



ICCUB WINTER MEETING

Gravitational signals from symmetry breaking

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February 2, 2026



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the European Union

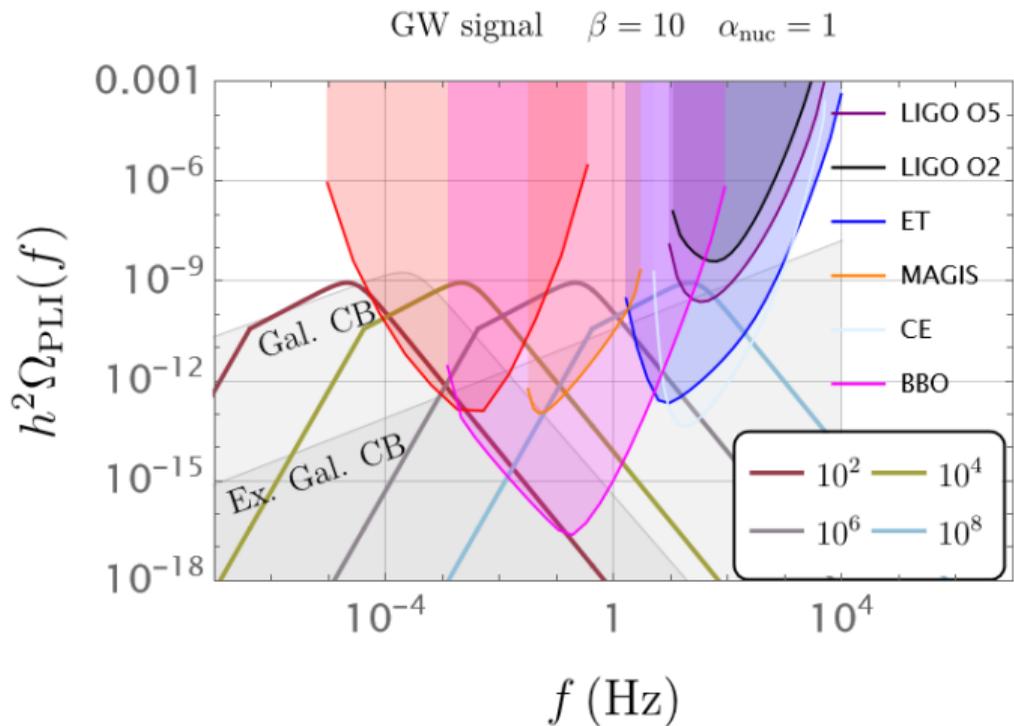


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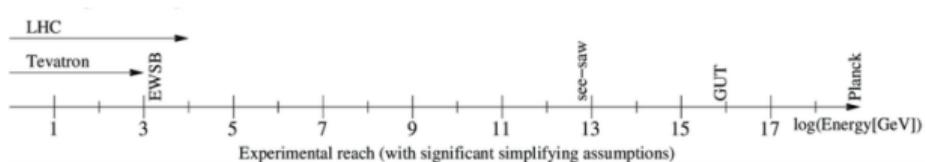
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Gravitational wave detectors

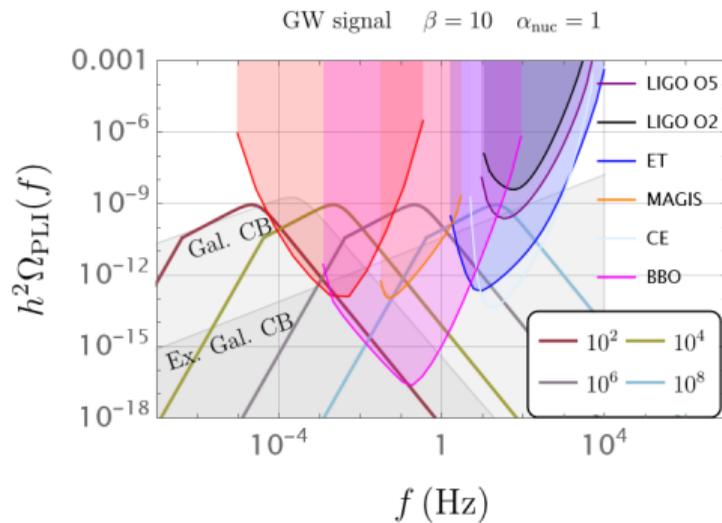


Search for a stochastic GW signal \Rightarrow search for GW noise

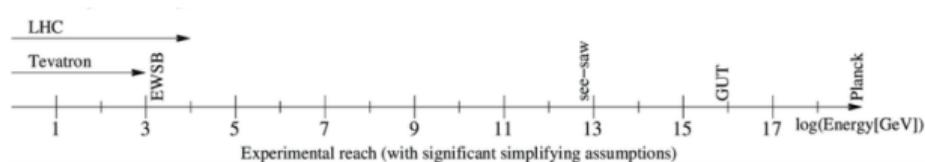
Domain walls in the early universe



- Universe high-T: from $T \sim 10^{15}$ GeV



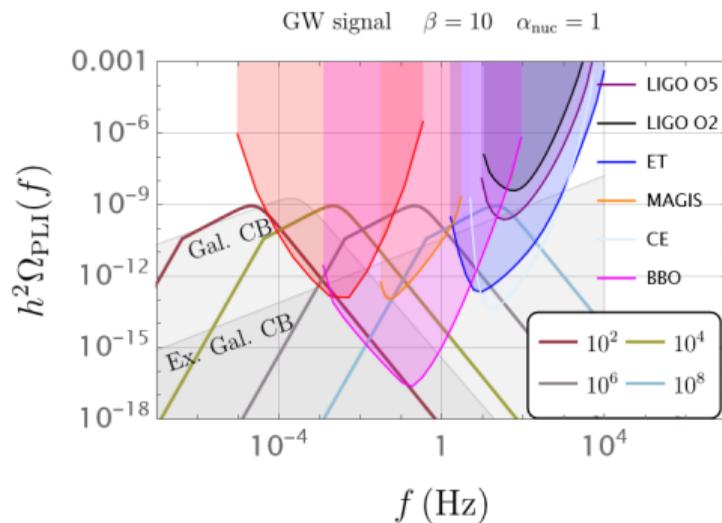
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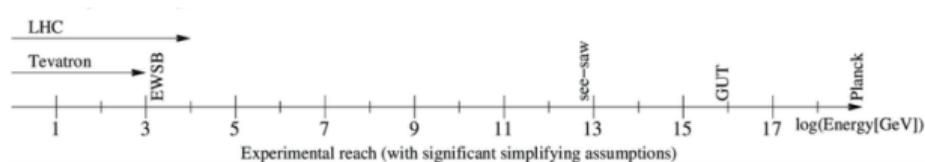
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- Breaking of symmetry \rightarrow GW stochastic background



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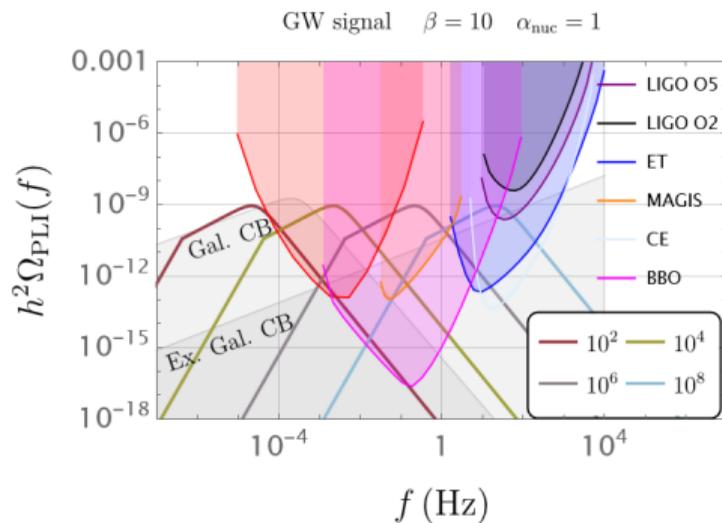


- Universe high-T: from $T \sim 10^{15}$ GeV



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-

$$h^2 \Omega_{GW}^{\text{today}} \sim \underbrace{h^2 \Omega_{\text{rad}}}_{\sim 10^{-5}} \times \underbrace{\epsilon}_{\sim 0.01} \times \underbrace{S(??) \times f(k)}_{\text{source characteristics}}$$



How generic is it for symmetry breaking to induce detectable GW ?

GW from symmetry breaking remnants

GW from symmetry breaking remnants

Topological Defects from Symmetry Breaking

- Symmetry breaking \Rightarrow Topological defects form via Kibble-Zurek mechanism.

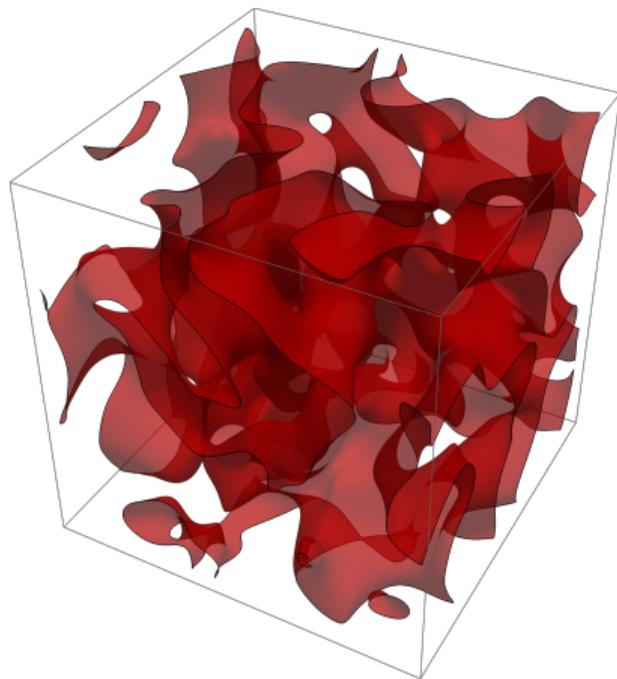


Figure:

Topological Defects from Symmetry Breaking

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- Defect type depends on the symmetry group and its breaking pattern:

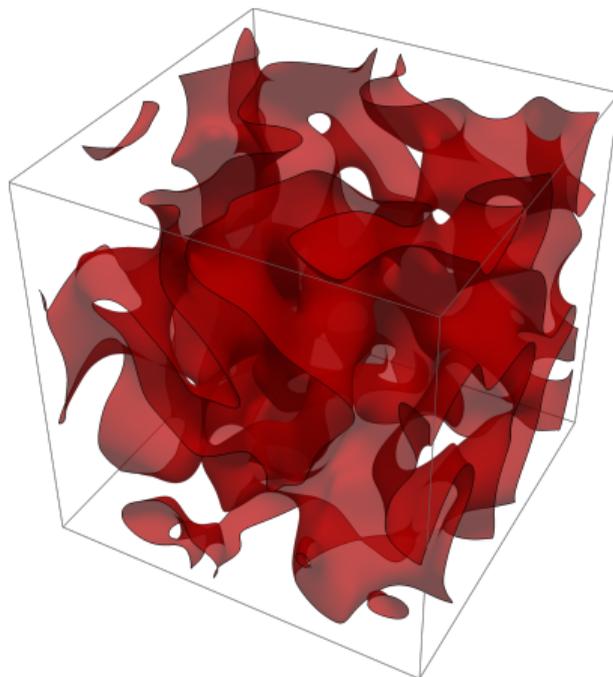


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Topological Defects from Symmetry Breaking

- Symmetry breaking \Rightarrow Topological defects form via Kibble-Zurek mechanism.
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 - ① Discrete symmetry \Rightarrow Domain Walls (DW)

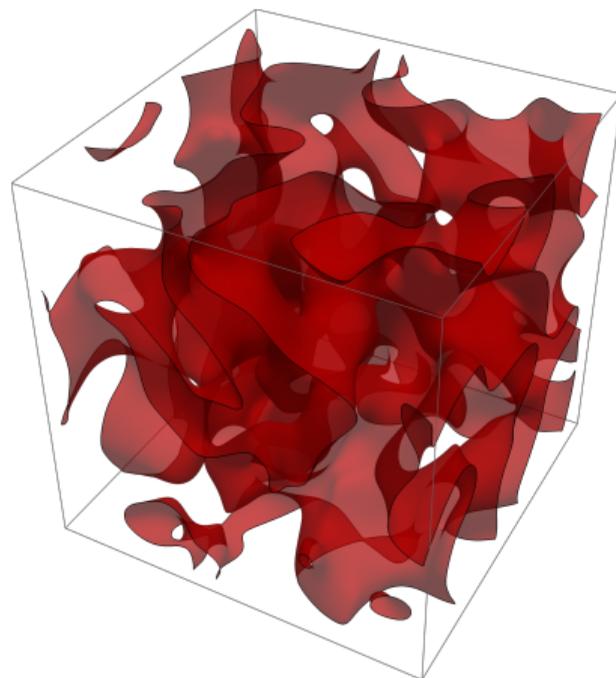


Figure: Domain Wall (2D defect)

Topological Defects from Symmetry Breaking

- Symmetry breaking \Rightarrow Topological defects form via Kibble-Zurek mechanism.
- Defect type depends on the symmetry group and its breaking pattern:
 - 1 Discrete symmetry \Rightarrow Domain Walls (DW)
 - 2 U(1) symmetry \Rightarrow Cosmic Strings

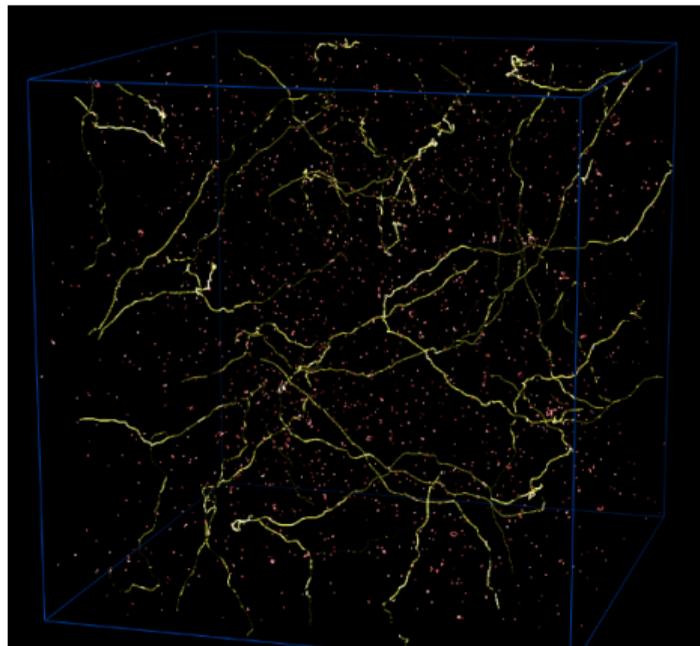


Figure: Cosmic String (1D defect)

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 - 3 $SU(2)$ or higher \Rightarrow Magnetic Monopoles

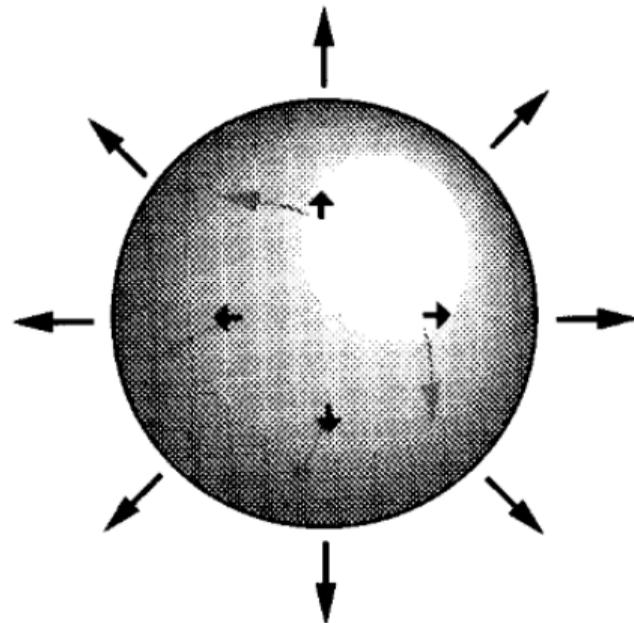


Figure: Magnetic Monopole (0D defect)

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 - 4 Non-Abelian groups \Rightarrow Textures

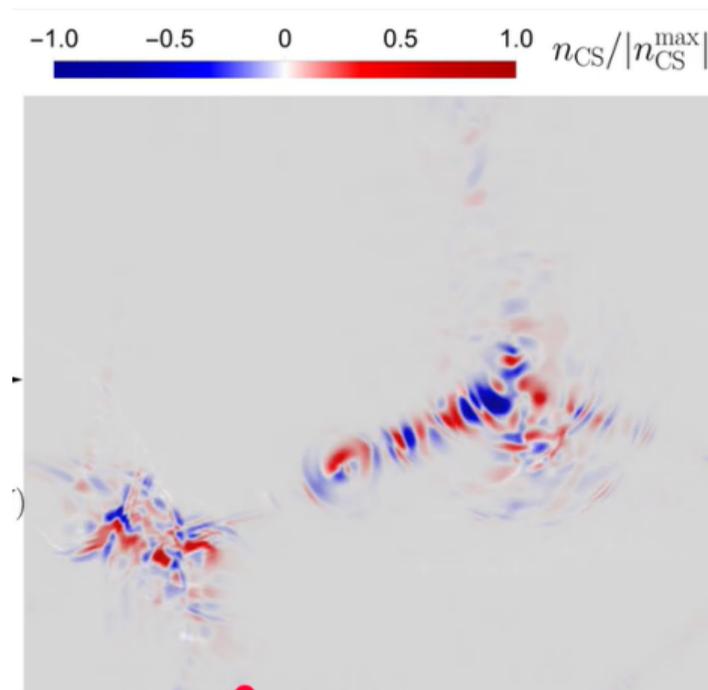


Figure: Texture (3D defect)

Topological Defects from Symmetry Breaking

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 - 1 Discrete symmetry \Rightarrow Domain Walls (DW)
 - 2 U(1) symmetry \Rightarrow Cosmic Strings
 - 3 SU(2) or higher \Rightarrow Magnetic Monopoles
 - 4 Non-Abelian groups \Rightarrow Textures
- Defects are stable if topology forbids decay.

