

*Notes: These are notes on an online graduate course in stacks by Jarod Alper in Spring 2021. As such, any errors or inaccuracies are almost certainly my own.*

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# Introduction to Stacks and Moduli

Lectures by Jarod Alper. University of Washington, Spring 2021

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# 1 | Friday, July 30

References:

- Course website: <https://sites.math.washington.edu/~jarod/math582C.html>
- Gómez 99: Expository article on algebraic stacks

**Remark 1.0.1:** Stated goal of the course: prove that the moduli space  $\overline{\mathcal{M}}_g$  of stable curves (for  $g \geq 2$ ) is a smooth, proper, irreducible Deligne-Mumford stack of dimension  $3g - 3$ . Moreover, it admits a projective coarse moduli space.

In the process we'll define **algebraic spaces** and **stacks**.

Prerequisites:

- Schemes
- Existence of Hilbert schemes
- Artin approximation
- Resolution of singularities for surfaces
- Deformation theory

## 2 | Lecture 3: Groupoids and Prestacks (Monday, September 06)

### 2.1 Groupoids

**Remark 2.1.1:** Last time: functors, sheaves on sites, descent, and Artin approximation. Today: groupoids and stacks.

Recall that a **site**  $S$  is a category such that for all  $U \in \text{Ob}(S)$ , there exists a set  $\text{Cov}(U) := \{U_i \rightarrow U\}_{i \in I}$  (a *covering family*) such that

- $\text{id}_U \in \text{Cov}(U)$ ,
- $\text{Cov}(U)$  is closed under composition.
- $\text{Cov}(U)$  is closed under pullbacks:

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 \exists U_i \times_U V & \xrightarrow{\quad \quad \quad} & U_i \\
 \downarrow & \searrow \in \text{Cov}(U) & \downarrow \in \text{Cov}(U) \\
 V & \xrightarrow{\quad \quad \quad} & U
 \end{array}$$

[Link to Diagram](#)

**Example 2.1.2 (The big étale site):** Take  $\mathcal{S} := \text{Sch}_{\text{ét}}$  to be the big étale site: the category of all schemes, with covering families given by étale morphisms  $\{U_i \rightarrow U\}_{i \in I}$  such that  $\coprod_i U_i \rightarrow U$ . Note that there is a special covering family given by *surjective* étale morphisms.

Reducing to case of single surjective étale cover somehow?

**Definition 2.1.3** (Sheaves on sites)

Let  $\mathcal{C}$  be a category (e.g.  $\mathcal{C} := \text{Set}$ ) and recall that a *presheaf* on a category  $\mathcal{S}$  is a contravariant functor  $\mathcal{S} \rightarrow \mathcal{C}$ .

A  $\mathcal{C}$ -valued **sheaf** on a site  $\mathcal{S}$  is a presheaf

$$\mathcal{F} : \mathcal{S} \rightarrow \mathcal{C}$$

such that for all  $U_i, U_j \in \text{Cov}(U)$ , the following equalizer diagram is exact in  $\mathcal{C}$

$$0 \longrightarrow \mathcal{F}(U) \rightrightarrows \prod_i \mathcal{F}(U_i) \rightrightarrows \prod_{i,j} \mathcal{F}(U_i \times_U U_j)$$

**Exercise 2.1.4** (Criterion for sheaves on the big étale site)

Show that a presheaf  $F$  is a sheaf on  $\text{Sch}_{\text{ét}}$  iff

- $F$  is a sheaf on  $\text{Sch}_{\text{Zar}}$  and
- For all étale surjections  $U' \twoheadrightarrow_{\text{ét}} U$  of affines, the equalizer diagram is exact.

**Proposition 2.1.5 (Yoneda).**

For  $X \in \text{Sch}$ , the presheaf

$$h_X := \text{Mor}(-, X) : \text{Sch} \rightarrow \text{Set}$$

is a sheaf on  $\text{Sch}_{\text{ét}}$ .

**Remark 2.1.6:** We'll often consider *moduli functors*: functors  $F : \text{Sch} \rightarrow \text{Set}$  where  $F(S)$  is a family of objects over  $S$ . Then  $F$  will be a sheaf iff families glue uniquely in the étale topology, and representability of such functors will imply they are sheaves.

