Quantum gravity in the general boundary formulation

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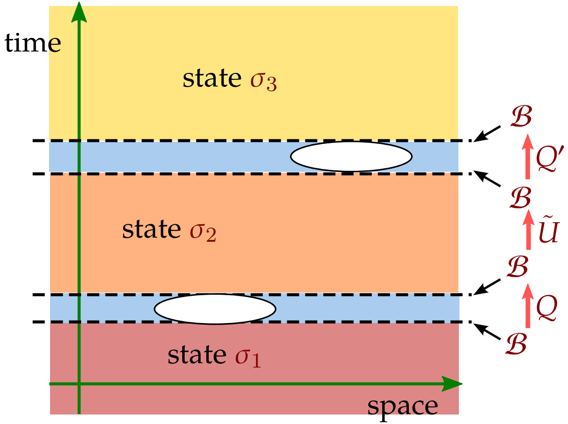
Measurement in the standard formulation and time

- **Measurements** are encoded by **quantum operations** Q, Q'.
- These are **superoperators** on the space $\mathcal{B}$ of **mixed states**.
- **Unitary dynamics** is also encoded by **superoperators** $\tilde{U}$ on $\mathcal{B}$.

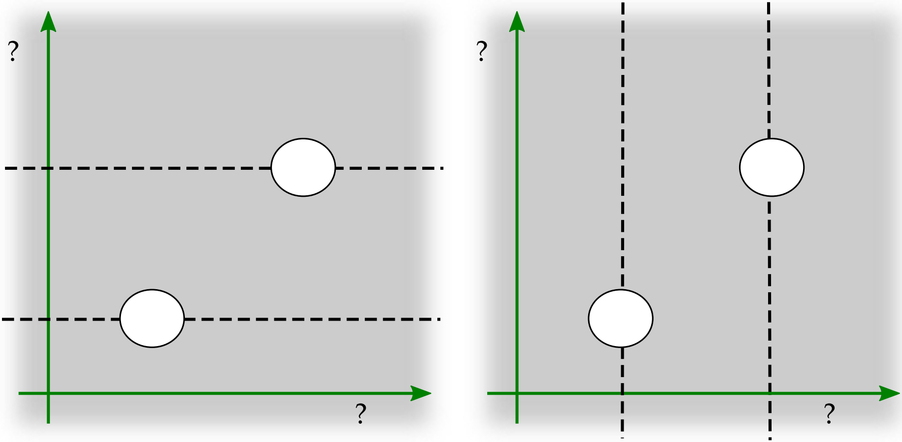


The product $Q' \circ \tilde{U} \circ Q$ encodes **joint measurement** and evolution. Its order is the **temporal order** of processes.

Time plays a special role!

Quantum theory without spacetime metric?

If spacetime is dynamical, as in a **general relativistic** setting, there is no a priori metric "separating" space and time. What do we do then?



The **standard formulation of quantum theory** breaks down.

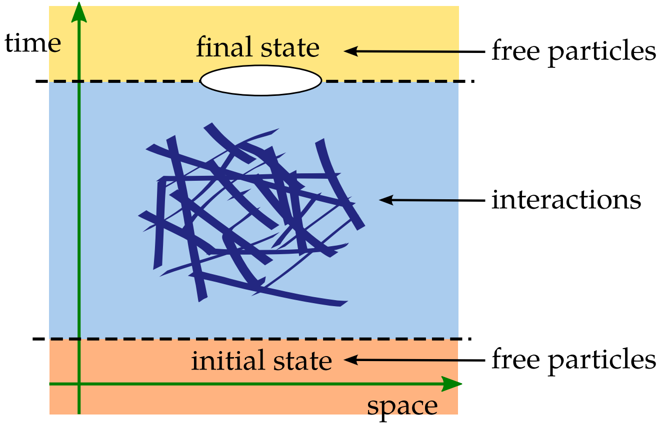
How do we do quantum gravity? (I)

Traditionally three lines of attack have been followed:

1. **Do what you can do:** Measure in classical spacetime.
2. **Just go for it:** Ignore the problems (for now).
3. **Quantum theory is wrong:** There.

