
STATE-DEPENDENT FORCES IN COLD QUANTUM GASES

Christopher Billington

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Supervisory committee:

Prof Kristian Helmerson

Dr Lincoln Turner

Dr Russell Anderson



School of Physics and Astronomy
Monash University

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CHAPTER 4

Software for experiment control and analysis

SOFTWARE UNDERLIES A HUGE PART of physicists' work, whether experimental or theoretical. On the experimental side, increasingly complex and precise experiments in atomic physics require increasingly sophisticated control of the lasers, magnetic coils, frequency synthesisers, cameras, etc. that interact with the quantum systems being studied. Use of these devices necessitates some kind of interface between the experimentalist and each device, and whilst interfaces of the past were more likely to be knobs and dials on the front of the device, they are increasingly taking the form of software. Software is needed to convert from a smooth ramp of voltages designed to ramp up a magnetic field slowly into a finite list of voltages and times that a device can output with precise timing to make it happen. Software is needed to transmit this data to the device in question, using a communications protocol and data format compatible with the device. Software is required to extract the images from cameras and voltage time series from acquisition devices and store them in computer memory or on disk. And finally, software is required to compute meaningful results from this raw data.

A significant fraction of my PhD was spent developing, maintaining and improving the laboratory control system software suite that has emerged from the Quantum Fluids group at Monash: the *labscript suite*. Originally envisioned as a Python [1] library for generating instructions for programmable hardware via a LabVIEW [2] graphical interface, the software suite grew to encompass most aspects of day-to-day control and analysis in our labs. At present it comprises several separate programs/libraries—depending on how one chooses to draw the borders between them—that control every aspect of a cold atom physics experiment, from setting parameters to analysing results. An overview of the process is shown in Figure 4.1.

The types of experiments the labscript suite addresses are ‘shot-based’—ones in which precise timing is required over hardware during some interval while a sequence of instructions is executed (a ‘shot’), after which the hardware is idle until the next shot. Many repetitions of similar shots are often performed to build up measurement statistics or investigate the response of a system to a change in one or more parameters. This general method of hardware control and data acquisition is common to many experiments in cold quantum gases and trapped ions [3, 4], quantum computation [5, 6], and quantum simulation [7, 8].

In this chapter, I'll first give a quick overview of each program and what it does. Then I'll outline the design and development approaches we undertook with the labscript suite and comment on the effects these choices have had on the course of the project in subsequent years. Then I'll summarise developments since the publication of our paper on the

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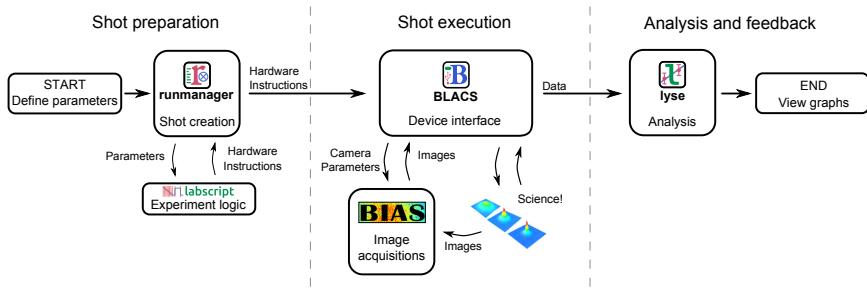


Figure 4.1: The `labscrip` suite comprises a number of libraries and programs allowing one to perform precisely timed experiments, each realisation of which we call a ‘shot’, using commodity hardware such as devices from SpinCore, NovaTech, National Instruments and others. Experiment logic is described by the user in the form Python code using the `labscript` Python module, which produces from the user’s code a set of low-level instructions appropriate for being programmed into the hardware. The program `runmanager` provides a graphical interface for inputting parameters into this experiment logic, and allows this process to be repeated to produce multiple sets of instructions for repeated execution of the shot with different parameters. Not shown in this flowchart is `runviewer`, a graphical program displaying plots of the instructions that have been generated by `labscript`. Once the instructions have been generated, the program `BLACS` (Better Lab Apparatus Control System) is responsible for communicating with the hardware: programming in the generated instructions, beginning the experiment, and saving any acquired data to file. An auxiliary LabVIEW program called `BIAS` (BEC Image Acquisition System) is used for communication with cameras in Monash Quantum Fluids group laboratories, though other groups use a number of alternate programs in its place, including a stripped-down derivative called `unBIASed`, as well as several other Python-based ‘camera servers’. After `BLACS` is finished with a shot, the data is passed to `lyse`, which executes user-written Python scripts on each shot to analyse the results, and also executes scripts that operate on sets of data over multiple shots, producing dynamically updating plots. In addition to providing a graphical interface for setting parameters, `runmanager` provides a Python library for compiling shots programmatically, allowing the flowchart to close into a loop and produce shots with parameters based on analysis results. This can be used to optimise experiment outcomes with respect to a given figure of merit. Figure reused with permission from Starkey et al. [9], © American Institute of Physics 2013.

software, *A scripted control system for autonomous hardware-timed experiments* [9], which is reproduced at the end of this chapter. I will also discuss our development roadmap. Further details on the role of each program in the suite and the design underlying it are available in the paper, and a more thorough presentation of the software, its design principles, comparisons with other laboratory control software, and recent and future developments are available in Philip Starkey’s thesis [10].

The `labscrip` suite has been adopted by world-leading research groups at the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the University of Maryland, National Research Laboratories, US Army Research Laboratory, Stanford University, JILA, the University of Rochester, Dartmouth College, Universität Tübingen, Bates College, Universität Basel, and Technische Universität Darmstadt. It continues to grow as a collaborative open-source software project benefiting the experimental physics community.

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4.1 The labscript suite

4.1.1 labscript

`labscript` is a library: that is, it is a set of classes, functions and methods that can be called from user-written code. We call `labscript` a *compiler*, because the functions, classes and methods within it generate tables of low-level instructions appropriate for programming into devices to execute the experiment described by the user. Thus the user writes a line of code such as `MOT_beams.constant(t=3, 100, 'mW')` and this will add an entry to the table of instructions for whichever digital-to-analogue converter (DAC) is controlling the MOT beams to output 3 mW at $t = 3$ s after the beginning of the experiment. This is a simple example, but has advantages over having a human write the table directly.¹ After one has told the `labscript` compiler with this line that the MOT beams should have their control voltage² set to a particular value, it knows that at all later times the same state should remain, until the user says otherwise. Thus the user doesn't need to also change all future rows of the table: it is enough to declare a change once.

`labscript` automates much of the tedious, repetitive work of generating those lists of voltages, frequencies, and digital values required to control an apparatus during a shot. This tedium mostly comes from the fact that devices share a common timebase, trigger, or clock. Synchronised output is achieved using a method called *pseudoclocking*, in which timing pulses are produced by a 'pseudoclock' device whenever a state change is required by one or more output devices. These pulses are received by several devices, necessitating that all devices sharing a pseudoclock have an entry in their corresponding tables in order to output the correct value (possibly the same as the previous value they were outputting) at that time, lest they get too far ahead and output a value that was meant for a later time. `labscript` takes high level descriptions of what voltages etc. are required at different times, puts them on a common timing base and generates the correct tables of values. It also collects any other instructions such as camera exposure durations, or the position a translation stage should move to at the start of the experiment even though it is not capable of moving quickly during the experiment. These instructions are processed by `labscript` and saved to a file in the Hierarchical Data Format, version 5 [11] (HDF5). HDF5 is a convenient, standardised, cross-platform, and self-documenting format with widespread adoption across many disciplines, and compatibility with a wide range of programming and analysis environments, providing a high degree of interoperability between the data files produced by the `labscript` suite and other software tools.

