

Substances Trapped in Nanobubbles

Skoltech scientists modeled the behavior of nanobubbles appearing in van der Waals heterostructures and the behavior of substances trapped inside the bubbles. [41]

Researchers at University College Dublin (UCD) have discovered a new energy-efficient method to generate and release substantial volumes of metastable, nano-scale gas bubbles in water, in excess of natural solubility levels. [40]

The research is carried out in the Quantum Photonics Group at the Niels Bohr Institute, which is a part of the newly established Center for Hybrid Quantum Networks (Hy-Q) [39]

With international collaboration, researchers at Aalto University have now developed a nanosized amplifier to help light signals propagate through microchips. [38]

Physicists at the Kastler Brossel Laboratory in Paris have reached a milestone in the combination of cold atoms and nanophotonics. [37]

The universal laws governing the dynamics of interacting quantum particles are yet to be fully revealed to the scientific community. [36]

Now NIST scientists have designed a vacuum gauge that is small enough to deploy in commonly used vacuum chambers. [35]

A novel technique that nudges single atoms to switch places within an atomically thin material could bring scientists another step closer to realizing theoretical physicist Richard Feynman's vision of building tiny machines from the atom up. [34]

One of the most enduring "Holy Grail" experiments in science has been attempts to directly observe atomic motions during structural changes. [33]

Faster and more compact memory storage devices will become a reality when physicists gain precise control of the spins of electrons. [32]

UCLA biologists report they have transferred a memory from one marine snail to another, creating an artificial memory, by injecting RNA from one to another. [31]

Scientists at the Wellcome Trust/ Cancer Research UK Gurdon Institute, University of Cambridge, have identified a new type of stem cell in the brain which they say has a high potential for repair following brain injury or disease. [30]

A team of researchers working at the Weizmann Institute of Science has found that organoids can be used to better understand how the human brain wrinkles as it develops. [29]

A team of biologists has found an unexpected source for the brain's development, a finding that offers new insights into the building of the nervous system. [28]

Researchers discover both the structure of specific brain areas and memory are linked to genetic activity that also play important roles in immune system function. [27]

The inner workings of the human brain have always been a subject of great interest. Unfortunately, it is fairly difficult to view brain structures or intricate tissues due to the fact that the skull is not transparent by design. [26]

But now there is a technology that enables us to "read the mind" with growing accuracy: functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). [25]

Advances in microscopy techniques have often triggered important discoveries in the field of neuroscience, enabling vital insights in understanding the brain and promising new treatments for neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. [24]

What is the relationship of consciousness to the neurological activity of the brain? Does the brain behave differently when a person is fully conscious, when they are asleep, or when they are undergoing an epileptic seizure? [23]

Consciousness appears to arise naturally as a result of a brain maximizing its information content. So says a group of scientists in Canada and France, which has studied how the electrical activity in people's brains varies according to individuals' conscious states. The researchers find that normal waking states are associated with maximum values of what they call a brain's "entropy". [22]

New research published in the New Journal of Physics tries to decompose the structural layers of the cortical network to different hierarchies enabling to identify the network's nucleus, from which our consciousness could emerge. [21]

Where in your brain do you exist? Is your awareness of the world around you and of yourself as an individual the result of specific, focused changes in your brain, or does that awareness come from a broad network of neural activity? How does your brain produce awareness? [20]

In the future, level-tuned neurons may help enable neuromorphic computing systems to perform tasks that traditional computers cannot, such as learning from their environment, pattern recognition, and knowledge extraction from big data sources. [19]

IBM scientists have created randomly spiking neurons using phase-change materials to store and process data. This demonstration marks a significant step forward in the

development of energy-efficient, ultra-dense integrated neuromorphic technologies for applications in cognitive computing. [18]

An ion trap with four segmented blade electrodes used to trap a linear chain of atomic ions for quantum information processing. Each ion is addressed optically for individual control and readout using the high optical access of the trap. [17]

To date, researchers have realised qubits in the form of individual electrons (aktuell.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/pm2012/pm00090.html.en). However, this led to interferences and rendered the information carriers difficult to programme and read. The group has solved this problem by utilising electron holes as qubits, rather than electrons. [16]

Physicists from MIPT and the Russian Quantum Center have developed an easier method to create a universal quantum computer using multilevel quantum systems (qudits), each one of which is able to work with multiple "conventional" quantum elements – qubits. [15]

Precise atom implants in silicon provide a first step toward practical quantum computers. [14]

A method to produce significant amounts of semiconducting nanoparticles for light-emitting displays, sensors, solar panels and biomedical applications has gained momentum with a demonstration by researchers at the Department of Energy's Oak Ridge National Laboratory. [13]

A source of single photons that meets three important criteria for use in quantum-information systems has been unveiled in China by an international team of physicists. Based on a quantum dot, the device is an efficient source of photons that emerge as solo particles that are indistinguishable from each other. The researchers are now trying to use the source to create a quantum computer based on "boson sampling". [11]

With the help of a semiconductor quantum dot, physicists at the University of Basel have developed a new type of light source that emits single photons. For the first time, the researchers have managed to create a stream of identical photons. [10]

Optical photons would be ideal carriers to transfer quantum information over large distances. Researchers envisage a network where information is processed in certain nodes and transferred between them via photons. [9]

While physicists are continually looking for ways to unify the theory of relativity, which describes large-scale phenomena, with quantum theory, which describes small-scale phenomena, computer scientists are searching for technologies to build the quantum computer using Quantum Information.

In August 2013, the achievement of "fully deterministic" quantum teleportation, using a hybrid technique, was reported. On 29 May 2014, scientists announced a reliable way of

transferring data by quantum teleportation. Quantum teleportation of data had been done before but with highly unreliable methods.

The accelerating electrons explain not only the Maxwell Equations and the Special Relativity, but the Heisenberg Uncertainty Relation, the Wave-Particle Duality and the electron's spin also, building the Bridge between the Classical and Quantum Theories.

The Planck Distribution Law of the electromagnetic oscillators explains the electron/proton mass rate and the Weak and Strong Interactions by the diffraction patterns. The Weak Interaction changes the diffraction patterns by moving the electric charge from one side to the other side of the diffraction pattern, which violates the CP and Time reversal symmetry.

The diffraction patterns and the locality of the self-maintaining electromagnetic potential explains also the Quantum Entanglement, giving it as a natural part of the Relativistic Quantum Theory and making possible to build the Quantum Computer with the help of Quantum Information.

Contents

Preface	7
Substances trapped in nanobubbles exhibit unusual properties	7
Researchers discover new method to generate nanobubbles in water	8
Nanocomponent is a quantum leap for Danish physicists.....	10
Achieving 'quantum supremacy' is realistic	11
Breakthrough in photonics—data-transmitting light signal gets power boost from nanosized amplifier.....	12
Help from atomic layer deposition	12
When cold atoms meet nano: A wired quantum node.....	13
Breaching the horizons: Universal spreading laws confirmed.....	14
A new way to measure nearly nothing: Ultracold trapped atoms to measure pressure.....	16
Scientists forge ahead with electron microscopy to build quantum materials atom by atom	18
Ultrafast optical fiber-based electron gun to reveal atomic motions.....	19
Precise electron spin control yields faster memory storage	20
Biologists 'transfer' a memory	21
'Sleeping' stem cells could aid brain repair.....	24
Using organoids to understand how the brain wrinkles	26
Biologists find new source for brain's development.....	26

Link Between Immune System, Memory and Brain Structure Discovered.....	27
Search for regulatory patterns	27
Gene variant intensifies traumatic memories	28
Innovative research methods.....	28
Researcher looking to shed light deeper into the human brain	28
Brain scanners allow scientists to 'read minds'—could they now enable a 'Big Brother' future?	29
Enormous potential.....	30
'Latest spoke in the wheel' drives brain-mapping advances.....	31
Consciousness and Entropy	32
Consciousness is tied to 'entropy', say researchers.....	33
Many ways of connecting	33
Varying results	33
Emergent property	34
A new study looks for the cortical conscious network	34
Network theory sheds new light on origins of consciousness	36
Neuromorphic computing mimics important brain feature	38
IBM scientists imitate the functionality of neurons with a phasechange device	39
Programmable ions set the stage for general-purpose quantum computers	40
Putting the pieces together	41
Realizing quantum bits.....	42
Electrons as qubits.....	43
Advantages of electron holes	43
Russian physicists discover a new approach for building quantum computers	43
Precise atom implants in silicon provide a first step toward practical quantum computers	45
Team demonstrates large-scale technique to produce quantum dots	46
Superfast light source made from artificial atom.....	47
Quantum speed up	48
Increasing the light-matter interaction	48
Single-photon source is efficient and indistinguishable	48
Exciting dots.....	49
Quantum sandwich	49
Semiconductor quantum dots as ideal single-photon source.....	50
Noise in the semiconductor	50
How to Win at Bridge Using Quantum Physics.....	50

Quantum Information.....	51
Heralded Qubit Transfer.....	51
Quantum Teleportation	52
Quantum Computing	52
Quantum Entanglement	53
The Bridge	53
Accelerating charges	53
Relativistic effect	53
Heisenberg Uncertainty Relation	54
Wave – Particle Duality	54
Atomic model.....	54
The Relativistic Bridge	54
The weak interaction	55
The General Weak Interaction.....	56
Fermions and Bosons	56
Van Der Waals force	56
Electromagnetic inertia and mass.....	57
Electromagnetic Induction	57
Relativistic change of mass	57
The frequency dependence of mass	57
Electron – Proton mass rate	57
Gravity from the point of view of quantum physics	57
The Gravitational force.....	57
The Higgs boson	58
Higgs mechanism and Quantum Gravity	59
What is the Spin?.....	59
The Graviton	59
Conclusions.....	60
References	60

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Preface

Where in your brain do you exist? Is your awareness of the world around you and of yourself as an individual the result of specific, focused changes in your brain, or does that awareness come from a broad network of neural activity? How does your brain produce awareness? [20]

While physicists are continually looking for ways to unify the theory of relativity, which describes large-scale phenomena, with quantum theory, which describes small-scale phenomena, computer scientists are searching for technologies to build the quantum computer.

Australian engineers detect in real-time the quantum spin properties of a pair of atoms inside a silicon chip, and disclose new method to perform quantum logic operations between two atoms. [5] Quantum entanglement is a physical phenomenon that occurs when pairs or groups of particles are generated or interact in ways such that the quantum state of each particle cannot be described independently – instead, a quantum state may be given for the system as a whole. [4]

I think that we have a simple bridge between the classical and quantum mechanics by understanding the Heisenberg Uncertainty Relations. It makes clear that the particles are not point like but have a dx and dp uncertainty.

Substances trapped in nanobubbles exhibit unusual properties

Skoltech scientists modeled the behavior of nanobubbles appearing in van der Waals heterostructures and the behavior of substances trapped inside the bubbles. In the future, the new model will help obtain equations of state for substances in nano-volumes, opening up new opportunities for the extraction of hydrocarbons from rock with large amounts of micro- and nanopores. The results of the study were published in the *Journal of Chemical Physics*.

The van der Waals nanostructures hold much promise for the study of tiniest samples with volumes from 1 cubic micron down to several cubic nanometers. These atomically thin layers of two-dimensional materials, such as graphene, [hexagonal boron nitride](#) (hBN) and dichalcogenides of transition metals, are held together by weak van der Waals interaction only. Inserting a sample between the layers separates the upper and bottom layers, making the upper layer lift to form a nanobubble. The resulting [structure](#) will then become available for transmission electron and [atomic force microscopy](#), providing an insight into the structure of the substance inside the bubble.

The properties exhibited by [substances](#) inside the van der Waals nanobubbles are quite unusual. For example, water trapped inside a nanobubble displays a tenfold decrease in its dielectric constant and etches the diamond surface, something it would never do under normal conditions. Argon which typically exists in [liquid form](#) when in large quantities can become solid at the same pressure if trapped inside very small nanobubbles with a radius of less than 50 nanometers.

Scientists led by professor Iskander Akhatov of the Skoltech Center for Design, Manufacturing and Materials (CDMM) built a universal numerical model of a nanobubble that helps predict the bubble's shape under certain thermodynamic conditions and describe the molecular structure of the substance trapped inside.

"In a practical sense, the bubbles in the van der Waals structures are most often regarded as flaws that experimenters are eager to get rid of. However, from the standpoint of straintronics, the bubbles create strain, and its effect on the [electronic structure](#) can be used to create practical devices, such as transistors, logic elements and ROM," Petr Zhilyaev, a senior research scientist at Skoltech, said.

"In our recent study, we created a model which describes a specific shape that flat nanobubbles assume in the subnanometer dimension range only. We discovered that the vertical size of these nanostructures can only take discrete values divisible by the size of the molecules trapped. In addition, the model enables changing the size of nanobubbles by controlling the temperature of the system and the physicochemical parameters of the materials," said senior research scientist Timur Aslyamov. [41]

Researchers discover new method to generate nanobubbles in water

Researchers at University College Dublin (UCD) have discovered a new energy-efficient method to generate and release substantial volumes of metastable, nano-scale gas bubbles in water, in excess of natural solubility levels. The discovery has the potential to disrupt a number of industries including; wastewater treatment, gas storage, food, bio-pharma and brewing.

The nanobubble-generation discovery has been announced in a [scientific paper](#) entitled Massive Generation of Metastable Bulk Nanobubbles in Water by External Electric Fields just published in *Science Advances*, a peer-reviewed multidisciplinary open-access scientific journal.

Micron-sized bubbles are tiny gas bubbles with a diameter of less than 50 micron (μm), a micron (μm) is a millionth of a meter, and they have a number of industrial applications, including in wastewater treatment. However micron-sized bubbles decrease in size and eventually disappear underwater due to the rapid dissolution of their interior gas, which limits their industrial potential.

Nanobubbles are also tiny gas bubbles but on the nanometer (nm) scale. A nanometer is one billionth of a meter, and for example a DNA molecule is ca. 2.5 nm wide and a human hair is ca. 60,000—100,000 nm wide. Nanobubbles are thermodynamically metastable for many months or even longer, in contrast to micron-sized bubbles, and have therefore enhanced gas-transfer properties and greater industrial potential.

The challenge for scientists to date has been the development of easily controlled methods to promote nanobubble formation and nanobubble release.

The discovery of a new, energy-efficient and easily controlled method to generate and release large volumes of nanobubbles has been made by Professor Niall English and Dr. Mohammad Reza Ghaani at UCD's School of Chemical and Bioprocess Engineering.

Outlining the discovery, Professor Niall English, UCD School of Chemical and Bioprocess Engineering said, "Our new fundamental discovery involves the application of electric fields, which cause transient negative-pressure regions at gas-liquid interfaces, thereby resulting in gas incorporation in liquids in nanoscale-bubble form. It is very energy-efficient, additive-free, and works for a wide range of gases and the greatly enhanced gas solubility in water is highly metastable, lasting at least for many months."

He added, "Following the completion of a research program in collaboration with Professor Peter Kusalik at the University of Calgary, we have established a good theoretical understanding of nanobubble mobility in electric fields which contributes to our microscopic knowledge of nanobubble stability."

This development in nanobubble science has the potential to dramatically increase gas-transfer rates and deliver a step-change in operational efficiencies of a number of industrial sectors, including; [gas storage](#), wastewater treatment, bio-pharma, brewing, agriculture and food.

Dr. Mohammad Reza Ghaani, UCD School of Chemical and Bioprocess Engineering, said, "Our new method of nanobubble generation has multiple commercial applications and has the potential to boost the ability to store gas directly in aqueous solutions over months. In addition it has the potential to boost by several-fold dissolved-gas levels, resulting in greater capacities to treat wastewater and also enhance mass transfer in oxygen-limited biochemical and biopharma reactions, such as fermentation processes in the food and brewing industries."

He added, "Working with UCD's knowledge transfer team at NovaUCD we have filed patent applications and we are also looking to commercialize the technology through a UCD spin-out company."

Paper co-author, Professor Peter Kusalik, Department of Chemistry, University of Calgary, said, "Our work also reveals the molecular origins for the apparent stability of nanobubbles, which might otherwise be expected not to be stable due to their very small size. The origins of the behavior can be traced to the unique structure of the water molecules at boundary between the liquid water and the gas."

"The explanation also accounts for why these otherwise uncharged bubbles can be seen to move when an electric field is applied. Thus, this study is able to provide a clear and consistent explanation to a previously puzzling problem."

Professor English concluded, "We would like to thank Irish company Particular Sciences for access to dynamic-light scattering (DLS) equipment used during this research."

