

Categories, Higher Categories, and Spaces

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Definition of category

Category \mathcal{C}

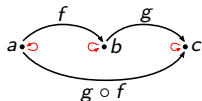
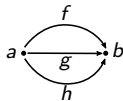
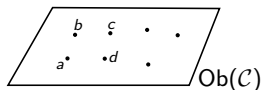
$$\ast \quad a, b, c, d, \dots \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$$

$$\ast \quad f, g, h \in \text{Hom}_{\mathcal{C}}(a, b)$$

$$\ast \quad \text{id}_a \in \text{Hom}_{\mathcal{C}}(a, a)$$

$$\ast \quad \text{Hom}(b, c) \times \text{Hom}(a, b) \xrightarrow{\circ} \text{Hom}(a, c)$$

Visualization



Conditions

$$f \circ \text{id}_a = f = \text{id}_b \circ f$$

$$(h \circ g) \circ f = h \circ (g \circ f)$$

Examples

- Top: Category of topological spaces and continuous maps
- Grp: Category of groups and group homomorphisms
- $\text{Vect}_{\mathbb{R}}$: Category of real vector spaces and linear transformations

Category \mathcal{C} is called a *groupoid* if all of its morphisms are **isomorphisms**, i.e. for any $f : a \rightarrow b$, there exists $f^{-1} : b \rightarrow a$ with

$$f \circ f^{-1} = \text{id}_b \quad f^{-1} \circ f = \text{id}_a$$

- Considering only homeomorphisms in Top \rightsquigarrow groupoid Top
- Considering only group isomorphisms in Grp \rightsquigarrow groupoid Grp

Note that when \mathcal{C} is a groupoid each $\text{Hom}(a, a)$ is a group.

- For any (discrete) group G there is a groupoid \mathcal{G} with one object \bullet and $\text{Hom}(\bullet, \bullet) \cong G$.

Why categories?

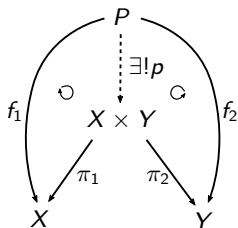
- Unifying common concepts in mathematics (limits, colimits,...)
- A different approach to foundations of mathematics (ETCS)
- Applications in other areas (computer science, physics, biology,...)
- Generalizations of concepts (categorification, sheaves,...)
- ...

Abstractly unifying modern abstract mathematics

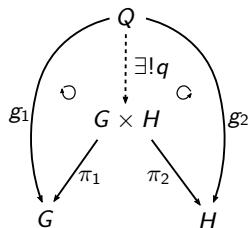
Category theory takes a bird's eye view of mathematics. From high in the sky, details become invisible, but we can spot patterns that were impossible to detect from ground level.

Tom Leinster

Consider a product $X \times Y$ of top. spaces and a product $G \times H$ of groups



$$p(a) = (f_1(a), f_2(a))$$



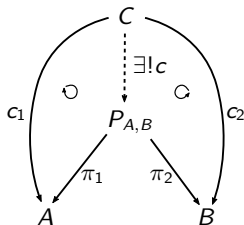
$$q(a) = (g_1(a), g_2(a))$$

Abstractly unifying modern abstract mathematics

Category theory takes a bird's eye view of mathematics. From high in the sky, details become invisible, but we can spot patterns that were impossible to detect from ground level.

Tom Leinster

A product of objects A and B in a category \mathcal{C} is a triple $[P_{A,B}, \pi_1, \pi_2]$ where $\pi_1 : P_{A,B} \rightarrow A$ and $\pi_2 : P_{A,B} \rightarrow B$ such that for any triple $[C, c_1, c_2]$ there exists a unique map $c : C \rightarrow P_{A,B}$ commuting the diagram



⊛ Product of objects may not exist in a category, but when it exists it is unique up to a unique isomorphism!

