

Singular functions in groupoid algebras

York, Semigroup seminar

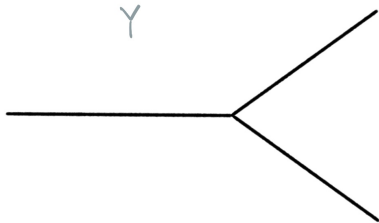
Nóra Szakács

Nov 26, 2025

Groupoids: a motivating example

Consider a group G acting on a locally compact, Hausdorff space Y .

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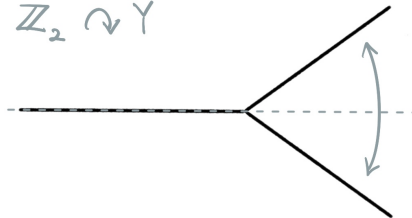


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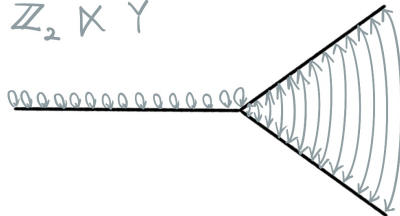
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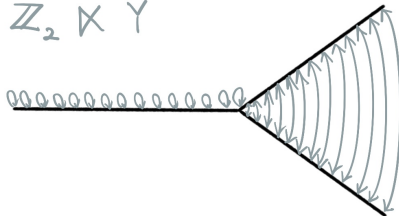
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$\{(g, y) : y \in Y, g \in G\}$

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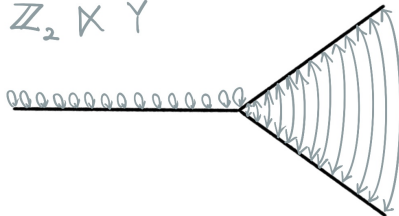
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$$s(g, y) = y, r(g, y) = g(y),$$

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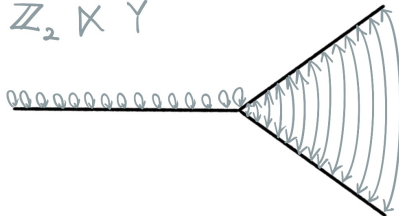
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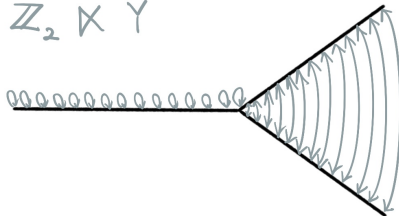
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form a basis where

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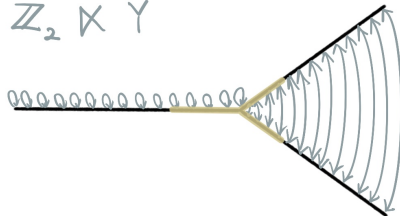
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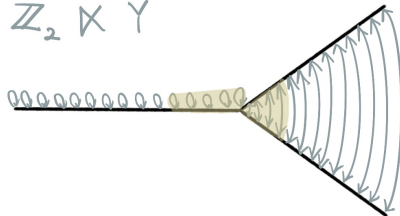
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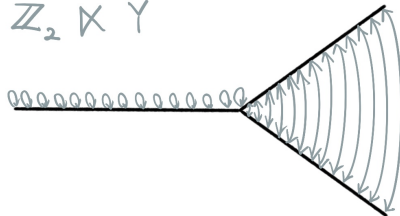
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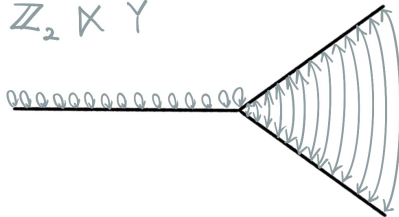
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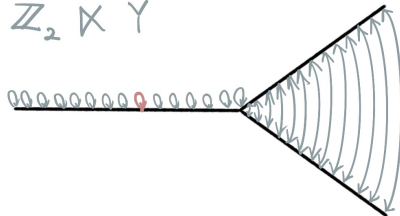
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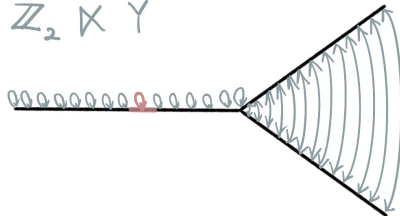
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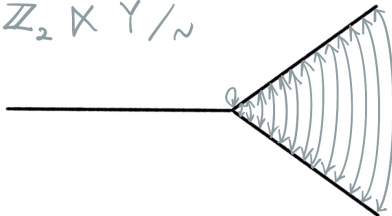
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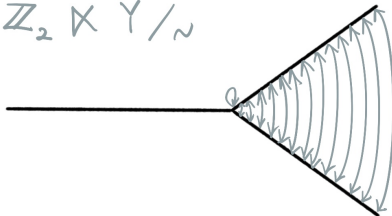
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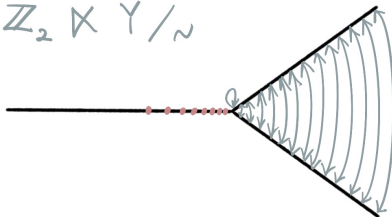
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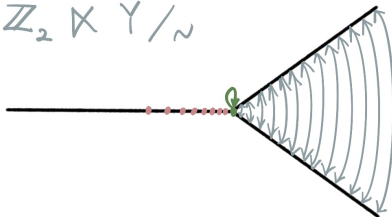
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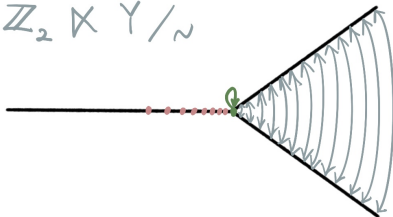
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It is typically *not* a Hausdorff space!

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The quotient $S \ltimes Y / \sim$ is still a *groupoid* of germs.

Étale groupoids

Let \mathcal{G} be a topological groupoid, i.e. a groupoid with a topology such that source and range maps, and the operations are continuous.

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\mathcal{G} is **ample** if:

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Given an ample groupoid \mathcal{G} , its (complex) Steinberg algebra $\mathbb{C}\mathcal{G}$ consist of

$$\text{span}\{\chi_U : U \text{ is a compact open bisection}\} \subseteq \ell^\infty(\mathcal{G})$$

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Remark: inverse semigroup algebras are also isomorphic to some $\mathbb{C}\mathcal{G}$ (Steinberg [Adv. Math, 2010]), but here \mathcal{G} is usually not Hausdorff.

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It is a:

- complex algebra
- with an involutive operation $()^*$ $(ca + b)^* = \overline{c}a^* + b^*$, $(ab)^* = b^*a^*$
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Examples:

1. full complex matrix algebras
2. more generally: bounded linear operators on a Hilbert space: $\mathcal{B}(\mathcal{H})$

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$$\begin{aligned}\lambda_x: \mathbb{C}\mathcal{G} &\rightarrow \mathcal{B}(\ell^2(\mathcal{G}_x)) \\ \lambda_x(f)(\delta_\gamma) &= \sum_{\alpha: s(\alpha)=r(\gamma)} f(\alpha)\delta_{\alpha\gamma}.\end{aligned}$$

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If \mathcal{G} is a group or an inverse semigroup, then $C_{red}^*(\mathcal{G})$ coincides with the reduced group/inverse semigroup C^* -algebra as usually defined.

More examples

If X is a finite set with $|X| = n$, there is an ample groupoid \mathcal{G}_n such that

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If E is a directed graph, there is an ample groupoid \mathcal{G}_E such that

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More examples

If X is a finite set with $|X| = n$, there is an ample groupoid \mathcal{G}_n such that

$\mathbb{C}\mathcal{G}_n \cong L_{\mathbb{C}}(1, n)$ is the (complex) Leavitt algebra

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If E is a directed graph, there is an ample groupoid \mathcal{G}_E such that

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Many ring-theoretic properties of the two algebras coincide: simplicity, purely infinite simplicity, primitivity, primeness...

The j -map

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There exists an injective linear map $j: C_{red}^(\mathcal{G}) \rightarrow \ell^\infty(\mathcal{G})$ such that for any $a, b \in C_{red}^*(\mathcal{G})$,*

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From now on we identify a with $j(a)$ in notation.

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$\Leftarrow \mathcal{G}$ is minimal and effective

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Minimal: every orbit is dense in the unit space, i.e. for all $x \in \mathcal{G}^{(0)}$, $\mathcal{G}x\mathcal{G} \cap \mathcal{G}^{(0)}$ is dense in $\mathcal{G}^{(0)}$.

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Remark: any groupoid of germs (as we defined it) is effective

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$C_{red}^*(\mathcal{G})/J = C_{ess}^*(\mathcal{G})$ is the essential algebra of \mathcal{G} .