The (open-access) article is titled "Massive Generation of Metastable Bulk Nanobubbles in Water by External Electric Fields." [40]

Nanocomponent is a quantum leap for Danish physicists

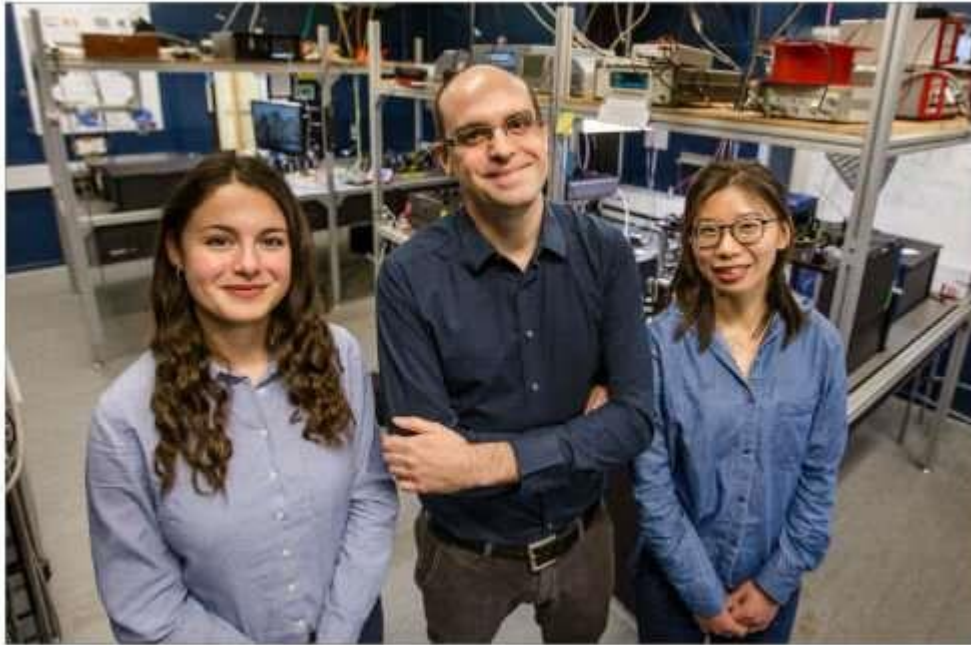
University of Copenhagen researchers have developed a nanocomponent that emits light particles carrying quantum information. Less than one-tenth the width of a human hair, the miniscule component makes it possible to scale up and could ultimately reach the capabilities required for a quantum computer or quantum internet. The research result puts Denmark at the head of the pack in the quantum race.

Teams around the world are working to develop quantum technologies. The focus of researchers based at the Center for Hybrid Quantum Networks (Hy-Q) at the University of Copenhagen's Niels Bohr Institute is on developing quantum communication technology based on light circuits, known as nanophotonic circuits. The UCPH researchers have now achieved a major advancement.

"It is a truly major result, despite the component being so tiny," says Assistant Professor Leonardo Midolo, who has been working towards this breakthrough for the past five years.

The research team has invented a component, called a nanomechanical router, that emits [quantum information](#) carried by light particles (photons) and routes them into different directions inside a photonic chip. Photonic chips are like computer microchips—only, they use light instead of electrons. The component merges nano-opto-mechanics and [quantum photonics](#)—two areas of research that, until now, have never been combined. Most spectacular of all is the size of the component, just a tenth that of a [human hair](#). It is this microscopic size that makes it so promising for future applications.

"Bringing the worlds of nanomechanics and quantum photonics together is a way to scale up quantum technology. In [quantum physics](#), it has been a challenge to scale systems. Until now, we have been able to send off individual photons. However, to do more advanced things with quantum physics, we will need to scale systems up, which is what this invention allows for. To build a quantum computer or quantum internet, you don't just need one [photon](#) at a time, you need lots of photons simultaneously that you can connect to each other," explains Leonardo Midolo.



Research

team from the left Camille Papon, Leonardo Midolo and Xiaoyan Zhou. Credit: Ola Jakub

Achieving 'quantum supremacy' is realistic

To exploit quantum mechanical laws, e.g. to build a quantum computer or a [quantum internet](#), many nanomechanical routers must be integrated in the same chip. About 50 photons are required to have enough power for achieving what is known as "quantum supremacy." According to Midolo, the new nanomechanical router makes doing so a realistic goal.

"We have calculated that our nanomechanical [router](#) can already be scaled up to ten photons, and with further enhancements, it should be able to achieve the 50 photons needed to reach '[quantum](#) supremacy.'"

The invention is also a major leap forward in controlling light in a chip. Existing technology allows for only a few routers to be integrated on a single chip due to the large device footprint. Nanomechanical routers, on the contrary, are so small that several thousand can be integrated in the same chip.

"Our component is extremely efficient. It is all about being able to emit many photons at once, without losing any of them. No other current technique allows for this," says Leonardo Midolo.

The research is carried out in the Quantum Photonics Group at the Niels Bohr Institute, which is a part of the newly established Center for Hybrid Quantum Networks (Hy-Q) [39]

Breakthrough in photonics—data-transmitting light signal gets power boost from nanosized amplifier

Light is more energy-efficient and a faster way of transferring data than electricity. Until now, the rapid attenuation of light signals in microchips has prevented the use of light as a source of an information signal.

With international collaboration, researchers at Aalto University have now developed a nanosized amplifier to help light signals propagate through microchips. In their study published in *Nature Communications*, the researchers show that signal attenuation can be significantly reduced when data is transferred inside a microchip, for example, from one processor to another.

"Photonics, or light transfer that is already widely used in [internet connections](#), is increasingly being used by microcircuit systems because light is a more energy efficient and faster way of transferring data than electricity. The increase in information also requires an increase in performance. Boosting performance through electronic methods is getting to be very difficult, which is why we're looking towards photonics for answers," says doctoral candidate John Rönn.

Help from atomic layer deposition

The researchers made their breakthrough with the help of a Finnish invention: the [atomic layer deposition method](#). According to the team, the method is ideal for processing various kinds of microcircuits, as it plays an important role in manufacturing today's microprocessors.

So far, the atomic layer deposition method has been used mainly in electronic applications. However, the newly released study indicates that possible applications also exist in photonics. In the development of photonics, new components must also ideally work with electricity—that is, in electronics.

"Silicon is a key material in electronics, and that's why it's also included in our light amplifiers together with the amplification element erbium," Rönn says.

"Today's compound semiconductors, which are used, for instance, in LED technology, can also be used effectively in light amplification. That being said, most compound semiconductors are not compatible with silicon, which is a problem for mass production."

The study showed that a light signal can be potentially boosted in all kinds of structures and that the structure of a microchip is not limited to a specific type. The results indicate that atomic layer deposition is a promising method for developing [microchip photonic](#) processes.

"Our international collaboration made a breakthrough with one component: a nanosized amplifier. The amplification that we got was very significant. But we'll still need more components before [light](#) can completely replace electricity in data transfer systems. The first [possible applications](#) are in nanolasers, and in sending and amplifying data," says Professor Zhipei Sun. [38]

When cold atoms meet nano: A wired quantum node

Physicists at the Kastler Brossel Laboratory in Paris have reached a milestone in the combination of cold atoms and nanophotonics. Using fiber-addressable atoms, they have created the first wired atomic entangled state that can be stored and later read out as a guided single photon.

The integration of cold atoms with nanoscopic waveguides has raised a lot of interest in recent years, giving birth to a booming research field known as waveguide quantum electrodynamics. Such integrated platforms hold the promises of better scalability and figures of merit than free-space implementations, which will eventually lead to on-chip technologies for a future quantum internet. This combination could be a new frontier for atom-photon physics. So far, the experimental progress has been limited due to the very challenging combination of these two worlds.

In the journal *Nature*, Professor Julien Laurat and his colleagues at Sorbonne University report that they have used an atomic register composed of a chain of individual cesium atoms tightly trapped along a nanoscale waveguide. In this configuration, they were able to generate and store a single atomic excitation, as in a quantum memory, and subsequently read it out in the form of a guided single photon.

In the experiment, the nanowaveguide is fabricated from a commercial fiber of which the diameter has been locally reduced to 400 nanometers. Given the fiber's diameter, a large fraction of the light travels outside the nanofiber in an evanescent field, which is heavily focused along 1 centimeter. This field allows 2000 cold atoms to be trapped around 200 nm from the nanofiber surface. "This is a very powerful technique to trap cold atoms and to interact with them via a fiber," says Jérémy Raskop, a graduate student involved in this experiment. "This trapping technique was developed a few years ago, but pushing the system to make a quantum device was a strong challenge."



Picture of an optical nanofiber (in red) inside a vacuum chamber. Arrays of individual cold atoms can be trapped around the fiber -about 200 nanometers from the surface- and addressed via the guided light. These “fibered atoms” offer an [...more](#)

Initially, all the trapped atoms in the register are prepared on one energy level. Then, a weak write pulse that illuminates the fiber induces scattering. The detection of a single photon inside the fiber heralds the creation of a single collective excitation shared among the whole atomic chain. To retrieve the stored information, an external read pulse is sent to the atomic ensemble. The atom-waveguide coupling then allows the efficient transfer of the single excitation into a fibered [single photon](#). The performance is already above the known operational benchmarks for the realization of quantum network primitives.

"This work is an important milestone for the emerging waveguide-QED field as this capability brings it into the quantum regime," says Neil Corzo, a Marie Curie postdoctoral fellow and the lead author of the study. "Our device can find applications for quantum networks as our experiment now offers a wired quantum node. Also, our demonstration opens an avenue for new studies towards quantum nonlinear optics and quantum many-body physics in this one-dimensional system."

This demonstration follows other works that [Laurat's group](#) has done in recent years, including the first demonstration of [stopped light in an optical fiber](#) or the realization of [record-breaking efficient quantum memory](#) for secure storage. [37]

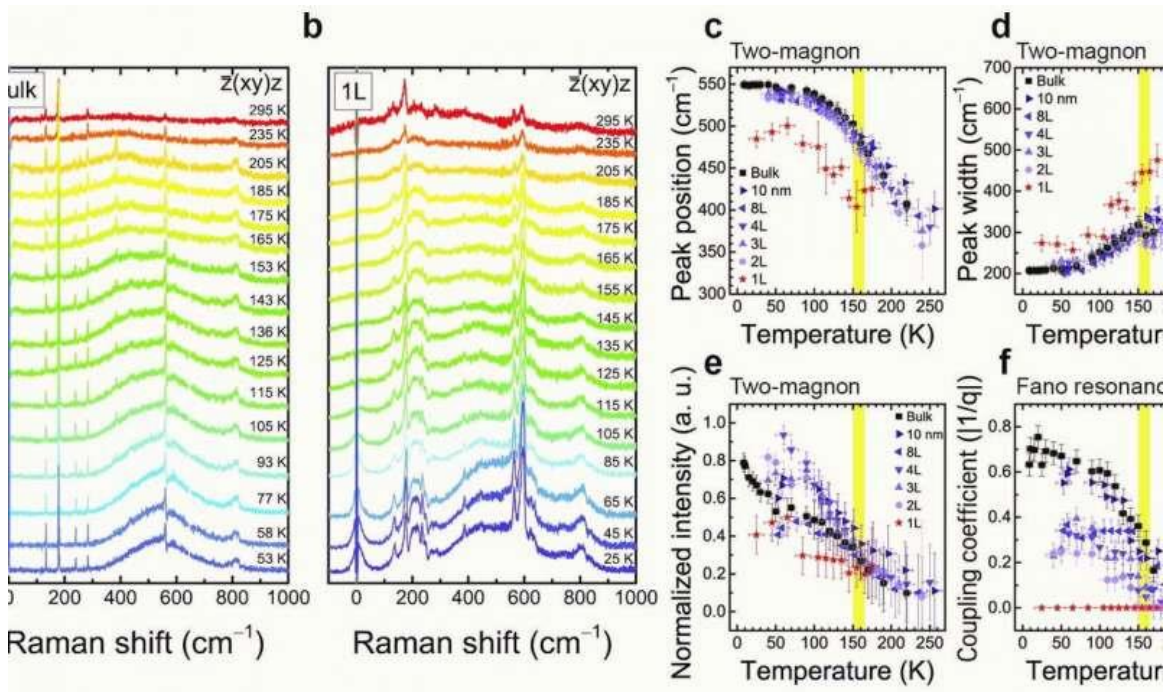
Breaching the horizons: Universal spreading laws confirmed

The universal laws governing the dynamics of interacting quantum particles are yet to be fully revealed to the scientific community. A team of researchers at the Center for Theoretical Physics of Complex Systems (PCS), within the Institute for Basic Science (IBS in Daejeon, South Korea) have proposed to use an innovative toolbox that enables them to obtain simulation data of equivalent to 60 years' experimental time. By extending the computational horizons from one day to unprecedented time scales, the IBS researchers were able to confirm that a cloud of quantum particles continues to spread even when particle to particle interactions, originally deemed to be the activator of the spreading, exert almost no strength. Their findings were published online on 30 January 2019 at *Physical Review Letters*.

The work deals with two of the most fundamental phenomena of condensed matter: interaction and disorder. Think about ultra-cold atomic gases. One atom from the gas is a quantum particle, and thus a quantum wave as well, which has both amplitude and phase. When such quantum particles, i.e. waves fail to propagate in a disordered medium, they get trapped and come to a complete halt. This destructive interference of propagating waves is Anderson localization.

Microscopic [particles](#), described by quantum mechanics, interact when approaching each other. The presence of interaction, at least initially, destroys localization in a cloud of [quantum particles](#), and allows the cloud to escape and smear out, though very slowly and subdiffusively. When atoms interact (collide) they exchange not only energy and momentum, but change their phases as well. The interaction destroys regular wave patterns, leading to the loss of the phase information. As time goes on the cloud spreads and thins out.

Hot debates over the past decade were devoted to the question of whether the process will stop because the effective strength of interaction becomes too low, or not. Experiments with Bose-Einstein condensates of ultracold Potassium atoms have been conducted for up to 10 seconds as researchers try hard to keep the atomic gas stable. Numerical computations were performed for an equivalent of one day. Remarkably theoretical computational physics was already in a unique situation to be way superior to experiments!



Wave packet density profiles of a zero (orange, respecting Anderson localization) and non-zero (blue, disrespecting Anderson localization) nonlinearity. The simulation times reach $2 \cdot 10^{12}$. Credit: IBS

The team of IBS researchers, led by Sergej Flach, decided to give the cloud dynamics a novel hard numerical test and to extend the computational horizons from one day to 60 years in experimental time equivalent. The main challenge is the slow pace of the process: one has to simulate the dynamics of the cloud for a long time to see any significant changes. The new goal was to extend the previous records drastically, by a factor of at least ten thousand, and to simultaneously develop a new approach to fast simulations of computationally hard physical models.

The research team observed subdiffusive clouds spreading up to the record timescales investigated. The key to the success was the usage of so-called Discrete Time Quantum Walks— theoretical and experimental platforms for quantum computations. Their unique feature is that time doesn't flow continuously, but increments abruptly, becoming one of the main speedup factors. Several additional technical tools were used to realize the new record times: massive supercomputing powers of IBS, program optimization, and the use of clusters of graphical processing units (GPU).

The results of the team pose complicated new questions on the understanding of the interplay of interaction and disorder. IBS-PCS researchers continue to work on different aspects of the problem,

using tools including Discrete Time Quantum Walks. "We are currently employing the same technique to crack several other long-standing problems that require novel computational approaches and powers", says Ihor Vakulchyk—Ph.D. student of the research team. The proposed toolbox opens seemingly limitless possibilities for the novel field of Quantum Modeling and optimization of computer models in physics. [36]

A new way to measure nearly nothing: Ultracold trapped atoms to measure pressure

Many semiconductor fabricators and research labs are under increasing pressure from, of all things, vacuum. These facilities need to remove greater amounts of gas molecules and particles from their setups as new technologies and processes demand lower and lower pressures. For example, the vacuum chambers in which microchip manufacturers lay down a series of ultrathin layers of chemicals step by step—a process that must be utterly free of contaminants—operate at about one hundred-billionth of the air pressure at sea level. Some applications need pressures at least a thousand times lower than that, approaching the even more rarefied environments of the Moon and outer space.

Measuring and controlling vacuum at those levels is an exacting business in which accuracy is essential. Current technology usually relies on a device called an ion gauge. However, ion gauges require periodic recalibration and are not compatible with the new worldwide effort to base the International System of Units (SI) on fundamental, invariant constants and quantum phenomena.

Now NIST scientists have designed a vacuum gauge that is small enough to deploy in commonly used vacuum chambers. It also meets Quantum SI criteria, meaning it requires no calibration, depends on fundamental constants of nature, reports the correct quantity or none at all, and has specified uncertainties that are suitable for its application. The new gauge tracks changes in the number of cold lithium atoms trapped by a laser and magnetic fields within the vacuum. The trapped atoms fluoresce as a result of the laser light.

Every time a cold atom is struck by one of the few molecules moving around in the vacuum chamber, the collision kicks the lithium atom out of the trap, decreasing the amount of fluorescent light emitted. A camera records the dimming. The faster the light dims, the more molecules are in the vacuum chamber, making the fluorescence level a sensitive measure of pressure.

