Combinatory Completeness in Structured Multicategories

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February 12th, 2026
Topos Institute Colloquium

The Plan:

1. Combinatory Algebras and Combinatory Completeness
2. Faithful Cartesian Clubs and Structured Multicategories
3. Combinatory Completeness in Structured Multicategories
4. Miscellany (An Hour is a Long Time!)

1. Combinatory Algebras and Combinatory Completeness

An *applicative system* $(A, \bullet)$ consists of a set A together with a binary operation $\bullet : A \times A \to A$.

A convention: $\bullet$ is left-associative, infix, and usually omitted, as in

$$xyz = (xy)z = (x \bullet y) \bullet z = \bullet(\bullet(x, y), z)$$

Further examples:

$$xz(yz) = (x \bullet z) \bullet (y \bullet z) \qquad x(yzw)y = (x \bullet ((y \bullet z) \bullet w)) \bullet y$$

Say that an applicative system $(A, \bullet)$ has a(n):

- B combinator if $\exists \mathsf{B} \in A . \forall x, y, z \in A . \mathsf{B} x y z = x(yz)$
- C combinator if $\exists \mathsf{C} \in A . \forall x, y, z \in A . \mathsf{C} x y z = x z y$
- K combinator if $\exists \mathsf{K} \in A . \forall x, y \in A . \mathsf{K} x y = x$
- W combinator if $\exists \mathsf{W} \in A . \forall x, y \in A . \mathsf{W} x y = x y y$
- I combinator if $\exists \mathsf{I} \in A . \forall x \in A . \mathsf{I} x = x$

Then a BI-algebra is an applicative system with a B and I combinator, and so on.

A *combinatory algebra* is a BCKWI-algebra.

Some Examples:

Combinatory Logic (the free combinatory algebra)

Terms of the λ-calculus (open or closed) modulo $\equiv_\beta$

Various models of the λ-calculus (e.g., graph models)

There is a more structural chacterisation of combinatory algebras.

Fix an applicative system $(A, \bullet)$.

A *polynomial* in variables $x_1, \ldots, x_n$ is one of:

- a variable x_i where $1 \leq i \leq n$
- a combinator $a \in A$
- of the form $t \bullet s$ where t, s are polynomials in $x_1, \ldots, x_n$

E.g., if $a, b \in A$ then the following are polynomials in x, y, z:

$$a \bullet x \qquad a \qquad x \bullet (b \bullet z) \qquad a \bullet b \qquad y$$

A polymomial t in variables $x_1, \ldots, x_n$ is *computable* in case $\exists a \in A$ such that for all $b_1, \ldots, b_n \in A$ we have:

$$ab_1 \cdots b_n = t[b_1, \ldots, b_n / x_1, \ldots, x_n]$$

For example, in a combinatory algebra the polynomial $x_3 \bullet (x_1 \bullet x_2)$ is computable via $\mathsf{BC}(\mathsf{CB})$ as in:

$$\mathsf{BC}(\mathsf{CB})b_1b_2b_3 = \mathsf{C}(\mathsf{CB}b_1)b_2b_3 = \mathsf{CB}b_1b_3b_2 = \mathsf{B}b_3b_1b_2$$
$$= b_3(b_1b_2) = (x_3 \bullet (x_1 \bullet x_2))[b_1, b_2, b_3 / x_1, x_2, x_3]$$

An applicative system is called *combinatory complete* in case all of its polynomials are computable.

Theorem (e.g., Curry & Feys 1958)

Let $(A, \bullet)$ *be an applicative system. Then* $(A, \bullet)$ *is combinatory complete if and only if it is a combinatory algebra (i.e., a* BCKWI-*algebra).*

A polynomial is *regular* in case it contains no constants.

For example the following are both polynomials in x_1, x_2, x_3

$$x_1(x_2x_3) \qquad\qquad x_1a$$

The one on the left is regular, but the one on the right is not.

To obtain a combinatory algebra it suffices to ask that all regular polynomials are computable.

