

Wilson loops and Amplitudes in $N=4$ SYM

Claude Duhr

In collaboration with V. Del Duca and V. A. Smirnov.

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Why planar $N=4$ SYM..?

- Why are we interested in planar $N=4$ Super-Yang-Mills?
In the end, the world is not $N=4$ SYM, so we should rather concentrate on QCD...

Why planar $N=4$ SYM..?

- Why are we interested in planar $N=4$ Super-Yang-Mills?
In the end, the world is not $N=4$ SYM, so we should rather concentrate on QCD...
- But in QCD, life is (too) hard...
- Aim: Find a 'simpler' gauge theory, that can act as a toy model to explore the structure of gauge theory amplitudes to higher loop orders.

Why planar $\mathcal{N}=4$ SYM..?

- $\mathcal{N}=4$ planar SYM is such a simpler gauge theory!
 - ➔ It is conformal to all orders in perturbation theory.
 - ➔ AdS/CFT correspondence might even give some insight into the strongly coupled sector of the theory.
 - ➔ $\mathcal{N}=4$ SYM amplitudes are part of QCD amplitudes, e.g., at one-loop level:

$$A_n^{\text{YM}} = A_n^{\mathcal{N}=4} - 4A_n^{\mathcal{N}=1} + A_n^{\text{scalar}}$$

- A lot of new developments were made in the last few years, and the field is developing very fast!

Outline

- Several intriguing conjectures/observations in $N=4$ SYM:
 - ➔ ABDK/BDS ansatz.
 - ➔ MHV amplitude - Wilson loop duality.
 - ➔ Computation of two-loop remainder functions.

The ABDK/BDS ansatz

- Anastasiou, Bern, Dixon and Kosower (ABDK) formulated a conjecture for a generic two-loop MHV amplitude in N=4 SYM:

$$M_n^{(2)}(\epsilon) = \frac{1}{2} (M_n^{(1)}(\epsilon))^2 + f^{(2)}(\epsilon) M_n^{(1)}(2\epsilon) + C^{(2)} + \mathcal{O}(\epsilon),$$

- Bern, Dixon and Smirnov (BDS) extended this conjecture to all loop orders, by exponentiating the one-loop amplitude:

$$M_n(\epsilon) = 1 + \sum_{l=1}^{\infty} a^l M_n^{(l)}(\epsilon) = \exp \sum_{l=0}^{\infty} a^l \left[f^{(l)}(\epsilon) M_n^{(1)}(l\epsilon) + C^{(l)} + E_n^{(l)}(\epsilon) \right],$$

The ABDK/BDS ansatz

	$n=4$	$n=5$	$n=6$
$l=2$			
$l=3$			

The ABDK/BDS ansatz

	n=4	n=5	n=6
l=2	✓		
l=3	✓		

[ABDK; BDS]

The ABDK/BDS ansatz

	n=4	n=5	n=6
l=2	✓	✓ (num.)	
l=3	✓		

[ABDK; BDS]

[Bern, Czakon,
Kosower, Roiban,
Smirnov]

The ABDK/BDS ansatz

	n=4	n=5	n=6
l=2	✓	✓ (num.)	● (num.)
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[ABDK; BDS]
[Bern, Czakon, Kosower, Roiban, Smirnov]
[Bern, Dixon, Kosower, Roiban, Spradlin, Vergu, Volovich]

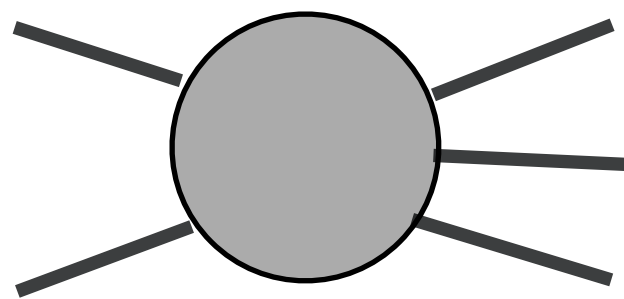
- What goes wrong for $n = 6$..?
- The answer comes from the Wilson loop!

Wilson loops in N=4 SYM

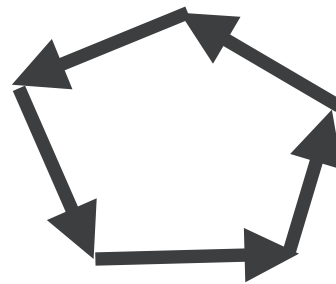
- Definition of a Wilson loop:

$$W[\mathcal{C}_n] = \text{Tr } \mathcal{P} \exp \left[ig \oint d\tau \dot{x}^\mu(\tau) A_\mu(x(\tau)) \right]$$

- It is conjectured that Wilson loop along an n -edged polygon is equal to an n -point MHV scattering amplitude:



=



$$p_i = x_{i,i+1} = x_i - x_{i+1}$$

[Alday, Maldacena;
Drummond, Korchemsky, Sokatchev]

- Proven analytically at one-loop for arbitrary n , and at two-loops for $n = 4, 5, 6$.
[Drummond, Henn, Korchemsky, Sokatchev;
Brandhuber, Heslop, Spence]

Wilson loops in N=4 SYM

- Wilson loops possess a conformal symmetry, and it was shown that a solution to the corresponding Ward identities is the BDS ansatz, e.g., at two-loops,

[Drummond, Henn,
Korchemsky, Sokatchev]

$$w_n^{(2)}(\epsilon) = f_{WL}^{(2)}(\epsilon) w_n^{(1)}(2\epsilon) + C_{WL}^{(2)} + \mathcal{O}(\epsilon),$$

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[Drummond, Henn,
Korchemsky, Sokatchev]

$$w_n^{(2)}(\epsilon) = f_{WL}^{(2)}(\epsilon) w_n^{(1)}(2\epsilon) + C_{WL}^{(2)} + R_n^{(2)}(u_{ij}) + \mathcal{O}(\epsilon),$$

- ... but we can always add a arbitrary function of conformal invariants and we still obtain a solution to the Ward identities!





$$u_{ij} = \frac{x_{ij+1}^2 x_{i+1j}^2}{x_{ij}^2 x_{i+1j+1}^2}$$

-

The breakdown of BDS

	n=4	n=5	n=6
l=2	✓	✓ (num.)	● (num.)
l=3	✓		

The breakdown of BDS

	n=4	n=5	n=6
l=2		 (num.)	 (num.)
l=3			

No non trivial
conformal cross-
ratios,

$$R_4^{(l)} = R_5^{(l)} = 0.$$

The breakdown of BDS

	n=4	n=5	n=6
l=2	✓	✓ (num.)	● (num.)
l=3	✓		

No non trivial
conformal cross-
ratios,

$$R_4^{(l)} = R_5^{(l)} = 0.$$

There are three non
trivial cross ratios:

$$u_1 = \frac{s_{12} s_{45}}{s_{123} s_{345}}, \quad u_2 = \frac{s_{23} s_{56}}{s_{123} s_{234}},$$

$$u_3 = \frac{s_{34} s_{61}}{s_{234} s_{345}},$$

Strong coupling

- At strong coupling, the AdS/CFT machinery was used to compute some special cases of the remainder function
 - ➔ for six edges, in 3+1 dimensions when all cross ratios are equal

$$R(u, u, u) = -\frac{\pi}{6} + \frac{1}{3\pi}\phi^2 + \frac{3}{8}(\log^2 u + 2Li_2(1-u))$$

[Alday, Gaiotto, Maldacena]

- ➔ for eight edges, in 1+1 dimensions

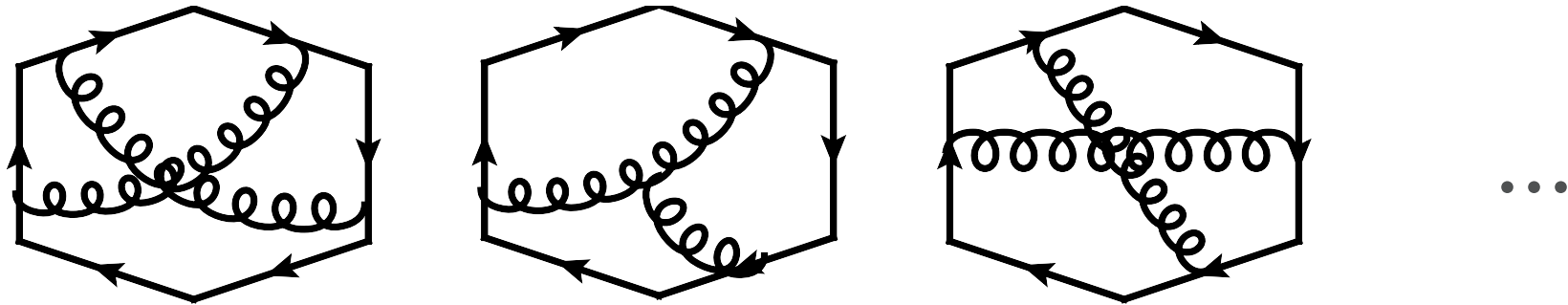
$$R_{8,WL}^{\text{strong}} = -\frac{1}{2} \ln(1 + \chi^-) \ln\left(1 + \frac{1}{\chi^+}\right) + \frac{7\pi}{6}$$

$$+ \int_{-\infty}^{+\infty} dt \frac{|m| \sinh t}{\tanh(2t + 2i\phi)} \ln\left(1 + e^{-2\pi|m| \cosh t}\right)$$

[Alday, Maldacena]