The new portable system is the result of a NIST project to create a tabletop cold-atom vacuum standard (CAVS) that will be used to make measurements of fundamental atomic properties. While CAVS is too large for, and unsuited to, use outside the laboratory, the portable version, or p-CAVS, is designed to be a "drop-in" substitute for existing vacuum gauges.

"Nobody has thought about how to miniaturize such a cold-atom vacuum gauge and what kinds of uncertainties it would entail," said Stephen Eckel, one of the project scientists who in September described their design in the journal *Metrologia*. "We are in the process of developing such a system that could potentially replace sensors now on the market, as well as figuring out how to operate and evaluate it." Individual components are being tested, and a working prototype is expected in the nearfuture.

The NIST design uses a newly developed variation on a staple technology of atomic physics: the magneto-optical trap (MOT). In a typical MOT, there are six laser beams—two opposing beams on each of three axes. Atoms placed in the trap are slowed when they absorb momentum from laser photons of exactly the right amount of energy, damping the atoms' motion. To confine them in the desired location, the MOT contains a varying magnetic field, the strength of which is zero at the center and increases with distance outward. Atoms in higher-field areas are more susceptible to laser photons and are thus pushed inward.

NIST's portable gauge uses only a single laser beam directed onto an optical component known as a diffraction grating, which splits the light into multiple beams coming from various angles. "Putting in laser beams from six different directions makes the experiment really big and needs a lot of optics," said Daniel Barker, another NIST project scientist. "Now you only need one laser beam that comes in and hits a diffraction grating. When the light is diffracted you get the other beams that you need to close the MOT and make the trap."

At that point, the atoms are only a few thousandths of a degree above absolute zero. They are struck by ambient molecules, principally hydrogen—the dominant gas that remains after the vacuum chambers are baked and then pumped down to ultrahigh (UHV) or extreme-high vacuum (XHV). The UHV range includes the vacuum level around the International Space Station; XHV includes the even lower pressure levels above the Moon.

The use of lithium is another scientific innovation in the NIST design. Lithium is the third-lightest element and belongs to the group of alkali metals—including sodium, potassium, rubidium and cesium—which are comparatively easy to cool and trap. "Nobody to our knowledge has been thinking about a single-beam MOT for lithium," Barker said. "Lots of people think about rubidium and cesium, but not too many about lithium. Yet it turns out that lithium is a much better sensor for vacuum."

Among the advantages: The interaction dynamics between lithium atoms and hydrogen molecules can be calculated exactly from first principles. "That allows us to make a primary gauge that you don't need to calibrate," Eckel said. "Moreover, lithium has an extraordinarily low vapor pressure at room temperature (meaning it has a low tendency to change into a gaseous state). So, typically, the atom will make a single pass through the MOT region and if it is not trapped it will hit a wall and stay there forever. With rubidium or cesium, which have relative high vapor pressures at room temperature, eventually you will coat the walls of the vacuum chamber with enough rubidium or cesium metal that the coatings will start emitting atoms.

"In addition, lithium's vapor pressure also remains low at 150 degrees Celsius, where people generally bake UHV and XHV chambers to remove water coatings on the stainless steel components. In that sense, you can still prepare the vacuum chamber through standard techniques, even with this gauge attached."

UHV and XHV environments "are a critical part of the infrastructure in advanced manufacturing and research, from gravitational-wave detectors to quantum information science," said James Fedchak, who oversees the project. "CAVS will be the first absolute sensor created that operates in this pressure regime. At present, engineers and scientists often use the experiment or process itself to determine the vacuum level, which is often a destructive test."

"p-CAVS will enable researchers and manufacturers to accurately determine the vacuum level before the experiment or process begins," said Fedchak. "It will also allow lower levels of vacuum to be accurately measured—levels which are becoming more and more important in areas such as quantum information science." [35]

Scientists forge ahead with electron microscopy to build quantum materials atom by atom

A novel technique that nudges single atoms to switch places within an atomically thin material could bring scientists another step closer to realizing theoretical physicist Richard Feynman's vision of building tiny machines from the atom up.

A significant push to develop materials that harness the quantum nature of atoms is driving the need for methods to build atomically precise electronics and sensors. Fabricating nanoscale devices atom by atom requires delicacy and precision, which has been demonstrated by a microscopy team at the Department of Energy's Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

They used a scanning [transmission electron microscope](#), or STEM, at the lab's Center for Nanophase Materials Sciences to introduce [silicon atoms](#) into a single-atom-thick sheet of [graphene](#). As the [electron beam](#) scans across the material, its energy slightly disrupts the graphene's molecular structure and creates room for a nearby silicon atom to swap places with a carbon atom.

"We observed an electron beam-assisted chemical reaction induced at a single atom and chemical bond level, and each step has been captured by the microscope, which is rare," said ORNL's Ondrej Dyck, co-author of a study published in the journal *Small* that details the STEM demonstration.

Using this process, the scientists were further able to bring two, three and four silicon atoms together to build clusters and make them rotate within the graphene layer. Graphene is a two-dimensional, or 2-D, layer of [carbon atoms](#) that exhibits unprecedented strength and high electrical conductivity. Dyck said he selected graphene for this work, because "it is robust against a 60-kilovolt electron beam."

"We can look at graphene for long periods of time without hurting the sample, compared with other 2-D materials such as transition metal dichalcogenide monolayers, which tend to fall apart more easily under the electron beam," he added.

STEM has emerged in recent years as a viable tool for manipulating atoms in materials while preserving the sample's stability.

Dyck and ORNL colleagues Sergei Kalinin, Albina Borisevich and Stephen Jesse are among few scientists learning to control the movement of single atoms in 2-D materials using the STEM. Their work supports an ORNL-led initiative coined The Atomic Forge, which encourages the microscopy community to reimagine STEM as a method to build [materials](#) from scratch.

The fields of nanoscience and nanotechnology have experienced explosive growth in recent years. One of the earlier steps toward Feynman's idea of building tiny machines atom by atom—a follow-on from his original theory of atomic manipulation first presented during his famous 1959 lecture—

was seeded by the work of IBM fellow Donald Eigler. He had shown the manipulation of atoms using a scanning tunneling microscope.

"For decades, Eigler's method was the only technology to manipulate atoms one by one. Now, we have demonstrated a second approach with an electron beam in the STEM," said Kalinin, director of the ORNL Institute for Functional Imaging of Materials. He and Jesse initiated research with the electron beam about four years ago.

Successfully moving atoms in the STEM could be a crucial step toward fabricating quantum devices one atom at a time. The scientists will next try introducing other [atoms](#) such as phosphorus into the graphene structure.

"Phosphorus has potential because it contains one extra electron compared to carbon," Dyck said. "This would be ideal for building a quantum bit, or qubit, which is the basis for quantum-based devices."

Their goal is to eventually build a device prototype in the STEM.

Dyck cautioned that while building a qubit from phosphorus-doped graphene is on the horizon, how the material would behave at ambient temperatures—outside of the STEM or a cryogenic environment—remains unknown.

"We have found that exposing the silicon-doped graphene to the outside world does impact the structures," he said.

They will continue to experiment with ways to keep the material stable in non-laboratory environments, which is important to the future success of STEM-built atomically precise structures.

"By controlling matter at the atomic scale, we are going to bring the power and mystery of quantum physics to real-world devices," Jesse said. [34]

Ultrafast optical fiber-based electron gun to reveal atomic motions

One of the most enduring "Holy Grail" experiments in science has been attempts to directly observe atomic motions during structural changes. This prospect underpins the entire field of chemistry because a chemical process occurs during a transition state—the point of no return separating the reactant configuration from the product configuration.

What does that transition state look like and, given the enormous number of different possible nuclear configurations, how does a system even find a way to make it happen?

Now in the journal *Applied Physics Letters*, researchers at the Max Planck Institute for the Structure and Dynamics of Matter are reporting "ultrabright" electron sources with sufficient brightness to literally light up atomic motions in real time—at a time scale of 100 femtoseconds, making these sources particularly relevant to chemistry because [atomic motions](#) occur in that window of time.

After seeing the first atomic movies of phase transitions in bulk thin films using high-energy (100 kilovolt) [electron bunches](#), the researchers wondered if they could achieve atomic resolution of

surface reactions—occurring within the first few monolayers of materials—to gain a better understanding of surface catalysis.

So they devised a low-energy (1-2 kilovolt) time-resolved electron diffraction concept of using fiber optics for miniaturization and the ability to stretch the electron pulse, then apply [streak camera](#) technology to potentially obtain subpicosecond temporal resolution—a difficult feat within the low-electron energy regime.

"The first atomic movies use a stroboscopic approach akin to an old 8-millimeter camera, frame by frame, in which a laser excitation pulse triggers the structure, then an electron pulse is used to light up the atomic positions," said co-author Dwayne Miller. "We believed that a streak camera could get a whole movie in one shot within the window defined by the deliberately stretched electron pulse. It solves the problem of low electron numbers and greatly improves image quality."

Of the myriad possible nuclear configurations, the group discovered that the system collapses to just a few key modes that direct chemistry and that a reduction in dimensionality that occurs in the transition state or barrier-crossing region can be inferred. "We see it directly with the first atomic movies of ring closing, electron transfer and bond breaking," said Miller. [33]

Precise electron spin control yields faster memory storage

Data storage devices are not improving as fast as scientists would like. Faster and more compact memory storage devices will become a reality when physicists gain precise control of the spins of electrons. They typically rely on ultra-short lasers to control spins. However, improvement of storage devices via spin control requires first to develop ways of controlling the forces acting on these electronic spins. In a recent study published in *EPJ B*, John Kay Dewhurst and colleagues, have developed a new theory to predict the complex dynamics of spin precession once a material is subjected to ultra-short laser pulses. The advantage of this approach, which takes into account the effect of internal spin rotation forces, is that it is predictive.

In this study, the authors study the effect of firing an ultra-short laser pulse—below 100 femtoseconds— on the internal electron spin [rotation](#) in bulk cobalt, nickel and combinations of these metals with platinum. These metals are typically used in spintronics devices—electronic devices which exploit the extra degree of freedom of electron spins. Unlike previous studies where the magnetic moment was forced to be aligned with the internal fields that generate it, in this study the authors use a fully non-aligned approach to create a theoretical description. As a result, spin rotation's contributions to the spin dynamics are taken into account. This makes the method applicable to a far broader set of magnetic materials than previous methods.

The authors find that internal spin rotation forces only contribute significantly to spin dynamics when the variation in different directions of the magnetic energy—or magnetic anisotropy energy—is small. This is the case with materials which are highly symmetric such as bulk metals with a cubic structure. When such magnetic anisotropy energy is large, the spin rotation effect is too small to cause any significant precession of spins below 100 femtoseconds. Further, the spin-dynamics caused by the internal spin-rotation is slow compared to other spin phenomenon, such as the inter site spin transfer between electrons and the spin-flips, mediated by spin-orbit. [32]

Biologists 'transfer' a memory

UCLA biologists report they have transferred a memory from one marine snail to another, creating an artificial memory, by injecting RNA from one to another. This research could lead to new ways to lessen the trauma of painful memories with RNA and to restore lost memories.

"I think in the not-too-distant future, we could potentially use RNA to ameliorate the effects of Alzheimer's disease or post-traumatic stress disorder," said David Glanzman, senior author of the study and a UCLA professor of integrative biology and physiology and of neurobiology. The team's research is published May 14 in *eNeuro*, the online journal of the Society for Neuroscience.

RNA, or ribonucleic acid, has been widely known as a cellular messenger that makes proteins and carries out DNA's instructions to other parts of the cell. It is now understood to have other important functions besides protein coding, including regulation of a variety of cellular processes involved in development and disease.

The researchers gave mild electric shocks to the tails of a species of marine snail called *Aplysia*. The snails received five tail shocks, one every 20 minutes, and then five more 24 hours later. The shocks enhance the snail's defensive withdrawal reflex, a response it displays for protection from potential harm. When the researchers subsequently tapped the snails, they found those that had been given the shocks displayed a defensive contraction that lasted an average of 50 seconds, a simple type of learning known as "sensitization." Those that had not been given the shocks contracted for only about one second.

The life scientists extracted RNA from the nervous systems of marine snails that received the tail shocks the day after the second series of shocks, and also from marine snails that did not receive any shocks. Then the RNA from the first (sensitized) group was injected into seven marine snails that had not received any shocks, and the RNA from the second group was injected into a control group of seven other snails that also had not received any shocks.



UCLA Professor David Glanzman holding a marine snail. Credit: Christelle Snow/UCLA

Remarkably, the scientists found that the seven that received the RNA from snails that were given the shocks behaved as if they themselves had received the tail shocks: They displayed a defensive contraction that lasted an average of about 40 seconds.

"It's as though we transferred the memory," said Glanzman, who is also a member of UCLA's Brain Research Institute.

As expected, the control group of snails did not display the lengthy contraction.

Next, the researchers added RNA to Petri dishes containing neurons extracted from different snails that did not receive shocks. Some dishes had RNA from marine snails that had been given electric tail shocks, and some dishes contained RNA from snails that had not been given shocks. Some of the dishes contained sensory neurons, and others contained motor neurons, which in the snail are responsible for the reflex.

When a marine snail is given electric tail shocks, its sensory neurons become more excitable. Interestingly, the researchers discovered, adding RNA from the snails that had been given shocks also produced increased excitability in sensory neurons in a Petri dish; it did not do so in motor

neurons. Adding RNA from a marine snail that was not given the tail shocks did not produce this increased excitability in sensory neurons.



David Glanzman holding a marine snail. Credit: Christelle Snow/UCLA

In the field of neuroscience, it has long been thought that memories are stored in synapses. (Each neuron has several thousand synapses.) Glanzman holds a different view, believing that memories are stored in the nucleus of neurons.

"If memories were stored at synapses, there is no way our experiment would have worked," said Glanzman, who added that the marine snail is an excellent model for studying the brain and memory.

Scientists know more about the cell biology of this simple form of learning in this animal than any other form of learning in any other organism, Glanzman said. The cellular and molecular processes seem to be very similar between the marine snail and humans, even though the snail has about 20,000 neurons in its central nervous system and humans are thought to have about 100 billion.

In the future, Glanzman said, it is possible that RNA can be used to awaken and restore memories that have gone dormant in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. He and his colleagues published research in the journal *eLife* in 2014 indicating that lost memories can be restored.

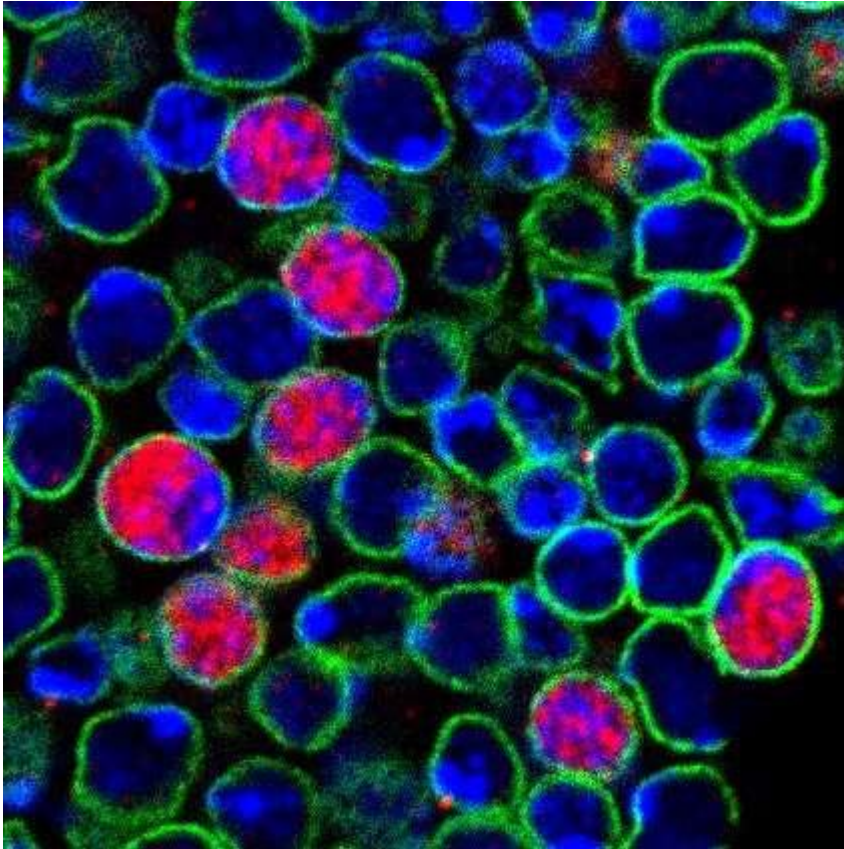
There are many kinds of RNA, and in future research, Glanzman wants to identify the types of RNA that can be used to transfer memories. [31]

'Sleeping' stem cells could aid brain repair

Scientists at the Wellcome Trust/ Cancer Research UK Gurdon Institute, University of Cambridge, have identified a new type of stem cell in the brain which they say has a high potential for repair following brain injury or disease.