Asymptotic measurement: QFT

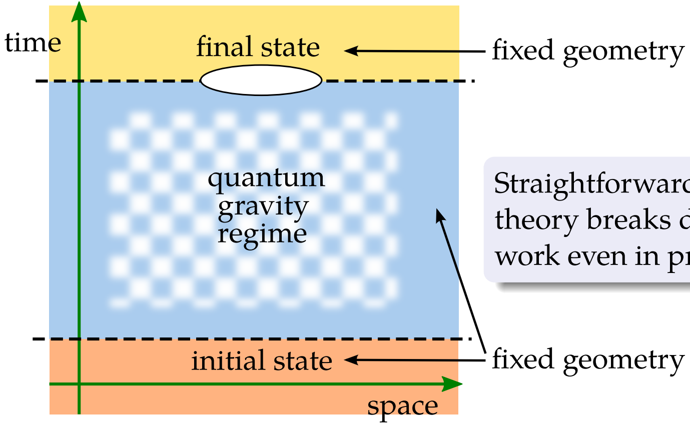
Consider measurement only at **asymptotic infinity**, infinitely early and infinitely late time, described by **transition probabilities**. This is how the **S-matrix** in **quantum field theory** works to describe **scattering processes**. This requires **perturbation theory**.



At early and late times particles are far apart and do not interact. The interesting physics happens at **intermediate times**.

Asymptotic measurement: QG

Fix an approximate **classical metric background** at **asymptotic infinity**. Observations take place exclusively in this region. This requires **perturbation theory** in the **metric**.
(Perturbative Quantum Gravity, String Theory)



Straightforward perturbation theory breaks down. Can this work even in principle?

How do we do quantum gravity? (II)

Traditionally three lines of attack have been followed:

2. Just go for it: Keep the mathematics of the **standard formulation**, but throw away the background metric and with it the physical content. Focus on the **mathematical objects**: Hilbert spaces, a Hamiltonian, observables as operators. Use **canonical quantization** to construct these. Hope that in some future an operational connection of these objects with physical reality can be established. (Quantum Geometrodynamics, Loop Quantum Gravity)

So far no such connection has been proposed. There might be none.

How do we do quantum gravity? (III)

Traditionally three lines of attack have been followed:

3. Quantum theory is wrong: Quantum theory as we know it is fundamentally limited and must be replaced by some different underlying theory. Known physics is modified. (Causal sets, Gravity induced collapse models)

There is no evidence for violations of quantum theory as we know it. Also, it is difficult to reinvent physics from scratch and still reproduce known results to high precision.

Can we do better?

The long standing failure to come up with a theory of quantum gravity within the standard formulation suggests that these efforts might be futile.

But can we do better?

Can we do better? – YES!

Recent advances in the **foundations of quantum theory** have lead to a novel formulation of quantum theory which is,

- **more fundamental:** the standard formulation is recovered when appropriate, known physics is not modified
- **timeless:** does not require a notion of time
- **local:** implements manifest spacetime locality without metric
- **operational:** recovers and generalizes quantum measurement theory

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This arose from a merger of **quantum field theory** with **quantum foundations**.

I call this the **positive formalism**, completes the program of the **general boundary formulation (GBF)** [RO]. Related names are **process matrix framework** [Brukner, Oreshkov,...], **causaloid formalism** [Hardy], **operator tensor quantum theory** [Hardy], ...

Quantum gravity in the GBF

1. Perturbative quantum gravity: This depends on the integration of QFT with the GBF. If finite regions can be described successfully, this might yield new insight into this approach. But there is no reason to expect improvement of the **non-renormalizability** issue.

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3. A functorial top-down approach: The mathematical structure of TQFT that is part of the GBF also suggests a top-down approach: Guided by **axiomatics**, **functoriality**, and **representation theory** and with a minimum of assumptions explore the **theory space**.

Classical ingredients

The spin foam approach

We start with the Palatini action of gravity,

$$S_M^{\text{Palatini}}(e, A) = \int_M \mathrm{tr}(e \wedge e \wedge F).$$

A – connection with gauge group $\mathrm{Spin}(1,3) = \mathrm{SL}(2,\mathbb{C})$

F – curvature 2-form of the connection A

e – 4-bein frame field

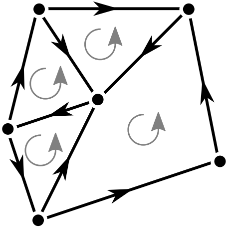
To simplify this theory we replace $e \wedge e$ with the Lie algebra valued 2-form field B. This yields BF theory,

$$S_M^{\text{BF}}(B, A) = \int_M \mathrm{tr}(B \wedge F).$$

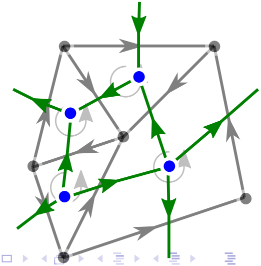
This is not gravity, but becomes gravity if we add certain **constraints**.