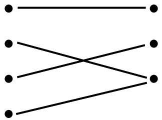
2. Faithful Cartesian Clubs and Structured Multicategories

The category **Fun** has:

Natural numbers as objects

Morphisms $\mathbf{a} : m \to n$ are functions $\mathbf{a} : \{1, \ldots, m\} \to \{1, \ldots, n\}$

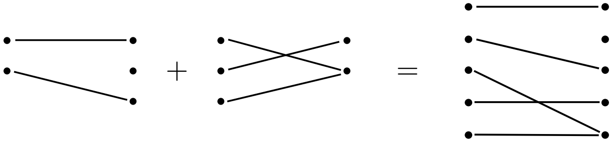
For example, this is a morphism $4 \to 3$ of **Fun**:



$(\mathbf{Fun}, +, 0)$ is (cocartesian) strict monoidal

On objects, $+$ is addition of natural numbers

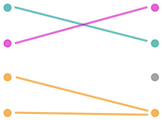
On morphisms, $+$ is defined as in:



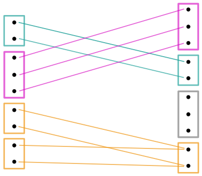
For each $\mathbf{a} : m \to n$ and $k_1, \ldots, k_n \in \mathbb{N}$ there is a *wreath product*:

$$\mathbf{a} \wr (k_1, \ldots, k_n) : \sum_{j=1}^{m} k_{\mathbf{a}(j)} \to \sum_{i=1}^{n} k_i$$

Definition by example. If $\mathbf{a} : 4 \to 4$ is:



Then $\mathbf{a} \wr (3, 2, 3, 2) : 9 \to 10$ is:



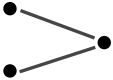
A *faithful cartesian club* is a wide subcategory of $\mathbf{Fun}$ that is closed under $+$ (from the monoidal structure) and $\wr$ (the wreath product).

Club $\mathfrak{S}$	Consists of
Id	identities
Bij	bijections
Minj	monotone injections
Inj	injections
Srj	surjections
Fun	functions

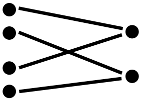
Table: Some faithful cartesian clubs

Notably, the monotone surjections and monotone functions do not form faithful cartesian clubs.

The following map $\mathbf{a} : 2 \to 1$ is a monotone surjection:

$\mathbf{a} \quad \leftrightsquigarrow$ 

But $\mathbf{a} \wr (2)$ is not monotone:

$\mathbf{a} \wr (2) \quad \leftrightsquigarrow$ 

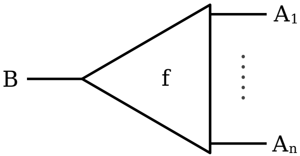
So these classes of function are not closed under wreath product.

A *multicategory* $\mathcal{M}$ has: (Part 1 of 2)

A set of *objects* $\mathcal{M}_0$

Sets of *morphisms* $\mathcal{M}(A_1, \ldots, A_n; B)$ for each $A_1, \ldots, A_n, B \in \mathcal{M}$

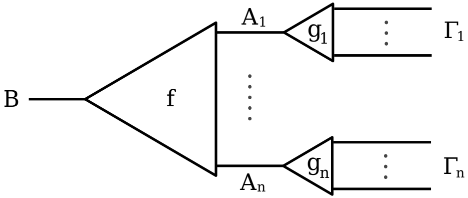
Identity morphisms $1_A \in \mathcal{M}(A; A)$ for each $A \in \mathcal{M}_0$



A *multicategory* $\mathcal{M}$ has: (Part 2 of 2)

For each $f \in \mathcal{M}(A_1, \ldots, A_n; B)$ and $(g_i \in \mathcal{M}(\Gamma_i; A_i))_{i \in \{1,\ldots,n\}}$

A *composite* $f \circ (g_1, \ldots, g_n) \in \mathcal{M}(\Gamma_1, \ldots, \Gamma_n; B)$

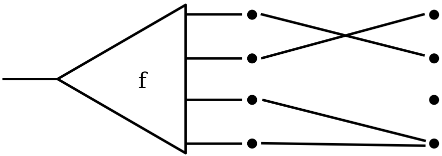


Satisfying sensible associativity and unitality axioms.