A major goal of regenerative research is to repair the brain efficiently following injury, for example due to stroke, Alzheimer's disease or head trauma, disease or ageing. The brain is poor at repairing itself; however, it may become possible to improve repair without surgery by targeting stem cells residing in patients' brains. Stem cells have the unique capacity to produce all of the cells in the brain but are normally kept inactive in a form of cellular 'sleep' known as quiescence. Quiescent cells do not proliferate or generate new cells. Thus, any regenerative therapy targeting stem cells must first awaken them from quiescence.

In a study published today in the journal *Science*, PhD student Leo Otsuki and his supervisor Professor Andrea Brand report the discovery in the brain of a new type of quiescent stem cell (known as 'G2 quiescent stem cell') with higher regenerative potential than quiescent stem cells identified previously. Importantly, G2 quiescent stem cells awaken to make the key types of cell in the brain - neurons and glia - much faster than known quiescent stem cells, making them attractive targets for therapeutic design.



Stem cells are labelled in red, nuclear membranes in green and DNA in blue. Credit: Andrea Brand/Leo Otsuki

"The brain is not good at repairing itself, but these newly-discovered stem cells suggest there may be a way to improve its ability," says Professor Brand. "These stem cells are in a dormant state, but once awake, they have the ability to generate key brain cells."

By studying the fruit fly (*Drosophila*), the authors identified a gene known as *tribbles* that selectively regulates G2 quiescent stem cells. The DNA of fruit flies has many similarities with that of humans, making them a useful model to understand human biology, and 60% of human genes associated with disease are also found in *Drosophila*. The *tribbles* gene has counterparts in the mammalian genome that are expressed in stem cells in the brain. The researchers believe that drugs that target *tribbles* might be one route to awakening G2 quiescent stem cells.

"We've found the gene that directs these cells to become quiescent," adds Otsuki. "The next step is to identify potential drug-like molecules that block this gene and awaken a person's stem cells."

"We believe there may be similar quiescent stem cells in other organs, and this discovery could help improve or develop new regenerative medicines." [30]

Using organoids to understand how the brain wrinkles

A team of researchers working at the Weizmann Institute of Science has found that organoids can be used to better understand how the human brain wrinkles as it develops. In their paper published in the journal *Nature Physics*, the team describes how they used a modified form of organoid development to study the development of brain wrinkles. Larry Taber with Washington University offers a News & Views [piece](#) on the work done by the team in the same journal issue.

An organoid is an artificially grown mass of [cells](#) meant to replicate human or other animal organs. They are typically much smaller than the organs they are meant to mimic, but allow researchers a unique means of studying how organs develop. In this new effort, the researchers sought to better understand the process by which the [human brain](#) develops wrinkles. Realizing that the standard approach used for creating organoids would not work in such a study, the team tried another tactic—they grew stem cells on platform that resulted in a brain organoid that was much thinner and rounder than it would naturally grow—and it was also grown on a form surrounding a narrow space. The end result, the team reports, was a brain organoid that resembled a pita. This configuration allowed the researchers to take images of folds as they developed and to supply nutrients to all the cells since blood vessels typically do not develop in organoids.

In studying the images of the developing organoid, the researchers found that the folds developed as expected—opposing forces resulting from growth differences in brain material. In this case, it was the cytoskeleton in the organoid's core and the cell nucleus expanding at the organoid's outer edges. Uneven expansion between the two causes one or the other to fold as a means of dealing with the increase in pressure.

To learn more about the development of folds, the researchers ran the same experiment again, but used [stem cells](#) from a patient with smooth brain syndrome, which, as it sounds, is a condition in which the brain develops without folds. As expected, the organoid developed very few folds. A closer look showed differences in elasticity between the cells in the organoid grown with [healthy cells](#) and the those with the mutated genes that are behind smooth [brain](#) syndrome. [29]

Biologists find new source for brain's development

A team of biologists has found an unexpected source for the brain's development, a finding that offers new insights into the building of the nervous system.

The research, which appears in the journal *Science*, discovered that glia, a collection of non-neuronal cells that had long been regarded as passive support cells, in fact are vital to nerve-cell development in the brain.

"The results lead us to revise the often neuro-centric view of brain development to now appreciate the contributions for non-neuronal cells such as glia," explains Vilaiwan Fernandes, a postdoctoral fellow in New York University's Department of Biology and the study's lead author. "Indeed, our study found that fundamental questions in brain development with regard to the timing, identity,

and coordination of nerve cell birth can only be understood when the glial contribution is accounted for."

The brain is made up of two broad cell types, nerve cells or neurons and glia, which are non-nerve cells that make up more than half the volume of the brain. Neurobiologists have tended to focus on the former because these are the cells that form networks that process information.

However, given the preponderance of glia in the brain's cellular make-up, the NYU researchers hypothesized that they could play a fundamental part in brain development.

To explore this, they examined the visual system of the fruit fly. The species serves as a powerful model organism for this line of study because its visual system, like the one in humans, holds repeated mini-circuits that detect and process light over the entire visual field.

This dynamic is of particular interest to scientists because, as the brain develops, it must coordinate the increase of neurons in the retina with other neurons in distant regions of the brain.

In their study, the NYU researchers found that the coordination of nerve-cell development is achieved through a population of glia, which relay cues from the retina to the brain to make cells in the brain become nerve cells.

"By acting as a signaling intermediary, glia exert precise control over not only when and where a neuron is born, but also the type of neuron it will develop into," notes NYU Biology Professor Claude

Desplan, the paper's senior author. [28]

Link Between Immune System, Memory and Brain Structure Discovered

The body's immune system performs essential functions, such as defending against bacteria and cancer cells. However, the human brain is separated from immune cells in the bloodstream by the so-called blood-brain barrier. This barrier protects the brain from pathogens and toxins circulating in the blood, while also dividing the immune cells of the human body into those that fulfill their function in the blood and those that work specifically in the brain. Until recently, it was thought that brain function was largely unaffected by the peripheral immune system.

However, in the past few years, evidence has accumulated to indicate that the blood's immune system could in fact have an impact on the brain. Scientists from the University of Basel's Transfaculty Research Platform Molecular and Cognitive Neurosciences (MCN) have now carried out two independent studies that demonstrate that this link between the immune system and brain is more significant than previously believed.

Search for regulatory patterns

In the first study, the researchers searched for epigenetic profiles, i.e. regulatory patterns, in the blood of 533 young, healthy people. In their genome-wide search, they identified an epigenetic profile that is strongly correlated with the thickness of the cerebral cortex, in particular in a region of the brain that is important for memory functions. This finding was confirmed in an independent examination of a further 596 people. It also showed that it is specifically those genes that are

responsible for the regulation of important immune functions in the blood that explain the link between the epigenetic profile and the properties of the brain.

Gene variant intensifies traumatic memories

In the second study, the researchers investigated the genomes of healthy participants who remembered negative images particularly well or particularly poorly. A variant of the TROVE2 gene, whose role in immunological diseases is currently being investigated, was linked to participants' ability to remember a particularly high number of negative images, while their general memory remained unaffected.

This gene variant also led to increased activity in specific regions of the brain that are important for the memory of emotional experiences. The researchers also discovered that the gene is linked to the strength of traumatic memories in people who have experienced traumatic events.

The results of the two studies show that both brain structure and memory are linked to the activity of genes that also perform important immune regulatory functions in the blood. "Although the precise mechanisms behind the links we discovered still need to be clarified, we hope that this will ultimately lead to new treatment possibilities," says Professor Andreas Papassotiropoulos, CoDirector of the University of Basel's MCN research platform. The immune system can be precisely affected by certain medications, and such medications could also have a positive effect on impaired brain functions.

Innovative research methods

These groundbreaking findings were made possible thanks to cutting edge neuroscientific and genetic methods at the University of Basel's MCN research platform. Under the leadership of Professor Andreas Papassotiropoulos and Professor Dominique de Quervain, the research platform aims to help us better understand human brain functions and to develop new treatments for psychiatric disorders. [27]

Researcher looking to shed light deeper into the human brain

The inner workings of the human brain have always been a subject of great interest. Unfortunately, it is fairly difficult to view brain structures or intricate tissues due to the fact that the skull is not transparent by design. The reality is that light scattering is the major obstacle for deep penetration into tissue.

Dr. Vladislav Yakovlev, professor in the Department of Biomedical Engineering at Texas A&M University, has been developing a more efficient way of propagating light through an opaque medium. Propagation of light refers to the way that light travels from one point to another, in this case, through a medium, such as human tissue.

The new method involves making a minimally invasive hole within the medium, which is smaller in diameter than needles that are currently being used within the medical field. The process shows a great deal of promise in many uses, including viewing brain structure through the skull and imaging blood through skin tissue.

The technology could even be extended outside the realm of biomedical engineering to develop a more efficient way of seeing through fog while driving. This can be accomplished by deploying a laser pulse that could be sent through fog and evaporate water. This would allow drivers to have a safer experience during hazardous driving conditions and would work exactly as the method used in biomedical engineering applications.

The holes used to pass the light through are a few hundred micrometers in depth and a width of 20 to 30 microns. A micron is one millionth of a meter, and by comparison a single strand of human hair is about 75 microns in diameter. The light is then coupled into the opaque material resulting in an increase of magnitude of optical transmission into the material. The material that light is passed through is also referred to as the scattering medium.

The report documenting the work of Yakovlev was recently published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America and definitively demonstrated that light injected into the scattering medium will remain there for an extended period of time. The amount of time that the photons remained was increased by a factor of 100.

One of the challenges facing researchers is that of optical absorption within tissues. However, because the new method is wavelength independent, the wavelength can be specified to perform measurements in a specific part of the light spectrum. This approach has the potential to yield analytical information about the composition and structure of the medium or tissue. [26]

Brain scanners allow scientists to 'read minds'—could they now enable a 'Big Brother' future?

Are you lying? Do you have a racial bias? Is your moral compass intact? To find out what you think or feel, we usually have to take your word for it. But questionnaires and other explicit measures to reveal what's on your mind are imperfect: you may choose to hide your true beliefs or you may not even be aware of them.

But now there is a technology that enables us to "read the mind" with growing accuracy: functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). It measures brain activity indirectly by tracking changes in blood flow – making it possible for neuroscientists to observe the brain in action. Because the technology is safe and effective, fMRI has revolutionised our understanding of the human brain. It has shed light on areas important for speech, movement, memory and many other processes.

More recently, researchers have used fMRI for more elaborate purposes. One of the most remarkable studies comes from Jack Gallant's lab at the University of California. His team showed movie trailers to their volunteers and managed to reconstruct these video clips based on the subjects' brain activity, using a machine learning algorithm.

In this approach, the computer developed a model based on the subject's brain activity rather than being fed a pre-programmed solution by the researchers. The model improved with practice and after having access to enough data, it was able to decode brain activity. The reconstructed clips were blurry and the experiment involved extended training periods. But for the first time, brain activity was decoded well enough to reconstruct such complex stimuli with impressive detail.

Enormous potential

So what could fMRI do in the future? This is a topic we explore in our new book *Sex, Lies, and Brain Scans: How fMRI Reveals What Really Goes on in our Minds*. One exciting area is lie detection. While early studies were mostly interested in finding the brain areas involved in telling a lie, more recent research tried to actually use the technology as a lie detector.

As a subject in these studies, you would typically have to answer a series of questions. Some of your answers would be truthful, some would be lies. The computer model is told which ones are which in the beginning so it gets to know your "brain signature of lying" – the specific areas in your brain that light up when you lie, but not when you are telling the truth.

Afterwards, the model has to classify new answers as truth or lies. The typical accuracy reported in the literature is around 90%, meaning that nine out of ten times, the computer correctly classified answers as lies or truths. This is far better than traditional measures such as the polygraph, which is thought to be only about 70% accurate. Some companies have now licensed the lie detection algorithms. Their next big goal: getting fMRI-based lie detection admitted as evidence in court.

They have tried several times now, but the judges have ruled that the technology is not ready for the legal setting – 90% accuracy sounds impressive, but would we want to send somebody to prison if there is a chance that they are innocent? Even if we can make the technology more accurate, fMRI will never be error proof. One particularly problematic topic is the one of false memories. The scans can only reflect your beliefs, not necessarily reality. If you falsely believe that you have committed a crime, fMRI can only confirm this belief. We might be tempted to see brain scans as hard evidence, but they are only as good as your own memories: ultimately flawed.

Still, this raises some chilling questions about the possibility for a "Big Brother" future where our innermost thoughts can be routinely monitored. But for now fMRI cannot be used covertly. You cannot walk through an airport scanner and be asked to step into an interrogation room, because your thoughts were alarming to the security personnel.

Undergoing fMRI involves lying still in a big noise tube for long periods of time. The computer model needs to get to know you and your characteristic brain activity before it can make any deductions. In many studies, this means that subjects were being scanned for hours or in several sessions. There's obviously no chance of doing this without your knowledge – or even against your will. If you did not want your brain activity to be read, you could simply move in the scanner. Even the slightest movements can make fMRI scans useless.

Although there is no immediate danger of undercover scans, fMRI can still be used unethically. It could be used in commercial settings without appropriate guidelines. If academic researchers want to start an fMRI study, they need to go through a thorough process, explaining the potential risks and benefits to an ethics committee. No such guidelines exist in commercial settings. Companies are free to buy fMRI scanners and conduct experiments with any design. They could show you traumatising scenes. Or they might uncover thoughts that you wanted to keep to yourself. And if your scan shows any medical abnormalities, they are not forced to tell you about it.

Mapping the brain in great detail enables us to observe sophisticated processes. Researchers are beginning to unravel the brain circuits involved in self control and morality. Some of us may want to use this knowledge to screen for criminals or detect racial biases. But we must keep in mind that

fMRI has many limitations. It is not a crystal ball. We might be able to detect an implicit racial bias in you, but this cannot predict your behaviour in the real world.

fMRI has a long way to go before we can use it to fire or incarcerate somebody. But neuroscience is a rapidly evolving field. With advances in clever technological and analytical developments such as machine learning, fMRI might be ready for these futuristic applications sooner than we think. Therefore, we need to have a public discussion about these technologies now. Should we screen for terrorists at the airport or hire only teachers and judges who do not show evidence of a racial bias? Which applications are useful and beneficial for our society, which ones are a step too far? It is time to make up our minds. [25]

'Latest spoke in the wheel' drives brain-mapping advances

Advances in microscopy techniques have often triggered important discoveries in the field of neuroscience, enabling vital insights in understanding the brain and promising new treatments for neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. A special section on "Superresolution Microscopy of Neural Structure and Function" in the current issue of the journal *Neurophotonics*, published by SPIE, the international society for optics and photonics, details this work in reports on ground-breaking new research and reviews.

Starting with the Golgi technique at the end of the 19th century, to electron microscopy in the 1950s, to fluorescent confocal and two-photon microscopy at the close of the 20th century, microscopy techniques have driven important breakthroughs in neuroscience, note guest editors Valentin Nägerl and Jean-Baptiste Sibarita of the Université de Bordeaux and the CNRS in their editorial for the special section.

"By providing higher spatial and temporal resolutions, as well as more contrast and specificity, these ground-breaking techniques have greatly informed our view of how the brain works," the editors write.

Super-resolution fluorescence microscopy "is the latest spoke in the revolutionary wheel," the guest editors note. "Recognized with the Nobel Prize in chemistry in 2014 for overcoming the diffraction barrier of light microscopy, it unlocks a new potential to upend biological research at the molecular level. Ten years after their development in a handful of laboratories, super-resolution microscopy techniques have caught on like wildfire and are now routinely used in a large number of biology labs."

While super-resolution microscopy is a relative recent addition to the arsenal of tools available for neuroscientific research, said *Neurophotonics* editor-in-chief David Boas of Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School, "the breadth of impactful applications is growing rapidly. This special section provides a snapshot of this growth with a collection of exciting papers illustrating the breadth of applications."

Articles in the section, many of them accessible via open access, help validate and assess new techniques by comparing them with more established approaches. Among them:

In "Filling the gap: adding super-resolution to array tomography for correlated ultrastructural and molecular identification of electrical synapses at the *C. elegans* connectome," Sebastian Matthias

Markert of the University of Würzburg and co-authors describe a new method to correlate molecular information with ultrastructural context. Their aim is to allow researchers to dissect the molecular underpinnings of the ultrastructural organization and function of electrical synapses precisely and confidently.

Producing nanoscale maps of protein organization on cell surfaces or within organelles is another exciting prospect in super-resolution microscopy. In "Counting numbers of synaptic proteins: absolute quantification and single molecule imaging techniques," Angela Patrizio and Christian Specht of École Normale Supérieure describe how single-molecule-based microscopy techniques offer unparalleled opportunities to study protein content and dynamics in key functional compartments.