Functor category $\text{Func}(\mathcal{C}, \mathcal{D})$

How to relate/compare two categories? \leadsto Functors

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{F} &: \mathcal{C} \rightarrow \mathcal{D} \\ a &\mapsto \mathcal{F}(a) \\ (f : a \rightarrow b) &\mapsto (\mathcal{F}(f) : \mathcal{F}(a) \rightarrow \mathcal{F}(b))\end{aligned}$$

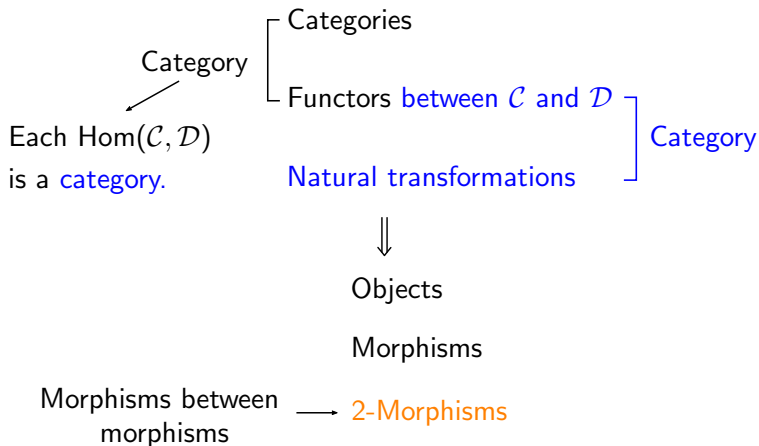
How to relate/compare functors? \leadsto Natural transformations

$\eta : \mathcal{F} \rightarrow \mathcal{G}$ consists of $\{\eta_a : \mathcal{F}(a) \rightarrow \mathcal{G}(a)\}_{a \in \mathcal{C}}$ such that for any $f : a \rightarrow b$

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \mathcal{F}(a) & \xrightarrow{\mathcal{F}(f)} & \mathcal{F}(b) \\ \eta_a \downarrow & \square & \downarrow \eta_b \\ \mathcal{G}(a) & \xrightarrow{\mathcal{G}(f)} & \mathcal{G}(b) \end{array}$$

commutes. Natural transformations can be composed. Hence, for any categories \mathcal{C} and \mathcal{D} we have a new category $\text{Func}(\mathcal{C}, \mathcal{D})$ of functors and natural transformations.

Categories inside a category??

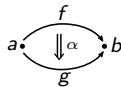
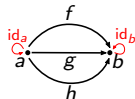
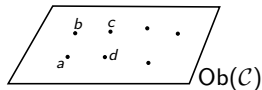


Definition of 2-category

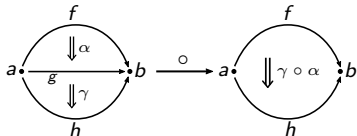
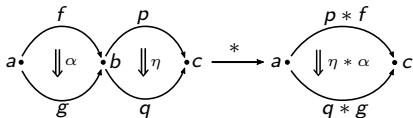
2-category \mathcal{C}

- * $a, b, c, d, \dots \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$
- * $\text{Hom}_{\mathcal{C}}(a, b)$ is a category.
- * $\alpha, \beta, \gamma \in \text{Hom}_{\mathcal{C}}(f, g)$

Visualization

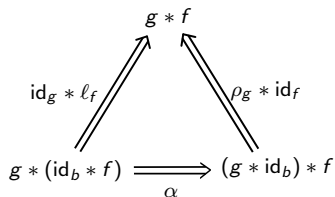
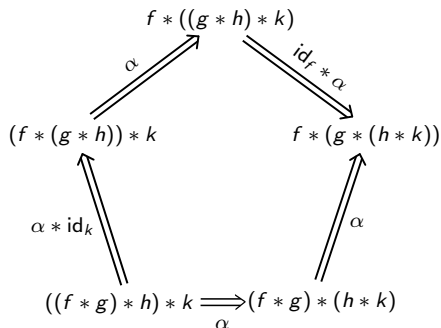


Compositions



Definition of bicategory (Bénabou)

For every composable 1-morphisms f, g, h there exist isomorphisms $\alpha_{f,g,h} : (f * g) * h \rightarrow f * (g * h)$ such that the pentagon diagram commutes.



For any 1-morphism $f : a \rightarrow b$ there exist isomorphisms $l_f : id_b * f \rightarrow f$ and $\rho_f : f * id_a \rightarrow f$ such that the triangle diagram commutes.