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Recall:

$\mathbb{C}\mathcal{G} = \text{span}\{\chi_U : U \text{ is a compact open bisection}\}, C_{red}^*(\mathcal{G}) = \overline{\mathbb{C}\mathcal{G}};$

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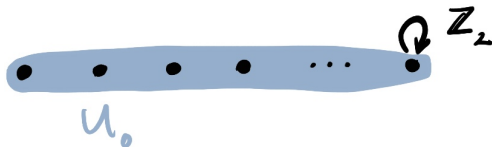
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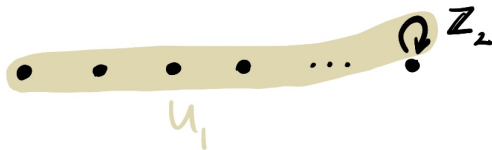
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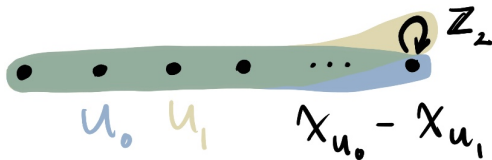
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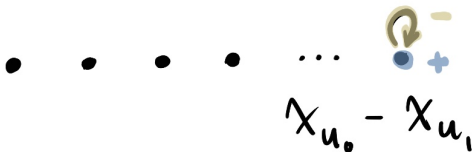
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Example:



$$\chi_{U_0} - \chi_{U_1} \in J_{alg}$$

The singular ideal – a minimal and effective example

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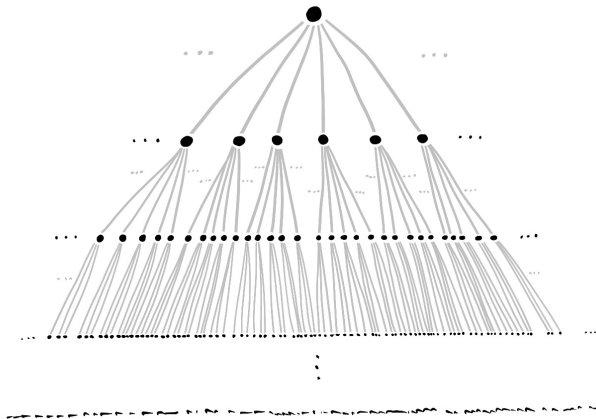
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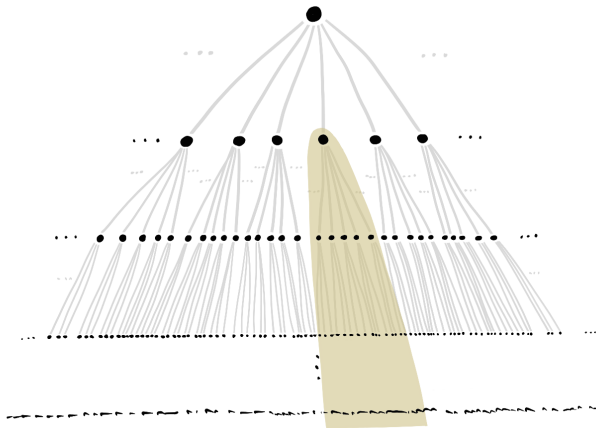
We present an easier-to-explain example with similar behaviour.

The singular ideal – a minimal and effective example



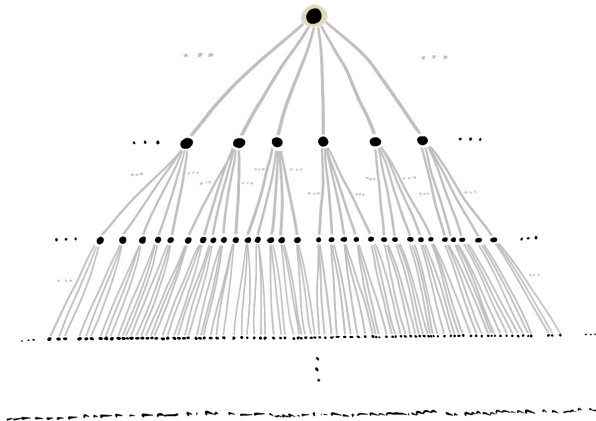
$\mathcal{G}^{(0)}$: black dots above (in bijection with finite and infinite rays in the tree)

The singular ideal – a minimal and effective example



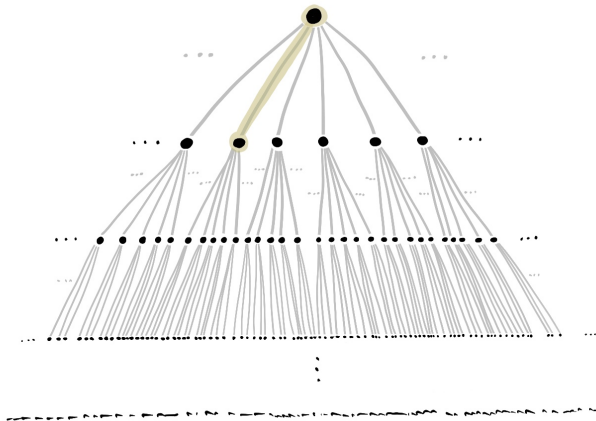
Topology on $\mathcal{G}^{(0)}$: generated by the clopen 'cones'

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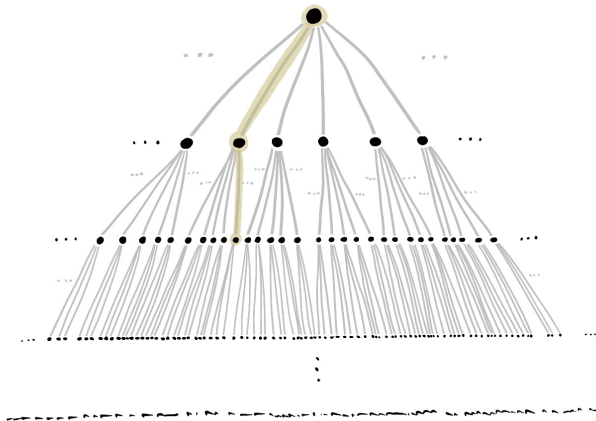
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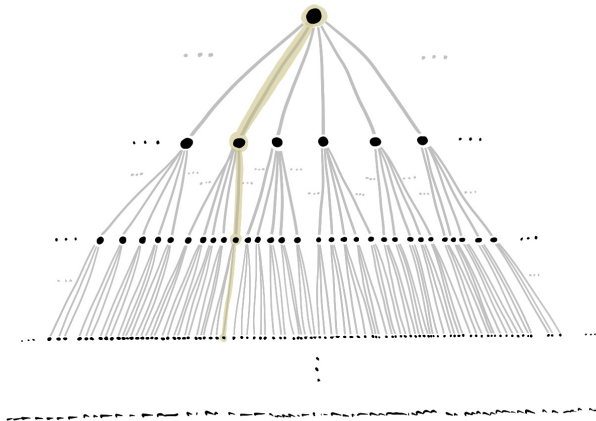
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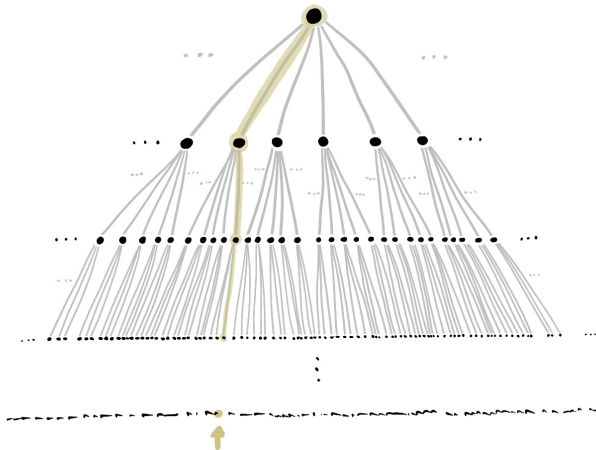
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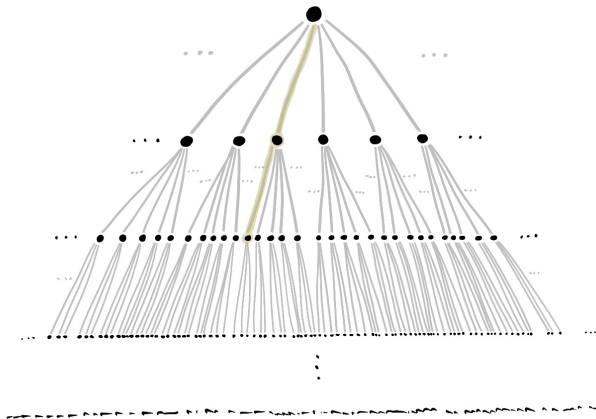
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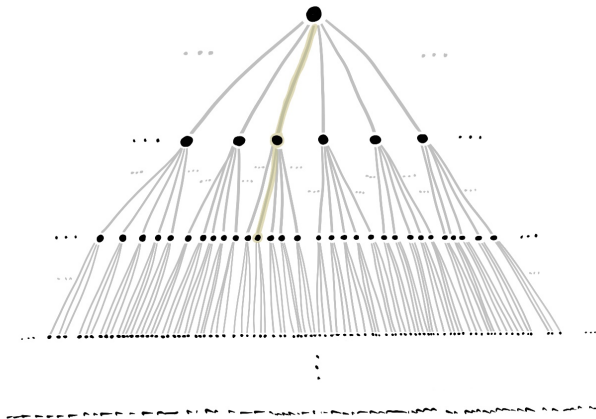
infinite rays are approximated by their finite prefixes

