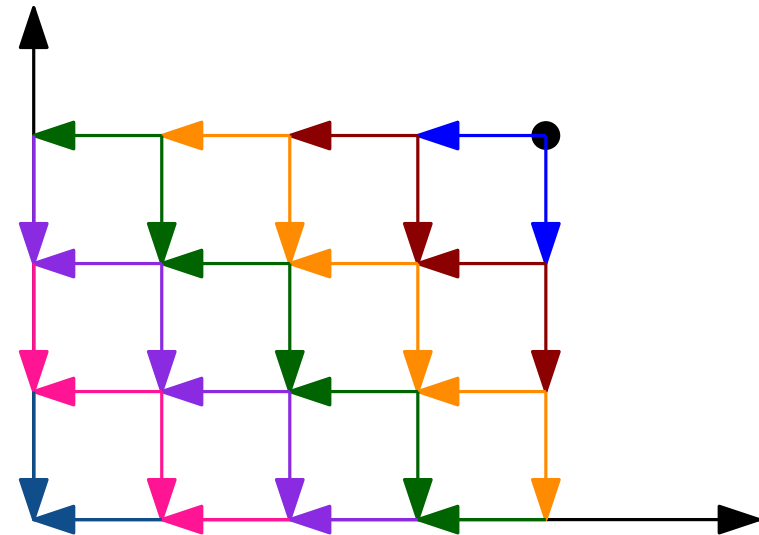
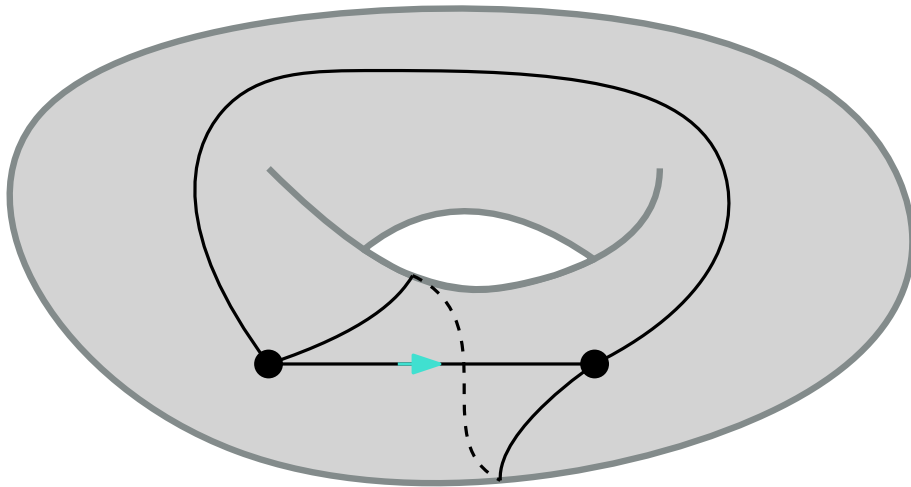


# Counting with random walks

Baptiste Louf

with Andrew Elvey–Price, Wenjie Fang and Michael Wallner



# 2-year postdoc position with me

Bordeaux, starting Fall 2025, deadline 31 December 2024

On **High genus geometry and/or asymptotic enumeration**:

- hyperbolic geometry
- maps
- random graphs
- enumeration (cf this talk)
- and more !

