

Mahler measures, special values and exactness: a periodic journey

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The plan

- 1 Mahler measure: definition and basic properties
- 2 Exact polynomials: from Darboux to Lalín
- 3 Our contribution: a geometric approach

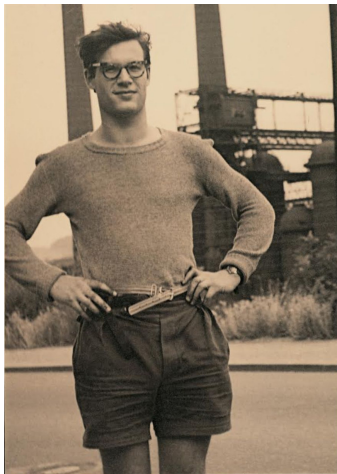
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So many periods...



Alexander Grothendieck

Periods $z \in \mathbb{C}$ admit the following equivalent characterizations:

Elementary $|\Re(z)|, |\Im(z)|$ are volumes of \mathbb{Q} -semi-algebraic sets;

K.-Z. $|\Re(z)|, |\Im(z)|$ are of the form $\int_{g \leq 0} f$, for $f, g \in \mathbb{Q}(t)$;

Motivic $z = \langle \eta, \gamma \rangle_{(X, D)}$, where $\eta \in H_{\text{dR}}^n(X, D)$ and $\gamma \in H_n^{\text{B}}(X, D)$, for some smooth variety X/\mathbb{Q} and some divisor $D \hookrightarrow X$ which can be taken to have simple normal crossings.

Example: $\Im(2\pi i)/2 = \text{Vol}(x^2 + y^2 \leq 1) = \int_{-\infty}^{+\infty} \frac{dt}{t^2+1}$, and $2\pi i = \left\langle \left[\frac{dz}{z} \right], [\odot] \right\rangle$

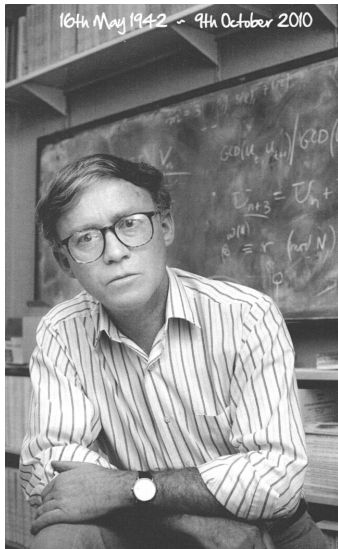
Problem: Given a period, express it as a motivic one. This allows to:

- make predictions about transcendence, via the *period conjecture*;
- place our period in various filtrations (e.g. study its *weight*).

Today: We are going to see this for the *Mahler measure* of a polynomial.

$$\underline{z}_n = (z_1, \dots, z_n), \quad \underline{z}_n^{\vee} = z_1^{\vee} \wedge \dots \wedge z_n^{\vee}$$

A huge problem about small Mahler measures



Kurt Mahler

Mahler (1962): For $P \in \mathbb{C}[\underline{z}_n^{\pm 1}] \setminus \{0\}$, let $m(P) := \int_{\mathbb{T}^n} \log |P| d\mu_n$, where $\mathbb{T}^n := (S^1)^n$ and $\mu_n = \frac{1}{(2\pi i)^n} \left(\frac{dz_1}{z_1} \wedge \dots \wedge \frac{dz_n}{z_n} \right)$ is the Haar probability measure.

We have $m(P) = \log(\lim_{p \rightarrow 0} \|P\|_{p, \mu_n})$, but also $\{m(PQ) = m(P) + m(Q)\}$.

Moreover, $m(P) \asymp \log(\ell(P))$, where $\ell(\sum_{v \in \mathbb{Z}^n} a_v \cdot \underline{z}_n^{\vee}) = \sum_{v \in \mathbb{Z}^n} |a_v|$ is the length.

