Lecture 30: Open Quantum Systems and Continuous Measurement

There is an intimate relationship between the study of open quantum systems and the theory of quantum measurement. An "open quantum system" is a system soon coupled to a reservoir. The reservoir is considered to be one with an effectively infinite number of degrees of freedom so that energy and information flow irreversibly from the "system" to the "bath".

\[ \text{System} \rightarrow \text{Reservoir} \]

In a measurement, the "system" is coupled to a "meter". The states of the meter are correlated to states of the system in such a way that an observation of the meter gives information about the state of the system.

\[ \text{System} \rightarrow \text{Meter} \]

A free measurement is also considered to be irreversible; once the meter is "macroscopic" enough to be observed, coherence between the different alternatives is to be lost. The meter's freedom of freedom returns us again to the system-reservoir paradigm. Indeed, in most circumstances, the measurement arises from an "amplification" of a quantum event.
The paradigm of "decoherence" explaining the lack of quantum coherence in a system–meter interaction, with the "Schrödinger Cat" the most famous paradox, was described and analyzed in detail by Zurek.

In quantum optics, there was considerable work on models of decoherence via amplified amplification. We will not have time to discuss that here. For detail see the text "Quantum Optics" by Walls & Milburn.

Von Neumann Model of Measurement

Putting aside the deep issues at the foundations of quantum mechanics, let us recall the basic von Neumann model for a projective measurement. Consider the Stern–Gerlach apparatus to measure a $\hat{J}_z$.

In the example above, $J=2$ with 5 possible eigenvalues of $\hat{J}_z$. 
In this apparatus, the atom's motion acts as a "mover" for its internal spin component along the direction of the magnetic field gradient. Of course the real measurement occurs when one "observes" the atom's position, which is correlated to its momentum after the gradient field. One can do this, in principle, by having the atoms fluoresce as they pass a "shat of light" (shown as a dashed screen).

To model the basic measurement, consider a Hamiltonian for the spin-motion coupling

\[ \hat{H}_{\text{int}} = \hbar \gamma J_z \]

We assume an atom enters the S-G apparatus with its motion uncorrelated from its spin. For simplicity, we take both to be in a pure state.

\[ |\Psi_{\text{total}}\rangle = |\Phi\rangle_{\text{spin}} \otimes |\psi_0\rangle_{\text{motion}} \]

\[ = \sum_{m_j} C_{m_j} |m_j\rangle_{\text{spin}} \otimes |\psi_0\rangle_{\text{motion}} \]

After the interaction

\[ e^{-i \hat{H}_{\text{int}} t / \hbar} |\Psi\rangle = \sum_{m_j} C_{m_j} |m_j\rangle_{\text{spin}} \otimes e^{-i m_j \gamma t / \hbar} |\psi_0\rangle_{\text{motion}} \]

\[ |\Psi_{\text{total}}(t)\rangle = |\psi(t)\rangle_{\text{motion}} \]
At this point, the system and meter are correlated, but the different meter states $| E_{m_j} \rangle$ are not distinguishable by a position measurement,

$$\langle \Psi_{m_j} | \Psi_{m_j}' \rangle^2 = 1 \quad \forall m_j, m_j'$$

Intuitively, the different branches of the wave function receive a momentum impulse $p_{m_j} = \hbar k_{1T, m_j}$.

The different beams separate after propagating for a sufficient time in free space

$$e^{-iA_{m_j}(t)} | \underline{\Psi}_{m_j}(t) \rangle = e^{-\frac{\hbar^2 k_{1T, m_j}^2}{2m}} e^{-ip_{m_j} \hat{X}/\hbar} | \Psi_0 \rangle$$

$$= | \underline{\Psi}_{m_j}(t) \rangle$$

To good approximation (ignoring the spread of wave packets due to dispersion)

$$| \langle z | \underline{\Psi}_{m_j}(t) \rangle | = | \underline{\Psi}_{m_j}(z - \frac{p_{m_j} t}{\hbar}) |$$

That is, the wave packet is displaced along $z$ by an amount depending on the momentum impulse, $\hbar$ the free propagation time.

