

TYPE THEORY AS A TOPIC OF MATHEMATICAL STUDY

AN INTRODUCTION TO GENERALISED ALGEBRAIC THEORIES

Formal proof and synthetic mathematics workshop – June 26th 2026

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Or, to be precise, worked *in* type theories.

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But:

- What is a type theory?
- What is a model of such a type theory?
- What does it mean “to work in” such a type theory?

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- What is a model of such a type theory?
- What does it mean “to work in” such a type theory?

These questions can be given **mathematical answers**

WARMUP: UNIVERSAL ALGEBRA

Who here has been exposed to **universal algebra**?

Ambient logic = set-theoretic notation (but could be a type theory!): \in , Set , \prod , Σ ...

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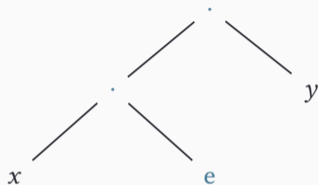
Signature

A signature Σ consists of:

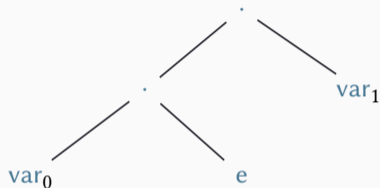
- a set of operations (generators) op_Σ , specified by an arity $\text{ar}_\Sigma \in \text{op}_\Sigma \rightarrow \mathbb{N}$

Signature of monoids :

- $\text{op} := \{\text{e}, \cdot\}$, $\text{ar}(\text{e}) := 0$, $\text{ar}(\cdot) := 2$



- They exist!
- Nice representation in (functional) programming languages (algebraic datatypes)



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- Nice representation in (functional) programming languages (algebraic datatypes)
- Variables complicate things, but there are ways

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Ambient logic = set-theoretic notation (but could be a type theory!): $\in, \text{Set}, \prod, \Sigma \dots$

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→ generates a set of terms $\text{Tm} \in \mathbb{N} \rightarrow \text{Set}$
- for each n , a set of equations (relations) $\text{eqs}_\Sigma(n) \subseteq \text{Tm}(n) \times \text{Tm}(n)$

Signature of monoids :

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- $\mathbf{e} \in \text{Tm}(0)$, $(x \cdot \mathbf{e}) \cdot y \in \text{Tm}(2)$
- $\text{eqs}(1) := \{(x \cdot \mathbf{e} = x), (\mathbf{e} \cdot x = x)\}$, $\text{eqs}(3) := \{x \cdot (y \cdot z) = (x \cdot y) \cdot z\}$

Model of a signature (sort, op, ar)

- a set X

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- a constant $e \in X$ and a function $f \in X \times X \rightarrow X$

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- such that for every $(l, r) \in \text{eqs}(n)$ and $v \in X^n$, we have $\llbracket l \rrbracket(v) = \llbracket r \rrbracket(v)$

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- such that for all u, v and w we have $f(e, v) = v$, $f(v, e) = v$ and $f(u, f(v, w)) = f(f(u, v), w)$

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+ **Morphism of model**

Theorem (originally, Birkhoff?)

Every signature has a **free model**, which is initial amongst all models.

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Free model for the signature of monoids = free monoid = $\{e\}$
Free model for the signature of monoids + 1 constant per $a \in A$ = free monoid on A

GENERALISED ALGEBRAIC THEORY

MULTI-SORTED UNIVERSAL ALGEBRA

Monoids, rings, propositional logic... fit in universal algebra

Modules, vector spaces... need multiple sorts

Monoids, rings, propositional logic... fit in universal algebra
Modules, vector spaces... need multiple sorts

Multi-sorted signature

A signature Σ consists of:

- a **set of sorts** $\text{sort}_\Sigma \in \mathbf{Set}$
- a set of operations op_Σ , specified by an arity $\text{ar}_\Sigma \in \text{op}_\Sigma \rightarrow \text{sort}_\Sigma^* \times \text{sort}_\Sigma$
→ generates a set of terms $\text{Tm} \in \text{sort}_\Sigma^* \times \text{sort}_\Sigma \rightarrow \mathbf{Set}$
- a set of equations $\text{eqs}_\Sigma(v, s) \subseteq \text{Tm}(v, s) \times \text{Tm}(v, s)$