Figure:

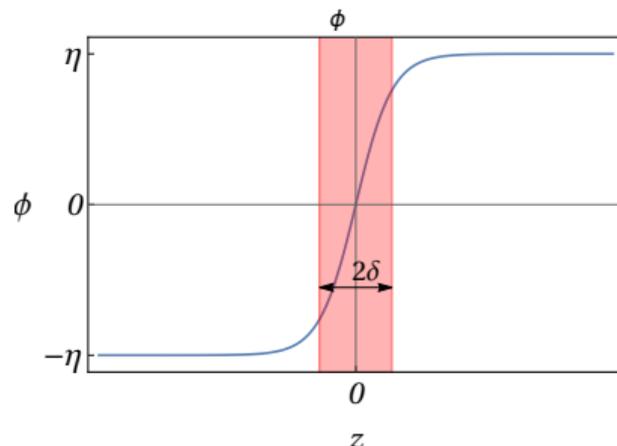
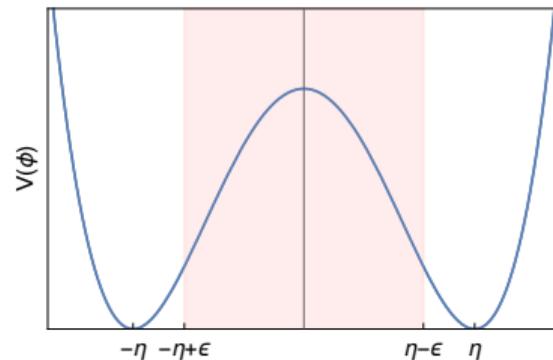
Domain walls in the early universe

Universe high-T after inflation: cooling of primordial soup



- axion example

$$V_d(a) = m_a^2 f_a^2 \left(1 - \cos \left(\frac{a}{f_a} \right) \right)$$



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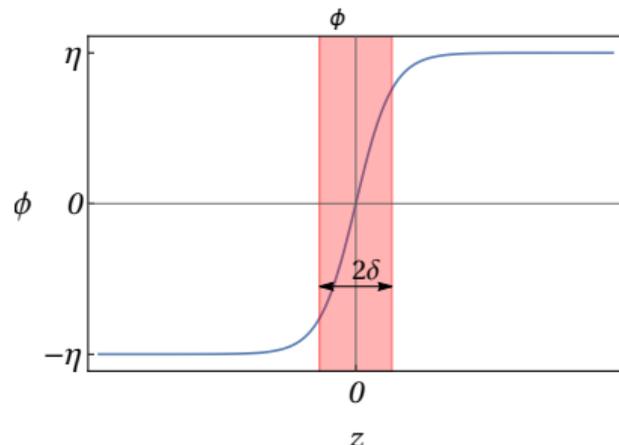
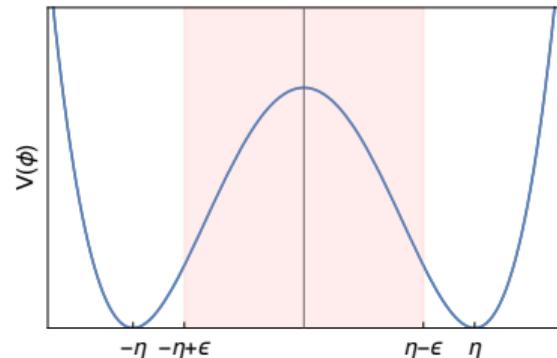
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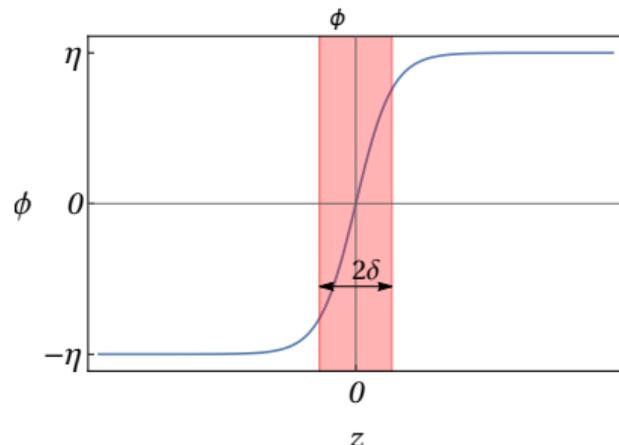
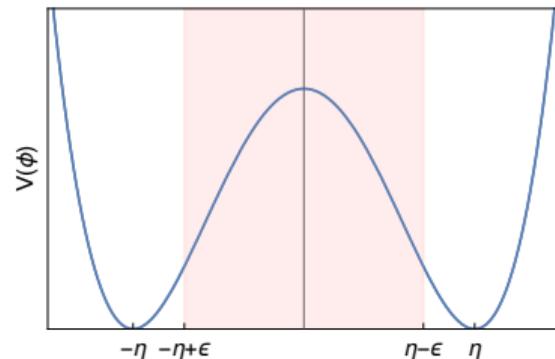
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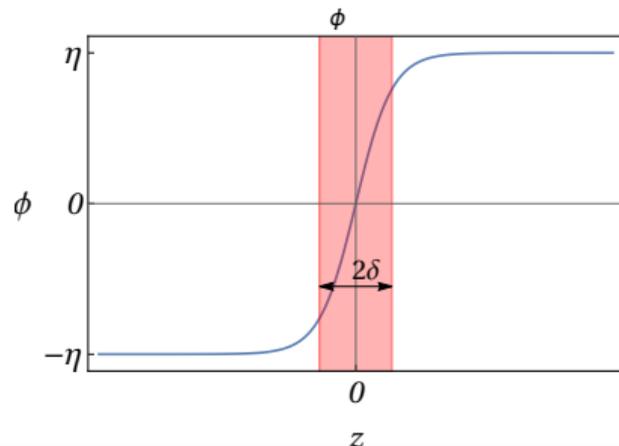
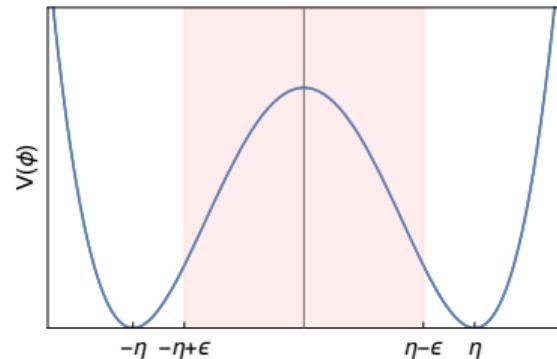


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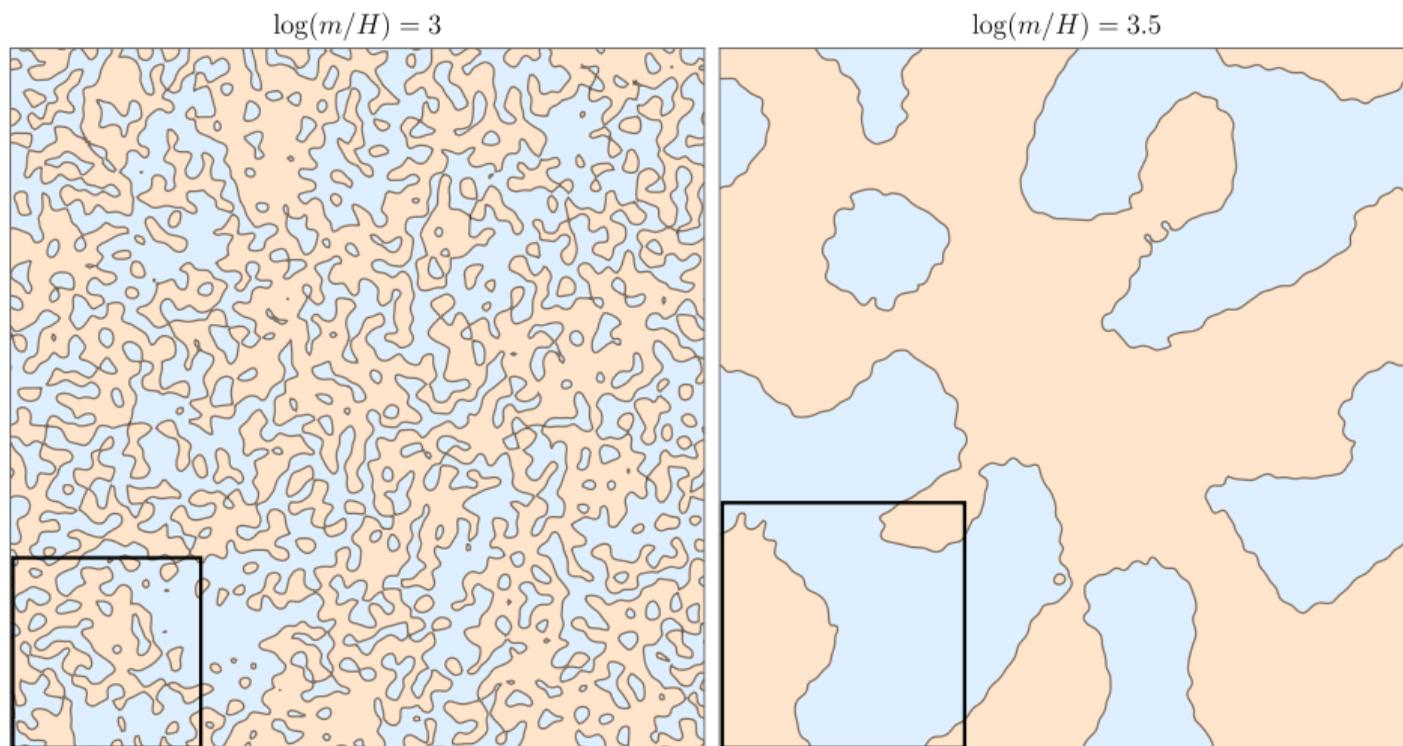
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- Potential $V(T, a) = V_d(a) + V_{\text{thermal}}(T, a)$
- High T, potential melts: $V_d \sim \text{const.}$
- Formation of DWs at $T \sim T_{\text{form}} \sim \sqrt{f_a m_a}$

$$\sigma \sim m_a f_a^2$$



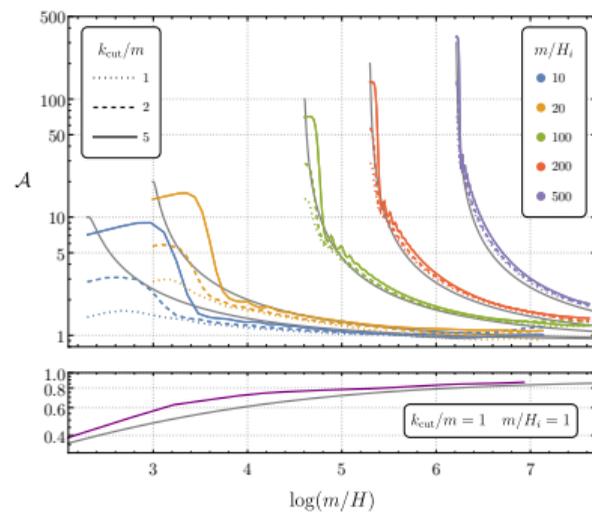
Formation of domain wall and Kibble Zurek mechanism



Attraction to scaling and GW signal

[2511.16649]: Blasi, Mariotti, Rase, MV

Evolution of the area parameter \mathcal{A}

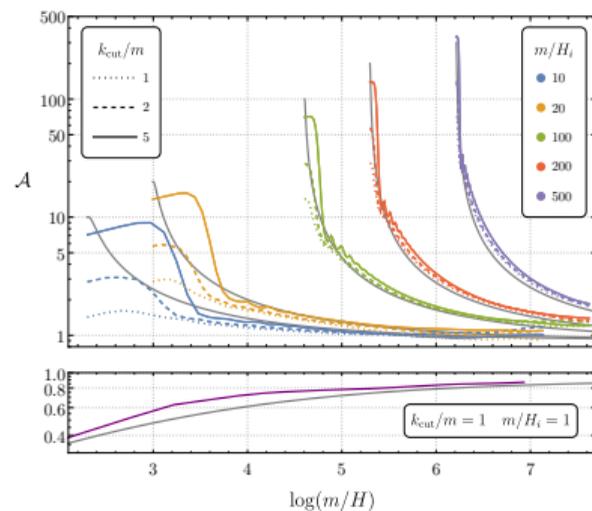


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$$\mathcal{A}_{\text{initial}} \sim \frac{m}{H(T \sim m)} \sim \frac{M_{\text{Pl}}}{m} \gg 1$$

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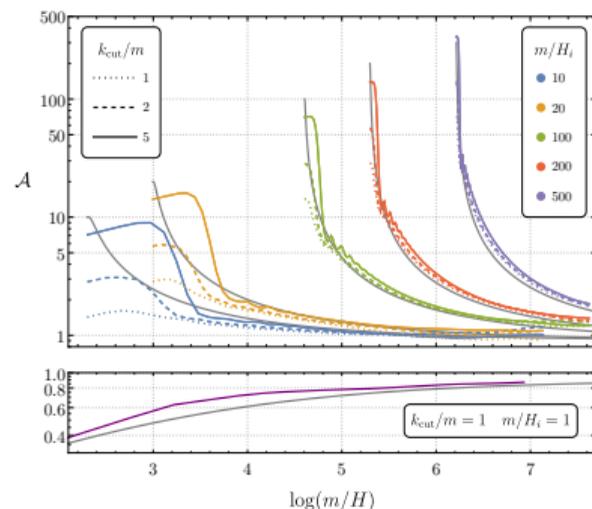
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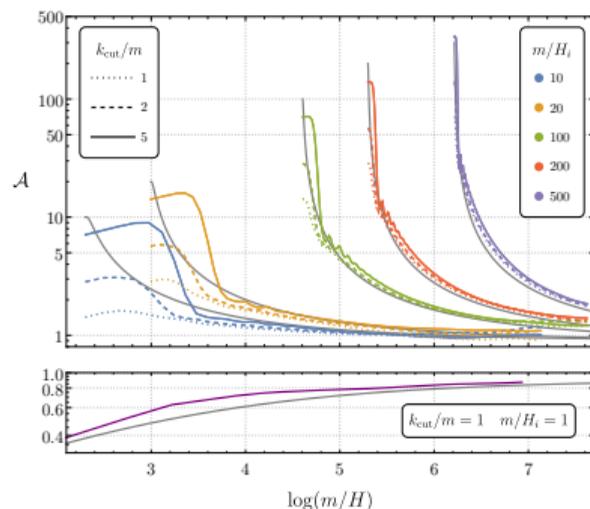
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Induced GW signal $P_{\text{gw}} = \frac{G}{5} \langle \ddot{Q}_{ij} \ddot{Q}_{ij} \rangle$.

$$\rho_{\text{gw}} \equiv \frac{1}{V} \int dt P_{\text{gw}} \sim P_{\text{gw}} \frac{t}{V}.$$

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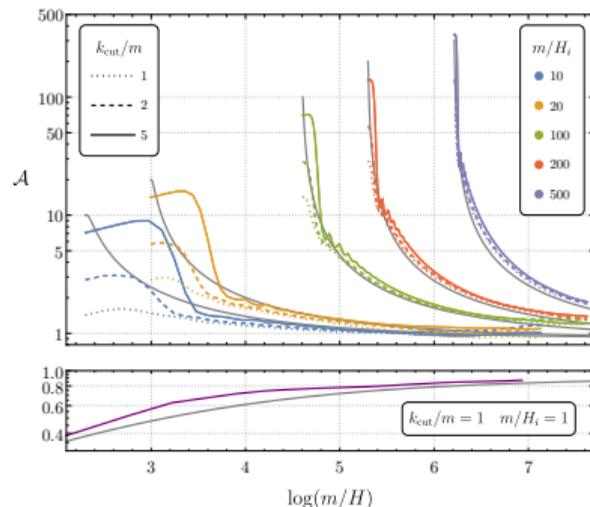
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$$Q_{ij}(t) = \int \rho_S(\mathbf{x}, t) \left(x_i x_j - \frac{1}{3} \delta_{ij} r^2 \right) d^3x \sim M_{\text{dw}} \ell^2$$

$$\rho_{\text{gw}} \sim G \frac{M_{\text{dw}}^2}{\ell^2} \times \frac{t}{V} \times \frac{V}{\ell^3} \sim \mathcal{A}^2 \sigma^2 / M_{\text{Pl}}^2 \quad M_{\text{dw}}, \sim \mathcal{A} \sigma \ell^2$$