¹Most existing control systems in our field are more-or-less in the form of a large table with each row corresponding to a particular interval during the shot, with the user editing values in the table directly, or typing mathematical expressions in the table describing signal generation as a function of time between one row of the table and the next.

²In the example, the user provided a power in units of milliwatts. `labscript` device objects can include user-provided unit conversion functions, allowing instructions to be given in more physically meaningful units for the common case of an output voltage ultimately controlling a laser power or some other physical quantity via a known conversion function.

4.1.2 runmanager

A thirty second or so experiment shot (a typical duration for a BEC experiment, though ion trapping experiments are often much shorter) is not the only timescale on which experimentalists require automation. Commonly, the same brief experiment is repeated over a range of input parameters spanning some (possibly multi-dimensional) parameter space. In addition, there are many quantities involved in an experiment that do not vary often, but nonetheless need to be managed. `runmanager` is a program providing a graphical user interface (GUI) for entering and managing such parameters and describing the parameter spaces over which they vary. Users can enter simple numbers or expressions (including expressions for non-numerical variables) into the interface, or lists of numbers that can optionally be considered a description of a dimension of a parameter space. These dimensions may be combined in an outer product resulting in a larger space, or equal length dimensions may be looped over in tandem, if two or more variables are intended to vary together rather than independently.

The GUI of `runmanager` is shown in Figure 4.2. The user specifies in `runmanager`'s interface which Python file contains their 'experiment script', i.e. a Python script describing

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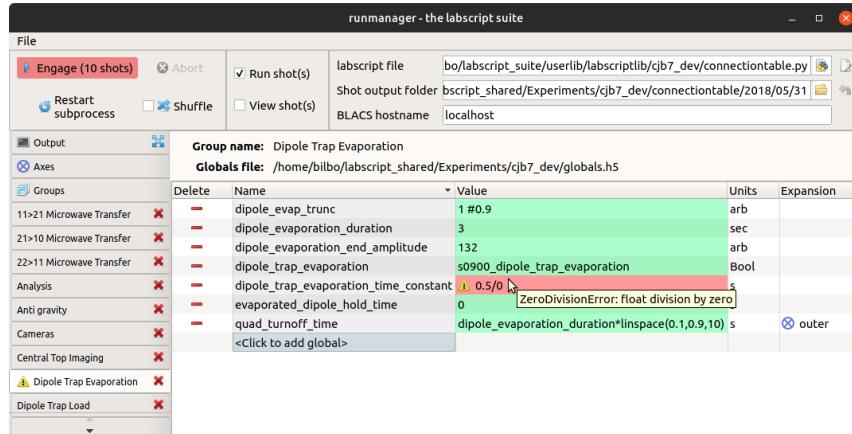


Figure 4.2: The `runmanager` GUI, showing the interface for entering ‘globals’, so called because they appear to the user’s code as global variables. Boolean globals can be turned on and off with a checkbox, and expressions resulting in an error are highlighted in red. The ‘expansion’ column is where the user specifies whether a global should be considered a list of values to loop over, re-running the experiment each time, and if so if that loop should be combined with other such globals to loop over the resulting product space (‘outer’) or whether the globals should be looped over together (‘zip’³). Zipped globals can be grouped together by typing a name in the expansion column to identify which ‘zip group’ the global belongs to. Globals in the same zip group will loop together, and multiple zip groups will form separate axes of a product space. Globals can be entered as Python expressions, including expressions containing the names of other globals. The evaluated result of an expression, or the error message if it could not be evaluated, is displayed on mouse-over for each global.

the experiment logic using the `labscript` library. When the user clicks the ‘engage’ button, `runmanager` produces one `HDF5` file—each containing a set of parameters—for each point in the parameter space described by those parameters currently active in the `runmanager` interface. For each `HDF5` file `runmanager` initialises the `labscript` library such that these values become global variables from the perspective of the user’s experiment script, which then runs. For this reason we call the parameters ‘globals’. After the user’s instructions are processed, the `labscript` library writes the resulting low-level hardware instructions to that same `HDF5` file.

We refer to the process of passing the `HDF5` file to the user’s code and running it as ‘compilation’, and the resulting `HDF5` file containing both globals and hardware instructions a ‘compiled shot file’. Compilation occurs in a separate process from the `runmanager` graphical interface, allowing a clean separation between user code and `runmanager`, so that even the most low-level crashes of the user’s code cannot crash `runmanager` and only require a restart of its subprocess. This type of separation is a repeated theme in the `labscript` suite and has been invaluable for making robust programs that can continue to operate in the case of inevitable crashes of user code, or of bugs within `labscript` suite or third-party code.

4.1.3 runviewer

`runviewer` is a program for viewing the results of `labscript` compilation in the form of graphical plots of the voltages, digital values, frequencies etc. that comprise the hardware

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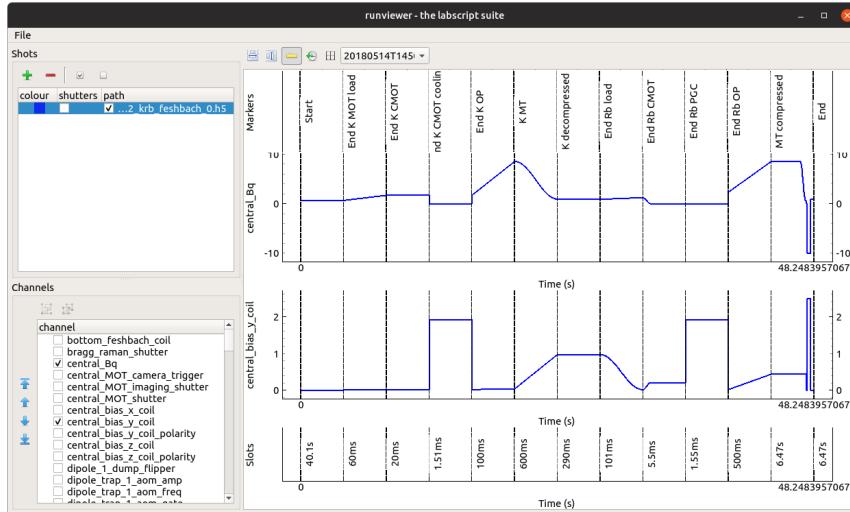


Figure 4.3: The interface of `runviewer`, showing the recently-added ‘nonlinear time’ feature, in which different intervals of the shot—as declared with `labscript` code—can be meaningfully shown on the same time axis in equal proportion despite being of very different duration.

instructions produced. This is useful for debugging experiment design and timing of instructions, as well as verifying that a newly made `labscript` device class (the ‘driver’ code for each device that converts `labscript`’s intermediate description of hardware instructions into the actual format required for a given device) is functioning as intended. The GUI of `runviewer` is shown in Figure 4.3, illustrating the display of the output values of a number of devices varying over the course of the shot.

4.1.4 BLACS

`BLACS` (Better Lab Apparatus Control System) is a graphical program responsible for queueing experiment shots as compiled by `labscript` in tandem with `runmanager`, and executing them one after the other on the hardware. As such, `BLACS` interacts with a number of Python classes that serve as *drivers* for each device, containing code that uses the required software libraries, hardware drivers or communication protocols to communicate with each device. `BLACS` executes the code for communicating with each device in a separate process in order to isolate them from each other, so that communication failures, software bugs, or other failures that may occur in the interactions with one device will not stop `BLACS` from continuing to function in other respects. Errors are presented graphically and each device process may be restarted with the click of a button if something goes wrong, re-initialising communication with the offending device. This is useful both for responding to an unexpected failure, and for debugging when developing a driver for a new device (or new features for an existing device) to be integrated with the `labscript` suite.