Monoids, rings, propositional logic... fit in universal algebra

Modules, vector spaces... need multiple sorts

- two sorts = s for scalars and v for vectors
- operations $ar(\cdot_v) := ([s, v], v)$ $ar(\cdot_s) := ([s, s], s)$ $ar(+_s) := ([s, s], s)$ $ar(+_v) := ([v, v], v)$
- + equations

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- a set of equations $eqs_\Sigma(v, s) \subseteq Tm(v, s) \times Tm(v, s)$

STILL NOT ENOUGH!

But there's more!

- Category: set of morphisms $\text{Hom}(X, Y)$ for objects X, Y
- First-order logic: expressions, formulas over a given context
- Type theory: types over a context, terms of a type in a context

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- First-order logic: expressions, formulas over a given context
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Missing ingredient = dependent sorts

A category:

- sorts $\text{ob} \in \mathbf{Set}$ and $\text{hom} \in \prod_{x,y \in \text{ob}} \mathbf{Set}$
- operations $\text{id} \in \prod_{x \in \text{ob}} \text{hom}(x, x)$ and $\circ \in \prod_{g \in \text{hom}(y,z), f \in \text{hom}(x,y)} \text{hom}(x, z)$
- equations $\prod_{f \in \text{hom}(x,y)} f \circ \text{id}(x) = f$ etc.

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A (model of) dependent type theory:

- $\text{Ctx} \in \mathbf{Set}$ (contexts)
- $\text{Ty} \in \text{Ctx} \rightarrow \mathbf{Set}$ (types)
- $\text{Tm} \in \prod_{\Gamma \in \text{Ctx}} \text{Ty}(\Gamma) \rightarrow \mathbf{Set}$ (terms)
- ...

Use a **type theory** (= the **logical framework**) to define signatures

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Signature, take 2

A signature is a context in the type theory below.

$$\begin{array}{c}
 \frac{}{\Sigma \vdash \text{Sort}} \qquad \frac{\Sigma \vdash X : \text{Sort}}{\Sigma \vdash \text{El}(X)} \\
 \\
 \frac{\Sigma \vdash A : \text{Sort} \quad \Sigma \vdash l : \text{El}(A) \quad \Sigma \vdash r : \text{El}(A)}{\Sigma \vdash l \equiv_A r} \qquad \text{(extensional)}
 \end{array}$$

$\Sigma, (X : \text{Sort})$

$\Sigma', (x : \text{El}(X))$

$\Sigma'', (e : x \equiv_A y)$

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$$\frac{\Sigma \vdash A : \text{Sort} \quad \Sigma, (x : A) \vdash B}{\vdash (x : A) \rightarrow B}$$

$$\frac{\Sigma \vdash f : (x : A) \rightarrow B \quad \Sigma \vdash u : \text{El}(A)}{\Sigma \vdash f u : \text{El}(B[u])}$$

$$\Sigma, (X : \text{Sort}) \quad \Sigma', (f : \text{El}(X) \rightarrow \text{El}(X)) \quad \Sigma'', (e : (x : \text{El}(X)) \rightarrow f(f x) \equiv_X x)$$

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 \end{array}$$

For now: work with this type theory informally

THE GAT OF CATEGORIES, VERY FORMALLY

ob : Sort

hom : (x: ob) → (y: ob) → Sort

id : (x: ob) → El(hom(x, x))

comp : (x, y, z: ob) → (f: hom(x, y)) → (g: hom(y, z)) → El(hom(x, z))

idl : (x, y: ob) → (f: hom(x, y)) → comp(x, x, y, id(x), f) $\equiv_{\text{hom}(x,y)}$ f

idr : (x, y: ob) → (f: hom(x, y)) → comp(x, y, y, f, id(y)) $\equiv_{\text{hom}(x,y)}$ f

assoc : (w, x, y, z: ob) → (f: hom(w, x)) → (g: hom(x, y)) → (h: hom(y, z)) →
comp(w, x, z, f, comp(x, y, z, g, h)) $\equiv_{\text{hom}(w,z)}$ comp(w, y, z, comp(w, x, y, f, g), h)

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What a mouthful!