In particular, $m(P) \geq 0$ if $P \in \mathbb{Z}[\underline{z}_n^{\pm 1}] \setminus \{0\}$.

Lawton (1977): If $P \in \mathbb{Z}[\underline{z}_n^{\pm 1}] \setminus \{0\}$, then $m(P) = 0 \Leftrightarrow P = z_n^w \cdot \prod_{j \geq 1} \Phi_j(z_n^{v_j})^{a_j}$.

This generalizes **Kronecker (1884)**. Other proofs by **Boyd (1981)**, **Smyth (1981)**.

Pierce (1917) If $P(z_1) = \prod_j (z_1 - \alpha_j) \in \mathbb{Z}[z_1]$, then $\Delta_n(P) := \prod_j \alpha_j^n - 1$ is easier to factor than a random integer. Often, $\Delta_n(P)/\Delta_1(P)$ is prime, if n is prime.

Lehmer (1933) We have $\Delta_{n+1}(P)/\Delta_n(P) \rightarrow \exp(m(P))$. Thus, we want the smallest $m(P) > 0$. Does it exist? If so, is it achieved by:

$$P(z_1) = z_1^{10} + z_1^9 - z_1^7 - z_1^6 - z_1^5 - z_1^4 - z_1^3 + z_1 + 1 ?$$

The multivariate aspects of Lehmer's problem



David William Boyd

Let $\mathcal{M}_n := m(\mathbb{Z}[\underline{z}_n^{\pm 1}] \setminus \{0\}) \subseteq \mathbb{R}_{\geq 0}$, and $\mathcal{M}_\infty := \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \mathcal{M}_n(\mathbb{Z}) \subseteq \mathbb{R}_{\geq 0}$.

Boyd (1981) $m(P) = \lim_{d \rightarrow +\infty} m(P(z_1, z_1^d, z_1^{d^2}, \dots, z_1^{d^{\binom{n-1}{d}}}))$, if $P \in \mathbb{C}[\underline{z}_n^{\pm 1}] \setminus \{0\}$.

Hence, we have $\mathcal{M}_1 \subseteq \mathcal{M}_\infty \subseteq \overline{\mathcal{M}_1}$, and $\overline{\mathcal{M}_1} = \mathbb{R}_{\geq 0}$ if $\inf(\mathcal{M}_1 \setminus \{0\}) = 0$.

Thus, if \mathcal{M}_∞ is closed, then Lehmer's question has a positive answer.

For $P \in \mathbb{C}[\underline{z}_n^{\pm 1}]$ and $A \in \mathbb{Z}^{m \times n}$, let $P_A(\underline{z}_m) := P(z_1^{a_{1,1}} \dots z_m^{a_{m,1}}, \dots, z_1^{a_{1,n}} \dots z_m^{a_{m,n}})$.

Smyth (2018) For $P \in \mathbb{C}[\underline{z}_n^{\pm 1}]$, the set $\mathcal{M}(P) := \{m(P_A) : A \in \mathbb{Z}^{* \times n}\}$ is closed. Moreover, \mathcal{M}_∞ is filtered by the sets $\mathcal{M}(Q_d)$, where $Q_d := \sum_{j=1}^d (z_{2j-1} - z_{2j})$.

Brunault, Guilloux, Mehrabdollahei, P. (2021) For $P \in \mathbb{C}[\underline{z}_n^{\pm 1}] \setminus \{0\}$, we have that $m(P) = \lim_{\rho(A) \rightarrow +\infty} m(P_A)$, where $\rho(A) := \min\{\|v\|_\infty : v \in \ker(A) \setminus \{0\}\}$. This gives us new limit points inside \mathcal{M}_∞ , and generalizes **Lawton (1983)**.

