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# Moduli Spaces

Edited by

Leticia Brambila-Paz, Oscar García-Prada,  
Peter Newstead and Richard P. Thomas



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# Moduli Spaces

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## Preface

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A programme on Moduli Spaces was held from 4 January to 1 July 2011 at the Isaac Newton Institute for Mathematical Sciences in Cambridge, UK. This volume is based on courses and lectures that took place during this semester and reflects some of the main themes that were covered during the activities.

Moduli spaces play a fundamental role in geometry. They are geometric versions of parameter spaces. That is, they are geometric spaces which parametrise something – each point represents one of the objects being parametrised, such as the solution of a particular equation, or a geometric structure on some other object. In the language of physics, a moduli space models the degrees of freedom of the solutions of some system of equations.

The programme was very successful, with a great deal of activity taking place. There were three main areas of research involved in the programme, namely derived categories, Higgs bundles and character varieties, and vector bundles and coherent systems. Topics that were covered included BPS invariants of 3-folds from derived categories of sheaves, and their motivic and categorified refinements, Hodge polynomials of character varieties, motives of moduli spaces of Higgs bundles and their relation to BPS invariants, Gromov–Witten invariants, notions of stability, Bridgeland stability, stability for pairs, geometric invariant theory constructions, wall-crossing formulae using Kirwan blow-ups,  $d$ -manifolds, a motivic version of Göttsche’s conjecture, the Hilbert scheme of the moduli space of vector bundles, derived categories of quiver representations, mirror symmetry conjecture, ramified non-abelian Hodge theory correspondence, Hitchin fibration and real forms, parahoric bundles, parabolic Higgs bundles and representations of fundamental groups of punctured surfaces, Higgs bundles on Klein surfaces, Higgs bundles and groups of Hermitian type, Higgs bundles over elliptic curves, geometry of moduli spaces of vortices, coherent systems and geometry of moduli of curves, Brill–Noether loci for fixed determinant, Green’s conjecture, Butler’s conjecture, etc.

We saw progress on many of these topics in real time; it is fair to say that the state of the art looked very different at the end of the six months than it did in the introductory school at the beginning.

### **Acknowledgements**

We are indebted to the authors of these articles for their outstanding contributions and to the referees for the care with which they have read the articles and the helpful suggestions they have made. We thank the speakers in the School on Moduli Spaces held in January 2011 on which this book is based and all participants in the school and in the more extensive programme on Moduli Spaces held from 4 January to 1 July 2011.

Our most grateful thanks are due to the Isaac Newton Institute for funding and hosting this activity. The staff of the Institute were unfailingly helpful. We also acknowledge Cambridge University Press for their help in publishing the volume.

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# Contents

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<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i>	ix
<i>List of contributors</i>		xi
<b>1 Introduction to algebraic stacks</b>		<b>1</b>
<i>K. Behrend</i>		
Introduction		3
1.1 Topological stacks: triangles		8
1.1.1 Families and their symmetry groupoids		8
1.1.2 Continuous families		13
1.1.3 Classification		16
1.1.4 Scalene triangles		23
1.1.5 Isosceles triangles		24
1.1.6 Equilateral triangles		26
1.1.7 Oriented triangles		26
1.1.8 Stacks		32
1.1.9 Versal families		34
1.1.10 Degenerate triangles		43
1.1.11 Change of versal family		58
1.1.12 Weierstrass compactification		66
1.2 Formalism		74
1.2.1 Objects in continuous families: categories fibered in groupoids		74
1.2.2 Families characterized locally: prestacks		79
1.2.3 Families which can be glued: stacks		82
1.2.4 Topological stacks		82
1.2.5 Deligne–Mumford topological stacks		89
1.2.6 Lattices up to homothety		96
1.2.7 Fundamental groups of topological stacks		99