THE GAT OF CATEGORIES, VERY FORMALLY

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 $\text{hom} : (x: \text{ob}) \rightarrow (y: \text{ob}) \rightarrow \text{Sort}$

$\text{id} : \{x: \text{ob}\} \rightarrow \text{El}(\text{hom}(x, x))$
 $\circ : \{x, y, z: \text{ob}\} \rightarrow (g: \text{hom}(y, z)) \rightarrow (f: \text{hom}(x, y)) \rightarrow \text{El}(\text{hom}(x, z))$

$(x, y: \text{ob}) \rightarrow (f: \text{hom}(x, y)) \rightarrow f \circ \text{id}_x \equiv f$
 $(x, y: \text{ob}) \rightarrow (f: \text{hom}(x, y)) \rightarrow \text{id}_y \circ f \equiv f$
 $(w, x, y, z: \text{ob}) \rightarrow (f: \text{hom}(w, x)) \rightarrow (g: \text{hom}(x, y)) \rightarrow (h: \text{hom}(y, z)) \rightarrow$
 $(h \circ g) \circ f \equiv h \circ (g \circ f)$

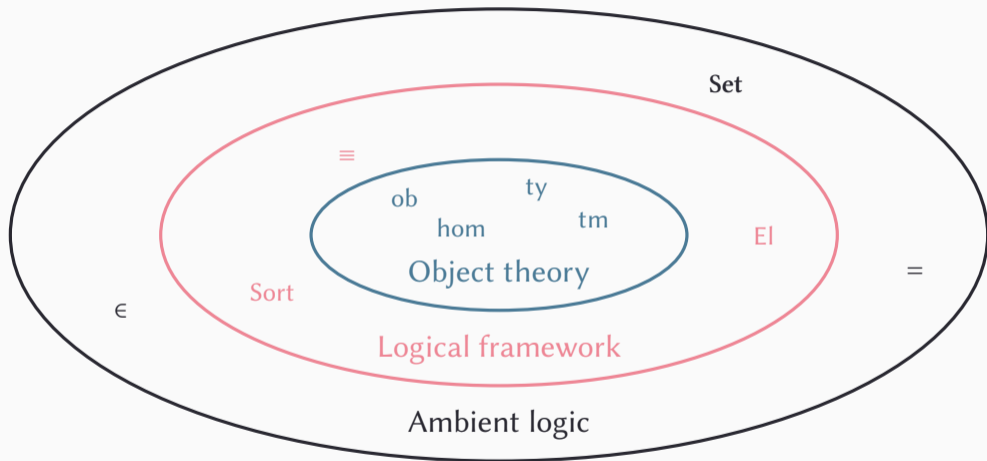
What a mouthful! Conventions: implicit arguments + notations

THE GAT OF CATEGORIES, VERY FORMALLY

$$\begin{array}{c} \frac{}{\vdash \text{ob}} \\ \frac{\vdash x : \text{ob}}{\vdash \text{id}_x : \text{hom}(x, y)} \quad \frac{\vdash x, y, z : \text{ob} \quad \vdash f : \text{hom}(x, y) \quad \vdash g : \text{hom}(y, z)}{\vdash g \circ f : \text{hom}(x, z)} \\ \frac{\vdash x, y : \text{ob} \quad \vdash f : \text{hom}(x, y)}{\vdash f \circ \text{id}_x \equiv f : \text{hom}(x, y)} \quad \frac{\vdash x, y : \text{ob} \quad \vdash f : \text{hom}(x, y)}{\vdash \text{id}_y \circ f \equiv f : \text{hom}(x, y)} \\ \frac{\vdash w, x, y, z : \text{ob} \quad \vdash f : \text{hom}(w, x) \quad \vdash g : \text{hom}(x, y) \quad \vdash h : \text{hom}(y, z)}{\vdash (h \circ g) \circ f \equiv h \circ (g \circ f) : \text{hom}(w, z)} \end{array}$$

What a mouthful! As typing rules

THE TYPE THEORIST'S FAVOURITE GAT: CATEGORIES WITH FAMILIES



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ctx : Sort

sub : $(\Gamma : \text{ctx}) \rightarrow (\Delta : \text{ctx}) \rightarrow \text{Sort}$

...

ctx and sub form a category

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...