Examples of bicategories

Definition (Ehresmann)

A 2-category or a strict bicategory is a bicategory $(\mathcal{C}, \alpha, \ell, \rho)$ where the natural isomorphisms α, ℓ , and ρ are the identity isomorphisms.

Examples of bicategories

- Cat : categories, functors, and natural transformations
- $\text{Alg}_{\mathbb{k}}$: \mathbb{k} -algebras, bimodules, and bimodule maps
Composition of bimodules is given by

$${}_C N_B \circ_B M_A = {}_C N \otimes_B M_A$$

- Extended 2d-bordism bicategory Bord_2 (Schommer-Pries)

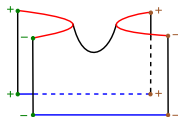
Objects

$\dagger \quad \cdot \quad \cdot \quad \dagger$

1-morphisms

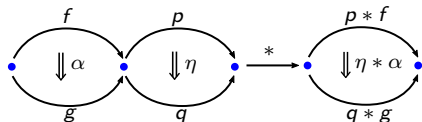


2-morphisms



What is a bicategory with one object?

A bicategory $(\mathcal{C}, \alpha, \ell, \rho)$ with a single object \bullet is simply a category $\mathcal{D} := \text{Hom}(\bullet, \bullet)$ equipped with a bifunctor $* : \mathcal{D} \times \mathcal{D} \rightarrow \mathcal{D}$.



If \mathcal{C} is strict ($\alpha, \ell, \rho = \text{id}$) then $*$ is a unital associative product on \mathcal{D} and the pair $(\mathcal{D}, *)$ is called a **strict monoidal category**. In the general case, the quintuple $(\mathcal{D}, *, \alpha, \ell, \rho)$ is called a *monoidal category*.

A bicategory with one object is a monoidal category.

Examples of monoidal categories

- (Cat, \times) of (small) categories and functors
- $(\text{Vect}_{\mathbb{R}}, \otimes_{\mathbb{R}})$ of real vector spaces and linear transformations
- $(\text{Rep}(G), \otimes)$ of finite dim. \mathbb{C} -reps. of group G and intertwiners
- (Cob_n, \amalg) of $(n - 1)$ -dim. closed oriented manifolds and cobordisms

A (topological) structure on a monoidal category

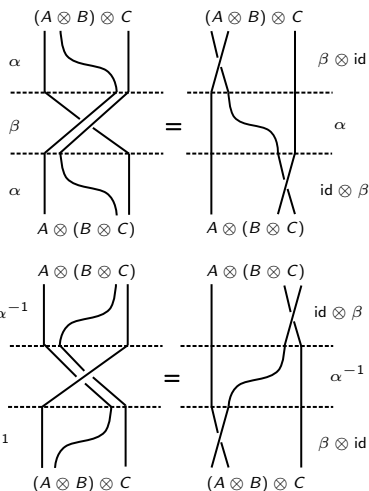
A *braided monoidal category* is a monoidal category $(\mathcal{C}, \otimes, \alpha, \ell, \rho, \mathbb{1})$ equipped with a braiding $\{\beta : A \otimes B \rightarrow B \otimes A\}_{A, B \in \mathcal{C}}$

$$\beta := \begin{array}{c} A \quad B \\ \diagdown \quad / \\ \diagup \quad \diagdown \\ B \quad A \end{array}$$

which satisfies the conditions

A *symmetric monoidal category* is a braided monoidal category such that $\beta^2 = \text{id} : A \otimes B \rightarrow A \otimes B$.

$$\begin{array}{c} \diagdown \quad / \\ \diagup \quad \diagdown \\ \diagdown \quad / \\ \diagup \quad \diagdown \end{array} = \parallel \parallel$$



Braided and symmetric monoidal categories

Braided and symmetric monoidal categories are useful in

- obtaining knot and link invariants,
- axiomatization of topological quantum field theories,
- formulation of topological quantum computation,
- classification of topological phases of matter,
- representations of groups or Hopf algebras,
- ...