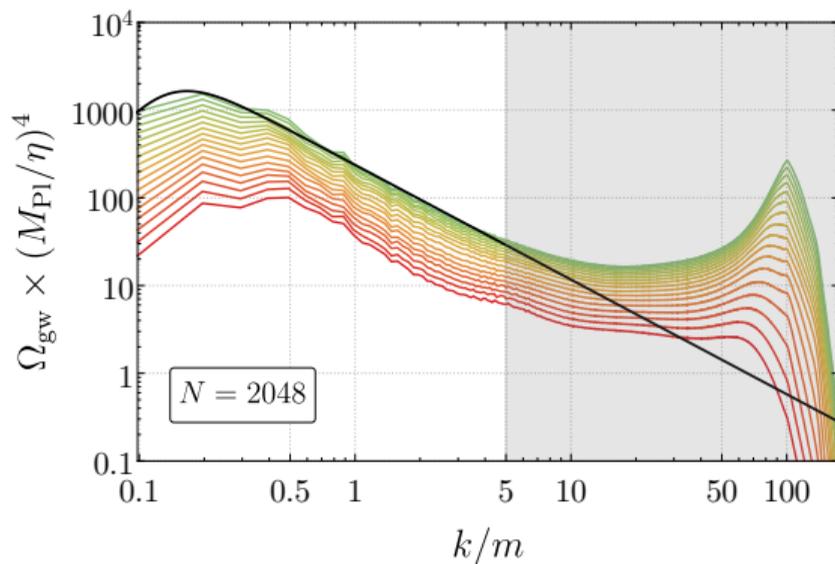
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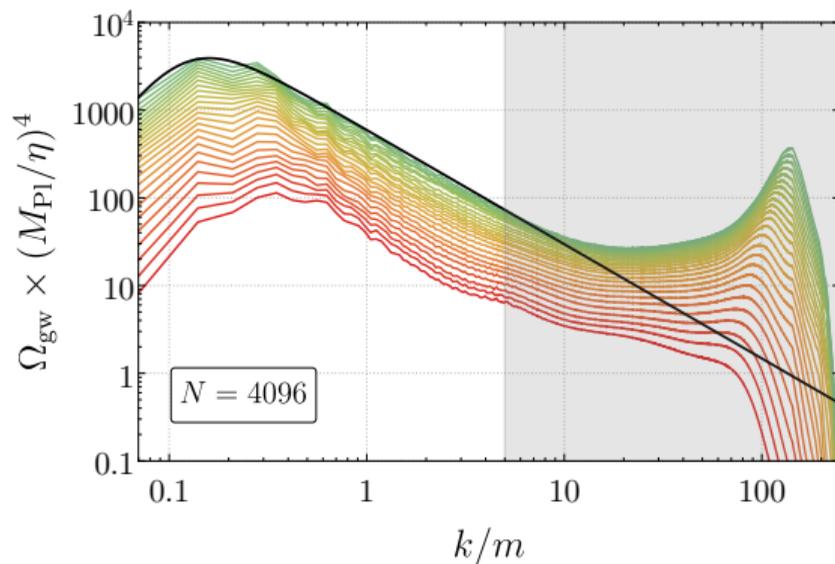
GW signal from domain wall

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GW spectra (radiation domination)

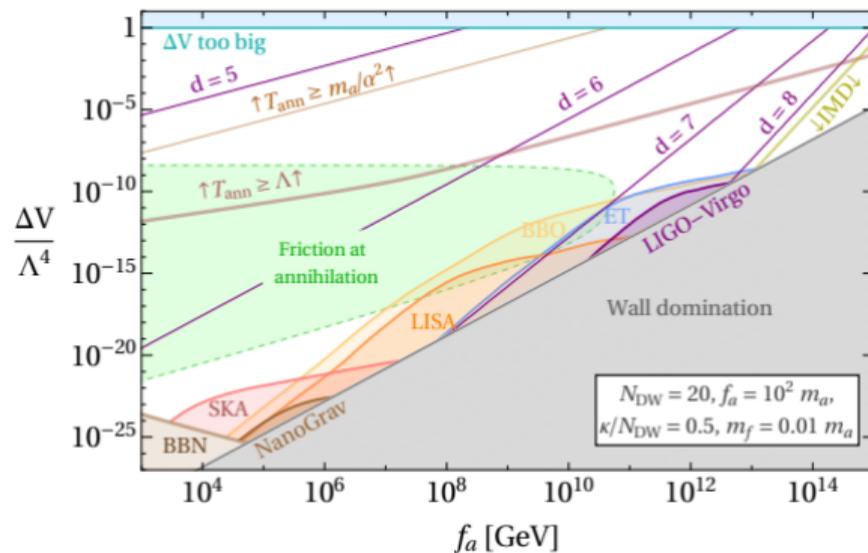


GW spectra (radiation domination)



Domain wall and detectability

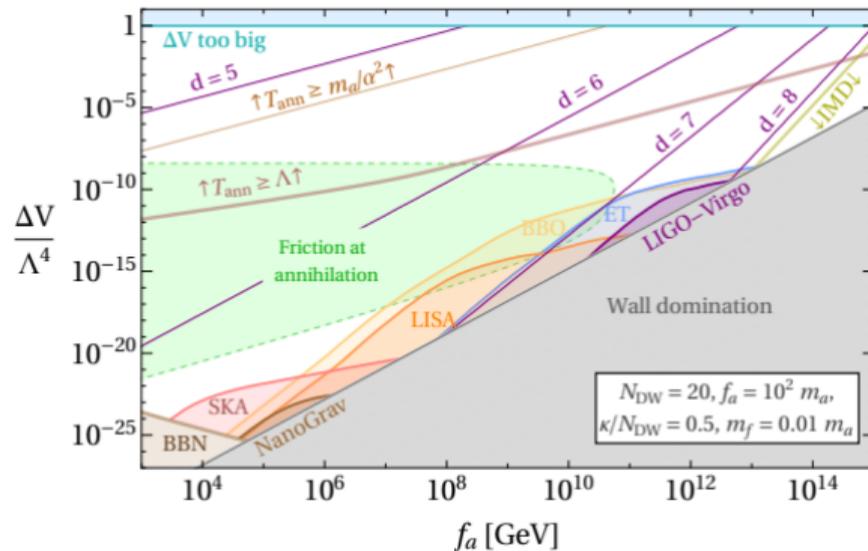
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Domain wall and detectability

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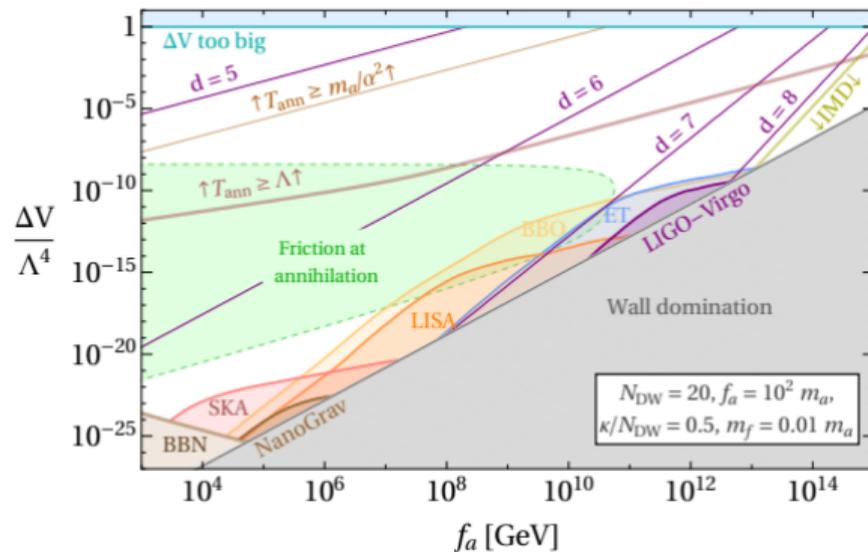


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Network needs to annihilate for $T > T_{\text{dom}}$.



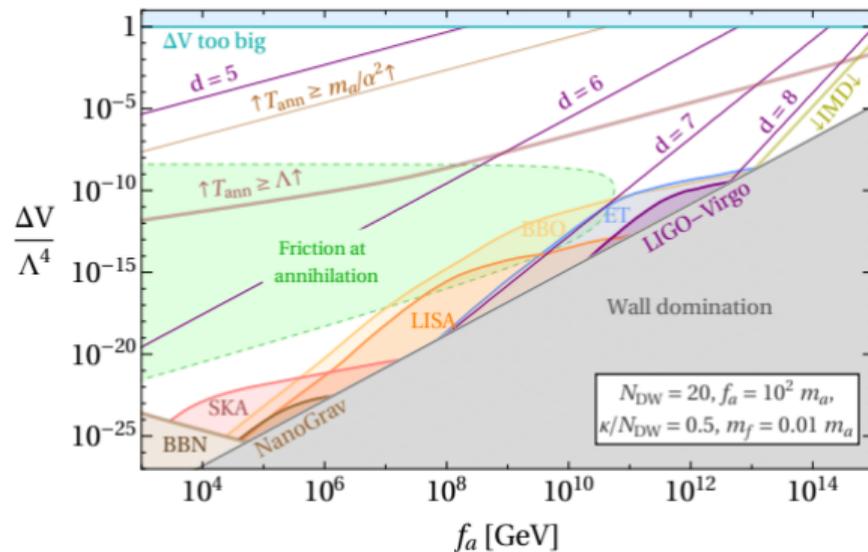
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$$\Omega_{GW} \propto \Omega_{rad} (T_{dom}/T)^4$$



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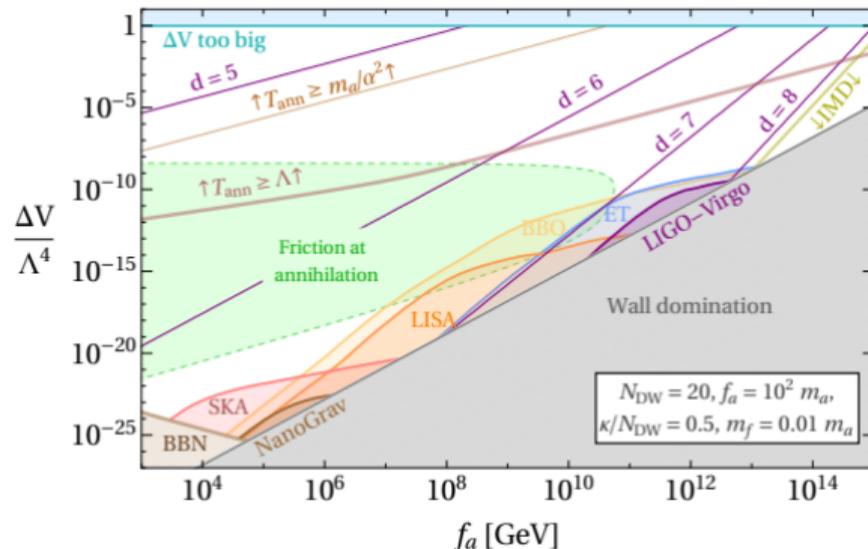
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GW signal maximised if $T_{\text{ann}} \rightarrow T_{\text{dom}}$: Not related to special symmetry



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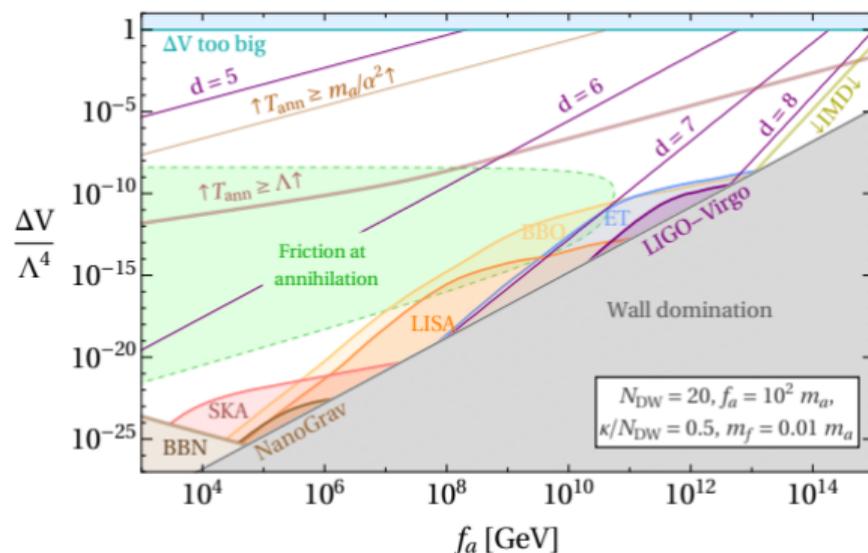
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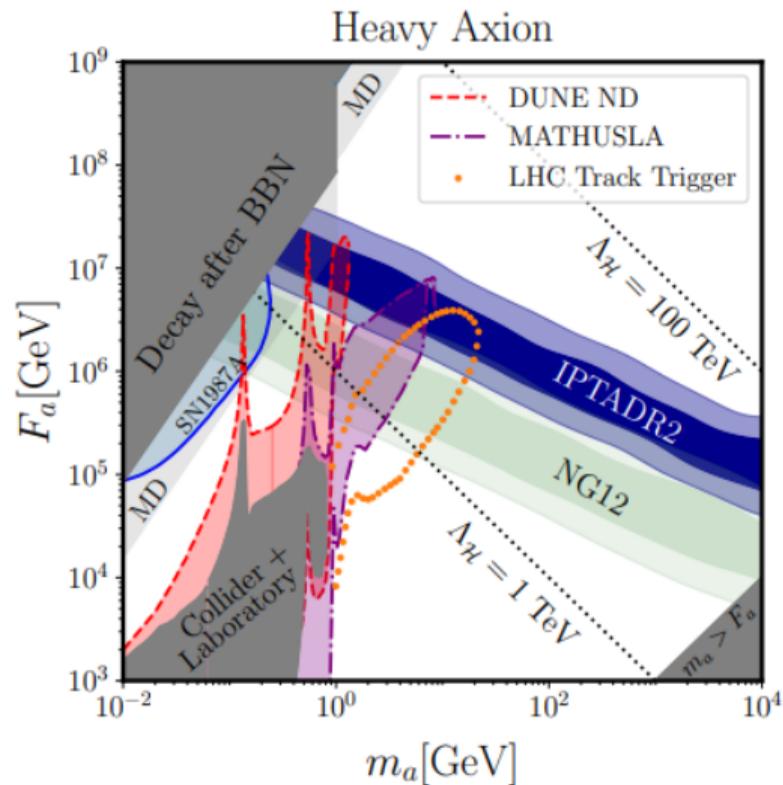
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What is the physics of DW domination ? Z. Wang, M. Elley, MV with GRChombo

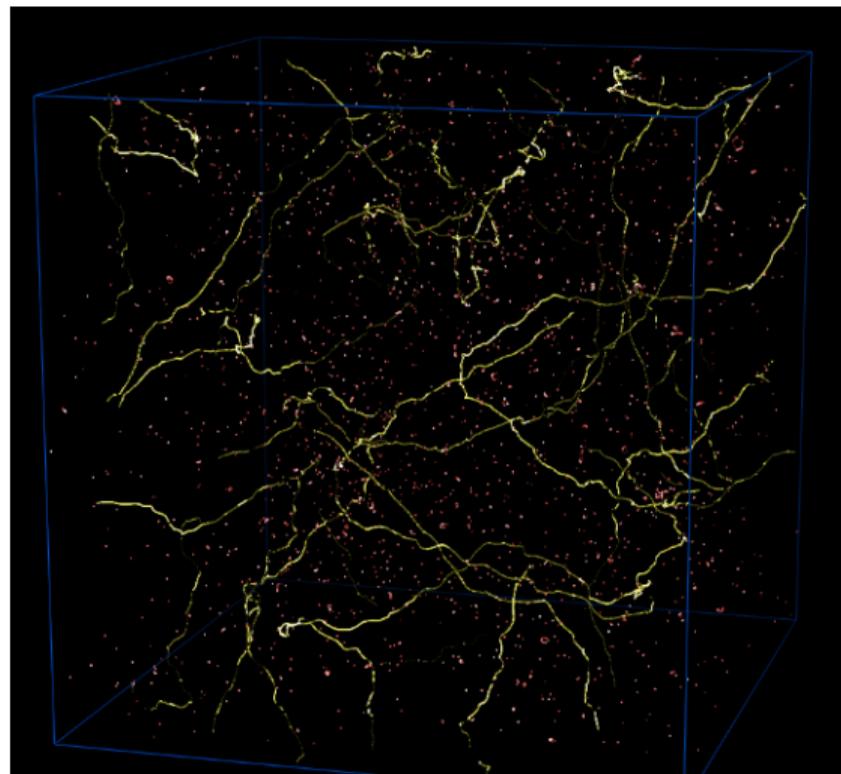
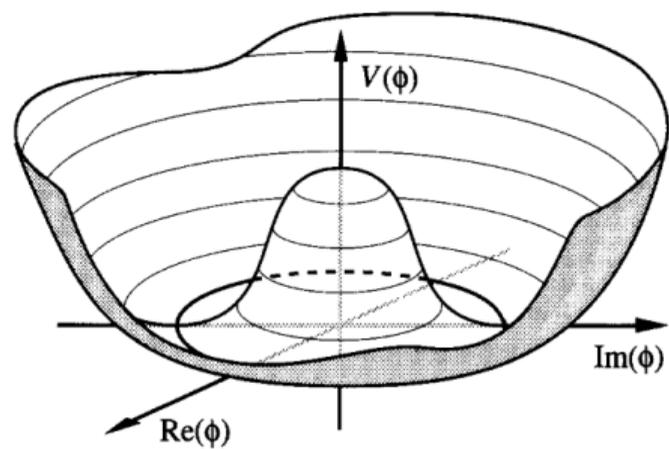


Domain wall at Nanograv

[arXiv:2204.04228]: Ferreira et al.

