

Categorical Anomalies

(or RG flows in the SymTFT)

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Generalized symmetries in HEP and CMP

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Motivation

"Anomalies" are very powerful

[t Hooft '79; Witten '83]

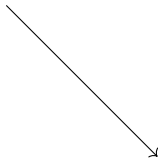
$T_{UV} : G, \omega_{UV}$



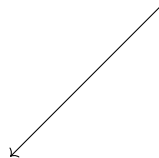
$T_{IR} : G, \omega_{IR}$

$$\omega_{UV} = \omega_{IR}$$

$T_{UV,1} : G, \omega_{UV,1}$



$T_{UV,2} : G, \omega_{UV,2}$



T_{IR}

$$\omega_{UV,1} = \omega_{UV,2}$$

Motivation

Caveat: symmetry does NOT need to be the same in IR

- A sub-symmetry can be come trivial
- Emergent (higher-form) symmetries
- $G_{UV}^{(0)}$ in the IR doesn't act on local operators, but on extended objects

'Phenomenology' of anomaly matching:

- Emergent anomalies. E.g. anomaly free $\mathbb{Z}_4 \longrightarrow$ anomalous $\mathbb{Z}_4/\mathbb{Z}_2 \cong \mathbb{Z}_2$
- UV anomaly of 0-form symmetry \longrightarrow anomaly of "emergent" higher-form symmetry (fractionalization/transmutation [Barkeshli, Bonderson, Cheng, Wang '14; Wang, Wen, Witten '17] [Delmastro, Gomis, Hsin Komargodski '22; Brennan, Cordova, Dumitrescu '22; AA, Benini, Rizi '24; Seiberg, Seifnashri '25])

What is the most general constraint?

Non-invertible symmetries

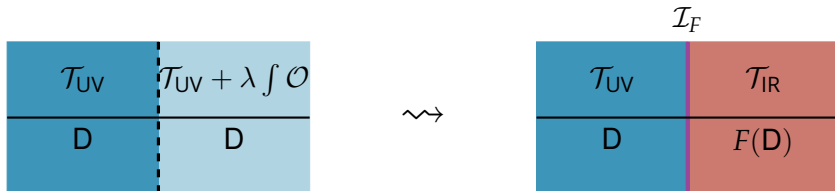
- Hard to separate anomaly from symmetry
- Only Yes/No type of definitions: \mathcal{C} anomalous if no trivially gapped realization.
- Not enough for "anomaly matching":

When can two anomalous symmetries $\mathcal{C}_{UV}, \mathcal{C}_{IR}$ be connected by an RG?

Motivation

Formulation of anomaly (symmetry) matching?

- Symmetry in QFT has to be thought of as (higher) tensor category.
- The UV symmetry defects remain topological in the IR: fusions and (higher) associativity data are invariant.
- RG interfaces



Motivation

Central concept: **tensor functors**

$$F : \mathcal{C}_{UV} \rightarrow \mathcal{C}_{IR}$$

- When a tensor functor $F : \mathcal{C}_{UV} \rightarrow \mathcal{C}_{IR}$ exists?
- Extract some "data" $\mathfrak{A}(\mathcal{C})$

Very complicated (especially w/ non-invertible and/or $d > 2$...)

Motivation

Central concept: **tensor functors**

$$F : \mathcal{C}_{UV} \rightarrow \mathcal{C}_{IR}$$

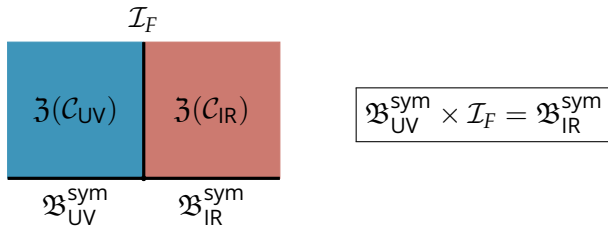
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Very complicated (especially w/ non-invertible and/or $d > 2$...

SymTFT !