For more info, check my website: <https://baptiste.louf.fr/>

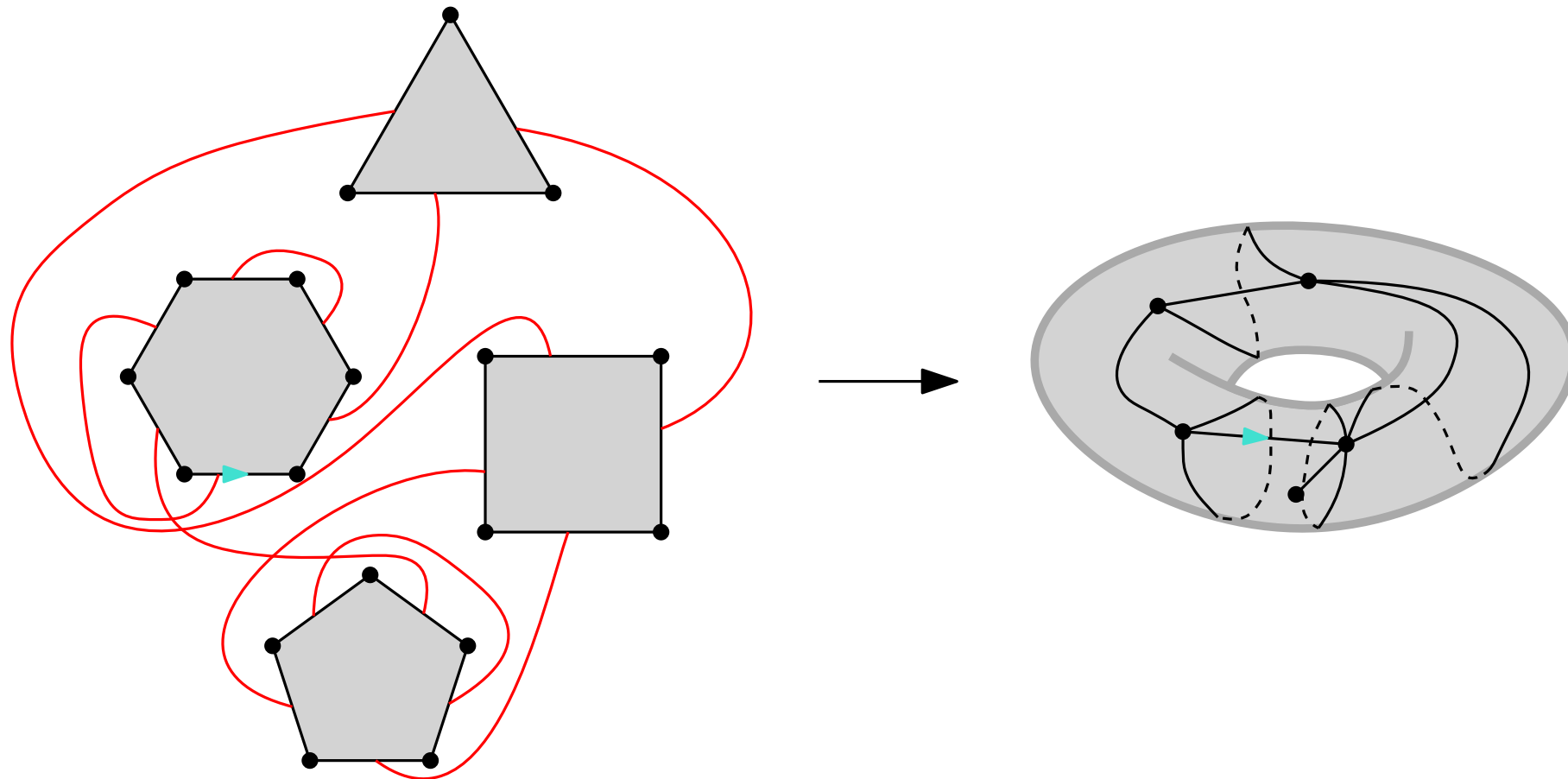
**A bit of context:  
combinatorial maps and enumerative combinatorics**

# Definition : maps

Map = **discrete surfaces**

i.e. gluing of polygons along their edges to create a (compact, connected, oriented) surface

Genus  $g$  of the map = genus of the surface = # of handles



# Counting maps

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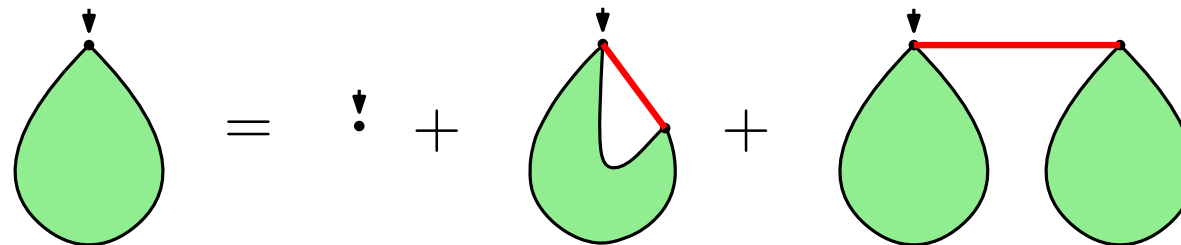
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"Catalan number" (counts trees etc.)

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**Method** : Generating function and recursive decomposition

$$F(z) = \sum_{n \geq 0} a_n z^n$$





# Counting maps ... asymptotically

How about maps in positive genus ?