For $\mathfrak{S}$ a faithful cartesian club, an $\mathfrak{S}$-*multicategory* is a multicategory $\mathcal{M}$ equipped with an operation:

$$\mathcal{M}(A_{\mathbf{a}(1)}, \ldots, A_{\mathbf{a}(m)}; B) \xrightarrow{[-]\mathbf{a}} \mathcal{M}(A_1, \ldots, A_n; B)$$

for each $\mathbf{a} : m \to n$ of $\mathfrak{S}$, satisfying sensible axioms.



For example, there is a $\mathbf{Fun}$-multicategory Set where Set$(A_1, \ldots, A_n; B)$ is the set of functions $A_1 \times \cdots A_n \to B$.

The wreath product shows up in the following axiom:

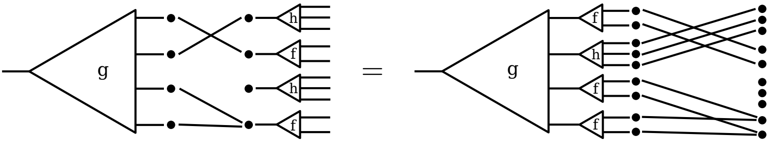
$$[g]\mathbf{a} \circ (f_1, \ldots, f_n) = [g \circ (f_{\mathbf{a}(1)}, \ldots, f_{\mathbf{a}(m)})](\mathbf{a} \wr (k_1, \ldots, k_n))$$

where each k_i is the arity of f_i.

For example, if $f/_2$, $g/_4$ and $h/_3$ and $\mathbf{a} : 4 \to 4$ as below then:

$$[g]\mathbf{a} \circ (h, f, h, f) = [g \circ (f, h, f, f)](\mathbf{a} \wr (3, 2, 3, 2))$$

which is pictured as in:



Instances:

- An $\mathbf{Id}$-multicategory is just a multicategory.
- A $\mathbf{Bij}$-multicategory precisely a *symmetric multicategory*.
- A $\mathbf{Fun}$-multicategory is precisely a *cartesian multicategory*.

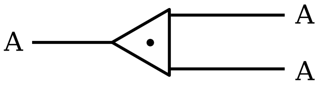
Reference:

Shulman. "Categorical Logic from a Categorical Point of View" (2016)
`https://mikeshulman.github.io/catlog/catlog.pdf`.

3. Combinatory Completeness in Structured Multicategories

Fix a faithful cartesian club $\mathfrak{S}$ and an $\mathfrak{S}$-multicategory $\mathcal{M}$.

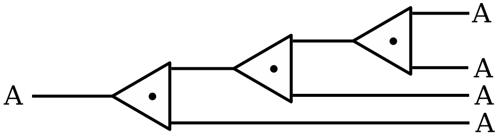
An *applicative system in* $\mathcal{M}$ is $(A, \bullet)$ where $\bullet \in \mathcal{M}(A, A; A)$.



We define *iterated application* $\bullet^n \in \mathcal{M}(A, A^n; A)$ for each $n \in \mathbb{N}$:

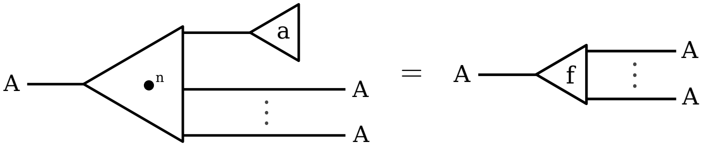
$$\bullet^0 = 1_A \qquad\qquad \bullet^{n+1} = \bullet \circ (\bullet^n, 1_A)$$

So that for example $\bullet^3 \in \mathcal{M}(A, A, A, A; A)$ is:



and $\bullet^1 = \bullet \in \mathcal{M}(A, A; A)$.

We say that $f \in \mathcal{M}(A^n; A)$ is *computable* in case there exists some $a \in \mathcal{M}(; A)$ such that $\bullet^n \circ (a, 1_A, \ldots, 1_A) = f$, as in:



All $a \in \mathcal{M}(; A)$ are computable as in $\bullet^0 \circ (a) = 1_A \circ (a) = a$.