For times $t^\prime$ s.t. $p_{m_j} t^\prime / \hbar \gg (2\hbar)^{1/2}$

$$\langle \underline{\Psi}_{m_j}(t) | \underline{\Psi}_{m_j}(t') \rangle^2 = \delta_{m_j m_j'}$$
When the different beams are completely distinguishable (orthogonal) the system (spin) and meter (position) are maximally entangled. At that point, measurement of the meter (atom position) determines the eigenvalue of $\hat{J}_z$, $m_j$.

$$|\Psi_{\text{total}}(t)\rangle = \sum_{m_j} C_{m_j} |m_j\rangle \otimes |\hat{E}_{m_j}(t)\rangle$$

- Finding motional state $|\hat{E}_{m_j}\rangle$

  $\Rightarrow$ Spin in state $|m_j\rangle$ with probability $|C_{m_j}|^2$

- Post measurement state $= |m_j\rangle = \frac{|\hat{E}_{m_j}\rangle_{\text{spin}}}{\| |\hat{E}_{m_j}\rangle_{\text{spin}} \|^2}$

This is a "strong" von Neuman projection measurement, strong in the sense that the post-measurement state of the atom's spin is strongly perturbed from its initial state by a projection operator.

From the theory of completely positive maps, the Kraus operator

This type of measure is known as "quantum nondemolition" (QND) in that if we started in an eigenstate of $\hat{J}_z$ we remain there after the measurement, this is because $[\hat{J}_z, \hat{A}_{\text{int}}] = 0$. 
From the perspective of the theory of completely positive maps, the Kraus operators become projection operators when the beams are fully resolvable. For shorter times, $\langle z | \Omega | z \rangle \neq \text{Projection on span}$.

The measurement will not give complete information about the eigenvalue $m_f$, and will not lead to strong backaction on the spin state. These "weak measurements" are POVMs. They exemplify the information gain/disturbance tradeoff.

**Continuous Weak Measurement**

The discussion of measurement above assumed the measurement process to be instantaneous. In reality, all measurements occur over a finite time. Physically, a probe is detected, an integrated over some time before enough information is gathered to register a choice of outcome. In the Stern-Gerlach example, fluorescence from the atoms must be integrated for sufficient time to resolve the position and thus the spin state $|m_f\rangle$.

The main goal of this lecture, thus, is to describe the basic theory of continuous measurement.
Continuous Quantum Measurement can be understood in the following paradigm:

\[ \Delta L = v \Delta t \]

A probe such as a laser beam, electron current, or other traveling beam is passed over the system to be measured where they intersect. Downstream, the probe is detected in some way, extracting information that is correlated to the observable we seek to measure of the system. We break up the traveling probe into packets of length \( \Delta L = v \Delta t \) where \( v \) is the speed at which the probe travels and \( \Delta t \) is the duration the detector must integrate in order to register the signal of interest.

We can thus think about this continuous measurement paradigm as a series of “weak measurements”. Each probe packet is a meter which becomes weakly entangled with the system and thus there is little back-action is a single detection. Integrating over a long time, the information gain becomes greater and greater, and eventually approaching a projective measurement in the asymptotic limit. In this way, we will see the von Neumann projection arising from a dynamical evolution (dynamical “Collapse of the wave function”).
We seek, thus, a stochastic differential equation that describes the dynamical measurement. We are guided by the theory of quantum trajectories discussed in the previous lectures. Though not a "reservoir" in the traditional sense, the probe carries away information in an irreversible way. Without detection of the probe, we expect decoherence of the system's density matrix. With perfect detection of the probe, we expect stochastic evolution of the system's pure state.

**Continuous Measurement SSE**

The key step in deriving the Stochastic Schrödinger Equation for continuous measurement is to write the approach completely positive map, that is the Kraus operators. We take a model Hamiltonian for the continuous measurement of an observable \( \hat{\mathcal{A}} \) through coupling to observable \( \hat{A}_i \) in the \( i^{th} \) packet of the probe:

\[
\hat{H}_{\text{int}} = \sum_i \frac{i \chi}{\Delta t} \hat{\mathcal{A}} \otimes \hat{A}_i
\]

Here we have assumed \( \hat{\mathcal{A}} \) and \( \hat{A}_i \) have been scaled by characteristic units so they are dimensionless, and \( \chi \) is a dimensionless coupling constant.
In this form, the unitary coupling matrix takes a Markov form, under the assumption that the system observable \( \hat{A}_v \) interacts with the system only for a time \( (\mathbb{L}-1)\Delta t \leq t < \mathbb{L}\Delta t \):

\[
\Rightarrow \quad U(t) = \prod_{i=1}^{\mathbb{L}\Delta t} U_i(\Delta t)
\]

\[
U_i(\Delta t) = e^{-ix \delta \otimes \hat{A}_v}
\]

Note: \( \delta \) is an "QND" variable.