**Example 2.1.7 (A non-sheaf):** Consider the following moduli functor:

$$F_{\text{Alg}} : \text{Sch} \rightarrow \text{Set}$$

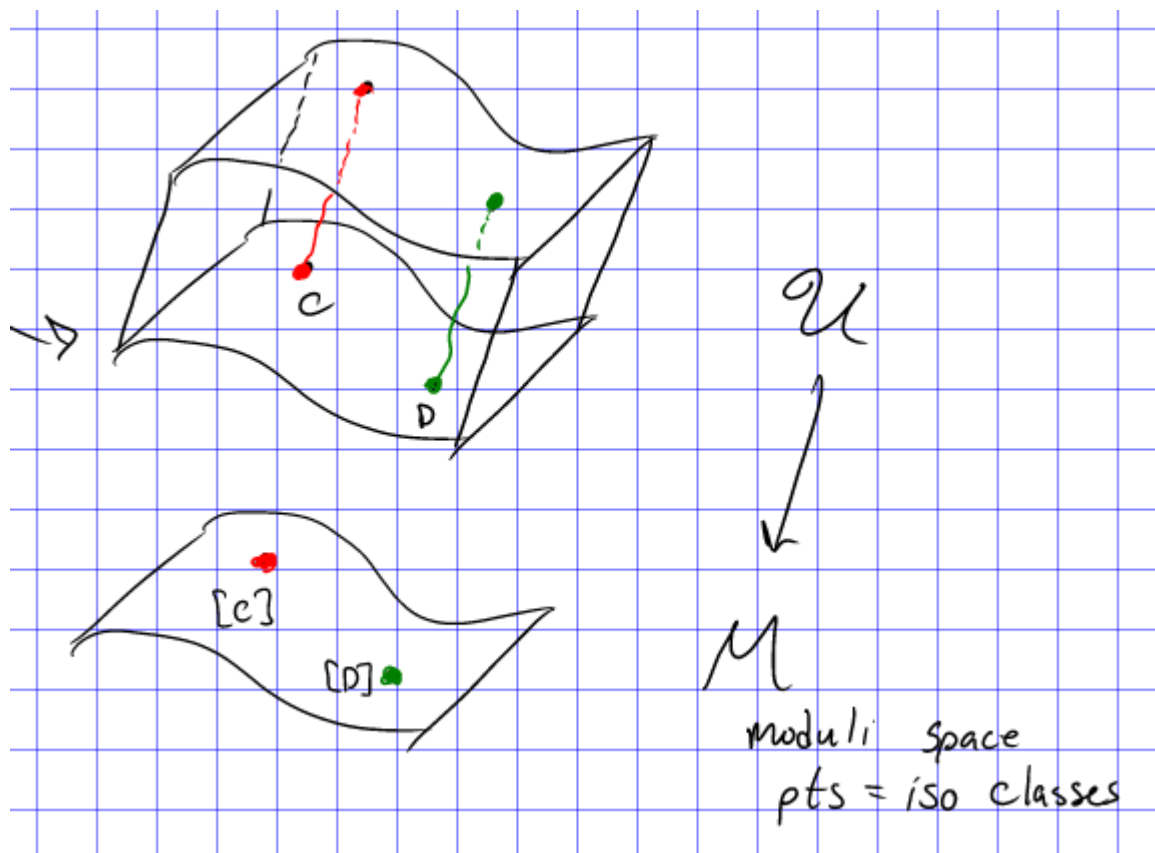
$$S \mapsto \left\{ \begin{array}{c} \mathcal{C} \\ \downarrow \\ S \end{array} \right. \text{ Smooth families of} \\ \text{genus } g \text{ curves.}$$

This is *not* representable by a scheme and not a sheaf.

**Remark 2.1.8:** Why care about representability? Suppose there were a scheme  $M$ , so

$$F_{\text{Alg}}(S) \simeq \text{Mor}(S, M).$$

Then taking  $\text{id}_M \in \text{Mor}(M, M)$  should yield a universal family  $\mathcal{U} \rightarrow M$ :



Then the points of  $M$  would correspond to isomorphism classes of curves, and every family of curves would be a pullback of this.