The singular ideal – a minimal and effective example



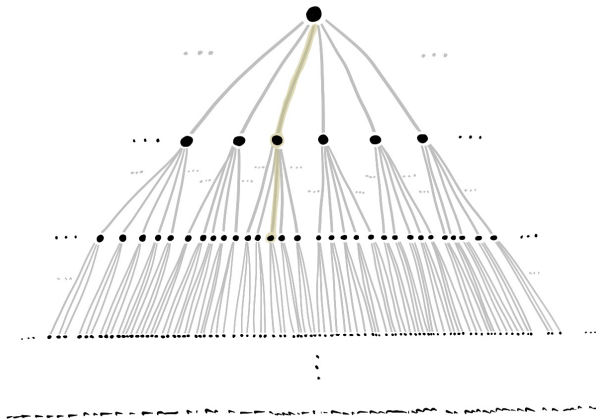
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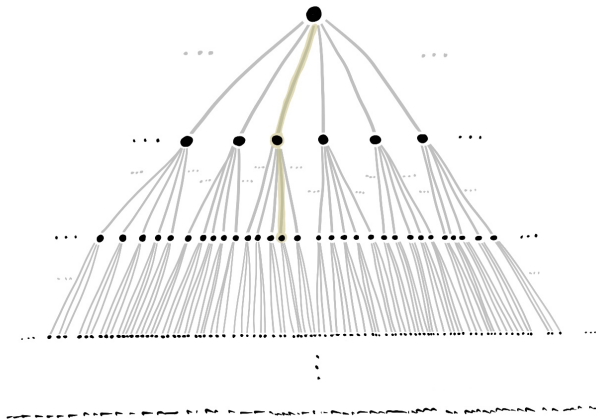
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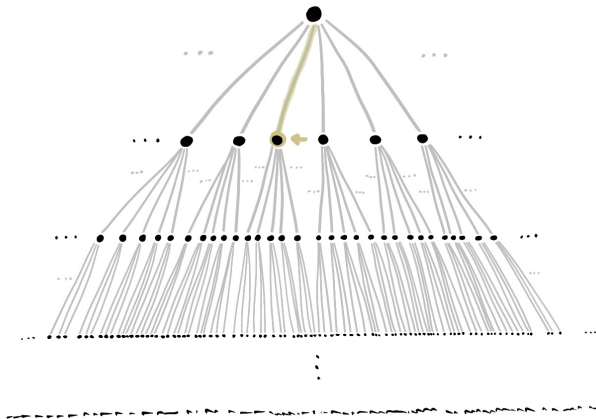
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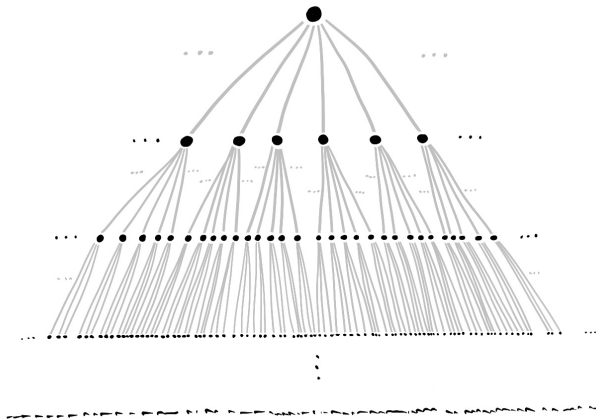
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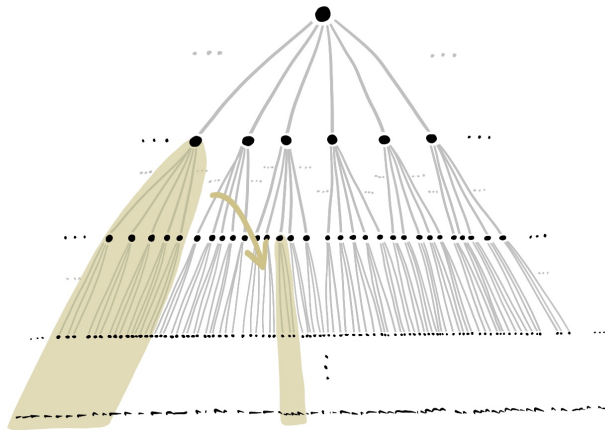
finite rays are approximated by rays with that common prefix

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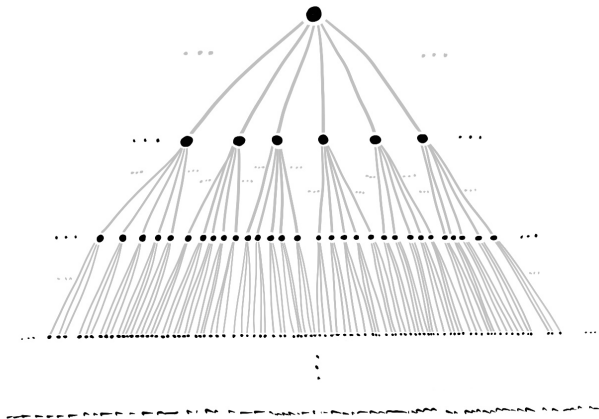
\mathcal{G} is a groupoid of germs of an inverse semigroup. **The action:**

The singular ideal – a minimal and effective example



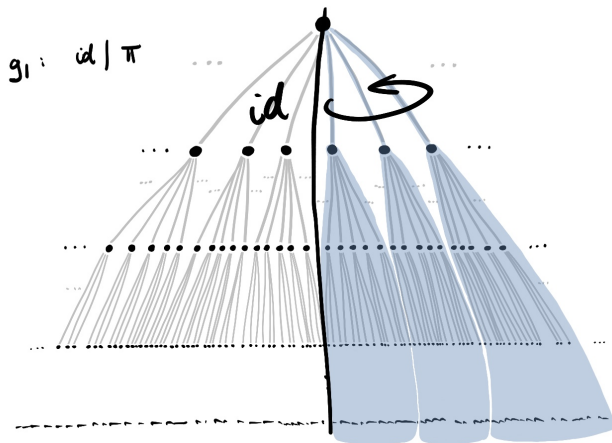
\mathcal{G} is a groupoid of germs of an inverse semigroup. **The action:**
'prefix exchange' maps – these ensure minimality

The singular ideal – a minimal and effective example



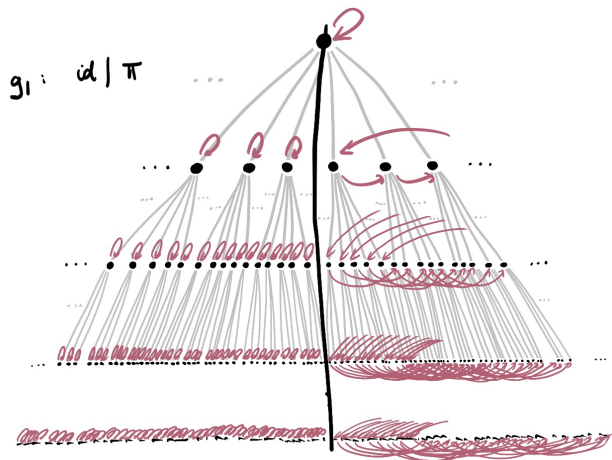
\mathcal{G} is a groupoid of germs of an inverse semigroup. **The action:**
additional 'group' maps create a singular function

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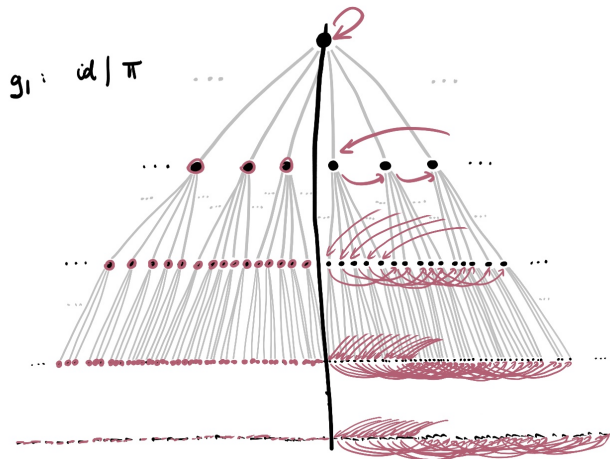
\mathcal{G} is a groupoid of germs of an inverse semigroup. **The action:**
the action of g_1

The singular ideal – a minimal and effective example



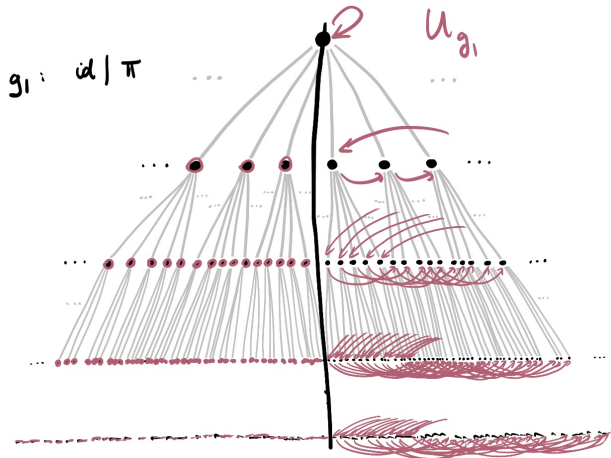
\mathcal{G} is a groupoid of germs of an inverse semigroup. **The action:**
the g_1 -arrows in the transformation groupoid