Then, the Kraus operator for a time step \( \Delta t \) given a fictitious state of the apparatus (probe packet) \( \{\alpha\} \) and measurement result \( \{m\} \):

\[
\hat{M}(\Delta t) = \langle m | U_i(\Delta t) | \alpha \rangle = \langle m | e^{-ix \delta \otimes \hat{A}_v} | \alpha \rangle
\]

The assumption is that the measurement result is Gaussian distributed.

\[
\hat{M}(\Delta t) \propto e^{-\frac{\kappa \Delta t}{4} (\delta - \Omega_m)^2}
\]

So that the POVM element

\[
\hat{E}(\Delta t) = \hat{M}^\dagger(\Delta t) \hat{M}(\Delta t) \propto e^{-\frac{\kappa \Delta t}{2} (\delta - \Omega_m)^2}
\]

where \( \Omega_m \) is the value of \( \delta \) that corresponds to \( m \).
The parameter \( \kappa \) is known as the “measurement strength.” It corresponds to the rate at which we gain information about \( \theta \) through observation of the probe, as measured by the rate at which the variance in the POVM element decreases (Note: My definition of \( \Omega \) differs by a factor of \( \kappa \) compared to other definitions - below).

Given the Gaussian form of the POVM element, the probability of deducing value \( \Omega_m \) of the system observably given an outcome \( m \) of the probe, when the system is in state \( |\phi\rangle \) is:

\[
P_{\Omega_m} = \langle \phi | \hat{\Omega}(\Delta t) | \phi \rangle \propto e^{-\frac{\kappa \Delta t}{2} (\Omega_m - \langle \Omega \rangle)^2}
\]

That is, the probability is Gaussian distributed about mean \( \langle \Omega \rangle \) with variance \( \frac{\kappa \Delta t}{2} \).

In our measurement model, we will see that

\[
\kappa \propto \kappa^2 \frac{dN}{dt}
\]

where \( \frac{dN}{dt} \) is the mean flux of particles in the probe.

The unnormalized S.S.E. then follow from

\[
\tilde{\Psi}(t+\Delta t) = M(\Delta t) \Psi(t) \propto e^{-\frac{\kappa \Delta t (\Omega - \Omega_m)^2}{4}} \Psi(t)
\]
As discussed in Lect. 29, the macroscopic nature of the probe being measured implies, by the Central Limit theorem, a signal plus Gaussian noise. The measurement result is thus a stochastic variable described according to a Wiener process

$$\hat{\Phi}_m = \langle \hat{\Phi} \rangle + \frac{\Delta W}{\sqrt{\kappa \Delta t}}$$

$$\Delta W =$$ Weiner stochastic increment of zero mean and variance $\Delta t$

$$\Rightarrow$$ Variance of $\hat{\Phi}_m = \frac{\langle \Delta W^2 \rangle}{\kappa \Delta t} = \frac{1}{\kappa \Delta t}$ as expected

Thus, the S.S.E. for the unnormalized states is

$$\hat{\Psi}(t+\Delta t) = e^{-\frac{\kappa \Delta t}{2} \hat{\Phi}^2} (\hat{\Phi} - \langle \hat{\Phi} \rangle - \frac{\Delta W}{\sqrt{\kappa \Delta t}})^2 \hat{\Psi}(t)$$

$$= \exp \left\{ -\frac{\kappa \Delta t}{2} \hat{\Phi}^2 + \frac{\kappa \Delta t}{2} \langle \hat{\Phi} \rangle \hat{\Phi} + \sqrt{\kappa \Delta t} \Delta W \hat{\Phi} \right\} \hat{\Psi}(t)$$

We now take the limit $\Delta t \to dt$, $\Delta W \to dW$ as in Lect 29 with "Do rules" of stochastic differentials:

$$\text{d}W^2 = dt$$

$$\text{d}t^2 = dt \text{d}W = 0$$

$$\Rightarrow$$ Unnormalized State:

$$\hat{\Psi}(t+dt) = \left[ 1 - \frac{\kappa dt}{4} \hat{\Phi}^2 + \left( \frac{\kappa dt}{2} \langle \hat{\Phi} \rangle + \frac{\sqrt{\kappa dt}}{2} \text{dW} \right) \hat{\Phi} 
\qquad + \frac{1}{2} \left( \frac{\sqrt{\kappa}}{2} \text{dW} \hat{\Phi} \right)^2 \right] \hat{\Psi}$$
\[ \Psi(t + dt) = \left[ 1 - \frac{k dt}{8} \hat{\sigma}^2 + \left( \frac{kt}{2} \langle \hat{\sigma} \rangle + \frac{\sqrt{k}}{2} \, dW \right) \right] \Psi(t) \]