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**Theorem** [Lehman–Walsh '72+ Bender–Canfield '86] :

$a_n^{(g)}$  = nb of maps of genus  $g$  with  $n$  edges

$$a_n^{(g)} \sim C_g 12^n n^{5/2(g-1)}$$

as  $n \rightarrow \infty$  for  $g$  fixed.

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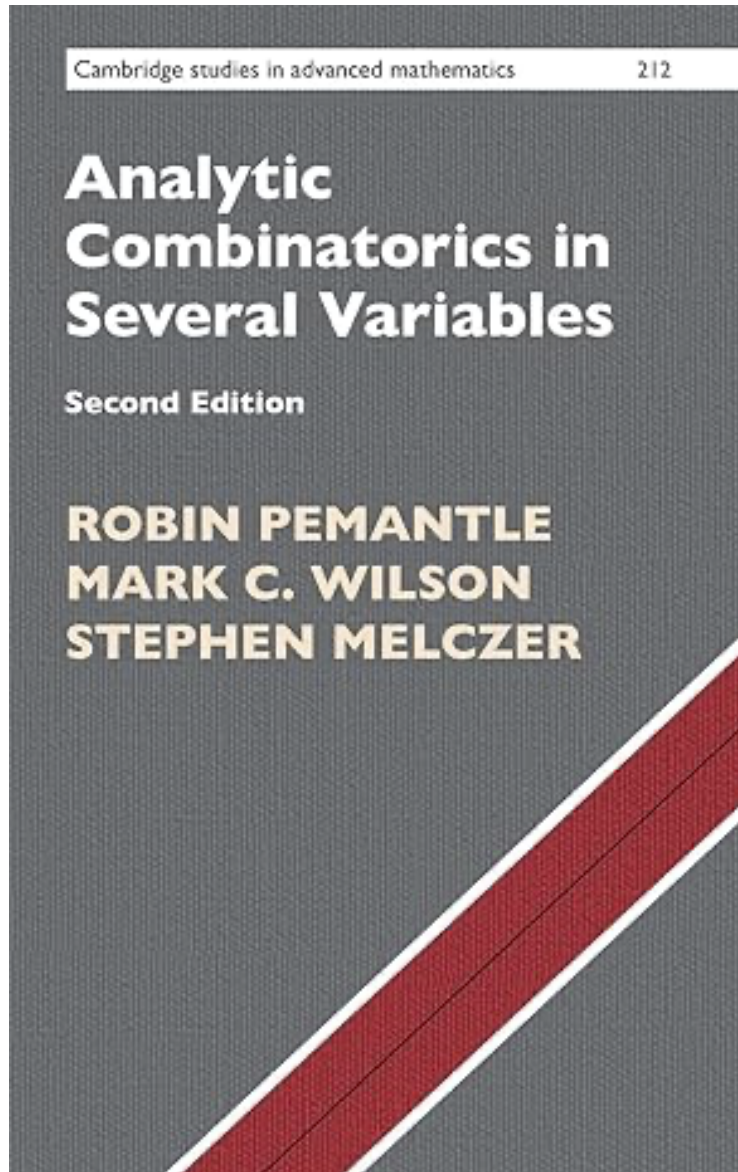
**Large genus geometry:** negative average discrete curvature, **hyperbolic** behaviour.