Weak coupling

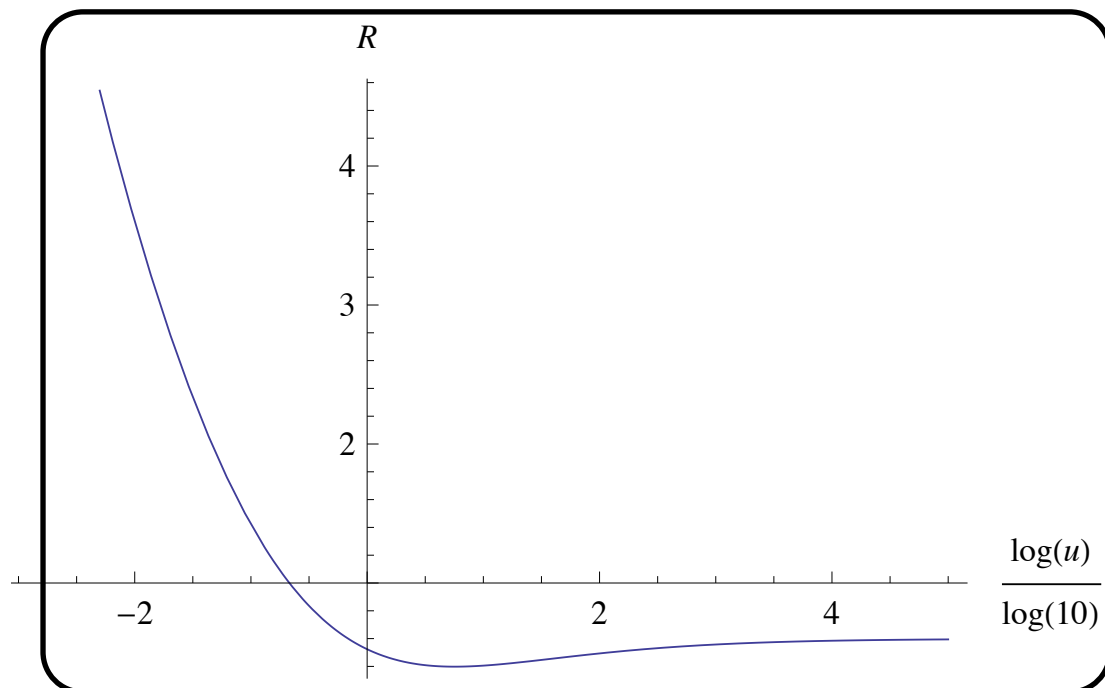
- Anastasiou, Brandhuber, Heslop, Khoze, Spence and Travaglini worked out the two-loop Wilson loop diagrams:



- Each of these diagrams is an integral, similar to a Feynman parameter integral.
- Numerical evaluations of the integrals allow to compare to the strong coupling answer.

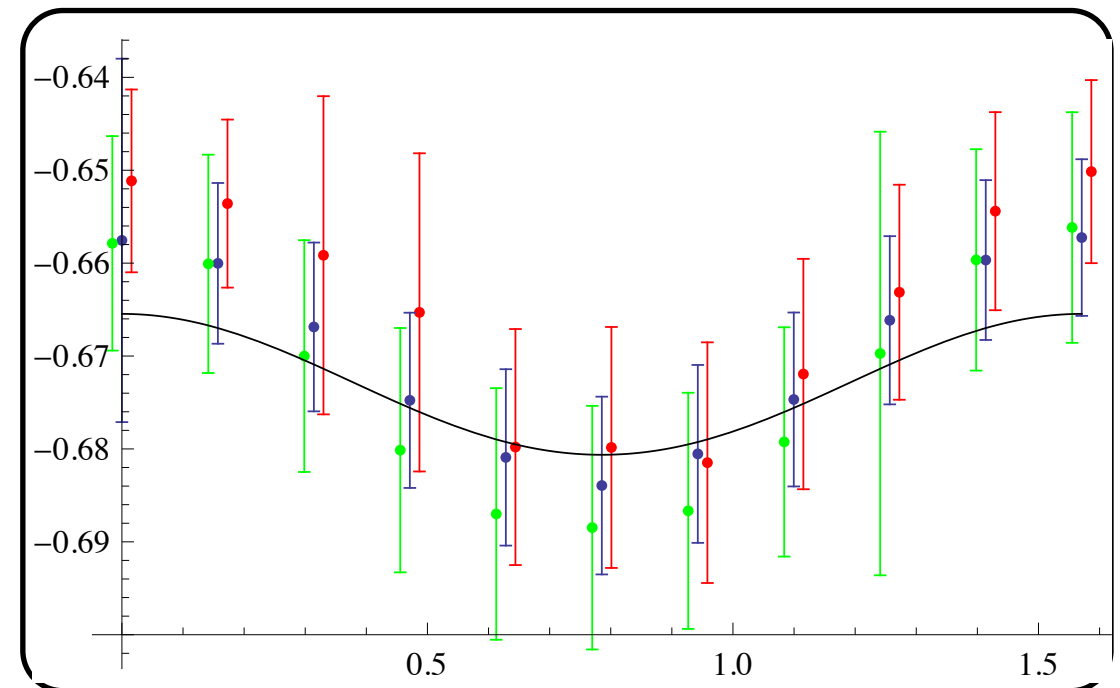
Weak coupling vs. strong coupling

● Hexagon



[Alday, Gaiotto, Maldacena]

● Octagon

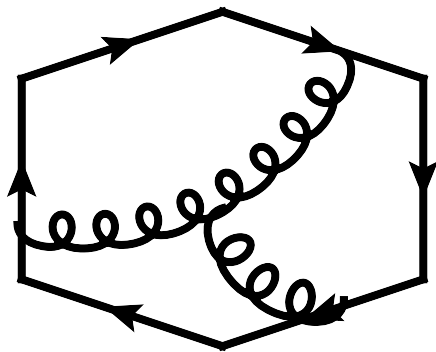


[Brandhuber, Heslop, Khoze
Spence, Travaglini]

- Could it be that the strong coupling result is equal to the weak coupling result???
- Only analytic results at weak coupling can tell...

Weak coupling

- For $n = 6$, many of the integrals can be computed explicitly, but one is particularly 'hard':



$$f_H(p_1, p_2, p_3; Q_1, Q_2, Q_3) := \frac{\Gamma(2 - 2\epsilon_{UV})}{\Gamma(1 - \epsilon_{UV})^2} \int_0^1 \left(\prod_{i=1}^3 d\tau_i \right) \int_0^1 \left(\prod_{i=1}^3 d\alpha_i \right) \delta\left(1 - \sum_{i=1}^3 \alpha_i\right) (\alpha_1 \alpha_2 \alpha_3)^{-\epsilon_{UV}} \frac{\mathcal{N}}{\mathcal{D}^{2-2\epsilon_{UV}}},$$

$$\begin{aligned} \mathcal{N} = & 2(p_1 p_2)(p_1 p_3) \left[\alpha_1 \alpha_2 (1 - \tau_1) + \alpha_3 \alpha_1 \tau_1 \right] + 2(p_1 p_3)(p_2 p_3) \left[\alpha_3 \alpha_1 (1 - \tau_3) + \alpha_2 \alpha_3 \tau_3 \right] \\ & + 2(p_1 p_2)(p_2 p_3) \left[\alpha_2 \alpha_3 (1 - \tau_2) + \alpha_1 \alpha_2 \tau_2 \right] + 2\alpha_1 \alpha_2 \left[2(p_1 p_2)(p_3 Q_3) - (p_2 p_3)(p_1 Q_3) - (p_3 p_1)(p_2 Q_3) \right] \\ & + \dots \end{aligned}$$

- The integrals do not explicitly depend on conformal ratios.
- But is all this complexity really needed..?
- Could we go to simplified kinematics?

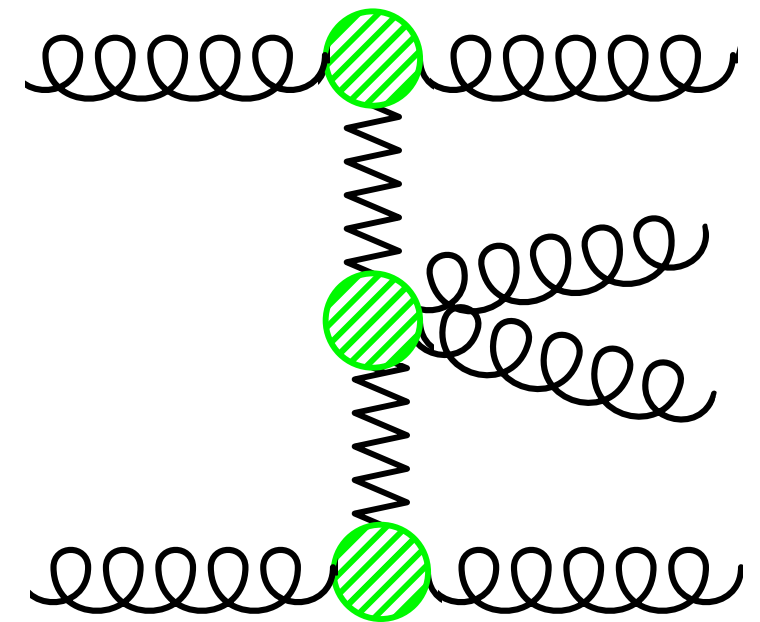
Regge limits

- Quasi-multi-Regge kinematics

$$y_3 \gg y_4 \simeq y_5 \gg y_6$$

$$|p_{3\perp}|^2 \simeq |p_{4\perp}|^2 \simeq |p_{5\perp}|^2 \simeq |p_{6\perp}|^2$$

- Conformal cross ratios are no longer trivial



[Del Duca, CD, Glover]

The six-point remainder function

- Conclusion: It is enough to compute the remainder function in this restricted area of phase space.
- In the limit, all integrals are
 - ➔ at most three-fold.
 - ➔ dependent on conformal cross ratios only.
- The resulting integrals are much simpler and can be solved in a closed form, and we can extract the two-loop six-point remainder function,

$$w_n^{(2)}(\epsilon) = f_{WL}^{(2)}(\epsilon) w_n^{(1)}(2\epsilon) + C_{WL}^{(2)} + R_{n,WL}^{(2)} + \mathcal{O}(\epsilon)$$