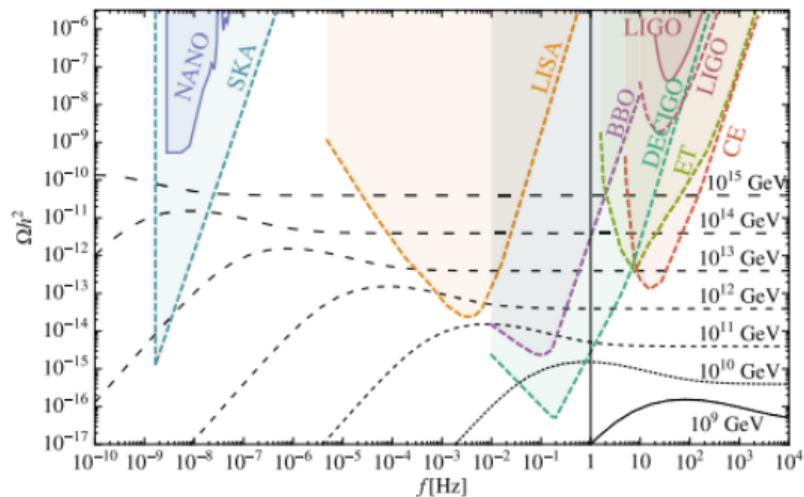


Cosmic strings



Cosmic strings and detectability

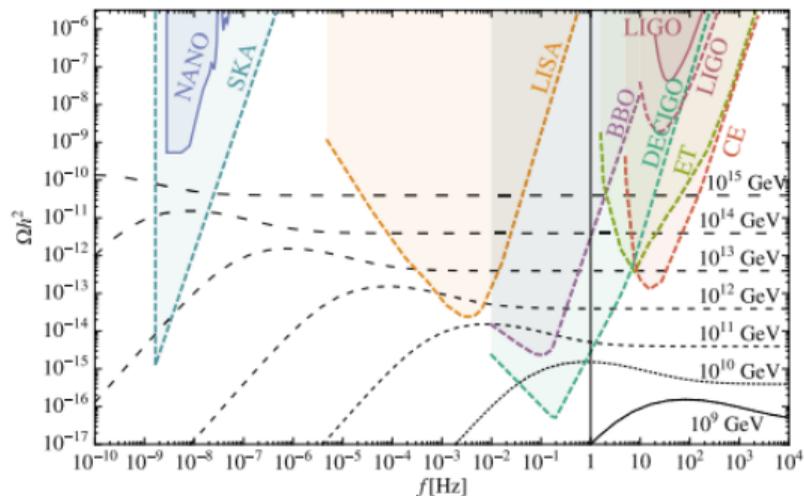
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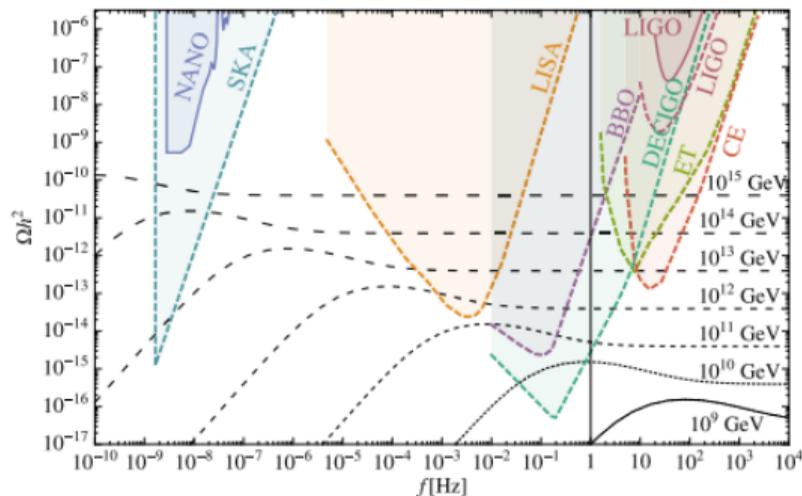


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⇒ Scale invariant GW spectrum



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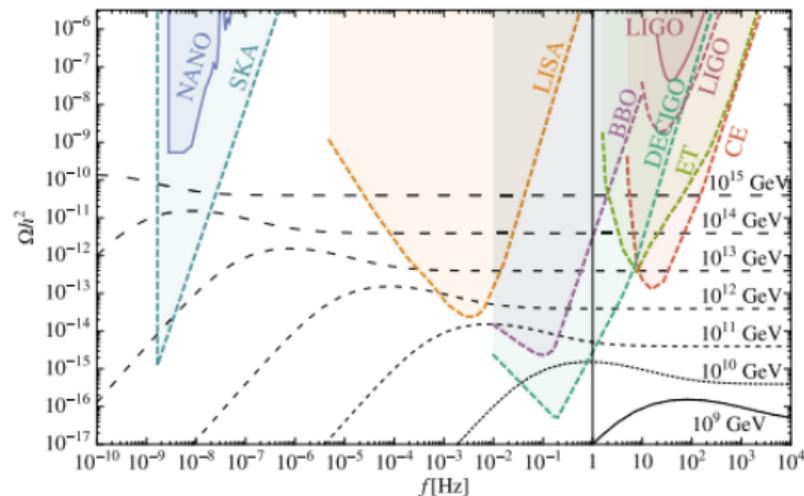
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⇒ Scale invariant GW spectrum

GW from NG strings ([arxiv:1909.00819]LISA)

$$\Omega_{\text{GW}} \sim \Omega_{\text{rad}} \times (v/M_{\text{pl}})$$

(If particle production is subdominant)



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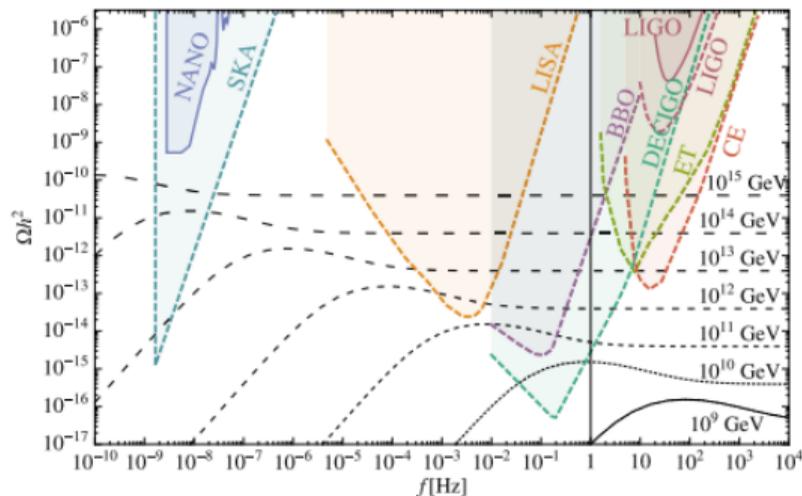
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ET and LISA can detect $U(1)$ breaking for $v \gtrsim 10^{13-12}$ GeV.



Case of FOPTS

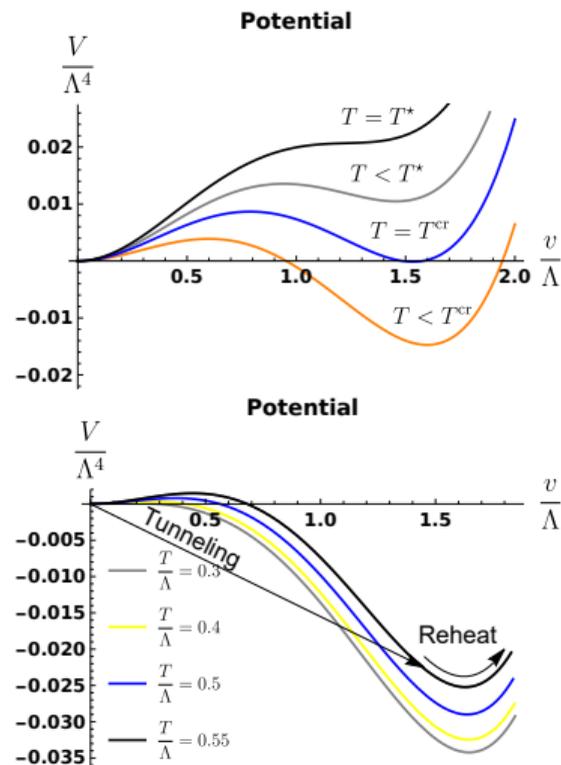
Case of FOPTS

First order phase transition (FOPT) in the early universe

Universe high-T after inflation: cooling of primordial soup



- QFT = landscape of minima \Rightarrow PT

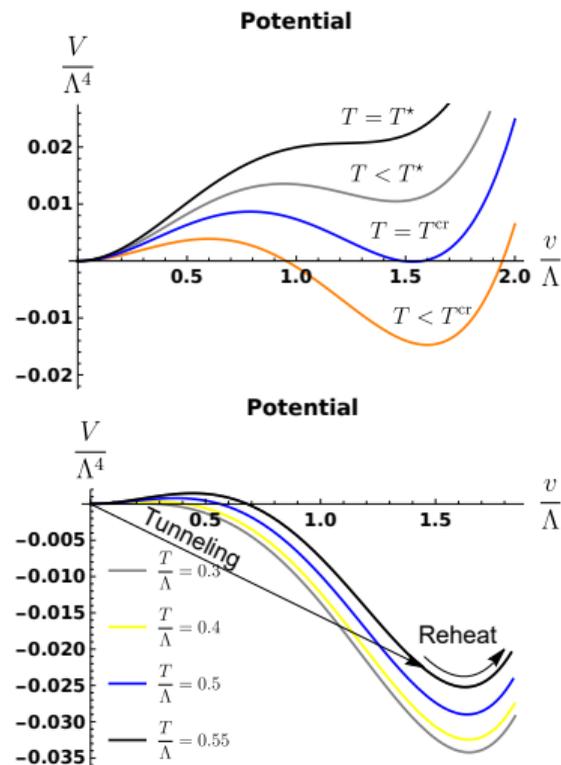


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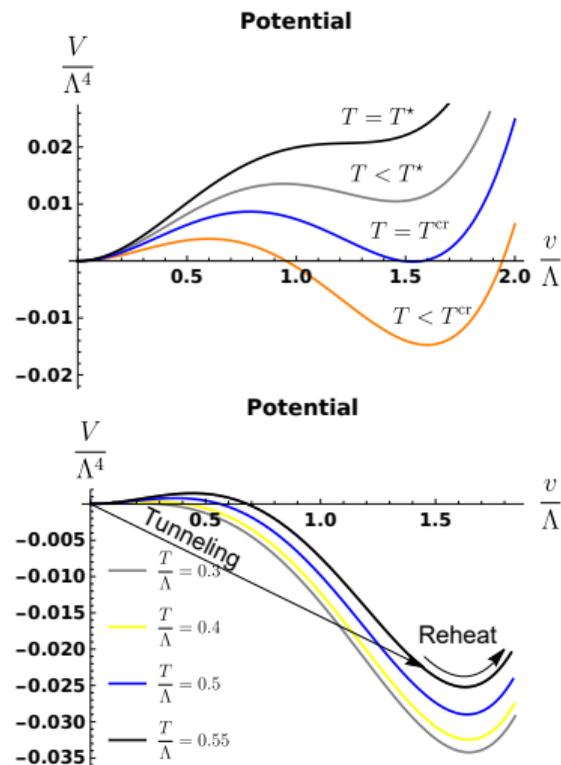


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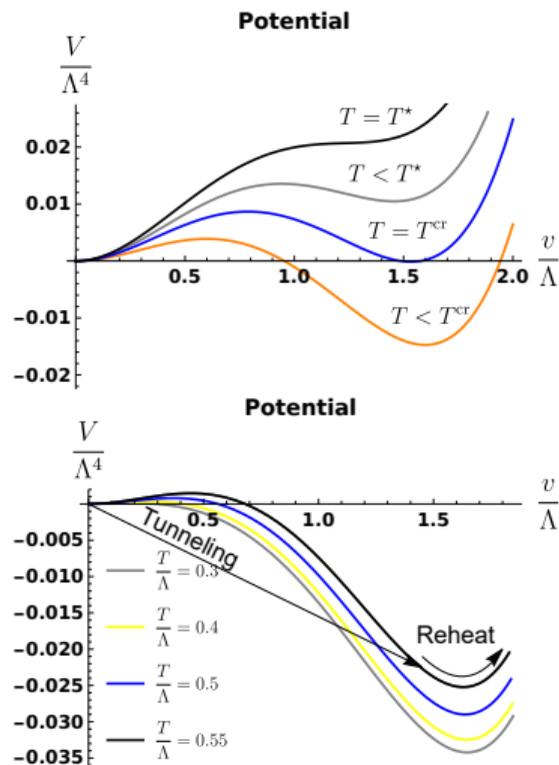


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- FOPT feature a barrier between two vacua and cooling ($T_{\text{nuc}} < T_{\text{cr}}$)



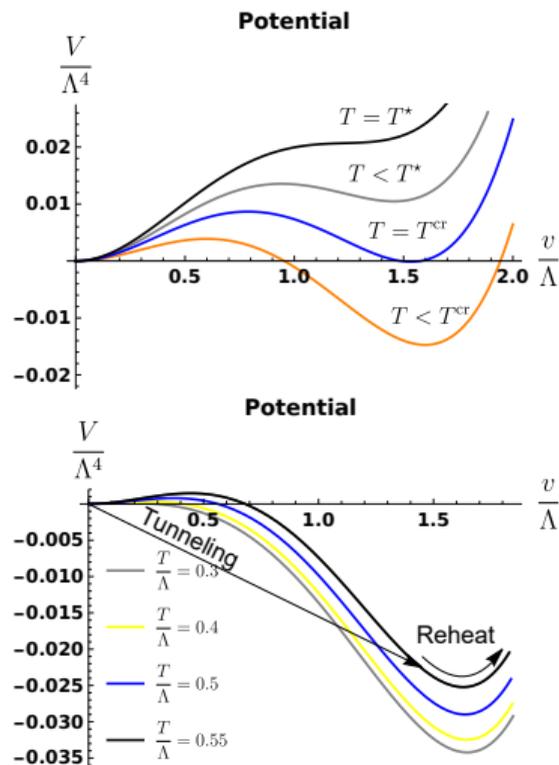
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- High T: $V \supset \phi^2 T^2 \Rightarrow$ sym restoration
- FOPT feature a barrier between two vacua and cooling ($T_{\text{nuc}} < T_{\text{cr}}$)
- Nucleation controlled by bounce solution

$$\Gamma \sim T^4 \text{Exp} \left[-\frac{S_3}{T} \right]$$

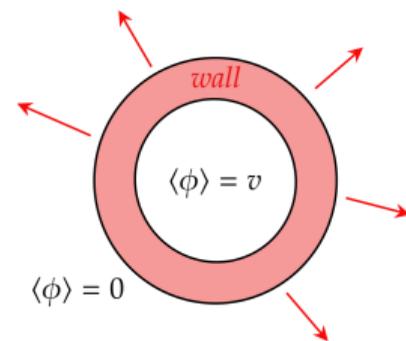


Nucleation and early expansion

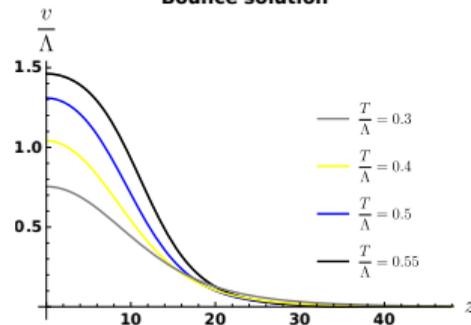
- Energy released $\Delta V \Rightarrow$ Driving energy:

$$E_{\text{driving}} = -\frac{4}{3}\pi\Delta V R^3 \text{ VS } \Delta\mathcal{P}_{\text{tension}} = 4\pi\sigma R^2$$

Expansion when $R_{\text{initial}} > R_c \sim \sigma/\Delta V$



Bounce solution



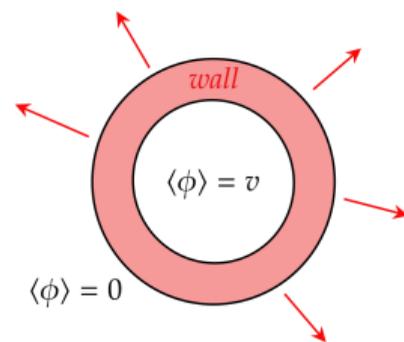
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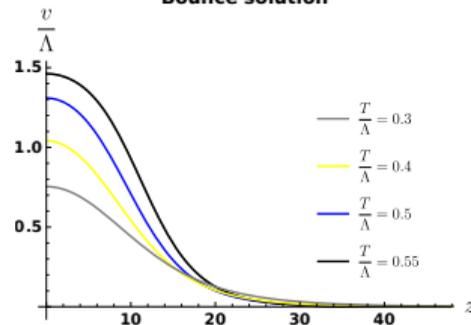
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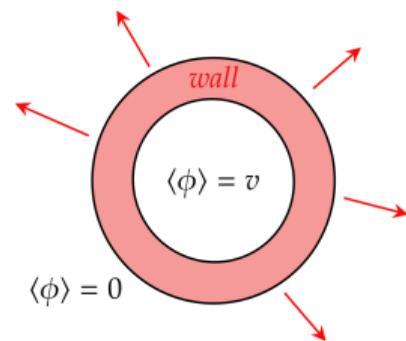
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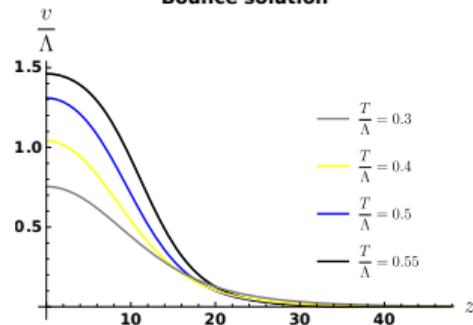
Expansion when $R_{\text{initial}} > R_c \sim \sigma/\Delta V$

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- Strength of the FOPT

$$\alpha_N \equiv \frac{\Delta V}{\rho_r(T_{\text{nuc}})} \propto 1/T_{\text{nuc}}^4$$



Bounce solution



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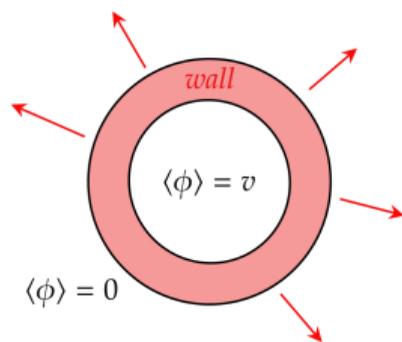
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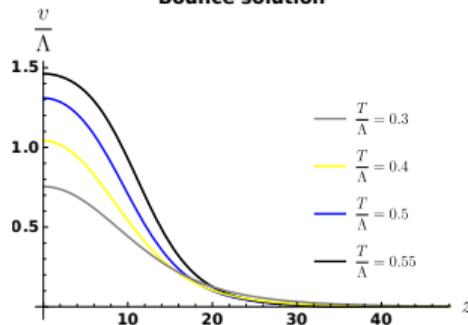
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- Duration of the FOPT

$$\beta \equiv \frac{t_{\text{exp}}}{t_{PT}} = \frac{1}{t_{PT}H} \propto R_{\text{collision}}^{-1}$$