An early hallmark of neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's is the misfolding and self-aggregation of proteins into amyloid structures that are believed to wreak havoc on neurons and synapses. In "Probing amyloid protein aggregation with optical super-resolution methods: from the test tube to models of disease", Clemens Kaminski and Gabriele Kaminski Schierle of the University of Cambridge explain the potential of new optical super-resolution techniques to provide insight on the molecular mechanism of the pathogenic self-assembly process in vitro and inside cells. [24]

Consciousness and Entropy

What is the relationship of consciousness to the neurological activity of the brain? Does the brain behave differently when a person is fully conscious, when they are asleep, or when they are undergoing an epileptic seizure? A recent study by R. Guevara Erra, D. M. Mateos, R. Wennberg, J.L. Perez Velazquez of the University of Toronto, suggests that consciousness is correlated to a maximum number of neurological connections. In thermodynamics, this quantity, describing the complexity of a system, is entropy. In their paper, published in Physics Letters, they write:

It has been said that complexity lies between order and disorder. In the case of brain activity, and physiology in general, complexity issues are being considered with increased emphasis. We sought to identify features of brain organization that are optimal for sensory processing, and that may guide the emergence of cognition and consciousness, by analysing neurophysiological recordings in conscious and unconscious states. We find a surprisingly simple result: normal wakeful states are characterised by the greatest number of possible configurations of interactions between brain networks, representing highest entropy values. Therefore, the information content is larger in the network associated to conscious states, suggesting that consciousness could be the result of an optimization of information processing. These findings encapsulate three main current theories of cognition, as discussed in the text, and more specifically the conceptualization of consciousness in terms of brain complexity. We hope our study represents the preliminary attempt at finding organising principles of brain function that will help to guide in a more formal sense inquiry into how consciousness arises from the organization of matter.

The authors are rightly cautious about the significance of the correlation. Just because A and B are correlated, does not mean that A causes B. However the recognition that a phenomenon such as entropy may describe consciousness opens a new direction for consciousness research. [23]

Consciousness is tied to 'entropy', say researchers

Consciousness appears to arise naturally as a result of a brain maximizing its information content. So says a group of scientists in Canada and France, which has studied how the electrical activity in people's brains varies according to individuals' conscious states. The researchers find that normal waking states are associated with maximum values of what they call a brain's "entropy".

Statistical mechanics is very good at explaining the macroscopic thermodynamic properties of physical systems in terms of the behaviour of those systems' microscopic constituent particles. Emboldened by this success, physicists have increasingly been trying to do a similar thing with the brain: namely, using statistical mechanics to model networks of neurons. Key to this has been the study of synchronization – how the electrical activity of one set of neurons can oscillate in phase with that of another set. Synchronization in turn implies that those sets of neurons are physically tied to one another, just as oscillating physical systems, such as pendulums, become synchronized when they are connected together.

The latest work stems from the observation that consciousness, or at least the proper functioning of brains, is associated not with high or even low degrees of synchronicity between neurons but by middling amounts. Jose Luis Perez Velazquez, a biochemist at the University of Toronto, and colleagues hypothesized that what is maximized during consciousness is not connectivity itself but the number of different ways that a certain degree of connectivity can be achieved.

Many ways of connecting

Perez Velazquez's colleague Ramon Guevarra Erra, a physicist at the Paris Descartes University, points out that there is only one way to connect each set of neurons in a network with every other set, just as there is only one way to have no connections at all. In contrast, he notes, there are many different ways that an intermediate medium-sized number of connections can be arranged.

To put their hypothesis to the test, the researchers used data previously collected by Perez Velazquez showing electric- and magnetic-field emissions from the brains of nine people, seven of whom suffered from epilepsy. With emissions recorded at dozens of places across the subjects' scalps, the researchers analysed every possible pairing of these data "channels" to establish whether the emissions in each case were in phase with one another. They added up the number of synchronized pairs and plugged that figure along with the total number of all possible pairings into a fairly straightforward statistical formula to work out how many different brain configurations that level of synchronicity yields. They then took the logarithm of that number to establish the brain's entropy.

The data were analysed in two parts. In one, they compared the emissions from four of the epileptic patients when undergoing a seizure and when in a normal "alert" state. In the second, they compared emissions from the other five individuals when sleeping and when awake. In both cases, the bottom line was the same: subjects' brains display higher entropy, or a higher value of a similar quantity known as Lempel–Ziv (LZ) complexity, when in a fully conscious state.

Varying results

Guevarra Erra admits that the results are not watertight. Indeed, the LZ complexity of one of the four epileptic patients in the first analysis showed no change between seizure and alert states (although that person did remain conscious during part of the seizure). In another individual, LZ

complexity actually increased in the second analysis while that person was asleep. Guevarra Erra says that he and his colleagues didn't carry out a statistical analysis of their results in part because of the "very heterogeneous" nature of those results. But he nevertheless remains "highly confident" that the correlations they have identified are real, particularly, he argues, because they were seen in "two very different sets of data".

Peter McClintock, a physicist who works on nonlinear dynamics at Lancaster University in the UK, describes the research as "intriguing" but says that the consciousness–entropy correlation should be confirmed using a larger number of subjects. He also suggests investigating "what happens in other brain states where consciousness is altered", such as anaesthesia.

Emergent property

Perez Velazquez and colleagues argue that consciousness could simply be an "emergent property" of a system – the brain – that seeks to maximize information exchange and therefore entropy, since doing so aids the survival of the brain's bearer by allowing them to better model their environment. On the question of entropy, however, Guevarra Erra is cautious. He says that personally he would like to have a better understanding of the physical processes taking place in the brain before employing the label "entropy", explaining that Perez Velazquez was keen to use the term in their paper. One option, he says, would be to carry out fresh experiments that measure thermodynamic quantities in subjects' brains. He notes, for example, that magnetic resonance imaging can be used to measure oxygenation, which is directly related to metabolism and therefore to the generation of heat.

Guevarra Erra adds that he would like to extend their investigations beyond the hospital to cover more subtle but general cognitive behaviour. The idea would be to monitor a person's changing brain activity as they focus on carrying out a specific task, such as discriminating between musical tones or trying to find their way round a labyrinth. This, he says, should help to establish whether varying "entropy" correlates with degree of awareness as well as simply with the presence or absence of consciousness.

A paper describing the work will be published in Physical Review E and is also available on arXiv. [22]

A new study looks for the cortical conscious network

New research published in the New Journal of Physics tries to decompose the structural layers of the cortical network to different hierarchies enabling to identify the network's nucleus, from which our consciousness could emerge.

The brain is a very complex network, with approximately 100 billion neurons and 100 trillion synapses between the neurons. In order to cope with its enormous complexity and to understand how brain function eventually creates the conscious mind, science uses advanced mathematical tools. Ultimately, scientists want to understand how a global phenomenon such as consciousness can emerge from our neuronal network.

A team of physicists from Bar Ilan University in Israel led by Professor Shlomo Havlin and Professor Reuven Cohen used network theory in order to deal with this complexity and to determine how the

structure of the human cortical network can support complex data integration and conscious activity. The gray area of the human cortex, the neuron cell bodies, were scanned with MRI imaging and used to form 1000 nodes in the cortical network. The white matter of the human cortex, the neuron bundles, were scanned with DTI imaging, forming 15,000 links or edges that connected the network's nodes. In the end of this process, their network was an approximation of the structure of the human cortex.

Previous studies have shown that the human cortex is a network with small world properties, which means that it has many local structures and some shortcuts from global structures that connect faraway areas (similar to the difference between local buses and cross-country trains). The cortex also has many hubs, which are nodes that have a high number of links (like central stations), that are also strongly interconnected between themselves, making it easy to travel between the brain's information highways.

Nir Lahav, the lead author of the study, says, "In order to examine how the structure of the network can support global emerging phenomena like consciousness, we applied a network analysis called Kshell decomposition. This analysis takes into account the connectivity profile of each node, making it easy to uncover different neighborhoods of connections in the cortical network, which we called shells."

The most connected neighborhood in the network is termed the network's nucleus. Nir says, "In the process, we peel off different shells of the network to get the most connected area of the network, the nucleus. Until today, scientists were only interested in the network's nucleus, but we found that these different shells can hold important information about how the brain integrates information from the local levels of each node to the entire global network. For the first time, we could build a comprehensive topological model of the cortex."

This topological model reveals that the network's nucleus includes 20 percent of all nodes and that the remaining 80 percent are strongly connected across all of the shells. Interestingly, comparing this topology to that of other networks, such as the internet, noticeable differences are apparent. For instance, in internet network topology, almost 25 percent of the nodes are isolated, meaning they don't connect to any other shells but the nucleus. In the cortical network, however, there are hardly any isolated nodes. It seems that the cortex is much more connected and efficient than the internet.

Looking at all the shells of the cortical network, the authors were able to define the network's hierarchical structure and essentially model how information flows within the network. The structure revealed how shells of low connectivity are nodes that typically perform specific functions like face recognition. From there, the data is transferred to higher, more connected shells that enable additional data integration. This reveals regions of the executive network and working memory. With these areas, researchers can focus on task performance, for example.

The integrated information then 'travels' to the most connected neighborhood of nodes, the nucleus, which spans across several regions of the cortex. According to Nir, "It's an interconnected collective which is densely linked with itself and can perform global functions due to its great number of global structures, which are widespread across the brain."

Which global function might the nucleus serve? The authors suggest the answer is no less than consciousness itself.

"The connection between brain activity and consciousness is still a great mystery," says Nir. The main hypothesis today is that in order to create conscious activity, the brain must integrate relevant information from multiple areas of the network. According to this theory, led by Professor Giulio Tononi from the University of Wisconsin, if the level of integrated information crosses a certain limit, a new and emergent state is entered—consciousness. This model suggests that consciousness depends on both information integration and information segregation. Loosely speaking, consciousness is generated by a "central" network structure with a high capacity for information integration, with the contribution of sub-networks that contain specific and segregated information without being part of the central structure. In other words, certain parts of the brain are more involved than others in the conscious complex of the brain, yet other connected parts still contribute, working quietly outside the conscious complex.

The authors demonstrate how the nucleus and the shells satisfy all of the requirements of these recent consciousness theories. The shells calculate and contribute to data integration without actually being part of the conscious complex, while the nucleus receives relevant information from all other hierarchies and integrates it to a unified function using its global interconnected structure.

The nucleus could thus be this conscious complex, serving as a platform for consciousness to emerge from the network activity.

When the authors examined the different regions that make up the nucleus, they revealed that, indeed, these regions have been previously associated with conscious activities. For example, structures within the brain's midline, which form the majority of the network's nucleus, were found to be associated with the stream of consciousness, and some researchers, like Professor Georg Northoff from the University of Ottawa, have suggested that these regions are involved with creating our sense of self.

"Now, we need to use this analysis on the whole brain, and not only on the cortex in order to reveal a more exact model of the brain's hierarchy, and later on understand what, exactly, are the neuronal dynamics that lead to such global integration and ultimately consciousness." [21]

Network theory sheds new light on origins of consciousness

Where in your brain do you exist? Is your awareness of the world around you and of yourself as an individual the result of specific, focused changes in your brain, or does that awareness come from a broad network of neural activity? How does your brain produce awareness?

Vanderbilt University researchers took a significant step toward answering these longstanding questions with a recent brain imaging study, in which they discovered global changes in how brain areas communicate with one another during awareness. Their findings, which were published March 9 in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, challenge previous theories that hypothesized much more restricted changes were responsible for producing awareness.

"Identifying the fingerprints of consciousness in humans would be a significant advancement for basic and medical research, let alone its philosophical implications on the underpinnings of the

human experience," said René Marois, professor and chair of psychology at Vanderbilt University and senior author of the study. "Many of the cognitive deficits observed in various neurological diseases may ultimately stem from changes in how information is communicated throughout the brain."

Using graph theory, a branch of mathematics concerned with explaining the interactive links between members of a complex network, such as social networks or flight routes, the researchers aimed to characterize how connections between the various parts of the brain were related to awareness.

"With graph theory, one can ask questions about how efficiently the transportation networks in the United States and Europe are connected via transportation hubs like LaGuardia Airport in New York," Douglass Godwin, graduate student and lead author on the research, said. "We can ask those same questions about brain networks and hubs of neural communication."

Modern theories of the neural basis of consciousness fall generally into two camps: focal and global. Focal theories contend there are specific areas of the brain that are critical for generating consciousness, while global theories argue consciousness arises from large-scale brain changes in activity. This study applied graph theory analysis to adjudicate between these theories.

The researchers recruited 24 members of the university community to participate in a functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) experiment. While in the fMRI scanner, participants were asked to detect a disk that was briefly flashed on a screen. In each trial, participants responded whether they were able to detect the target disk and how much confidence they had in their answer. Experimenters then compared the results of the high-confidence trials during which the target was detected to the trials when it was missed by participants. These were treated as "aware" and "unaware" trials, respectively.

Comparison of aware and unaware trials using conventional fMRI analyses that assess the amplitude of brain activity showed a pattern of results typical of similar studies, with only a few areas of the brain showing more activity during detection of the target than when participants missed seeing it. The present study, however, was interested not simply in what regions might be more activated with awareness, but how they communicate with one another.

Unlike the focal results seen using more conventional analysis methods, the results via this network approach pointed toward a different conclusion. No one area or network of areas of the brain stood out as particularly more connected during awareness of the target; the whole brain appeared to become functionally more connected following reports of awareness.

"We know there are numerous brain networks that control distinct cognitive functions such as attention, language and control, with each node of a network densely interconnected with other nodes of the same network, but not with other networks," Marois said. "Consciousness appears to break down the modularity of these networks, as we observed a broad increase in functional connectivity between these networks with awareness."

The research suggests that consciousness is likely a product of this widespread communication, and that we can only report things that we have seen once they are being represented in the brain in this manner. Thus, no one part of the brain is truly the "seat of the soul," as René Descartes once

wrote in a hypothesis about the pineal gland, but rather, consciousness appears to be an emergent property of how information that needs to be acted upon gets propagated throughout the brain.

"We take for granted how unified our experience of the world is. We don't experience separate visual and auditory worlds, it's all integrated into a single conscious experience," Godwin said. "This widespread cross-network communication makes sense as a mechanism by which consciousness gets integrated into that singular world." [20]

Neuromorphic computing mimics important brain feature

When you hear a sound, only some of the neurons in the auditory cortex of your brain are activated. This is because every auditory neuron is tuned to a certain range of sound, so that each neuron is more sensitive to particular types and levels of sound than others. In a new study, researchers have designed a neuromorphic ("brain-inspired") computing system that mimics this neural selectivity by using artificial level-tuned neurons that preferentially respond to specific types of stimuli.

In the future, level-tuned neurons may help enable neuromorphic computing systems to perform tasks that traditional computers cannot, such as learning from their environment, pattern recognition, and knowledge extraction from big data sources.

The researchers, Angeliki Pantazi et al., at IBM Research-Zurich and École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, both in Switzerland, have published a paper on the new neuromorphic architecture in a recent issue of Nanotechnology.

Like all neuromorphic computing architectures, the proposed system is based on neurons and their synapses, which are the junctions where neurons send signals to each other. In this study, the researchers physically implemented artificial neurons using phase-change materials. These materials have two stable states: a crystalline, low-resistivity state and an amorphous, high-resistivity state. Just as in traditional computing, the states can be switched by the application of a voltage.

When the neuron's conductance reaches a certain threshold, the neuron fires.

"We have demonstrated that phase-change-based memristive devices can be used to create artificial neurons and synapses to store and process data," coauthor Evangelos Eleftheriou at IBM Research Zurich told Phys.org. "A phase-change neuron uses the phase configuration of the phase-change material to represent its internal state, the membrane potential. For the phase-change synapse, the synaptic weight—which is responsible for the plasticity—is encoded by the conductance of the nanodevice."

In this architecture, each neuron is tuned to a specific range, or level. Neurons receive signals from many other neurons, and a level is defined as the cumulative contribution of the sum of these incoming signals.

"We have introduced the biologically inspired architecture of level-tuned neurons that is able to distinguish different patterns in an unsupervised way," Eleftheriou said. "This is important for the development of ultra-dense, scalable and energy-efficient neuromorphic computing."

One of the main advantages of these highly selective level-tuned neurons is their improved learning ability. In neuromorphic computing, learning occurs through repeated incoming signals, which strengthens certain synaptic connections. The researchers showed that level-tuned neurons are very good at learning multiple input patterns, even in the presence of input noise.

"Even a single neuron can be used to detect patterns and to discover correlations in real-time streams of event-based data," Eleftheriou said. "Level-tuned neurons increase the capability of a single-neuron network for discriminating information when multiple patterns appear at the input. Level-tuned neurons, along with the high-speed and low-energy characteristics of their phasechange-based implementation, will be particularly useful for various emerging applications, such as Internet of Things, that collect and analyze large volumes of sensory information and applications to detect patterns in data sources, such as from social media to discover trends, or weather data for real-time forecasts, or healthcare data to detect patterns in diseases, etc."