1.3	Algebraic stacks	104
1.3.1	Groupoid fibrations	104
1.3.2	Prestacks	107
1.3.3	Algebraic stacks	113
1.3.4	The coarse moduli space	117
1.3.5	Bundles on stacks	120
1.3.6	Stacky curves: the Riemann–Roch theorem	124
<b>2</b>	<b>BPS states and the <math>P = W</math> conjecture</b>	<b>132</b>
	<i>W.-Y. Chuang, D.-E. Diaconescu, and G. Pan</i>	
2.1	Introduction	132
2.2	Hausel–Rodriguez-Villegas formula and $P = W$	138
2.2.1	Hausel–Rodriguez-Villegas formula	139
2.2.2	Hitchin system and $P = W$	140
2.3	Refined stable pair invariants of local curves	141
2.3.1	TQFT formalism	142
2.3.2	Refined invariants from instanton sums	142
2.4	HRV formula as a refined GV expansion	145
<b>3</b>	<b>Representations of surface groups and Higgs bundles</b>	<b>151</b>
	<i>Peter B. Gothen</i>	
3.1	Introduction	151
3.2	Lecture 1: Character varieties for surface groups and harmonic maps	152
3.2.1	Surface group representations and character varieties	152
3.2.2	Review of connections and curvature in principal bundles	153
3.2.3	Surface group representations and flat bundles	155
3.2.4	Flat bundles and gauge equivalence	156
3.2.5	Harmonic metrics in flat bundles	157
3.2.6	The Corlette–Donaldson theorem	159
3.3	Lecture 2: $G$ -Higgs bundles and the Hitchin–Kobayashi correspondence	160
3.3.1	Lie theoretic preliminaries	160
3.3.2	The Hitchin equations	161
3.3.3	$G$ -Higgs bundles, stability and the Hitchin–Kobayashi correspondence	163
3.3.4	The Hitchin map	166
3.3.5	The moduli space of $SU(p, q)$ -Higgs bundles	166

3.4	Lecture 3: Morse–Bott theory of the moduli space of $G$ -Higgs bundles	168
3.4.1	Simple and infinitesimally simple $G$ -Higgs bundles	168
3.4.2	Deformation theory of $G$ -Higgs bundles	169
3.4.3	The $\mathbb{C}^*$ -action and topology of moduli spaces	170
3.4.4	Calculation of Morse indices	172
3.4.5	The moduli space of $\mathrm{Sp}(2n, \mathbb{R})$ -Higgs bundles	174
<b>4</b>	<b>Introduction to stability conditions</b>	<b>179</b>
	<i>D. Huybrechts</i>	
4.1	Torsion theories and t-structures	181
4.1.1	$\mu$ -stability on curves (and surfaces): recollections	181
4.1.2	Torsion theories in abelian categories	186
4.1.3	t-structures on triangulated categories	187
4.1.4	Torsion theories versus t-structures	190
4.2	Stability conditions: definition and examples	192
4.2.1	Slicings	192
4.2.2	Stability conditions	194
4.2.3	$\mathrm{Aut}(\mathcal{D})$ -action and $\widetilde{\mathrm{GL}}^+(2, \mathbb{R})$ -action	198
4.2.4	Stability conditions on curves	200
4.3	Stability conditions on surfaces	203
4.3.1	Classification of hearts	204
4.3.2	Construction of hearts	208
4.4	The topological space of stability conditions	210
4.4.1	Topology of $\mathrm{Slice}(\mathcal{D})$	210
4.4.2	Topology of $\mathrm{Stab}(\mathcal{D})$	213
4.4.3	Main result	214
4.5	Stability conditions on K3 surfaces	216
4.5.1	Main theorem and conjecture	216
4.5.2	Autoequivalences	219
4.5.3	Building up $\mathrm{Stab}(X)^0$	220
4.5.4	Moduli space rephrasing	224
4.6	Further results	226
4.6.1	Non-compact cases	226
4.6.2	Compact cases	227
<b>5</b>	<b>An introduction to d-manifolds and derived differential geometry</b>	<b>230</b>
	<i>Dominic Joyce</i>	
5.1	Introduction	231

