Acknowledgments

This thesis is an exploration for me, but it cannot be accredited to just myself. I cannot achieve even one percent of what I put down in this thesis on my own, so please allow me to express my profound gratitude in the limited space below.

To Prof. Andrew Larkoski:

Thanks for all the patient guidance, inspiring ideas, and continued encouragement throughout this project and throughout my academic life at Reed. I am grateful for this valuable chance to work with and learn from you. Looking back a year ago, I would not have imagined myself knowing and working with anything like spinor helicity and amplitudes. There are so many aspects of my research and academic life that are influenced or even shaped by you, from how to think and ask, to how to show and present. Although "lying to you audience if it leads to a greater truth" is our strategy when running short on time in a presentation, like this one-paragraph acknowledgment, I am afraid that I cannot take that advice here and lie to you about how excited I am to wrap up this thesis. It is because conducting this thesis project is really a process that I wouldn't like to wrap up. It has been such a delight that setting some conclusion feels so strange. Fortunately, I know that I probably cannot resist this tease of learning physics, and I am hoping that one day, I can be a qualified scholar with a broader stock of knowledge and more fruitful projects like this one. And when that day comes, I hope I can proudly say, "I have now concluded my thesis work guided by Andrew!"

To Prof. Lucas Illing:

Thank you for taking me as your mentee when I was in my first year at Reed. It was that summer research project that encouraged me to pursue a life as a researcher. I still remember the amazement and thrill I had when I saw the mysterious signal from the nonlinear circuit I built. At that moment, I realized how exciting my "routine lab work" could be which rewards me with something unexpected and unknown to me. You also were the first person with whom I coauthored an academic paper, and the first person who sponsored, encouraged, and helped my first external presentation. I am surprised and grateful for your effort in showing me the life as a researcher, sharing your thoughts about various projects, helping me out when I got confused, and treating me not only as a student but also as a capable collaborator (which may be a title that I have not yet earned). My gratitude to you will be in every research project in which I participate.

To faculties and staff of the Department of Physics at Reed College:

Thank you all for building such an inclusive and family-like community for me to thrive.

The brilliant curriculum shapes the fundamentals of my understanding of physics from which I will benefit for the rest of my life. I cannot and will not forget the eye-opening observation of M33 in Alison's astrophysics class, the tie-wearing oral exam of Andrew's elementary particle class, the impeccable board work (and drawing!) of Darrell's quantum class, the elegant acrylic optic stand perfected by Jay's design, the weekly-due full-length lab reports (really makes you stronger) of Jenna's JLab I, the inspiring feedbacks and conversations from Joel's sonorous and cheerful voice, the hypersensitive interferometer I built with the kind help of John, the lasing excitement of Lucas's optics class, and the 50-minute (but-according-to-the-instruction-15-minute) plicker-ful presentation in Ragnar's electrodynamics class. It is impossible to express the four-year-long belongingness and thankfulness in one paragraph, but I hope a few scattered moments can at least provide a peek of my bliss as a part of the Physics Department.

To all faculty members from whom I took a class and learned:

Thank you for helping me form my own knowledge web. As time evolves, it will be more and more difficult for me to remember what Lucretius had to say in *De Rerum Natura*, what the subtleties are between scientific realism and constructive empiricism, how one constructs a Grothendieck completion of a monoid, what a Schumpeterian growth is, which declension I should use after the preposition "auf" *etc.* But I know that they have quietly become a part of the knowledge stock which powers me through this enigmatic exploration called life. This knowledge web, functioning as a map, will guide me through the time of bewilderment and perplexity, and it is an honor to have you all to be parts of the sources and exemplary models for the formation of this web.

To Dr. Ying Xu:

You are the first person who showed me what physics looks like beyond textbooks, and you are the first-ever teacher-mentor-friend I have. I cannot imagine myself being an actual physics student without those derivations filled with intriguing concepts and techniques you showed me, without those valuable references you recommended to me, without those encouraging supports you gave me. I know it may be challenging, if not impossible, but I will try to spread the passion in physics you shared with me in the same degree to more people who, like who I once was, are not aware of the beauty of physics. 谢谢您。

To Ms. Yingbo Ye:

You are my first physics teacher, and it was still when I was an enthusiastic musician and had no interest in middle-school mathematics. My first contact with physics should have ended my path in physics since physics at that time resembled too much like those frightening triangles and hyperbolas. You are the person who gave me a second chance to re-exam what physics is about, and my academic passion traces all the way back to that little nudge you gave me when I was scared by the first appearance of physics. 谢谢您。

To Martin (Jiaqi) Ying and Cosmos (Zhongtian) Dong:

You guys are the best officemates! I get inspired a lot in this project from our conversations, not even mentioning hearing about the exciting projects that you two are working on. It is the anecdotes of our thesis meetings that we share in the office, the new knowledge

about other fields of physics from our conversations, and the warmth of helping each other out when one of us cannot make further progress that powered my daily life, a life of submerging into pages of calculations. You have my best wishes for a bright future. 谢谢你们。

To Hyun Soo Kim:

You are a brilliant and enthusiastic physicist, an inspiring classmate, a good tea party joiner and host, an adroit Civ player, and surely a meme lord. It is my fortune to be your friend, and I have no doubt that your academic pursuit is getting more impressive and more enjoyable. Thanks, mate.

To my lovely family:

致我可爱的家庭:

How all this thesis (and even my undergraduate life) starts is attributed to your four-year (and also twenty-year) endless unrequited support. I cannot singlehandedly start an academic life in the U.S.A. researching the physics I love. It is your sound bolster behind me that enables my dream-come-true, completing a thesis of which I never thought. For that, I am not sure how I may return this profound love. I can only hope that by dedicating this thesis to you, I can show my sincere gratitude to all those which I can't return fully.

这一切的开始都取决于四年来(以及这二十多年来)您们对我的无尽支持。我不可能够凭一己之力来到美国学习、生活、研究我感兴趣的物理。是您们背后的付出让我梦想成真,完成了一篇我未曾想象过的论文,对此我无以为报。只希望把这篇论文提献给您们能够表达我深深的感激。

—Yunjia Bao, Portland, May 2020—包昀嘉 庚子年五月于珀特兰