[Del Duca, CD, Smirnov]

The six-point remainder function

- The result is completely expressed in terms Goncharov's multiple polylogarithm,

$$G(\vec{w}; z) = \int_0^z \frac{dt}{t-a} G(\vec{w}'; t) \quad \Bigg| \quad \text{Li}_n(z) = \int_0^z \frac{dt}{t} \text{Li}_{n-1}(t)$$

- Some of them depend on complicated arguments:

$$u_{jkl}^{(\pm)} = \frac{1 - u_j - u_k + u_l \pm \sqrt{(u_j + u_k - u_l - 1)^2 - 4(1 - u_j)(1 - u_k)u_l}}{2(1 - u_j)u_l},$$

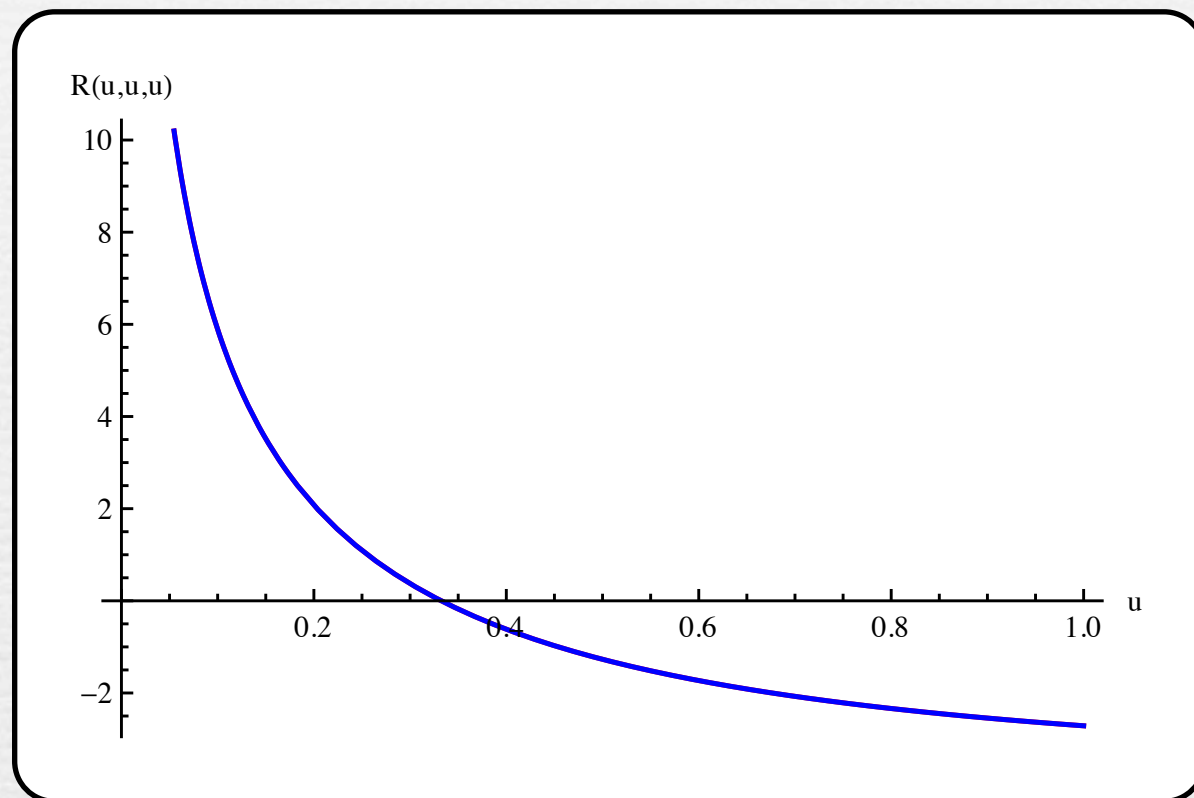
$$v_{jkl}^{(\pm)} = \frac{u_k - u_l \pm \sqrt{-4u_ju_ku_l + 2u_ku_l + u_k^2 + u_l^2}}{2(1 - u_j)u_k}.$$

- The result is expressed as a very complicated combination of multiple polylogarithms.

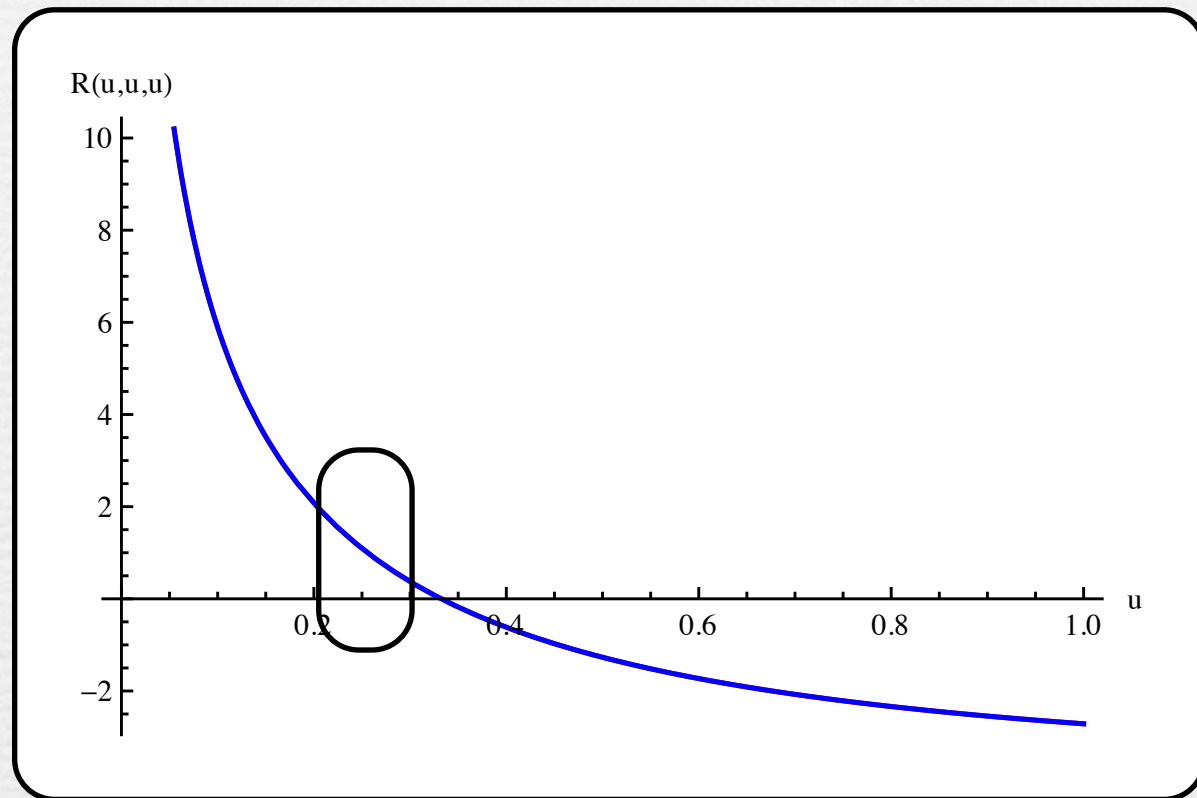
The six-point remainder function

$$\begin{aligned}
 R_{6,WL}^{(2)}(u_1, u_2, u_3) = & \quad (H.1) \\
 & \frac{1}{24}\pi^2 G\left(\frac{1}{1-u_1}, \frac{u_2-1}{u_1+u_2-1}; 1\right) + \frac{1}{24}\pi^2 G\left(\frac{1}{u_1}, \frac{1}{u_1+u_2}; 1\right) + \frac{1}{24}\pi^2 G\left(\frac{1}{u_1}, \frac{1}{u_1+u_3}; 1\right) + \\
 & \frac{1}{24}\pi^2 G\left(\frac{1}{1-u_2}, \frac{u_3-1}{u_2+u_3-1}; 1\right) + \frac{1}{24}\pi^2 G\left(\frac{1}{u_2}, \frac{1}{u_1+u_2}; 1\right) + \frac{1}{24}\pi^2 G\left(\frac{1}{u_2}, \frac{1}{u_2+u_3}; 1\right) + \\
 & \frac{1}{24}\pi^2 G\left(\frac{1}{1-u_3}, \frac{u_1-1}{u_1+u_3-1}; 1\right) + \frac{1}{24}\pi^2 G\left(\frac{1}{u_3}, \frac{1}{u_1+u_3}; 1\right) + \frac{1}{24}\pi^2 G\left(\frac{1}{u_3}, \frac{1}{u_2+u_3}; 1\right) + \\
 & \frac{3}{2}G\left(0, 0, \frac{1}{u_1}, \frac{1}{u_1+u_2}; 1\right) + \frac{3}{2}G\left(0, 0, \frac{1}{u_1}, \frac{1}{u_1+u_3}; 1\right) + \frac{3}{2}G\left(0, 0, \frac{1}{u_2}, \frac{1}{u_1+u_2}; 1\right) + \\
 & \frac{3}{2}G\left(0, 0, \frac{1}{u_2}, \frac{1}{u_2+u_3}; 1\right) + \frac{3}{2}G\left(0, 0, \frac{1}{u_3}, \frac{1}{u_1+u_3}; 1\right) + \frac{3}{2}G\left(0, 0, \frac{1}{u_3}, \frac{1}{u_2+u_3}; 1\right) - \\
 & \frac{1}{2}G\left(0, \frac{1}{u_1}, 0, \frac{1}{u_2}; 1\right) + G\left(0, \frac{1}{u_1}, 0, \frac{1}{u_1+u_2}; 1\right) - \frac{1}{2}G\left(0, \frac{1}{u_1}, 0, \frac{1}{u_3}; 1\right) + \\
 & G\left(0, \frac{1}{u_1}, 0, \frac{1}{u_1+u_3}; 1\right) - \frac{1}{2}G\left(0, \frac{1}{u_1}, \frac{1}{u_1}, \frac{1}{u_1+u_2}; 1\right) - \frac{1}{2}G\left(0, \frac{1}{u_1}, \frac{1}{u_1}, \frac{1}{u_1+u_3}; 1\right) - \\
 & \frac{1}{2}G\left(0, \frac{1}{u_1}, \frac{1}{u_2}, \frac{1}{u_1+u_2}; 1\right) - \frac{1}{2}G\left(0, \frac{1}{u_1}, \frac{1}{u_3}, \frac{1}{u_1+u_3}; 1\right) - \frac{1}{2}G\left(0, \frac{1}{u_2}, 0, \frac{1}{u_1}; 1\right) + \\
 & G\left(0, \frac{1}{u_2}, 0, \frac{1}{u_1+u_2}; 1\right) - \frac{1}{2}G\left(0, \frac{1}{u_2}, 0, \frac{1}{u_3}; 1\right) + G\left(0, \frac{1}{u_2}, 0, \frac{1}{u_2+u_3}; 1\right) -
 \end{aligned}$$