Discretized connections I

BF theory is much simpler than gravity and can be quantized explicitly. It tuns out that the B-field can be integrated out so we only need to consider configurations of the connection field A.



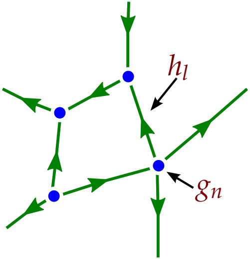
To make the "space of connections" on the hypersurface Σ more manageable, we discretize Σ via a **cellular decomposition**.



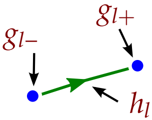
Given a "gauge" (local trivialization), connections give rise to **holonomies** along paths. We choose paths dual to the cellular decomposition. We call them **links** (green lines). Their end points are **nodes** (blue dots).

Discretized connections II

The holonomies associate one element h_l of the structure group G to each link l. We denote this space by $K^1_\Sigma = G^L$, where L is the number of links in Σ.



A gauge transformation consists of the assignment of one element g_n of G to each node n. The gauge group is thus $K^0_\Sigma = G^N$, where N is the number of nodes.



A gauge transformation $g \in K^0_\Sigma$ acts on $h \in K^1_\Sigma$ via $(g \triangleright h)_l := g_{l+} h_l g_{l-}^{-1}$. The **configuration space** is the quotient $K_\Sigma := K^1_\Sigma / K^0_\Sigma$.

State space

Supposing that G is compact for simplicity, there is a unique normalized biinvariant measure on G, the **Haar measure** μ. This allows to define a Hilbert space $\mathrm{L}^2(G)$ of complex functions on G with the inner product,

$$\langle\psi,\eta\rangle = \int_G \overline{\psi(g)}\eta(g)\,\mathrm{d}\mu(g).$$

By putting the same inner product on each copy of G, we obtain a Hilbert space $\mathcal{H}^1_\Sigma := \mathrm{L}^2(K^1_\Sigma)$. The action of the gauge group K^0_Σ on K^1_Σ induces an action on $\mathcal{H}^1_\Sigma$. The subspace $\mathcal{H}_\Sigma \subseteq \mathcal{H}^1_\Sigma$ of invariant functions on K^1_Σ can be identified with a space of functions on the configuration space K_Σ. This Hilbert space is our **state space**.

Propagator

Recall that in Schrödinger-Feynman quantization amplitudes are determined by propagators.

$$\rho_M(\psi) = \int_{K^1_\Sigma} \psi(h)\, Z_M(h^{-1})\, \mathrm{d}\mu(h)$$

Here, it is simpler to think of the **propagator** as a function $Z_M : K^1_{\partial M} \to \mathbb{C}$ rather than a function $K_{\partial M} \to \mathbb{C}$.

For BF theory the propagator turns out to be,

$$\tilde{Z}^{\mathrm{BF}}_M(h) = \prod_{l \in \partial M} \delta(h_l).$$

In gauge invariant form this is,

$$Z^{\mathrm{BF}}_M(h) = \int_{K^0_{\partial M}} \prod_{l \in \partial M} \delta(g_{l-} h_l g_{l+}^{-1})\, \mathrm{d}\mu(g).$$

Other models

If we want to get closer to gravity and implement **constraints** it is useful to discretize also the interior of M via a **cellular decomposition**. We may then think of each cell in the interior as an "elementary" spacetime region, all glued together according to the **gluing axioms** of the GBF. That is, to specify a model we only need to specify the **cell propagator** for one single cell.