The singular ideal – a minimal and effective example



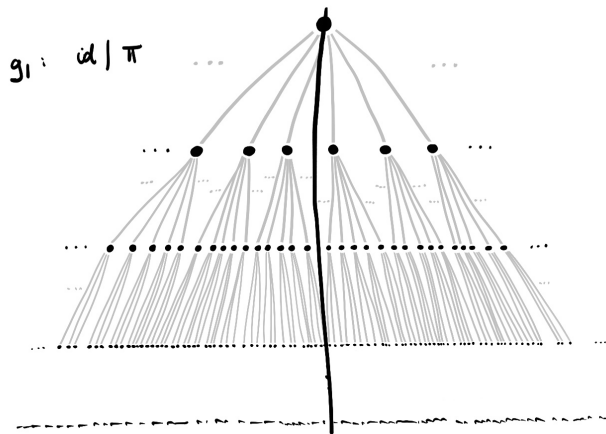
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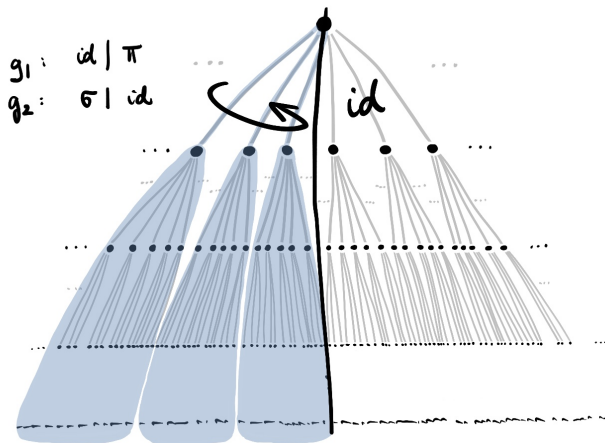
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 these form the compact open bisection U_{g_1}

The singular ideal – a minimal and effective example



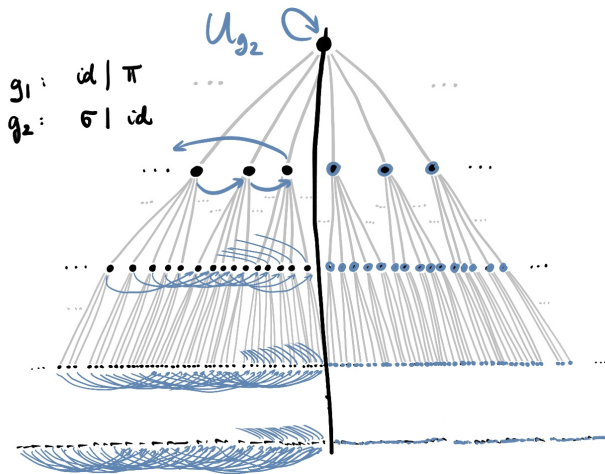
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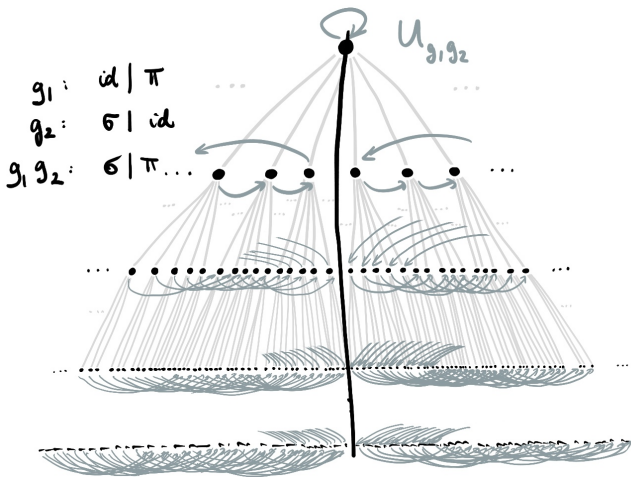
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the action of g_2

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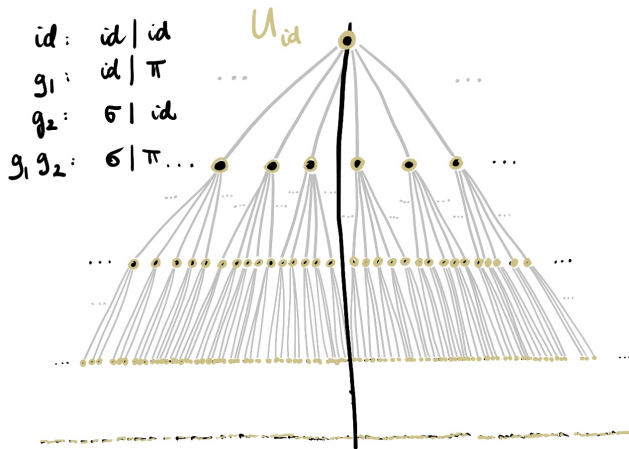
\mathcal{G} is a groupoid of germs of an inverse semigroup. **The action:**
 we similarly obtain the compact open bisection U_{g_2}

The singular ideal – a minimal and effective example



\mathcal{G} is a groupoid of germs of an inverse semigroup. **The action:**
 the product $g_1 g_2$ gives $U_{g_1 g_2}$

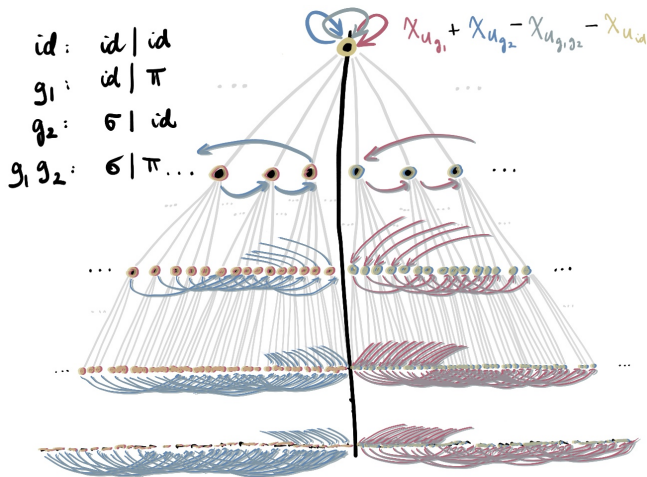
The singular ideal – a minimal and effective example



\mathcal{G} is a groupoid of germs of an inverse semigroup. **The action:**

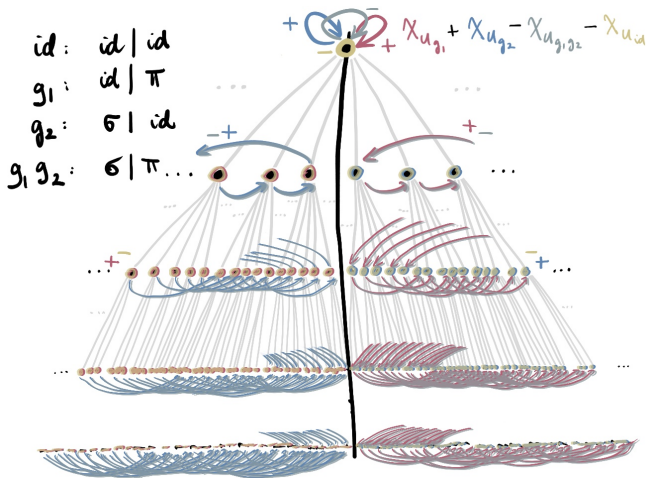
$\mathcal{G}^{(0)}$ itself is a compact open bisection U_{id}

The singular ideal – a minimal and effective example



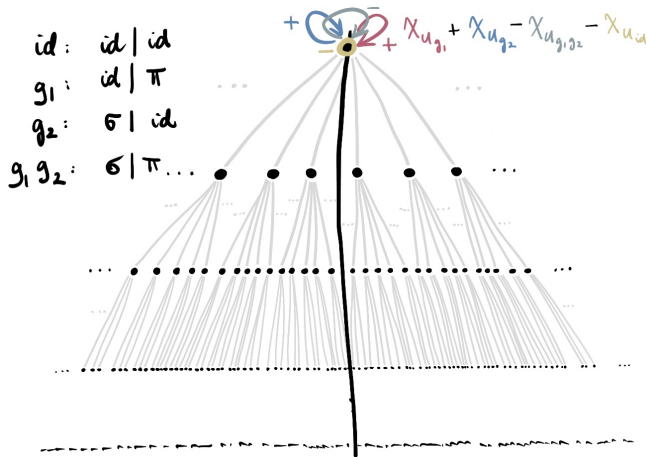
Consider the function $\chi_{u_{g_1}} + \chi_{u_{g_2}} - \chi_{u_{g_1 g_2}} - \chi_{u_{id}}$

The singular ideal – a minimal and effective example



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The singular ideal – a minimal and effective example



Consider the function $\chi_{u_{g_1}} + \chi_{u_{g_2}} - \chi_{u_{g_1 g_2}} - \chi_{u_{id}} \in J_{alg}$

Simplicity

When is $\mathbb{C}\mathcal{G}$ simple (as a complex algebra)?

When is $C_{red}^*(\mathcal{G})$ simple (as a C^* -algebra)?

Non-Hausdorff, second countable case:

Clark-Exel-Pardo-Starling-Sims [Trans. AMS, 2019]

$\iff \mathcal{G}$ is minimal, effective, and
 $J_{alg}(\mathcal{G}) = 0$

$\Leftarrow \mathcal{G}$ is minimal, effective, $J = 0$
 $\implies \mathcal{G}$ is minimal, effective and
 $J = 0$ when \mathcal{G} is amenable

Where $J = \{f \in C_{red}^*(\mathcal{G}) : f \text{ vanishes on a dense subset}\}$ is called the (C^*) singular ideal of $C_{red}^*(\mathcal{G})$.