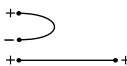
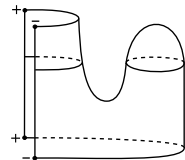
Are there similar structures on bicategories?

In the case of bicategories there is an additional monoidal bicategory between braided and symmetric called *syllleptic monoidal bicategory*.

- Monoidal bicategories
- Braided monoidal bicategories
- Syllleptic monoidal bicategories
- Symmetric monoidal bicategories

We skip definitions of these bicategories. Instead, we give two examples of symmetric monoidal bicategories .

Examples of monoidal bicategories and extended TFTs

	$(\text{Bord}_2, \text{II})$	$(\text{Alg}_{\mathbb{k}}^2, \otimes_{\mathbb{k}})$
Objects:	$\dagger \bar{\cdot}$	\mathbb{k} -algebras
1-morphisms:		Bimodules
2-morphisms:		Bimodule maps

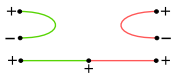
Examples of monoidal bicategories and extended TFTs

$(\text{Bord}_2, \text{II})$

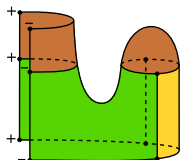
Objects:

$\dagger \quad \bar{\cdot}$

1-morphisms:



2-morphisms:



$(\text{Alg}_{\mathbb{k}}^2, \otimes_{\mathbb{k}})$

\mathbb{k} -algebras

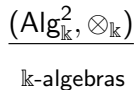
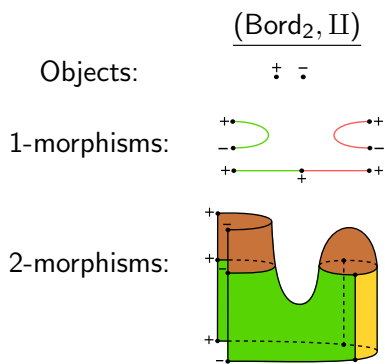
${}_A M \otimes_A N_A$

${}_A R \otimes_A S_A$

${}_A M \otimes_A N_A$

${}_A T_A$

Examples of monoidal bicategories and extended TFTs



$${}_A M \otimes_A N_A$$

$${}_A R \otimes_A S_A$$

$${}_A M \otimes_A N_A$$

$${}_A T_A$$

Definition (Schommer-Pries)

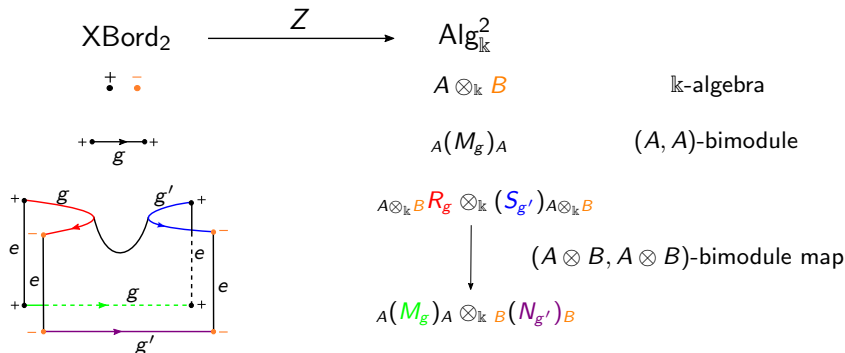
A two-dimensional extended TFT is a symmetric monoidal 2-functor

$$Z : (\text{Bord}_2, \text{II}) \rightarrow (\text{Alg}_{\mathbb{k}}^2, \otimes_{\mathbb{k}}).$$

Two-dimensional extended HFTs

Definition (S.)

A two-dimensional extended HFT with target $X \simeq K(G, 1)$ is a symmetric monoidal 2-functor $Z : (\mathbf{XBord}_2, \mathbb{I}) \rightarrow (\mathbf{Alg}_{\mathbb{k}}^2, \otimes_{\mathbb{k}})$.

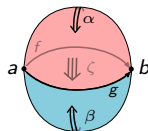
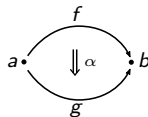
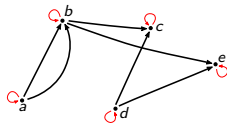


What's next after 2-categories?