As a special case, we recover an identity of **Mehrabdollahei (2020)**, concerning the limit of $m(P_d)$, where $P_d(z_1, z_2) = \sum_{0 \leq a+b \leq d} z_1^a z_2^b$.

$$\log|z_1| \operatorname{darg}(z_2) - \log|z_2| \operatorname{darg}(z_1)$$



Christopher Deninger

Mahler measures and special values of L -functions

Boyd (1998) looked for small numbers inside \mathcal{M}_2 , and found numerically:

$$m\left(\sqrt{\frac{1}{z_1} + \frac{1}{z_2} + k}\right) \stackrel{?}{\sim}_{\mathbb{Q}^\times} L'(E_k, 0)$$

whenever $k^2 \in \mathbb{Z}$. Today, this has been proven for:

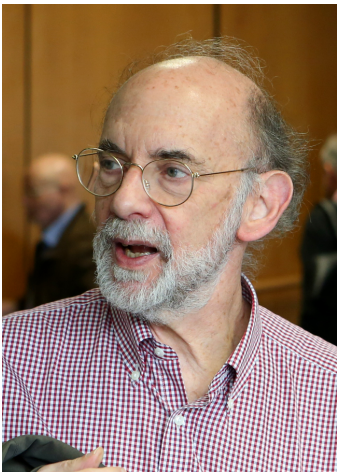
$$k \in \{-4\sqrt{2}, -2\sqrt{2}, 1, 2, 3, 2\sqrt{2}, 3\sqrt{2}, 5, 8, 12, 16, i, 2i, 3i, 4i, \sqrt{2}i\}$$

by Rodriguez-Villegas (1999), Rogers & Zudilin (2014), Brunault (2016), etc...

These identities can be related to the conjectures of Beilinson (1984) on special values of L -functions. Indeed, Deninger (1997) proved that:

$$m(P) = m(P(\underline{z}_{n-1}, 0)) + \langle r_{V_P}^\infty(\{z_1, \dots, z_n\}), [\gamma_P] \otimes (2\pi\sqrt{-1})^{1-n} \rangle_{(V_P, \partial\gamma_P)}$$

where $V_P := \{P=0\} \hookrightarrow \mathbb{G}_m^n$ and $\gamma_P := V_P(\mathbb{C}) \cap \{|z_1| = \dots = |z_{n-1}| = 1, |z_n| \leq 1\}$. Hence, if V_P is smooth, P is tempered, and $\partial\gamma_P = \emptyset$, Beilinson's conjectures predict $m(P) \rightsquigarrow L^*(H^{n-1}(\overline{V}_P), 0)$, for a smooth compactification \overline{V}_P of V_P .



Spencer Janney Bloch

Some little steps...

In particular, [Bornhorn \(1999\)](#), following the ideas of [Deninger \(1997\)](#), proves that Boyd's conjecture:

$$m\left(z_1 + \frac{1}{z_1} + z_2 + \frac{1}{z_2} + k\right) \stackrel{?}{\sim}_{\mathbb{Q}^\times} L'(E_k, 0)$$

holds under Beilinson's conjectures. This can be generalized to the family:

$$P(z_1, z_2) = z_1 + \frac{1}{z_1} + z_2 + \frac{1}{z_2} + \frac{z_1}{z_2} + \frac{z_2}{z_1} + k$$

which was treated in Theorem 4.4.3 of [P. \(2020\)](#).

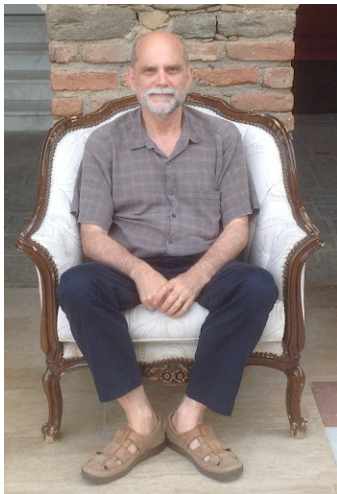
One can also use a weak form of Beilinson's conjectures for CM elliptic curves E/\mathbb{Q} , proved by [Bloch \(1978\)](#) (see also [Rohrlich \(1987\)](#)), to show that:

$$m(P) = rL'(E, 0) + \log|s|$$

for some $P \in \mathbb{Z}[z_1, z_2]$, and two numbers $r \in \mathbb{Q}$ and $s \in \overline{\mathbb{Q}}^\times$. This was done in [Theorem 9.2.4 of P. \(2020\)](#).