Out(punch)line

- 1 Tensor functors are SymTFT interfaces



- 2 Functor/interface dictionary
- 3 Normal subcategories and short-exact-sequences

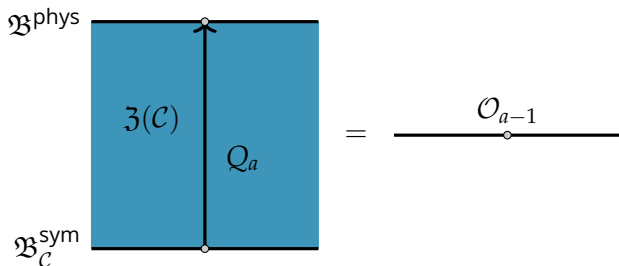
$$\mathcal{N} \rightarrow \mathcal{C} \rightarrow \mathcal{S}$$

- 4 Anomalous Simple Categories (ASCies) \mathcal{S} : $\mathfrak{A}(\mathcal{C}) = \{\mathcal{S}_1, \mathcal{S}_2, \dots\}$
- 5 Examples:
 - Known
 - Expected
 - New

Symmetry Topological Field Theory (SymTFT)

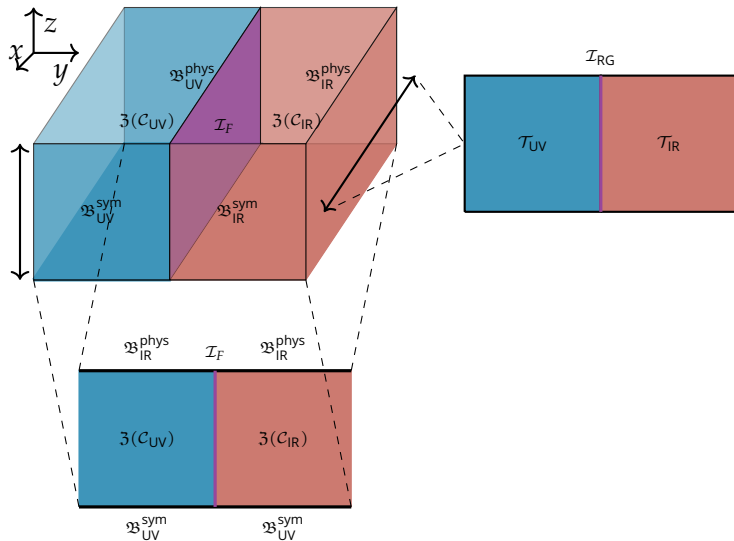
Any symmetry \mathcal{C} in d -dim $\cong (\mathfrak{Z}(\mathcal{C}), \mathfrak{B}_{\mathcal{C}}^{\text{sym}})$

- $\mathfrak{Z}(\mathcal{C}) = (d+1)$ -dim TQFT = (flat) gauging \mathcal{C} in $(d+1)$ -dim (state-sum).
- $\mathfrak{B}_{\mathcal{C}}^{\text{sym}} =$ topological boundary condition (Lagrangian algebra $\mathcal{L}_{\mathcal{C}}$)

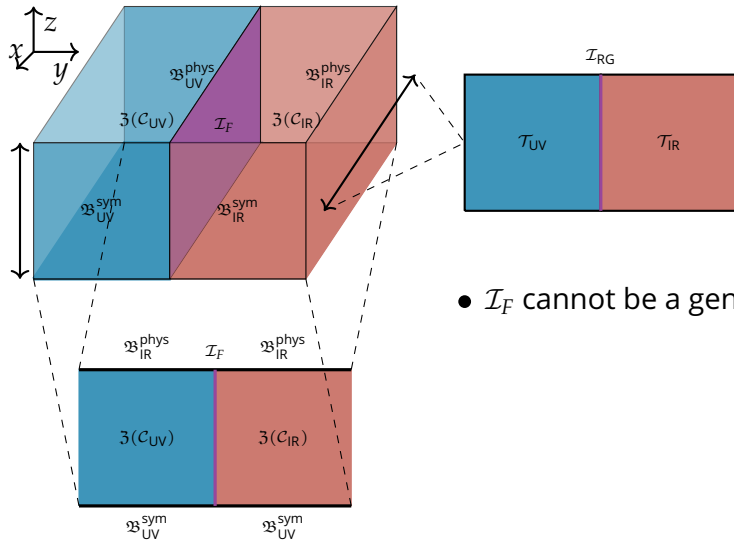


"Isolate symmetry/topology from dynamics"