3-category \mathcal{C}

- ⊛ Objects
- ⊛ 1-morphisms
- ⊛ 2-morphism $\alpha : f \rightarrow g$
- ⊛ 3-morphism $\zeta : \alpha \rightarrow \beta$

Visualization



Descriptive definition of tricategory

There are invertible modifications subject to conditions given by a list of commutative diagrams (see Gordon-Power-Street).

- ⊛ For any two objects $a, b \in \mathcal{C}$ $\text{Hom}_{\mathcal{C}}(a, b)$ is a bicategory.

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 & g * f & \\
 \text{id}_g * \ell_f \nearrow & & \searrow \rho_g * \text{id}_f \\
 g * (\text{id}_b * f) & \xrightarrow{\alpha} & (g * \text{id}_b) * f
 \end{array}$$

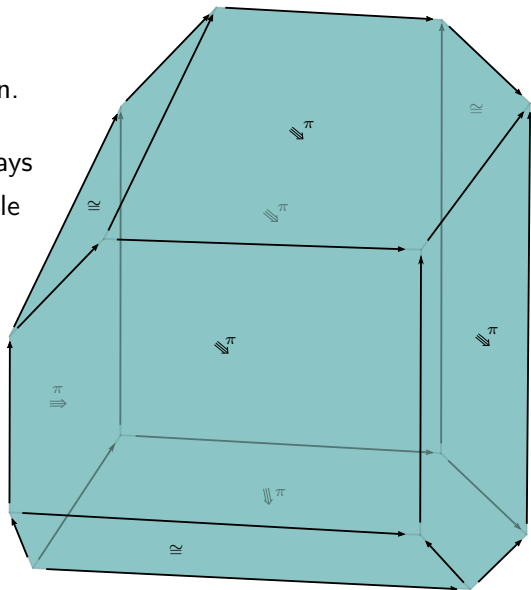
λ

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 & f * ((g * h) * k) & \\
 \alpha \nearrow & & \searrow \text{id}_f * \alpha \\
 (f * (g * h)) * k & & f * (g * (h * k)) \\
 \alpha * \text{id}_k \nearrow & \xrightarrow{\pi} & \searrow \alpha \\
 ((f * g) * h) * k & \xrightarrow{\alpha} & (f * g) * (h * k)
 \end{array}$$

- ⊛ A tricategory with one object is a monoidal bicategory.
- ⊛ A tricategory with only one object and one 1-morphism is a braided monoidal category.

Descriptive definition of tricategory: Associahedron K_5

- ⊛ One of the conditions is given by the associahedron.
- ⊛ Corners are all different ways of composing 5 composable 1-morphisms.
- ⊛ # of vertices (K_{n+1})
||
 n -th Catalan number
- ⊛ Edges are associator 2-morphisms.



Descriptive definition of n -category

An n -category \mathcal{C} consists of

- Objects,
- 1-morphisms between objects,
- 2-morphisms between 1-morphisms,
- \vdots $\quad \quad \quad \vdots$
- $(n - 1)$ -morphisms between $(n - 2)$ -morphisms,
- n -morphisms between $(n - 1)$ -morphisms.

Definition

A *strict n -category* is a diagram of sets with $s \circ s = s \circ t$ and $t \circ s = t \circ t$.

$$\mathcal{C}_n \begin{array}{c} \xrightarrow{s_n} \\ \xrightarrow{t_n} \end{array} \mathcal{C}_{n-1} \begin{array}{c} \xrightarrow{s_{n-1}} \\ \xrightarrow{t_{n-1}} \end{array} \cdots \begin{array}{c} \xrightarrow{s_2} \\ \xrightarrow{t_2} \end{array} \mathcal{C}_1 \begin{array}{c} \xrightarrow{s_1} \\ \xrightarrow{t_1} \end{array} \mathcal{C}_0 \quad + \text{assoc} + \text{unit conds.}$$

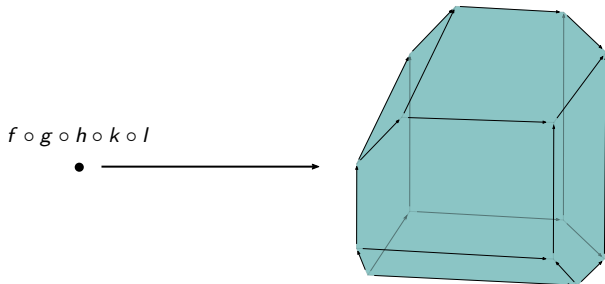
Definition

Let 0-category be a set. Then a *strict n -category* (all coherence isomorphisms = identities) is a category enriched over $(n - 1)$ -Cat.