For any  $S \in \mathbf{Sch}$  and a family  $\mathcal{C} \xrightarrow{f} S$ , the fiber  $f^{-1}(s) \in \mathcal{C}$  is a curve for any  $s \in S$ , so one could define a map

$$\begin{aligned} g : S &\rightarrow M \\ s &\mapsto [s], \end{aligned}$$

where we send a curve to its isomorphism class. Then  $\mathcal{C}$  would fit into a pullback diagram:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \mathcal{C} & \overset{\quad}{\dashrightarrow} & \mathcal{U} \\ \downarrow & \lrcorner & \downarrow \\ S & \longrightarrow & M \end{array}$$

[Link to Diagram](#)

If  $S$  was itself a curve, then  $g : S \rightarrow M$  would be a path in  $M$  deforming a base curve.

## 2.2 Groupoids

**Remark 2.2.1:** Recall that a **groupoid** is a category where every morphism is an isomorphism. Morphisms of groupoids are functors, and isomorphisms of groupoids are equivalences of categories.

**Example 2.2.2 (Groupoid of a set):** A basic example is the category of sets where

$$\mathrm{Mor}(A, B) := \begin{cases} \mathrm{id}_A & A = B \\ \emptyset & \text{else.} \end{cases}$$

A similar construction: for any set  $\Sigma$ , one can form a groupoid  $\mathcal{C}_\Sigma$ :

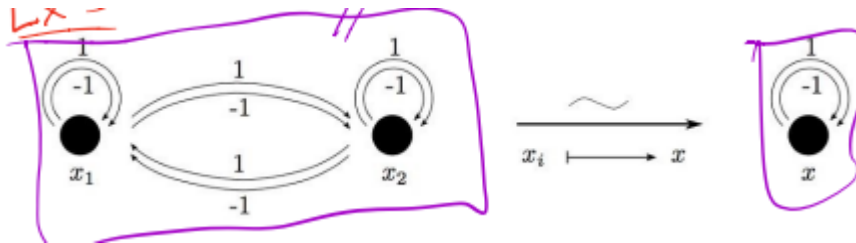
- Object: Elements  $x \in \Sigma$ .
- Morphisms:  $\mathrm{id}_x$

**Example 2.2.3 (Moduli of curves):** Define a category  $\mathcal{M}_g(\mathbb{C})$ :

- Objects: smooth projective curves over  $\mathbb{C}$  of genus  $g$ .
- Morphisms:

$$\mathrm{Mor}(C, C') = \mathrm{Isom}_{\mathrm{Sch}/\mathbb{C}}(C, C') \subseteq \mathrm{Mor}_{\mathrm{Sch}/\mathbb{C}}(C, C').$$

**Example 2.2.4 (Equivalence of groupoids):** Groupoids are equivalent iff they are equivalent as categories. The following is an example of mapping the quotient groupoid  $[C_2/C_4]$  to  $BC_2$ :



**Example 2.2.5 (Groupoids equivalent to sets):** If a groupoid  $\mathfrak{X}$  is equivalent to  $C_\Sigma$  for any  $\Sigma \in \mathbf{Set}$ , we say  $\mathfrak{X}$  is **equivalent to a set**. For example, the following groupoid is equivalent to a 2-element set:



**Example 2.2.6 (Quotient groupoids):** For  $G \curvearrowright \Sigma$  a group acting on any set, define the **quotient groupoid**  $[\Sigma/G]$  in the following way:

- Objects:  $x \in \Sigma$ , i.e. one object for each element of the set  $\Sigma$ .
- Morphisms:  $\text{Mor}(x, x') = \{g \in G \mid gx' = x\}$ .

**Exercise 2.2.7** (Groupoids equivalent to sets)

Show that  $[\Sigma/G]$  is equivalent to a set iff  $G \curvearrowright \Sigma$  is a free action.

**Example 2.2.8 (Classifying stacks):** For  $\Sigma = \{\text{pt}\}$ , we obtain

$$BG := [\text{pt}/G],$$

where there is one object  $\text{pt}$  and  $\text{Mor}(\text{pt}, \text{pt}) = G$ .