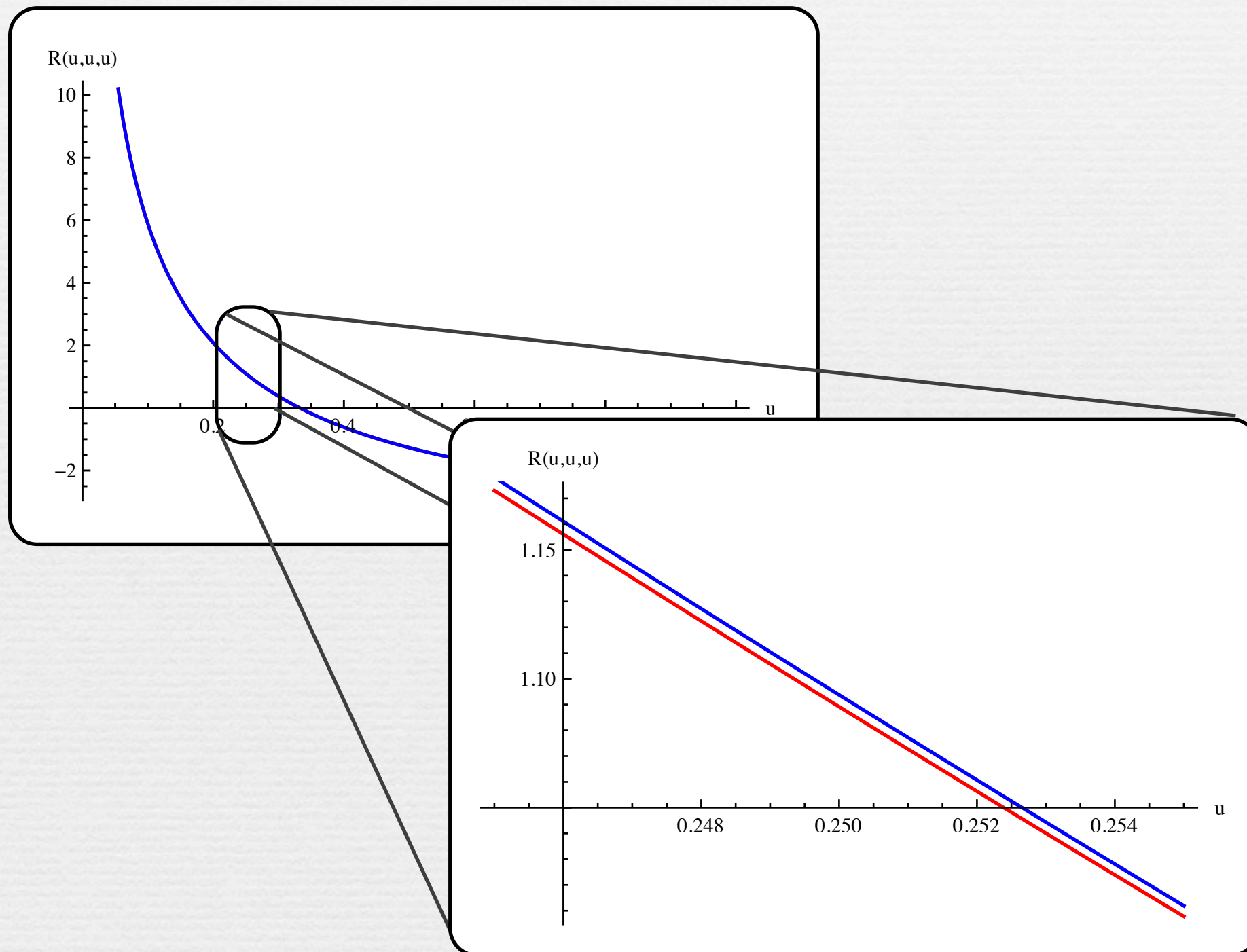
Weak coupling vs. strong coupling



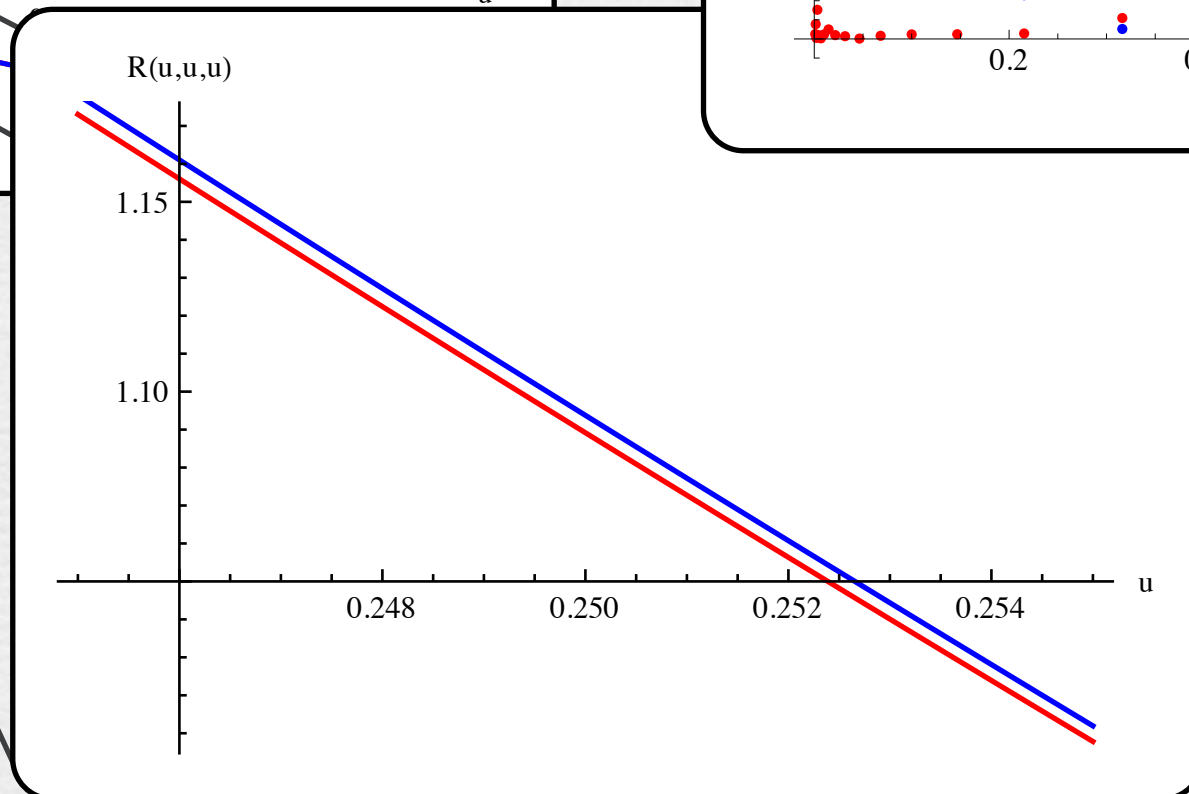
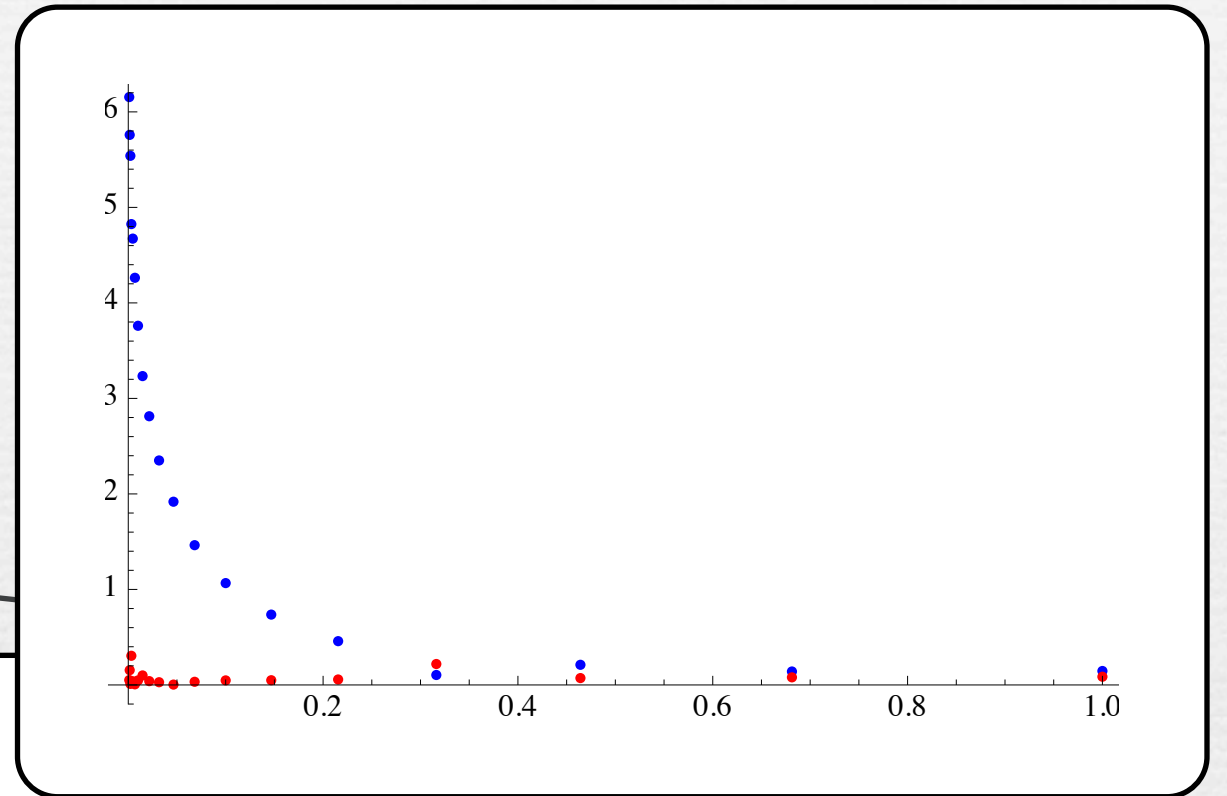
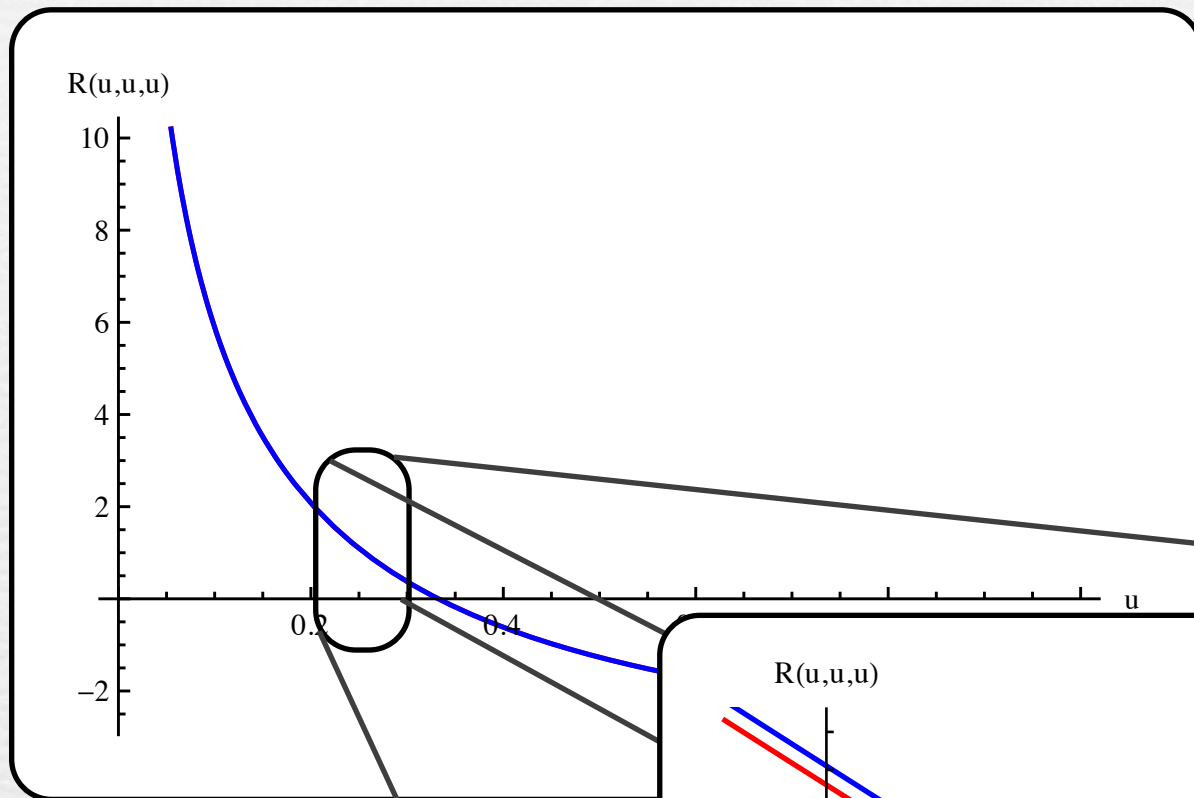
Weak coupling vs. strong coupling



Weak coupling vs. strong coupling



Weak coupling vs. strong coupling



The six-point remainder function

- If we want to compare directly the analytic expressions, we need identities among multiple polylogarithms...
 - ➔ Needs the intervention of a mathematician!
- The theory of motives provides a way to handle such expression
 - ➔ Hand-waving idea: Associate a 'tensor calculus' to polylogarithms that incorporates the functional identities.

[Goncharov, Spradlin,
Vergu, Volovich]

The six-point remainder function

