Melanie Matchett Wood and Ravi Vakil* (vakil@math.stanford.edu). From combinatorics to motives: Cutting and pasting in algebraic geometry.

Given some class of "geometric spaces", we can make a ring as follows.

(i) (additive structure) When $U$ is an open subset of such a space $X$, $[X] = [U] + [(X \setminus U)];$

(ii) (multiplicative structure) $[X \times Y] = [X][Y].$

In the algebraic setting, this ring (the "Grothendieck ring of varieties") contains surprising structure, connecting geometry to arithmetic and topology. I will discuss some remarkable statements about this ring (both known and conjectural), and present new statements (again, both known and conjectural). A motivating example will be polynomials in one variable. The key to these results is understanding the combinatorial structure related to "symmetric powers".

This is joint work with Melanie Matchett Wood. (Received September 17, 2013)