5.2	$C^\infty$ -rings and $C^\infty$ -schemes	234
5.2.1	$C^\infty$ -rings	234
5.2.2	$C^\infty$ -schemes	236
5.2.3	Modules over $C^\infty$ -rings, and cotangent modules	239
5.2.4	Quasicoherent sheaves on $C^\infty$ -schemes	240
5.3	The 2-category of d-spaces	243
5.3.1	The definition of d-spaces	243
5.3.2	Gluing d-spaces by equivalences	246
5.3.3	Fibre products in <b>dSpa</b>	249
5.4	The 2-category of d-manifolds	250
5.4.1	The definition of d-manifolds	250
5.4.2	'Standard model' d-manifolds, 1- and 2-morphisms	251
5.4.3	The 2-category of virtual vector bundles	255
5.4.4	Equivalences in <b>dMan</b> , and gluing by equivalences	257
5.4.5	Submersions, immersions and embeddings	259
5.4.6	D-transversality and fibre products	262
5.4.7	Embedding d-manifolds into manifolds	264
5.4.8	Orientations on d-manifolds	266
5.4.9	D-manifolds with boundary and corners, d-orbifolds	269
5.4.10	D-manifold bordism, and virtual cycles	272
5.4.11	Relation to other classes of spaces in mathematics	274
A	Basics of 2-categories	277
<b>6</b>	<b>13/2 ways of counting curves</b>	282
	<i>R. Pandharipande and R. P. Thomas</i>	
0	Introduction	283
$\frac{1}{2}$	Naive counting of curves	287
$1\frac{1}{2}$	Gromov–Witten theory	289
$2\frac{1}{2}$	Gopakumar–Vafa / BPS invariants	294
$3\frac{1}{2}$	Donaldson–Thomas theory	298
$4\frac{1}{2}$	Stable pairs	306
$5\frac{1}{2}$	Stable unramified maps	314
$6\frac{1}{2}$	Stable quotients	319
	Appendix: Virtual classes	324

# 1

## Introduction to algebraic stacks

K. Behrend

*The University of British Columbia*

### Abstract

These are lecture notes based on a short course on stacks given at the Isaac Newton Institute in Cambridge in January 2011. They form a self-contained introduction to some of the basic ideas of stack theory.

### Contents

Introduction	page 3
1.1 Topological stacks: triangles	8
1.1.1 Families and their symmetry groupoids	8
Various types of symmetry groupoids	9
1.1.2 Continuous families	13
Gluing families	14
1.1.3 Classification	16
Pulling back families	18
Moduli map of a family	18
Fine moduli spaces	19
Coarse moduli spaces	22
1.1.4 Scalene triangles	23
1.1.5 Isosceles triangles	24
1.1.6 Equilateral triangles	26
1.1.7 Oriented triangles	26
Non-equilateral oriented triangles	31

1.1.8	Stacks	32
1.1.9	Versal families	34
	Generalized moduli maps	36
	Reconstructing a family from its generalized moduli map	38
	Versal families: definition	40
	Isosceles triangles	41
	Equilateral triangles	42
	Oriented triangles	43
1.1.10	Degenerate triangles	43
	Lengths-of-sides viewpoint	45
	Embedded viewpoint	48
	Complex viewpoint	54
	Oriented degenerate triangles	56
1.1.11	Change of versal family	58
	Oriented triangles by projecting equilateral triangles	59
	Comparison	62
	The comparison theorem	63
1.1.12	Weierstrass compactification	66
	The $j$ -plane	71
1.2	Formalism	74
1.2.1	Objects in continuous families: categories fibered in groupoids	74
	Fibered products of groupoid fibrations	78
1.2.2	Families characterized locally: prestacks	79
	Versal families	80
1.2.3	Families which can be glued: stacks	82
1.2.4	Topological stacks	82
	Topological groupoids	83
	Generalized moduli maps: groupoid torsors	84
	Change of versal family: Morita equivalence of groupoids	86
	Quotient stacks	88
	Separated topological stacks	89
1.2.5	Deligne–Mumford topological stacks	89
	Structure theorem	93
	Orbifolds	95
1.2.6	Lattices up to homothety	96
	Compactification	98
1.2.7	Fundamental groups of topological stacks	99
	The fundamental group of the stack of triangles	101
	More examples	103