We recognize this S.S.E. as equivalent to that we studied in Lect. 29, corresponding to the quantum trajectory under continuous homodyne measurement. In that case, the Lindblad operator was \( \hat{L} = \hat{\Phi}^\dagger \hat{\Phi} \), as the unnormalized S.S.E. could be written

\[ \Psi(t + dt) = \left[ 1 - \frac{kt}{2} \hat{\sigma}^2 + \langle \hat{\sigma}^2 \rangle dt + dW \right] \Psi(t) \]

In the continuous measurement case, we can define the Lindblad operator \( \hat{L} = \hat{\Phi}^\dagger \hat{\Phi} \)

\[ \Rightarrow \Psi(t + dt) = \left[ 1 - \frac{k dt}{8} \hat{\sigma}^2 + \left( \frac{kt}{2} \langle \hat{\sigma} \rangle + \frac{\sqrt{k}}{2} \, dW \right) \right] \Psi(t) \]

To normalize:

\[ \| \Psi(t + dt) \|^2 = 1 + \frac{k dt}{8} \langle \hat{\sigma}^2 \rangle + \frac{kt}{2} \langle \hat{\sigma} \rangle \langle \hat{\sigma} \rangle + \frac{\sqrt{k}}{2} \langle \hat{\sigma} \rangle \langle \hat{\sigma} \rangle \, dW \]

\[ + \frac{3}{4} \langle \hat{\sigma}^2 \rangle \, dW^2 \]

\[ \Rightarrow \frac{1}{\| \Psi(t + dt) \|^2} = \left[ \| \Psi(t + dt) \|^2 \right]^{-\frac{1}{2}} = 1 - \frac{k dt}{8} \langle \hat{\sigma}^2 \rangle - \frac{\sqrt{k}}{2} \langle \hat{\sigma} \rangle \, dW \]

\[ + \frac{3}{8} \left( \frac{\sqrt{k}}{2} \langle \hat{\sigma} \rangle \, dW \right)^2 \]

\[ \Rightarrow \frac{1}{\| \Psi(t + dt) \|^2} = 1 - \frac{k dt}{8} \langle \hat{\sigma}^2 \rangle - \frac{\sqrt{k}}{2} \langle \hat{\sigma} \rangle \, dW \]

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Thus, the normalized S.S.E. for continuous measurement:

$$|\Psi(t+\Delta t)\rangle = \frac{1}{\|\Psi(t+\Delta t)\|}$$

$$= \left[1 - \frac{k}{8} dt \left( \frac{\hat{\Theta}^2 + \langle \Theta \rangle^2}{2} \right) + \frac{\sqrt{\kappa}}{2} \left( \Theta - \langle \Theta \rangle \right) dW - \frac{k}{4} \Theta \langle \Theta \rangle dW^2 \right] |\Psi(t)\rangle$$

$$\Rightarrow$$

$$|\Psi(t+\Delta t)\rangle = \left[1 - \frac{k}{8} dt \left( \Theta^2 - \langle \Theta \rangle^2 \right) + \frac{\sqrt{\kappa}}{2} dW \left( \Theta - \langle \Theta \rangle \right) \right] |\Psi(t)\rangle$$

This S.S.E. leads to "dynamical collapse" of the wave function. That is, given an arbitrary state, in steady state $|\Psi\rangle$ converges on an eigenstate of $\hat{\Theta}$. Which eigenstate it converges to is random, with probability of reaching $|\Theta\rangle$ given by the Born rule $|\langle \Theta | \Psi(t) \rangle|^2$.

We will show this in detail below. As a first step, note that is

$$\hat{\Theta} |\Psi\rangle = \langle \Theta | \Psi \rangle$$

the state does not change. This is true for an eigenstate of $\hat{\Theta}$. The change in $|\Psi\rangle$ depends on $\left(\Theta - \langle \Theta \rangle\right) |\Psi\rangle$. 
S.M.E. in Continuous measurement

We write the Stochastic Master equation for the conditioned state

\[
\dot{\rho}_c(t) = \frac{1}{2} \left( \dot{\rho}_c(t) - \frac{k}{\hbar} dt \left\{ (\hat{\Theta} - \langle \Theta \rangle)^2, \hat{\rho}_c \right\} + \frac{\sqrt{k}}{2} dw \left\{ (\hat{\Theta} - \langle \Theta \rangle), \hat{\rho}_c \right\} + \frac{k}{4} dw^2 (\Theta \langle \Theta \rangle) \rho_c (\Theta - \Theta \langle \Theta \rangle) \right)
\]

\[
= \hat{\rho}_c(t) - \frac{k}{\hbar} dt \left( \hat{\Theta} \hat{\rho}_c + \hat{\rho}_c \hat{\Theta} - 2 \hat{\Theta} \hat{\rho}_c \hat{\Theta} \right)
\]

\[
+ \frac{\sqrt{k}}{2} dw \left( \Theta \hat{\rho}_c + \hat{\rho}_c \hat{\Theta} - 2 \langle \Theta \rangle \hat{\rho}_c \right)
\]

\[
\Rightarrow \quad d\hat{\rho}_c = -\frac{k}{\hbar} dt \left[ \hat{\Theta}, [\hat{\Theta}, \hat{\rho}_c] \right] + \frac{\sqrt{k}}{2} dw \left( \Theta \hat{\rho}_c + \hat{\rho}_c \hat{\Theta} - 2 \langle \Theta \rangle \hat{\rho}_c \right)
\]

