemma, that W is stationary, rectifiable and there is some $c > 0$ with

$$(21) \quad \Theta_*^2(\|W\|, x) \geq c$$

for all $x \in \text{spt} \|W\| \cap U$.

Interior regularity of W follows from [AS], §§ 5, 6. Also, W is integral.

Let $x_0 \in \text{spt} \parallel W \parallel \cap U \cap \partial A$.

We assume for a moment that W has a varifold tangent C at x_0 with $\text{spt} \parallel C \parallel$ contained in a half plane H .

Since W is also stationary w. r. t. variations of its boundary on ∂A , C has to contain the interior normal of ∂A at x_0 .

W. l. o. g. $x_0 = 0$, and $(0, 1, 0)$ is normal to H .

Let $\tilde{K}_{\rho, \sigma} := ((D_\rho \sim \partial D_\rho) \times (-\sigma, \sigma)) \cap A$.

By rescaling, we can assume w. l. o. g. $\tilde{K}_{1,1} \subset U$.

Put $N_k := \psi_1^k(S)$.

By definition of C ,

$$(22) \quad \mu_{r_k} \# W \rightarrow C$$

for some sequence $(r_k) \rightarrow \infty$ as $k \rightarrow \infty$.

Let $\sigma_0 \in (0, 1)$ be given.

(21) implies that we can find $r \in (r_k)$ with

$$(23) \quad \tilde{K}_{1,1} \cap \text{spt} \parallel \mu_r \# W \parallel \subset \tilde{K}_{1, \sigma_0/2}.$$

W. l. o. g. also

$$(24) \quad \begin{aligned} \mathcal{H}^2(\text{spt} \parallel \mu_r \# W \parallel \cap (\partial D_{\frac{1}{2}} \times \mathbb{R})) &= \emptyset \\ \mathcal{H}^2(\text{spt} \parallel \mu_r \# W \parallel \cap \partial A_r) &= \emptyset, \quad \text{where } A_r = \mu_r(A). \end{aligned}$$

By assumption

$$(25) \quad \mathcal{H}^2(\mu_r(N_k)) \leq \mathcal{H}^2(N) + r^2 \varepsilon$$

for all $N \in \mathcal{M}$ with $\partial N \cap A_r = \partial \mu_r(N_k) \cap A_r$.

Let $A_r \Leftrightarrow \mu_r(A)$.

Since $\underline{v}(\mu_r(N_k)) \rightarrow \mu_r \# W$, (23) and the coarea formula yield for almost all $\sigma \in (\sigma_0/2, 1)$ and $k \rightarrow \infty$

$$\mathcal{H}^1(\mu_r(N_k) \cap (D_1 \times (\{-\sigma\} \cup \{\sigma\}) \cap A_r)) \rightarrow 0.$$

Thus, for sufficiently large k , we can find $\sigma_k \in \left(\frac{3}{4}\sigma_0, \sigma_0\right)$ and $\rho_k \in \left(\frac{3}{4}, 1\right)$ with

$$(26) \quad \mu_r(N_k) \cap (((\partial D_{\rho_k} \times (\{-\sigma_k\} \cup \{\sigma_k\})) \cup (\partial A_r \cap D_{\rho_k} \times (\{-\sigma_k\} \cup \{\sigma_k\}))) = \emptyset$$

Furthermore, by Sard's Lemma, we can assume that $\mu_r(N_k)$ intersects $D_{\rho_k} \times (\{-\sigma_k\} \cup \{\sigma_k\})$ and $\partial D_{\rho_k} \times [-1, 1]$ transversally. Moreover $\mu_r(N_k)$ intersects A_r transversally by assumption.

We now want to apply Theorem 1 of [AS] for $M = \mu_r(N_k)$ and $U = \tilde{K}_{\rho_k, \sigma_k}$ (M, U as in [AS], Theorem 1).

As observed in [AS], p. 475, we don't have to worry about the edges of $\tilde{K}_{\rho_k, \sigma_k}$. Because of (26), anyway only the edge $\partial A_r \cap (\partial D_{\rho_k} \times [-\sigma_k, \sigma_k])$

has to be taken into account. The N_j and P from the statement of Theorem 1 in [AS] are then in $\tilde{\mathcal{M}}$ instead of \mathcal{M} .

Anyway, we find integers $0 < R_k^1 \leq R_k^2 \leq R_k^3$ and disks $P_k^1, \dots, P_k^{R_k^3}$ with

$$\begin{aligned} \partial P_k^1, \dots, \partial P_k^{R_k^2} &\subset \partial D_{\rho_k} \times (-\sigma_k, \sigma_k) \cup (\partial A \cap (D_{\rho_k} \times (-\sigma_k, \sigma_k))) =: E_k \\ \partial P_k^{R_k^2+1}, \dots, \partial P_k^{R_k^3} &\subset D_{\rho_k} \times (\{-\sigma_k\} \cup \{\sigma_k\}) \end{aligned}$$

and $\partial P_k^1, \dots, \partial P_k^{R_k^2}$ are homotopically nontrivial in E_k while $\partial P_k^{R_k^2+1}, \dots, \partial P_k^{R_k^3}$ bound disks in E_k .

Note that because of (26), the edges

$$\partial D_{\rho_k} \times (\{-\sigma_k\} \cup \{\sigma_k\}) \quad \text{and} \quad \partial A_r \cap (D_{\rho_k} \times (\{-\sigma_k\} \cup \{\sigma_k\}))$$

are not intersected by the ∂P_k^l .

Moreover,

$$(27) \quad \mathcal{H}^2(P_k^l) \leq \mathcal{H}^2(P) + \varepsilon_k, l \quad \forall P \in \tilde{\mathcal{M}} \quad \text{with} \quad \partial P = P_k^l \quad l=1, \dots, R_k^3$$

(for $l = R_k^2 + 1, \dots, R_k^3$, we can actually assume $P_k^l, P \in \mathcal{M}$) and

$$\sum_{l=1}^{R_k^3} \varepsilon_{k,l} \leq r^2 \varepsilon_k$$

and using (14) and [AW1] 2.6 (2) (d),

$$(28) \quad \mu_{r\#} W \llcorner \tilde{K}_{\frac{1}{2},1} \times G(3, 2) = \lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} \sum_{l=1}^{R_k^3} \nu(P_k^l \cap \tilde{K}_{\frac{1}{2},1}).$$

Then, first of all, $P_k^{R_k^2+1}, \dots, P_k^{R_k^3}$ can be discarded as in [AS], p. 465 f., without changing the varifold limit in (28).

We now want to delete $P_k^{R_k^2+1}, \dots, P_k^{R_k^2}$.

Let $\Delta_{k,l}$ be the intersection of the disk bounded by P_k^l in E_k with $\partial D_{\rho_k} \times (-\sigma_k, \sigma_k)$ ($l = R_k^1 + 1, \dots, R_k^2$).

Clearly

$$\mathcal{H}^2(\Delta_{k,l}) \leq 2\pi\rho_k\sigma_0.$$

Choosing $P = \Delta_{k,l}$ in (17) and k sufficiently large, hence

$$(29) \quad \mathcal{H}^2(P_k^l) < 2\pi\sigma_0 + \varepsilon_{k,l} \quad (l = R_k^1 + 1, \dots, R_k^2).$$

Choosing σ_0 sufficiently small and using the boundary filigree lemma for the family of cylinders (which after suitably rescaling and slightly perturbing satisfy the proper assumptions)

$$\begin{aligned} Y_t &= \{x = (x_1, x_2, x_3) : \sqrt{x_1^2 + x_2^2} < t\rho_k\} \\ f(x) &= \frac{1}{\rho_k} \sqrt{x_1^2 + x_2^2} \\ c_1 &= \rho_k^{-1} \end{aligned}$$

we get

$$\mathcal{H}^2(P_k \cap \tilde{K}_{\frac{1}{2},1}) \leq 3\varepsilon_{k,l} \quad l = R_k^1 + 1, \dots, R_k^2$$

and thus also these P_k^l can be discarded without changing the varifold limit in (28).

Thus

$$(30) \quad \mu_{r\#} W \llcorner \tilde{K}_{\frac{1}{2},1} \times G(3, 2) = \lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} \sum_{l=1}^{R_k^1} \underline{v}(P_k \cap \tilde{K}_{\frac{1}{2},1}).$$

For $l = 1, \dots, R_k^1$, we have

$$(31) \quad \frac{1}{2} \pi \rho^2 (1 - \delta(r)) \leq \mathcal{H}^2(P_k^l \cap \tilde{K}_{\rho,1}) \quad (\rho \in (0, \rho_k]),$$

where $\delta(r) \rightarrow 0$ as $r \rightarrow \infty$, since $\partial A \in C^2$.

Furthermore, comparing P_k^l with either of the parts into which $\partial P_k^l \cap A_r$ divides $(\partial D_{\rho_k} \times (-\sigma_0, \sigma_0)) \cap A_r$ and using (27)

$$\mathcal{H}^2(P_k^l) \leq \frac{1}{2} \pi \rho_k^2 + \pi \rho_k \sigma_0 + \varepsilon_{k,l}.$$

We now choose k so large that $\varepsilon_k < \pi \sigma_0$ (Note that the choice of σ_0 leading to the deletion of P_k^l for $l = R_k^1 + 1, \dots, R_k^2$ did not depend on k).