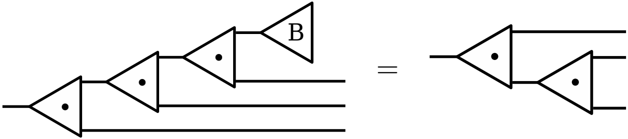
Define the *regular* $\mathfrak{S}$*-polynomials* over $(A, \bullet)$ to be the smallest sub-$\mathfrak{S}$-multicategory of $\mathcal{M}$ containing $\bullet \in \mathcal{M}(A, A; A)$.

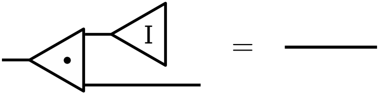
Say that $(A, \bullet)$ is *weakly* $\mathfrak{S}$*-combinatory complete* in case every $\mathfrak{S}$-polynomial over $(A, \bullet)$ is computable.

Define the $\mathfrak{S}$-*polynomials* over $(A, \bullet)$ to be the smallest sub-$\mathfrak{S}$-multicategory of $\mathcal{M}$ containing $\bullet \in \mathcal{M}(A, A; A)$ and all $a \in \mathcal{M}(; A)$.

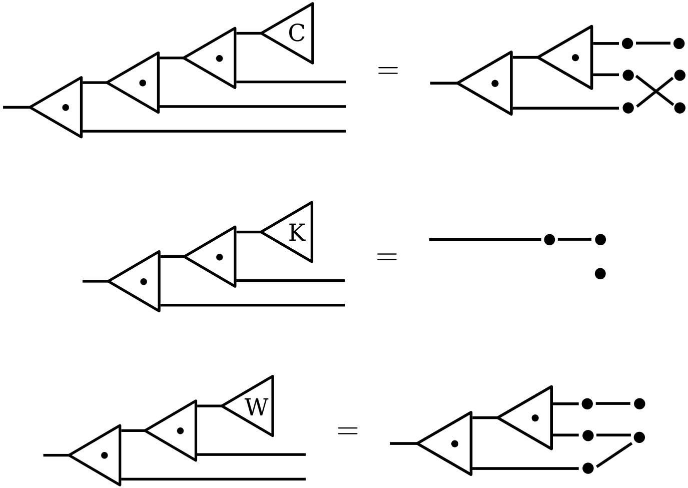
Say that $(A, \bullet)$ is $\mathfrak{S}$-*combinatory complete* in case every $\mathfrak{S}$-polynomial over $(A, \bullet)$ is computable.

Combinators: (Part 1 of 2)





Combinators: (Part 2 of 2)



Theorem(s) about weak $\mathfrak{S}$-combinatory completeness:

Club $\mathfrak{S}$	Consists of	Characterises
Id	identities	BI-algebras
Bij	bijections	BCI-algebras
Minj	monotone injections	BKI-algebras
Inj	injections	BCKI-algebras
Srj	surjections	BCWI-algebras
Fun	functions	BCKWI-algebras

Table: Weak $\mathfrak{S}$-combinatory completeness results

For example, an aplicative system in a **Bij**-multicategory is weakly **Bij**-combinatory complete iff it is a BCI-algebra.

What about (non-weak) $\mathfrak{S}$-combinatory completeness?

Lemma

Let $\mathfrak{S}$ be a faithful cartesian club that contains the bijections, let $\mathcal{M}$ be an $\mathfrak{S}$-multicategory, and let $(A, \bullet)$ be a BCI*-algebra in $\mathcal{M}$. Then $(A, \bullet)$ is $\mathfrak{S}$-combinatory complete if and only if it is weakly $\mathfrak{S}$-combinatory complete.*

We need[1] C. Without it e.g., $x_1 a$ is not $(A, \bullet)$-computable.

[1] or something similar (Tomita)

Our table gains a new column:

Club $\mathfrak{S}$	Consists of	Characterises	Only Weak
Id	identities	BI-algebras	Yes
Bij	bijections	BCI-algebras	No
Minj	monotone injections	BKI-algebras	Yes
Inj	injections	BCKI-algebras	No
Srj	surjections	BCWI-algebras	No
Fun	functions	BCKWI-algebras	No

Table: $\mathfrak{S}$-combinatory completeness results

For example, an applicative system in a $\mathbf{Bij}$-multicategory is $\mathbf{Bij}$-combinatory complete iff it is weakly $\mathbf{Bij}$-combinatory complete iff it is a BCI-algebra.