Upon receiving an `HDF5` file from `runmanager`, `BLACS` adds it to the queue of shots to be executed on the hardware. It then executes these shots in order, by programming the instructions stored in the `HDF5` file into each device, and then giving the top-level device the command to begin the experiment. Devices are programmed in parallel in their separate processes, saving time.⁴ Once the shot is complete, each device process is given the command to write any data acquired to the `HDF5` file.

⁴Particularly since many delays in programming the devices are communication delays, during which the process is simply idle.

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`BLACS` can also repeat shots, by copying and then ‘cleaning’ an `HDF5` file after it has already run to produce a new shot file ready to be run on the hardware. It can repeat either all the shots, or just the last one in the queue. This ability to always keep running by repeating the last shot in the queue is crucial for experiments using alkali metal dispensers (‘getters’) or ultraviolet light-induced atom desorption [12], as these processes must run on an approximately fixed duty cycle to maintain a stable atomic vapour pressure, otherwise experiments need to ‘warm up’ after being idle to reach a stable pressure.

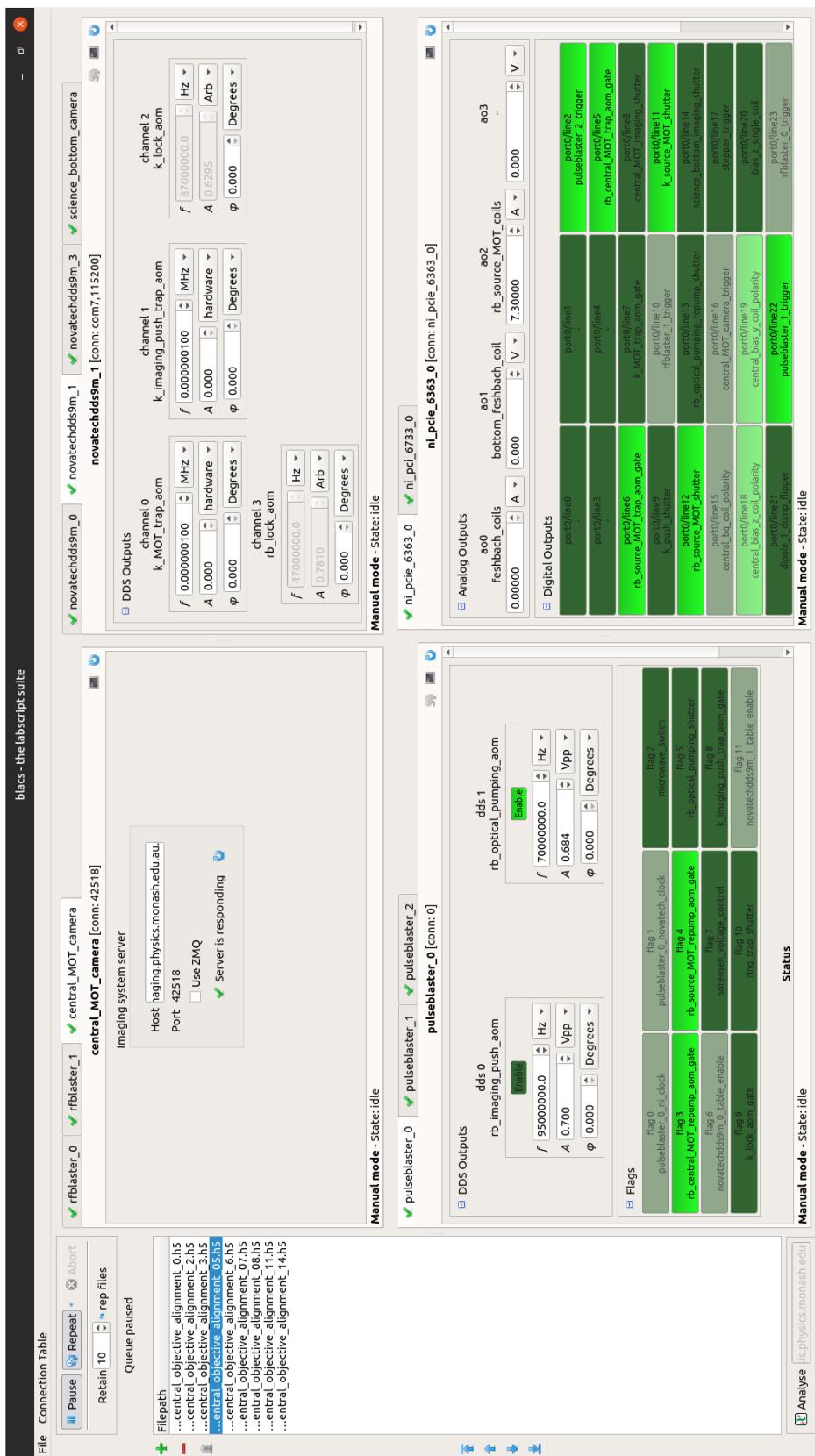
When processing of the shot queue is paused by the user or when the shot queue is empty, `BLACS` remains in ‘manual mode’, in which the devices’ outputs may be controlled in real-time by the user. The graphical interface of `BLACS` (shown in Figure 4.4) presents controls for the outputs of all devices, with each device and output channel labelled with its name as specified in a ‘connection table’ file containing `labscript` code describing the connection hierarchy of all devices. `BLACS` automatically generates the graphical interface for each device based a specification of its capabilities by its driver class, resulting in a set of controls for digital, analogue, and frequency generator outputs labelled with their names and using the same unit conversions set in `labscript` code for use in manual mode. Driver code may add to this interface arbitrarily to add a graphical interface for other capabilities of the device. The `BLACS` queue can be paused, shots reordered or deleted, and the currently running shot can be aborted. The queue can be put in one of two repeat modes, such that either all queued shots, or only the final shot are repeated indefinitely.

4.1.5 `lyse`

Once a shot has been executed, `BLACS` optionally passes the shot file on to the analysis program `lyse`. `lyse` is essentially a scheduler for user-provided analysis routines. A list of analysis routines (in the form of Python scripts), called *single-shot routines* are executed in order whenever a new shot is received by `lyse`, with the shot file provided as input to each script. The analysis routines may read raw data from the `HDF5` file, or read analysis results saved by previously-run analysis routines, and save their own results. Analysis routines may also produce plots using the `matplotlib` library [13]—`lyse` detects these and reuses the same window for subsequent plots so that repeated runs of the analysis routines result in the plot updating in-place, rather than a proliferation of plot windows. Any other plotting library can be used (for example `pyqtgraph` [14]), though in this case the auto-updating behaviour is not provided automatically by `lyse`.

The shot globals and analysis results for all shots received by `lyse` are maintained in a tabular data structure—a ‘dataframe’ provided by the `pandas` [15] Python package—which is browsable in the `lyse` interface. This table of data is available to a further list of analysis routines, called *multi-shot routines*. This list of analysis routines is also run in sequence, but only once single-shot analysis has completed on all shots presently loaded into `lyse`. These routines can be analyses of relations between input parameters and analysis results of the shots, in order to say, measure a trend of the number of atoms in a MOT as the magnetic field gradient was varied. Both single-shot and multi-shot routines can be run from within `lyse`, or externally by running Python manually. In this latter case, the shot file on which to run single shot analysis can be provided as a command line argument, and the dataframe analysed by multi-shot routines can be obtained from a running instance of `lyse` over the network. This is no different to what happens when multi-shot routines are run from within `lyse`: they are simply run by `lyse` with no input, and are expected to call a function `lyse.data()` to obtain the dataframe containing multi-shot data. Because of the way this is implemented, one can also open an interactive Python interpreter such as IPython [16] on any computer on the same network, type `import lyse; df = lyse.data(hostname)` (where `hostname` is the network

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Figure 4.4: The interface of **BLACS**, showing the experiment queue to the left and manual controls of devices within a tabbed interface to the right. When a hardware-timed experiment is not in progress, outputs may be controlled manually using this interface. Presently the GUI for four devices can be displayed simultaneously, though we plan to allow **BLACS** tabs to occupy their own windows or even reside on different computers to allow a better use of screen space. Output widgets are labelled with the names of the outputs they control and can be ‘locked’ to temporarily disallow modifications to their state. Most of the interface for each device is automatically generated from the description of the device and its outputs given in [Labscript](#) code, though the author of a device driver for the labscript suite is free to include any graphical elements in a device tab. This screenshot was taken using the current device configuration of the Monash KRB lab.