Thus

$$(32) \quad \mathcal{H}^2(P_k^l) \leq \frac{1}{2} \pi \rho_k^2 + 2\pi \sigma_0$$

(30) and (31) imply that R_k^1 is bounded independent of k . After selection of a subsequence, we find a positive integer n and

$$\rho_k \rightarrow \rho_0 \in \left[\frac{3}{4}, 1 \right] \quad \text{as } k \rightarrow \infty$$

as for $l = 1, \dots, n$

$$\underline{v}(\pi_{\rho_k^{-1}} P_k) \text{ converges to a varifold } W_l$$

with (using (31), (32), (33))

$$(33) \quad \frac{1}{2} \pi \rho^2 (1 - \delta(r)) \leq \|W_l\|(\tilde{K}_{\rho,1}) \quad \text{for each } \rho \in [0, 1]$$

$$(34) \quad \begin{aligned} \|W_l\|(\tilde{K}_{1,1}) &\leq \frac{\pi}{2} + 2\pi \sigma_0 \rho_0^{-2} \\ &\leq \frac{\pi}{2} + 20\sigma_0 \end{aligned}$$

$$(35) \quad \text{spt } \|W_l\| \subset \tilde{K}_{1,\sigma_0}$$

$$(36) \quad (\mu_{r\rho_0^{-1}} W) \llcorner \tilde{K}_{\frac{1}{2},1} \times G(3, 2) = \sum_{l=1}^n W_l \llcorner \tilde{K}_{\frac{1}{2},1} \times G(3, 2).$$

Since $\tilde{K}_{1-\sigma_0, \sigma_0} \subset U(0, 1)$, (33) and (35) imply

$$(37) \quad \begin{aligned} \|W_l\| (U(0, 1)) &\geq \|W_l\| K_{1-\sigma_0, \sigma_0} = \|W_l\| K_{1-\sigma_0, 1} \\ &\geq \frac{\pi}{2} (1 - \delta(r))(1 - \sigma_0)^2. \end{aligned}$$

Since $U(0, 1) \cap A \subset \tilde{K}_{1,1}$, (34) yields

$$(38) \quad \|W_l\| U(0, 1) \leq \frac{\pi}{2} + 20\sigma_0.$$

Since we can make σ_0 and $\delta(r)$ as small as we want by choosing r sufficiently large (satisfying (23)), we obtain, using the monotonicity at the free boundary of [GJ]

$$(39) \quad \Theta(\|W\|, x_0) = \frac{n}{2}.$$

We now apply the first part of the proof of $(\mu_{\rho_k^{-1}}(P_k^l))$ instead of (N_k) ($l = 1, \dots, n$). This, together with the interior regularity of [AS, § 5] implies that each W_l is a stationary integral varifold with density 1 $\|W_l\|$ -almost everywhere. Taking σ_0 in (38) sufficiently small, the free boundary regularity of [GJ] implies

$$W_l \llcorner \tilde{K}_{\frac{1}{2}, 1} \times G(3, 2) = \underline{v}(M_l), \quad l = 1, \dots, n$$

where M_l is a minimal surface which can be represented as a graph over $D_{\frac{1}{2}} \cap \bar{A}_{r\rho_0}$:

$$M_l = \{ (x_1, x_2, x_3) : x_3 = u_l(x_1, x_2), \quad x \in D_{\frac{1}{2}} \cap \bar{A}_{r\rho_0^{-1}} \}$$

By (39) (remembering $x_0 = 0$) and (36),

$$u_l(0) = 0 \quad (l = 1, \dots, n).$$

Since for $l, m \in \{1, \dots, n\}$ either $u_l \leq u_m$ or $u_l \geq u_m$ in $D_{\frac{1}{2}} \cap \bar{A}_{r\rho_0^{-1}}$ by construction of W_l , and since we can apply the strong maximum principle to the difference of two solutions of the minimal surface equation also at boundary points, $u_l = u_m$ on $D_{\frac{1}{2}} \cap \bar{A}_{r\rho_0^{-1}}$. Hence

$$\mu_{r\rho_0^{-1} \#} W \llcorner \tilde{K}_{\frac{1}{2}, 1} \times G(3, 2) = n\underline{v}(M_1).$$

In order to finish the proof, we have to show that at each $x_0 \in \partial A \cap U \cap \text{spt } \|W\|$, there is a varifold tangent C of V of the form $n\underline{v}(H)$ with H a half plane and $n \in \mathbb{N}$.

W. l. o. g. $x_0 = 0$ again.

Let $C \in \text{Var Tan}(W, x_0)$

$$C = \lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} \mu_{t_k \#} W \quad \text{for some sequence } (t_k).$$

We choose a sequence (N_k) in \mathcal{M} with

$$\begin{aligned} N_k &= \mu_{r_k}(\psi_k^1(S)) \\ \underline{v}(N_k) &\rightarrow C \quad \text{as } k \rightarrow \infty \\ \mathcal{H}^2(N_k) &\leq \mathcal{H}^2(N) + \tilde{\varepsilon}_k \quad \forall N = \psi_1(S) \quad \psi \in I(U, A) \\ \tilde{\varepsilon}_k &\rightarrow 0 \quad \text{as } k \rightarrow \infty. \end{aligned}$$

It follows that C is stationary. We reflect C across $\text{Tan}(A, x_0)$ and obtain a stationary \tilde{C} (cf. [GJ; 4. 11]). We apply the interior arguments of [AS; § 6] to \tilde{C} and deduce that it is contained in a plane. From the two remaining possibilities, the first one, namely that C is a halfplane (containing the interior normal of A at x_0) was already treated above. Therefore we only have to exclude the second possibility, namely

$$C = \text{Tan}(A, x_0).$$

Let $B_r = B(x_0, r) \cap A$ and assume w. l. o. g. $B_1 \subset U$. By the usual replacement argument, we can assume that each N_k intersects B_{r_k} in a number of disks $P_k^1, \dots, P_k^{R_k}$ for a suitable $r_k \in \left(\frac{3}{4}, 1\right]$.

Using the coarea formula, for given $\varepsilon > 0$ we can also assume that for all sufficiently large k

$$\mathcal{H}^1(N_k \cap \partial B_{r_k} \cap \{x : \text{dist}(x, C) > \varepsilon\}) < \varepsilon.$$

It follows that if one of the disks $P_k^i, i \in \{1, \dots, R_k\}$ has part of its boundary on ∂A , i. e. $P_k^i \cap \partial A \neq \emptyset$, we can replace it by a region $A_k^i \subset \partial B(x_0, r_k) \cap A$ with

$$\mathcal{H}^2(A_k^i) \leq c\varepsilon$$

where c is a fixed constant. Lemma 2 (again after rescaling and perturbing so that the proper assumptions are satisfied) implies that those P_k^i do not contribute to the limit and can hence be discarded.

Therefore, we may assume

$$N_k \cap \partial A \cap B_{3/4} = \emptyset.$$

We let

$$A_\varepsilon := \{x \in A : \text{dist}(x, \text{Tan}(A, x_0)) \geq \varepsilon\}.$$

Since A is strictly convex, we may assume if ε is small

$$A \setminus A_\varepsilon \subset B_{3/4}.$$

By smoothing out the corner $\partial A \cap \{x : \text{dist}(x, \text{Tan}(A, x_0)) = \varepsilon\}$ we can obtain a convex $\tilde{A}_\varepsilon \subset A$ with boundary of class C^2 . We can also assume that $\partial \tilde{A}_\varepsilon$ is intersected transversally by all N_k . Thus, we can apply Thm. 1 of [AS] and produce a minimizing sequence

$$(\tilde{N}_k) \subset \tilde{A}_\varepsilon$$

with $\tilde{N}_k \cap \tilde{A}_{2\varepsilon} \subset N_k \cap \tilde{A}_{2\varepsilon}$ and

$$\mathcal{H}^2(\tilde{N}_k) \leq \mathcal{H}^2(N_k) - \mathcal{H}^2(N_k \sim \tilde{N}_k \cap \tilde{A}_{2\varepsilon}).$$

Therefore, by interior regularity $\underline{v}(\tilde{N}_k)$ converges to a stationary vari-fold \tilde{W} with $\text{spt} \|\tilde{W}\| \subset \tilde{A}_\varepsilon$ and

$$W \llcorner A_{2\varepsilon} \times G(3, 2) = W \llcorner A_{2\varepsilon} \times G(3, 2),$$

and

$$\text{spt} \|\tilde{W}\| = \tilde{M}$$

where \tilde{M} is an embedded minimal surface in the interior of \tilde{A}_ε . On the other hand, by interior regularity as well, also $\text{spt} \|W\|$ is represented by an embedded minimal surface M in the interior of A . Of course

$$M \cap \tilde{A}_\varepsilon = \tilde{M} \cap \tilde{A}_\varepsilon.$$

Therefore, by unique continuation, M and \tilde{M} also coincide in the interior of A . It follows

$$\text{spt} \|W\| \cap A \setminus A_\varepsilon = \emptyset$$

and in particular $x_0 \notin \text{spt} \|W\|$ which is a contradiction and excludes the possibility

$$C = \text{Tan}(A, x_0).$$

Since $\text{Var Tan}(W, x_0) \neq \emptyset$, this completes the proof.

THEOREM 2. — *Let U be an open 3-cell in \mathbb{R}^3 , S an embedded surface in \tilde{A} which intersects ∂U and ∂A transversally. Suppose $S \cap \partial A$ is connected. (ψ^j) a sequence in $I(U, A)$ with*

$$(40) \quad \lim_{j \rightarrow \infty} \text{area}(S^j) = \inf \{ \text{area}(\psi_1(S)) : \psi \in I(U, A) \} \quad (S^j := \psi_1^j(S)).$$

Suppose

$$(41) \quad W = \lim_{j \rightarrow \infty} \underline{v}(S^j)$$

exists in $V_2(\mathbb{R}^3)$.

Then

$$(42) \quad W \llcorner U \cap \bar{A} \times G(2, 3) \in IV_2(\mathbb{R}^3)$$

$$(43) \quad \text{spt} \|W\| \cap U \cap \bar{A} = M$$

where M is a stable embedded min. surface in $U \cap \bar{A}$ meeting ∂A orthogonally,

$$(44) \quad \partial M \cap U \cap A = \emptyset$$

(M is not necessarily connected).

Proof. — Since $S \cap U$ neither is necessarily connected nor a disk we first have to perform some reductions as in [MSY], § 3.

Suppose $\gamma > 0$ is given.

Assume that there is some $\tilde{S} = \psi_1(S)$, $\psi \in I(U, A)$ with

$$\text{area}(\tilde{S}\Delta S) < \gamma$$

and some curve λ on \tilde{S} which (possibly together with a curve in ∂A) bounds a disk Δ in $U \cap A$ with

$$A \cap \Delta \cap \tilde{S} = \lambda$$

and

$$\text{area} \Delta < \gamma,$$

while none of the two parts into which λ divides its component of $\tilde{S} \cap U$ is a disk.

We then cut \tilde{S} along λ , insert Δ into each part, smooth out the corners and move the two inserted disks a bit apart so that we get an embedded surface S_1 with

$$\begin{aligned} S_1 \cap \mathbb{R}^3 \setminus U &= S \cap \mathbb{R}^3 \setminus U \\ (45) \quad \text{area}(S_1\Delta S) &< 3\gamma \end{aligned}$$

while $S_1 \cap U$ has one more connected component than $S \cap U$.