**Example 2.2.9 (from representation stability):** Define  $\mathbf{FinSet}$  to be the category of finite sets where the morphisms are set bijections. Then  $\mathbf{FinSet} = \coprod_{n \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}} BS_n$  for  $S_n$  the symmetric group.

**Definition 2.2.10** (Fiber products of groupoids)

For  $C, D' \rightarrow D$  morphisms of groupoids, we can construct their **fiber product** as the cartesian diagram:

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 C \times_D D' & \xrightarrow{\text{pr}_2} & D' \\
 \text{pr}_1 \downarrow & & \downarrow g \\
 C & \xrightarrow{f} & D
 \end{array}$$

[Link to Diagram](#)

It can be constructed as the following category:

$$\text{Ob}(C \times_D D') := \left\{ (c, d', \alpha) \left| \begin{array}{l} c \in C, d' \in D', \\ \alpha : f(c) \xrightarrow{\sim} g(d') \end{array} \right. \right\}$$

$$\text{Mor}((c_1, d'_1, \alpha_1), (c_2, d'_2, \alpha_2)) := \left\{ \begin{array}{c} c_1 \xrightarrow{\beta} c_2 \\ d'_1 \xrightarrow{\gamma} d'_2 \end{array} \left| \begin{array}{ccc} f(c_1) & \xrightarrow{f(\beta)} & f(c_2) \\ \alpha_1 \downarrow & & \downarrow \alpha_2 \\ g(d'_1) & \xrightarrow{g(\gamma)} & g(d'_2) \end{array} \right. \right\}$$

**Exercise 2.2.11** (Universal property of pullbacks in Groupoids)

Describe the universal property of the pullback in the 2-category of groupoids.

**Example 2.2.12** ( *$G$  is a pullback of  $BG$* ):  $G$  regarded as a groupoid is the pullback over inclusions of points into  $BG$ :

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 G & \longrightarrow & \text{pt} \\
 \downarrow & \lrcorner & \downarrow \\
 \text{pt} & \longrightarrow & BG
 \end{array}$$

[Link to Diagram](#)

**Example 2.2.13** (*Orbit/Stabilizer*): Let  $G \curvearrowright \Sigma$  and  $x \in \Sigma$ , and let  $Gx$  be the orbit and  $G_x$  be the stabilizer. Then there is a morphism of groupoids  $f \in \text{Mor}(BG_x, [\Sigma/G])$  inducing a pullback:



$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 G_x & \xrightarrow{\quad} & \Sigma \\
 \downarrow & \lrcorner & \downarrow \\
 BG_x & \xrightarrow{\exists f} & [\Sigma/G] \\
 \\ 
 \text{pt} & \xrightarrow{\quad} & x
 \end{array}$$

[Link to Diagram](#)

## 2.3 Prestacks

**Remark 2.3.1:** Motivation: to specify a moduli functor, we'll need the data of

- Families over  $S$ ,
- How to pull back families under morphisms, and
- *How* objects are isomorphic.

As a first attempt, we might try to define a 2-functor  $F : \mathbf{Sch} \rightarrow \mathbf{Grpd}$  between 2-categories, where the latter is the category of groupoids. For this, we need the following data:

- For all  $S \in \mathbf{Sch}$ , an assignment of a groupoid  $F(S)$ ,
- For all morphisms  $f \in \mathbf{Mor}_{\mathbf{Sch}}(S, T)$ , an assignment of morphisms of groupoids

$$f^* \in \mathbf{Mor}_{\mathbf{Grpd}}(F(T), F(S)).$$

- For compositions of morphisms of schemes  $S \xrightarrow{f} T \xrightarrow{g} U$ , an isomorphism of functors

$$\psi_{fg} : g^* \circ f^* \xrightarrow{\sim} (g \circ f)^*.$$

- Compatibility of these isomorphisms on chains of compositions  $S \rightarrow T \rightarrow U \rightarrow V \rightarrow \dots$ .<sup>1</sup>

This is a lot of data to track, so instead we'll construct a large category  $\mathfrak{X}$  that encodes all of this, along with a fibration

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 \mathfrak{X} := \coprod_{S \in \mathbf{Sch}} F(S) & & (S, \alpha \in F(S)) \\
 \downarrow p & & \downarrow \\
 \mathbf{Sch} & & S
 \end{array}$$

Here  $S \in \mathbf{Sch}$  and  $F(S) \in \mathbf{Grpd}$ , so the “fibers” above  $S$  are groupoids.