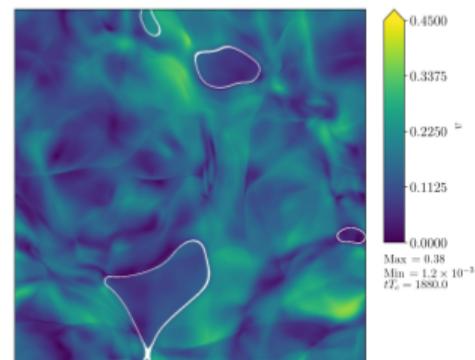
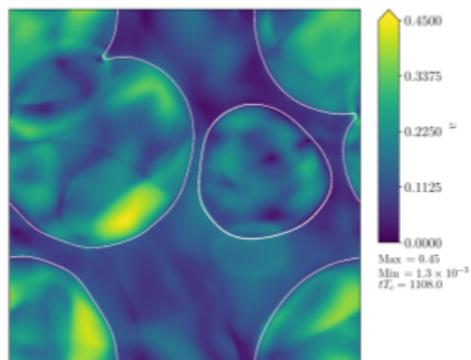
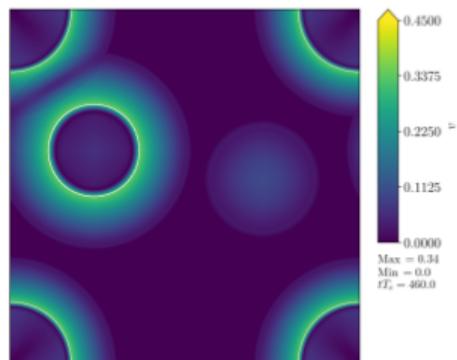
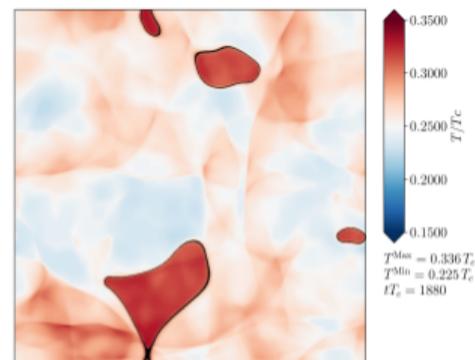
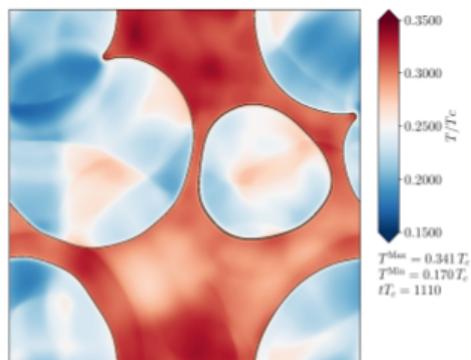
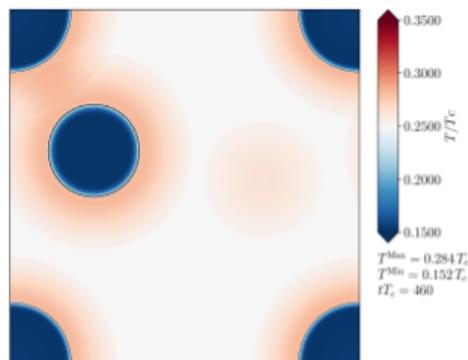


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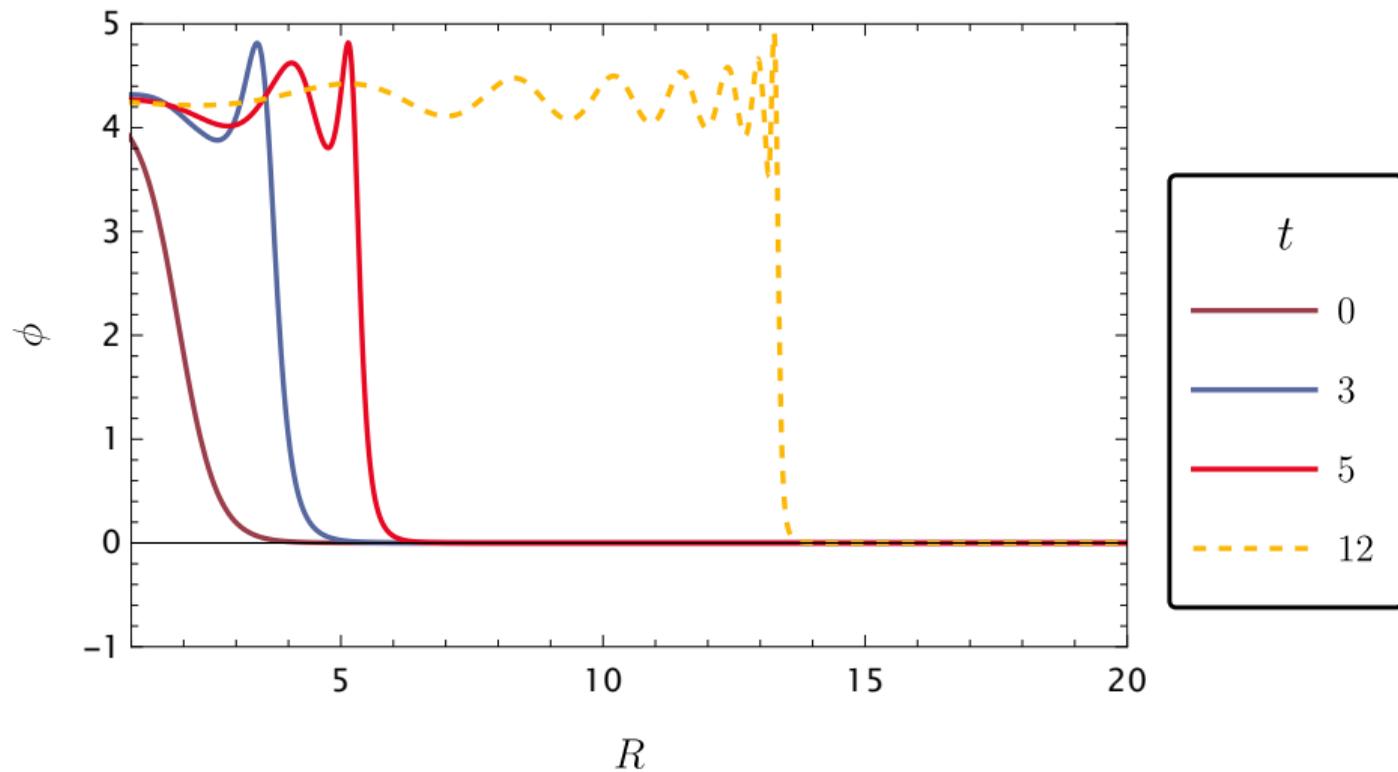


FOPT pictorially

Cutting, Hindmarsh and Weir:[1906.00480]: video in

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/5968055>

The bubble wall in time



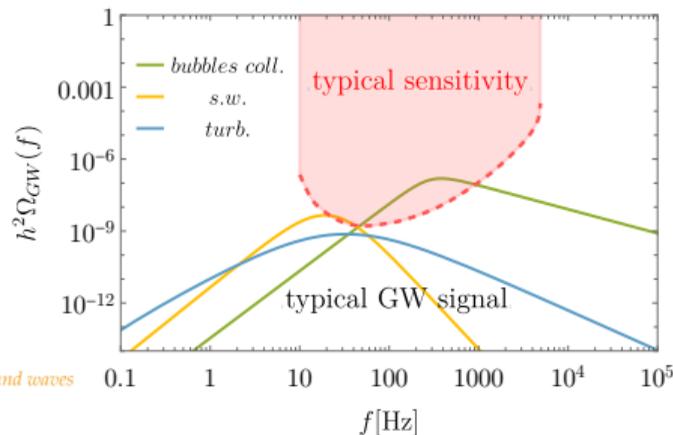
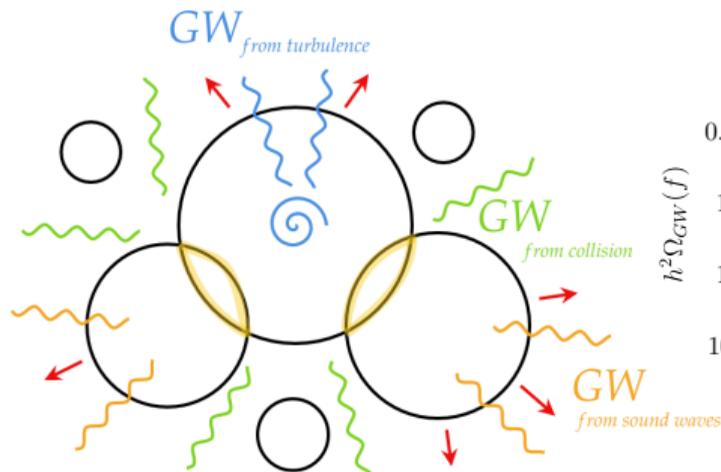
FOPT and Gravitational waves

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FOPT and Gravitational waves

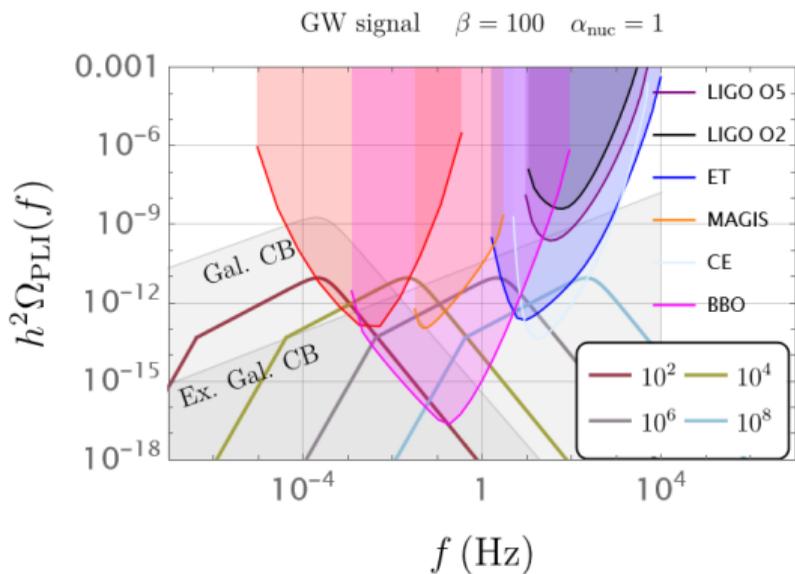
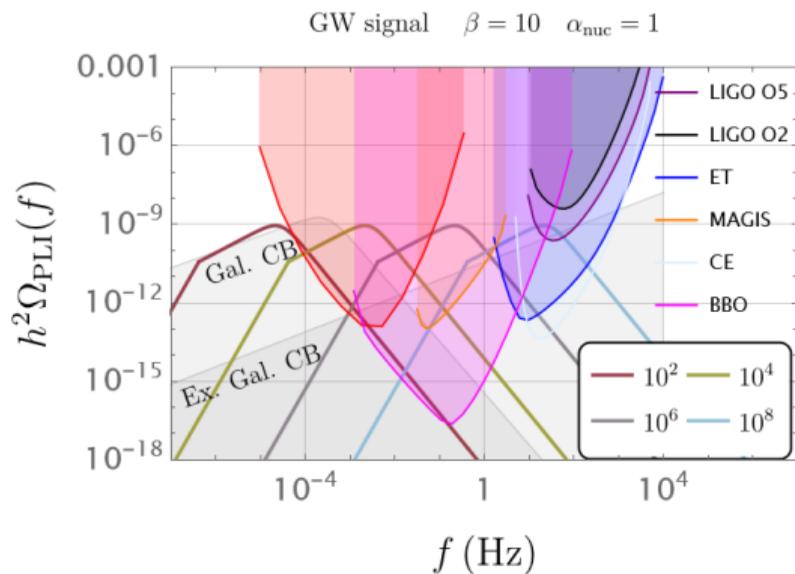
- 1 Bubbles can produce a stochastic GW background from

- bubble collision
- sound waves
- turbulence



Primordial GWs could be observed soon: Frequency \Rightarrow information about T_{reh} : $f_{\text{peak}} \propto T_{\text{reh}}$

Observation prospects of GW



$$\Omega_{\text{GW}} \propto v_w \left(\kappa_f \frac{\alpha_N}{1 + \alpha_N} \right)^2 \frac{1}{\beta^2} \Rightarrow$$

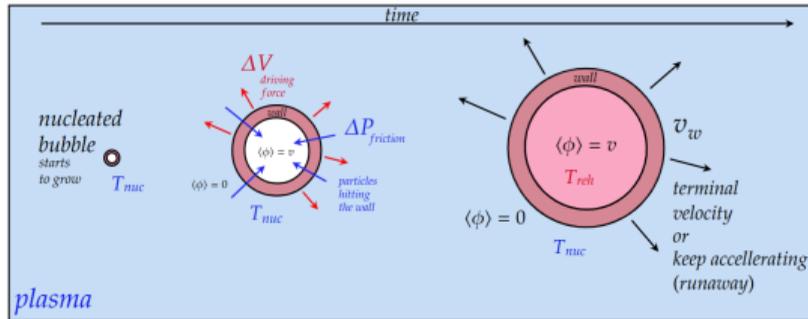
Need *strong, long PT with fast walls*

Good news: they *kinda* correlate

[2207.02230]: Azatov, Barni, Chakraborty, MV, Yin

v_w and α_N

- v_w : ΔV against $\Delta \mathcal{P}$

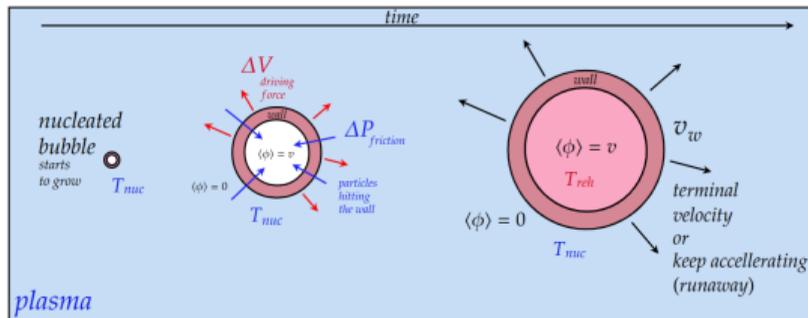


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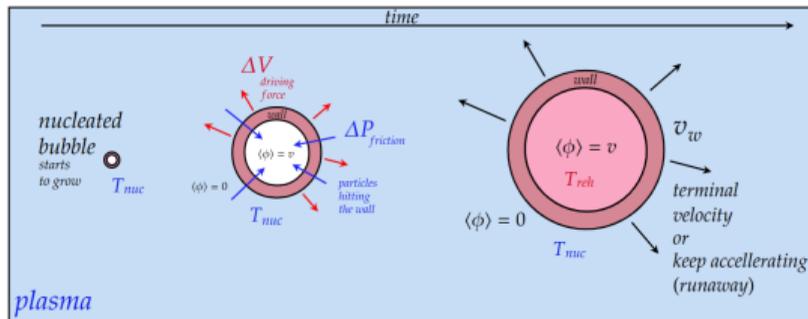
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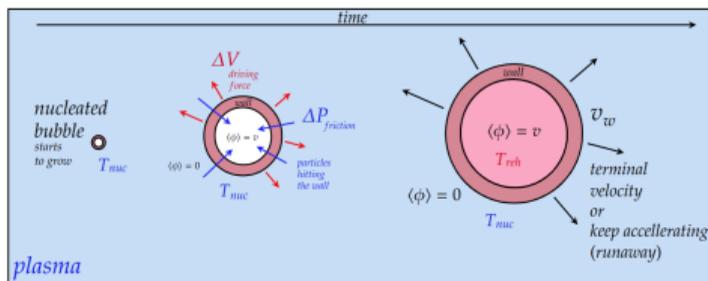
$$\text{Runaway : } \gamma_w \propto R/R_0 \quad \Rightarrow \quad \gamma_w^{\text{collision}} \propto M_{pl}/\beta v$$

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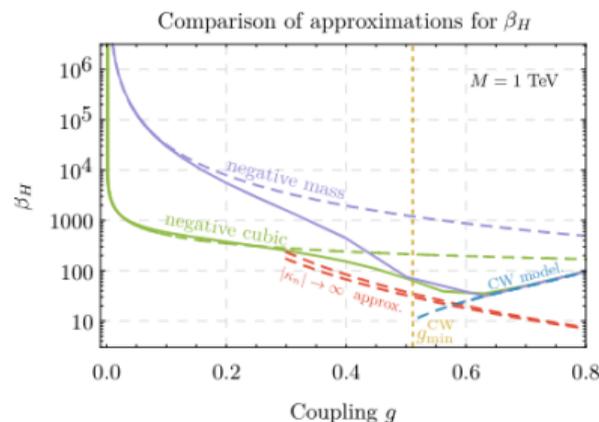
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β and α_N

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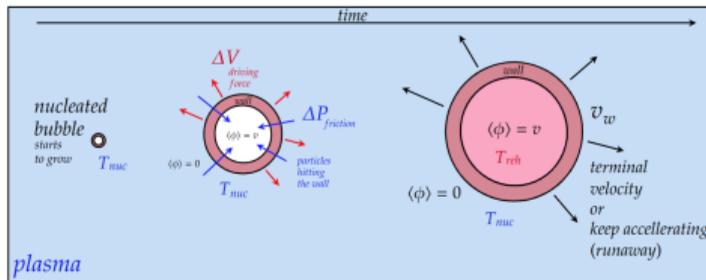


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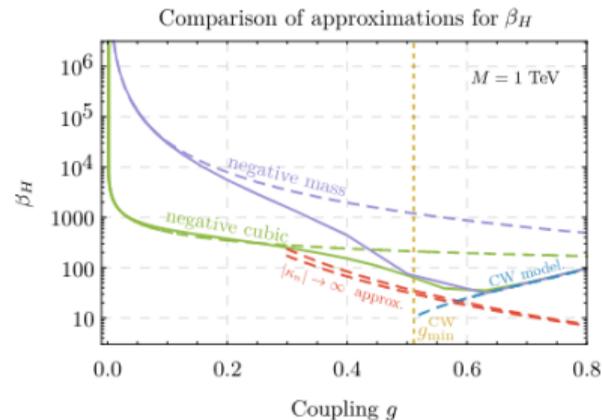
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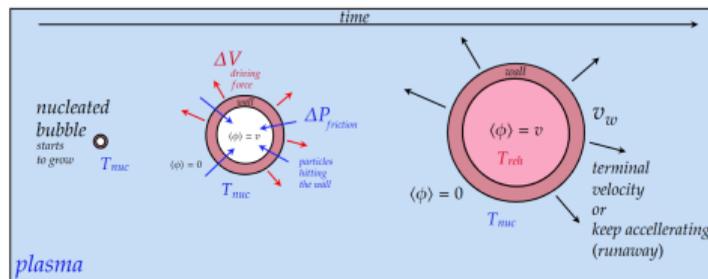
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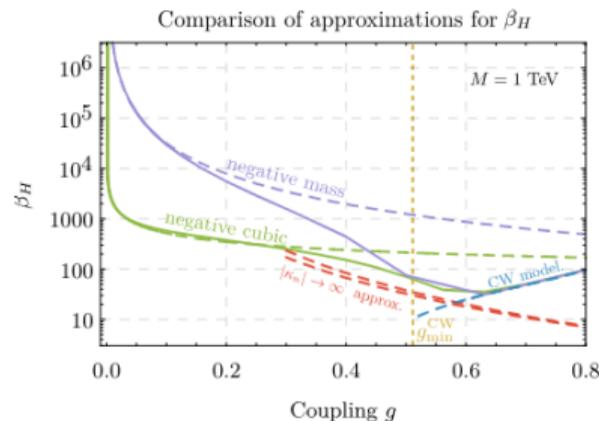
For large GW signal

\Rightarrow cooling or supercooling:

\Rightarrow where is supercooling ??