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Fernando
Rodriguez-Villegas

A gallery of explicit relations

Some identities between Mahler measures and zero-dimensional L -functions:

Smyth (1981) $m(L_2) = L'(\chi_{-3}, -1)$ and $m(L_3) = -14 \cdot \zeta'(-2)$, with $L_n = \sum_{j=0}^n z_j^{n+1}$

Ray (1987), Boyd & Rodriguez-Villegas (2002) Many more $L'(\chi_\Delta, -1)$ for $\Delta < 0$.

Lalín (2006) $m(z_0 S_{2k}^- + S_{2k}^+) \in \langle \zeta'(-2), \dots, \zeta'(-2k) \rangle_{\mathbb{Q}}$, for $S_m^\pm = \prod_{j=1}^m (1 \pm z_j)$.

D'Andrea & Lalín (2007) $m((1-z_1)(1-z_2) - (1-z_3)(1-z_4)) = -18 \cdot \zeta'(-2)$.

What about higher-dimensional L -functions?

Rodriguez-Villegas (2004) $m(L_4) \stackrel{?}{=} -L'(f, -1)$ and $m(L_5) \stackrel{?}{=} -8 \cdot L'(g, -1)$, for two modular forms $f \in S_3(15)$ and $g \in S_4(6)$. How to go on?

Note that $m(L_n)$ is related to the probability density of a random walk with n -steps, as studied by Borwein & Straub & Wan & Zudilin (2012).

Finally, some elliptic curves may appear, such as:

$$m(z_1 - (1-z_2)(1-z_3)) \stackrel{?}{=} -2 \cdot L'(X_1(15), -1)$$

studied by Boyd & Rodriguez-Villegas (2004) and Lalín (2013).



Matilde Noemí Lalín

Looking for answers: the notion of exactness

In all the previous examples, either $\partial\gamma_P \neq \emptyset$ or V_P is not smooth.

Maillot (2004) We should look at $W_P := V_P \cap V_{P^*}$, where $P^*(z_n) := \overline{P(\bar{z}_n^{-1})}$.

Why this? Suppose P is exact, i.e. $r_{V_P}^\infty(\{z_1, \dots, z_n\}) = 0$ inside $H_{\text{dR}}^{n-1}(V_P)$.

Then, using Stokes, we can write $m(P) = \int_{\partial\gamma_P} \omega$ for some $\omega \in \Omega^{n-2}(W_P)$.

This already explains Smyth's identity $m(L_2) = L'(\chi_{-3}, -1)$, because

$W_{L_2} = \{(\zeta_3, -\zeta_3 - 1), (-\zeta_3, \zeta_3 - 1)\}$. What about $m(L_3) = -14 \cdot \zeta'(-2)$?

Lalín (2007) Some polynomials are *successively exact*, so we can apply Stokes's theorem multiple times. Since $\partial \circ \partial = 0$, this can't be done directly.

However, if W_P is singular, the pullback of ω to the desingularization \tilde{W}_P of W_P may become exact, while $\partial\gamma_P$ might acquire a boundary!

For instance, if $P \in \mathbb{C}[z_3^{\pm 1}]$, one can take $\tilde{W}_P = \{\text{Res}_{z_3}(P, P^*) = 0\}$.