$\text{ty} : (\Gamma : \text{ctx}) \rightarrow \text{Sort}$

$_[_] : \{\Gamma, \Delta : \text{ctx}\} \rightarrow (X : \text{ty}(\Delta)) \rightarrow (\sigma : \text{sub}(\Gamma, \Delta)) \rightarrow \text{El}(\text{ty}(\Gamma))$

$(\Gamma : \text{ctx}) \rightarrow (X : \text{ty}(\Gamma)) \rightarrow X[\text{id}] \equiv X$

...

ctx and sub form a category

ty is a functor

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$\text{tm} : (\Gamma : \text{ctx}) \rightarrow (X : \text{ty}(\Gamma)) \rightarrow \text{Sort}$

$_[_] : \{\Gamma, \Delta : \text{ctx}\} \rightarrow \{X : \text{ty}(\Delta)\} \rightarrow (x : \text{tm}(\Delta, X)) \rightarrow (\sigma : \text{sub}(\Gamma, \Delta)) \rightarrow \text{El}(\text{tm}(\Gamma, X[\sigma]))$

$(\Gamma : \text{ctx}) \rightarrow (X : \text{ty}(\Gamma)) \rightarrow (x : \text{tm}(\Gamma, X)) \rightarrow x[\text{id}] \equiv_{\text{tm}(\Gamma, X)} x$

...

ctx and sub form a category

ty is a functor

tm is a displayed functor

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El(tr

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ntor

$(\Gamma: \text{ctx})$

...

THE TYPE THEORIST'S FAVOURITE GAT: CATEGORIES WITH FAMILIES (CTD.)

$\diamond : \text{El}(\text{ctx})$

$! : \{\Gamma : \text{ctx}\} \rightarrow \text{El}(\text{sub}(\Gamma, \diamond))$

$(\Gamma : \text{ctx}) \rightarrow (\sigma : \text{sub}(\Gamma, \diamond)) \rightarrow \sigma \equiv !$

ctx has a terminal object (empty context)

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context extension $(\Gamma, x : X)$

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context extension $(\Gamma, x : X)$

$\text{var} : \{\Gamma : \text{ctx}\} \rightarrow \{X : \text{ty}(\Gamma)\} \rightarrow \text{El}(\text{tm}(\Gamma \triangleright X, X))$ last variable in context

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weakening

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weakening

$(_, _) : \{\Gamma, \Delta : \text{ctx}\} \rightarrow \{X : \text{ty}(\Gamma)\} \rightarrow (\sigma : \text{sub}(\Delta, \Gamma)) \rightarrow$

substitution extension

$(x : \text{tm}(\Delta, X[\sigma])) \rightarrow \text{El}(\text{sub}(\Delta, \Gamma \triangleright X))$

+ equations

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$(x : \text{tm}(\Delta, X[\sigma])) \rightarrow \text{El}(\text{sub}(\Delta, \Gamma \triangleright X))$

+ equations

Only terms: $\text{var}[\uparrow^n]$ = n -th variable in context

MODELS OF A GAT

The logical framework looks a lot like the ambient logic...

THE STANDARD MODEL

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We can use that to interpret it! (\approx Tarski semantics...)

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Sort	\mapsto	Set
El(X)	\mapsto	$\llbracket X \rrbracket$
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The logical framework looks a lot like the ambient logic...
We can use that to interpret it! (\approx Tarski semantics...)

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Definition

A **model** of a GAT Σ is an inhabitant of $\llbracket \Sigma \rrbracket$.

In fact, we have a **category** $\text{Mod}(\Sigma)$ (might be too strict to your liking!)

WHAT IS A CwF?

Read from the GAT definition! Or...