β and α_N

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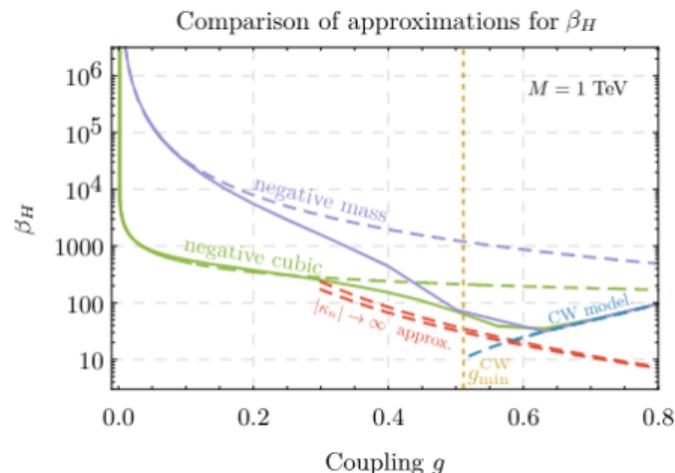
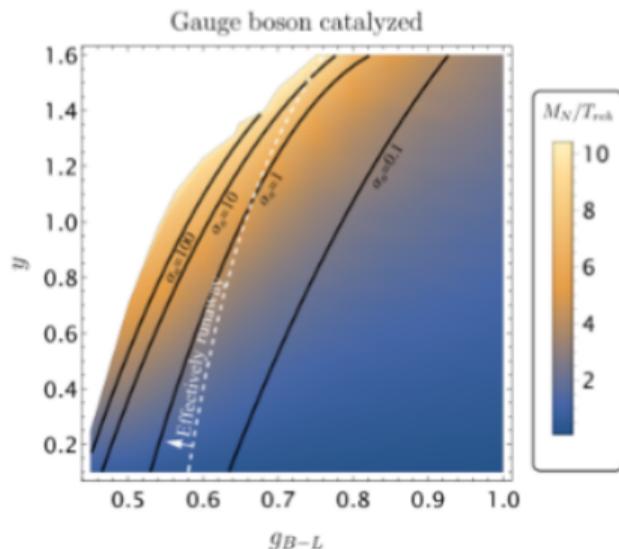


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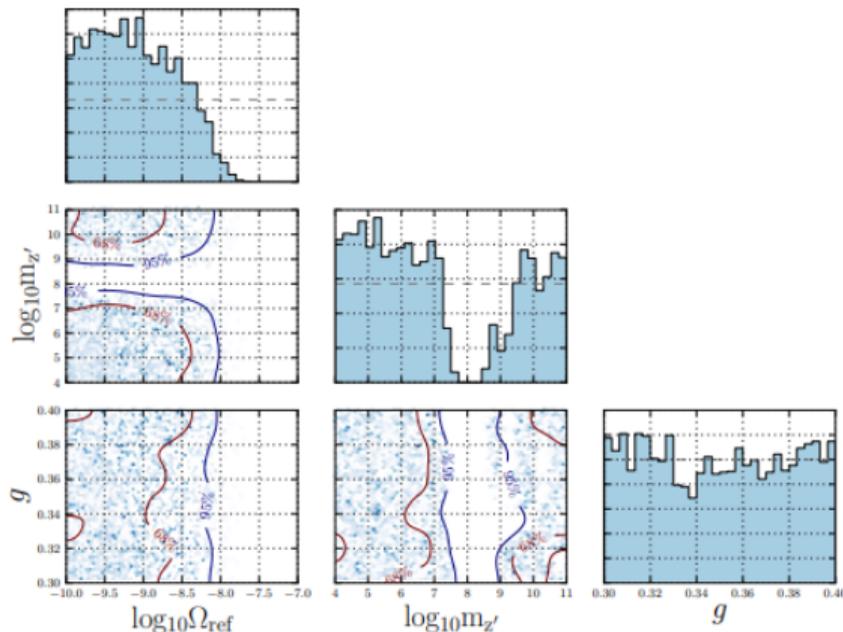
Conformal models

Impose a scale symmetry: the CW potentials

$$V_0(\phi) = \sum_i \frac{m_i^4(\phi)}{64\pi^2} \left(\log \frac{m_i^2(\phi)}{\mu^2} - c_i \right)$$



Constraining models with LVK



- Consider the conformal model

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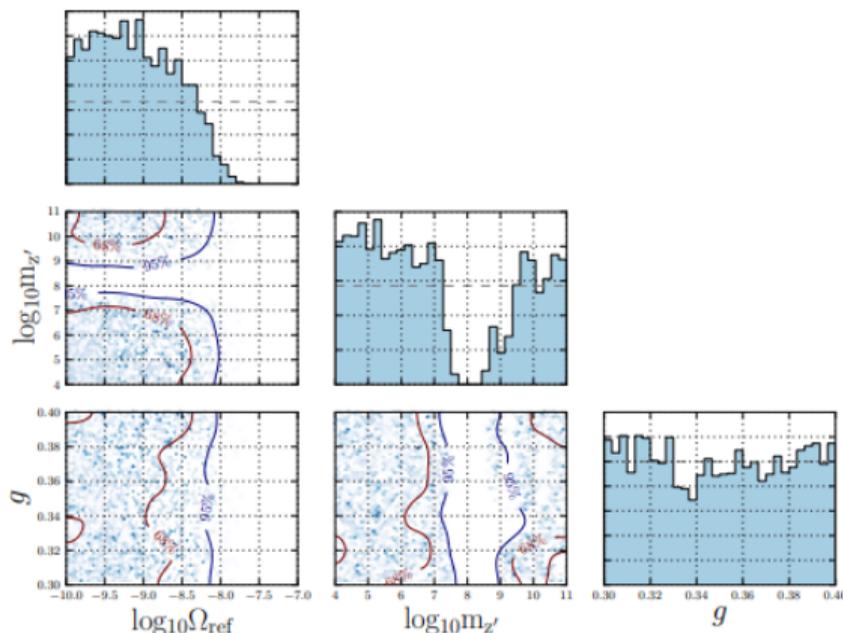
$$m_{Z'}^2(\phi) = 4g^2\phi^2$$

Interferometers can help constraining particle physics for very strong FOPT (mostly conformal models)

Constraining models with LVK

[2209.14707]: Badger, Fornal, Martinovic, Romero, Turbang, Guo,

Mariotti, Sakellariadou, Sevrin, Yang, Zhao



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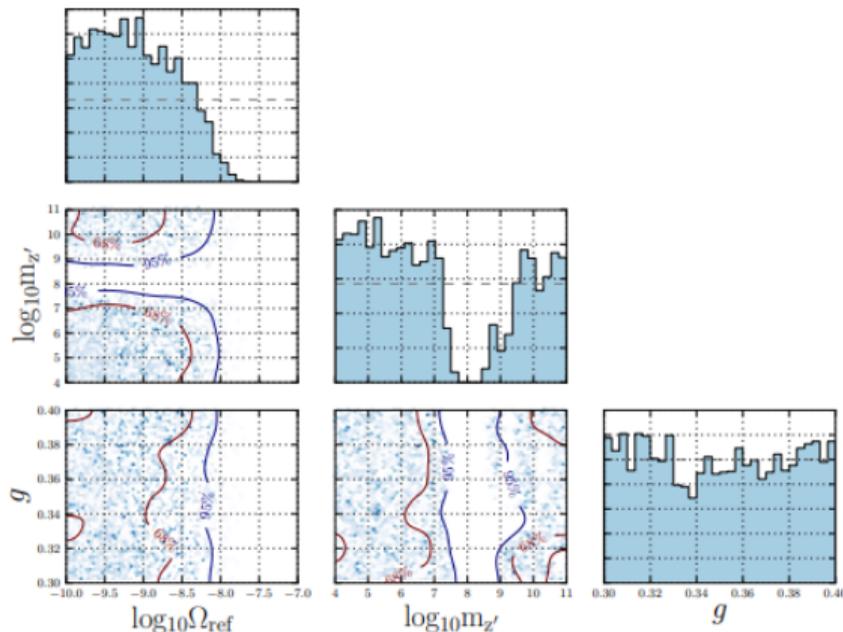
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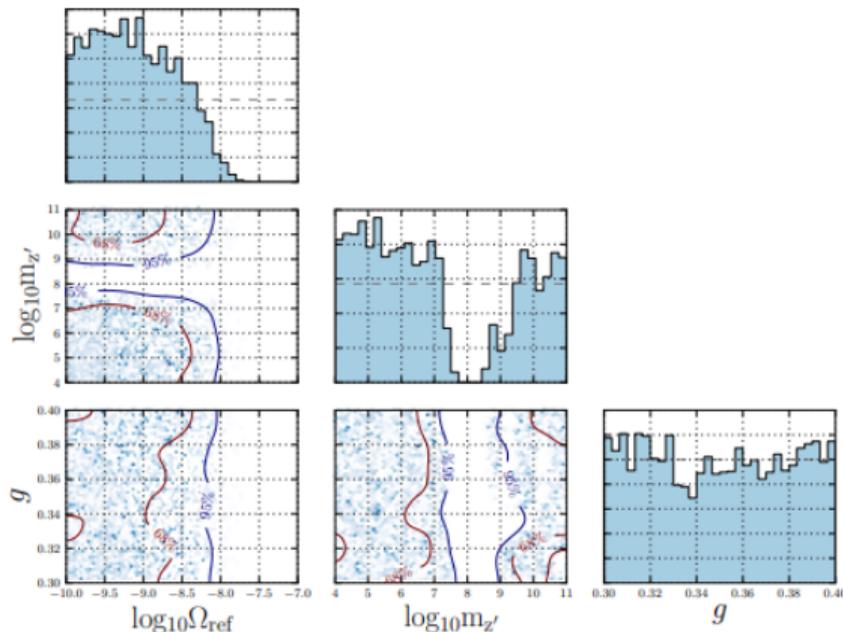
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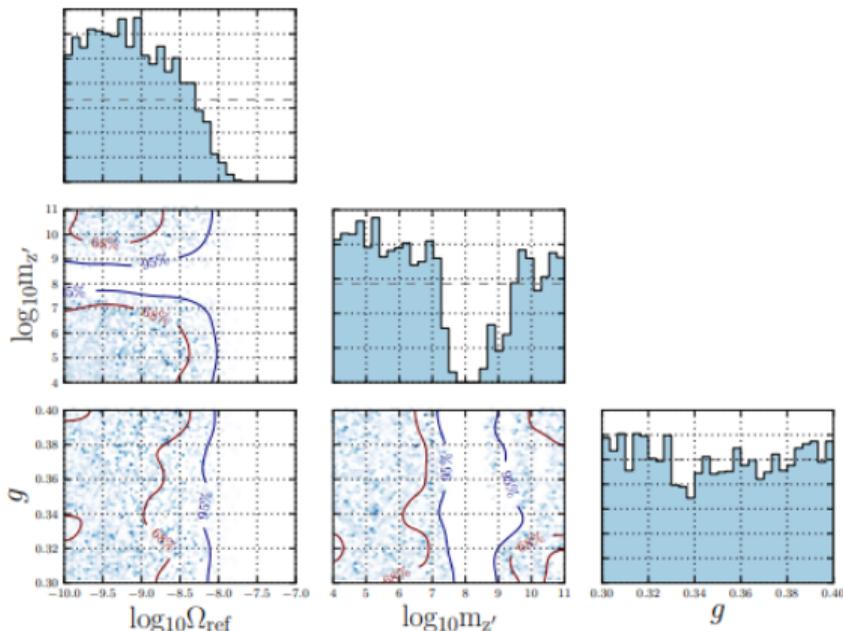
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- Disfavor $g \in [0.3, 0.4]$, $m_{Z'} \in [10^7, 10^9]$ GeV

Interferometers can help constraining particle physics for very strong FOPT (mostly conformal models)

Case of the EWPT

Let us add a hard scale: m_h

- Problem of EWPT for supercooling:

$$V_{\text{tree}} = -\frac{m_h^2}{2}h^2 + \frac{\lambda}{4}h^4, \quad V_T(h) \propto \sum_i g_i^2 \frac{T^2 h^2}{24} - \frac{Th^3}{12\pi} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \boxed{T_{\text{min}} \propto m_h} \quad \text{problem!}$$

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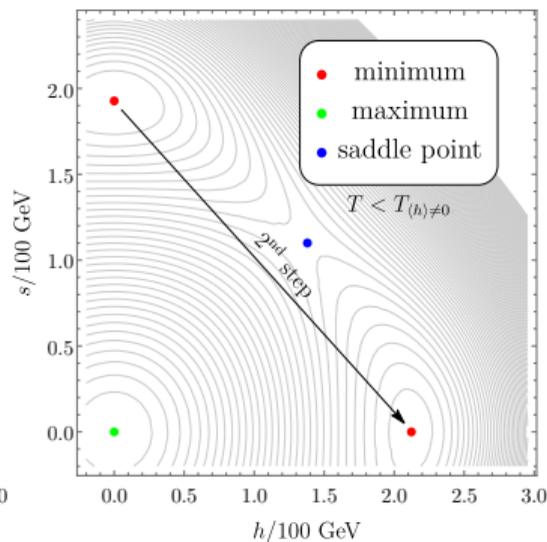
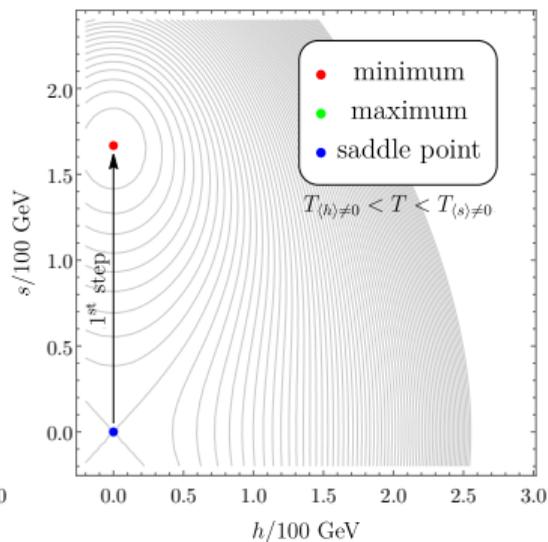
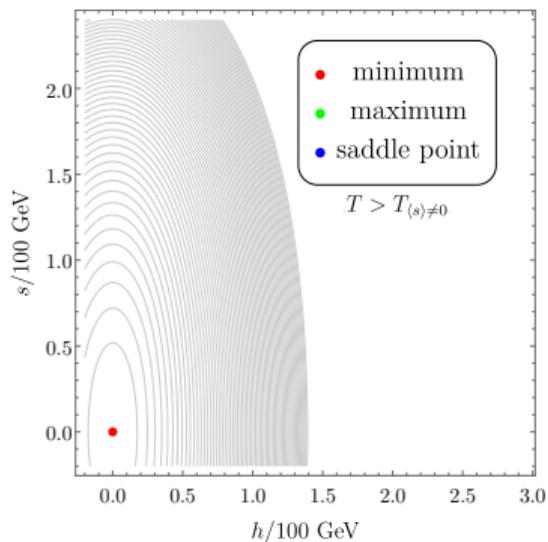
- **2-steps PT:** $\boxed{(0,0) \xrightarrow{SOPT} (0, v_s) \xrightarrow{FOPT} (v_{EW}, 0)}$