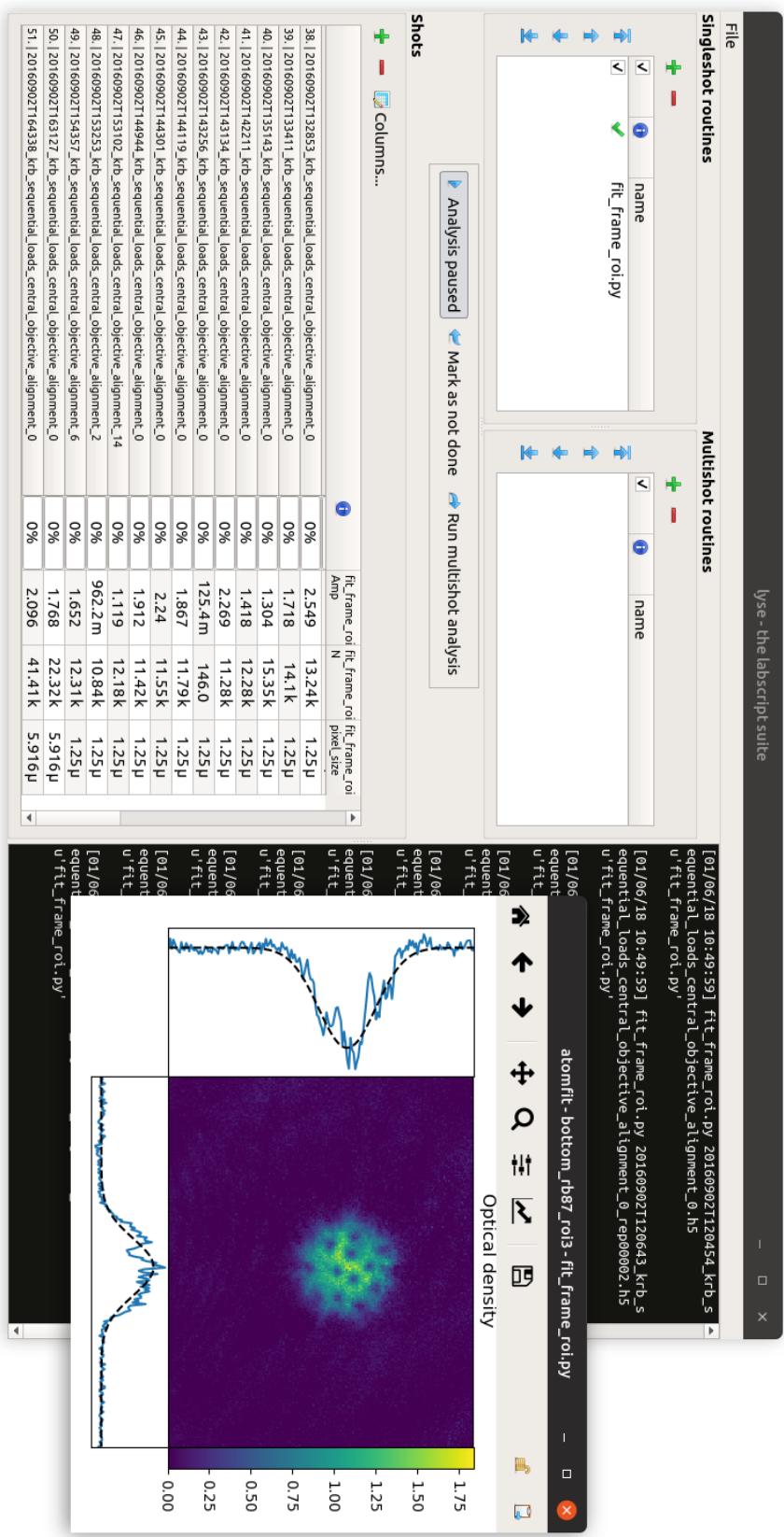


Figure 4-5: The interface of `lyse`. To the top left is the list of single-shot routines, and to the right of it the multi-shot routines presently loaded (empty in this example). The list of shots is below them, showing some of the globals and analysis results of these shots. To the right is the output box where any textual output produced by analysis routines is displayed. Overlaid is a plot produced by a single-shot analysis routine. This screenshot was taken using shot files and an analysis routine script from the Monash KRB lab's two-dimensional turbulence experiment [17].

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Figure 4.6: Sage advice from the Monash Spinor BEC lab gremlin. When troubleshooting a hyper-parametrised experiment, one often asks “What’s changed (since it last worked)?” This can be answered with a textual diff of the user’s experiment script, or by a similar ‘diff’ of the experiment parameters (globals) built into the `runmanager` GUI, the latter exposing those parameters that have changed, been removed, or added, with respect to any prior shot.

name of the computer running `lyse`) and begin interactively exploring the data using the `pandas` library, one of its great strengths.

4.2 Design philosophy and advantages of approach

4.2.1 It’s code

The design of the labscrip suite brings the process of composing experiments closer to that of software development, making it amenable to useful development precepts such as version control, bug tracking, and textual ‘diffs’ highlighting changes between versions of experiment logic. Both the experiment logic and the analysis routines comprise Python code amenable to these practices. This can allow risky changes to experiment logic or analysis code to be explored with the reassurance of being able to roll back to a known working state should the changes not prove fruitful, or for changes to shared experiment or analysis code to be forked into multiple versions using distributed version control and merged back together again to combine improvements from multiple sources. One exception to this ‘everything is code’ philosophy is the globals themselves, which are stored in non-textual `HDF5` files, though we do have a tool for ‘differing’ them too, to highlight what has changed between two globals files, or between the current set of values configured in `runmanager` as compared to a particular shot file, which is crucial in the experiment debugging process (Figure 4.6).

As in software development, experimental physics re-uses the same procedures time and time again, and benefits from a way to manage the complexity of turning large parts of functionality on and off, repeating them, or otherwise conditionally modifying their behaviour. In a traditional atomic physics control system, disabling or repeating a part of the experiment logic might involve tedious clicking to remove or duplicate each instruction involved. In Python, this can be a single `if` statement or `for` loop wrapping a function call containing the complexity of the part of the experiment being disabled or repeated. This ability of high level programming languages to manage complexity via encapsulation and code re-use with functions, classes and modules carries well over to experimental physics. Using an existing programming language saves us—as the developers of the control system—from having to re-invent (likely badly) the features of a programming language within our control system. For example, the tedious clicking

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required to disable part of an experiment in the aforementioned hypothetical ‘traditional’ control system could be avoided if the system implemented a feature for conditionals—akin to `if` statements. However, more complex control akin to *nested if* statements—or the equivalent of other control flow statements such as `while` loops or recursion—may be required for some applications. To support all the use cases that may arise, one would ultimately be inventing and embedding a complete programming language within such a control system. Use of an existing complete programming language obviates this need.