In the future, the researchers plan to further develop the concept of artificial level-tuned neurons in order to design enhanced large-scale neural networks.

"We will be looking into more complex computational tasks based on artificial spiking neurons and their synapses," Eleftheriou said. "We are interested in studying the scaling potential and applications of such neuromorphic systems in cognitive computing systems." [19]

IBM scientists imitate the functionality of neurons with a phasechange device

IBM scientists have created randomly spiking neurons using phase-change materials to store and process data. This demonstration marks a significant step forward in the development of energyefficient, ultra-dense integrated neuromorphic technologies for applications in cognitive computing.

Inspired by the way the biological brain functions, scientists have theorized for decades that it should be possible to imitate the versatile computational capabilities of large populations of neurons. However, doing so at densities and with a power budget that would be comparable to those seen in biology has been a significant challenge, until now.

"We have been researching phase-change materials for memory applications for over a decade, and our progress in the past 24 months has been remarkable," said IBM Fellow Evangelos Eleftheriou. "In this period, we have discovered and published new memory techniques, including projected memory, stored 3 bits per cell in phase-change memory for the first time, and now are demonstrating the powerful capabilities of phase-change-based artificial neurons, which can perform various computational primitives such as data-correlation detection and unsupervised learning at high speeds using very little energy."

The artificial neurons designed by IBM scientists in Zurich consist of phase-change materials, including germanium antimony telluride, which exhibit two stable states, an amorphous one (without a clearly defined structure) and a crystalline one (with structure). These materials are the basis of re-writable Blu-ray discs.

However, the artificial neurons do not store digital information; they are analog, just like the synapses and neurons in our biological brain.

In the published demonstration, the team applied a series of electrical pulses to the artificial neurons, which resulted in the progressive crystallization of the phase-change material, ultimately causing the neuron to fire. In neuroscience, this function is known as the integrate-and-fire property of biological neurons. This is the foundation for event-based computation and, in principle, is similar to how our brain triggers a response when we touch something hot.

Exploiting this integrate-and-fire property, even a single neuron can be used to detect patterns and discover correlations in real-time streams of event-based data.

For example, in the Internet of Things, sensors can collect and analyze volumes of weather data collected at the edge for faster forecasts. The artificial neurons could be used to detect patterns in financial transactions to find discrepancies or use data from social media to discover new cultural trends in real time. Large populations of these high-speed, low-energy nano-scale neurons could also be used in neuromorphic coprocessors with co-located memory and processing units.

IBM scientists have organized hundreds of artificial neurons into populations and used them to represent fast and complex signals. Moreover, the artificial neurons have been shown to sustain billions of switching cycles, which would correspond to multiple years of operation at an update frequency of 100 Hz. The energy required for each neuron update was less than five picojoule and the average power less than 120 microwatts—for comparison, 60 million microwatts power a 60 watt lightbulb.

"Populations of stochastic phase-change neurons, combined with other nanoscale computational elements such as artificial synapses, could be a key enabler for the creation of a new generation of extremely dense neuromorphic computing systems," said Tomas Tuma, a co-author of the paper. [18]

Programmable ions set the stage for general-purpose quantum computers

An ion trap with four segmented blade electrodes used to trap a linear chain of atomic ions for quantum information processing. Each ion is addressed optically for individual control and readout using the high optical access of the trap.

Quantum computers promise speedy solutions to some difficult problems, but building large-scale, general-purpose quantum devices is a problem fraught with technical challenges.

To date, many research groups have created small but functional quantum computers. By combining a handful of atoms, electrons or superconducting junctions, researchers now regularly demonstrate quantum effects and run simple quantum algorithms—small programs dedicated to solving particular problems.

But these laboratory devices are often hard-wired to run one program or limited to fixed patterns of interactions between the quantum constituents. Making a quantum computer that can run arbitrary algorithms requires the right kind of physical system and a suite of programming tools. Atomic ions, confined by fields from nearby electrodes, are among the most promising platforms for meeting these needs.

In a paper published as the cover story in Nature on August 4, researchers working with Christopher

Monroe, a Fellow of the Joint Quantum Institute and the Joint Center for Quantum Information and Computer Science at the University of Maryland, introduced the first fully programmable and reconfigurable quantum computer module. The new device, dubbed a module because of its potential to connect with copies of itself, takes advantage of the unique properties offered by trapped ions to run any algorithm on five quantum bits, or qubits—the fundamental unit of information in a quantum computer.

"For any computer to be useful, the user should not be required to know what's inside," Monroe says. "Very few people care what their iPhone is actually doing at the physical level. Our experiment brings high-quality quantum bits up to a higher level of functionality by allowing them to be programmed and reconfigured in software."

The new module builds on decades of research into trapping and controlling ions. It uses standard techniques but also introduces novel methods for control and measurement. This includes manipulating many ions at once using an array of tightly-focused laser beams, as well as dedicated detection channels that watch for the glow of each ion.

"These are the kinds of discoveries that the NSF Physics Frontiers Centers program is intended to enable," says Jean Cottam Allen, a program director in the National Science Foundation's physics division. "This work is at the frontier of quantum computing, and it's helping to lay a foundation and bring practical quantum computing closer to being a reality."

The team tested their module on small instances of three problems that quantum computers are known to solve quickly. Having the flexibility to test the module on a variety of problems is a major step forward, says Shantanu Debnath, a graduate student at JQI and the paper's lead author. "By directly connecting any pair of qubits, we can reconfigure the system to implement any algorithm," Debnath says. "While it's just five qubits, we know how to apply the same technique to much larger collections."

At the module's heart, though, is something that's not even quantum: A database stores the best shapes for the laser pulses that drive quantum logic gates, the building blocks of quantum algorithms. Those shapes are calculated ahead of time using a regular computer, and the module uses software to translate an algorithm into the pulses in the database.

Putting the pieces together

Every quantum algorithm consists of three basic ingredients. First, the qubits are prepared in a particular state; second, they undergo a sequence of quantum logic gates; and last, a quantum measurement extracts the algorithm's output.

The module performs these tasks using different colors of laser light. One color prepares the ions using a technique called optical pumping, in which each qubit is illuminated until it sits in the proper quantum energy state. The same laser helps read out the quantum state of each atomic ion at the end of the process. In between, a separate laser strikes the ions to drive quantum logic gates.

These gates are like the switches and transistors that power ordinary computers. Here, lasers push on the ions and couple their internal qubit information to their motion, allowing any two ions in the module to interact via their strong electrical repulsion. Two ions from across the chain notice each other through this electrical interaction, just as raising and releasing one ball in a Newton's cradle transfers energy to the other side.

The re-configurability of the laser beams is a key advantage, Debnath says. "By reducing an algorithm into a series of laser pulses that push on the appropriate ions, we can reconfigure the wiring between these qubits from the outside," he says. "It becomes a software problem, and no other quantum computing architecture has this flexibility."

To test the module, the team ran three different quantum algorithms, including a demonstration of a Quantum Fourier Transform (QFT), which finds how often a given mathematical function repeats. It is a key piece in Shor's quantum factoring algorithm, which would break some of the most widelyused security standards on the internet if run on a big enough quantum computer.

Two of the algorithms ran successfully more than 90% of the time, while the QFT topped out at a 70% success rate. The team says that this is due to residual errors in the pulse-shaped gates as well as systematic errors that accumulate over the course of the computation, neither of which appear fundamentally insurmountable.

They note that the QFT algorithm requires all possible two-qubit gates and should be among the most complicated quantum calculations.

The team believes that eventually more qubits—perhaps as many as 100—could be added to their quantum computer module. It is also possible to link separate modules together, either by physically moving the ions or by using photons to carry information between them.

Although the module has only five qubits, its flexibility allows for programming quantum algorithms that have never been run before, Debnath says. The researchers are now looking to run algorithms on a module with more qubits, including the demonstration of quantum error correction routines as part of a project funded by the Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity. [17]

Realizing quantum bits

A research team from Germany, France and Switzerland has realised quantum bits, short qubits, in a new form. One day, they might become the information units of quantum computers.

To date, researchers have realised qubits in the form of individual electrons (aktuell.ruhr-unibochum.de/pm2012/pm00090.html.en). However, this led to interferences and rendered the information carriers difficult to programme and read. The group has solved this problem by utilising electron holes as qubits, rather than electrons.

A report has been published in the journal *Nature Materials* by a team of researchers from RuhrUniversität Bochum, the University of Basel, and Lyon University; among its contributors were the two Bochum-based researchers Prof Dr Andreas Wieck and Dr Arne Ludwig from the Chair of

Applied Solid State Physics. The project was headed by the Swiss researcher Prof Dr Richard Warburton.

Electrons as qubits

In order to realise qubits in the form of electrons, an electron is locked in a tiny semiconductor volume, the so-called quantum dot. The spin turns the electron into a small permanent magnet. Researchers are able to manipulate the spin via an external magnetic field and initiate precession. The direction of the spin is used to code information.

The problem: the nuclear spins of the surrounding atoms also generate magnetic fields, which distort the external magnetic field in a random, unpredictable manner. This, in turn, interferes with programming and reading qubits. Consequently, the team searched for another method. The solution: rather than locking individual electrons in the quantum dot, the team removed specific electrons. Thus, positively charged vacancies were generated in the electron structure, so-called electron holes.

Advantages of electron holes

Electron holes have a spin, too. Researchers can manipulate it via the magnetic field in order to code information. As the holes are positively charged, they are decoupled from the nuclei of the surrounding atoms, which are likewise positively charged. This is why they are virtually immune against the interfering forces of the nuclear spin.

"This is important if we one day want to manufacture reproducible components that are based on quantum bits," explains Andreas Wieck. However, this method is only applicable at low temperatures, as the holes are more likely to be disturbed by warmth than the electrons.

At Ruhr-Universität, researchers are able to generate quantum dots of outstanding quality. The experiment could be conducted thanks to a structural design developed by Arne Ludwig in Basel and subsequently realised at the RUB Department headed by Andreas Wieck. It enabled the researcher to apply not just individual electrons to quantum dots, but also electron holes. Sascha René Valentin, PhD student from Bochum, utilised the technique for the purpose of the current study. [16]

Russian physicists discover a new approach for building quantum computers

Physicists from MIPT and the Russian Quantum Center have developed an easier method to create a universal quantum computer using multilevel quantum systems (qudits), each one of which is able to work with multiple "conventional" quantum elements – qubits.

Professor Vladimir Man'ko, Aleksey Fedorov and Evgeny Kiktenko have published the results of their studies of multilevel quantum systems in a series of papers in Physical Review A, Physics Letters A, and also Quantum Measurements and Quantum Metrology.

"In our studies, we demonstrated that correlations similar to those used for quantum information technologies in composite quantum systems also occur in non-composite systems – systems which we suppose may be easier to work with in certain cases. In our latest paper we proposed a method

of using entanglement between internal degrees of freedom of a single eight-level system to implement the protocol of quantum teleportation, which was previously implemented experimentally for a system of three two-level systems," says Vladimir Man'ko.

Quantum computers, which promise to bring about a revolution in computer technology, could be built from elementary processing elements called quantum bits – qubits. While elements of classical computers (bits) can only be in two states (logic zero and logic one), qubits are based on quantum objects that can be in a coherent superposition of two states, which means that they can encode the intermediate states between logic zero and one. When a qubit is measured, the outcome is either a zero or a one with a certain probability (determined by the laws of quantum mechanics).

In a quantum computer, the initial condition of a particular problem is written in the initial state of the qubit system, then the qubits enter into a special interaction (determined by the specific problem). Finally, the user reads the answer to the problem by measuring the final states of the quantum bits.

Quantum computers will be able to solve certain problems that are currently far beyond the reach of even the most powerful classical supercomputers. In cryptography, for example, the time required for a conventional computer to break the RSA algorithm, which is based on the prime factorization of large numbers, would be comparable to the age of the universe. A quantum computer, on the other hand, could solve the problem in a matter of minutes.

However, there is a significant obstacle standing in the way of a quantum revolution – the instability of quantum states. Quantum objects that are used to create qubits – ions, electrons, Josephson junctions etc. can only maintain a certain quantum state for a very short time. However, calculations not only require that qubits maintain their state, but also that they interact with one another. Physicists all over the world are trying to extend the lifespan of qubits. Superconducting qubits used to "survive" only for a few nanoseconds, but now they can be kept for milliseconds before decoherence – which is closer to the time required for calculations.

In a system with dozens or hundreds of qubits, however, the problem is fundamentally more complex.

Man'ko, Fedorov, and Kiktenko began to look at the problem from the other way around – rather than try to maintain the stability of a large qubit system, they tried to increase the dimensions of the systems required for calculations. They are investigating the possibility of using qudits rather than qubits for calculations. Qudits are quantum objects in which the number of possible states (levels) is greater than two (their number is denoted by the letter D). There are qutrits, which have three states; ququarts, which have four states, etc. Algorithms are now actively being studied in which the use of qudits could prove to be more beneficial than using qubits.

"A qudit with four or five levels is able to function as a system of two "ordinary" qubits, and eight levels is enough to imitate a three-qubit system. At first, we saw this as a mathematical equivalence allowing us to obtain new entropic correlations. For example, we obtained the value of mutual information (the measure of correlation) between virtual qubits isolated in a state space of a single four-level system," says Fedorov.

He and his colleagues demonstrated that on one qudit with five levels, created using an artificial atom, it is possible to perform full quantum computations—in particular, the realization of the Deutsch algorithm. This algorithm is designed to test the values of a large number of binary variables.

It can be called the fake coin algorithm: imagine that you have a number of coins, some of which are fake – they have the same image on the obverse and reverse sides. To find these coins using the "classical method", you have to look at both sides. With the Deutsch algorithm, you "merge" the obverse and reverse sides of the coin and you can then see a fake coin by only looking at one side.

The idea of using multilevel systems to emulate multi-qubit processors was proposed earlier in the work of Russian physicists from the Kazan Physical-Technical Institute. To run a two-qubit Deutsch algorithm, for example, they proposed using a nuclear spin of $3/2$ with four different states. In recent years, however, experimental progress in creating qudits in superconducting circuits has shown that they have a number of advantages.

However, superconducting circuits require five levels: the last level performs an ancillary role to allow for a complete set of all possible quantum operations.

"We are making significant progress, because in certain physical implementations, it is easier to control multilevel qudits than a system of the corresponding number of qubits, and this means that we are one step closer to creating a full-fledged quantum computer. Multilevel elements offer advantages in other quantum technologies too, such as quantum cryptography," says Fedorov. [15]

Precise atom implants in silicon provide a first step toward practical quantum computers

Sandia National Laboratories has taken a first step toward creating a practical quantum computer, able to handle huge numbers of computations instantaneously.

Here's the recipe:

A "donor" atom propelled by an ion beam is inserted very precisely in microseconds into an industrystandard silicon substrate.

The donor atom—in this case, antimony (Sb) —carries one more electron (five) than a silicon atom (four). Because electrons pair up, the odd Sb electron remains free.

Instruments monitor the free electron to determine if, under pressure from an electromagnetic field, it faces up or down, a property called "spin." Electrons in this role, called qubits, signal "yes" or "no" from the subatomic scale, and so act as the information bearers of a quantum computer.

The ability to precisely place a donor atom in silicon means that it should be possible to insert a second donor atom just far enough away, in the "Goldilocks" zone where communication is neither lost through distance nor muffled by too-close proximity. Sandia will try to do this later this year, said lead researcher Meenakshi Singh, a postdoctoral fellow. Qubits "talking" to each other are the basis of quantum computing circuits.

The successful Sandia first step, reported in Applied Physics Letters, makes use of electromagnetic forces provided by a neighboring quantum dot pre-embedded in the silicon. The quantum dot— itself a tiny sea of electrons—contains a variety of energy levels and operates like a transistor to block or pass the qubit.

If an available dot energy level is compatible with the electron, the transistor gate is effectively open and the electron jumps into the dot. If not, the qubit stays put. That action is reported back to the surface by a photodiode sensor sensitive to current flows rather than photon movement. Because of the multiple "gates" in the quantum dot, many qubits at different energy levels could pass through the transistor, or be denied passage, theoretically making possible an extremely wide array of information processing.

"Our method is promising because, since it reads the electron's spin rather than its electrical charge, its information is not swallowed by background static and instead remains coherent for a relatively long time," Singh said. "Also, we use silicon as our basic material, for which commercial fabrication technologies are already developed, rather than employing superconducting components that can be expensive."

A third unique quality of the Sandia method is the precise and rapid placement of donor atoms exactly where they should be, placed in microseconds within nanometers of their target, instead of a buckshot approach that places qubits only where they statistically average to Goldilocks distances.