# Bivariate asymptotics

If  $n, g \rightarrow \infty$ , we're dealing with **bivariate asymptotics**  
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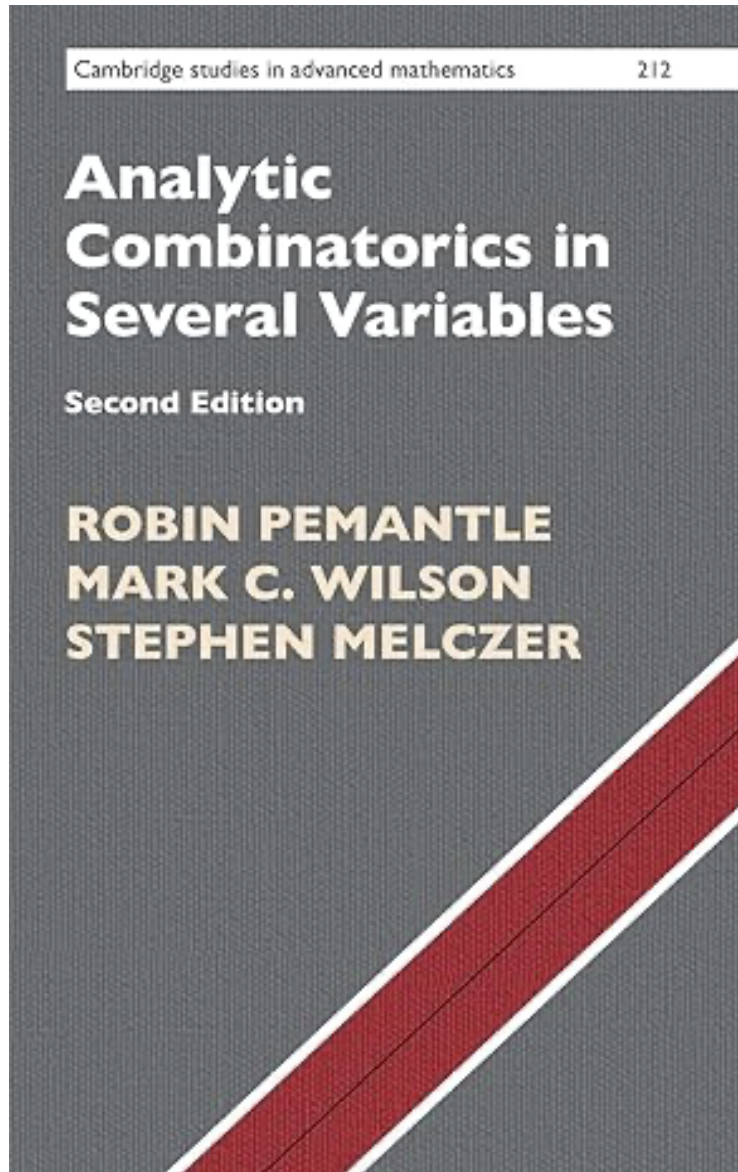


Recent progress to get asymptotics when the generating function is explicit and "simple"

(2nd edition, 2024, 550 pages !)

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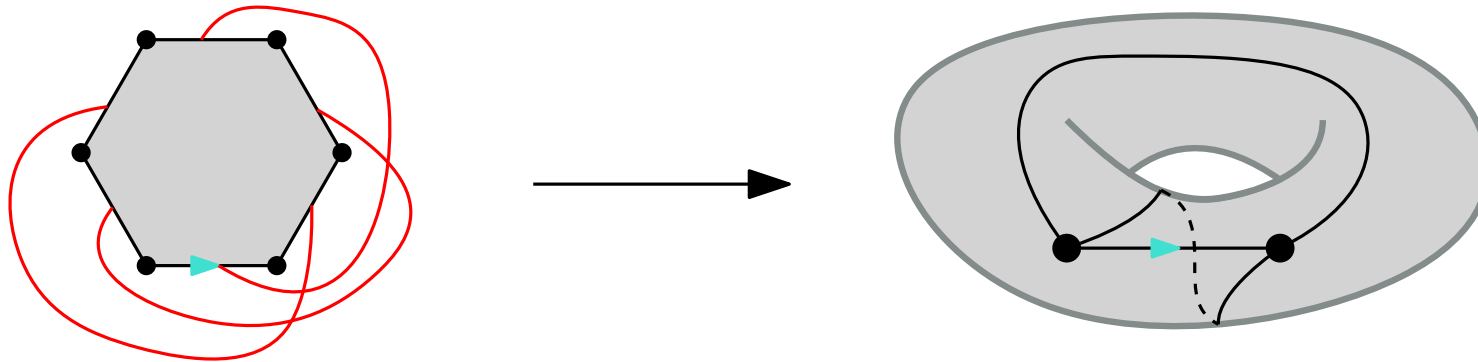
→ maps do not fit in this case !