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The first step: symmetrizing the Deninger cycle

Brunault & P. (2021): If $P \in \mathbb{C}[z_n^{\pm 1}] \setminus \{0\}$ and $V_0: \{P \cdot P^* = 0\} \hookrightarrow \mathbb{G}_m^n$, then:

$$\left(\int_{\text{dR}}^{-1} \langle \eta_0 \rangle \right) m(P) - m(P(z_{n-1}, 0)) = \langle \eta_0, \gamma_0 \rangle V_0$$

where $\eta_0 = r_{V_0}^{\infty}(\{z_1, \dots, z_n\})$ and $\gamma_0 \in H_{n-1}^B(V_0)$ is a symmetrized version of γ_P .

Thus, looking at the Mayer-Vietoris long exact sequence:

$$\dots \rightarrow H_{\text{dR}}^{n-2}(W_P) \xrightarrow{\delta} H_{\text{dR}}^{n-1}(V_0) \rightarrow H_{\text{dR}}^{n-1}(V_P) \oplus H_{\text{dR}}^{n-1}(V_{P^*}) \rightarrow \dots$$

we get a class $\eta_1 \in H_{\text{dR}}^{n-2}(W_P)$ if $\eta_0|_{V_P} = 0$. Hence, we get:

$$m(P) - m(P(z_{n-1}, 0)) = \langle \eta_1, \gamma_1 \rangle W_P$$

where $\gamma_1 = \partial(\gamma_0)$ is obtained by looking at the adjoint Mayer-Vietoris long exact sequence in homology. Thus, say that P is exact if $\eta_0|_{V_P} = 0$, as before.

Historical note: Maillot points out that the relation between the involution $z_n \mapsto z_n^{-1}$ and the intersection $V_P(\mathbb{C}) \cap \mathbb{T}^n$ might go back to Darboux (1875).



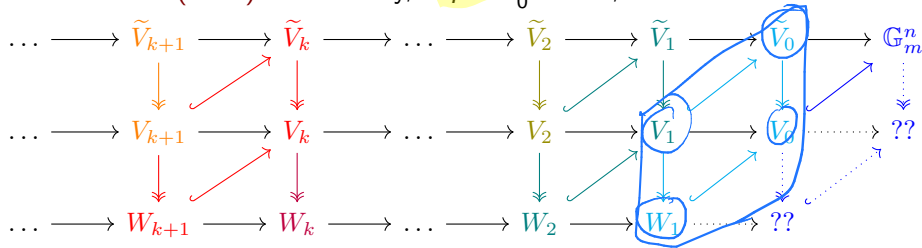
Jean Gaston Darboux

$$W_j := V_j^{\text{sing}}$$

How to go on: successive desingularization

There exist exact reciprocal polynomials, such as $P = z_1 + z_1^{-1} + z_2 + z_2^{-1} + 4$. In this case, $W_P = V_P$ is not the good variety. How to deal with them?

Brunault & P. (2021): Generically, $W_P = V_0^{\text{sing}}$. So, one can look at:



where each \tilde{V}_k is smooth. Here, a polynomial is *exact* if $\eta_0|_{\tilde{V}_0} = 0$.

By induction, P is *k-exact* if it is *(k-1)-exact* and $\eta_{k-1}|_{\tilde{V}_{k-1}} = 0$. We get:

$$m(P) - m(P(z_{n-1}, 0)) = \langle \eta_k, \gamma_k \rangle V_k$$

for $\eta_k \in H_{\text{dR}}^{n-1-k}(V_k)$ and $\gamma_k = \partial(\gamma_{k-1}) \in H_{n-1-k}^B(V_k)$.



Heisuke Hironaka

$$H^{u-k} (D^{(u)}, \mathbb{R}(u))$$



Pierre René Deligne

$$L(H^{u-1-k}(\bar{D}^{(u)}), u)$$

$$P(z_i) = z_i - \lambda$$

A more canonical approach: the exactness filtration

Let $X := \tilde{V}_0$ (smooth), and $D := V_1 \hookrightarrow X$ (simple normal crossings divisor). Write $D = D_1 \cup \dots \cup D_r$ and $D^{(i)} = \bigsqcup_{|I|=i} D_I$, where $D_I = \bigcap_{i \in I} D_i$ (smooth).