We then perform a similar reduction with S_1 and so on until we obtain a surface S_k which allows no further such reduction. We note that the number k of possible such reductions is bounded independent of γ by the number of components of $S \cap U$ and their topological complexity. By (45)

$$(46) \quad \text{area}(S_k\Delta S) < 3k\gamma.$$

Hence, we can find as in [MSY, § 3] subsequences q_j and (\tilde{S}^j) with (after selection of a subsequence of (S^j))

$$(47) \quad \text{area}(S^{q_j}\Delta\tilde{S}^j) \leq \frac{3K}{j}$$

where K is independent of j and \tilde{S}^j allows no more such reduction for some fixed $\gamma > 0$.

(47) implies

$$(48) \quad \lim_{j \rightarrow \infty} v(\tilde{S}^j) = \lim_{j \rightarrow \infty} v(S^{q_j}).$$

Thus, we can assume w. l. o. g. that already our original sequence (S^j) allowed no such reductions for some fixed γ .

The proof is then completed by simple modifications of the arguments of [MSY, Th. 2 and § 5] involving Th. 1 (actually in the present context where the ambient space is \mathbb{R}^3 instead of a general three dimensional manifold, the proof can even be simplified compared to [MSY]).

**§ 3. CURVATURE ESTIMATES
FOR STABLE MINIMAL SURFACES AT FREE BOUNDARIES
AND AN ABSTRACT REGULARITY THEOREM**

We want to extend the interior curvature estimates for stable minimal hypersurfaces of [SRS] to such hypersurfaces which solve a free boundary problem.

Let S be a hypersurface in \mathbb{R}^{n+1} , $0 \in S$, and X be a hypersurface in $B^{n+1}(0, \rho_0)$ for some $\rho_0 > 0$, with $\partial X \cap B^{n+1}(0, \rho_0) = S \cap X \cap B^{n+1}(0, \rho_0)$ and X lies entirely on one side of $S \cap B(0, \rho_0)$. Suppose X is embedded and is stationary and stable w. r. t. the area integrand. This implies in particular that X meets S orthogonally.

Suppose S is of class C^4 , and $S \cap B(0, \rho_0)$ is diffeomorphic to the n -dimensional disk.

We now perform a C^4 -transformation f of coordinates with the following properties

$$\begin{aligned} i) \quad & f(B^{n+1}(0, \rho_0)) = B^{n+1}(0, \rho_0), \quad f(0) = 0 \\ ii) \quad & f(S \cap B^{n+1}(0, \rho_0)) = (\{0\} \times \mathbb{R}^n) \cap B^{n+1}(0, \rho_0), \end{aligned}$$

i. e. $S \cap B^{n+1}(0, \rho_0)$ is mapped into the hyperplane orthogonal to the first coordinate axis.

iii) The area integrand is transformed into a C^3 integrand F satisfying properties (1.2)-(1.6) of [SRS].

iv) Normal vectors to S are mapped onto normal vectors to $f(S)$.

Let $M = f(X)$. Assume $M \in C^2$.

Let e_i be a moving orthonormal frame on M .

Let ξ be a vector field on $B^{n+1}(0, \rho_0)$ with compact support.

Let ν be the normal vector field, $x \in M$, $\alpha, \beta \in T_x M$, and A the second fundamental form of M , i. e.

$$A(\alpha, \beta) = - \langle D_\beta \nu, \alpha \rangle,$$

where D is covariant differentiation on M .

The first variation of F at M w. r. t. ξ is given by

$$(1) \quad \delta F(M, \xi) = \int_M \operatorname{div}_M \xi d\mathcal{H}^n + R(\xi),$$

where

$$(2) \quad |R(\xi)| \leq c_1 \mu_1 \int_M (|\xi| + |x| |\nabla \xi|) d\mathcal{H}^n,$$

where $x \in M$, ∇ is the derivative in \mathbb{R}^{n+1} , and c_1, μ_1 are the constants of [SRS, (1.9)].

Similarly, the second variation is given by

$$(3) \quad \delta^2 F(M, \xi) = \int_M \left(\sum_{i=1}^n |(D_{e_i} \xi)^\perp|^2 + (\operatorname{div}_M \xi)^2 - \sum_{i=1}^n \langle e_i, D_{e_i} \xi \rangle \langle e_j, D_{e_j} \xi \rangle \right) d\mathcal{H}^n + \tilde{R}(\xi)$$

with

$$(4) \quad |\tilde{R}(\xi)| \leq c_2 \mu_1 \int_M (\mu_1 |\xi|^2 + |\xi| |\nabla \xi| + |x| |\nabla \xi|^2) d\mathcal{H}^n$$

as in [SRS, (1.10), (1.12)], where $^\perp$ denotes orthogonal projection onto the ν -direction ($[\nu(x)] \oplus T_x M = T_x \mathbb{R}^{n+1}$).

We now use a normal vector field $\zeta = \zeta \nu$ in (3) to obtain

$$(5) \quad \delta^2 F(M, \zeta \nu) = \int_M (|\nabla \zeta|^2 - |A|^2 \zeta^2 + H^2 \zeta^2) d\mathcal{H}^n + \tilde{R}(\zeta \nu)$$

where H is the mean curvature of M , cf. [SRS, (1.14)].

We now assume that M is stationary w. r. t. all variations ξ with $\xi(x) \in \{0\} \times \mathbb{R}^n$ for $x \in \{0\} \times \mathbb{R}^n$, i. e. variations which are tangent to the supporting hyperplane, i. e.

$$(6) \quad \delta F(M, \xi) = 0 \quad \text{for such vector fields.}$$

This implies

$$(7) \quad \nu(x) \in \{0\} \times \mathbb{R}^n \quad \text{for } x \in \{0\} \times \mathbb{R}^n \cap M.$$

(Note $\{0\} \times \mathbb{R}^n = f(S)$).

Furthermore, we assume that M is also stable w. r. t. such variations, i. e. (using (7))

$$(8) \quad \delta^2 F(M, \zeta \nu) \geq 0$$

for all compactly supported ζ .

Note that this is equivalent with the original assumption that $X = f^{-1}(M)$ was stationary and stable w. r. t. variations which are tangential to S . As in [SRS, (1.17)] we deduce

$$(9) \quad \int_M |A|^2 \zeta^2 d\mathcal{H}^n \leq \int_M |\nabla \zeta|^2 d\mathcal{H}^n + c_3 \mu_1 \int_M \{ \mu_1 \zeta^2 + \zeta |\nabla \zeta| + \zeta^2 |A| + |x| |\nabla \zeta|^2 + \zeta |x|^2 \zeta^2 |A|^2 + \mu_1 |x|^2 \zeta^2 |A|^3 \} d\mathcal{H}^n$$

where c_3 depends only on n , μ_1 is as in [SRS, (1.4)] and hence depends on the C^4 -norm of S , and ζ is any Lipschitz function on M vanishing near $M \cap \partial B^{n+1}(0, \rho_0)$.

The crucial step now is to use (9) in order to extend Lemma 1 of [SRS] to the present situation. The constants c_3, c_4, c_5, \dots in the sequel will depend only on $n, \mu, \mu_1 \rho_0$ (μ, μ_1 as in [SRS, (1.3)-(1.6)]).

LEMMA 1. — *Let M as before be a C^2 -surface in $B^{n+1}(0, \rho_0)$ with $\partial M \cap B^{n+1}(0, \rho_0) = f(S) \cap M \cap B^{n+1}(0, \rho_0)$ which is stationary and stable w. r. t. F .*

There exists $\varepsilon_0 > 0$, depending only on $n, \mu, \mu_1 \rho_0$, with the property that if $\mu_1 \rho \leq \varepsilon_0, v_0 \in S^n \cap T_0 f(S), \phi$ is a bounded locally Lipschitz function vanishing in a neighbourhood of $\partial M \cap C(0, \rho)$, where $C(0, \rho) = B^n(0, \rho) \times \mathbb{R}$, then

$$(10) \quad \int_M |A|^2 \phi^2 d\mathcal{H}^n \leq c_3 \int_M (1 - v - v_0)^2 |\nabla \phi|^2 d\mathcal{H}^n + c_3 \mu_1^2 \int_M \phi^2 d\mathcal{H}^n.$$

Remark. — We have tacitly assumed that M is complete. As in [SRS] one can also handle singularities, i. e. points where \bar{M} is not locally an embedded hypersurface as long as the $(n - 2)$ dimensional Hausdorff measure of the singular set vanishes.

Proof. — We use $\zeta = \phi (1 - v - v_0)^{\frac{1}{2}}$ as a test function in (9). It is standard to estimate

$$|\nabla(1 - (v \cdot v_0)^2)^{\frac{1}{2}}| \leq |A|,$$

and hence ζ is locally Lipschitz.

W. l. o. g. $2\rho \leq \rho_0$.

Then (9) gives (cf. [SRS, (2.1)])

$$(11) \quad \int_M |A|^2 (1 - v \cdot v_0)^2 \phi^2 d\mathcal{H}^n \leq \int_M \{ c_4 (1 - (v \cdot v_0)^2) |\nabla \phi|^2 + 2\phi (1 - (v \cdot v_0)^2)^{\frac{1}{2}} \nabla \phi \cdot \nabla (1 - (v \cdot v_0)^2)^{\frac{1}{2}} + \phi^2 |\nabla (1 - (v \cdot v_0)^2)^{\frac{1}{2}}|^2 \} d\mathcal{H}^n + c_4 \int_M (\mu_1 \rho |A|^2 + \mu_1 |A| + \mu_1^2) \phi^2 d\mathcal{H}^n.$$

We now choose an orthonormal frame e_1, \dots, e_n on M with the property that on $S \cap M, e_1, \dots, e_{n-1}$ are tangential to S and e_n is normal. We look at the second term on the right hand side of (11) which equals

$$(12) \quad \frac{1}{2} \int_M \nabla \phi^2 \cdot \nabla (1 - v \cdot v_0)^2 d\mathcal{H}^n = \frac{1}{2} \int_M \phi^2 \Delta (v \cdot v_0)^2 d\mathcal{H}^n - \int_{S \cap M} \phi^2 (v \cdot v_0) \langle \text{grad}(v \cdot v_0), e_n \rangle d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}$$

integrating by parts, since ϕ vanishes near $M \cap \partial C(0, \rho)$.