$$R(u_1, u_2, u_3) = \sum_{i=1}^3 \left(L_4(x_i^+, x_i^-) - \frac{1}{2} \text{Li}_4(1 - 1/u_i) \right) - \frac{1}{8} \left(\sum_{i=1}^3 \text{Li}_2(1 - 1/u_i) \right)^2 + \frac{J^4}{24} + \chi \frac{\pi^2}{12} (J^2 + \zeta(2))$$

$$x_i^\pm = u_i x^\pm, \quad x^\pm = \frac{u_1 + u_2 + u_3 - 1 \pm \sqrt{\Delta}}{2u_1u_2u_3},$$

$$\Delta = (u_1 + u_2 + u_3 - 1)^2 - 4u_1u_2u_3.$$

[Goncharov, Spradlin,
Volovich, Vergu]

Towards remainder functions with more legs

- The techniques we developed for the computation of the six-point remainder function can also be applied to Wilson loops with more edges.
- We focus on the 1+1 dimensional setup studied at strong coupling.

Towards remainder functions with more legs

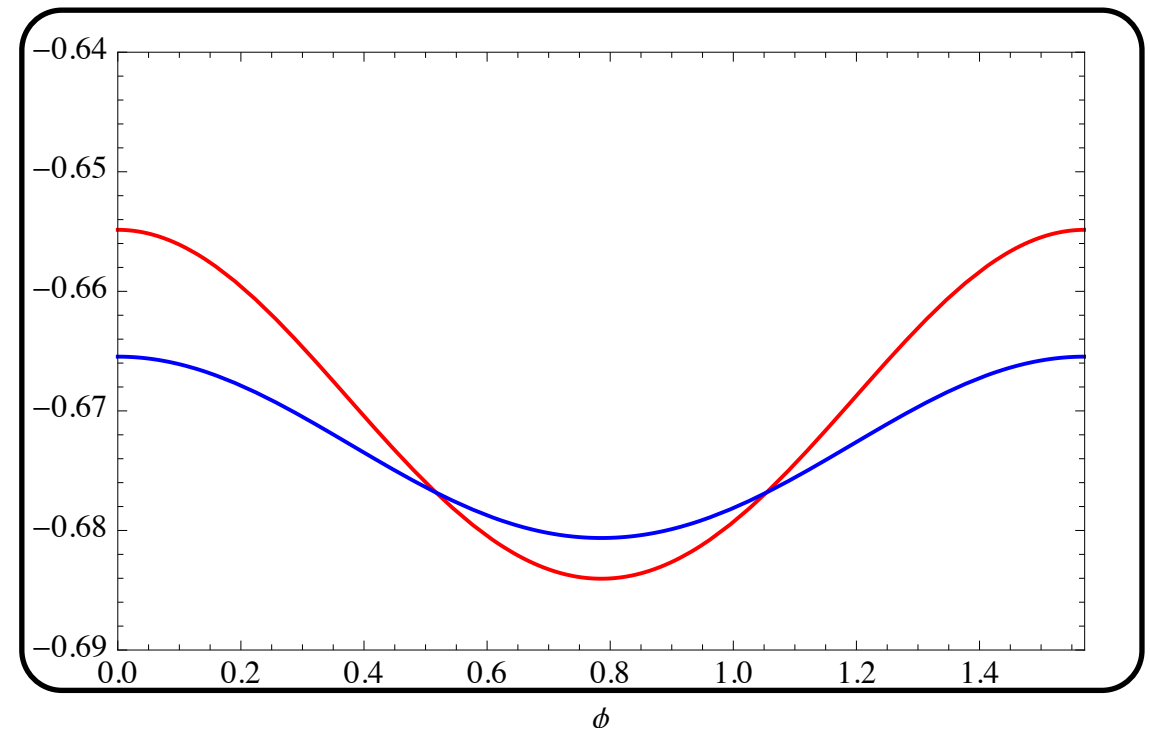
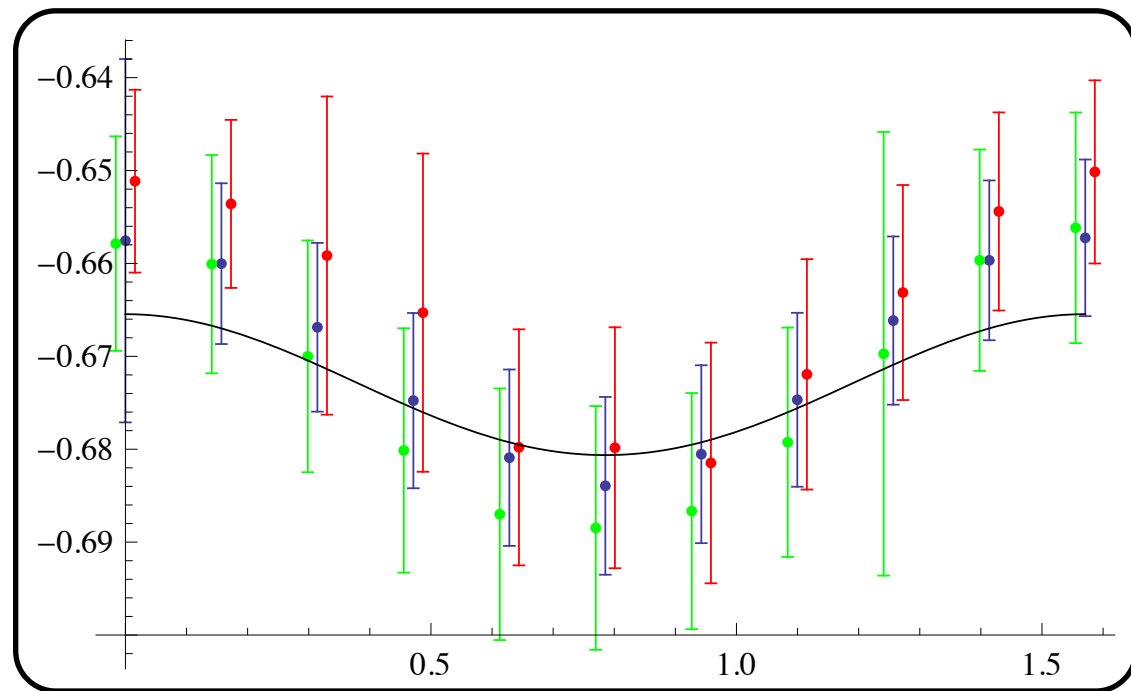
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Towards remainder functions with more legs