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Definition (Fiore 2012, Awodey 2018)

A **natural model** consists of:

- a category \mathcal{C} with a terminal object = contexts + substitutions + empty context
- two presheaves Ty and Tm (functors $\mathcal{C}^{op} \rightarrow \mathbf{Set}$) = types, terms, action of substitutions
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“ $\Gamma \triangleright A$ is the universal context which extends Γ and has a term of type A ”

$$\begin{array}{ccc} y(\Gamma \triangleright A) & \xrightarrow{\text{var}} & Tm \\ \uparrow \downarrow & \lrcorner & \downarrow ty \\ y\Gamma & \xrightarrow{A} & Ty \end{array}$$

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“ $\Gamma \triangleright A$ is the universal context which extends Γ and has a term of type A ”

The diagram illustrates the universal property of the context $\Gamma \triangleright A$. It features a commutative square with $y\Gamma$ at the bottom-left and Ty at the bottom-right. The top-left node is $y\Delta$, and the top-right node is Tm . A solid arrow labeled σ points from $y\Delta$ to $y\Gamma$. A solid arrow labeled A points from $y\Gamma$ to Ty . A solid arrow labeled ty points from Tm to Ty . A solid arrow labeled var points from $y(\Gamma \triangleright A)$ to Tm . A dashed arrow labeled (σ, t) points from $y\Delta$ to $y(\Gamma \triangleright A)$. A solid arrow labeled t points from $y\Delta$ to Tm . Vertical arrows labeled \uparrow and \downarrow connect $y\Gamma$ and $y(\Gamma \triangleright A)$, and Tm and Ty respectively. A small symbol \lrcorner is located between $y(\Gamma \triangleright A)$ and Tm .

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Definition (Fiore 2012)

A **natural model** consists

- a category \mathcal{C} with
- two presheaves Ty
- a natural transform
- such that ty is local

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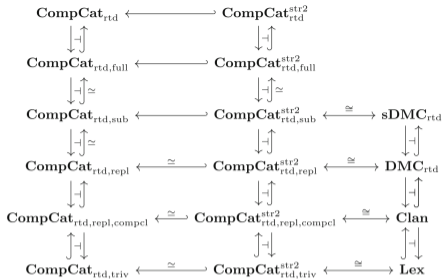


Fig. 4. Notions with types as maps, rooted

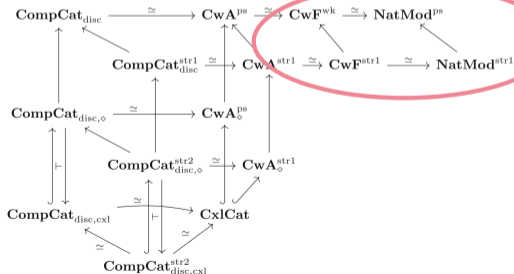


Fig. 5. Notions with types primitive

empty context
action of substitutions

SYNTAX

WHAT DO I MEAN BY SYNTAX?

Constructions that are valid in every model?

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Some sort of manipulation of syntax trees?

It is the same!

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Ill-formed syntax trees: $0 + +$ $\lambda x.y$

Ill-typed syntax trees: $0 + (\lambda x.x)$

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If f represents a valid term of type $\text{hom}(a, b)$, is $f \circ \text{id}_{a'}$ valid?

→ equations play a role in typing!

Theorem (Cartmell 1986, Kaposi, Kovács and Altenkirch 2019)

The initial model of any GAT exists.

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Implementation: work with pre-terms, but check for typing/definitional equality

Much better if typing is **decidable!**

WRAPPING UP

One type theory to describe them all: a **logical framework**

Do the work **once**, get it for **all theories**:

- syntax
- (category of) models

Syntax is the **initial model**

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

To go on with GATs and CwFs

- *Generalised algebraic theories and contextual categories* (Cartmell 1986)
- *Categories with families: Unityped, simply typed, and dependently typed* (Castellan et al. 2021)
- *Constructing Quotient Inductive-Inductive Types* (Kaposi et al. 2019)
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Other logical frameworks

- SOGATs = GATs + built-in handling of contexts & variables
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- a more syntactic version (// construction of syntax)
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Theorem (Uemura 2022)

The category of GATs is the bi-initial category with finite limits and an exponentiable morphism.

Thank you!

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