Weak n -categories

In a **strict** n -category, we can take a pasting diagram of cells and compose them in any order we like, the result will be the same. To make a **weak** n -category, we are going to “stretch out” a strict n -category a bit, so that there is a bit of “distance” in between these composites done in different orders but not too much. And it shouldn't be empty space in between; they must be connected via mediating cell.

Eugenia Cheng and Aaron Lauda

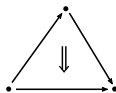


On different definitions of weak n -category

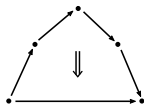
Authors	Shapes of cells
Batanin	globular
Baez-Dolan, Cheng, et al.	opetopic
Joyal	globular/simplicial
Leinster	globular
May	-
Penon	globular
Simpson	simplicial/globular
Street	simplicial
Tamsamani	simplicial/globular
Trimble	path parametrizations



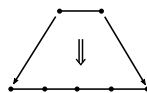
globular



simplicial



opetopic



path parametrizations

The Homotopy Hypothesis

Note that in $\pi_{\leq n}X$, composition is not associative, nor unital, nor the morphisms are invertible on the nose; **only up to homotopy**.

The Homotopy Hypothesis

There is an equivalence of $(n + 1)$ -categories $n\text{Types} \begin{array}{c} \xrightarrow{\pi_{\leq n}} \\ \xleftarrow{|-|_n} \end{array} n\text{Grpds}$

where $| - |_n$ is the (geometric) realization functor and $n\text{Types}$ has

- n -types as objects,
- continuous maps as 1-morphisms,
- homotopies as 2-morphisms,
- homotopies between homotopies as 3-morphisms,
- \vdots \vdots \vdots
- homotopy classes of n -fold homotopies as $(n + 1)$ -morphisms.

The homotopy hypothesis in the limit

In the limit $n \rightarrow \infty$ we obtain all spaces (CW complexes).

The Homotopy Hypothesis for $n = \infty$

There is an equivalence of ∞ -categories $\text{Spaces} \begin{array}{c} \xrightarrow{\pi_\infty} \\ \xleftarrow{|\cdot|_\infty} \end{array} \infty\text{Grpds}$ where Spaces is the ∞ -category of spaces (CW complexes).

Considering Kan complexes as a model for ∞ -groupoids we can take π_∞ as the singular simplicial set functor Sing . Then, the Quillen adjunction

$\text{Top} \begin{array}{c} \xrightarrow{\pi_\infty = \text{Sing}} \\ \xleftarrow{|\cdot|_\infty} \end{array} \text{SSets}$ is the equivalence of ∞ -categories.

Challenging question: Find a definition of n -groupoids so that the Homotopy hypothesis holds in both finite and infinite cases.

There are various different attempts/answers; see [nLab](#) and [Mathoverflow](#)

Strict n -groupoids cannot model n -types

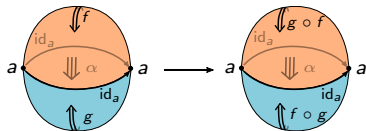
Theorem (Simpson)

Strict 3-groupoids are not sufficient to model all 3-types.

Example (Simpson, Berger)

One cannot obtain the 3-type of S^2 from a realization functor defined on strict 3-groupoids.

Consider a 3-groupoid with a single object \mathbf{a} and a single 1-morphism id_a .



In a strict 3-groupoid α is identity.

In a weak 3-groupoid α is braiding.

⊗ There exist weak 3-groupoids not equivalent to strict 3-groupoids.