The first term (proportional to \(dt\)) is the Lindblad master equation with Lindblad operator \(\hat{L} = \frac{\sqrt{k}}{2} \hat{\Theta}\)

\[
d\hat{\rho}_c = -\frac{dt}{\hbar} [\hat{\Theta}, \hat{\rho}_c] + dt \hat{\rho}_c \hat{\Theta} \hat{\rho}^+ \hat{\Theta}^+ +\]

\[
= -\frac{k}{\hbar} dt [\hat{\Theta}, [\hat{\Theta}, \hat{\rho}_c]] + \frac{k}{4} dt \Theta \hat{\rho}_c \Theta
\]

\[
= -\frac{k}{\hbar} dt [\hat{\Theta}, \left[ \hat{\Theta}, \hat{\rho}_c \right]]
\]
That is, the unconditioned density operator for the system, in the absence of measurement of the probe, decoheres as the probe carries away information.

To understand this decoherence, look at the matrix elements in the eigenstates of $\hat{\sigma}$. We easily see that the unconditioned density matrix evolves as

$$\frac{d}{dt} \langle \sigma^+ | \rho | \sigma^- \rangle = -\frac{k}{8} (\sigma^+ \cdot \sigma^-)^2 \langle \sigma^+ | \rho | \sigma^- \rangle$$

That is, the populations $\langle \sigma^+ | \rho | \sigma^- \rangle$ remain unchanged, and the coherences in this basis decay at rate $\frac{k}{8} (\sigma^+ \cdot \sigma^-)^2$ (Note: the factor of 8 is often absorbed into the definition of $k$; see e.g. Jacob & Steck quant-ph/0611027).

Thus, given an initial state $|\psi\rangle = \sum_{\sigma} c_{\sigma} |\sigma\rangle$, the steady state $\rho = \sum_{\sigma} |c_{\sigma}|^2 |\sigma\rangle \langle \sigma|$ is a statistical mixture of eigenstates of $\hat{\sigma}$, with probability $|c_{\sigma}|^2$. The basis $\sum |\sigma\rangle$ is known as the "pointer" basis, corresponding to the eigenstates of the Lindblad operator.
To understand the dynamical "collapse" of the wave function, consider that the differential Kraus operator under our Markov approximation is:

\[ \hat{M}_m(\delta t) = e^{-\frac{\kappa \delta t}{4} (\hat{\sigma} - \sigma_m)^2} \frac{\sigma_m}{(2\pi/\kappa \delta t)^{1/4}} \]

Thus after a finite time we can easily integrate:

\[ \hat{M}_m(t) = e^{-\frac{\kappa t}{2} (\hat{\sigma} - \sigma_m)^2} \frac{\sigma_m}{(2\pi/\kappa t)^{1/2}} \]

That is, the Kraus operator which (stochastically) maps the state at time \( t = 0 \) to time \( t \) is itself a Gaussian filter of width \( \sqrt{t} \) (variance) \( 1/\kappa t \). The longer the integration time, the narrower the filter:

\[ |\psi(t)\rangle = \hat{M}_m(t) |\psi(0)\rangle \]

\[ \frac{||\hat{M}_m(t) |\psi(0)\rangle||}{|| |\psi(0)\rangle||} \]

In the limit \( t \to \infty \) (i.e. \( t \gg 1/\kappa \))

\[ \hat{M}_m \to \delta(\hat{\sigma} - \sigma_m) = 10_m \times \langle \sigma_m \rangle \]

A projection operator?
The particular value on the filter converges to a random, distributed according to 1 cm$^3$ by the rule $P_n = \langle \psi_0 \rangle (A_n^+ A_n^0 \langle \psi_0 \rangle)$. Note that backaction is only important when $\langle \psi_0 \rangle < < \langle \Delta \psi^2 \rangle$. That is, the measurement uncertainty is less than the uncertainty in the value of $\psi$ in the initial state preparation. Before that time, the measurement is weak.

For long times, the continuous measurement approaches a projective measurement, strongly perturbing the state conditional on the measurement history.