- The techniques we developed for the computation of the six-point remainder function can also be applied to Wilson loops with more edges.
- We focus on the 1+1 dimensional setup studied at strong coupling.
- The final answer involves 25.000 terms...
... but they all collapse to

$$R_{8,WL}^{(2)}(\chi^+, \chi^-) = -\frac{\pi^4}{18} - \frac{1}{2} \ln(1 + \chi^+) \ln\left(1 + \frac{1}{\chi^+}\right) \ln(1 + \chi^-) \ln\left(1 + \frac{1}{\chi^-}\right)$$

Octagon in 1+1 dimensions



- Same pattern as for the hexagon:
Even though the two answers are very close everywhere, they are not identical...

Conclusion

- In the last ten months, a lot of progress was made to compute two-loop multi-leg amplitudes/Wilson loops:
 - ➔ Hexagon in $3+1$ dimensions
 - ➔ Octagon in special kinematics ($1+1$ dimensions)
 - ➔ All even-sided polygons in $1+1$ dimensions. [Heslop, Khoze]
- Intriguing connection between strong and weak coupling to be understood.
- Along the way, we can start to fill up our tool box for multi-leg multi-loop computations:
 - ➔ Multiple polylogarithms
 - ➔ New insights from the theory of motives
- Interesting times are ahead in the $N=4$ SYM world!

Back ups

A Recipe to compute Wilson loops

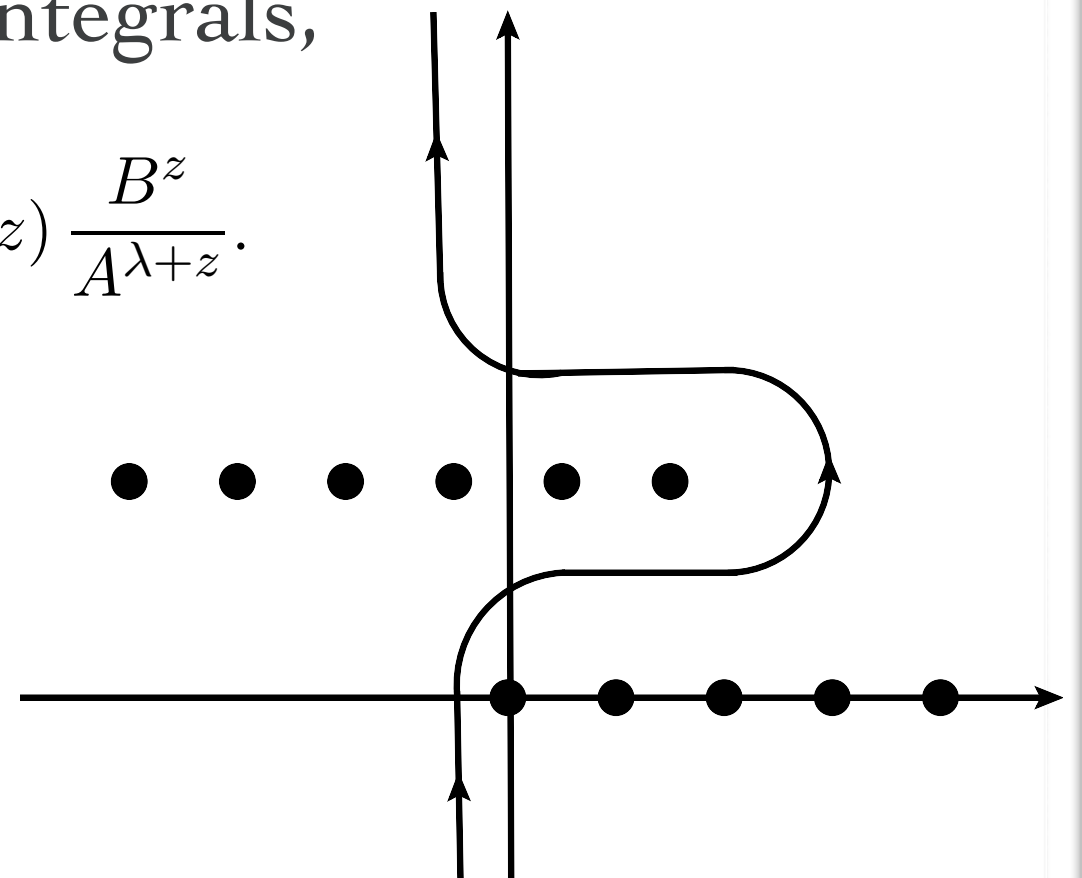
- Step 1:

We write down a Mellin-Barnes representation for each diagram, i.e., we replace denominators in the Feynman parameter integrals by contour integrals,

$$\frac{1}{(A+B)^\lambda} = \frac{1}{\Gamma(\lambda)} \frac{1}{2\pi i} \int_{-i\infty}^{+i\infty} dz \Gamma(-z) \Gamma(\lambda+z) \frac{B^z}{A^{\lambda+z}}.$$

- This turns the Feynman parameter integral into residue calculus:

$$\text{Res}_{z=-n} \Gamma(z) = \frac{(-1)^n}{n!}$$

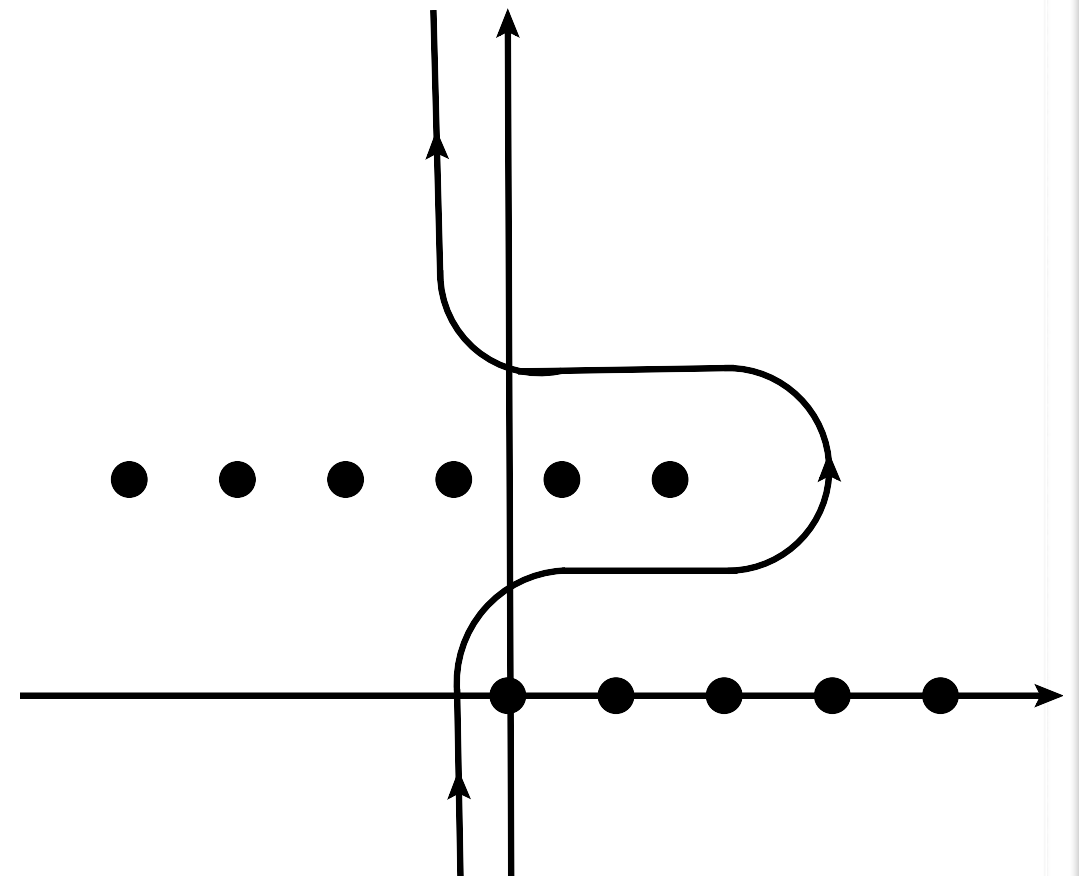


A Recipe to compute Wilson loops

- Step 2:

We exploit Regge exactness and we only compute the leading behavior of each integral in the quasi-multi-Regge limit

- The Mellin-Barnes approach is very suitable for this!