$J_{alg} := J \cap \mathbb{C}\mathcal{G}$ is called the (algebraic) singular ideal of $\mathbb{C}\mathcal{G}$.

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It is natural to ask:

Question 1: Does $J_{alg} = 0$ imply $J = 0$?

Question 2: Is J_{alg} dense in J ?

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But in general, the answer is NO, in fact there are even minimal and effective counterexamples (Martínez, Sz., [preprint, 2025]).

The strategy

Recall:

- $J_{alg} \triangleleft \mathbb{C}\mathcal{G} = \text{span}\{\chi_U : U \text{ is a compact open bisection}\};$
- $J \triangleleft C_{red}^*(\mathcal{G}) = \overline{\mathbb{C}\mathcal{G}} \subseteq \overline{\mathbb{C}\mathcal{G}}^\infty;$
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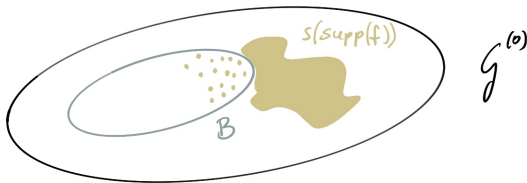
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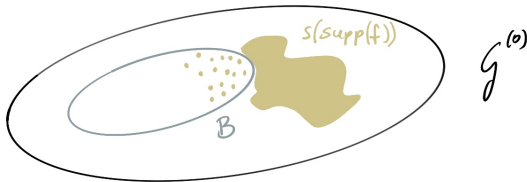
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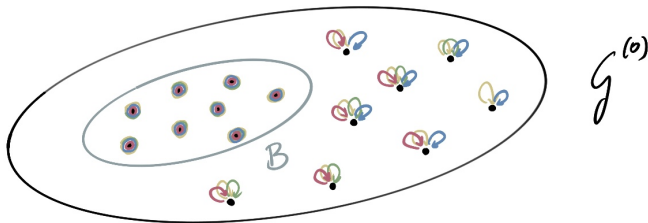
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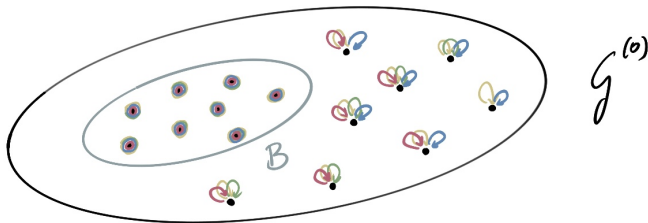


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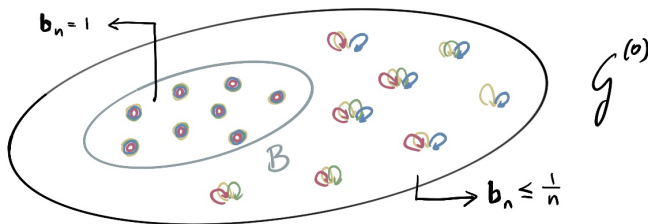


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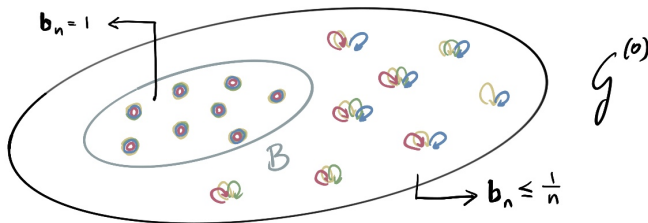


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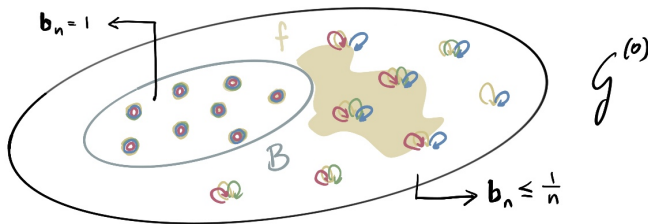


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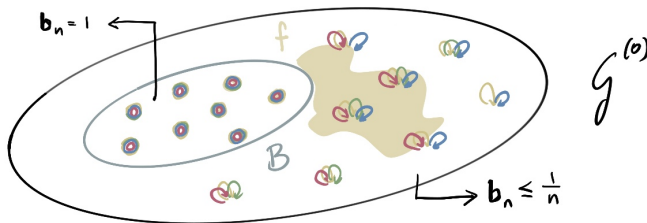
So $f * \mathfrak{b}_n \xrightarrow{\|\cdot\|_\infty} f * \chi_B$.

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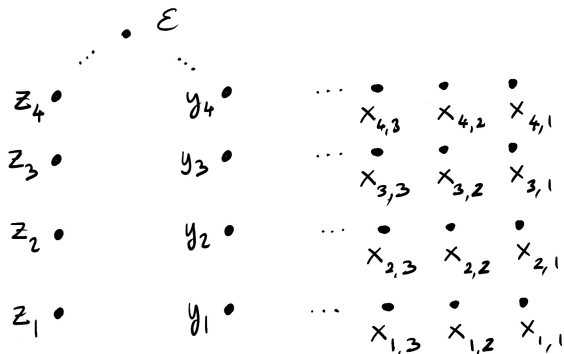
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So $\mathfrak{f} * \mathfrak{b}_n \xrightarrow{\|\cdot\|_\infty} \mathfrak{f} * \chi_B$.

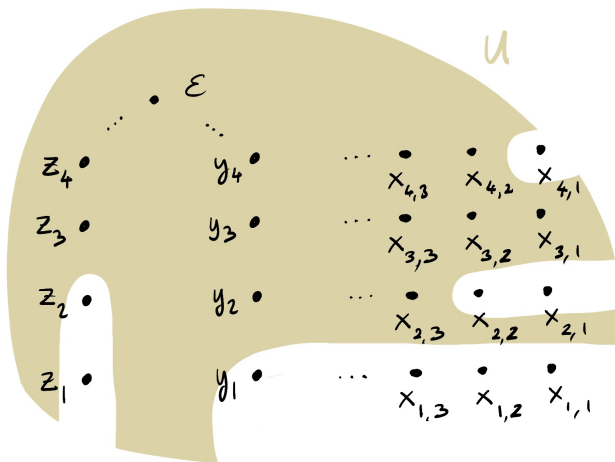
Convergence in C^* -norm comes at the cost of amenability.

The example: the definition of \mathcal{G}



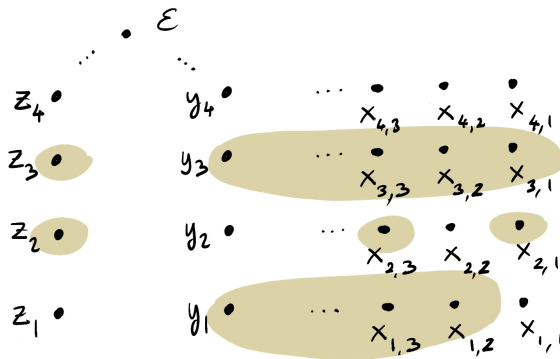
$\mathcal{G}^{(0)}$: black dots above (where \dots denotes convergence)

The example: the definition of \mathcal{G}



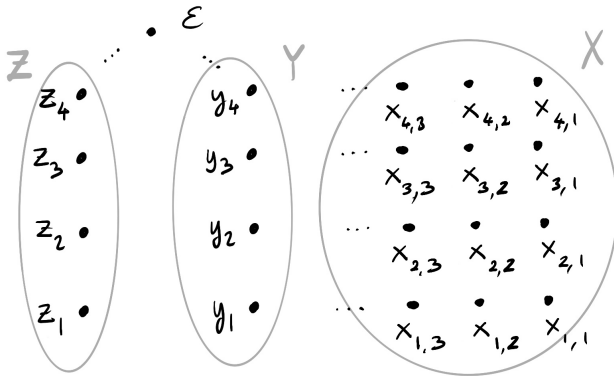
A 'typical' basic compact open neighborhood of ϵ

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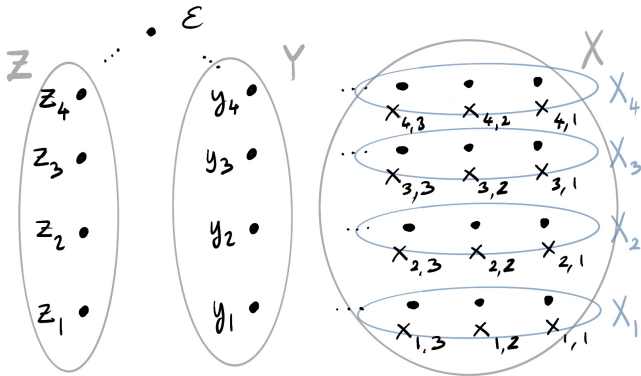
A 'typical' basic compact open set not containing ϵ

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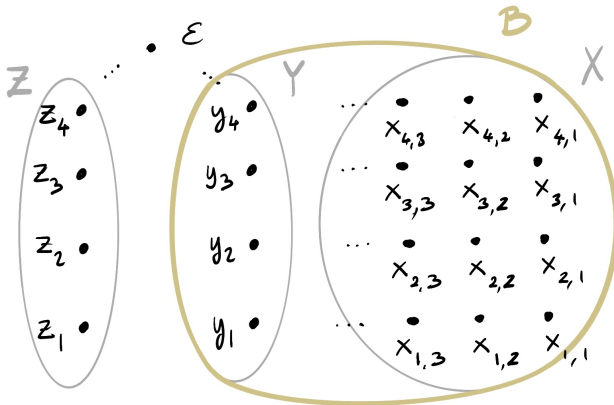
Notation: X, Y, Z