The use of an existing programming language for experiment control flow only aids the `labscrip`t suite in the case of ‘compile-time’ conditionals and other control statements—those that can be evaluated when the hardware instructions are produced by `labscrip`t—as opposed to those at ‘run time’ when the shot is run on the hardware (such as conditionally turning a laser on if a photon is detected on a photo-detector). Such run-time control statements do require special treatment in `labscrip`t, and `labscrip`t currently only has one type of functionality like this built-in. This is the ability to pause the shot until a pulse is produced that resumes the ‘master’ pseudoclock. This allows the common use case of synchronisation with the background 50 or 60 Hz magnetic noise from mains electricity by pausing shot execution until a fixed point in the power line cycle to ensure the magnetic field is close to identical from one shot to the next. Another example is servoing of the MOT load, by loading for a variable amount of time based on a threshold fluorescence such that variations in MOT loading efficiency from one shot to the next do not result in variations in actual atom numbers.

Further run-time control flow tools such as conditional branches would not be too difficult to incorporate into `labscrip`t in the future, but would require hardware capable of holding multiple alternative sets of instructions in memory and able to switch between them on a digital edge or the state of a digital signal on some input. The SpinCore PulseBlaster—the device used by most users of the `labscrip`t suite to produce clocking pulses—supports this, but most output devices labs use with the `labscrip`t suite do not. Custom field-programmable gate arrays (FPGAs) implementing this functionality however for digital or analogue output could be integrated with the `labscrip`t suite for this purpose, as they have been for other purposes [18].

4.2.2 Modularity and the Unix philosophy

An aspect of the Unix philosophy [19] is that tools should ‘do one thing and do it well’. The components of the `labscrip`t suite are not as minimal as they could be, but are nonetheless discrete, encapsulating different concerns and communicating with each other over network connections.⁵ Thus in principle one can remove a component and replace it with another that plays a different role. For example, `runmanager` has been re-purposed by Philip Starkey [10] to generate parameter space scans for numerical simulations rather than for experiments. `lyse` is in use by Fred Jendrzejewski’s group at Universität Heidelberg for on-line analysis of experiment results in the form of `HDF5` files produced by a different data acquisition system.

Each of `runmanager`, `BLACS`, and `lyse`, is implemented as a number of sub-components exchanging instructions over network sockets, even though the collection of processes semantically comprise a single application. This architecture facilitates a fairly direct extension (currently in development) in which different parts of the same program can be run on different computers. One can then imagine having `lyse` analysis routines run on a remote computer (perhaps a server with a powerful GPU or many CPU cores for computationally intensive analyses), or having `BLACS` control devices that connected to a remote computer. This latter configuration will allow `BLACS` to simultaneously control devices that cannot be connected to the same computer; for example, those which require different operating systems or have other conflicting software or hardware configurations.⁶. The ability to control devices via additional computers that are located close to

⁵This is in violation of another part of the Unix philosophy that says programs should exchange text streams: our programs mostly exchange messages over network sockets, containing filenames pointing to `HDF5` files on a network drive.

⁶A pertinent example is the bandwidth of a computer’s USB bus being the limiting factor in the speed at which one lab can run experiments: using two computers to program two USB devices could halve the programming time between shots. This is a limiting factor in the repetition rate of shots in the Spielman group’s RbLi lab at the Joint Quantum Institute.

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the devices they control will also reduce the need for long signal cables that can contribute to ground loops.

Modularity also allows the user's role in setting globals and commanding the experiment graphically via `runmanager` to be replaced with algorithmic control of globals and shot compilation. This opens the door to closed-loop optimisation in which globals in the next batch of shots are determined by the results of previous analysis routines run on previous shots as part of an optimisation algorithm. In the past, the labscrip suite contained a program called `mise`, used for performing optimisation of the experiment. `mise` would use a library of functions provided by `runmanager` (but not the graphical interface) to produce shots based on a genetic algorithm and the results of analysis communicated to it by `lyse` analysis routines. This type of optimisation was powerful but inflexible, and we no longer maintain `mise`. However a similar method is used in the Spinor BEC lab at Monash to integrate the MLOOP machine-learning optimisation library [20] with the labscrip suite for experiment optimisation.

The separation of components also aids in development of the labscrip suite. Programs can be ported one-at-a-time to use updated versions of libraries, and tested separately, enabling a flexible model of development which has proved invaluable to the open-source development process.

4.2.3 Off-the-shelf hardware

The labscrip suite is the software part of an experiment control system, and does not mandate any particular hardware. Whilst drivers for a range of off-the-shelf and in-house devices are developed and maintained by myself and the other labscrip suite developers, if one wants to use different hardware, whether off-the-shelf or custom, one can write drivers for it and use it with the labscrip suite. This does mean that the software cannot make hard assumptions about the hardware and has to deal with a wider range of possibilities, which is a complicating factor in maintaining the code, but I believe this approach is better compared to designing a limited range of hardware specifically for the labscrip suite or vice versa. It is difficult to anticipate what hardware capabilities experimentalists will require for atomic physics experiments in the future, and science is by its nature pushing the envelope such that converging on 'standard' hardware can be at odds with making scientific progress. Therefore it is better to leave the software as agnostic as reasonably possible when it comes to hardware.

The abstraction of devices as Python objects in `labscrip` code allows interchangeability of devices with compatible feature sets, minimising the code changes required if a device is replaced with one from the another manufacturer should it break or be superseded in some specification. Such a 'drop-in' replacement may only require one line of user code to change, with all subsequent references in code to the device instance remaining unchanged, and `labscrip` thereafter generating instructions as required by the new device. This agnosticism to and abstraction over hardware decreases the friction of making hardware changes to an experiment, allowing the experimenter more flexibility in making such modifications.

Labscrip suite developers and users have also made some hardware of their own, and there exists a low-cost pseudoclock and digital output device based on a sub-US\$100 microcontroller board (called the PineBlaster and BitBlaster, respectively). However these have proved difficult to maintain in the face of changing software development kits for the microcontrollers, and I suspect the use of FPGAs instead of microcontrollers will offer the same functionality at similar cost, but with greater longevity.⁷ Rory Speirs [21] has developed a low-cost FPGA-based pseudoclock (to be released as an open-source project) that may be an attractive alternative to the SpinCore PulseBlaster for use with the labscrip suite.

⁷Longevity in the sense of the code continuing to work unmodified with future versions of the device and the software development kit required to program it.