**The problem: enumerating unicellular maps, asymptotically,  
bivariately**



# Unicellular maps

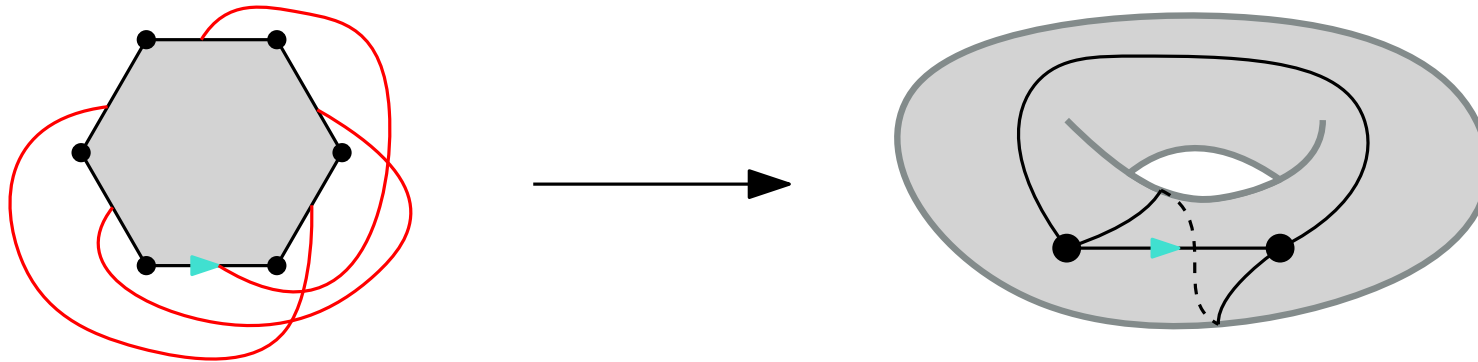
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# Unicellular maps

**Simplest model of maps:** maps with only one face/gluing of a single polygon



(unicellular map of genus 0 = tree !)

Let  $E(n, g)$  be the number of unicellular maps with  $n$  edges and genus  $g$

**Goal:** Study the asymptotics of  $E(n, g)$  as  $n, g \rightarrow \infty$  !

# Unicellular maps: what's known ?

**Theorem [Harer–Zagier '86]:**  $E(0, 0) = 1$ , for  $n \geq 1, n \geq 2g$ , we have

$$(n + 1)E(n, g) = 2(2n - 1)E(n - 1, g) + (n - 1)(2n - 3)(2n - 1)E(n - 2, g - 1)$$

$$\implies 1 + 2xy + 2 \sum_{g \geq 0, n > 0} \frac{E(n, g)}{(2n - 1)!!} y^{n+1} x^{n+1-2g} = \left( \frac{1 + y}{1 - y} \right)^x$$

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## Asymptotic enumeration:

- for  $\frac{g}{n} \rightarrow \theta \in (0, 1/2)$  [Angel–Chapuy–Curien–Ray '13]
- for  $g = O(n^{1/3})$  [Curien–Kortchemski–Marzouk '23]

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**Method :** A bijection between unicellular maps and decorated trees

[Chapuy–Féray–Fusy '12] (first case)

core/kernel decomposition (second case)

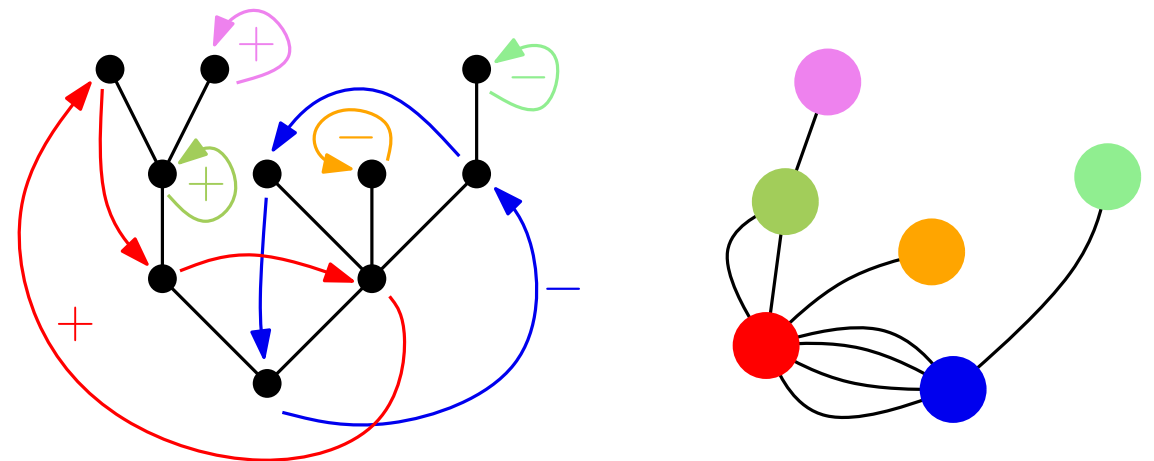


image : G. Chapuy

# Univellular maps: full asymptotics

**Our goal:** Obtain asymptotics for  $E(n, g)$  for all regimes of  $n, g$  using **only** the Harer-Zagier recurrence (we forget about the combinatorics !)