But

$$\langle \text{grad}(v \cdot v_0), e_n \rangle = \langle v_{e_i}, e_j \rangle \langle e_j, v_0 \rangle \langle e_i, e_n \rangle$$

since $\langle v_{e_i}, v \rangle = 0$, employing the standard summation convention. Now

$$\begin{aligned} \langle e_i, e_n \rangle &= 0 && \text{if } i \neq n, \\ \langle e_n, v_0 \rangle &= 0 && \text{by assumption} \\ \langle v_{e_n}, e_j \rangle &= 0 \\ &= \langle v_{e_j}, e_n \rangle = 0 && \text{for } j \neq n, \end{aligned}$$

since v, e_1, \dots, e_{n-1} are always tangent to the hyperplane $f(S) = \{0\} \times \mathbb{R}^n$, whereas e_n is normal to it.

Hence

$$\langle \text{grad}(v \cdot v_0), e_n \rangle = 0,$$

and there is no boundary contribution in (12).

Hence we can calculate as in [SRS, (2.8)]

$$\begin{aligned} (13) \quad & \frac{1}{n} \int_{\mathbf{M}} |A|^2 \phi^2 d\mathcal{H}^n \\ & \leq c_4 \int_{\mathbf{M}} (1 - (v \cdot v_0)^2) |\nabla \phi|^2 d\mathcal{H}^n + \int_{\mathbf{M}} \phi^2 H_{e_i}(e_i \cdot v_0)(v \cdot v_0) d\mathcal{H}^n \\ & \quad + c_4 \int_{\mathbf{M}} (\mu_1 \rho |A|^2 + \mu_1 |A| + \mu_1^2) \phi^2 d\mathcal{H}^n + \frac{2}{n} \int_{\mathbf{M}} \phi^2 |A| \cdot |H| d\mathcal{H}^n \end{aligned}$$

We examine the second term on the right hand side of (13):

$$\begin{aligned} \text{div}_{\mathbf{M}}(H\phi^2(e_i \cdot v_0)(v \cdot v_0)e_i) &= H_{e_i}\phi^2(e_i \cdot v_0)(v \cdot v_0) + 2H\phi \cdot \phi_{e_i}(e_i \cdot v_0)(v \cdot v_0) \\ & \quad - H\phi^2 \cdot H(v \cdot v_0)^2 + H\phi^2(e_i \cdot v_0)h_{ij}(e_j \cdot v_0). \end{aligned}$$

If we integrate over \mathbf{M} we obtain

$$\int_{\mathbf{M}} \text{div}_{\mathbf{M}}(H\phi^2(e_i \cdot v_0)(v \cdot v_0)e_i) = \int_{\mathbf{M} \cap S} H\phi^2(e_i \cdot v_0)(v \cdot v_0) \langle e_i, e_n \rangle d\mathcal{H}^{n-1} = 0,$$

since $(e_n \cdot v_0) = 0$, since v_0 is tangential to $f(S)$. Hence the boundary contribution vanishes again, and we conclude as in [SRS, p. 751]

$$\begin{aligned} \int |A|^2 \phi^2 d\mathcal{H}^n &\leq c_5 \int_{\mathbf{M}} (1 - (v \cdot v_0)^2) |\nabla \phi|^2 \\ & \quad + c_6 \int_{\mathbf{M}} \{ \mu_1 \rho |A|^2 + \mu_1 |A| + \mu_1^2 \} \phi^2 d\mathcal{H}^n, \end{aligned}$$

and if $\mu_1 \rho$ is small, we can absorb the terms with $|A|$ and $|A|^2$ into the left hand side. q. e. d.

It is now fairly straightforward to extend Theorems 1-3 of [SRS] to the present context to obtain.

LEMMA 2. — Suppose S is a surface of class C^4 in \mathbb{R}^3 , $0 \in S$, S intersecting $B^3(0, \rho_0)$ in a disk.

Suppose M is a complete surface of class C^2 with boundary $\partial M \cap B^3(0, \rho_0) = S \cap M \cap B^3(0, \rho_0)$ which is stationary and stable with respect to the area integral and variations tangent to S .

Suppose

$$\mathcal{H}^2(M \cap B^3(0, \rho_0)) \leq \mu \rho_0^2.$$

Then there exists $\delta_0 > 0$, depending only on $\mu, \mu_1 \rho_0$ (if the transformation f introduced above leads to an integrand satisfying (1.2)-(1.6) of [SRS] with constants μ, μ_1) with the property that if $x \in M \cap B^3(0, \frac{1}{4} \rho_0)$, $0 < \rho < \frac{1}{4} \rho_0$, M' is the connected component of

$$M \cap C(x, \rho) (= \{y = (y_1, y_2, y_3) \in \mathbb{R}^3 : |x_1 - y_1|^2 + |x_2 - y_2|^2 \leq \rho^2\}),$$

and

$$\begin{aligned} \sup_{y \in M'} |y_3 - x_3| &\leq \delta_0 \rho \\ \mu_1 \rho &\leq \delta_0 \end{aligned}$$

then $M' \cap C(x, \frac{1}{2} \rho)$ consists of a disjoint union of graphs of functions $u_1 < u_2 < \dots < u_k$ defined on $\{(y_1, y_2) : |y_1 - x_1|^2 = |y_2 - x_2|^2 \leq (\frac{1}{2} \rho)^2\}$ satisfying

$$\sup_{\substack{(y_1, y_2) : |y_1 - x_1|^2 \\ + |y_2 - x_2|^2 \leq (\frac{1}{2} \rho)^2}} (|Du_i| + \rho |D^2u_i|) \leq c_7 \delta_0$$

($i = 1, \dots, k$), where c_7 depends only on $\mu, \mu_1 \rho_0$.

Using the techniques of [SRS] it is not too difficult to show

LEMMA 3. — Suppose (S_n) is a sequence of surfaces in \mathbb{R}^3 , for which $S_n \cap B^3(0, \rho_0)$ is a disk with uniformly (i.e. independently of n) bounded C^4 -norm (in the sense that the corresponding transformations f_n , mapping S_n onto a disk and satisfying i)-iv) above, have uniformly bounded C^4 -norms). Suppose (M_n) is a sequence of complete orientable surfaces with boundary in $B^3(0, \rho_0)$, with

$$\begin{aligned} 0 &\in M_n \cap S_n \\ \partial M_n \cap B^3(0, \rho_0) &= S_n \cap M_n \cap B^3(0, \rho_0) \end{aligned}$$

which are stationary and stable w.r.t. the area integrand and variations tangent to S_n .

Suppose moreover

$$\limsup_{n \rightarrow \infty} \mathcal{H}^2(M_n \cap B^3(0, \rho_0)) < \infty.$$

Then after selection of a subsequence, we can find a varifold

$$V = \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \left| M_n \cap B^3\left(0, \frac{1}{2}\rho_0\right) \right|$$

with

$$\text{spt} \|V\| \cap B^3\left(0, \frac{1}{2}\rho_0\right) = M \cap B^3\left(0, \frac{1}{2}\rho_0\right),$$

where M is a complete orientable surface with boundary in $B^3\left(0, \frac{1}{2}\rho_0\right)$,

$$\mathcal{H}^2\left(M \cap B^3\left(0, \frac{1}{2}\rho_0\right)\right) < \infty$$

$$\partial M \cap B^3\left(0, \frac{1}{2}\rho_0\right) = S \cap M \cap B^3\left(0, \frac{1}{2}\rho_0\right),$$

where S is a surface of class C^4 .

LEMMA 4. — Suppose S and M are as in Lemma 2, in particular

$$\mathcal{H}^2(M \cap B^3(0, \rho_0)) \leq \mu \rho_0^2.$$

Then there is some constant c_8 , depending only on μ , $\mu_1 \rho_0$ with

$$\sup_{M \cap B^3(0, \rho_0/2)} |A| \leq c_8 \rho_0^{-1}$$

where A is the second fundamental form of M .

We indicate the modifications of the arguments of [SRS] required to prove the preceding lemmata.

We look at the point $x = 0$ and try to represent a surface M satisfying the assumptions of Theorem 1 [SRS] (in the modified form for our free boundary problem) as a graph over the plane which is orthogonal to the normal vector $\nu(0)$ of M ($\nu(0) = e_{n+1}$ in the notations of [SRS]). Note that $\nu(0)$ is tangent to $f(S)$.

In the definition of the excess E_σ on p. 757, we can allow only vectors v_i which are tangent to the plane $f(S)$, since we had to make that restriction in Lemma 1.

Lemma 1 then has to be applied with $v_0 = \nu(0)$ (p. 753 and p. 763) and with $v_0 = v_i$, where v_i realizes the infimum in the definition of E_σ (cf. p. 760, p. 763).

For the harmonic comparison function v_i on p. 766 we then have to require that the normal derivative vanishes at the free boundary.

(In order to fix the notation, assume

$$f(S) = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^3 : x_1 = 0\}, \quad \nu(0) = (0, 0, 1), \quad M \subset \{x_1 \geq 0\}.$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Then} \quad v_i &= v_i(x_1, x_2) && (x_1 \geq 0) \\ \Delta v_i &= 0 && \text{for } x_1 \geq 0, \quad x_1^2 + x_2^2 < (\sigma/2)^2 \\ v_i &= \bar{u}_i && \text{if } x_1^2 + x_2^2 = (\sigma/2)^2 \\ \frac{\partial v_i}{\partial x_1} &= 0 && \text{for } x_1 = 0 \end{aligned}$$

v_i then can be reflected as a harmonic function across $\{x_1 = 0\}$, and the estimates (4.8) pertain.

Since the graphs u_i also meet $f(S)$ orthogonally,

$$\frac{\partial u_i}{\partial x_1} = 0 \quad \text{for } x_1 = 0,$$

and hence as on p. 767 for ζ a compactly on $\Omega^{(\sigma)}$ supported Lipschitz function

$$\begin{aligned} &\int_{\mathbf{B}_{\sigma/2} \cap \{x_1 > 0\}} Du_i \cdot D\zeta dx \\ &= \int_{\mathbf{B}_{\sigma/2} \cap \{x_1 > 0\}} \left(1 - \frac{1}{(1 + |Du_i|^2)^{\frac{1}{2}}}\right) Du_i \cdot D\zeta dx - \int_{\mathbf{B}_{\sigma/2} \cap \{x_1 > 0\}} \zeta(x) H(x, u_i(x)) dx \end{aligned}$$

($x = (x_1, x_2)$ here).