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date:   Tue Jun 26 17:28:41 2018 +1000
summary: Increase size of tracer particles in velocimetry.
More editing of labscrip chapter
One of russ's edits to HVSC.
```

4.2.4 Open-source, popular programming language and data format

The open source nature of labscript suite—as well as that of the technologies used in its implementation—has benefited the project considerably.

The labscript suite itself being open source allows others to modify it to their needs, expanding the range of experiments that it can be used with. If such modifications are applicable to a wide enough range of users, they can be contributed back to the main project. Not least importantly, bugs in the code that have been worked around or fixed by a single end-user can be contributed back to the main project for the benefit of all. This has led to a steady improvement in the usability and stability of the software as usability issues and bugs have been noticed and fixed by people inside and outside the core development team. Sometimes there is disagreement about what features belong in the labscript suite, or more often, over how they should be implemented. The open-source nature of the project allows end users to continue to use an implementation of functionality that there may not be agreement about including in the main project, either permanently or until another implementation is available. This is preferable to simply being at the mercy of the core developers as to what features they will or will not implement (whether due to differing opinions or to time constraints).⁸

The use of third-party open-source technologies in the labscript suite has also been advantageous, as when the projects we rely on do not fully satisfy our needs, we can modify them accordingly. Furthermore, these modifications, if agreeable to the developers of said libraries, can be included in the ‘upstream’ project to remove the requirement that we maintain the patches ourselves. To this end I have had changes accepted into the `numpy` [22], `pandas` [15], `pyzmq` [23] and `h5py` [24] projects which improve their behaviour for the labscript suite’s purposes.

Python is a popular programming language with a gentle learning curve, allowing new users with little programming experience to compose experiment logic quickly. Many students and other physicists already use Python for data analysis and other tasks, and knowledge of the language is increasingly widespread among physicists. This decreases the barrier to entry for modifying the labscript suite or contributing to its development.

The use of the standardised `HDF5` format, and of the popular `zeromq` [25] messaging protocol for communication between components allows interoperability with a wide range of other programming languages and technologies, such that software written in other languages can interact with running labscript suite programs and read the data files produced by them. The camera interface program `BIAS` is an example of this—it is written in LabVIEW and yet reads and writes data to the same shot files as the rest of the labscript suite using the `HDF5` library, and communicates with components of the suite over the network using the `zeromq` library.

4.2.5 Collateral benefits

Developing and maintaining the labscript suite has involved achieving several intermediate, instrumental goals in order to advance the ultimate goals of the project. Some of these solutions have been packaged as separate software projects, or are available from within the labscript suite, and may be used for other purposes.

For example, the modular nature of the suite (Section 4.2.2) and the multi-threaded and multi-process implementation of its components necessitates that components communicate with each other by message passing (largely in line with the ‘actor model’ of concurrent programming⁹). As such the codebase contains reusable pieces for launching processes and initiating message passing with them, of redirecting output of subprocesses to some visible location rather than a terminal, or of starting and stopping ‘servers’ and creating ‘clients’ to either pipe data continuously, or make discrete requests that necessitate a response. Furthermore, these multiple threads and processes often require access to

⁸Though I had no formal education in the actor model before writing code in this style—I attribute my fondness for it to the computer game *SpaceChem* [26], in which the player constructs chemical ‘reactors’ comprising multiple threads of execution exchanging atoms and molecules.

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One of russ's edits to HVSC.
```

the same files (the `HDF5` files containing the data for each experiment run), and access to these files needs to be serialised to prevent data corruption, including the case of multiple computers attempting to access the file over the network. To address these problems I developed `zprocess` [27], an open-source Python package officially separate from the `labscript` suite but very much developed to meet its needs for management of and communication/synchronisation between multiple processes. This project is used not just for the `labscript` suite, but for other laboratory automation tasks. It is also used in the software implementation of an undergraduate experiment in the School of Physics and Astronomy at Monash University, allowing students to remotely control the experiment and collect data over the internet [28].

Multi-threaded graphical programs can present development problems as the software library for the graphical interface generally must be accessed only from the one thread. This is the case for the `Qt` toolkit [29] as used in the `labscript` suite, and so interacting with the graphical interface from multiple threads necessitates message passing to request that an operation be performed in the ‘main’ thread. We have similarly encapsulated our solutions to this—as well as several other problems repeatedly encountered in using the `Qt` toolkit, such as an icon set, automatic loading of graphical layouts from external files, and others—into the `qtutils` project [30], which is used for other small graphical utilities in our group, separately from the `labscript` suite. This library has also been used in an undergraduate teaching context at Monash University to improve infrastructure for digital logbooks used by undergraduate students.

We have also developed a number of debugging and profiling tools that are useful for debugging numerical simulations, or other code unrelated to the `labscript` suite.

4.3 Recent and future developments

Since the publication of our paper in 2013 [9], the number of groups using our software has increased considerably, from the two BEC laboratories at Monash, to a modest number of groups around the world.

During my PhD I was invited to visit the Joint Quantum Institute in the group of Ian Spielman, with the aim of improving the `labscript` suite to make it more usable, and easier for others to install. The primary goal was to port the graphical programs from the `GTK` toolkit [31]—used to produce the graphical interfaces of the `labscript` suite—to the `Qt` toolkit [29], and to write a program to automate the installation process, which was previously somewhat tedious. These goals were achieved, and installing the `labscript` suite is now a matter of installing an appropriate Python environment, and then downloading and running our installation script.

The following subsections detail this and a number of other developments since the publication of our paper, as well as planned and in-progress improvements to the suite.

4.3.1 Port to Qt

The port to `Qt` [29] was a crucial development. As discussed in the publication reproduced at the end of this chapter, we initially chose the `GTK` toolkit for its cross-platform compatibility and good Python bindings [32]. This proved to be the wrong decision, as the `GTK` project has rapidly developed and dropped support for older versions. The newer versions were difficult to install or deploy on operating systems other than Linux, and the changes were significant enough to impose a considerable ongoing development cost to keeping code up to date with them. Although slated as a cross-platform toolkit, the `GTK` project is developed by and primarily serves the needs of the `GNOME` project [33], and thus its development is driven by those needs. There is little incentive for Windows- or Mac-specific bugs to be fixed, or for the installation process to be improved. Although

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```

it's an open-source project such that people other than the core developers could contribute fixes to these issues, the Linux-centric nature of the project impedes these fixes from being accepted for inclusion. Using the (also open-source) Qt toolkit is the chosen solution for many cross-platform graphical software projects, and so we chose to adopt this toolkit in 2013, with most programs ported in 2014. The experience of both maintaining and installing the labscript suite is much improved as a result. Being the standard cross-platform GUI toolkit, Qt is already available in the standard Anaconda Python distribution [34]—the preferred Python distribution among scientists at the present time. With our `qtutils` package, an icon set is available, obviating the need to install a separate icon pack as was previously the case. Most importantly, the Qt software project exists to serve the needs of graphical programs generally, and is used by many major cross-platform projects. Combined with the fact that Qt is open source, this is insurance against future breaking changes in Qt or against the Qt Company going out of business—open source projects can be forked and maintained by the community, and the more popular they are the more likely this is to occur if they take an unpopular turn or are abandoned by their present maintainers. We therefore have confidence that the Qt project's direction is aligned with the needs of the labscript suite, and that we can continue to rely on it in a way we could not with the GTK project for our project's longevity, without introducing unnecessary technical debt.

4.3.2 Python 3

The labscript suite was initially written in version 2.7 of the Python programming language, even though version 3 of Python had been released several years prior. The Python community has in this time been in a decade-long transition from one version to the next due to some non-trivial differences between the two versions. I believe we made the right decision to initially use Python version 2.7, as many of the technologies the labscript suite relies on did not have Python 3 compatibility for some time. However, the point of inflection in the adoption curve for Python 3 has occurred in the last two years or so, and now is the right time for Python 3 adoption. With the help of third party contributors (primarily Jan Werkmann), the entirety of the labscript suite has now been ported to run on both Python 2 and Python 3.

We do not expect such an extended issue as this to occur again: the Python core developers consider this transition to be a one-off, and future porting efforts of labscript-suite components will likely be no more work than usually required to keep up with minor changes between language versions.