Suspension and Stabilization

	Category	Bicategory	Tricategory	Tetracategory
One object	✓	✓	✓	✓
One 1-morphism			✓	✓
One 2-morphism				✓
	Monoid	Monoidal category	Braided monoidal category	Symmetric monoidal category

Definition (Baez-Dolan)

An m -tuply monoidal n -category is an $(m + n)$ -category with only one i -morphism for $i < m$.

The Periodic Table

	$n = 0$	$n = 1$	$n = 2$
$m = 0$	Set	Category	2-category
$m = 1$	Monoid	Monoidal category	Monoidal bicategory
$m = 2$	Commutative monoid	Braided mon category	Braided mon bicategory
$m = 3$	"	Symmetric mon category	Sylleptic mon bicategory
$m = 4$	"	"	Symmetric mon bicategory
$m = 5$	"	"	"

Stabilization Hypothesis (Baez-Dolan)

Periodic table stabilizes for $m \geq n + 2$ just as $\pi_{m+n}(S^m)$.

There are different approaches and proofs for this conjecture; see

► nLab

The n -category of cobordisms

Recall the extended 2-dimensional bordism bicategory Bord_2

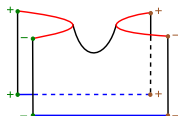
Objects

$\dagger \quad \dashv \quad \dashv \quad \dagger$

1-morphisms



2-morphisms



Extending Bord_2 inductively we obtain the n -category Bord_n which has

- compact oriented 0-manifolds as objects,
- oriented cobordisms as 1-morphisms,
- oriented cobordisms between those as 2-morphisms,

\vdots \vdots \vdots

- diffeomorphism classes of n -fold oriented cobordisms relative to boundary/corners as n -morphisms.

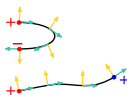
The Cobordism Hypothesis (Baez-Dolan)

Symmetric
monoidal
bicategory
($\text{Bord}_2^{\text{fr}}, \Pi$)

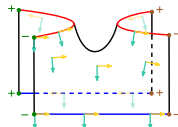
Objects



1-morphisms



2-morphisms



Definition

An n -dimensional **fully-extended framed topological field theory** is a symmetric monoidal n -functor $Z : \text{Bord}_n^{\text{fr}} \rightarrow \mathcal{C}$ where \mathcal{C} is any symmetric monoidal n -category.

The Cobordism Hypothesis (Baez-Dolan)

Each n -dimensional fully-extended framed topological field theory is determined by the image of framed point which is a fully-dualizable object.

\mathcal{C} -valued n -dim fully-extended framed TFTs \leftrightarrow Fully-dualizable objects in \mathcal{C}

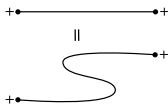
Why not any object but a fully-dualizable one?

Consider a 1-dimensional framed (oriented) TFT:

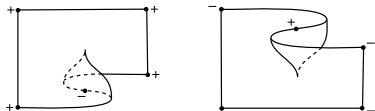
$$Z\left(\begin{array}{c} \text{---} \oplus \text{---} \\ \text{---} \oplus \text{---} \\ \text{---} \oplus \text{---} \end{array}\right) = Z\left(\begin{array}{c} \text{---} \oplus \text{---} \\ \text{---} \oplus \text{---} \end{array}\right) \circ Z\left(\begin{array}{c} \text{---} \oplus \text{---} \\ \text{---} \oplus \text{---} \end{array}\right) = \begin{array}{cc} Z\left(\begin{array}{c} \text{---} \oplus \text{---} \\ \text{---} \oplus \text{---} \end{array}\right) & Z\left(\begin{array}{c} \text{---} \oplus \text{---} \\ \text{---} \oplus \text{---} \end{array}\right) \\ \otimes & \circ \\ Z\left(\begin{array}{c} \text{---} \oplus \text{---} \\ \text{---} \oplus \text{---} \end{array}\right) & Z\left(\begin{array}{c} \text{---} \oplus \text{---} \\ \text{---} \oplus \text{---} \end{array}\right) \end{array} = Z\left(\begin{array}{c} \text{---} \oplus \text{---} \\ \text{---} \oplus \text{---} \end{array}\right)$$