Finally, we note that the vector

$$v_0 = (-Dv_i(0), 1) \cdot (1 + |Dv_i(0)|^2)^{-\frac{1}{2}}$$

on p. 770 again is tangential to $f(S)$ and hence admissible.

Moreover, when one performs blowing ups, then in the limit S becomes a plane, i. e. F becomes the area functional, and we can reflect M , since stationary w. r. t. F , across $S = f(S)$ to apply interior arguments (cf. 4.11 in [GJ]).

Detailed arguments in a similar situation were carried out in [GJ].

We note that also the arguments of chapter 6 of [P] can be carried over to free boundaries without essential difficulties. The arguments of chapter 5 of [P], which are taken from [SSY], however, are not readily generalizable for several reasons. Therefore, we had to take recourse to [SRS] for the curvature estimates.

Let A be a bounded open strictly convex subset of \mathbb{R}^3 with $\partial A \in C^4$.

Let $x \in \bar{A}$, $\sigma, \sigma_1, \sigma_2 > 0$

$$U(x, \sigma) := \{\tilde{x} \in \bar{A} : |\tilde{x} - x| < \sigma\}$$

$$A(x, \sigma_1, \sigma_2) := \{\tilde{x} \in \bar{A} : \sigma_1 < |\tilde{x} - x| < \sigma_2\}.$$

We fix $x_0 \in \bar{A}$ and $\sigma > 0$ and put

$$U = U(x_0, \sigma) \setminus \{x_0\}.$$

Let $\mathcal{A} := \mathcal{A}(x_0, \sigma)$ be a nonempty set of varifolds V in $V_2(\mathbb{R}^3)$ with support contained in \bar{A} which are stationary for the area integral w. r. t. variations tangent to ∂A and which enjoy the following property

for all $p \in \bar{A}$, $0 < \rho_1 < \rho_2 < \sigma$ for which $A(p, \rho_1, \rho_2) \subset \dot{U}$

there is some $V^* \in \mathcal{A}$ with

i) $V^* \llcorner G_2(\mathbb{R}^3 \sim \bar{A}(p, \rho_1, \rho_2)) = V \llcorner G_2(\mathbb{R}^3 \sim \bar{A}(p, \rho_1, \rho_2))$

ii) $V^* \llcorner G_2(A(p, \rho_1, \rho_2)) \in IV_2(\mathbb{R}^3)$ (i. e. an integral varifold)

and

$$\text{spt} \parallel V^* \parallel \cap A(p, \rho_1, \rho_2) = M$$

where M is a not necessarily connected embedded minimal surface with boundary

$$\partial M \cap A(p, \rho_1, \rho_2) = \partial A \cap M \cap A(p, \rho_1, \rho_2)$$

which is stable w. r. t. variations tangent to ∂A .

It is now easy, using the arguments of chapter 7 of [P] (cf. also [SRS], chapter 7 and [SS]) in conjunction with Lemmata 2-4 to prove the following abstract regularity theorem (cf. [SS]).

LEMMA 5. — *Let $x_0 \in \bar{A}$ and $\sigma > 0$ so small that $\partial B(x_0, \sigma) \cap \partial A$ is empty or a circle.*

Let $V \in \mathcal{A}(x_0, \sigma)$.

Then V is regular in $U(x_0, \sigma)$ in the sense that

$$V \llcorner G_2(U(x_0, \sigma)) \in IV_2(\mathbb{R}^3)$$

$$\text{spt} \parallel V \parallel \cap U(x_0, \sigma) = M$$

where M is a (not necessarily connected) minimal surface with boundary

$$\partial M \cap U(x_0, \sigma) = M \cap \partial A \cap U(x_0, \sigma)$$

which is stable w. r. t. variations tangent to ∂A . In particular, M meets ∂A orthogonally.

Finally, if V^ is constructed from V as in the definition of \mathcal{A} , then $V^* = V$.*

The idea of the proof is first to show that by comparison with a suitable sequence of replacements, every tangent cone of V is a plane with integer multiplicity. Then one selects spheres which are intersected transversally by $\text{spt} \parallel V \parallel$ (using Sard's Lemma) to make suitable replacements which by definition of \mathcal{A} again lead to stationary surfaces so that one can apply a unique continuation result for elliptic equations, taking the decomposition result of Lemma 2 into account. This gives regularity on annuli $A(p, \rho_1, \rho_2)$ for any $0 < \rho_1 < \rho_2 < \sigma$, and regularity at p then is obtained as in [P, 7.12].

§ 4. REGULARITY OF ALMOST MINIMIZING VARIFOLDS AT FREE BOUNDARIES

Besides considerations of free boundaries, we also use arguments of [SS].

LEMMA 1. — $\Sigma \in \mathcal{M}$, $\alpha > 0$, U open in \mathbb{R}^3 , (ϕ^j) sequence in $I(\Sigma, U, A, \alpha)$, $\Sigma^j := \phi_1^j(\Sigma)$

$$(1) \quad \lim_{j \rightarrow \infty} \text{area}(\Sigma^j) = \inf \{ \text{area} \psi_1(\Sigma), \psi \in I(\Sigma, U, A, \alpha) \}.$$

Then for each $x \in U$, there exists $\sigma \in (0, \text{dist}(x, \partial U))$ with

$$(2) \quad \lim_{j \rightarrow \infty} \text{area} \Sigma^j = \inf \{ \text{area} \psi_1(\Sigma) : \psi \in I(B(x, \sigma), A) \}.$$

Proof. — We assume w. l. o. g. $x \in \partial A$ since the interior case is similar and already treated in [SS].

After selection of a subsequence

$$(3) \quad V = \lim_{j \rightarrow \infty} v(\Sigma^j) \text{ exists and is stationary.}$$

Given $\sigma_0 \in (0, \text{dist}(x, \partial U))$, using (3) and the monotonicity formula at the free boundary of [GJ] for V ,

$$(4) \quad \text{area}(\Sigma^j \cap B(x, \sigma)) < c_1 \sigma_0^2$$

if j is greater than some $j(\sigma_0)$, where $c_1 = c_1(\kappa, \text{dist}(x, \partial U))$, and κ is the curvature of ∂A .

Using the coarea formula, and Sard's Lemma, for each j , we can choose $\sigma \in (\sigma_{0/2}, \sigma_0)$ for which Σ^j intersects $\partial B(x, \sigma)$ transversally and

$$(5) \quad \text{length}(\Sigma^j \cap \partial B(x, \sigma)) < 8c_1 \sigma.$$

Let now $\psi^j \in I(B(x, \sigma), A)$ be given with

$$(6) \quad \text{area}(\psi_1^j(\Sigma^j) \cap B(x, \sigma)) < c_1 \sigma_0^2 \leq 4c_1 \sigma^2.$$

We want to show that there is an isotopy

$$\psi^* \in I(B(x, \sigma), A)$$

with

$$(7) \quad \text{area}(\psi_i^*(\Sigma^j) \cap B(x, \sigma)) < c_2 \sigma^2$$

and

$$(8) \quad \psi_1^*(\Sigma^j) = \psi_1^j(\Sigma^j)$$

where c_2 depends only on c_1 and κ .

Employing a diffeomorphism which changes areas only by some fixed

factor (controlled from above and below by κ and an upper bound for σ_0), we can assume that $\partial A \in \mathbf{B}(x, \sigma_0)$ is plane.

Since $\psi^j \in \mathbf{I}(\mathbf{B}(x, \sigma), A)$ there is some $\sigma_1 \in (0, \sigma)$ with

$$\psi^j | \mathbb{R}^3 \setminus \mathbf{B}(x, \sigma_1) = id | \mathbb{R}^3 \setminus \mathbf{B}(x, \sigma_1).$$

By (5), we can find $\sigma_2, \sigma_3, \sigma_1 < \sigma_2 < \sigma_3 < \sigma$, with the property that Σ^j intersects $\partial \mathbf{B}(x, \tau)$ transversally for all $\tau \in [\sigma_2, \sigma_3]$ and

$$(9) \quad \text{length}(\Sigma^j \cap \partial \mathbf{B}(x, \tau)) < c_3 \sigma$$

with $c_3 = 16c_1$, if $\sigma_2 \leq \tau \leq \sigma_3$ (σ_2 and σ_3 of course depend on Σ^j).

We introduce polar coordinates $r \in [0, \sigma]$ and $\theta \in S^2$ on $\mathbf{B}(x, \sigma)$. Let

$$\begin{aligned} & |d\psi_i^j| \leq K \\ & 0 < \theta < \min\left(1, \frac{1}{K}\right) \\ \beta(t, r) := & \begin{cases} 1 + t(\theta - 1), & 0 \leq r \leq \sigma_2 \\ 1 + t \frac{(\sigma_3 - r)(\theta - 1)}{\sigma_3 - \sigma_2}, & \sigma_2 \leq r \leq \sigma_3 \\ 1, & \sigma_3 \leq r \leq \sigma \end{cases} \end{aligned}$$

$$\gamma_t(r, \theta) := (\beta(t, r)r, \theta)$$

$$(\gamma_t | \mathbb{R}^3 \setminus \mathbf{B}(x, \sigma_3) = id | \mathbb{R}^3 \setminus \mathbf{B}(x, \sigma_3))$$

$$\psi_t^* := \begin{cases} \gamma_{3t} & 0 \leq t \leq \frac{1}{3} \\ \gamma_1 \circ \psi_{3t-1}^j & \frac{1}{3} \leq t \leq \frac{2}{3} \\ \gamma_{3-3t} \circ \psi_1^j & \frac{2}{3} \leq t \leq 1. \end{cases}$$

Using (9) and $\theta < \frac{1}{K}$, it is easy to check that ψ^* (after approximation by differentiable isotopies) satisfies (7) and (8).

We now choose

$$\sigma_0 \leq \sqrt{\frac{\alpha}{c_2}}.$$

Hence from (7), since $\sigma \leq \sigma_0$

$$\text{area}(\psi_t^*(\Sigma^j) \cap \mathbf{B}(x, \sigma)) < c_2 \sigma_0^2 \leq \alpha.$$

So far, we have chosen a different $\sigma, \sigma_{0/2} < \sigma < \sigma_0$, for each j , but since

$$\mathbf{I}(\mathbf{B}(x, \tau_1), A) \subset \mathbf{I}(\mathbf{B}(x, \tau_2), A)$$

if $\tau_1 \leq \tau_2$, (2) holds with $\sigma = \sigma_{0/2}$.