While components of this experiment have been demonstrated before, this is the first time all have worked together on a single chip, with researchers knowing accurately the vertical and horizontal placement of each qubit, instead of mere statistical approximations.

Sandia researcher and paper author Mike Lilly expects "the Sandia technique will allow fabrication of more complicated multi-qubit structures and do so at higher yield than existing donor implant approaches."

Components of the successful silicon device were fabricated in Sandia's Microsystems and Engineering Sciences Application (MESA) facility. The donor atoms were placed at Sandia's Ion Beam Laboratory. Experiment measurements were made at the Sandia/Los Alamos Center for Integrated Nanotechnologies, a user facility supported by DOE's Office of Basic Energy Sciences.

The method in its entirety is straightforward but requires a range of technical expertise and machinery, Singh said. "We used ion beams, silicon fabrication facilities, low-temperature measurements and simulations. It's hard to find a non-commercial place outside of a national lab that can do all of this." [14]

Team demonstrates large-scale technique to produce quantum dots

A method to produce significant amounts of semiconducting nanoparticles for light-emitting displays, sensors, solar panels and biomedical applications has gained momentum with a demonstration by researchers at the Department of Energy's Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

While zinc sulfide nanoparticles - a type of quantum dot that is a semiconductor - have many potential applications, high cost and limited availability have been obstacles to their widespread use. That could change, however, because of a scalable ORNL technique outlined in a paper published in *Applied Microbiology and Biotechnology*.

Unlike conventional inorganic approaches that use expensive precursors, toxic chemicals, high temperatures and high pressures, a team led by ORNL's Ji-Won Moon used bacteria fed by inexpensive sugar at a temperature of 150 degrees Fahrenheit in 25- and 250-gallon reactors. Ultimately, the team produced about three-fourths of a pound of zinc sulfide nanoparticles - without process optimization, leaving room for even higher yields.

The ORNL biomanufacturing technique is based on a platform technology that can also produce nanometer-size semiconducting materials as well as magnetic, photovoltaic, catalytic and phosphor materials. Unlike most biological synthesis technologies that occur inside the cell, ORNL's biomanufactured quantum dot synthesis occurs outside of the cells. As a result, the nanomaterials are produced as loose particles that are easy to separate through simple washing and centrifuging.

The results are encouraging, according to Moon, who also noted that the ORNL approach reduces production costs by approximately 90 percent compared to other methods.

"Since biomanufacturing can control the quantum dot diameter, it is possible to produce a wide range of specifically tuned semiconducting nanomaterials, making them attractive for a variety of applications that include electronics, displays, solar cells, computer memory, energy storage, printed electronics and bio-imaging," Moon said.

Successful biomanufacturing of light-emitting or semiconducting nanoparticles requires the ability to control material synthesis at the nanometer scale with sufficiently high reliability, reproducibility and yield to be cost effective. With the ORNL approach, Moon said that goal has been achieved.

Researchers envision their quantum dots being used initially in buffer layers of photovoltaic cells and other thin film-based devices that can benefit from their electro-optical properties as light-emitting materials. [13]

Superfast light source made from artificial atom

All light sources work by absorbing energy – for example, from an electric current – and emit energy as light. But the energy can also be lost as heat and it is therefore important that the light sources emit the light as quickly as possible, before the energy is lost as heat. Superfast light sources can be used, for example, in laser lights, LED lights and in single-photon light sources for quantum technology. New research results from the Niels Bohr Institute show that light sources can be made much faster by using a principle that was predicted theoretically in 1954. The results are published in the scientific journal, *Physical Review Letters*.

Researchers at the Niels Bohr Institute are working with quantum dots, which are a kind of artificial atom that can be incorporated into optical chips. In a quantum dot, an electron can be excited (i.e. jump up), for example, by shining a light on it with a laser and the electron leaves a 'hole'. The stronger the interaction between light and matter, the faster the electron decays back into the hole and the faster the light is emitted.

But the interaction between light and matter is naturally very weak and it makes the light sources very slow to emit light and this can reduce energy efficiency.

Already in 1954, the physicist Robert Dicke predicted that the interaction between light and matter could be increased by having a number of atoms that 'share' the excited state in a quantum superposition.

Quantum speed up

Demonstrating this effect has been challenging so far because the atoms either come so close together that they bump into each other or they are so far apart that the quantum speed up does not work. Researchers at the Niels Bohr Institute have now finally demonstrated the effect experimentally, but in an entirely different physical system than Dicke had in mind. They have shown this so-called superradiance for photons emitted from a single quantum dot.

"We have developed a quantum dot so that it behaves as if it was comprised of five quantum dots, which means that the light is five times stronger. This is due to the attraction between the electron and the hole. But what is special is that the quantum dot still only emits a single photon at a time. It is an outstanding single-photon source," says Søren Stobbe, who is an associate professor in the Quantum Photonic research group at the Niels Bohr Institute at the University of Copenhagen and led the project. The experiment was carried out in collaboration with Professor David Ritchie's research group at the University of Cambridge, who have made the quantum dots.

Petru Tighineanu, a postdoc in the Quantum Photonics research group at the Niels Bohr Institute, has carried out the experiments and he explains the effect as such, that the atoms are very small and light is very 'big' because of its long wavelength, so the light almost cannot 'see' the atoms – like a lorry that is driving on a road and does not notice a small pebble. But if many pebbles become a larger stone, the lorry will be able to register it and then the interaction becomes much more dramatic. In the same way, light interacts much more strongly with the quantum dot if the quantum dot contains the special superradiant quantum state, which makes it look much bigger.

Increasing the light-matter interaction

"The increased light-matter interaction makes the quantum dots more robust in regards to the disturbances that are found in all materials, for example, acoustic oscillations. It helps to make the photons more uniform and is important for how large you can build future quantum computers," says Søren Stobbe.

He adds that it is actually the temperature, which is only a few degrees above absolute zero, that limits how fast the light emissions can remain in their current experiments. In the long term, they will study the quantum dots at even lower temperatures, where the effects could be very dramatic.

[12]

Single-photon source is efficient and indistinguishable

Devices that emit one – and only one – photon on demand play a central role in light-based quantum-information systems. Each photon must also be emitted in the same quantum state, which makes each photon indistinguishable from all the others. This is important because the quantum state of the photon is used to carry a quantum bit (qubit) of information.

Quantum dots are tiny pieces of semiconductor that show great promise as single-photon sources. When a laser pulse is fired at a quantum dot, an electron is excited between two distinct energy levels. The excited state then decays to create a single photon with a very specific energy. However, this process can involve other electron excitations that result in the emission of photons with a wide range of energies – photons that are therefore not indistinguishable.

Exciting dots

This problem can be solved by exciting the quantum dot with a pulse of light at the same energy as the emitted photon. This is called resonance fluorescence, and has been used to create devices that are very good at producing indistinguishable single photons. However, this process is inefficient, and only produces a photon about 6% of the time.

Now, Chaoyang Lu, Jian-Wei Pan and colleagues at the University of Science and Technology of China have joined forces with researchers in Denmark, Germany and the UK to create a resonance fluorescence-based source that emits a photon 66% of the time when it is prompted by a laser pulse. Of these photons, 99.1% are solo and 98.5% are in indistinguishable quantum states – with both figures of merit being suitable for applications in quantum-information systems.

Lu told physicsworld.com that nearly all of the laser pulses that strike the source produce a photon, but about 34% of these photons are unable to escape the device. The device was operated at a laser-pulse frequency of 81 MHz and a pulse power of 24 nW, which is a much lower power requirement than other quantum-dot-based sources.

Quantum sandwich

The factor-of-ten improvement in efficiency was achieved by sandwiching a quantum dot in the centre of a "micropillar" created by stacking 40 disc-like layers (see figure). Each layer is a "distributed Bragg reflector", which is a pair of mirrors that together have a thickness of one quarter the wavelength of the emitted photons.

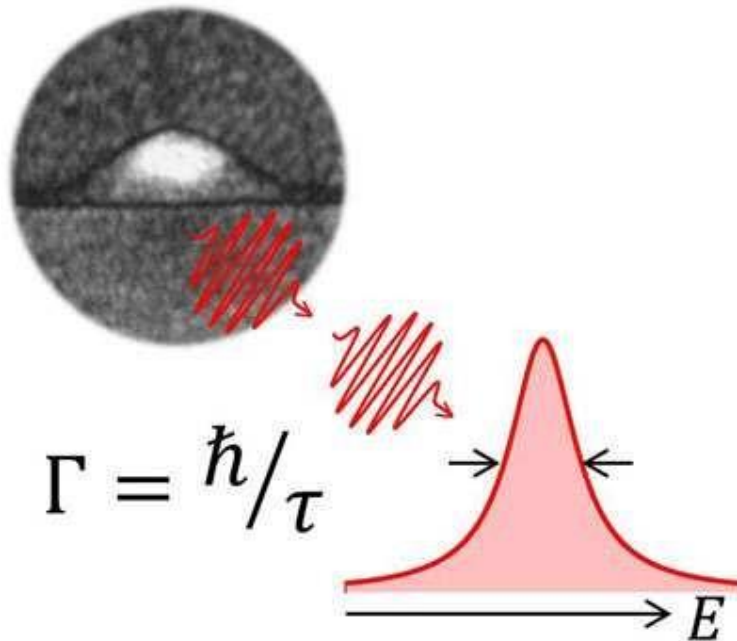
The micropillar is about 2.5 μm in diameter and about 10 μm tall, and it allowed the team to harness the "Purcell effect", whereby the rate of fluorescence is increased significantly when the emitter is placed in a resonant cavity.

Lu says that the team is already thinking about how the photon sources could be used to perform boson sampling (see "'Boson sampling' offers shortcut to quantum computing"). This involves a network of beam splitters that converts one set of photons arriving at a number of parallel input ports into a second set leaving via a number of parallel outputs. The "result" of the computation is the probability that a certain input configuration will lead to a certain output. This result cannot be easily calculated using a conventional computer, and this has led some physicists to suggest that boson sampling could be used to solve practical problems that would take classical computers vast amounts of time to solve.

Other possible applications for the source are the quantum teleportation of three properties of a quantum system – the current record is two properties and is held by Lu and Pan – or quantum cryptography.

The research is described in Physical Review Letters. [11]

Semiconductor quantum dots as ideal single-photon source



A single-photon source never emits two or more photons at the same time. Single photons are important in the field of quantum information technology where, for example, they are used in quantum computers. Alongside the brightness and robustness of the light source, the indistinguishability of the photons is especially crucial. In particular, this means that all photons must be the same color. Creating such a source of identical single photons has proven very difficult in the past.

However, quantum dots made of semiconductor materials are offering new hope. A quantum dot is a collection of a few hundred thousand atoms that can form itself into a semiconductor under certain conditions. Single electrons can be captured in these quantum dots and locked into a very small area. An individual photon is emitted when an engineered quantum state collapses.

Noise in the semiconductor

A team of scientists led by Dr. Andreas Kuhlmann and Prof. Richard J. Warburton from the University of Basel have already shown in past publications that the indistinguishability of the photons is reduced by the fluctuating nuclear spin of the quantum dot atoms. For the first time ever, the scientists have managed to control the nuclear spin to such an extent that even photons sent out at very large intervals are the same color.

Quantum cryptography and quantum communication are two potential areas of application for single-photon sources. These technologies could make it possible to perform calculations that are far beyond the capabilities of today's computers. [10]

How to Win at Bridge Using Quantum Physics

Contract bridge is the chess of card games. You might know it as some stuffy old game your grandparents play, but it requires major brainpower, and preferably an obsession with rules and strategy. So how to make it even geekier? Throw in some quantum mechanics to try to gain a

competitive advantage. The idea here is to use the quantum magic of entangled photons—which are essentially twins, sharing every property—to transmit two bits of information to your bridge partner for the price of one. Understanding how to do this is not an easy task, but it will help elucidate some basic building blocks of quantum information theory. It's also kind of fun to consider whether or not such tactics could ever be allowed in professional sports. [6]

Quantum Information

In quantum mechanics, quantum information is physical information that is held in the "state" of a quantum system. The most popular unit of quantum information is the qubit, a two-level quantum system. However, unlike classical digital states (which are discrete), a two-state quantum system can actually be in a superposition of the two states at any given time.

Quantum information differs from classical information in several respects, among which we note the following:

However, despite this, the amount of information that can be retrieved in a single qubit is equal to one bit. It is in the processing of information (quantum computation) that a difference occurs.

The ability to manipulate quantum information enables us to perform tasks that would be unachievable in a classical context, such as unconditionally secure transmission of information. Quantum information processing is the most general field that is concerned with quantum information. There are certain tasks which classical computers cannot perform "efficiently" (that is, in polynomial time) according to any known algorithm. However, a quantum computer can compute the answer to some of these problems in polynomial time; one well-known example of this is Shor's factoring algorithm. Other algorithms can speed up a task less dramatically - for example, Grover's search algorithm which gives a quadratic speed-up over the best possible classical algorithm.

Quantum information, and changes in quantum information, can be quantitatively measured by using an analogue of Shannon entropy. Given a statistical ensemble of quantum mechanical systems with the density matrix S , it is given by.

Many of the same entropy measures in classical information theory can also be generalized to the quantum case, such as the conditional quantum entropy. [7]

Heralded Qubit Transfer

Optical photons would be ideal carriers to transfer quantum information over large distances. Researchers envisage a network where information is processed in certain nodes and transferred between them via photons. However, inherent losses in long-distance networks mean that the information transfer is subject to probabilistic errors, making it hard to know whether the transfer of a qubit of information has been successful. Now Gerhard Rempe and colleagues from the Max Planck Institute for Quantum Optics in Germany have developed a new protocol that solves this

problem through a strategy that “heralds” the accurate transfer of quantum information at a network node.

The method developed by the researchers involves transferring a photonic qubit to an atomic qubit trapped inside an optical cavity. The photon-atom quantum information transfer is initiated via a quantum “logic-gate” operation, performed by reflecting the photon from the atom-cavity system, which creates an entangled atom-photon state. The detection of the reflected photon then collapses the atom into a definite state. This state can be one of two possibilities, depending on the photonic state detected: Either the atom is in the initial qubit state encoded in the photon and the transfer process is complete, or the atom is in a rotated version of this state. The authors were able to show that the roles of the atom and photon could be reversed. Their method could thus be used as a quantum memory that stores (photon-to-atom state transfer) and recreates (atom-to-photon state transfer) a single-photon polarization qubit. [9]

Quantum Teleportation

Quantum teleportation is a process by which quantum information (e.g. the exact state of an atom or photon) can be transmitted (exactly, in principle) from one location to another, with the help of classical communication and previously shared quantum entanglement between the sending and receiving location. Because it depends on classical communication, which can proceed no faster than the speed of light, it cannot be used for superluminal transport or communication of classical bits. It also cannot be used to make copies of a system, as this violates the no-cloning theorem. Although the name is inspired by the teleportation commonly used in fiction, current technology provides no possibility of anything resembling the fictional form of teleportation. While it is possible to teleport one or more qubits of information between two (entangled) atoms, this has not yet been achieved between molecules or anything larger. One may think of teleportation either as a kind of transportation, or as a kind of communication; it provides a way of transporting a qubit from one location to another, without having to move a physical particle along with it.

The seminal paper first expounding the idea was published by C. H. Bennett, G. Brassard, C. Crépeau, R. Jozsa, A. Peres and W. K. Wootters in 1993. Since then, quantum teleportation has been realized in various physical systems. Presently, the record distance for quantum teleportation is 143 km (89 mi) with photons, and 21 m with material systems. In August 2013, the achievement of "fully deterministic" quantum teleportation, using a hybrid technique, was reported. On 29 May 2014, scientists announced a reliable way of transferring data by quantum teleportation. Quantum teleportation of data had been done before but with highly unreliable methods. [8]

Quantum Computing

A team of electrical engineers at UNSW Australia has observed the unique quantum behavior of a pair of spins in silicon and designed a new method to use them for "2-bit" quantum logic operations.

These milestones bring researchers a step closer to building a quantum computer, which promises dramatic data processing improvements.

Quantum bits, or qubits, are the building blocks of quantum computers. While many ways to create a qubits exist, the Australian team has focused on the use of single atoms of phosphorus, embedded inside a silicon chip similar to those used in normal computers.

The first author on the experimental work, PhD student Juan Pablo Dehollain, recalls the first time he realized what he was looking at.