Relativistic EWPT: 2-step PT

[2207.02230]: Azatov, Barni, Chakraborty, MV, Yin,

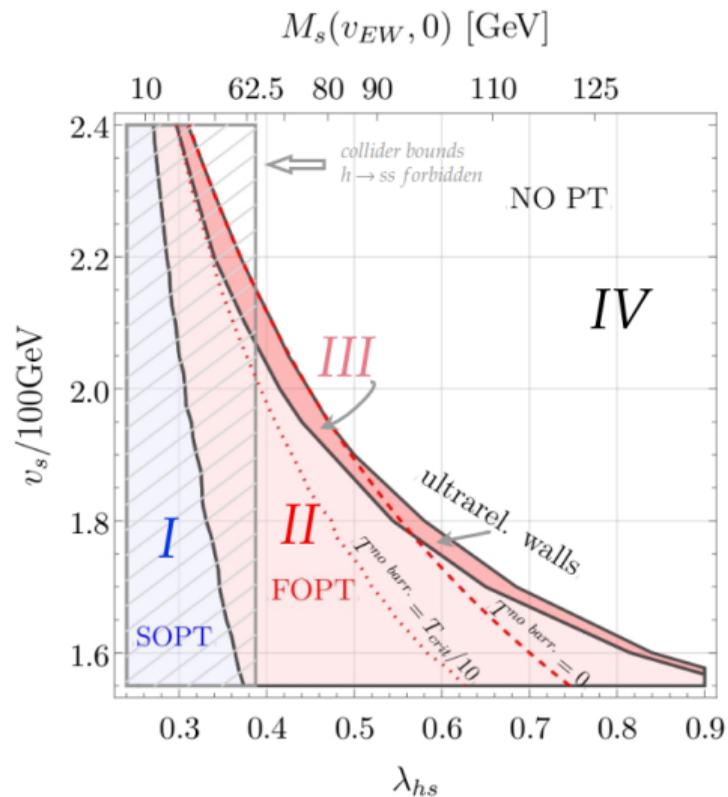
③ In the second PT:

$$m_{\text{eff}}^2(T) = -\frac{m_h^2}{2} + \frac{\lambda_{hs}}{2} v_s^2 \rightarrow 0 \quad \text{This is tuning!}$$



Singlet EWPT: Parameter scan

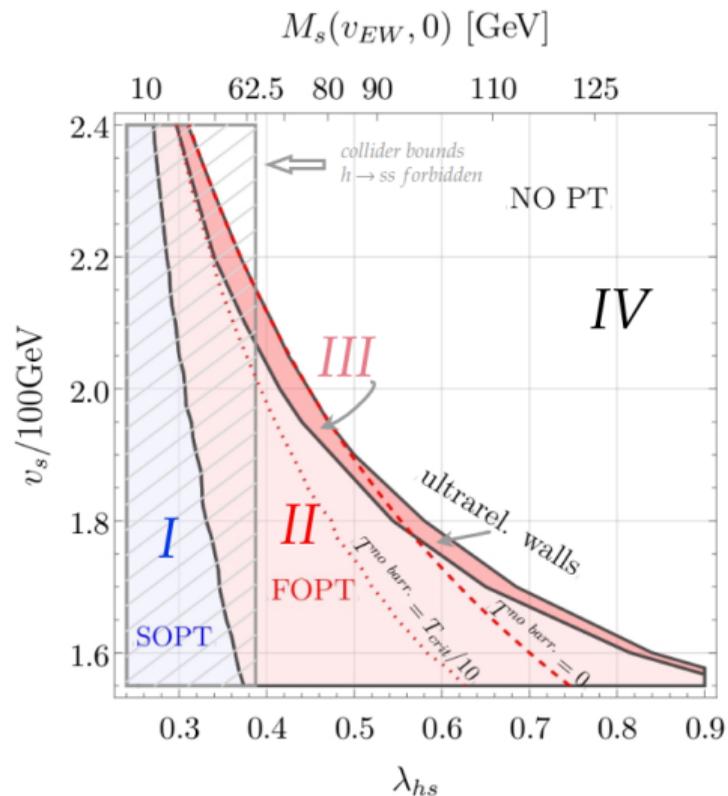
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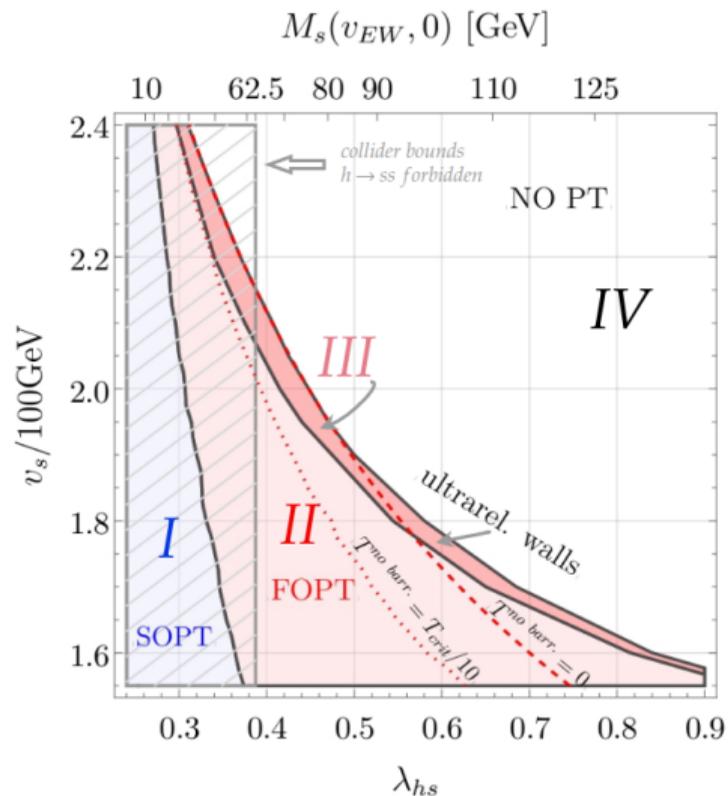


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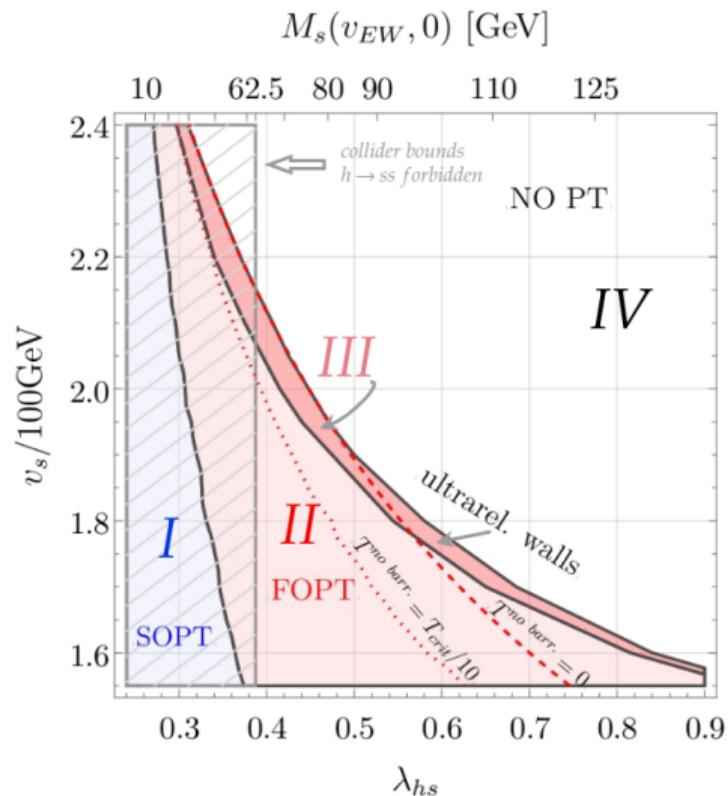
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I. SOPT: there is **never a barrier** separating the two minima

II. FOPT with slow walls $\gamma_w \sim 1$

III. Ultrarelativistic FOPT
 $\gamma_w \gg 1$ increasing λ_{hs} at fixed v_s .



Singlet EWPT: Parameter scan

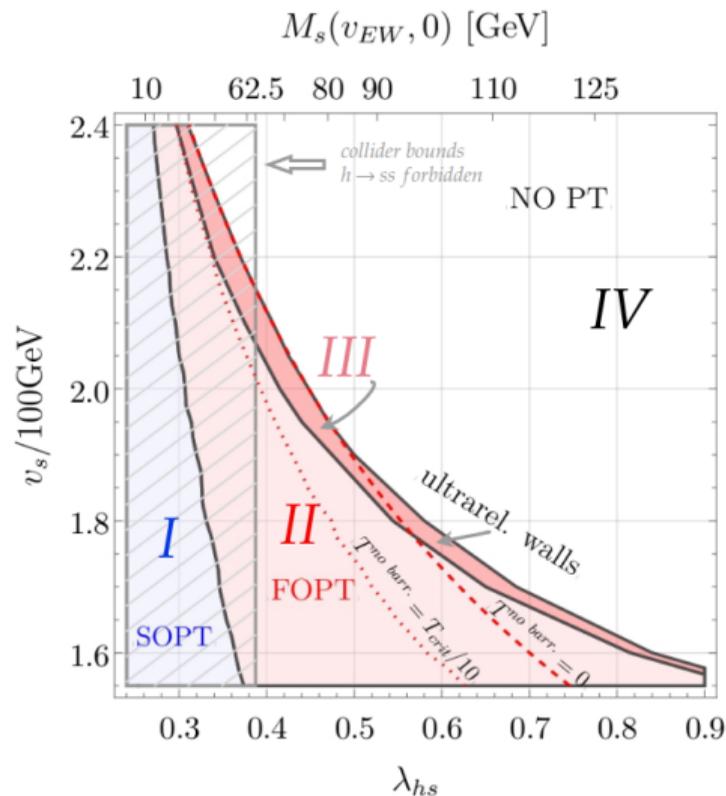
[2207.02230]: Azatov, Barni, Chakraborty, MV, Yin

I. SOPT: there is **never a barrier** separating the two minima

II. FOPT with slow walls $\gamma_w \sim 1$

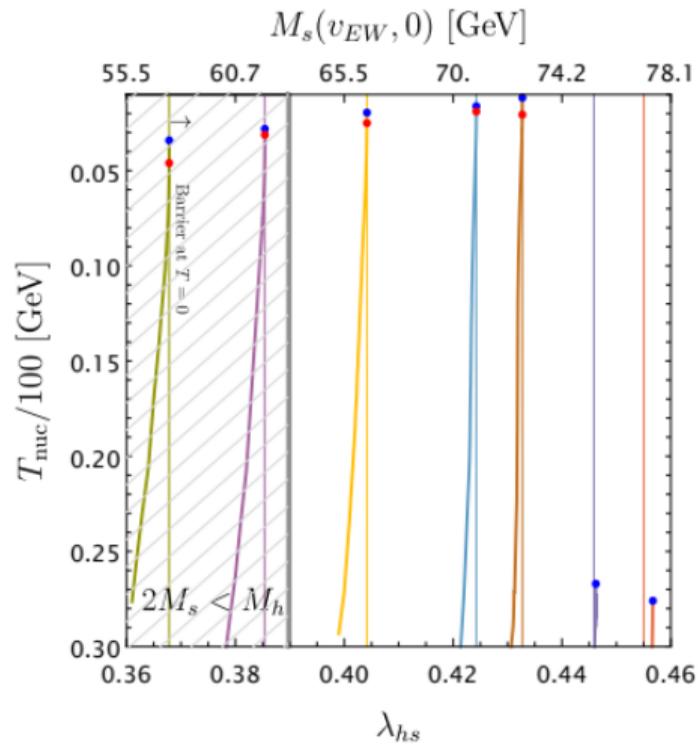
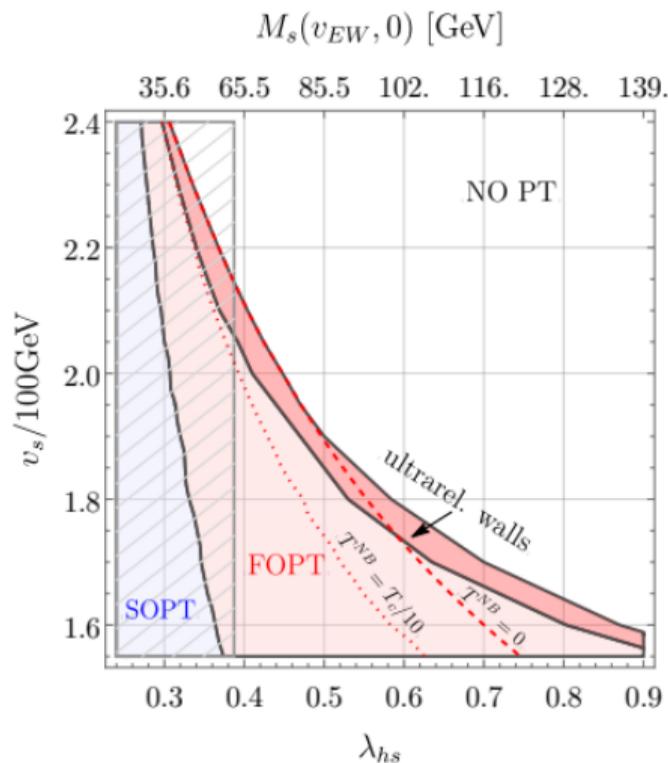
III. Ultrarelativistic FOPT
 $\gamma_w \gg 1$ increasing λ_{hs} at fixed v_s .

IV. No PT: the **system remains stuck** in the FV and never nucleates



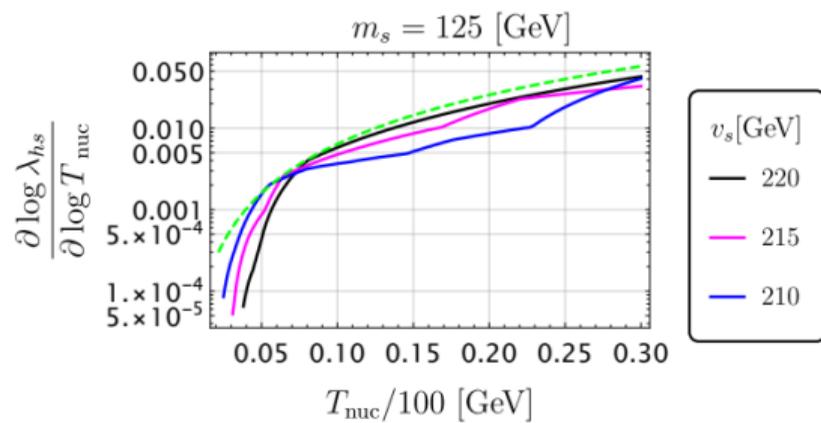
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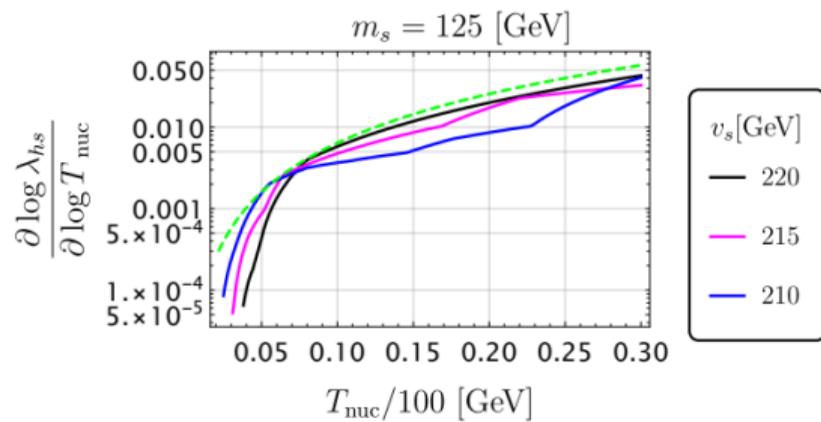
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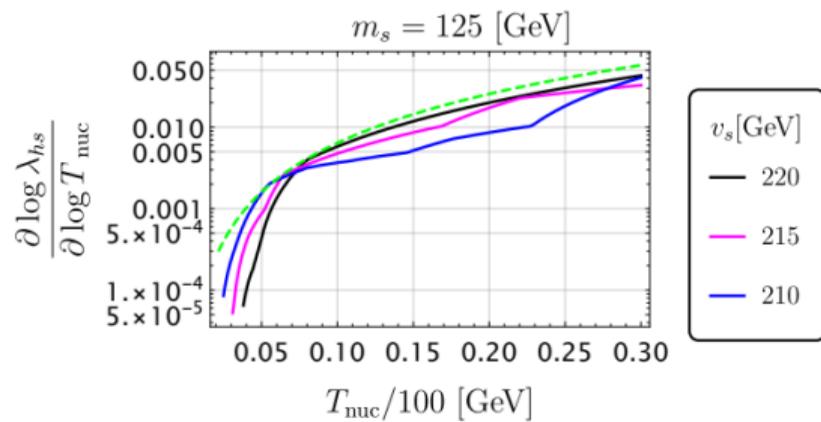
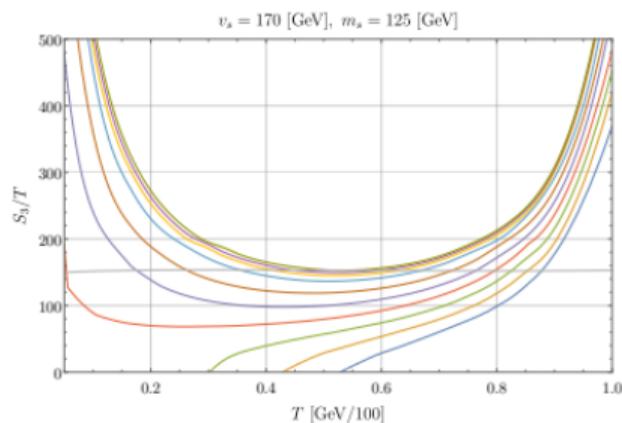
What fraction of the parameter space brings super-cooling ?