LEMMA 2. — Let $U \subset \mathbb{R}^3$ open $U \cap A \neq \emptyset$, $\Sigma \in \mathcal{M}$, $\alpha > 0$, (ϕ^i) sequence in $I(\Sigma, U, A, \alpha)$ with, abbreviating $\Sigma^i = \phi_1^i(\Sigma)$,

$$(10) \quad \lim_{i \rightarrow \infty} |\Sigma^i| = \inf \{ |\psi_1(\Sigma)| : \psi \in I(\Sigma, U, A, \alpha) \}$$

and

$$(11) \quad W = \lim_{i \rightarrow \infty} \underline{v}(\Sigma^i)$$

exists in $V_2(\mathbb{R}^3)$.

Thus $W \llcorner G_2(U \cap \bar{A})$ is an integral varifold and

$$\text{spt} \parallel W \parallel \cap U \cap \bar{A} = M,$$

where M is a (not necessarily connected) minimal surface in $U \cap \bar{A}$ with

$$\partial M \cap U = M \cap \partial A \cap U$$

which is stable w. r. t. variations tangent to ∂A .

A similar statement holds, if $\tilde{\Sigma}^i$ is any union of components of $\Sigma^i \cap U$ and

$$(12) \quad \tilde{W} = \lim_{i \rightarrow \infty} \underline{v}(\tilde{\Sigma}^i)$$

exists in $V_2(U)$.

Proof. — By Lemma 1, for any $x \in U \cap \bar{A}$, there exists $\sigma \in (0, \text{dist}(x, \partial U))$ with

$$(13) \quad \lim_{i \rightarrow \infty} |\Sigma^i| = \inf \{ |\psi_1(\Sigma)| : \psi \in I(B(x, \sigma), A) \}.$$

By Sard's lemma, we can assume that each Σ^i meets $B(x, \sigma)$ transversally.

We also note that W is stationary in $U \cap \bar{A}$ and stable in $B(x, \sigma) \cap \bar{A}$ by (13), e. g.

We now use the idea of Pitts [P, 3.10, 3.11] to construct suitable regular stationary comparison surfaces, in order to apply Lemma 5 of § 3.

Let $x \in \text{spt} \parallel W \parallel \cap U \cap \bar{A}$.

Let (χ^k) be a sequence in $I(B(x, \sigma), A)$ with, putting $\Sigma^{ik} = \chi_1^k(\Sigma^i)$

$$(14) \quad \lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} |\Sigma^{ik}| = \inf \{ |\psi_1(\Sigma^i)| : \psi \in I(B(x, \sigma), A) \}$$

and for which

$$V^i := \lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} \underline{v}(\Sigma^{ik}) \text{ exists in } V_2(\mathbb{R}^3).$$

By Theorem 2 of § 2, $V^i \llcorner G_2(B(x, \sigma))$ is an integral varifold with

$$(15) \quad \text{spt} \parallel V^i \parallel \cap B(x, \sigma) \cap \bar{A} = M^i$$

where M^i is a stable embedded minimal surface (w. r. t. variations tangent to ∂A),

$$\partial M^i \cap B(x, \sigma) = M^i \cap \partial A \cap B(x, \sigma).$$

Selecting a subsequence, we can assume that

$$W^* = \lim_{i \rightarrow \infty} V^i \quad \text{exists in } V_2(\mathbb{R}^3),$$

and by Lemma 3, § 3, it is an integral varifold with

$$\text{spt} \parallel W^* \parallel \cap B(x, \sigma/2) \cap \bar{A} = M^*$$

where M^* is a stable embedded minimal surface with

$$\partial M \cap B(x, \sigma) = M \cap \partial A \cap B(x, \sigma).$$

The argument of Pitts ([P, 3.10, 3.11]) then implies that

$$V^* = \begin{cases} W^* & \text{in } B(x, \sigma) \cap \bar{A} \\ W & \text{in } (U \cap \bar{A}) \setminus B(x, \sigma) \end{cases}$$

is stationary.

Moreover, by the same argument, we can also perform replacements on annuli.

Hence, Lemma 2 follows from Lemma 5, § 3.

THEOREM. — $x_0 \in \bar{A}$, $\sigma > 0$ so small that $\partial A \cap B(x_0, \sigma)$ is empty or a circle.

V is almost minimizing (uniformly among disks in the sense of § 1) in $\dot{U} := U(x_0, \sigma) \setminus \{x_0\}$.

Then V is an integral varifold, and

$$(13) \quad \text{spt} \parallel V \parallel \cap B(x_0, \sigma) \cap \bar{A} = M,$$

where M is a (not necessarily connected) embedded minimal surface with

$$(14) \quad \partial M \cap B(x_0, \sigma) = M \cap \partial A \cap B(x_0, \sigma)$$

which is stable w. r. t. variations tangent to ∂A .

Proof. — By the argument of Pitts [P, 3.3], V is stationary (w. r. t. variations tangent to ∂A in our case).

Let T be any annulus in $B(x_0, \sigma) \setminus \{x_0\}$. Then V is almost minimizing (in the above sense) in $T \cap \bar{A}$.

Hence, if $\varepsilon_n \rightarrow 0$, there is a sequence $\alpha_n \rightarrow 0$ and a sequence of disks $\Sigma^n \in \mathcal{M}$ with

$$(15) \quad \underline{F}(V, \underline{v}(\Sigma_n)) < \varepsilon_n$$

$$(16) \quad \Sigma_n \in S(T, A, \varepsilon_n, \alpha_n).$$

We choose a sequence $(\psi^{nj})_{j \in \mathbb{N}}$ in $I(\Sigma_n, T, A, \varepsilon_n)$ with, putting $\Sigma_n^i = \psi_1^{ni}(\Sigma_n) \in \mathcal{M}$,

$$(17) \quad \lim_{i \rightarrow \infty} |\Sigma_n^i| = \inf \{ |\psi_1(\Sigma_n)| : \psi \in I(\Sigma_n, T, A, \varepsilon_n) \}.$$

After selection of subsequences, we get varifold limits

$$(18) \quad V_n^* = \lim_{i \rightarrow \infty} \underline{v}(\Sigma_n^i) \quad (n = 1, 2, \dots)$$

and

$$(19) \quad V^* = \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} V_n^*$$

Applying Lemma 2 with $U = T$, $W = V_n^* \llcorner G_2(T \cap \bar{A})$, $\Sigma^i = \Sigma_n^i$, we infer that V_n^* is an integral varifold with

$$\text{spt} \parallel V_n^* \parallel \cap T \cap \bar{A} = M_n^*$$

where M_n^* satisfies the conclusions of the Theorem.

By Lemma 3 of §3, the same conclusion holds for V^* .

As in the proof of Lemma 2, we then conclude the desired regularity of V .

§ 5. CONTROL OF THE TOPOLOGICAL TYPE OF THE ALMOST MINIMIZING VARIFOLD

In this paragraph, we rather closely follow the corresponding argument of [SS].

From the preceding paragraphs, we infer that there exists a varifold of the form

$$(1) \quad V = \sum_{j=1}^N n_j \underline{v}(M_j)$$

where each M_j is an embedded compact minimal surface with boundary $\partial M_j = M_j \cap \partial A$ which intersects ∂A orthogonally, $n_j \in \mathbb{N}$, for $j = 1, \dots, N$.

(Since A is strictly convex, no interior point of M can touch ∂A in particular.)

$M_i \cap M_k \neq \emptyset$ for $i \neq k$.

Each M_j is uniformly almost minimizing among disks with respect to some collection of open subsets of A .

We now want to show that each M_j is simply connected, i. e. a disk. W. l. o. g., we shall do this for $M := M_1$.

We again put for $x \in \bar{A}$, $\sigma, \sigma_1, \sigma_2 > 0$

$$U(x, \sigma) := \{ y \in \bar{A} : |x - y| < \sigma \}$$

$$A(x, \sigma_1, \sigma_2) := \{ y \in \bar{A} : \sigma_1 < |x - y| < \sigma_2 \}.$$

Let $\delta > 0$ be so small that for any $x \in \partial A$, $\partial U(x, \delta) \cap \partial A$ is a single circle.

$\underline{v}(\mathbf{M})$ then is uniformly almost minimizing among disks w. r. t. the collection of pairs of annuli

$$\left\{ \left(\mathbf{A} \left(x, \frac{1}{32} \rho, \frac{1}{8} \rho \right), \mathbf{A} \left(x, \frac{1}{4} \rho, \rho \right) \right) : 0 < \rho < \delta, x \in \bar{\mathbf{A}} \right\}.$$

We can also require that $\delta > 0$ is so small that for each $x \in \mathbf{M}$, $\mathbf{B}(x, \delta) \cap \mathbf{M}$ is topologically a disk.

For each $x \in \bar{\mathbf{A}}$, we can select

$$\mathbf{A} \left(x, \frac{1}{4} \rho(x), \rho(x) \right), \quad \frac{1}{8} \delta \leq \rho(x) \leq \delta$$

with the property that $\underline{v}(\mathbf{M})$ is uniformly almost minimizing among disks w. r. t. the collection of these annuli.

The balls $\mathbf{U}(x, \rho(x))$ cover $\bar{\mathbf{A}}$, and hence (cf. [F; 2.8.11, 2.8.13]) we can choose a finite number of points $x_j \in \bar{\mathbf{A}}$, $j = 1, \dots, \mathbf{J}$ with

$$\bar{\mathbf{A}} = \bigcup_{j=1}^{\mathbf{J}} \mathbf{U}(x_j, \rho(x_j))$$

and

$$\bar{\mathbf{U}} \left(x_i, \frac{1}{5} \rho(x_i) \right) \cap \bar{\mathbf{U}} \left(x_k, \frac{1}{5} \rho(x_k) \right) = \emptyset$$

if $i \neq k$.