Take $\tilde{\eta} \in H_{dR}^{n-1}(X, D)$ lifting $\eta_0 \in H_{dR}^{n-1}(V_0)$ through the diagram:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} \dots & \rightarrow & H_{dR}^{n-2}(W_P) & \rightarrow & H_{dR}^{n-1}(V_0, W_P) & \rightarrow & H_{dR}^{n-1}(V_0) & \rightarrow & H_{dR}^{n-1}(W_P) = 0 \\ & & \downarrow & & \downarrow \wr & & \downarrow & & \downarrow \\ \dots & \rightarrow & H_{dR}^{n-2}(D) & \rightarrow & H_{dR}^{n-1}(X, D) & \rightarrow & H_{dR}^{n-1}(X) & \rightarrow & H_{dR}^{n-1}(D) = 0 \end{array}$$

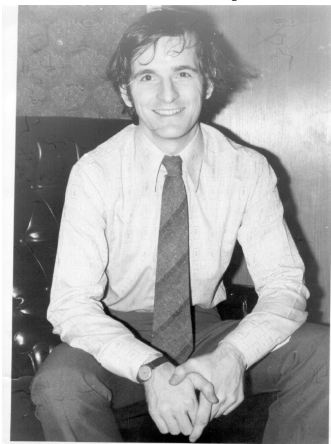
and consider the spectral sequence $H^q(D^{(p)}) \Rightarrow H^{p+q}(X, D)$, inducing $\text{Fil}_{\text{rel}}^\bullet$.

Brunault & P. (2021): Say that P is k -exact if $\tilde{\eta} \in \text{Fil}_{\text{rel}}^k(H_{dR}^{n-1}(X, D))$.

Let $\tilde{\gamma} \in H_{n-1}^B(X, D)$. If $\tilde{\eta} \notin \text{Fil}_{\text{rel}}^{k+1}$ and $\tilde{\gamma} \in \text{Fil}_k^{\text{rel}} \setminus \text{Fil}_{k-1}^{\text{rel}}$, we have:

$$m(P) - m(P(z_{n-1}, 0)) = \langle \text{gr}_{\text{rel}}^k(\tilde{\eta}), \text{gr}_k^{\text{rel}}(\tilde{\gamma}) \rangle_{(X, D)} = \langle \tilde{\eta}_k, \tilde{\gamma}_k \rangle_{D^{(k)}}$$

which computes $m(P)$ as an absolute period on the smooth variety $D^{(k)}$.



Christopher Smyth

$m(t + t^2 + t^3 + 1)$
An example: the three-variable linear polynomial

Let $P = L_3 = z_1 + z_2 + z_3 + 1$. Recall that $m(P) = -14\zeta'(-2)$ by Smyth (1981).
Let $Z = \{z_1 = 0\} \cup \{z_2 = 0\} \cup \{z_1 + z_2 = 1\}$ and $S = \{z_1 = 1\} \cup \{z_2 = 1\} \cup \{z_1 + z_2 = 0\}$.

We have $V_P \cong \mathbb{A}^2 \setminus Z$, thus $H_{\text{dR}}^2(V_P) \cong H_{\text{dR}}^1(V_P) \cong \mathbb{R}^3$, and $W_P \cong S \setminus (S \cap Z)$.
Hence, $H_{\text{dR}}^1(W_P) \cong \mathbb{R}^4$ and $\text{Im}(H_{\text{dR}}^1(V_P) \oplus H_{\text{dR}}^1(V_{P^*}) \rightarrow H_{\text{dR}}^1(W_P)) \cong \mathbb{R}^3$.