<sup>1</sup>This leads to the notion of **lax** or **pseudofunctors**.

**Definition 2.3.2** (Prestack)

Let  $p : \mathfrak{X} \rightarrow \mathbf{C}$  be a functor between two 1-categories, so we have the following data:

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 \mathfrak{X} & & \\
 \downarrow p & & \\
 \mathbf{C} & & 
 \end{array}
 \quad
 \begin{array}{ccc}
 a & \xrightarrow{\alpha} & b \\
 \downarrow & & \downarrow \\
 S & \xrightarrow{f} & T
 \end{array}
 \quad
 \begin{array}{l}
 \in \text{Ob}(\mathfrak{X}) \\
 \\
 \in \text{Ob}(\mathbf{C})
 \end{array}$$

[Link to Diagram](#)

Then  $\mathfrak{X}, p$  define a **prestack** over  $\mathbf{C}$  iff

- Pullbacks exist: for  $S \xrightarrow{f} T$ , there exists a (not necessarily unique) map  $f^*b$ , sometimes denoted  $b|_f$ , yielding a cartesian square:

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 \exists a & \xrightarrow{f^*b = b|_f} & b \\
 \downarrow & \lrcorner & \downarrow \\
 S & \xrightarrow{f} & T
 \end{array}$$

[Link to Diagram](#)

- A universal property making  $\mathfrak{X}$  a *fibered category*: every arrow in  $\mathfrak{X}$  is a pullback, so there are always lifts of the following form:

$$\begin{array}{ccccc}
 a & \xrightarrow{\exists!} & b & \longrightarrow & c \\
 \downarrow & \lrcorner & \downarrow & & \downarrow \\
 R & \longrightarrow & S & \longrightarrow & R
 \end{array}$$

[Link to Diagram](#)

**Slogan 2.3.3**

An alternative definition: a prestack is a category *fibered in groupoids*.

**Warning 2.3.4**


We often conflate  $\mathfrak{X}$  and the functor  $\mathfrak{X} \xrightarrow{p} \mathbf{C}$ , and don't spell out the composition law in  $\mathfrak{X}$ . Moreover, we write  $f^*b$  or  $b|_f$  for a *choice* of a pullback.

**Definition 2.3.5** (Fiber Categories)

For  $p : \mathfrak{X} \rightarrow \mathbf{C}$  a functor and  $S \in \text{Ob}(\mathbf{C})$  any fixed object, the associated **fiber category over  $S$** , denoted  $\mathfrak{X}(S)$ , is the subcategory of  $\mathfrak{X}$  defined by:

- Objects:  $a \in \text{Ob}(\mathfrak{X})$  such that  $a \xrightarrow{p} S$ ,
- Morphisms:  $\text{Mor}(a, a')$  are morphisms  $f \in \text{Mor}_{\mathfrak{X}}(a, a')$  over  $\text{id}_S$ :

$$\begin{array}{ccc} a & \xrightarrow{f} & a' \\ & \searrow & \swarrow \\ & S & \end{array}$$

**Remark 2.3.6:** We can now equivalently define presheaves as categories fibered in sets. 

**Exercise 2.3.7** (Justifying 'category fibered in groupoids')

Show that if  $\mathfrak{X} \rightarrow \mathbb{C}$  is a prestack, then for all  $S \in \mathbb{C}$ , all maps in  $\mathfrak{X}(S)$  are invertible. Conclude that the fiber categories  $\mathfrak{X}(S)$  are all groupoids.