4.3.3 More devices, more features, general polish

There are more devices compatible with the labscript suite, and more models and features of existing devices are now supported. The programs are easier to use, and many cases where obscure errors were thrown have been replaced with friendlier error messages explaining the situation in human-readable terms. Following is an incomplete list of minor to modest usability improvements:

- `BLACS` has a plugin to delete shots that are repeated versions of previous shots. This prevents unnecessary consumption of disk space when these shots are running only to keep an experiment ‘warm’ (initially implemented by Ian Spielman, and re-implemented by me as a plugin for `BLACS`).
- `lyse` more gracefully handles shot files that have been deleted off disk: declining to run single-shot analysis on them, but keeping their data in the dataframe available for multi-shot analysis until they are deleted from the `lyse` interface. This aids in, for example, diagnosing a day-long drift in some performance characteristic of

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One of russ's edits to HVSC.
```

the experiment even though most shot files are deleted due to the aforementioned desire to save disk space (implemented by me).

- `lyse` is more performant, only updating those values of the dataframe that have changed, and minimising the number of times it opens a `HDF5` file. This improves performance for very large numbers of very short duration shots, as is common in ion trapping (implemented by Jan Werkmann with changes by me).
- `BLACS` has had some bugs resolved that unnecessarily introduced delays on the order of 0.5 s between running shots. These delays were not very noticeable for the cold atom experiments of order 15–30 s, but again are important for the ion trappers (implemented by me and Philip Starkey).
- `BLACS` tabs have a separate optional terminal output for each device subprocess, allowing simpler debugging and development of devices (implemented by me).
- More flexible camera interface. There are now a number of camera ‘servers’ in use by various groups playing the role that `BIAS` plays at Monash, including a fork of `BIAS` named `unBIASed` by Ian Spielman (changes made to facilitate communication with Python camera servers implemented by me)
- `labscript` can accept arbitrary function ramps using user-supplied functions, not limited to the built-in list of functional forms. This has always been possible with some effort, but now has a friendlier programming interface (implemented by me).
- There is a unified interface for saving and retrieving configuration settings of devices in `labscript` to `HDF5` files, including JavaScript Object Notation serialisation for complex data types that do not coincide with a `HDF5` datatype. This replaces a number of ad-hoc serialisation methods previously in use to store configuration settings of devices (specification designed by Ian Spielman and core developers, implementation by Ian Spielman and me).
- There is a unified `labscript` device driver for National Instruments DAQmx devices, removing the code duplication and complexity of maintaining multiple device classes for this range of devices. This class exists in the fork of the `labscript_devices` repository in use by the Spielman group at the Joint Quantum Institute, but will be merged into the mainline codebase soon—it is already in use by groups who are not otherwise using the Spielman fork of the code, and so has undergone some testing and bugfixes outside of the hardware in the Spielman group. In time the model-specific code will likely be removed in favour of the unified interface (implemented by Ian Spielman).
- `labscript` has functionality to mark certain points of time of the shot with a named marker, visible in `runviewer` to visibly delineate different stages of the experiment (implemented by Jan Werkmann).
- `runviewer` has a ‘nonlinear time’ mode, in which the time axis uses a different scale for the different stages of the experiment as described by the markers, allowing short and long timescales to be visible on the same plots in. (implemented by Jan Werkmann with changes by Shaun Johnstone).
- `labscript` has the ability to mark digital outputs as ‘inverted’, such that digital low represents a device being on, semantically speaking. The buttons for these outputs are represented with different colours in the `BLACS` interface to avoid confusion (implemented by Jan Werkmann).

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```

- Gated clocks: devices with vastly different memory capabilities can receive clocking signals from the same clocking device such as a PulseBlaster, but on different digital channels such that the clock ticks intended for one device are not received by other devices. There is still a single pseudoclock, but its outputs are ‘gated’—whilst the clock is ticking for one device it is not ticking for another (implemented by Philip Starkey).
- `lyse` plots can be copied to the clipboard with a button click, reducing the number of steps to include plots in a digital log book (implemented by me).
- `runmanager`, `lyse`, and `runviewer` have the ability to save and load configuration settings, such that the same sets of globals files in the case of `runmanager` or the same sets of analysis routines in the case of `lyse` and the same view settings in the case of `runviewer` can be loaded at start-up of each application (implemented by me for `runmanager` and Jan Werkmann for `lyse` and `runviewer`).
- `runmanager` allows finer control over parameter spaces, including randomising the order of a parameter space scan on a per-axis basis, control over the nesting order in which the axes are looped over, and a graphical representation of this looping (implemented by Philip Starkey).

4.3.4 Optimisation

The program `mise`, mentioned in the paper, has been deprecated. Nothing has replaced it, though due to the modularity of the labscrip suite, optimisation is still possible through use of the `runmanager` library directly. This is a testament to the flexible design of the labscrip suite, but could nonetheless be improved.

I plan to improve this functionality in the future, and one of the near-term development goals is to add a ‘remote’ application programming interface (API) for `runmanager`. This will enable a program to control a running instance of `runmanager` to set the values of globals and initiate shot compilation and submission to `BLACS`. This will be a much simpler interface as well as being compatible with just-in-time compilation, discussed below.

4.3.5 Just-in-time compilation

One feedback mechanism not previously anticipated—more accurately described as *feed-forward* in this context—is the need to modify one or more parameters in the very next shot to be run, whilst performing some parameter space scan or repetition. For example, in the Spielman group’s atom chip lab, an environmental magnetic field drift on a several hour timescale is corrected for by performing an error measurement each shot, to be fed-forward to the next shot as a change in the applied field bias. Other than this, the experiment is not performing any optimisation or feedback. In the atom chip lab, this functionality is implemented by having `BLACS` use the existing `runmanager` API (not the proposed ‘remote’ API) to re-compile the shot files just before running them, to be sure to include the updated magnetic field bias estimate.

This is an example of functionality being implemented by users to serve an immediate need. However I would like to move this ‘just-in-time’ compilation into `runmanager`, so that the shot is compiled only once rather than being recompiled. Compilation by `BLACS` is unappealing since it may be on a different computer with different versions of the code being compiled, leading to the possibility of subtle errors, and more generally violates the design philosophy of separation of concerns that has served us well thus far.

For this reason—as well the applicability to optimisation mentioned above—I plan to implement both a remote API for `runmanager` as well as a ‘compilation queue’ containing

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```

shots yet to be compiled, whose variables can still be changed (possibly remotely) up until the moment `BLACS` requests a new shot,¹⁰ triggering compilation to occur.

4.3.6 Fixed shot repetition interval

Since `BLACS` takes a usually small—but variable—amount of time to program the hardware in between shots, this contributes to a variation in the average proportion of time an atom dispenser is receiving current or ultraviolet light-induced desorption is active, leading to vapour pressure variations in experiments that operate in this manner. In the Spielman fork of the `BLACS` repository, there is functionality—to be merged or reimplemented in the main codebase—for setting a fixed overall duration for the shot execution plus programming time, such that after programming devices, `BLACS` waits some additional amount of time in order that shots run at precisely equal intervals. This can be used not only to compensate for variations in programming time, but also for variations caused by changes of parameters that affect the shot duration, or by variable-length waits while the experiment is paused, such as servoing a MOT load as mentioned in Section 4.2.1.

¹⁰Either because its queue is empty, or nearly empty—by requesting a shot before the queue is fully empty one can prevent the experiment being idle during compilation, at the expense of the feed-forward changes taking effect only some number of shots in the future.

4.3.7 Remote device control

A work in progress is to allow devices to be connected to any computer, not just the one that `BLACS` is running on. Some devices—such as those communicating over Ethernet—are inherently remote controllable, but others can only be programmed from the computer to which they are directly connected. In addition to the benefits of remote control outlined in Section 4.2.2, a distributed graphical interface would also allow one to make better use of computer screen real estate, with interfaces for different device controlled by `BLACS` presented on separate computers, reducing the clutter in a single `BLACS` interface with a large number of devices. One reason for making a separate camera control program in the form of `BIAS` was to be able to view images immediately at all times without having to ensure the correct tab in the `BLACS` interface is active. Being able to display these tabs as separate windows on different screens and computers will obviate this need and allow cameras to be once again treated the same as other devices.¹¹