RG interfaces and RG quiches

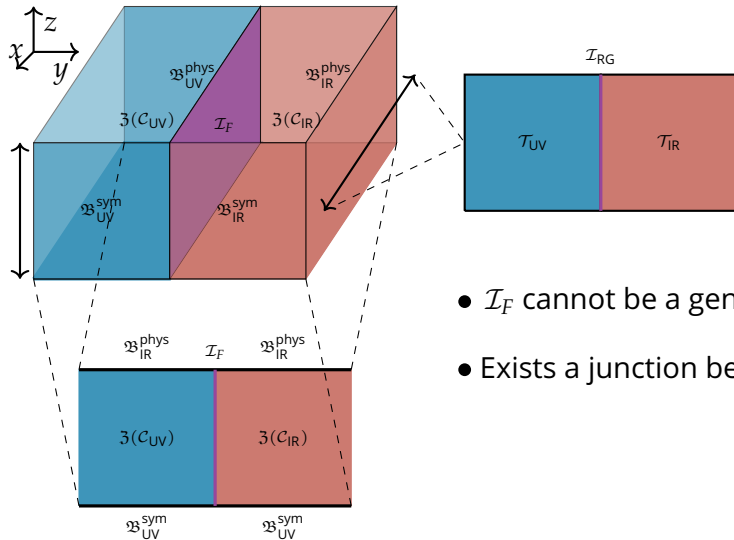


RG interfaces and RG quiches



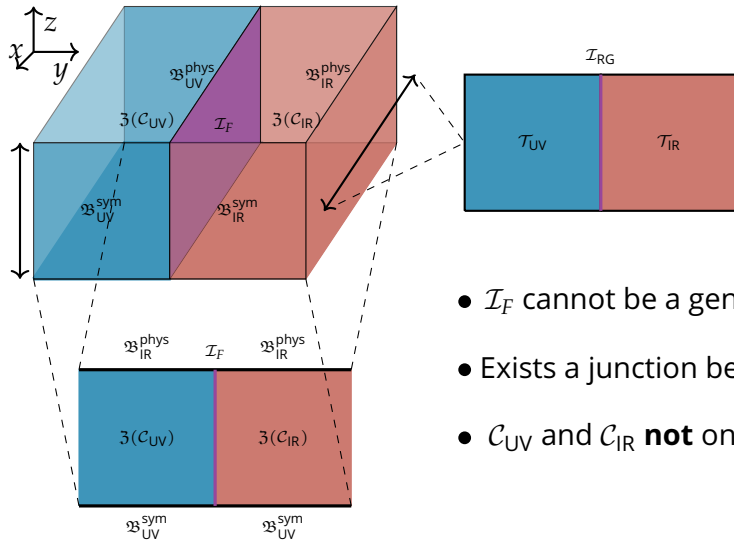
- \mathcal{I}_F cannot be a generic interface

RG interfaces and RG quiches



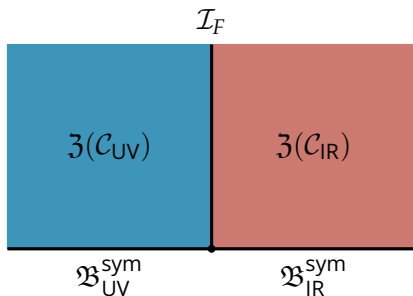
- \mathcal{I}_F cannot be a generic interface
- Exists a junction between \mathcal{I}_F , $\mathfrak{B}_{UV}^{\text{sym}}$, $\mathfrak{B}_{IR}^{\text{sym}}$

RG interfaces and RG quiches



- \mathcal{I}_F cannot be a generic interface
- Exists a junction between \mathcal{I}_F , $\mathfrak{B}_{UV}^{\text{sym}}$, $\mathfrak{B}_{IR}^{\text{sym}}$
- \mathcal{C}_{UV} and \mathcal{C}_{IR} **not** on same footing

Symmetry Matching Equation (ME)



$$\mathfrak{B}_{UV}^{\text{sym}} \times \mathcal{I}_F = \mathfrak{B}_{IR}^{\text{sym}}$$

- Intuition: \mathcal{I}_F is symmetric under \mathcal{C}_{UV} .
- Action of F on $D \in \mathcal{C}_{UV}$ determined by action of \mathcal{I}_F on Q , $\pi_{UV}(Q) = D$:

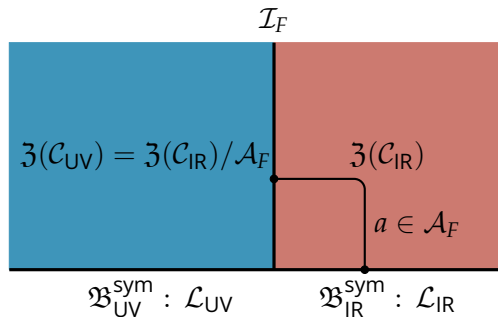
$$F(D) = \pi_{IR}(\mathcal{I}_F(Q))$$

- The (ME) $\equiv \mathcal{I}_F(\mathcal{L}_{UV}) = \mathcal{L}_{IR} \implies$ independence on arbitrariness in Q