If γ_0 is any simple closed curve in \mathbf{M} , we can isotope it in \mathbf{M} to a curve $\gamma \subset \mathbf{M} \cap \mathbf{A}$ with

$$(2) \quad \gamma \cap \bigcup_{j=1}^{\mathbf{J}} \bar{\mathbf{U}} \left(x_j, \frac{1}{5} \rho(x_j) \right) = \emptyset.$$

We need some notation:

$$\mathbf{T}_\theta := \{ x \in \bar{\mathbf{A}} : \text{dist}(x, \gamma) < \theta \} \quad \text{for } \theta > 0$$

$$\lambda : \mathbf{T}_\theta \rightarrow \gamma \quad \text{nearest point projection}$$

$$\mathbf{Y}_\sigma := \{ x \in \bar{\mathbf{A}} : \text{dist}(x, \mathbf{M}) < \sigma \} \quad \text{for } \sigma > 0$$

$$\pi : \mathbf{Y}_\sigma \rightarrow \mathbf{M} \quad \text{nearest point projection}.$$

We choose $\sigma > 0$ so small that

$$(3) \quad 0 < \sigma < \frac{1}{2} \min \left(\text{dist} \left(\gamma, \bigcup_{j=1}^{\mathbf{J}} \mathbf{U} \left(x_j, \frac{1}{5} \rho(x_j) \right) \right), \text{dist}(\gamma, \partial \mathbf{A}) \right)$$

and that

$$\lambda : \mathbf{T}_{2\sigma} \rightarrow \gamma$$

and

$$\pi : \mathbf{Y}_{2\sigma} \rightarrow \mathbf{M}$$

are continuous, that for any $y \in T_{2\sigma}$, $\lambda(y)$ and $\pi(y)$ are so close on M that they can be joined by a unique shortest geodesic arc on M , and that T_σ intersects no other connected component of $\text{spt} \|\mathbf{V}\|$ besides $M = M_1$.

In particular, $T_\sigma \cap \partial A = \emptyset$ and

$$(4) \quad T_\sigma \subset \bigcup_{j=1}^J A\left(x_j, \frac{1}{5} \rho(x_j), \rho(x_j)\right).$$

By the almost minimizing property of $\underline{v}(M)$ w. r. t. the collection of these annuli, for any sequence (ε_k) , $\varepsilon_k \rightarrow 0$, there is a sequence (α_k) and sequence $(\Sigma_k) \subset \mathcal{M}$ with

$$(5) \quad F(\underline{v}(M), \underline{v}(\Sigma_k)) < \varepsilon_k$$

and

$$(6) \quad \Sigma_k \in S\left(A\left(x_j, \frac{1}{5} \rho(x_j), \rho(x_j)\right), A, \varepsilon_k, \alpha_k\right)$$

$(k \in \mathbb{N}, j = 1, \dots, J)$.

From (4) and (6), for $x \in \gamma$

$$(7) \quad \Sigma_k \in S(U(x, \sigma), A, \varepsilon_k, \alpha_k).$$

We select $y_1, \dots, y_m \in \gamma$ and $0 < \tau < \sigma$ with

$$\gamma \subset \bigcup_{i=1}^m B(y_i, \tau),$$

where the boundaries $\partial B(y_i, \tau)$ all intersect transversally, and for each $y \in \gamma$

$$(8) \quad B(y, 4\tau) \subset A\left(x_j, \frac{1}{5} \rho(x_j), \rho(x_j)\right),$$

for some $j \in \{1, \dots, J\}$.

$W := \bigcup_{i=1}^m B(y_i, \tau)$. The components W_1, \dots, W_q of $W \setminus \bigcup_{i=1}^m \partial B(y_i, \tau)$

are then topological balls. By making a further subdivision, if necessary, we can also assume that $M \cap W_j$ is connected for $j = 1, \dots, q$ (without increasing $M \cap \cup \partial W_j$).

We choose sequences $(\psi^{kl})_{l \in \mathbb{N}} \subset \bigcup_{j=1}^q I(\Sigma_k, W_j, A, \varepsilon_k)$ with, putting $\Sigma_k^l = \psi_1^{kl}(\Sigma_k)$

$$(9) \quad \lim_{l \rightarrow \infty} |\Sigma_k^l| = \inf \left\{ |\psi_1(\Sigma_k)| : \psi \subset \bigcup_{j=1}^q I(\Sigma_k, W_j, A, \varepsilon_k) \right\}.$$

W. l. o. g.

$$|\psi_1^{kl}(\Sigma_k \cap W_j)| \leq |\Sigma_k \cap W_j| \quad \text{for each } j, k, l,$$

and hence

$$(10) \quad |\Sigma_k^l| \leq |\Sigma_k| \quad \text{for each } k, l.$$

Consequently

$$(11) \quad \Sigma_k^l \cap \partial W_j = \Sigma_k \cap \partial W_j \quad \text{for all } j, k, l$$

and by (7), $\tau < \sigma$, (8) and (10)

$$(12) \quad \Sigma_k^l \in S(U(x, \sigma/2), A, \varepsilon_k, \alpha_k) \quad \text{for } x \in \gamma.$$

After selection of subsequences, we get varifold limits

$$V_k = \lim_{l \rightarrow \infty} \underline{v}(\Sigma_k^l)$$

$$V^* = \lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} V_k.$$

By (8), V^* is almost minimizing in $B(y, 2\tau)$ for $y \in \gamma$, and hence regular there, cf. § 4. Since on the other hand, V and V^* coincide outside W , they have to coincide everywhere, i. e.

$$(13) \quad V = V^*.$$

Furthermore, $\text{spt} \parallel V_k \parallel \cap W_j$ is an embedded minimal surface (cf. Lemma 2, § 4), and the same holds, if instead of $\Sigma_k^l \cap W_j$, we take any union $\Sigma_{k,j}^l$ of components of $\Sigma_k^l \cap W_j$, for which the varifold limit exists as $l \rightarrow \infty$.

Let $\Sigma_{k,j}^1, \dots, \Sigma_{k,j}^P$ be the components of $\Sigma_k^1 \cap W_j$.

We can assume

$$(14) \quad V_{k,j}^m = \lim_{l \rightarrow \infty} \underline{v}(\Sigma_{k,j}^{l,m}) \neq 0 \quad (m = 1, \dots, P) \quad \text{(just discard the other ones).}$$

We can assume that for each k , we can select $l(k)$ with

$$(15) \quad \underline{F}(V, \underline{v}(\Sigma_k^{l(k)})) \leq \underline{F}(V, V_k) + \underline{F}(V_k, \underline{v}(\Sigma_k^{l(k)})) < \frac{1}{k}$$

$$(16) \quad \underline{F}(V_{k,j}^m, \underline{v}(\Sigma_{k,j}^{l(k),m})) < \frac{1}{k}$$

$$(17) \quad \lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} \left| \left(\Sigma_k^{l(k)} \setminus \bigcup_{m=1}^P \Sigma_{k,j}^{l(k),m} \right) \cap W_j \right| = 0$$

Finally, since $\text{spt} \parallel V_{k,j}^m \parallel$ is an embedded minimal surface, and

$$(18) \quad \lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} V_{k,j}^m = n_m \underline{v}(M) \quad \text{for some integer } n_m,$$

we can also w. l. o. g. discard $\Sigma_{k,j}^{l(k),m}$ with $n_m = 0$ by pushing them into ∂W_j . Then, P is bounded independently of k , and thus, after selection of a subsequence,

$$(19) \quad P = P(j)$$

Put

$$(20) \quad \Lambda_k := \Sigma_k^{l(k)}.$$

Let B be any open topological ball in A for which $B \cap M \cap W_j$ is connected for $j = 1, \dots, q$ and $B \cap M \cap W_j \neq \emptyset$ for at least one $j \in \{1, \dots, q\}$.

Let $\tilde{\Lambda}_k$ be any connected component of $B \cap \Lambda_k$ having a varifold limit

$$(21) \quad \lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} \underline{v}(\tilde{\Lambda}_k) \llcorner G_2(B) \neq 0$$

(such a component exists by (14)).

By (17) and (21), we can find j_0, m_0 and a compact set $K \subset B \cap W_{j_0}$ with $\Sigma_{k,j_0}^{l(k),m_0} \subset \tilde{\Lambda}_k$ and

$$(22) \quad \liminf_{k \rightarrow \infty} |\Sigma_{k,j_0}^{l(k),m_0} \cap K| > 0.$$

After selection of a subsequence, the varifold limit

$$Z = \lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} \underline{v}(\tilde{\Lambda}_k)$$

exists.

From (17) since $B \cap M \cap W_j$ is connected

$$(23) \quad Z \llcorner G_2(W_j) = m_j \underline{v}(B \cap M \cap W_j)$$

($j = 1, \dots, q$), with $m_j \in \mathbb{N}$, and $m_{j_0} \geq 1$ by (22).

LEMMA 1. — *Let B be a topological ball in A for which $B \cap M \cap W_j$ is (empty or) connected and simply connected for $j = 1, \dots, q$ and $B \cap M \cap W_j \neq \emptyset$ for at least one $j \in \{1, \dots, q\}$. Let $\tilde{\Lambda}_k$ be a connected component of $B \cap \Lambda_k$.*

If $B \cap M \cap W_j \neq \emptyset$, we have $m_j \geq 1$ in (23).

Proof. — Otherwise, there exist $j_1 \neq j_2 \in \{1, \dots, q\}$ with $m_{j_1} = 0, m_{j_2} \geq 1$, and so that we can choose some nonempty arc $\beta \subset \partial W_{j_1} \cap \partial W_{j_2} \cap B \cap M$, a point x_0 in the interior of β and $\eta < \tau$ with

$$B(x_0, \eta) \subset B$$

$$M \cap B(x_0, \eta) \cap \partial W_j \subset \beta \quad (j = 1, \dots, q).$$

Put

$$B^+ := B(x_0, \eta) \cap W_{j_1}$$

$$B^- := B(x_0, \eta) \cap W_{j_2}.$$

By assumption

$$(25) \quad Z \llcorner B^+ = 0$$

$$Z \llcorner B^- = m_{j_2} \underline{v}(M \cap B^-), \quad m_{j_2} \geq 1,$$

and we want to derive a contradiction from (25).