Therefore, $H_{\text{dR}}^1(V_0) \cong \mathbb{R}^3$ and $H_{\text{dR}}^2(V_0) \cong \mathbb{R}^7$. We get a diagram:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc}
 0 & \rightarrow & H_{\text{dR}}^1(V_0) & \rightarrow & H_{\text{dR}}^1(W_P) & \xrightarrow{\delta} & H_{\text{dR}}^2(V_0, W_P) \rightarrow H_{\text{dR}}^2(V_0) \rightarrow 0 \\
 & & \downarrow & & \downarrow & & \downarrow & & \downarrow \\
 0 & \rightarrow & H_{\text{dR}}^1(X) & \rightarrow & H_{\text{dR}}^1(D) & \xrightarrow{\delta} & H_{\text{dR}}^2(X, D) \rightarrow H_{\text{dR}}^2(X) \rightarrow 0
 \end{array}$$

whose rows are exact. Note that $D = W_P \sqcup W_P$ and $X = V_P \sqcup V_{P^*}$.

Finally, $\tilde{\eta} \in \text{Fil}_{\text{rel}}^1(H^2(X, D)) = \text{Fil}_{\text{rel}}^2(H^2(X, D)) \cong \mathbb{R}^2$, and $D^{(2)} \cong \text{Spec}(\mathbb{Q})^{\sqcup 6}$.

Thus, we should indeed expect (and we can prove) $m(P) \sim_{\mathbb{Q}^\times} \zeta'(-2)$.

$$\log(\alpha), \alpha \in \overline{\mathbb{Q}} \cap \mathbb{R}_{>0} \quad \in \mathbb{Q}^\times$$

$$\text{if } \Delta < 0, L'(\chi_\Delta, -1) = \sqrt{(*)} - m(P(z_1, z_2))$$

Further steps and directions



François Brunault

- Resolve the ambiguity $\text{Im}(H_{\text{dR}}^{n-2}(V_0^{\text{sing}}) \rightarrow H_{\text{dR}}^{n-1}(X, D))$ for $\tilde{\eta}$.
- Write $m(P)$ as a period for $(\overline{X} \setminus A, B \setminus (A \cap B))$, with \overline{X} smooth projective. Relate this to $\mathfrak{X}(\Delta_P)$ (toric variety) and to (successive) *temperedness*.
- Compare with the weight filtration on $H^{n-1}(V_0)$.
- Compare with the degeneration $P \cdot P^* = t$ for $t \rightarrow 0$. To do so, study $P \cdot P^* - t \in \mathbb{C}((t))[\mathbb{Z}_n^{\pm 1}]$, maybe via *tropical homology*.
- Make γ_P more canonical, following (perhaps) **Besser & Deninger (1999)**.
- Study the families L_n (1-exact if $n \neq 3$) and $z_0 S_n^- + S_n^+$ ($(n-1)$ -exact).
- “Compute” $m(L_4)$ and $m(L_5)$ up to \mathbb{Q}^\times , and assuming Beilinson’s conj.
- Study the co-exactness filtration on \mathcal{M}_∞ .
- Write $m(P)$ as a *motivic period*, following **Brown (2017)**. Maybe it’s a *single valued period*, as in **Brown & Dupont (2021)**.
- Study this in fibrations, as in **Doran & Kerr (2011)**.
- Compute $\text{trdeg}(\mathbb{Q}(\pi, m(P_1), \dots, m(P_r)) / \mathbb{Q})$, assuming the *period conj.*

Thank you very much for your attention!



Está preparando seu espírito e sua vontade, porque existe uma grande verdade neste planeta: seja você quem for ou o que faça, quando quer com vontade alguma coisa, é porque esse desejo nasceu na alma do Universo.

Paulo Coelho de Souza, *O Alquimista*

P.S: Did you get curious about Mahler measures? Check out the book:
Many Variations of Mahler Measures: A Lasting Symphony
by **Brunault and Zudilin (2020)**.