Functor/interface dictionary

Injective functors $\longleftrightarrow \mathcal{C}_{\text{UV}}$ acts faithfully in the IR

- $F^* : \mathcal{Q}_{\mathcal{C}_{\text{IR}}} \rightarrow \mathcal{Q}_{\mathcal{C}_{\text{UV}}}$ is surjective $\implies \mathcal{A} = \ker(F^*)$ trivialized charges.
- $\mathfrak{Z}(\mathcal{C}_{\text{UV}}) = \mathfrak{Z}(\mathcal{C}_{\text{IR}})/\mathcal{A}_F$, $\mathcal{A}_F \subset \mathcal{L}_{\mathcal{C}_{\text{IR}}}$ condensable **electric** algebra.



- $\mathfrak{B}_{\text{UV}}^{\text{sym}} \times \mathcal{I}_F \leftrightarrow \mathcal{L} \in \mathfrak{Z}(\mathcal{C}_{\text{IR}})$ by sequential gauging \implies choose $\mathcal{L}_{\text{IR}} = \mathcal{L}$

Functor/interface dictionary

Example: (1+1)d, $\mathcal{C}_{UV} = \text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2}^1$.

$$\mathfrak{Z}(\mathcal{C}_{UV}) = \text{DW}(\mathbb{Z}_2^1) = \frac{2\pi i}{2} \int_{X_3} a \cup db + a \cup \beta(a) .$$

Choose

$$\mathfrak{Z}(\mathcal{C}_{IR}) = \text{DW}(\mathbb{Z}_4) = \frac{2\pi i}{4} \int_{X_3} a \cup db$$

$$e = e^{i \int a} , \quad m = e^{i \int b} , \quad \theta(e^{n_e} m^{n_m}) = e^{\frac{2\pi i}{4} n_e n_m}$$

We have $\mathfrak{Z}(\mathcal{C}_{UV}) = \mathfrak{Z}(\mathcal{C}_{IR})/\mathcal{A}$ with

$$\mathcal{A} = 1 \oplus e^2 m^2$$

The (ME) is satisfied with

$$\mathcal{L}_{IR} = 1 \oplus e^2 \oplus m^2 \oplus e^2 m^2 \implies \mathcal{C}_{IR} = \text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2 \times \mathbb{Z}_2}^\omega$$

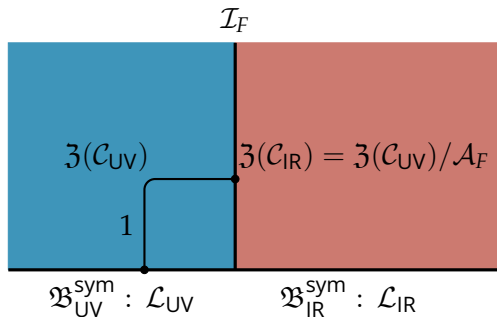
The functor is

$$F : \text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2}^1 \rightarrow \text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2 \times \mathbb{Z}_2}^\omega , \quad F(D) = D_1 D_2$$

Functor/interface dictionary

Surjective functors \longleftrightarrow **no** emergent symmetries

- $\ker(F)$ =trivial subsymmetry in IR
- $\boxed{\mathfrak{Z}(\mathcal{C}_{\text{IR}}) = \mathfrak{Z}(\mathcal{C}_{\text{UV}})/\mathcal{A}_F}$, $\pi_{\text{UV}}(\mathcal{A}_F) = \ker(F)$.
- $\boxed{\mathcal{A}_F \text{ **magnetic** condensable algebra}}$: $\mathcal{A}_F \cap \mathcal{L}_{\text{UV}} = \{1\}$



Functor/interface dictionary

From the (ME) $\mathfrak{B}_{\text{UV}}^{\text{sym}} \times \mathcal{I}_F = \mathfrak{B}_{\text{IR}}^{\text{sym}}$: magnetic \mathcal{A}_F follows from simplicity of $\mathfrak{B}_{\text{UV}}^{\text{sym}} \times \mathcal{I}_F$.