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**Theorem:** [Elvey-Price-Fang-L.-Wallner '2x]

As  $n, g \rightarrow \infty$  with  $n - 2g \gg \log(n)$

$$E(n, g) \sim \frac{1}{2\sqrt{2\pi}} n^{2g-2} e^{nf(\frac{g}{n})} J\left(\frac{g}{n}\right),$$

with

$$\theta(\lambda) = \frac{1}{2} - \frac{\lambda \log\left(\frac{1+\sqrt{1-4\lambda}}{1-\sqrt{1-4\lambda}}\right)}{\sqrt{1-4\lambda}},$$
$$f(\theta) = -\theta \log\left(\frac{1-4\lambda}{4\lambda^2}\right) - 2\theta - \log(\lambda),$$
$$J(\theta) = \sqrt{\frac{2}{\lambda(\theta)(1-4\lambda(\theta)-2\theta+4\theta\lambda(\theta))}}.$$

**Idea of proof 1: guess and check**



## Guess and check

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**Idea:** if I have explicit formulas for number  $\Omega(n, g)$  such that they satisfy **(HZ)** and  $\Omega(0, 0) = E(0, 0)$ , then  $E(n, g) = \Omega(n, g)$  always !

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**Goal:** find numbers  $\Omega(n, g)$  such that:

$$\Omega(n, 0) \sim E(n, 0) \text{ as } n \rightarrow \infty$$

“asymptotic initial condition”

$$(n+1)\Omega(n, g) \approx 2(2n-1)\Omega(n-1, g) + (n-1)(2n-3)(2n-1)\Omega(n-2, g-1)$$

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Then hopefully

$$\Omega(n, g) \sim E(n, g)$$

**Idea of proof 2: random walks**

# Rewriting the recurrence in terms of walks

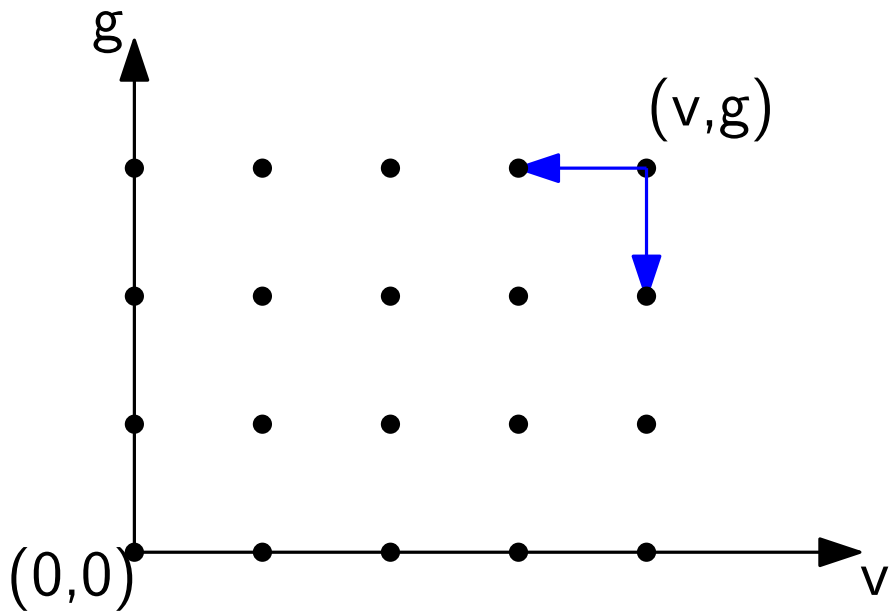
Set  $A(v, g) := E(v + 2g, g)$  Harer–Zagier rewrites

$$A(\mathbf{v}, \mathbf{g}) = \frac{2(2n-1)}{n+1} A(\mathbf{v} - \mathbf{1}, \mathbf{g}) + \frac{(n-1)(2n-3)(2n-1)}{n+1} A(\mathbf{v}, \mathbf{g} - \mathbf{1})$$