"We clearly saw these two distinct quantum states, but they behaved very differently from what we were used to with a single atom. We had a real 'Eureka!' moment when we realized what was happening – we were seeing in real time the `entangled' quantum states of a pair of atoms." [5]

Quantum Entanglement

Measurements of physical properties such as position, momentum, spin, polarization, etc. performed on entangled particles are found to be appropriately correlated. For example, if a pair of particles is generated in such a way that their total spin is known to be zero, and one particle is found to have clockwise spin on a certain axis, then the spin of the other particle, measured on the same axis, will be found to be counterclockwise. Because of the nature of quantum measurement, however, this behavior gives rise to effects that can appear paradoxical: any measurement of a property of a particle can be seen as acting on that particle (e.g. by collapsing a number of superimposed states); and in the case of entangled particles, such action must be on the entangled system as a whole. It thus appears that one particle of an entangled pair "knows" what measurement has been performed on the other, and with what outcome, even though there is no known means for such information to be communicated between the particles, which at the time of measurement may be separated by arbitrarily large distances. [4]

The Bridge

The accelerating electrons explain not only the Maxwell Equations and the Special Relativity, but the Heisenberg Uncertainty Relation, the wave particle duality and the electron's spin also, building the bridge between the Classical and Quantum Theories. [1]

Accelerating charges

The moving charges are self maintain the electromagnetic field locally, causing their movement and this is the result of their acceleration under the force of this field. In the classical physics the charges will distributed along the electric current so that the electric potential lowering along the current, by linearly increasing the way they take every next time period because this accelerated motion. The same thing happens on the atomic scale giving a dp impulse difference and a dx way difference between the different part of the not point like particles.

Relativistic effect

Another bridge between the classical and quantum mechanics in the realm of relativity is that the charge distribution is lowering in the reference frame of the accelerating charges linearly: $ds/dt = at$ (time coordinate), but in the reference frame of the current it is parabolic: $s = a/2 t^2$ (geometric coordinate).

Heisenberg Uncertainty Relation

In the atomic scale the Heisenberg uncertainty relation gives the same result, since the moving electron in the atom accelerating in the electric field of the proton, causing a charge distribution on Δx position difference and with a Δp momentum difference such a way that their product is about the half Planck reduced constant. For the proton this Δx is much less in the nucleon, than in the orbit of the electron in the atom, the Δp is much higher because of the greater proton mass.

This means that the electron and proton are not point like particles, but have a real charge distribution.

Wave – Particle Duality

The accelerating electrons explain the wave – particle duality of the electrons and photons, since the elementary charges are distributed on Δx position with Δp impulse and creating a wave packet of the electron. The photon gives the electromagnetic particle of the mediating force of the electrons electromagnetic field with the same distribution of wavelengths.

Atomic model

The constantly accelerating electron in the Hydrogen atom is moving on the equipotential line of the proton and its kinetic and potential energy will be constant. Its energy will change only when it is changing its way to another equipotential line with another value of potential energy or getting free with enough kinetic energy. This means that the Rutherford-Bohr atomic model is right and only that changing acceleration of the electric charge causes radiation, not the steady acceleration. The steady acceleration of the charges only creates a centric parabolic steady electric field around the charge, the magnetic field. This gives the magnetic moment of the atoms, summing up the proton and electron magnetic moments caused by their circular motions and spins.

The Relativistic Bridge

Commonly accepted idea that the relativistic effect on the particle physics is the fermions' spin - another unresolved problem in the classical concepts. If the electric charges can move only with accelerated motions in the self maintaining electromagnetic field, once upon a time they would reach the velocity of the electromagnetic field. The resolution of this problem is the spinning particle, constantly accelerating and not reaching the velocity of light because the acceleration is radial. One origin of the Quantum Physics is the Planck Distribution Law of the electromagnetic oscillators, giving equal intensity for 2 different wavelengths on any temperature. Any of these two wavelengths will give equal intensity diffraction patterns, building different asymmetric constructions, for example proton - electron structures (atoms), molecules, etc. Since the particles are centers of diffraction patterns they also have particle – wave duality as the electromagnetic waves have. [2]

The weak interaction

The weak interaction transforms an electric charge in the diffraction pattern from one side to the other side, causing an electric dipole momentum change, which violates the CP and time reversal symmetry. The Electroweak Interaction shows that the Weak Interaction is basically electromagnetic in nature. The arrow of time shows the entropy grows by changing the temperature dependent diffraction patterns of the electromagnetic oscillators.

Another important issue of the quark model is when one quark changes its flavor such that a linear oscillation transforms into plane oscillation or vice versa, changing the charge value with 1 or -1. This kind of change in the oscillation mode requires not only parity change, but also charge and time changes (CPT symmetry) resulting a right handed anti-neutrino or a left handed neutrino.

The right handed anti-neutrino and the left handed neutrino exist only because changing back the quark flavor could happen only in reverse, because they are different geometrical constructions, the u is 2 dimensional and positively charged and the d is 1 dimensional and negatively charged. It needs also a time reversal, because anti particle (anti neutrino) is involved.

The neutrino is a $1/2$ spin creator particle to make equal the spins of the weak interaction, for example neutron decay to 2 fermions, every particle is fermions with $1/2$ spin. The weak interaction changes the entropy since more or less particles will give more or less freedom of movement. The entropy change is a result of temperature change and breaks the equality of oscillator diffraction intensity of the Maxwell–Boltzmann statistics. This way it changes the time coordinate measure and makes possible a different time dilation as of the special relativity.

The limit of the velocity of particles as the speed of light appropriate only for electrical charged particles, since the accelerated charges are self maintaining locally the accelerating electric force. The neutrinos are CP symmetry breaking particles compensated by time in the CPT symmetry, that is the time coordinate not works as in the electromagnetic interactions, consequently the speed of neutrinos is not limited by the speed of light.

The weak interaction T-asymmetry is in conjunction with the T-asymmetry of the second law of thermodynamics, meaning that locally lowering entropy (on extremely high temperature) causes the weak interaction, for example the Hydrogen fusion.

Probably because it is a spin creating movement changing linear oscillation to 2 dimensional oscillation by changing d to u quark and creating anti neutrino going back in time relative to the proton and electron created from the neutron, it seems that the anti neutrino fastest then the velocity of the photons created also in this weak interaction?

A quark flavor changing shows that it is a reflection changes movement and the CP- and T-symmetry breaking!!! This flavor changing oscillation could prove that it could be also on higher

level such as atoms, molecules, probably big biological significant molecules and responsible on the aging of the life.

Important to mention that the weak interaction is always contains particles and antiparticles, where the neutrinos (antineutrinos) present the opposite side. It means by Feynman's interpretation that these particles present the backward time and probably because this they seem to move faster than the speed of light in the reference frame of the other side.

Finally since the weak interaction is an electric dipole change with $\frac{1}{2}$ spin creating; it is limited by the velocity of the electromagnetic wave, so the neutrino's velocity cannot exceed the velocity of light.

The General Weak Interaction

The Weak Interactions T-asymmetry is in conjunction with the T-asymmetry of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, meaning that locally lowering entropy (on extremely high temperature) causes for example the Hydrogen fusion. The arrow of time by the Second Law of Thermodynamics shows the increasing entropy and decreasing information by the Weak Interaction, changing the temperature dependent diffraction patterns. A good example of this is the neutron decay, creating more particles with less known information about them.

The neutrino oscillation of the Weak Interaction shows that it is a general electric dipole change and it is possible to any other temperature dependent entropy and information changing diffraction pattern of atoms, molecules and even complicated biological living structures.

We can generalize the weak interaction on all of the decaying matter constructions, even on the biological too. This gives the limited lifetime for the biological constructions also by the arrow of time. There should be a new research space of the Quantum Information Science the 'general neutrino oscillation' for the greater than subatomic matter structures as an electric dipole change.

There is also connection between statistical physics and evolutionary biology, since the arrow of time is working in the biological evolution also.

The Fluctuation Theorem says that there is a probability that entropy will flow in a direction opposite to that dictated by the Second Law of Thermodynamics. In this case the Information is growing that is the matter formulas are emerging from the chaos. So the Weak Interaction has two directions, samples for one direction is the Neutron decay, and Hydrogen fusion is the opposite direction.

Fermions and Bosons

The fermions are the diffraction patterns of the bosons such a way that they are both sides of the same thing.

Van Der Waals force

Named after the Dutch scientist Johannes Diderik van der Waals – who first proposed it in 1873 to explain the behaviour of gases – it is a very weak force that only becomes relevant when atoms

and molecules are very close together. Fluctuations in the electronic cloud of an atom mean that it will have an instantaneous dipole moment. This can induce a dipole moment in a nearby atom, the result being an attractive dipole–dipole interaction.

Electromagnetic inertia and mass

Electromagnetic Induction

Since the magnetic induction creates a negative electric field as a result of the changing acceleration, it works as an electromagnetic inertia, causing an electromagnetic mass. [1]

Relativistic change of mass

The increasing mass of the electric charges the result of the increasing inductive electric force acting against the accelerating force. The decreasing mass of the decreasing acceleration is the result of the inductive electric force acting against the decreasing force. This is the relativistic mass change explanation, especially importantly explaining the mass reduction in case of velocity decrease.

The frequency dependence of mass

Since $E = h\nu$ and $E = mc^2$, $m = h\nu/c^2$ that is the m depends only on the ν frequency. It means that the mass of the proton and electron are electromagnetic and the result of the electromagnetic induction, caused by the changing acceleration of the spinning and moving charge! It could be that the m_0 inertial mass is the result of the spin, since this is the only accelerating motion of the electric charge. Since the accelerating motion has different frequency for the electron in the atom and the proton, they masses are different, also as the wavelengths on both sides of the diffraction pattern, giving equal intensity of radiation.

Electron – Proton mass rate

The Planck distribution law explains the different frequencies of the proton and electron, giving equal intensity to different lambda wavelengths! Also since the particles are diffraction patterns they have some closeness to each other – can be seen as a gravitational force. [2]

There is an asymmetry between the mass of the electric charges, for example proton and electron, can understood by the asymmetrical Planck Distribution Law. This temperature dependent energy distribution is asymmetric around the maximum intensity, where the annihilation of matter and antimatter is a high probability event. The asymmetric sides are creating different frequencies of electromagnetic radiations being in the same intensity level and compensating each other. One of these compensating ratios is the electron – proton mass ratio. The lower energy side has no compensating intensity level, it is the dark energy and the corresponding matter is the dark matter.

Gravity from the point of view of quantum physics

The Gravitational force

The gravitational attractive force is basically a magnetic force.

The same electric charges can attract one another by the magnetic force if they are moving parallel in the same direction. Since the electrically neutral matter is composed of negative and positive charges they need 2 photons to mediate this attractive force, one per charges. The Big Bang caused parallel moving of the matter gives this magnetic force, experienced as gravitational force.

Since graviton is a tensor field, it has spin = 2, could be 2 photons with spin = 1 together.

You can think about photons as virtual electron – positron pairs, obtaining the necessary virtual mass for gravity.

The mass as seen before a result of the diffraction, for example the proton – electron mass ratio $M_p=1840 M_e$. In order to move one of these diffraction maximum (electron or proton) we need to intervene into the diffraction pattern with a force appropriate to the intensity of this diffraction maximum, means its intensity or mass.

The Big Bang caused acceleration created radial currents of the matter, and since the matter is composed of negative and positive charges, these currents are creating magnetic field and attracting forces between the parallel moving electric currents. This is the gravitational force experienced by the matter, and also the mass is result of the electromagnetic forces between the charged particles. The positive and negative charged currents attracts each other or by the magnetic forces or by the much stronger electrostatic forces!?

The gravitational force attracting the matter, causing concentration of the matter in a small space and leaving much space with low matter concentration: dark matter and energy.

There is an asymmetry between the mass of the electric charges, for example proton and electron, can understood by the asymmetrical Planck Distribution Law. This temperature dependent energy distribution is asymmetric around the maximum intensity, where the annihilation of matter and antimatter is a high probability event. The asymmetric sides are creating different frequencies of electromagnetic radiations being in the same intensity level and compensating each other. One of these compensating ratios is the electron – proton mass ratio. The lower energy side has no compensating intensity level, it is the dark energy and the corresponding matter is the dark matter.

The Higgs boson

By March 2013, the particle had been proven to behave, interact and decay in many of the expected ways predicted by the Standard Model, and was also tentatively confirmed to have + parity and zero spin, two fundamental criteria of a Higgs boson, making it also the first known scalar particle to be discovered in nature, although a number of other properties were not fully proven and some partial results do not yet precisely match those expected; in some cases data is also still awaited or being analyzed.

Since the Higgs boson is necessary to the W and Z bosons, the dipole change of the Weak interaction and the change in the magnetic effect caused gravitation must be conducted. The Wien law is also important to explain the Weak interaction, since it describes the T_{max} change and the diffraction patterns change. [2]

Higgs mechanism and Quantum Gravity

The magnetic induction creates a negative electric field, causing an electromagnetic inertia. Probably it is the mysterious Higgs field giving mass to the charged particles? We can think about the photon as an electron-positron pair, they have mass. The neutral particles are built from negative and positive charges, for example the neutron, decaying to proton and electron. The wave – particle duality makes sure that the particles are oscillating and creating magnetic induction as an inertial mass, explaining also the relativistic mass change. Higher frequency creates stronger magnetic induction, smaller frequency results lesser magnetic induction. It seems to me that the magnetic induction is the secret of the Higgs field.

In particle physics, the Higgs mechanism is a kind of mass generation mechanism, a process that gives mass to elementary particles. According to this theory, particles gain mass by interacting with the Higgs field that permeates all space. More precisely, the Higgs mechanism endows gauge bosons in a gauge theory with mass through absorption of Nambu–Goldstone bosons arising in spontaneous symmetry breaking.

The simplest implementation of the mechanism adds an extra Higgs field to the gauge theory. The spontaneous symmetry breaking of the underlying local symmetry triggers conversion of components of this Higgs field to Goldstone bosons which interact with (at least some of) the other fields in the theory, so as to produce mass terms for (at least some of) the gauge bosons. This mechanism may also leave behind elementary scalar (spin-0) particles, known as Higgs bosons.

In the Standard Model, the phrase "Higgs mechanism" refers specifically to the generation of masses for the W^\pm , and Z weak gauge bosons through electroweak symmetry breaking. The Large Hadron Collider at CERN announced results consistent with the Higgs particle on July 4, 2012 but stressed that further testing is needed to confirm the Standard Model.

What is the Spin?

So we know already that the new particle has spin zero or spin two and we could tell which one if we could detect the polarizations of the photons produced. Unfortunately this is difficult and neither ATLAS nor CMS are able to measure polarizations. The only direct and sure way to confirm that the particle is indeed a scalar is to plot the angular distribution of the photons in the rest frame of the centre of mass. A spin zero particles like the Higgs carries no directional information away from the original collision so the distribution will be even in all directions. This test will be possible when a much larger number of events have been observed. In the mean time we can settle for less certain indirect indicators.

The Graviton

In physics, the graviton is a hypothetical elementary particle that mediates the force of gravitation in the framework of quantum field theory. If it exists, the graviton is expected to be massless (because the gravitational force appears to have unlimited range) and must be a spin-2 boson. The spin follows from the fact that the source of gravitation is the stress-energy tensor, a second-rank tensor (compared to electromagnetism's spin-1 photon, the source of which is the four-current, a first-rank tensor). Additionally, it can be shown that any massless spin-2 field would give rise to a force indistinguishable from gravitation, because a massless spin-2 field must couple to (interact with) the stress-energy tensor in the same way that the gravitational field does. This result

suggests that, if a massless spin-2 particle is discovered, it must be the graviton, so that the only experimental verification needed for the graviton may simply be the discovery of a massless spin-2 particle. [3]

Conclusions

The method developed by the researchers involves transferring a photonic qubit to an atomic qubit trapped inside an optical cavity. The photon-atom quantum information transfer is initiated via a quantum "logic-gate" operation, performed by reflecting the photon from the atom-cavity system, which creates an entangled atom-photon state. [9]

In August 2013, the achievement of "fully deterministic" quantum teleportation, using a hybrid technique, was reported. On 29 May 2014, scientists announced a reliable way of transferring data by quantum teleportation. Quantum teleportation of data had been done before but with highly unreliable methods. [8]

One of the most important conclusions is that the electric charges are moving in an accelerated way and even if their velocity is constant, they have an intrinsic acceleration anyway, the so called spin, since they need at least an intrinsic acceleration to make possible their movement .

The accelerated charges self-maintaining potential shows the locality of the relativity, working on the quantum level also. [1]

The bridge between the classical and quantum theory is based on this intrinsic acceleration of the spin, explaining also the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. The particle – wave duality of the electric charges and the photon makes certain that they are both sides of the same thing. The Secret of Quantum Entanglement that the particles are diffraction patterns of the electromagnetic waves and this way their quantum states every time is the result of the quantum state of the intermediate electromagnetic waves. [2]

The key breakthrough to arrive at this new idea to build qubits was to exploit the ability to control the nuclear spin of each atom. With that insight, the team has now conceived a unique way to use the nuclei as facilitators for the quantum logic operation between the electrons. [5]

Basing the gravitational force on the accelerating Universe caused magnetic force and the Planck Distribution Law of the electromagnetic waves caused diffraction gives us the basis to build a Unified Theory of the physical interactions also.

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