However, the correspondence is slightly weaker between $\mathbf{Id}$-combinatory completeness and BI-algebras.

Our table gains a new column:

Club $\mathfrak{S}$	Consists of	Characterises	Only Weak
Id	identities	BI-algebras	Yes
Bij	bijections	BCI-algebras	No
Minj	monotone injections	BKI-algebras	Yes
Inj	injections	BCKI-algebras	No
Srj	surjections	BCWI-algebras	No
Fun	functions	BCKWI-algebras	No

Table: $\mathfrak{S}$-combinatory completeness results

Our Paper:
"Combinatory Completeness in Structured Multicategories"
To appear in the proceedings of RAMICS 2026.
(also on arXiv: `https://www.arxiv.org/abs/2511.17152`).

RAMICS

(Relational and Algebraic Methods in Computer Science)

7-10th April 2026

Submit a presentation/tutorial until February 26th!

`https://ramics-conf.github.io/2026/`

!!!!! End of Peer-Reviewed Material !!!!!

4. Miscellany

Suppose $\mathfrak{S}$ contains the bijections. Let $\mathcal{M}$ be an $\mathfrak{S}$-multicategory.

If $(A, \bullet)$ is $\mathfrak{S}$-combinatory complete in $\mathcal{M}$, then the $(A, \bullet)$-computable maps form a sub-$\mathfrak{S}$-multicategory of $\mathcal{M}$.

In fact, the $(A, \bullet)$-computable maps form a sub-$\mathfrak{S}$-multicategory of $\mathcal{M}$ **if and only if** $(A, \bullet)$ is $\mathfrak{S}$-combinatory complete.

For example, for an applicative system $(A, \bullet)$ in a $\mathbf{Bij}$-multicategory $\mathcal{M}$, TFAE:

- $(A, \bullet)$ is a BCI-algebra.
- $(A, \bullet)$ is weakly $\mathfrak{S}$-combinatory complete.
- $(A, \bullet)$ is $\mathfrak{S}$-combinatory complete.
- $(A, \bullet)$-computable maps form a sub-$\mathfrak{S}$-multicategory of $\mathcal{M}$.

So too for BCWI-algebras, BCKI-algebras, and BCKWI-algebras. (i.e., for the faithful cartesian clubs $\mathbf{Srj}$, $\mathbf{Inj}$, and $\mathbf{Fun}$.)

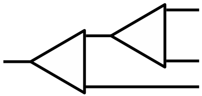
This is **not the case** for e.g., BI-algebras.

Essentially for the same reasons that weak $\mathbf{Id}$-combinatory completeness and $\mathbf{Id}$-combinatory completeness do not coincide.

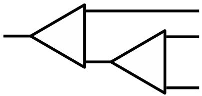
What do the computable maps of a BI-algebra form?

Say that a *left-multicategory* is "like a multicategory, but we can only compose along the topmost input wire / first element of the domain sequence":

Yes:



No:



The domain sequence must be nonempty.

The computable maps of a BI-algebra form a left-multicategory.

Every inclusion of a left-multicategory into a multicategory defines a *skew multicategory*. (Bourke and Lack 2017)

So the inclusion of the computable maps into the ambient multicategory defies a skew multicategory.

Also, the *fully left-associated terms* (e.g., $x_1 x_2 x_3$ but not $x_1(x_2 x_3)$) define a left-multicategory.

The LHS of every combinator equation (e.g., $\mathsf{C}xyz = xzy$) is fully left-associated.

Skew multicategories are closely related to *skew monoidal categories* (Szlachanyi 2012).

Basic idea: $(A \otimes B) \otimes C \to A \otimes (B \otimes C)$ instead of $\simeq$.

Symmetric skew monoidal categories (Bourke and Lack 2020) have:

$$(A \otimes B) \otimes C \to (A \otimes C) \otimes B$$

Compare to $\mathsf{B}xyz = x(yz)$ and $\mathsf{C}xyz = xzy$. Indeed, BCI-algebras make sense in any symmetric skew monoidal category.

Something is going on here!

. . . but we don't really know what

. . . **yet!**

End of talk. Thanks for listening!

Club $\mathfrak{S}$	Consists of	Characterises	Only Weak
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