- The trivialized symmetry $\ker(F)$ does **not** determine \mathcal{A}_F : $\pi_{\text{UV}}(\mathcal{A}_F^{(i)}) = \ker(F)$.
- Different $\mathcal{A}_F^{(i)} \rightarrow$ different $\mathfrak{Z}(\mathcal{C}_{\text{IR}}^{(i)}) = \mathfrak{Z}(\mathcal{C}_{\text{UV}})/\mathcal{A}_F^{(i)} \rightarrow$ different $\mathcal{C}_{\text{IR}}^{(i)}$.
- (invertible symm): **Emergent anomalies**
- (non-invertible): More surprising: even fusion rules can be different!!!

Functor/interface dictionary

Example: $(1+1)d$, $\mathcal{C}_{UV} = \text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_4}$.

$$\mathcal{L}_{UV} = 1 \oplus e \oplus e^2 \oplus e^3 \implies \mathbf{D} = \pi_{UV}(e^x m)$$

To trivialise $\mathbb{Z}_2 \subset \mathbb{Z}_4$, two choices (only two magnetic algebras)

① $\mathcal{A}_0 = 1 \oplus m^2 \implies \text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2}$

② $\mathcal{A}_1 = 1 \oplus e^2 m^2 \implies \text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2}^1$

Physically, to gap-out $\mathbb{Z}_2 \subset \mathbb{Z}_4$: $\mathcal{O}_e(x)$ heavy while $\mathcal{O}_{e^2}(x)$ light. But

① $\mathcal{O}_m(x)$ light, while $\mathcal{O}_{em}(x)$ heavy too.

② $\mathcal{O}_m(x)$ also heavy, while $\mathcal{O}_{em}(x)$ remains light.

Functor/interface dictionary

Fiber functors $F : \mathcal{C}_{UV} \rightarrow (d-1)\text{-Vec}$

- Physically: RG flow that trivializes the symmetry.
- Surjective $\implies \mathcal{A} \in \mathfrak{Z}(\mathcal{C}_{UV})$ magnetic.
- $\mathcal{Z}((d-1)\text{-Vec}) = \text{trivial} \implies \mathcal{I}_F = \text{b.c.} \implies \mathcal{A}_F = \text{Lagrangian}$

\mathcal{C}_{UV} anomalous iff \nexists magnetic Lagrangian algebra

[Kaidi, Nardoni, Zheng; Zhang, Cordova; AA, Benini, Copetti, Galati, Rizi; Cordova, Hsin, Zhang '23]

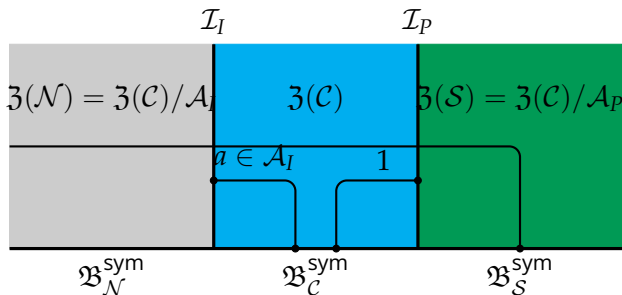
Normal subcategories

A subcategory $\mathcal{N} \subset \mathcal{C}$ is **normal** if

$$\mathcal{N} \xrightarrow{I} \mathcal{C} \xrightarrow{P} \mathcal{S}, \quad \text{im}(I) = \ker(P)$$

- $P \circ I$ is a fiber-functor $\implies \mathcal{N}$ is anomaly free
- $\mathcal{N} = \ker(P) \implies$ determined by a magnetic algebra $\mathcal{A}_P \in \mathfrak{Z}(\mathcal{C})$

$\mathcal{A}_I \otimes \mathcal{A}_P$, Lagrangian algebra



Normal subcategories

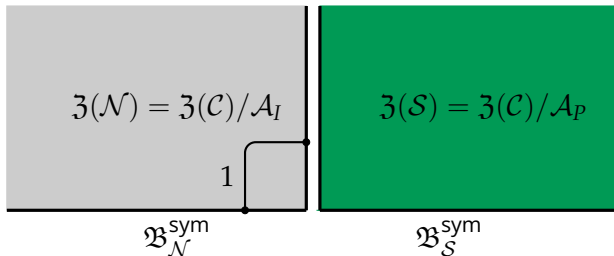
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$\mathcal{A}_I \otimes \mathcal{A}_P$, Lagrangian algebra

$$\mathcal{L}_{\mathcal{N}, \text{mag}} \otimes \mathcal{L}_{\mathcal{S}}$$



Normal subcategories: physical interpretation

\mathcal{N} is a subcategory that can be gapped out consistently without emergent symmetries

Not all anomaly free subcategories are normal!