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[2207.02230]: Azatov, Barni, Chakraborty, MV, Yin

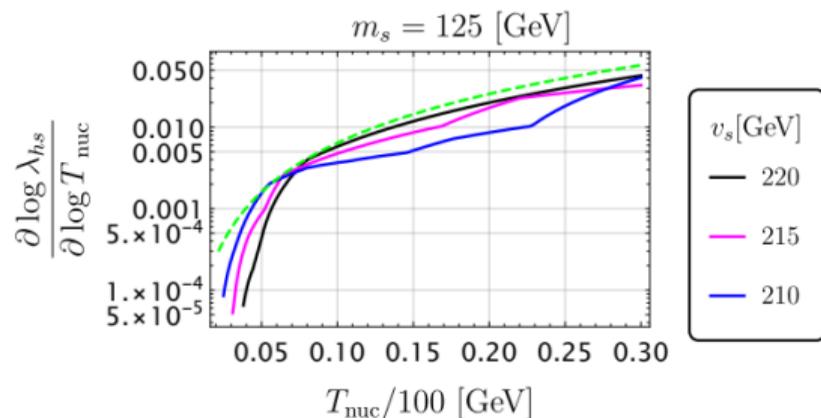
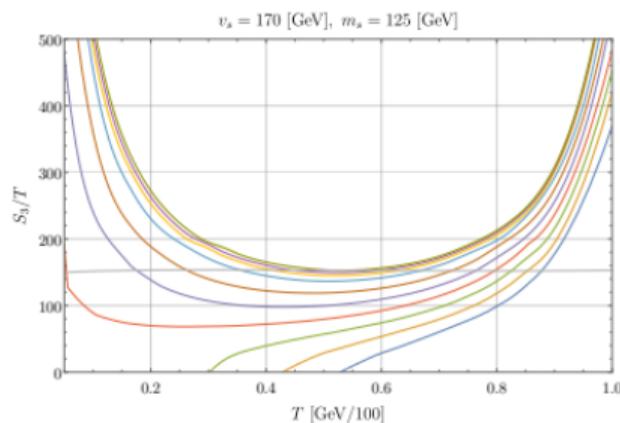
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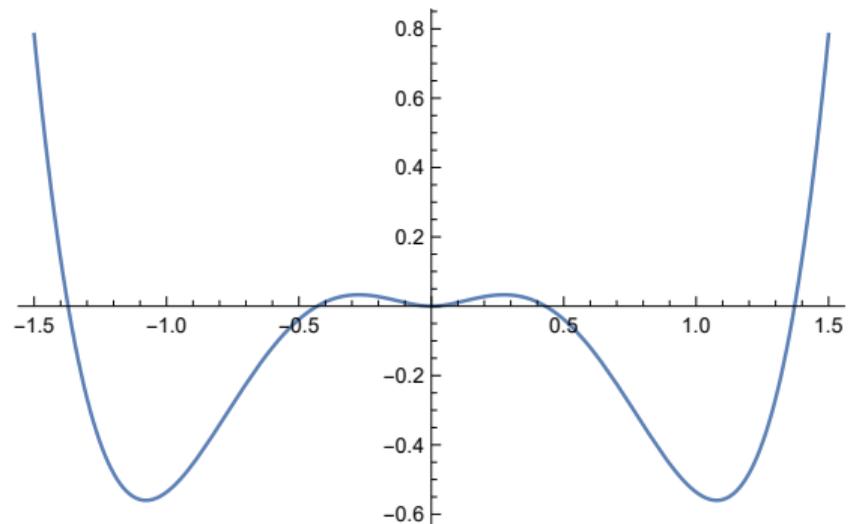
Supercooling requires tuning !!

Topological defect formation during FOPTs

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DW from bubbles

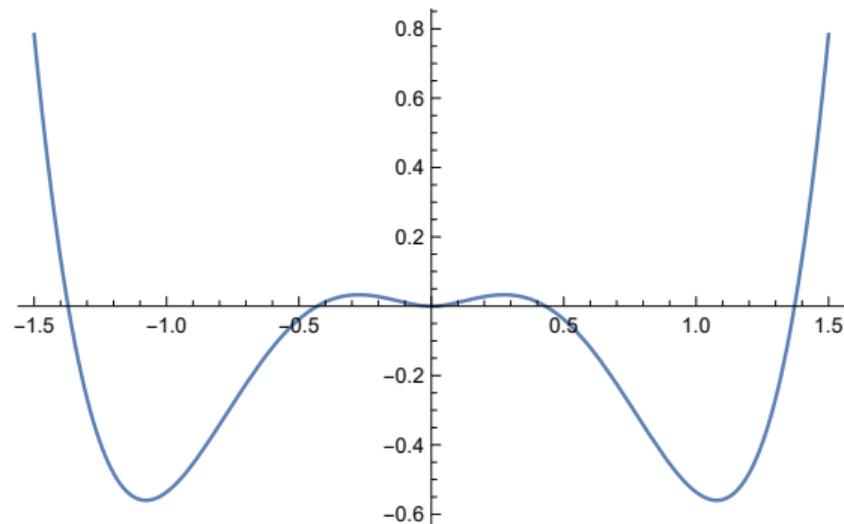
[26xx.xxxx]: Mariotti, Nagels, MV



DW from bubbles

[26xx.xxxx]: Mariotti, Nagels, MV

Nucleation of $+$ and $-$ bubbles

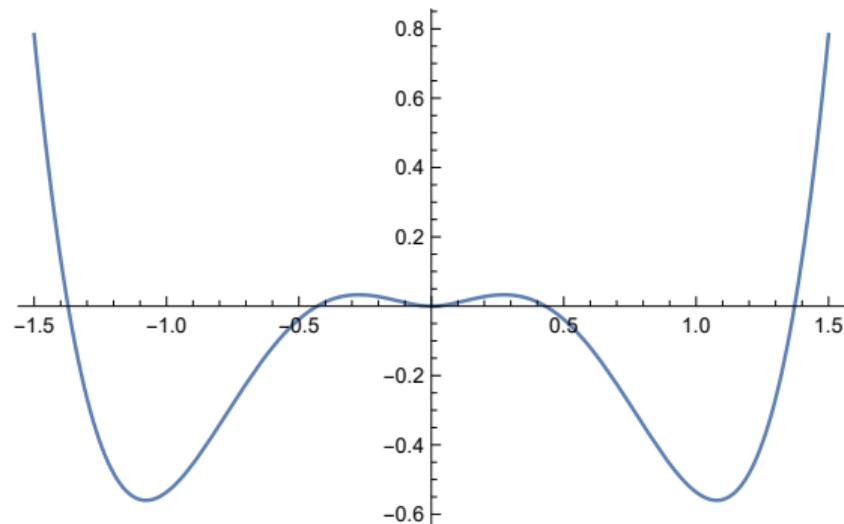


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Nucleation of $+$ and $-$ bubbles

Creation of a DW at the collision of bubbles



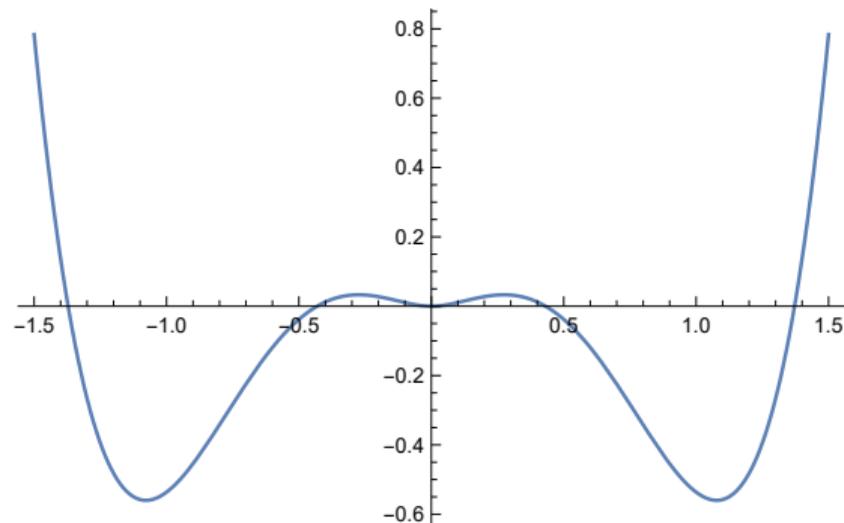
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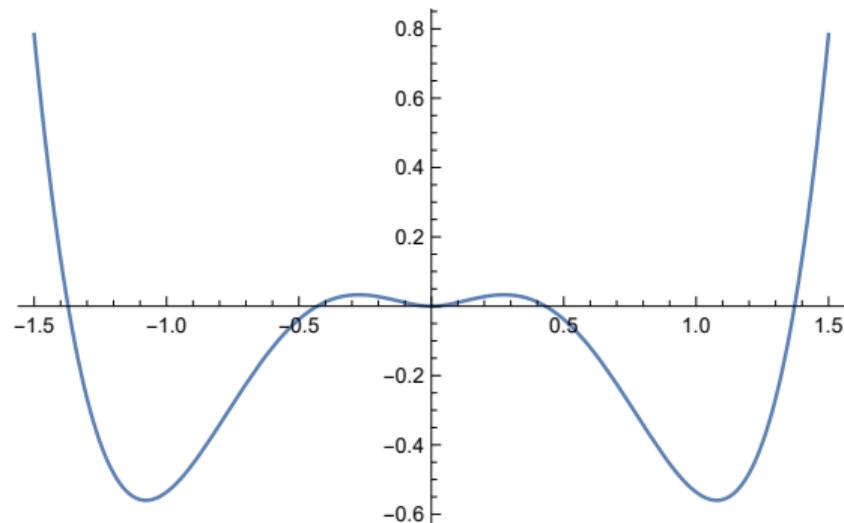
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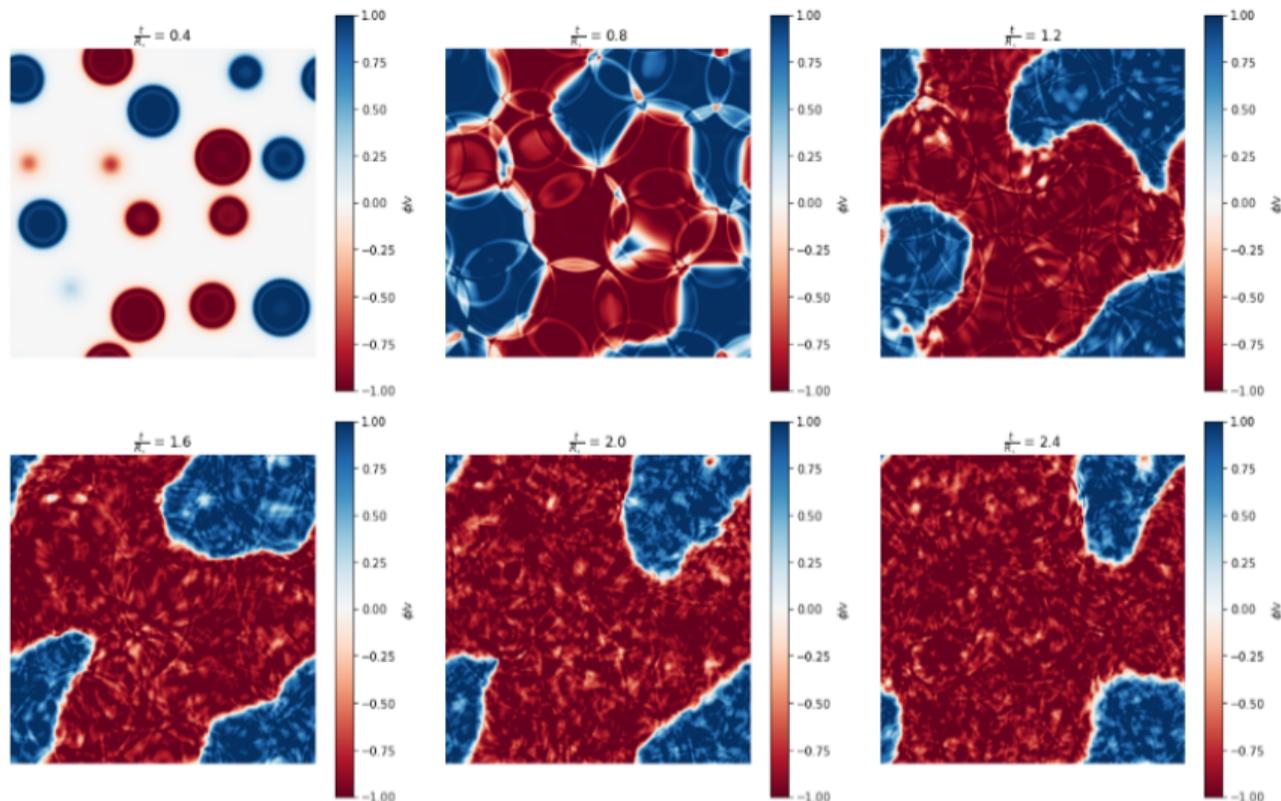
GW from bubble wall collision and DW network

which one dominates ? Is the DW relativistic ?



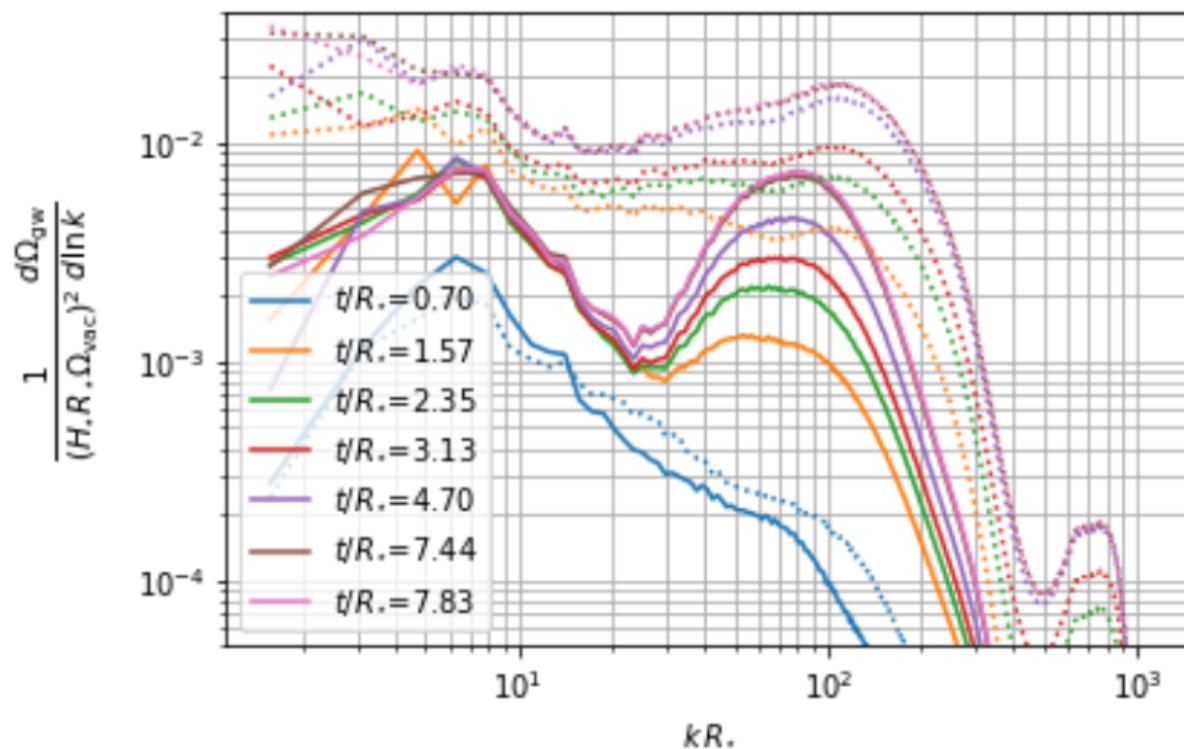
DW from bubbles

[26xx.xxxx]: Mariotti, Nagels, MV



Enhanced GW signal ??

[26xx.xxxx]: Mariotti, Nagels, MV



Conclusion

How generic is it for symmetry breaking to induce detectable GW ?

- GW from broken DW symmetries: DW networks. Strong signal if

$$T_{\text{ann}} \rightarrow T_{\text{dom}} \quad \text{Needs luck ?}$$

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- From FOPTs: large signal if mild supercooling.
- Supercooling natural if underlying conformal symmetry
- Supercooling requires fine-tuning if hard mass scale in the theory

Where does the energy go ?

[1004.4187]: Espinosa,No,Konstandin, Servant,[2406.01596]:Barni,Blasi,MV

- Fluid motion \Rightarrow GW !

$$\underbrace{\frac{\xi_w^3}{3}\epsilon}_{\text{vacuum}} + \underbrace{\frac{3}{4} \int \omega_N \xi^2 d\xi}_{\text{initial therm energy}} = \underbrace{\int \gamma^2 v^2 \omega \xi^2 d\xi}_{\text{fluid motion}} + \underbrace{\frac{3}{4} \int \omega \xi^2 d\xi}_{\text{final therm energy}}$$

$$\frac{\rho_{\text{kin}}}{\rho_i} \equiv \frac{\kappa_f \alpha_N}{1 + \alpha_N},$$

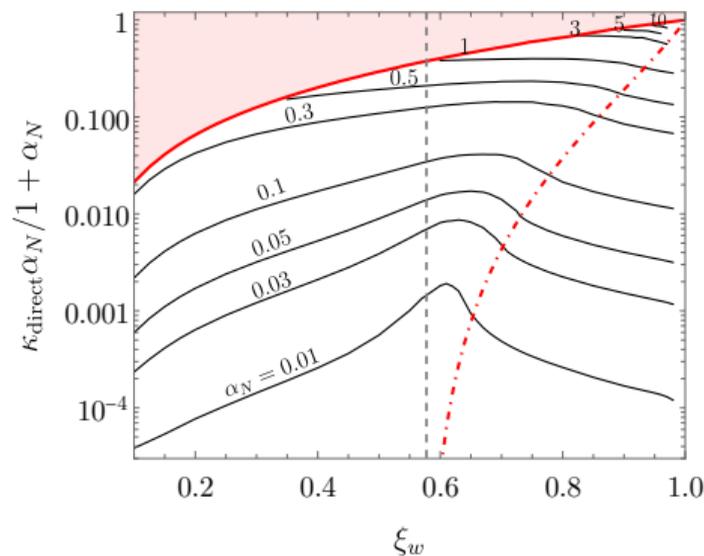


Figure: [2406.01596]:Barni,Blasi,MV