In Bord_2 (higher) duality data replaces equalities with isomorphisms

in Bord_1

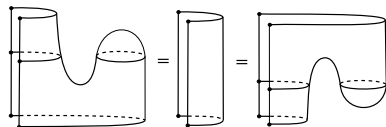


in Bord_2



Generators: handle attachments

Relations: handle cancellations



Lurie's reformulation

Extend the n -category $\text{Bord}_n^{\text{fr}}$ to an (∞, n) -category $\text{Bord}_n^{\text{fr}}$ by taking

- diffeomorphisms of n -manifolds with corners as $(n + 1)$ -morphisms,
- isotopies of such diffeomorphisms as $(n + 2)$ -morphisms,
- isotopies of these isotopies as $(n + 3)$ -morphisms,

\vdots \vdots \vdots

Definition (Lurie)

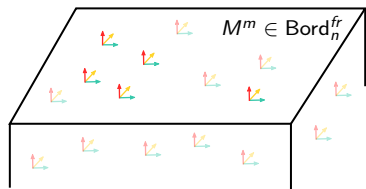
An n -dimensional fully-extended framed topological field theory is a symmetric monoidal (∞, n) -functor $Z : \text{Bord}_n^{\text{fr}} \rightarrow \mathcal{C}$ where \mathcal{C} is any symmetric monoidal (∞, n) -category.

The Cobordism Hypothesis (Lurie)

Let $\text{Fun}^{\otimes}(\text{Bord}_n^{\text{fr}}, \mathcal{C})$ be the (∞, n) -category of \mathcal{C} -valued fully-extended framed TFTs. Then there is a weak homotopy equivalence of spaces

$$\text{Fun}^{\otimes}(\text{Bord}_n^{\text{fr}}, \mathcal{C}) \simeq (\mathcal{C}^{\text{fd}})^{\sim}.$$

Structured Cobordism Hypothesis



$$T(M \times (-\varepsilon, \varepsilon)^{n-m}) \circlearrowright O(n)$$

$$\begin{array}{c} \downarrow Z \\ O(n) \circlearrowright \text{duality data} \\ Z(M) \text{ belongs} \end{array}$$

$$O(n) \circlearrowright \text{Bord}_n^{fr}$$

$$\begin{array}{c} \Downarrow \\ O(n) \circlearrowright (\mathcal{C}^{fd})^\sim \end{array}$$

A group homomorphism $\Gamma \rightarrow O(n)$ leads to a Γ -structured (∞, n) -bordism category Bord_n^Γ of manifolds with Γ -tangential structure.

Lurie's Γ -Structured Cobordism Hypothesis

There is a weak homotopy equivalence $\text{Fun}^\otimes(\text{Bord}_n^\Gamma, \mathcal{C}) \simeq ((\mathcal{C}^{fd})^\sim)^{h\Gamma}$ of spaces where $((\mathcal{C}^{fd})^\sim)^{h\Gamma} = \text{Hom}_\Gamma(E\Gamma, (\mathcal{C}^{fd})^\sim)$ is the space of homotopy Γ -fixed points.

- $\Gamma = \{e\}$ corresponds to framed TFTs i.e. $\text{Bord}_n^{\{e\}} = \text{Bord}_n^{fr}$,
- $\Gamma = SO(n)$ corresponds to oriented TFTs i.e. $\text{Bord}_n^{SO(n)} = \text{Bord}_n$,

Verifying $(G \times SO(2))$ -structured Cobordism Hypothesis

- For any discrete group G , $\Gamma = G \times SO(2)$ corresponds to certain oriented 2-dimensional extended homotopy field theories,
- When $\mathbb{k} = \overline{\mathbb{k}}$ and $\text{char}(\mathbb{k}) = 0$, comparing the classification of $\text{Alg}_{\mathbb{k}}^2$ -valued E-HFT and Davidovich's homotopy $(G \times SO(2))$ -fixed point computations verifies this hypothesis for $\text{Alg}_{\mathbb{k}}^2$ -valued $(G \times SO(2))$ -structured E-TFTs.

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Thanks for taking the time to read!