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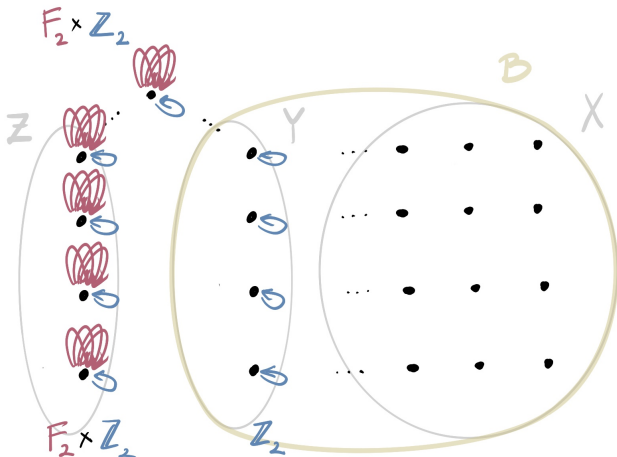
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Notation: X , Y , Z and B : the set we 'scatter' to

The example: the definition of \mathcal{G}



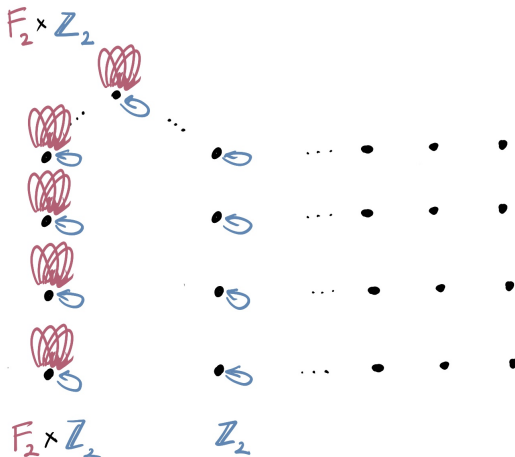
The groupoid:

units in Z and ϵ have the isotropy group $F_2 \times \mathbb{Z}_2$

units in Y have the isotropy group \mathbb{Z}_2

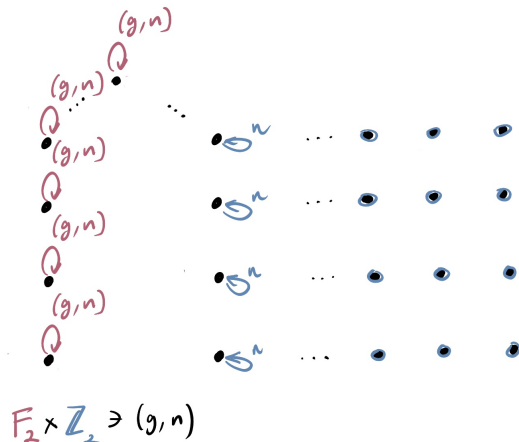
units in X have trivial isotropy group

The example: the definition of \mathcal{G}



Basic compact open bisections:

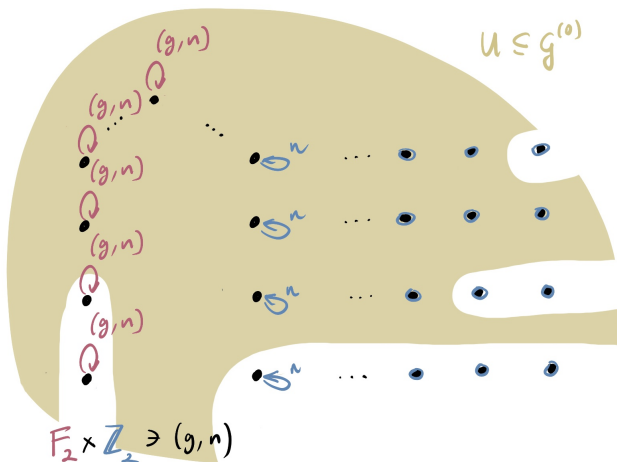
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Basic compact open bisections:

Every pair $(g, n) \in F_2 \times \mathbb{Z}_2$ defines a compact open bisection

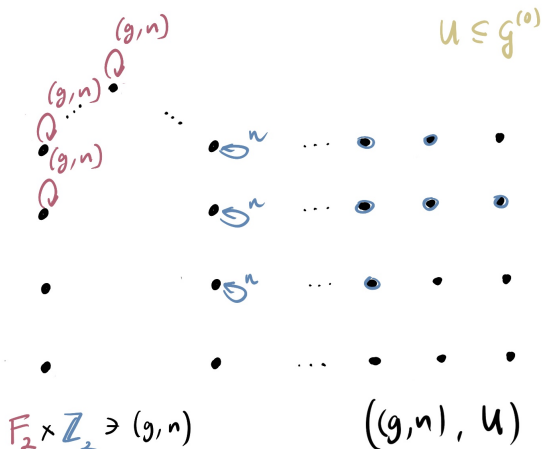
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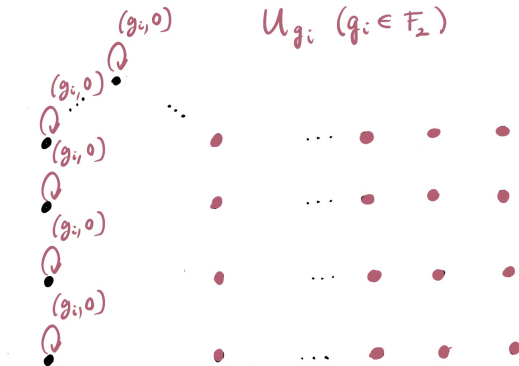
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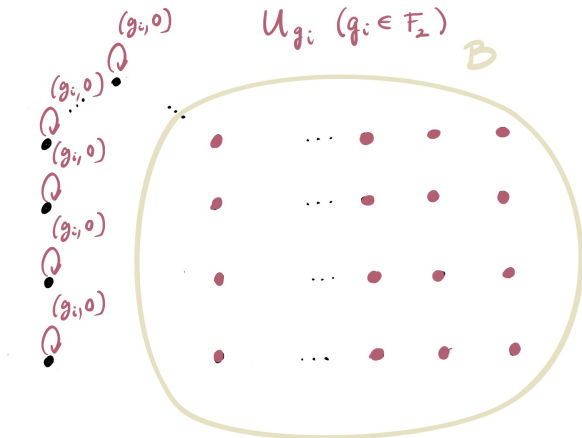
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The example: the singular element of $C_{red}^*(\mathcal{G})$



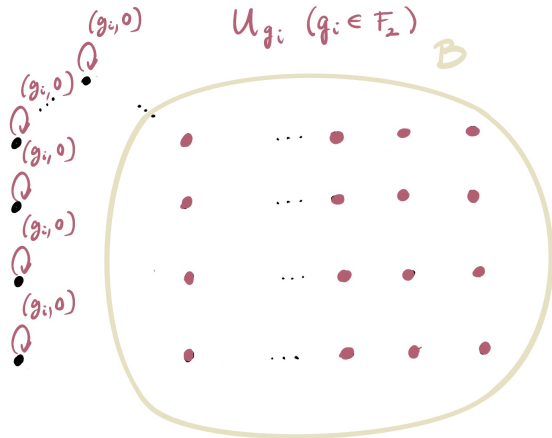
Let $g_i \in F_2, i \in \mathbb{N}$ be pairwise different.
 Consider the compact open bisection $B_i = U_{g_i} = ((g_i, 0), \mathcal{G}^{(0)})$.

The example: the singular element of $C_{red}^*(\mathcal{G})$



We 'scatter' to B :
$$b_n = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \chi_{U_{g_i}} \xrightarrow{\|\cdot\|_\infty} \chi_B$$

The example: the singular element of $C_{red}^*(\mathcal{G})$

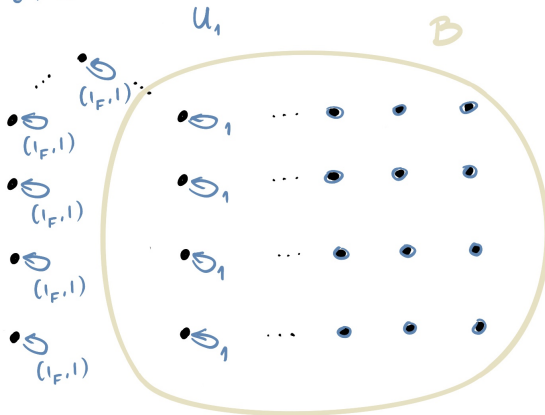


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Convergence in norm is harder and requires a more careful choice of g_i s.