Example: $\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_4}^{\omega=2}$.

$\mathbb{Z}_2 \subset \mathbb{Z}_4$ is anomaly free. But **not** normal!

$\exists(\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_4}^2) = \text{DW}(\mathbb{Z}_4^2)$ does not have magnetic algebras $\mathcal{A} \cap \mathcal{L}_C = \{1\} \implies$ no surjective functor $P : \text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_4}^2 \rightarrow \mathcal{S}$.

To gap out \mathbb{Z}_2 :

- 1 Break explicitly \mathbb{Z}_4 down to \mathbb{Z}_2 with a deformation.
- 2 Emergent symmetries. (e.g. in gapped phases)

Anomalous Simple Categories (ASCies)

Anomalous Simple Category (ASCy) \mathcal{S} = symmetry with **no**
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$$\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2}^1$$

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$\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2}^1$

$\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_4}^2$

Anomalous Simple Categories (ASCies)

Anomalous Simple Category (ASCy) \mathcal{S} = symmetry with **no** normal subsymmetry

$$\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2}^1$$

$$\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_4}^2$$

$$\text{TY}(\mathbb{Z}_2)$$

Anomalous Simple Categories (ASCies)

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$\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2}^1$

$\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_4}^2$

$\text{TY}(\mathbb{Z}_2)$

Fib

Anomalous Simple Categories (ASCies)

From any symmetry \mathcal{C} : extract ASCies

$$\mathcal{N}_i \rightarrow \mathcal{C} \rightarrow \mathcal{S}_i$$

\mathcal{N}_i is **maximal** (e.g. avoid $\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2} \rightarrow \text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_4} \rightarrow \text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2}^1$)

Even for fixed \mathcal{N}_i , \mathcal{S}_i is not unique \implies list of ASCies

$\mathfrak{A}(\mathcal{C}) = \{\mathcal{S}_1, \mathcal{S}_2, \dots\}$ = "quantification" of anomaly of \mathcal{C}

SymTFT: look for maximal magnetic algebras $\mathcal{A}_P \in \mathfrak{Z}(\mathcal{C})$:

$$\boxed{\mathfrak{Z}(\mathcal{S}) = \mathfrak{Z}(\mathcal{C}) / \mathcal{A}_P}$$

Example: $\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_8}^{\omega=4}$

$$\mathfrak{Z}(\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_8}^{\omega=4}) = \text{DW}(\mathbb{Z}_8^4). \quad \text{Lines } e^{n_e} m^{n_m}:$$

$$\theta(n_e, n_m) = \exp \left(\frac{2\pi i}{8} \left(n_m n_e - \frac{1}{2} n_m^2 \right) \right), \quad \mathcal{L}_C = 1 \oplus e \oplus e^2 \oplus \dots \oplus e^7$$

Two ('maximal') magnetic algebras \leftrightarrow two surjective functors

① $\mathcal{A}_{P_1} = 1 \oplus m^4 \implies \mathfrak{Z}(\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_8}^{\omega=4}) / \mathcal{A}_{P_1} = \mathfrak{Z}(\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_4}^1).$

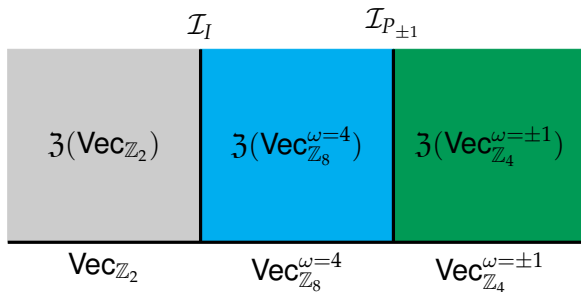
Kernel determined by $\mathcal{A}_I = 1 \oplus e^2 \oplus e^4 \oplus e^6 \implies \mathcal{N} = \text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2}.$

② $\mathcal{A}_{P_{-1}} = 1 \oplus e^4 m^4 \implies \mathfrak{Z}(\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_8}^{\omega=4}) / \mathcal{A}_{P_{-1}} = \mathfrak{Z}(\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_4}^{-1}).$

Kernel determined by $\mathcal{A}_I = 1 \oplus e^2 \oplus e^4 \oplus e^6 \implies \mathcal{N} = \text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2}.$