**Example 2.3.8 (Presheaves):** Every presheaf forms a prestack. Let  $F \in \mathbf{Sh}_{\text{pre}}(\text{Sch}, \text{Set})$  be a presheaf of sets, and define  $\mathfrak{X}_F$  as the following category:

- Objects: Pairs  $(S, a \in F(S))$  where  $S \in \text{Sch}$  and  $F(s) \in \text{Set}$ .
- Morphisms:

$$\text{Mor}((S, a), (T, b)) := \left\{ S \xrightarrow{f} T \mid a = f^*b \right\}.$$

Note that we'll often conflate  $F$  and  $\mathfrak{X}_F$ . This yields the fibration

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \mathfrak{X}_F & & (S, a) \\ \downarrow p & & \downarrow \\ \text{Sch} & & S \end{array}$$

[Link to Diagram](#) 

**Example 2.3.9 (Schemes):** For  $X \in \text{Sch}$ , take its Yoneda functor  $h_X : \text{Sch} \rightarrow \text{Set}$ . Then define the category  $\mathfrak{X}_X$ :

- Objects: Morphisms  $S \rightarrow X$  of schemes.
- Morphisms:  $\text{Mor}(S \rightarrow X, T \rightarrow X)$  are morphisms over  $X$ :

$$\begin{array}{ccc} S & \longrightarrow & T \\ & \searrow & \swarrow \\ & X & \end{array}$$

This yields the fibration

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \mathfrak{X}_X & & (S \rightarrow X) \\ \downarrow p & & \downarrow \\ \text{Sch} & & S \end{array}$$

[Link to Diagram](#)

**Example 2.3.10 (Moduli of curves):** Define  $\mathcal{M}_g$  as the following category:

- Objects: families  $\mathcal{C} \rightarrow S$  of smooth genus  $g$  curves,
- Morphisms:  $\text{Mor}(\mathcal{C} \rightarrow S, \mathcal{C}' \rightarrow S')$ : cartesian squares

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \mathcal{C} & \longrightarrow & \mathcal{C}' \\ \downarrow & \lrcorner & \downarrow \\ S & \longrightarrow & S' \end{array}$$

[Link to Diagram](#)

This yields a fibration

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \mathcal{M}_g & & (\mathcal{C} \rightarrow S) \\ \downarrow & & \downarrow \\ \text{Sch} & & S \end{array}$$

**Example 2.3.11 (Bundles):** For  $C$  a smooth connected projective curve over  $k$  a field, define  $\text{Bun}(C)$  as the following category:

- Objects: pairs  $(S, F)$  where  $F$  is a vector bundle over  $C \times S$ .
- Morphisms:

$$\text{Mor}((S, F), (S', F')) = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} f \in \text{Mor}_{\text{Sch}}(S, S') \\ \text{and a chosen isomorphism} \\ \alpha : (f \times \text{id})^* \circ F' \xrightarrow{\sim} F \end{array} \right\}.$$

**Remark 2.3.12:** A technical point: the choice of pushforward here is not necessarily canonical. However, as part of the data, one can take morphisms  $F' \rightarrow (f \times \text{id})_* \circ F$  such that the adjunction yields an isomorphism.

**Example 2.3.13 (Quotient prestack):** Let  $X/S \in \text{GrpSch}$  where  $G \curvearrowright X$ . Then define a category  $[X/G]^{\text{pre}}$ :

- Objects: Morphisms over  $\text{id}_S$ :

$$\begin{array}{ccc} T & \xrightarrow{\quad} & X \\ & \searrow & \swarrow \\ & S & \end{array}$$

- Morphisms:

$$\text{Mor}(T \rightarrow X, T' \rightarrow X) := \left\{ T \rightarrow T' \left| \begin{array}{l} (T \rightarrow T' \rightarrow X) = g(T \rightarrow X) \\ g \in G(T) \\ G(T) \curvearrowright X(T) \end{array} \right. \right\}.$$

**Remark 2.3.14:** A group scheme can alternatively be thought of as a functor with a factorization through  $\text{Grp}$ .

**Exercise 2.3.15** (Quotient prestacks and quotient groupoids)

Show that for  $T \in \text{Sch}$ , there is an equivalence

$$[X/G]^{\text{pre}}(T) \xrightarrow{\sim} [X(T)/G(T)],$$

where the left-hand side is a fibered category over  $T$  and the right-hand side is a quotient groupoid.