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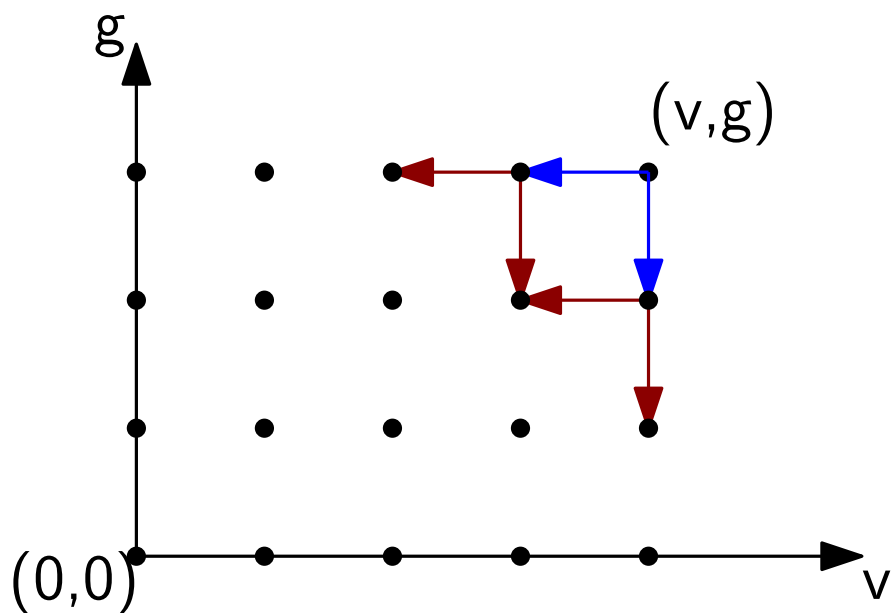




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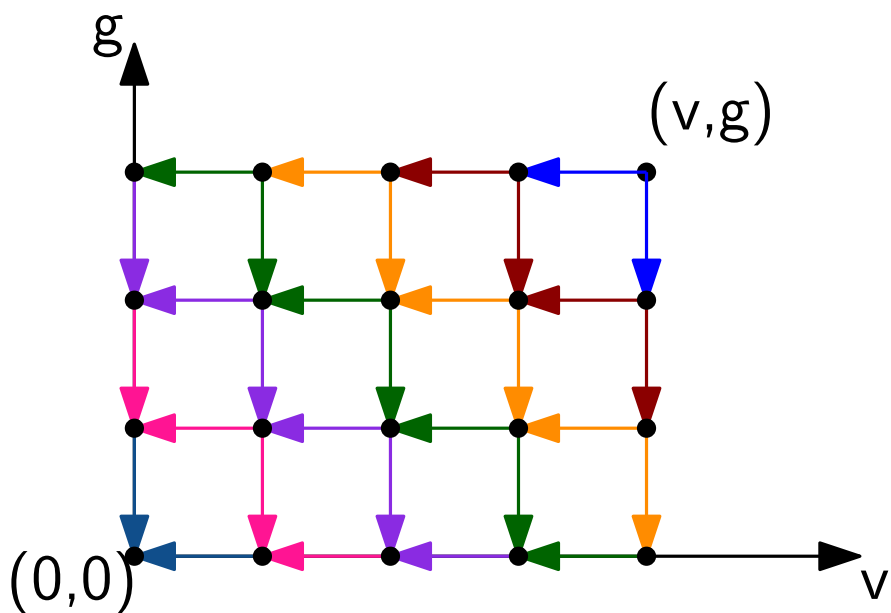


$$\begin{aligned} &= \frac{2(2n-1)2(2n-3)}{(n+1)n} A(\mathbf{v}-\mathbf{2}, \mathbf{g}) \\ &+ \frac{2(2n-1)(n-2)(2n-5)(2n-3)}{(n+1)n} A(\mathbf{v}-\mathbf{1}, \mathbf{g}-\mathbf{1}) \\ &+ \frac{(n-1)(2n-3)(2n-1)2(2n-5)}{(n+1)(n-1)} A(\mathbf{v}-\mathbf{1}, \mathbf{g}-\mathbf{1}) \\ &+ \frac{(n-1)(2n-3)(2n-1)(n-3)(2n-7)(2n-5)}{(n+1)(n-1)} A(\mathbf{v}, \mathbf{g}-\mathbf{2}) \end{aligned}$$

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 \end{aligned}$$

$$= \sum_{\text{paths from } (v, g) \text{ to } (0, 0)} \prod_{\text{steps of the paths}} \text{weight}(\text{step})$$

(because  $A(0, 0) = 1$  !)