Example: $\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_8}^{\omega=4}$

$$\mathfrak{A}(\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_8}^{\omega=4}) = \left\{ \text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_4}^1, \text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_4}^{-1} \right\}$$



Upshot: if trivialize $\mathbb{Z}_2 \implies$ anomaly not uniquely determined in the IR!

remark: related with emergent anomaly $\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_8} \rightarrow \text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_4}^2$

Example: $\mathrm{TY}(\mathbb{Z}_2 \times \mathbb{Z}_2)_{\chi_d, \epsilon=-1}$

$\mathrm{TY}(\mathbb{Z}_2 \times \mathbb{Z}_2)_{\chi_d, -1}$ has **Second-obstruction anomaly** [AA, Benini, Copetti, Galati, Rizi '23]

Lines of $\mathfrak{Z}(\mathrm{TY}(\mathbb{Z}_2 \times \mathbb{Z}_2)_{\chi_d, \epsilon=-1})$

	$X_{(0,0),\pm 1}$	$X_{(1,0),\pm i}$	$X_{(0,1),\pm i}$	$X_{(1,1),\pm 1}$	$Y_{(0,0),(1,0)}$
θ	1	-1	-1	1	1
d	1	1	1	1	2

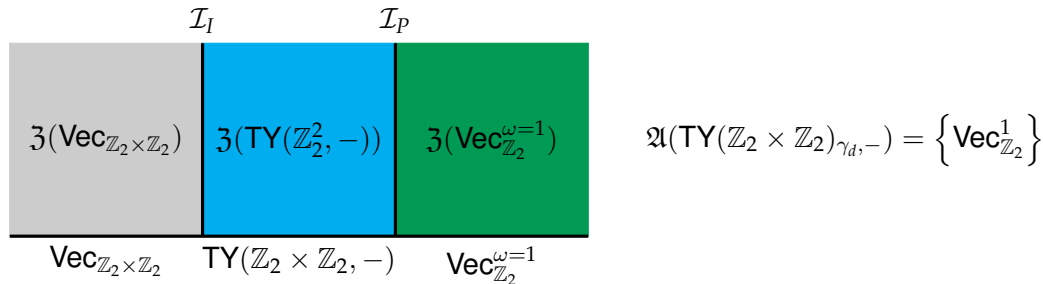
	$Y_{(0,0),(0,1)}$	$Y_{(0,0),(1,1)}$	$Y_{(1,0),(0,1)}$	$Y_{(1,0),(1,1)}$	$Y_{(0,1),(1,1)}$
θ	1	1	1	-1	-1
d	2	2	2	2	2

	$Z_{\rho_1, \pm \zeta_8^3}$	$Z_{\rho_2, \pm \zeta_8}$	$Z_{\rho_3, \pm i}$	$Z_{\rho_4, \pm i}$
θ	$\pm e^{\frac{3\pi i}{4}}$	$\pm e^{\frac{\pi i}{4}}$	$\pm i$	$\pm i$
d	2	2	2	2

$$\mathcal{L}_{\mathrm{TY}(\mathbb{Z}_2 \times \mathbb{Z}_2)_{\gamma_d, -}} = 1 \oplus X_{(0,0),-1} \oplus Y_{(0,0),(1,0)} \oplus Y_{(0,0),(0,1)} \oplus Y_{(0,0),(1,1)}$$

Example: $\mathbf{TY}(\mathbb{Z}_2 \times \mathbb{Z}_2)_{\gamma_d, -}$

- There is a unique maximal magnetic algebra $\mathcal{A}_P = 1 \oplus X_{(1,1),+1} \oplus Y_{(1,0),(0,1)}$
- $\mathfrak{Z}(\mathbf{TY}(\mathbb{Z}_2 \times \mathbb{Z}_2)_{\gamma_d, -})/\mathcal{A}_P = \mathfrak{Z}(\mathbf{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2}^1)$
- Kernel of $P : \mathbf{TY}(\mathbb{Z}_2 \times \mathbb{Z}_2)_{\gamma_d, -} \rightarrow \mathbf{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2}^1$ given by $\mathcal{A}_I = 1 \oplus X_{(0,0),-1}$



$$P(\mathcal{D}) = 1 \oplus \eta, \quad P(a_1) = P(a_2) = 1$$

Example: $\mathrm{TY}(\mathbb{Z}_4)_{\epsilon=+}$

- No fiber functor.
- No duality invariant SPT, but \exists duality invariant TQFT: SSB $\mathbb{Z}_4 \rightarrow \mathbb{Z}_2$