We can also assume, by possibly decreasing $\eta > 0$, that

$$|M \cap B(x_0, \eta)| \leq \frac{11}{10} \pi \eta^2.$$

We then use (15) (note that $\Lambda_k = \Sigma_k^{l(k)}$, and $\tilde{\Lambda}_k$ was a connected component of $\Lambda_k \cap B$, $V \cap W_j = n_1 \underline{v}(M \cap W_j)$) and the coarea formula, in order to find (for $k \geq 10$, say) $x_1 \in M \cap B^+$ and $\eta_k \in \left[\frac{1}{8} \eta, \frac{1}{4} \eta \right]$ for which $B(x_1, \eta_k) \subset B(x_0, \eta)$, $\partial B(x_1, \eta_k)$ intersects Λ_k transversally (Sard's Lemma) and

$$(26) \quad \begin{aligned} \text{length}(\partial B(x_1, \eta_k) \cap \tilde{\Lambda}_k) &\leq \frac{3}{4} (2\pi \eta_k) \\ \text{length}(\partial B(x_1, \eta_k) \cap \Lambda_k \setminus \tilde{\Lambda}_k) &\leq \left(n_1 - \frac{1}{4} \right) (2\pi \eta_k). \end{aligned}$$

W. l. o. g.
$$\eta_k \rightarrow \eta_* \in \left[\frac{1}{8} \eta, \frac{1}{4} \eta \right].$$

By (12), $\Lambda_k \in S(B(x_1, \eta_k), A, \varepsilon_k, \alpha_k)$.

Thus, for each k , we can find a sequence $(\phi^{kl})_{l \in \mathbb{N}} \subset I(\Lambda_k, B(x_1, \eta_k), A, \alpha_k)$ with, putting $\Lambda_k^l := \phi_1^{kl}(\Lambda_k)$,

$$\lim_{l \rightarrow \infty} |\Lambda_k^l| = \inf \{ |\psi_1(\Lambda_k)| : \psi \in I(\Lambda_k, B(x_1, \eta_k), A, \alpha_k) \}.$$

By Lemma 2 of §4,

$$\lim_{l \rightarrow \infty} \underline{v}(\Lambda_k^l) \llcorner G_2(B(x_1, \eta_k)) = \underline{v}(E_k) \llcorner G_2(B(x_1, \eta_k))$$

where E_k is a stable embedded minimal surface in $B(x_1, \eta_k)$ which by the boundary regularity results of [AS] is regular up to its boundary

$$\partial E_k = \Lambda_k \cap \partial B(x_1, \eta_k).$$

Let E_k^1, E_k^2 be the (unions of) components of E_k with

$$\begin{aligned} \partial E_k^1 &= \Lambda_k \cap \partial B(x_1, \eta_k) \\ \partial E_k^2 &= (\Lambda_k \setminus \tilde{\Lambda}_k) \cap \partial B(x_1, \eta_k). \end{aligned}$$

By (26) and the isoperimetric inequality

$$(27) \quad \begin{aligned} |E_k^1| &\leq \frac{3}{4} \pi \eta_k^2 \\ |E_k^2| &\leq \left(n_1 - \frac{1}{4} \right) \pi \eta_k^2. \end{aligned}$$

As in § 4, we infer that

$$\begin{aligned} \lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} \underline{v}(E_k^1) &= m_1 \underline{v}(M \cap B(x_1, \eta_k)) \\ \lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} \underline{v}(E_k^2) &= m_2 \underline{v}(M \cap B(x_1, \eta_k)) \end{aligned}$$

where $m_1, m_2 \in \mathbb{N}$. By (27), since $x_1 \in M$,

$$\begin{aligned} m_1 &= 0 \\ m_2 &\leq n_1 - 1. \end{aligned}$$

This is a contradiction, however, since

$$\lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} \underline{v}(E_k^1 \cup E_k^2) = \lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} \underline{v}(\Sigma_k \llcorner B(x_1, \eta_k)) = n_1 \underline{v}(M \cap B(x_1, \eta_k))$$

using again the unique continuation argument of § 4 for the first equality.

q. e. d.

W. l. o. g.

$$\gamma \cap W_1 \neq \emptyset.$$

Let
$$x_1 \neq x_2, \quad x_1, x_2 \in W_1 \cap M \cap T_\sigma,$$

$$\lambda(x_1) = \lambda(x_2) = p \in \gamma \cap W_1.$$

($\lambda : T_\sigma \rightarrow \gamma$ was the nearest point projection).

Let $L := \max \{ P(j) : j = 1, \dots, q \}$.

We cover T_σ by a finite collection B_1, \dots, B_r of topological balls so that $M \cap B_s \cap W_j$ is connected and simply connected for each $s \in \{1, \dots, r\}$, $j \in \{1, \dots, q\}$.

Suppose $B_1 \cap M \neq \emptyset$ and let $\tilde{\Lambda}_k$ be any connected component of $\Lambda_k \cap T_\sigma$ with

$$\lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} \underline{v}(\tilde{\Lambda}_k) \llcorner G_2(B_1) \neq \emptyset$$

(such $\tilde{\Lambda}_k$ exists by (14)).

If $B_1 \cap W_j \cap M \neq \emptyset$, then

$$(28) \quad \lim \underline{v}(\tilde{\Lambda}_k) \llcorner G_2(B_1 \cap W_j) = m_{1j} \underline{v}(M \cap B_1 \cap W_j)$$

and $m_{1j} \geq 1$ by Lemma 1.

There exist $i_1 \neq 1$ and j_1 with $B_1 \cap B_{i_1} \cap W_{j_1} \neq \emptyset$. Defining m_{ij} via

$$\lim \underline{v}(\tilde{\Lambda}_k) \llcorner G_2(B_i \cap W_j) = m_{ij} \underline{v}(M \cap B_i \cap W_j),$$

we see

$$m_{i_1 j_1} = m_{1 j_1} \geq 1 \quad \text{by Lemma 1.}$$

Continuing this way, repeatedly using Lemma 1, we get

$$(29) \quad m_{ij} \geq 1$$

provided $B_i \cap W_j \cap M \neq \emptyset$. Moreover, if $U \subset W_1 \cap T_\sigma$ is open, $U \cap M \neq \emptyset$, then for large k

$$\tilde{\Lambda}_k \cap \bigcup_{m=1}^{P(1)} \Sigma_{k,1}^{l(k),m} \cap U \neq \emptyset.$$

(This follows from (15) and Lemma 1).

Let $y \in \gamma \cap W_1$. We can find a point $z_1 \in T_\sigma \cap \tilde{\Lambda}_k \cap \bigcup_{m=1}^{P(1)} \Sigma_{k,1}^{l(k),m}$ with

$$|z_1 - y| < \frac{\sigma}{2}.$$

Using (29), we can lift γ inside T_σ to $\tilde{\Lambda}_k$ with starting point z_1 , i. e. we find $z_2 \in \tilde{\Lambda}_k \cap T_\sigma \cap \bigcup_{m=1}^{P(1)} \Sigma_{k,1}^{l(k),m}$ and $\gamma_1 \subset \Lambda_k \cap T_\sigma$ with endpoints z_1, z_2 and $|z_2 - y| < \frac{\sigma}{2}$ and

$$\lambda(\gamma_1) = \gamma + \gamma'$$

where γ' is some oriented arc in γ with length at most σ .

Likewise, we find a lift γ_2 with starting point z_2 , and if we continue this process L times, we obtain $\bar{\gamma} \subset \tilde{\Lambda}_k \cap T_\sigma$ with

$$(30) \quad \lambda_*(\bar{\gamma}) = L\gamma + \gamma''$$

length $(\gamma'') \leq \sigma$, and points $z_1, \dots, z_{L+1} \in \bar{\gamma} \cap \tilde{\Lambda}_k \cap T_\sigma \cap \bigcup_{m=1}^{P(1)} \Sigma_{k,1}^{l(k),m}$ with $|z_i - y| < \frac{\sigma}{2}$ ($i = 1, \dots, L + 1$) (here, λ_* is the induced map on homotopy classes, and $L \cdot \gamma$ is of course multiplication in the fundamental group).

On the other hand, since $P(1) \leq L$ (by choice of L), there must be two different points z_{i_1}, z_{i_2} which are contained in the same $\Sigma_{k,1}^{l(k),m_0}$ for some $m_0 \in \{1, \dots, P(1)\}$, since the number of the points z_i is $L + 1$.

Let γ^* be the subarc of $\bar{\gamma}$ with endpoints z_{i_1} and z_{i_2} . By (30)

$$(31) \quad \lambda_*(\gamma^*) = m\gamma + \gamma'',$$

where length $(\gamma'') < \sigma$ again, and $m \geq 1$, i. e. up to a small error, λ gives a nontrivial covering γ by γ^* .

We then close γ^* off in $\Sigma_{k,1}^{l(k),m_0}$ to obtain a closed curve γ_0 in $\Lambda_k \cap T_\sigma$ (note that $\Sigma_{k,1}^{l(k),m_0} \subset W_1 \subset T_\sigma$ by construction) with

$$\lambda_*(\gamma_0) = m\gamma$$

with $m \geq 1$.

Since Λ_k is an embedded disk, γ_0 bounds an embedded disk D_0 on Λ_k . By an elementary cutting procedure (one can e. g. use the topological version of the argument of [AS, § 3]), we can find an embedded disk $D_1 \subset A$ with

$$\begin{aligned}\partial D_1 &= \gamma_0 \\ D_1 &\subset Y_{2\sigma} (= \{x \in \bar{A} : \text{dist}(x, M) < 2\sigma\}) \\ D_1 \cap Y_\sigma &\subset D_0 \cap Y_\sigma.\end{aligned}$$

Hence γ_0 can be homotoped to a point in D_1 . Since $D_1 \subset Y_{2\sigma}$, and $\pi : Y_{2\sigma} \rightarrow M$ was continuous by choice of σ , $\pi(\gamma_0)$ is homotopic to a point in M .

Moreover, the choice of σ implies that $\pi(\gamma_0)$ and $\lambda(\gamma_0)$ are homotopic in M .

Hence, by (30), $m\gamma$ is homotopic to a point for some $m \geq 1$.

As M is orientable, this implies that γ itself is homotopic to a point, and hence that M is a disk. (That M is orientable follows, e. g., from the following argument: Topologically, A is half of the 3-sphere S^3 , and since M meets ∂A transversally, we can reflect M across ∂A to obtain a closed embedded surface \tilde{M} without boundary in S^3 . Thus, M and hence also \tilde{M} is orientable).

This completes the proof of our main theorem and thus also this paper.

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Added in proof. Subsequently, stronger results were obtained by the second author (cf. J. Jost, Existence results for embedded minimal surfaces of controlled topological type I, II, III, *Ann. Sc. Norm. Sup. Pisa*, to appear).