1.3 Algebraic stacks	104
1.3.1 Groupoid fibrations	104
Representable morphisms	106
1.3.2 Prestacks	107
Versal families and their symmetry groupoids	111
1.3.3 Algebraic stacks	113
1.3.4 The coarse moduli space	117
1.3.5 Bundles on stacks	120
1.3.6 Stacky curves: the Riemann–Roch theorem	124
Orbifold curves and root stacks	124
Stacky curves	128
References	130

## Introduction

Stacks and algebraic stacks were invented by the Grothendieck school of algebraic geometry in the 1960s. One purpose (see [11]) was to give geometric meaning to higher cohomology classes. The other (see [9] and [2]) was to develop a more general framework for studying moduli problems. It is the latter aspect that interests us in this chapter. Since the 1980s, stacks have become an increasingly important tool in geometry, topology and theoretical physics.

Stack theory examines how mathematical objects can vary in families. For our examples, the mathematical objects will be the triangles, familiar from Euclidean geometry, and closely related concepts. At least to begin with, we will let these vary in continuous families, parametrized by topological spaces.

A surprising number of stacky phenomena can be seen in such simple cases. (In fact, one of the founders of the theory of algebraic stacks, M. Artin, is famously reputed to have said that one need only understand the stack of triangles to understand stacks.)

This chapter is divided into three parts, Sections 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3. Section 1.1 is a very leisurely and elementary introduction to stacks, introducing the main ideas by considering a few elementary examples of topological stacks. The only prerequisites for this section are basic undergraduate courses in abstract algebra (groups and group actions) and topology (topological spaces, covering spaces, the fundamental group).

Section 1.2 introduces the basic formalism of stacks. The prerequisites are the same, although this section is more demanding than the preceding one.

Section 1.3 introduces algebraic stacks, culminating in the Riemann–Roch theorem for stacky curves. The prerequisite here is some basic scheme theory.



We do not cover much of the “algebraic geometry” of algebraic stacks, but we hope that these notes will prepare the reader for the study of more advanced texts, such as [16] or the forthcoming book.<sup>1</sup>

The following outline uses terminology that will be explained in the body of the text.

The first fundamental notion is that of a *symmetry groupoid of a family of objects*. This is introduced first for discrete and then for continuous families of triangles.

In Sections 1.1.1–1.1.3, we consider Euclidean triangles up to similarity (the stack of such triangles is called  $\mathfrak{M}$ ). We define what a fine moduli space is, and show how the symmetries of the isosceles triangles and the equilateral triangle prevent a fine moduli space from existing. We study the coarse moduli space of triangles, and discover that it parametrizes a *modular family*, even though this family is, of course, not universal.

Sections 1.1.4–1.1.6, introduce other examples of moduli problems. In Section 1.1.4, we encounter a fine moduli space (the fine moduli space of scalene triangles); in Section 1.1.5, where we restrict attention to isosceles triangles, we encounter a coarse moduli space supporting several non-isomorphic modular families. Restricting attention entirely to the equilateral triangle, in Section 1.1.6, we come across a coarse moduli space that parametrizes a modular family which is versal, but not universal.

In Section 1.1.7, we finally exhibit an example of a coarse moduli space which does not admit any modular family at all. We start studying *oriented triangles*. We will eventually prefer working with oriented triangles, because they are more closely related to algebraic geometry. The stack of oriented triangles is called  $\tilde{\mathfrak{M}}$ .

In Section 1.1.8, we first make a few general and informal remarks about stacks and their role in the study of moduli problems.

The second fundamental concept is that of *versal family*. Versal families replace universal families, where the latter do not exist. Stacks that admit versal families are called *geometric*, which means *topological* in Sections 1.1 and 1.2, but will mean *algebraic* in Section 1.3.

We introduce versal families in Section 1.1.9, and give several examples. We explain how a stack which admits a versal family is essentially equal to the stack of ‘generalized moduli maps’ (or torsors, in more advanced terminology).

In Section 1.1.10, we start including degenerate triangles in our examinations: triangles whose three vertices are collinear. The main reason we do this

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