# Modelling by random walks: first ideas

**Question:** What are the paths that contribute to the counting ?

Behaviour of RW started from  $N_0, G_0$ , with weight steps:

$$\frac{2(2n-1)}{n+1} \frac{E(n-1, g)}{E(n, g)} \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{(n-1)(2n-3)(2n-1)}{n+1} \frac{E(n-2, g-1)}{E(n, g)}$$

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**Approximation goal:** Find  $\Omega(n, g)$  such that

$$\frac{2(2n-1)}{n+1} \frac{\Omega(n-1, g)}{\Omega(n, g)} + \frac{(n-1)(2n-3)(2n-1)}{n+1} \frac{\Omega(n-2, g-1)}{\Omega(n, g)} \approx 1$$

**Proof: more details**

## Defining $\Omega(n, g)$

Setup:

$$\Omega(n, g) := \frac{1}{2\sqrt{\pi}} \frac{\sqrt{g}(g/e)^g}{g!} n^{2g-2} e^{nf(\frac{g}{n})} J\left(\frac{g}{n}\right) \frac{\sqrt{2\pi}(n-2g)^{n-2g+1}}{e^{(n-2g)}\Gamma(n-2g+3/2)},$$

$$\alpha(n, g) := \frac{2(2n-1)}{n+1} \frac{\Omega(n-1, g)}{\Omega(n, g)}$$

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$$\alpha(n, g) + \beta(n, g) := 1 + O\left(\frac{1}{n \log^2(n)}\right) \leftarrow \text{summable !}$$

This means that our approximation by a random walk will be valid !



# Defining the random walk

**Setup:** Start from  $N_0, G_0 = n, g$ , stop when  $G_k = 0$  or  $N_k = 2G_k$ .

Stopping time  $\tau = \tau(n, g)$

$$(N_{k+1}, G_{k+1}) = (N_k - 1, G_k)$$

$$\text{with proba } \frac{\alpha(N_k, G_k)}{\alpha(N_k, G_k) + \beta(N_k, G_k)}$$

$$(N_{k+1}, G_{k+1}) = (N_k - 2, G_k - 1)$$

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**Conserved quantity:**

$$Q(n, g) := \frac{E(n, g)}{\Omega(n, g)}$$

**(HZ)** rewrites

$$Q(n, g) = \alpha(n, g)Q(n - 1, g) + \beta(n, g)Q(n - 2, g - 1)$$

Hence

$$\mathbb{E}(Q(N_{k+1}, G_{k+1})) \approx \mathbb{E}(Q(N_k, G_k))$$

# Typical behaviour and asymptotic result

## Typical behaviour:

**Proposition:** As  $n, g \rightarrow \infty$  with  $n - 2g \gg \log n$ , with “very high probability”:

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## Asymptotics as a corollary:

Since  $Q(n, 0) \rightarrow 1$  as  $n \rightarrow \infty$ ,

$$\mathbb{E}(Q(N_\tau, G_\tau)) \sim 1$$

, but

$$\mathbb{E}(Q(N_\tau, G_\tau)) \sim Q(N_0, G_0) = Q(n, g)$$

hence

$$E(n, g) \sim \Omega(n, g)$$

## How to guess ?

$$\text{(HZ)} \quad (n+1)E(n, g) = 2(2n-1)E(n-1, g) + (n-1)(2n-3)(2n-1)E(n-2, g-1)$$

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### Plotting:

Fix  $\theta \in (0, 1/2)$  and plot

$$\frac{E(\lfloor \theta^{-1}g \rfloor, g-1)}{E(\lfloor \theta^{-1}g \rfloor, g)}$$

it grows like  $g^2$

$$\frac{E(\lfloor \theta^{-1}g \rfloor - 1, g)}{E(\lfloor \theta^{-1}g \rfloor, g)}$$

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### “Guess and check”:

$$E(n, g) \approx n^{2g} \exp(nf(g/n))$$

First order of **(HZ)** gives a differential equation for  $f$ .

# Conclusion

**Recap:** Approximating a linear bivariate recurrence by a random walk

*Guess and check* type of method

Nice feature: once the RW is defined, we only have to manipulate explicit formulas (a bit tedious though)



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**Robust method:** Doesn't rely on the combinatorics of the model, in fact we can study other linear recurrences of the same kind !

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## Other works on recurrences and random walks:

[Aggarwal '18,'20, Elvey-Price–Fang–Wallner '19,'20, Chassaing–Flin '22,...]

Thank you !