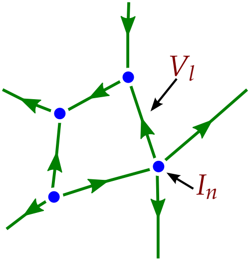
A famous model for implementing the constraints is the **Barrett-Crane model**. In this model $G = \mathrm{SU}(2) \times \mathrm{SU}(2)$ and we write $g = (g^{\mathrm{L}}, g^{\mathrm{R}})$. The cell propagator for (a version of) this model is,

$$Z_C^{\mathrm{BC}}(h) = \int_{K^0_{\partial C}} \prod_{l \in \partial C} \left(\int_{\mathrm{SU}(2)\times\mathrm{SU}(2)} \delta(g^{\mathrm{L}}_{l-} k h^{\mathrm{L}}_l k' (g^{\mathrm{L}}_{l+})^{-1}) \delta(g^{\mathrm{R}}_{l-} k h^{\mathrm{R}}_l k' (g^{\mathrm{R}}_{l+})^{-1}) \, \mathrm{d}\mu(k) \mathrm{d}\mu(k') \right) \mathrm{d}\mu(g).$$

The dual picture: spin networks

The Hilbert space $\mathcal{H}_\Sigma$ on the cellular hypersurface Σ can be constructed explicitly in terms of **spin networks**.

- Associate to each **link** l a finite-dimensional irreducible representation V_l of G.
- Associate to each **node** n an intertwiner $I_n \in \mathrm{Inv}\left(\bigotimes_{l\in\partial n} V_l^\pm\right)$ between the representations of the adjacent nodes.



Spin networks yield a complete description of $\mathcal{H}_\Sigma$:

$$\mathcal{H}_\Sigma = \bigoplus_{V_l} \bigotimes_{n\in\Sigma} \mathrm{Inv}\left(\bigotimes_{l\in\partial n} V_l^\pm\right).$$

Regions: spin foams

In order to obtain the amplitude for a region M composed of many elementary regions (cells) we need only know the amplitude ρ_C for an elementary cell C, also called **vertex amplitude**. We then sum over a complete ON-basis for each hypersurface where cells are glued together. (Recall GBF gluing rule.)

Taking basis consisting of spin networks, each summand will by labeled by an assignment of a spin network to each of these interior hypersurfaces. We can think of those spin networks as extended through all the interior of M. Links then become surfaces and nodes become lines where the surfaces meet. Surfaces are labeled by irreducible representations and lines by intertwiners. This picture is what is usually called a **spin foam**.

Spin foam summary

- Spacetime **hypersurfaces** are 3-dimensional cell complexes
- Spacetime **regions** are 4-dimensional cell complexes
- **Gauge fields** on hypersurfaces are encoded in terms of **holonomies** between cells
- The **state spaces** on hypersurfaces can be described in terms of **spin networks** (with ends!)
- A simple spin foam model is completely determined by its **cell (vertex) amplitudes**
- Spin foam **partition functions**, **amplitudes** etc. then follow from the **gluing rules**

A top-down approach to quantum gravity

List properties expected of a quantum theory of gravity and **construct**/**classify** models with these properties.

- In GR the metric is dynamical, but **differentiable** or **topological** structure may be fixed. Need ball-shaped regions for local physics.

A top-down approach to quantum gravity

List properties expected of a quantum theory of gravity and **construct/classify** models with these properties.

- In GR the metric is dynamical, but **differentiable** or **topological** structure may be fixed. Need ball-shaped regions for local physics.

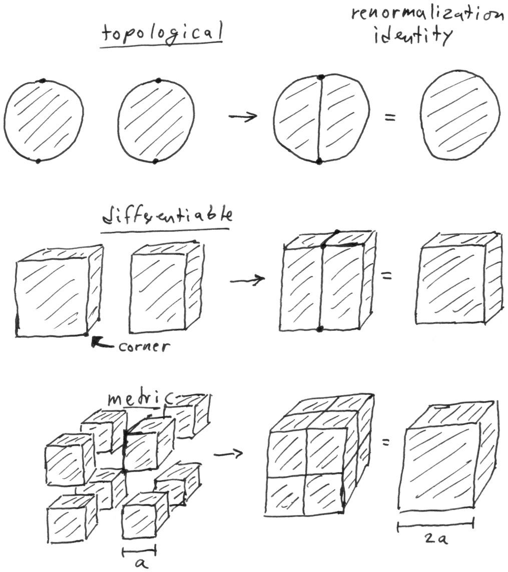
→ Consider a class of oriented compact **topological/differentiable** 4**-manifolds** with boundary as **regions**. Must include 4-balls and be closed under gluing.

