FAREWELL

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ABSTRACT. I gave the last lecture of my career in academic mathematics at the conference (∞, n)-Categories and Their Applications at Utrecht University on April 16, 2024. I began with the following brief farewell speech, in which I explained both my departure from academia and my presence at the conference.

Another component of my farewell was an offering of some open directions for exploration stemming from the material in the talk itself, which are detailed here.

It's incredible to be here; thanks so much to the organizers for the invitation to speak.

I love seeing all the young energy and engagement. I remember a conference talk like twelve years ago, with a long public argument – during the talk! – about whether some point-set colimit of symmetric spectra was already a homotopy colimit. And that seemed reasonable at the time. But now here are all you kids, talking about lax (∞, n) this-and-that. Thinking about that makes me feel old; it's like trying to describe a time before the internet, or before smartphones.

I fell in love with math as a freshman in college, almost 20 years ago – more than half my lifetime ago. It was just so beautiful and intoxicating. It's been a long journey since then. And many parts of it have been truly wonderful. But at times it's also been really, really bad. I've felt so trapped, and so deeply, existentially anxious. I've experienced so much failure. I made my relationship with mathematics more important than my own happiness. And I've felt so much self-hatred, wanting to be someone that I'm not.

So, I'm leaving academia. This is my last conference, and this is my last talk. I've grieved a lot, and yet I still feel very sad about it. But it feels very right. I feel free. Life is so, so beautiful. I'd forgotten just how big and incredible and full of wonder the world is.

Now, hearing all this, you might wonder: why am I here? Why am I at this conference in Utrecht, halfway around the world from home?

The answer is very clear to me: it's because I love sharing math with other people. It's you – it's all of you. You're the reason I'm here. I love talking about the math I've done, and hearing about the math other people have done, and witnessing everyone in the various stages of their own journeys – through math, and through life.

Obviously I have a lot more thoughts and feelings about all of this. And of course I do want to talk about the math I've done. I'll share more later, elsewhere.[1]

For now, I'd like to end this little talk-within-a-talk with an invitation. Sometime during this conference, I'd love for you to come up to me and tell me, and perhaps even ask and tell each other too: why are *you* here? What brought you to this conference, and to mathematics? What's your journey? What lights you up?

[1]Later has arrived! Elsewhere is here.