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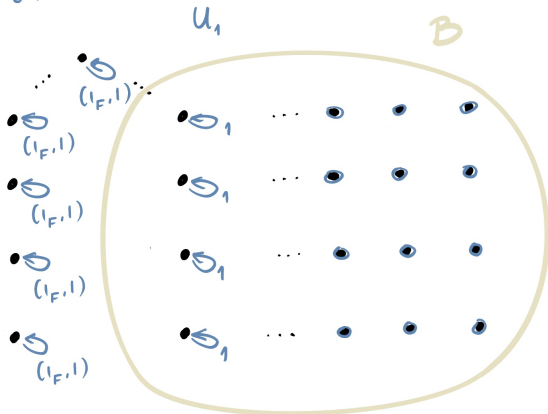
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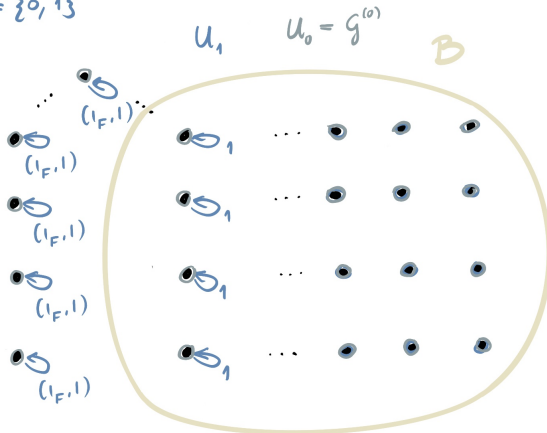
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Let $U_1 = ((1_F, 1), \mathcal{G}^{(0)})$ compact open bisection

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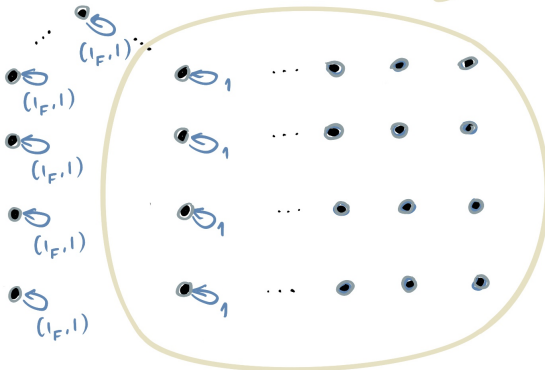
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$$\chi_{u_1} - \chi_{u_0}$$

\mathcal{B}



We create a \mathcal{B} -singular function:

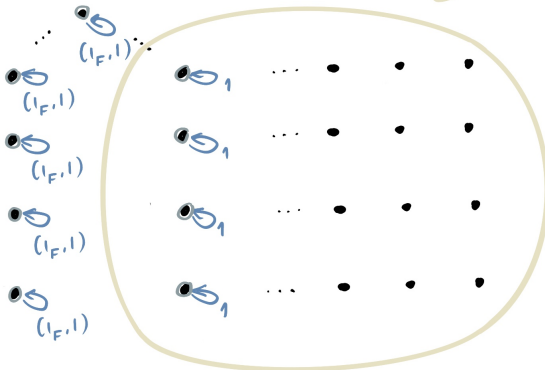
$$f = \chi_{u_1} - \chi_{u_0}$$

The example: the singular element of $C_{red}^*(\mathcal{G})$

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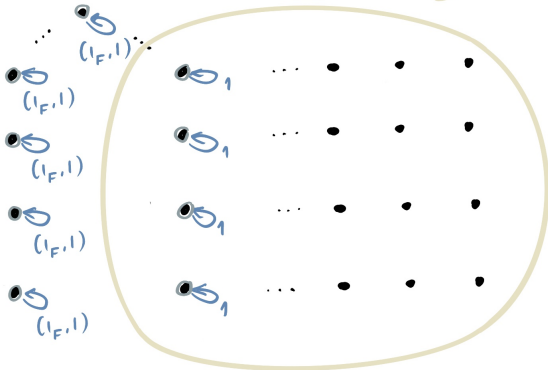
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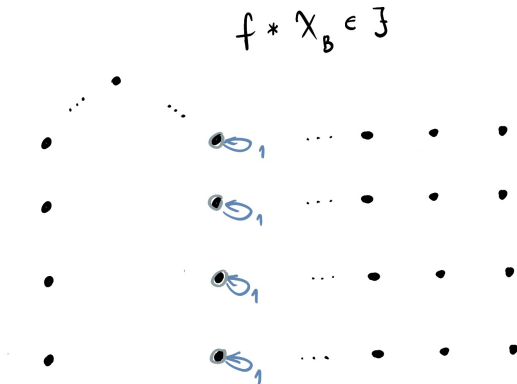


We create a B -singular function:

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$$\text{supp}(f)|_{\mathcal{G}_B} \text{ contains no open sets} \implies f * \chi_B \in J$$

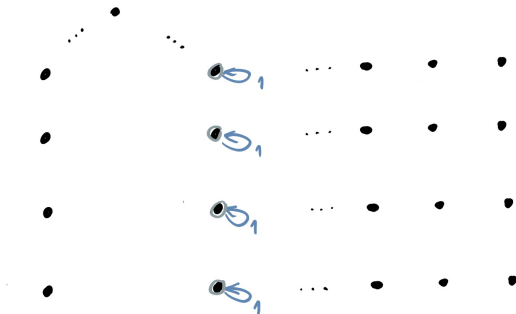
The example: $f * \chi_B \notin \overline{J_{alg}}$



What remains is to show that $f * \chi_B \notin \overline{J_{alg}}$.

The example: $f * \chi_B \notin \overline{J_{alg}}$

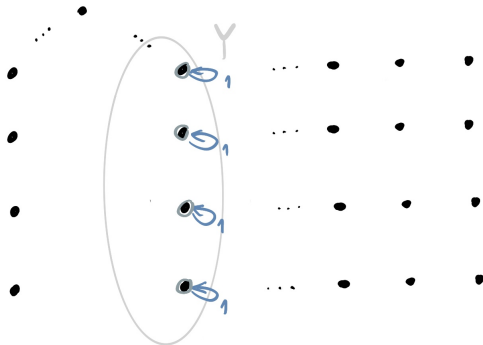
$$f * \chi_B \in \mathcal{J}$$



We show something stronger: $f * \chi_B \notin \overline{J_{alg}}^{\infty}$.

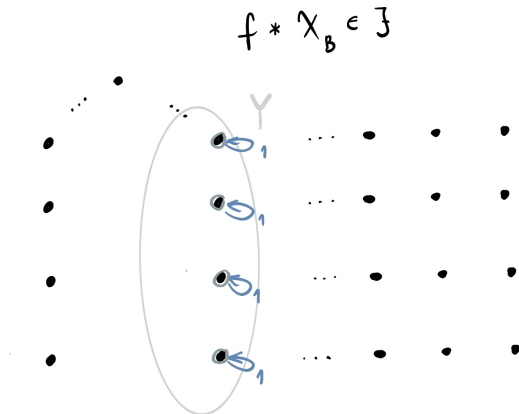
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 Observe that if $\|f - g\|_{\infty} < 1$ then $Y \in \text{supp } g$.

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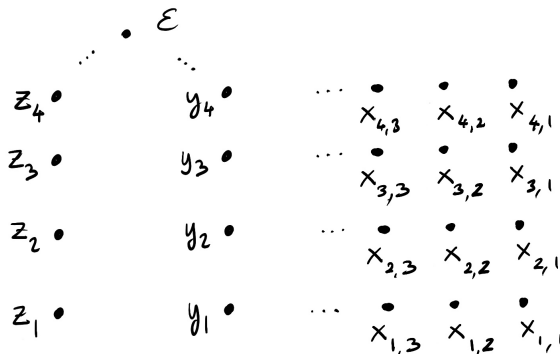


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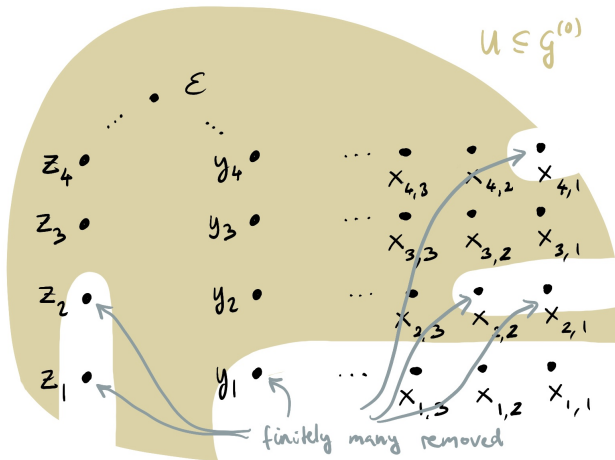
Claim: if $Y \subseteq \text{supp } g$ for $g \in \mathbb{C}\mathcal{G}$, then $g \notin J_{alg}$.

The example: $f * \chi_B \notin \overline{J_{alg}}$



Let $g = \sum_{V \in F} c_V \chi_V$ where F is a finite set of compact open bisections, and suppose $Y \subseteq \text{supp } g$.