### 2.3.1 Morphisms of Prestacks

**Definition 2.3.16** (Morphisms of prestacks)

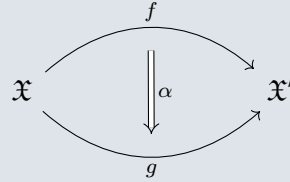
A **morphism of prestacks** is a functor  $\mathfrak{X} \xrightarrow{f} \mathfrak{X}'$  such that there is a (strictly) commutative triangle

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \mathfrak{X} & \xrightarrow{f} & \mathfrak{X}' \\ & \searrow p_X & \swarrow p_{X'} \\ & \mathcal{C} & \end{array}$$

[Link to Diagram](#)

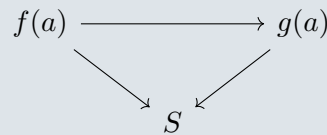
Here we require a strict equality  $p_X(a) = p_Y(f(a))$  for any  $a \in \mathfrak{X}$

A **2-morphism**  $\alpha$  between morphisms  $f, g$  is a natural transformation:



[Link to Diagram](#)

such that for all  $a \in \mathfrak{X}$ , the following triangle  $\alpha_a \in \text{Mor}_{\mathfrak{X}'}(f(a), g(a))$  is a morphism over  $\text{id}_S$  for any  $S \in \mathbf{C}$ :



We define a category  $\text{Mor}(\mathfrak{X}, \mathfrak{X}')$  by:

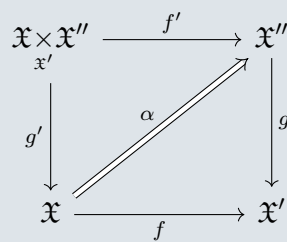
- Objects: morphisms of prestacks.
- Morphisms: 2-morphisms of prestacks.

### Exercise 2.3.17 (?)

Show that  $\text{Mor}(\mathfrak{X}, \mathfrak{X}')$  is a groupoid.

### Definition 2.3.18 (2-commutativity)

A diagram is **2-commutative** iff there exists a 2-morphism  $\alpha : g \circ f' \xrightarrow{\sim} f \circ g'$  which is an isomorphism:



[Link to Diagram](#)

### Definition 2.3.19 (Isomorphisms of prestacks)

An **isomorphism** of prestacks is a 1-isomorphism of prestacks  $f : \mathfrak{X} \rightarrow \mathfrak{X}'$  along with 2-isomorphisms  $g \circ f \xrightarrow{\sim} \text{id}_{\mathfrak{X}}$  and  $f \circ g \xrightarrow{\sim} \text{id}_{\mathfrak{X}'}$ .

### Exercise 2.3.20 (Isomorphisms of prestacks can be checked on fibers)

Show that  $\mathfrak{X} \rightarrow \mathfrak{X}'$  is an isomorphism iff  $\mathfrak{X}(S) \xrightarrow{\sim} \mathfrak{X}'(S)$  is an isomorphism on all fibers.

**Proposition 2.3.21 (2-Yoneda).**

If  $\mathfrak{X} \in \mathbf{St}_{\text{pre}}/\mathcal{C}$  is a prestack over  $\mathcal{C}$ , then for any  $S \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$ , there is an equivalence of categories induced by the following functor:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Mor}(S, \mathfrak{X}) &\xrightarrow{\sim} \mathfrak{X}(S) \\ f &\mapsto f_S(\text{id}_S). \end{aligned}$$

**Remark 2.3.22:** For  $S \in \text{Sch}$ , view  $S$  as a prestack and consider a morphism  $f : S \rightarrow \mathfrak{X}$ . How is this specified? For all  $T \in \text{Sch}$ , the objects of  $S/T$  are morphisms

$$f_T : \text{Mor}(T, S) \rightarrow \mathfrak{X}(T)$$

and if  $T = S$  this sends  $\text{id}_S$  to  $f_S(\text{id}_S) \in \mathfrak{X}(S)$ .

What is the inverse? For  $a \in \mathfrak{X}(S)$  and for each  $T \xrightarrow{g} S$ , **choose** a pullback  $g^*a$ . Then define  $f : S \rightarrow \mathfrak{X}$  by

$$\begin{aligned} f_T : \text{Mor}(T, S) &\rightarrow \mathfrak{X}(T) \\ g &\mapsto g^*a. \end{aligned}$$

**Exercise 2.3.23 (?)**

Define what this equivalence should do on morphisms.

**Remark 2.3.24:** Next time: fiber products of prestacks.

## ToDos

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