	$X_{0,\pm 1}$	$X_{1,\pm\zeta_8}$	$X_{2,\pm 1}$	$X_{3,\pm\zeta_8}$	$Y_{1,0}$	$Y_{2,0}$	$Y_{3,0}$
θ	1	$-i$	1	$-i$	1	1	1
d	1	1	1	1	2	2	2

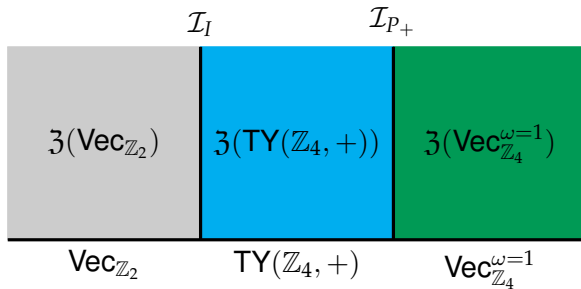
	$Y_{1,2}$	$Y_{1,3}$	$Y_{3,2}$	$Z_{\rho_0,\pm\zeta_{16}}$	$Z_{\rho_1,\pm 1}$	$Z_{\rho_2,\pm\zeta_{16}^{-3}}$	$Z_{\rho_3,\pm 1}$
θ	-1	i	-1	$\pm\zeta_{16}$	± 1	$\pm\zeta_{16}^{-3}$	± 1
d	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

$\mathrm{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_4} \subset \mathrm{TY}(\mathbb{Z}_4)$ anomaly free but not normal. $\mathrm{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2}$ also normal!

Two maximal magnetic algebras:

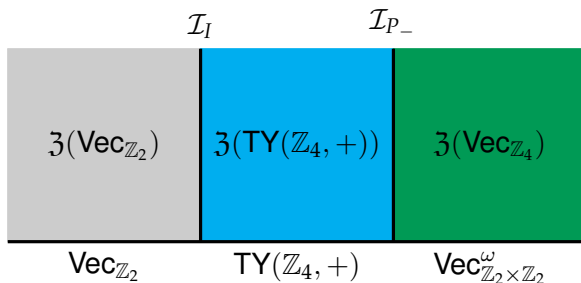
- ① $\mathcal{A}_{P_+} = 1 \oplus X_{2,+1} \implies \mathrm{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_4}^{\omega=1}$
- ② $\mathcal{A}_{P_-} = 1 \oplus X_{2,-1} \implies \mathrm{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2 \times \mathbb{Z}_2}^{\omega=\text{mixed}}$

Example: $\mathrm{TY}(\mathbb{Z}_4)_{\epsilon=+}$



$$P_+(\mathcal{D}) = \eta \oplus \eta^3, \quad P_+(a) = \eta^2, \quad P_+(a^2) = 1$$

Example: $\mathrm{TY}(\mathbb{Z}_4)_{\epsilon=+}$



$$P_-(\mathcal{D}) = \eta_1 \oplus \eta_2, \quad P_-(a) = \eta_1 \eta_2, \quad P_-(a^2) = 1$$

Example: $\text{TY}(\mathbb{Z}_4)_{\epsilon=+}$

$$\mathfrak{A}(\text{TY}(\mathbb{Z}_4)_+) = \left\{ \text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_4}^1, \text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2 \times \mathbb{Z}_2}^\omega \right\}$$

- Different ASCies have different fusion rules!
- $P_+(a) = \eta^2 \in \text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_4}^1$, $P_-(a) = \eta_1 \eta_2 \in \text{Vec}_{\mathbb{Z}_2 \times \mathbb{Z}_2}^\omega$: both anomalous \implies 'duality enforced' emergent anomaly
- Intuitive interpretation: preserving duality \implies if $\mathcal{O}_e(x)$ is light, $\mathcal{O}_m(x)$ is also light!

Other topics & future directions

- $d > 2$: matching anomalies with higher-form symmetries. Wang-Wen-Witten, Symmetry fractionalization, transmutation [Seiberg, Seifnashri '25]
- Duality symmetries in $(3+1)d$
- LSM anomalies [Pace, Aksoy, Lam '25]

Future directions

- Systematics in $(2+1)d$ and $(3+1)d$
- Math of ASCies?
- Structure of ASCies in higher dimensions
- Continuous symmetries
- Weak symmetries [Sakura's talk]
- Fermionic anomalies