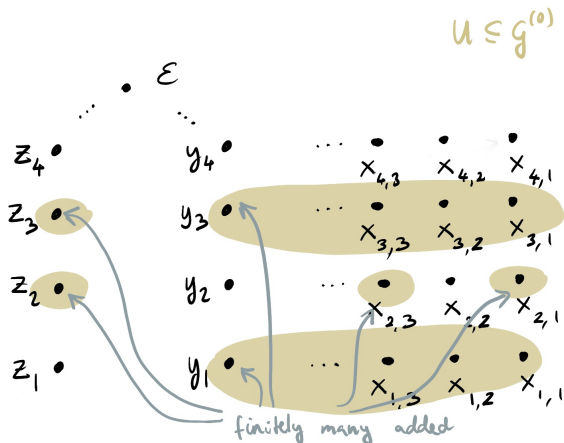
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Any compact open bisection $V \in F$ is of the form $((g, n), U)$ where

- (1) U is either G^0 with finitely many sets $\{x_{i,j}\}, \{y_k\} \cup X_k, \{z_l\}$ ‘removed’

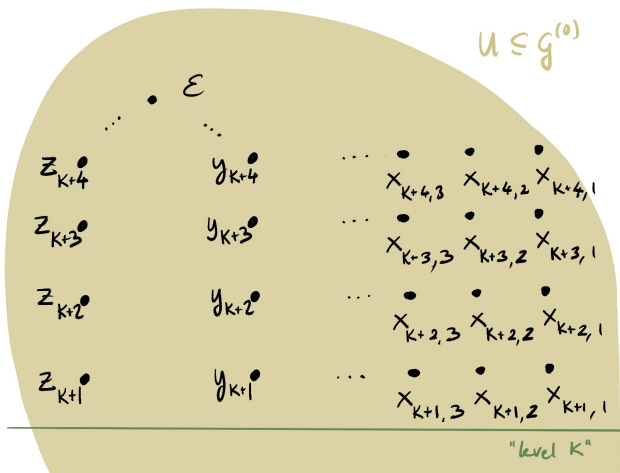
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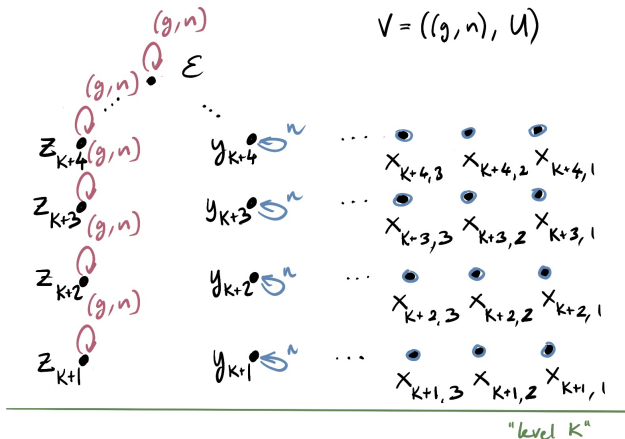
- (1) U is either G^0 with finitely many sets $\{x_{i,j}\}, \{y_k\} \cup X_k, \{z_l\}$ ‘removed’
- (2) or U consists of finitely many sets $\{x_{i,i}\}, \{y_k\} \cup X_k, \{z_l\}$ ‘added’

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Since F is finite, there exists some $K \in \mathbb{N}$ larger than any 'added' or 'removed' indices

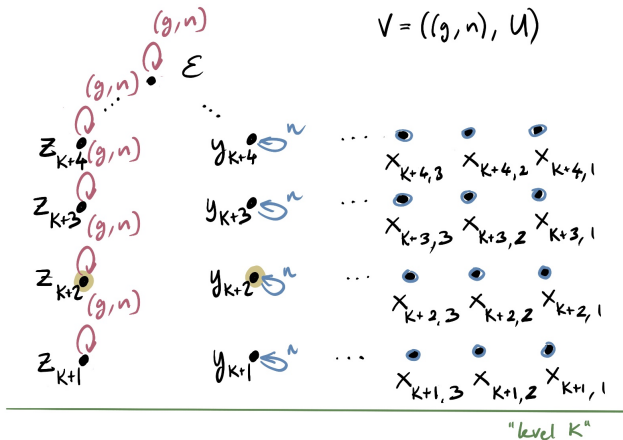
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Above the 'Kth level', any $V \in F$ looks either empty (type (ii)) or a like a full bisection (type(i)).

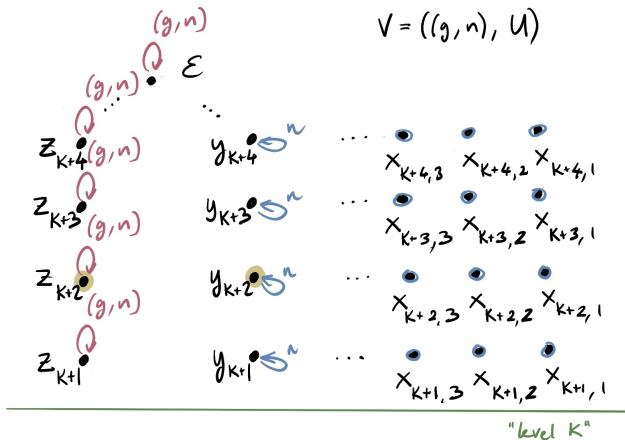
The example: $f * \chi_B \notin \overline{J_{alg}}$



Recall: $g = \sum_{V \in F} c_V \chi_V$. Let $i \geq K$. Then

$$0 \neq g(y_i)$$

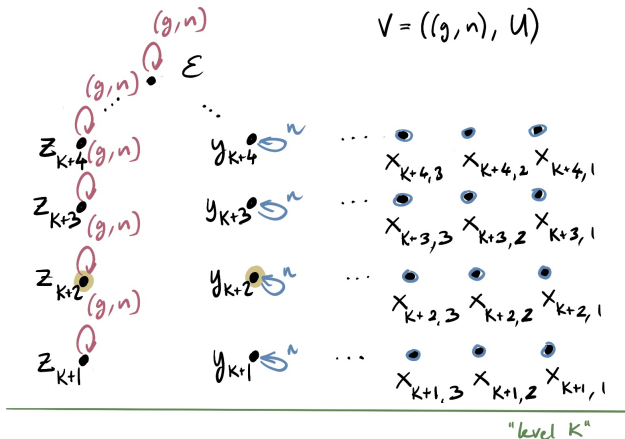
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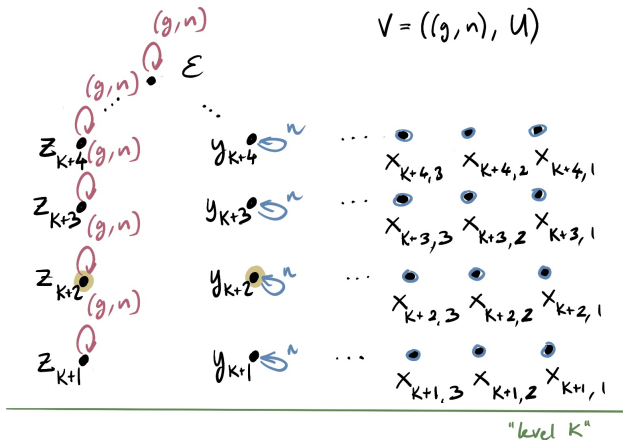
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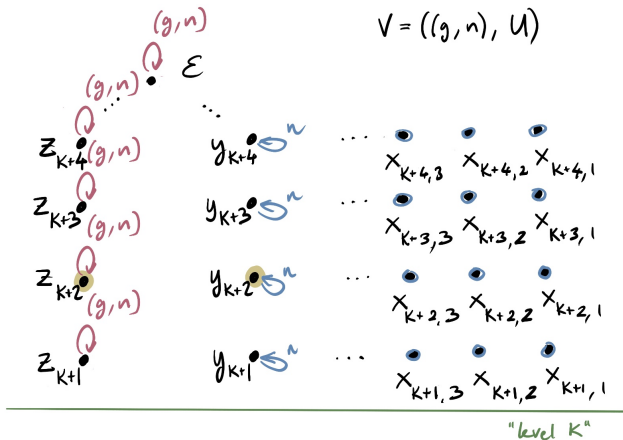
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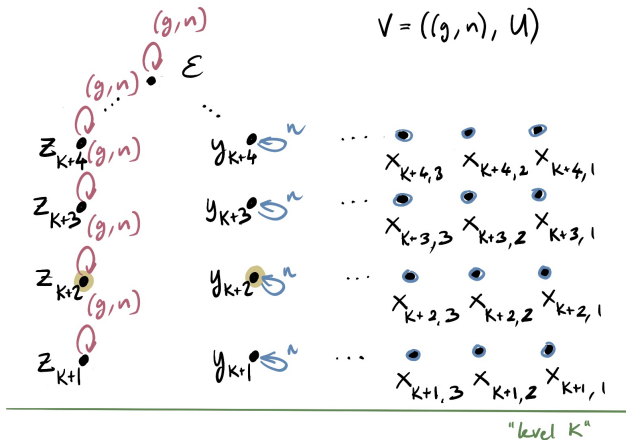
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$$\implies \text{there exists some } g \text{ such that } g((g, 0), z_i) \neq 0 \implies g \notin J_{alg}.$$

This completes the proof that $f * \chi_B \notin \overline{J_{alg}}$.

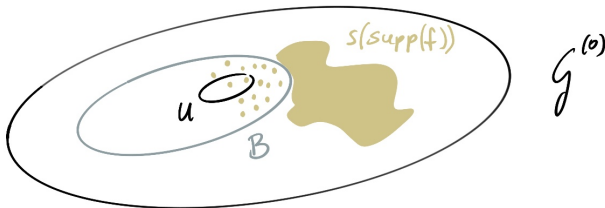
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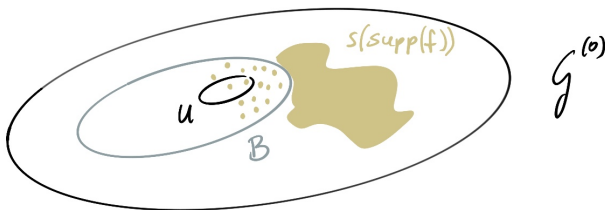
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In particular, this is still open:

Question 1: Does $J_{alg} = 0$ imply $J = 0$?