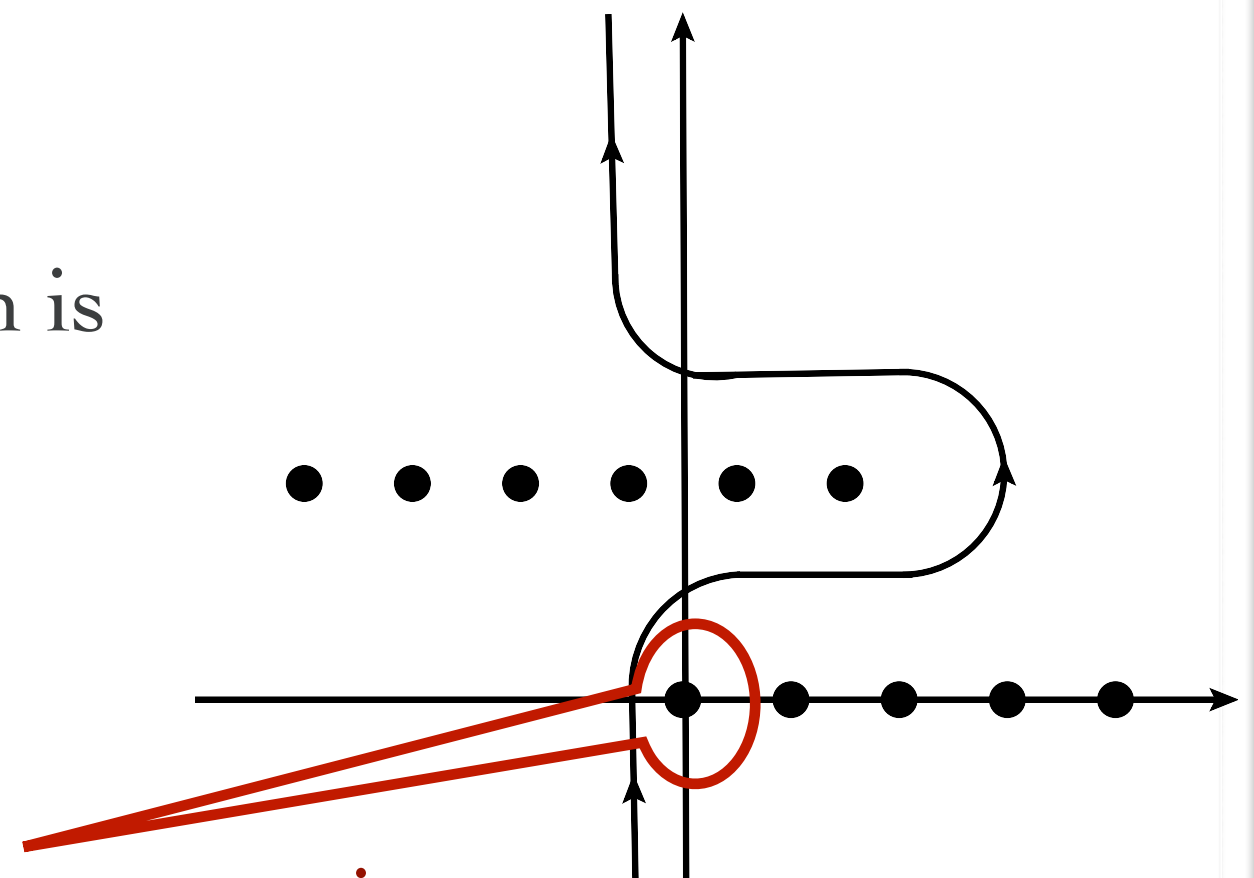


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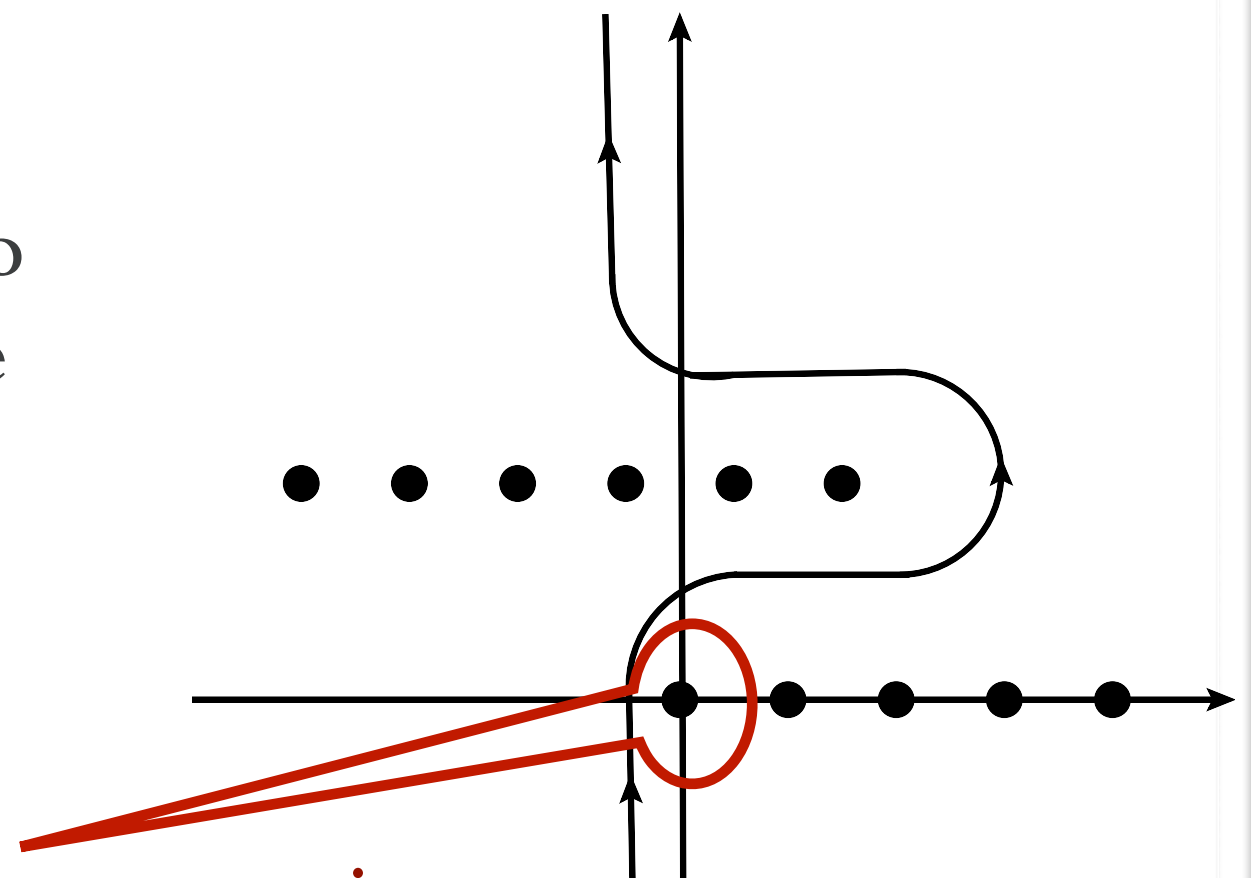
Leading term in the expansion

A Recipe to compute Wilson loops

- Step 3:

Iterate the limits: There are six different ways to take the limits, corresponding to the six cyclic permutations of the external legs.

- Regge-exactness allows us to take all six limits at the same time!