→ Admissible **hypersurfaces** are boundaries of regions and their connected components. (These hypersurfaces carry in addition the structure of an "infinitesimal 4-manifold neighborhood".)

→ To each hypersurface Σ associate a **Hilbert space** $\mathcal{H}_\Sigma$, to each region M an **amplitude map** $\rho_M : \mathcal{H}_{\partial M} \to \mathbb{C}$.

→ These structures have to satisfy the **axioms**. Gluings have to be compatible with the extra structure of the 3-manifolds.

Renormalization identities



topological

Relates regions of the same type. There is only one elementary region.

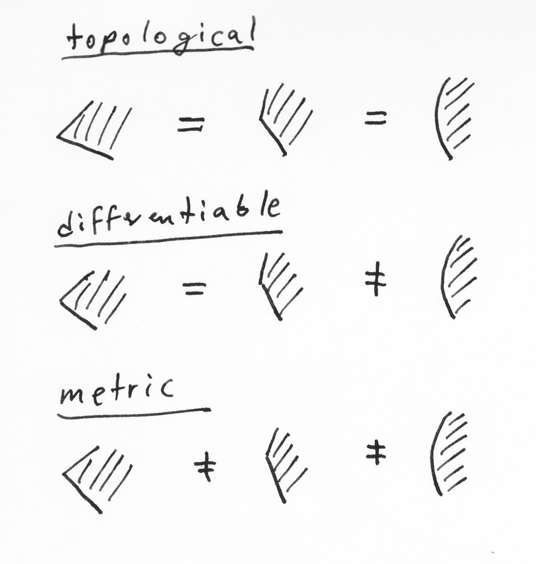
differentiable

Relates regions of the same type. Regions have **corners**.

metric

Relates regions of different sizes. Link to coupling constant renormalization.

Corners



topological

Corners are homeomorphic to smooth hypersurfaces.

differentiable

Corners of different angles are diffeomorphic, but distinct from smooth hypersurfaces.

metric

Corners of different angles are all distinct.

Symmetry

assume differentiable setting

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- On each **hypersurface** Σ acts its group of orientation preserving diffeomorphisms G_Σ. This induces $i_M : G_M \to G_{\partial M}$.
- Let $G_M^{\text{int}} \subseteq G_M$ be the subgroup that acts identically on the boundary. We have the exact sequence

$$G_M^{\text{int}} \to G_M \to G_{\partial M}$$

- For each hypersurface Σ, G_Σ must act on $\mathcal{H}_\Sigma$ by unitary transformations, i.e., $\mathcal{H}_\Sigma$ is a **unitary representation** of G_Σ.
- For each region M, ρ_M must be **invariant** under $i_M(G_M)$. That is, $\rho_M(g \triangleright \psi) = \rho_M(\psi)$ for any $\psi \in \mathcal{H}_{\partial M}$ and $g \in i_M(G_M) \subseteq G_{\partial M}$.

Representation theory of diffeomorphism groups is crucial ingredient.

Refinement: Projectivity

It is well known that representations of symmetry groups on the Hilbert space in quantum mechanics only have to be **projective representations**. This is related to the fact that what has to be preserved under symmetries are only measurable quantities like probabilities and expectation values. The same is true in the general boundary formulation. In light of this the previously mentioned implementation of symmetries may be relaxed accordingly.

Measurement in quantum gravity

- So far: measurements only on the boundary.
- As in QFT: scattering matrix is the main object of interest.
- But: is this justified in quantum gravity?

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- QFT scattering theory relies on perturbation theory. This does not work in quantum gravity.
- In QFT we also understand how to encode general measurements, but this requires recurring to a non-relativistic picture.

The **positive formalism** allows to implement **local measurements** into quantum theory, even in the absence of a spacetime metric.

Quantum gravity in the positive formalism

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The **top-down approach** can be directly applied at the level of the positive formalism. The **representation theory** of diffeomorphisms again would play a key role. **Projectivity** of representations would be automatic. The structure would be enriched by **quantum operations** representing local measurements in spacetime.

Open questions (MexiLazos 2015)

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Almost everything!

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- the top-down approach is new and almost totally unexplored
- the positive formalism is little explored
- even the amplitude formalism of the GBF for QFT is far from finished
- there is hardly any literature on local quantum operations even in QFT

…so there is a lot to do!