Leading term in the expansion

A Recipe to compute Wilson loops

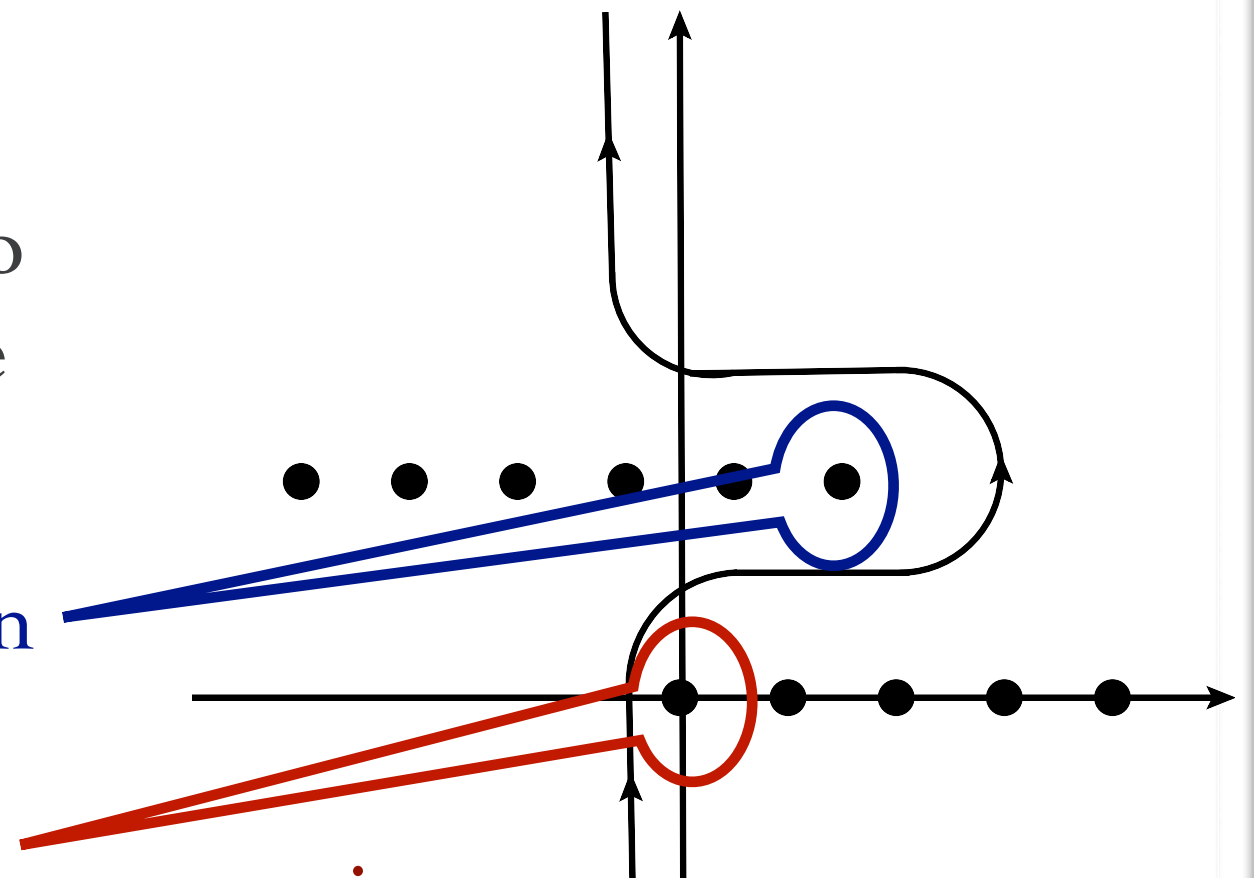
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Leading term in the expansion
in limit 2

Leading term in the expansion
in limit 1



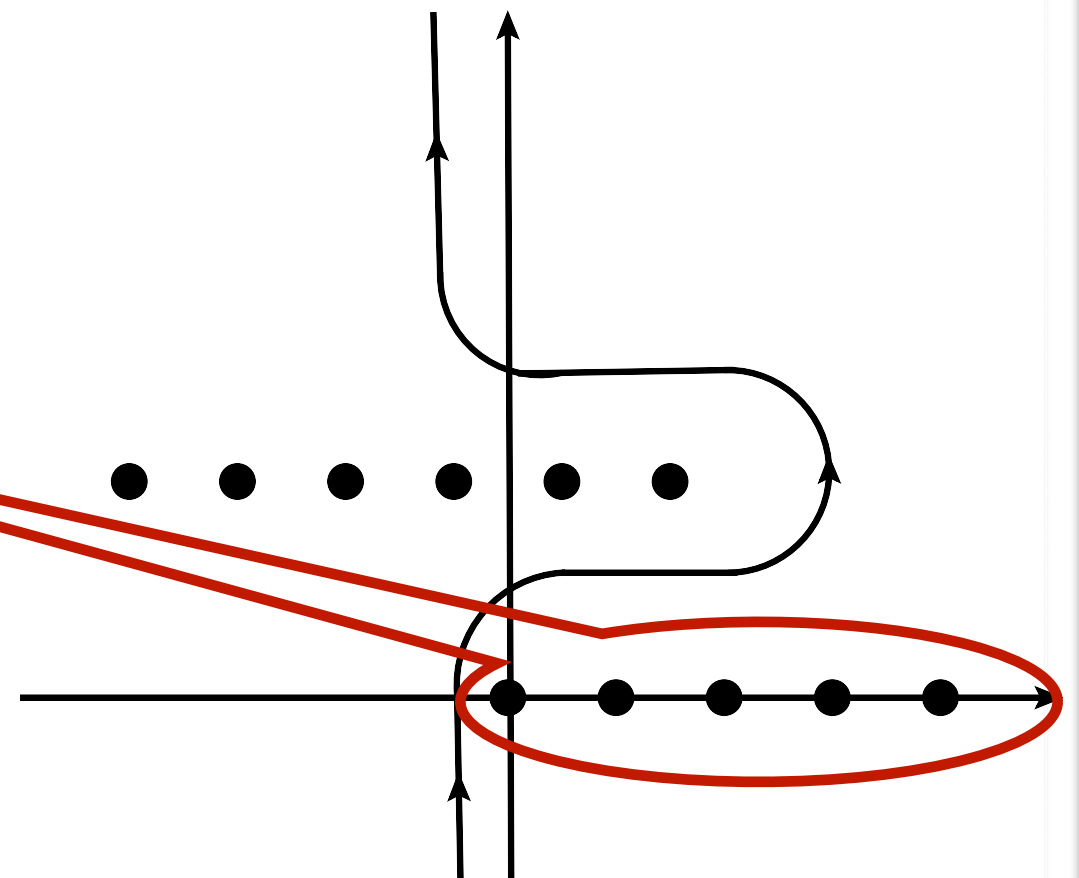
A Recipe to compute Wilson loops

- Step 4:

Sum up the remaining towers of residues:

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{u_i^n}{n} = -\ln(1 - u_i)$$

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{u_i^n}{n^k} = \text{Li}_k(u_i)$$



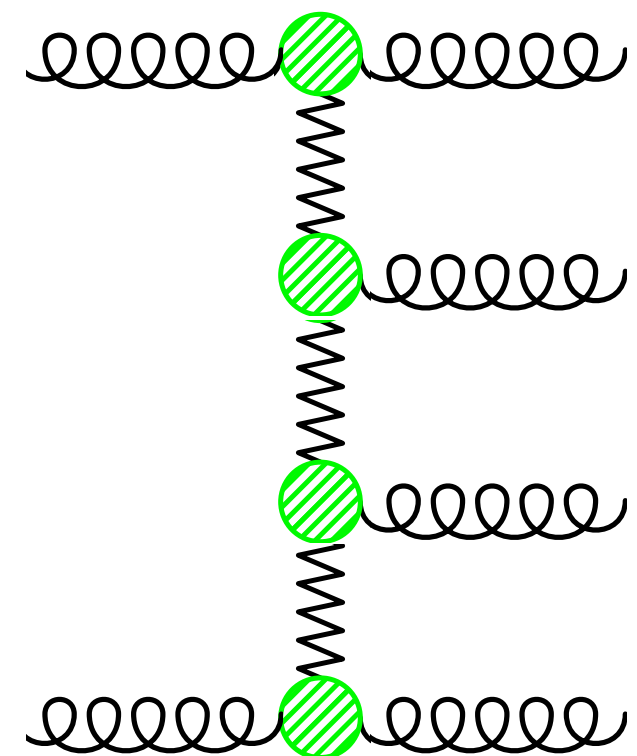
Regge limits

- Multi-Regge kinematics

$$y_3 \gg y_4 \gg y_5 \gg y_6$$

$$|p_{3\perp}|^2 \simeq |p_{4\perp}|^2 \simeq |p_{5\perp}|^2 \simeq |p_{6\perp}|^2$$

- s-type invariants are large.
t-type invariants are small.
Conformal cross ratios become trivial



[Del Duca, CD, Glover]

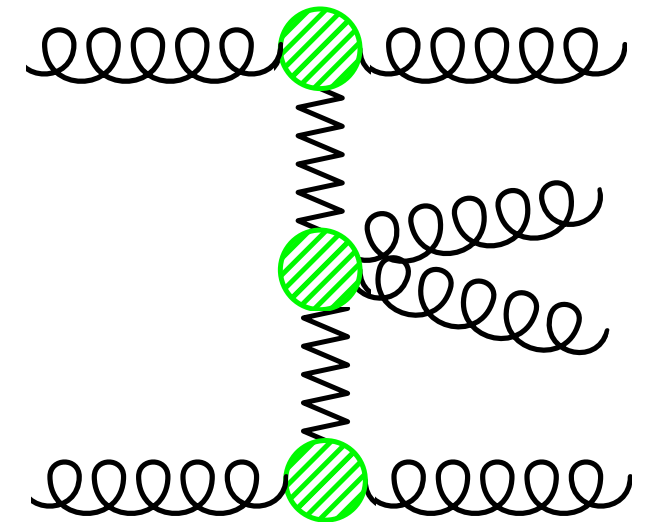
Regge-exactness of Wilson loops

- The result is in fact even stronger:

The Wilson-loop is **Regge-exact** in this limit, i.e., it is the same in this special kinematics and in arbitrary kinematics

$$y_3 \gg y_4 \simeq y_5 \gg y_6$$

$$|p_{3\perp}|^2 \simeq |p_{4\perp}|^2 \simeq |p_{5\perp}|^2 \simeq |p_{6\perp}|^2$$



- This result is in fact true for Wilson loops with an arbitrary number of edges and loops! [Del Duca, CD, Smirnov]
- **Bottomline:** it is enough to perform the computation in these **simplified** kinematics to obtain the two-loop six-point Wilson loop in **arbitrary** kinematics!

Regge-exactness of Wilson loops

- The proof is very simple:

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Log's are not power suppressed.

Symbols

- Simple example:

$$\operatorname{Li}_2(x) + \ln(1-x) \ln x = -\operatorname{Li}_2(1-x) - \frac{\pi^2}{6}$$

$$\operatorname{Symbol}(\operatorname{Li}_2(x)) = -(1-x) \otimes x$$

$$\operatorname{Symbol}(\ln(1-x) \ln x) = (1-x) \otimes x + x \otimes (1-x)$$

$$\operatorname{Symbol}(\text{const}) = 0$$

$$\operatorname{Symbol}(\operatorname{Li}_2(x) + \ln(1-x) \ln x) = x \otimes (1-x)$$

$$= -\operatorname{Symbol}(\operatorname{Li}_2(1-x))$$