In discussion with developers and users, we have designed a specification for how the desired layout of devices on a network will be described by users in `labscrip` code, and we have a partial implementation. Most of the work toward this has been in the `zprocess` package, which I have been adapting to meet these needs, including the use of encryption to ensure that the ability to start processes on remote computers is secure. This feature in `zprocess` is nearly complete, after which we will modify `BLACS` to make use of `zprocess` to launch remote processes for communicating with hardware and displaying their graphical interfaces. These two features are planned to be separate, such that `BLACS`, the graphical interface for a specific device, and the device itself can be on the same computer, or two, or three, for maximum flexibility in the location of graphical interfaces and hardware within the lab.

¹¹This was not the only reason `BIAS` was made as a separate system. Another reason was the availability of software libraries for interacting with certain cameras, these were available for LabVIEW at the time, but not Python. Python wrappers, `pyvisa`[35] and `pynivision`[36] for the National Instruments `VISA` and `NI-Vision` libraries have since become available, removing the need for LabVIEW to be used with cameras or other devices requiring these interfaces.

4.4 `labscrip` version 3

The `labscrip` compiler itself is the oldest part of our codebase, and has changed significantly since its initial incarnation. We have become more skilled programmers in the 7 years since it was first written, and some design decisions have proved to be limiting. For example, many calculations performed by `labscrip` during compilation are *destructive*—that is, new data replaces old data as processing proceeds. Specifically, timing transformations in `labscrip` discard the original, untransformed timing data. This makes it difficult to debug where timing problems have occurred, and makes the code fragile to the introduction of bugs in which timing transformations are accidentally taken

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into account twice or not at all, as opposed to exactly once as required. Furthermore, timing calculations are performed mostly using floating point arithmetic, necessitating that all comparisons be performed with some tolerance or rounding. This is error-prone and unnatural given that the hardware devices generally have a quantised duration of each instruction. Finally, when an exception occurs in `labscrip`t indicative of the user requesting something not possible (such as two instructions closer together in time than the hardware is capable of), `labscrip`t does not identify where in the user's code the instruction originated, making it difficult to provide the user with information that helps them resolve the issue.

To address these three concerns, I have been restructuring the core instruction and timing processing of `labscrip`t, such that: all processing is non-destructive, the points in the user's code where instructions are created are noted for later use in error messages, and all timing calculations are performed using integer arithmetic after quantising timing details as early as possible, according to the time resolution of the pseudoclock of each device. This project, called `labscrip`_core, will eventually replace the part of `labscrip`t responsible for timing calculations and instruction handling, improving the code from the perspective of users and developers. If possible I will keep the timing computations separate from the other higher level parts of `labscrip`t (globals, device properties, HDF5 files) so that it can be independently tested and verified (ideally in the context of an automated test suite) so that we can be confident in the output it produces, and that regressions have not been introduced when changes are made.

4.5 Other future developments

An immediate concern is to unify the mainline `labscrip`t suite codebase—that maintained by myself and the other core developers—with the Spielman group's fork of the code. This will involve merging (or re-implementing in the mainline codebase) the remaining features present in the Spielman fork as discussed in the previous sections, as well as others not mentioned here.

There are a number of third party contributions (mostly authored by Jan Werkmann) awaiting approval by a core maintainer such as myself or Philip Starkey. Some of these are:

- Analogue input widgets for `BLACS`, which display a numerical value for the voltage of each analogue input, or interactively updating plot of each voltage trace over time (i.e. a virtual oscilloscope).
- Plugin tabs for `BLACS` to allow plugins for `BLACS` to insert tabs into its graphical interface, allowing plugins to have rich interfaces of their own, separate from the main interface of `BLACS`.

Other changes proposed but not implemented include:

- ‘Analysis globals’: like the globals set in `runmanager`, but set in `lyse` instead. Presently, users are ‘abusing’ globals set in `runmanager` in order to configure how analysis will run. For example, there are globals being set by users that tell analysis code which pair of variables to plot against each other. As this may change after a shot has run, an interface where ‘analysis globals’ can be set and used by analysis routines would be preferable.

Finally, the entire project would benefit from more and better documentation. Documentation exists,¹² though it could be far more thorough. More importantly, the development process has not ensured that documentation is kept up to date with changes to the code. Instead, new information is often hidden in code comments or in commit messages.

¹²Primarily written by Philip Starkey

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This is a flaw in the development process, rather than a lack of effort or consideration. The Python community has a solution to this problem, which is to use libraries that turn appropriately formatted text embedded within the code, called ‘docstrings’, into proper documentation. This creates incentives to write and update these docstrings to a higher standard, knowing that they will be immediately visible in official documentation. This expectation can be enforced during code reviews that occur when pull requests are made for changes to be included in the mainline code repository. Such a change of process would help maintain and improve documentation continuously over time, and is better in my opinion than occasional bursts of effort and re-writes of the documentation.

An immediately available strategy to bring about better documentation is to put the process in place to automatically render and publish the existing docstrings, despite their present inadequacy, and begin to enforce the policy of updating the documentation whenever the code changes. This way over time the documentation will improve, and being code rather than a PDF or Microsoft Word document, will be amenable to pull requests and bug reports in the same manner as the rest of the code, which—as we have experienced—lead to inexorable improvement via an open process that accepts external fixes from others.

There is also a substantial quantity of best-practices and lore known to users of the `labscrip` suite regarding hardware as well as software, including many tips and tricks that are specific to certain setups. Whilst the `labscrip` suite has a mailing list in which much of this information is exchanged, it would benefit the project to have a user-editable wiki, to decrease the barrier-to-entry for users to share domain-specific knowledge outside the context of an email thread, even though it may not suit the official project documentation.

4.6 Project history and attribution

Here I acknowledge the contributions of authors to the different components of the `labscrip` suite, and provide a history of major developments. This is not comprehensive, and many improvements have been provided by others; nonetheless the majority of the design and programming effort behind the `labscrip` suite is due to the authors responsible for the initial creation and major developments of each subproject as outlined below. A full history of the codebase is publicly available on our on-line repositories [27, 30, 37] and can be used to credit any particular change or piece of code to the appropriate author.¹³ Plots of present and historical authorship by number of lines of code are shown in Figure 4.7.

The initial idea of having object-oriented Python code compiled to low-level instructions was inspired by a similar implementation by Scott Owen and David Hall [38] in which experiment logic is described in C++ and programmed into the hardware using a LabVIEW program with a state-machine architecture.

Toward this goal I developed an initial implementation of the `labscrip` compiler in Python in February 2011. Throughout the following year or so, the architecture of the software suite, its components and how they would interact was developed by members of the Monash Quantum Fluids group including Lincoln Turner, Russell Anderson, myself, Philip Starkey, Shaun Johnsone, Martijn Jasperse, and others.

The initial implementation of programming `labscrip`-generated instructions into hardware was written in LabVIEW by to Russell Anderson in early 2011, followed by the initial version of `runmanager` written by me in August 2011 and the initial version of `runviewer`, also by me, in September 2011. Early in development I moved `runviewer` to use the Qt toolkit in order to take advantage of the `pyqtgraph` [14] plotting library, which was necessary for acceptable performance of `runviewer`.

Philip Starkey wrote the initial version of `BLACS` in October 2011, superseding the LabVIEW control system. In November 2011 Philip Starkey and I re-architected `BLACS`

¹³With the exception of generic usernames occasionally being used from lab computers such that authorship was not recorded.

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date:   Tue Jun 26 17:28:41 2018 +1000
summary: Increase size of tracer particles in velocimetry.
More editing of labscrip chapter
One of russ's edits to HVSC.
```

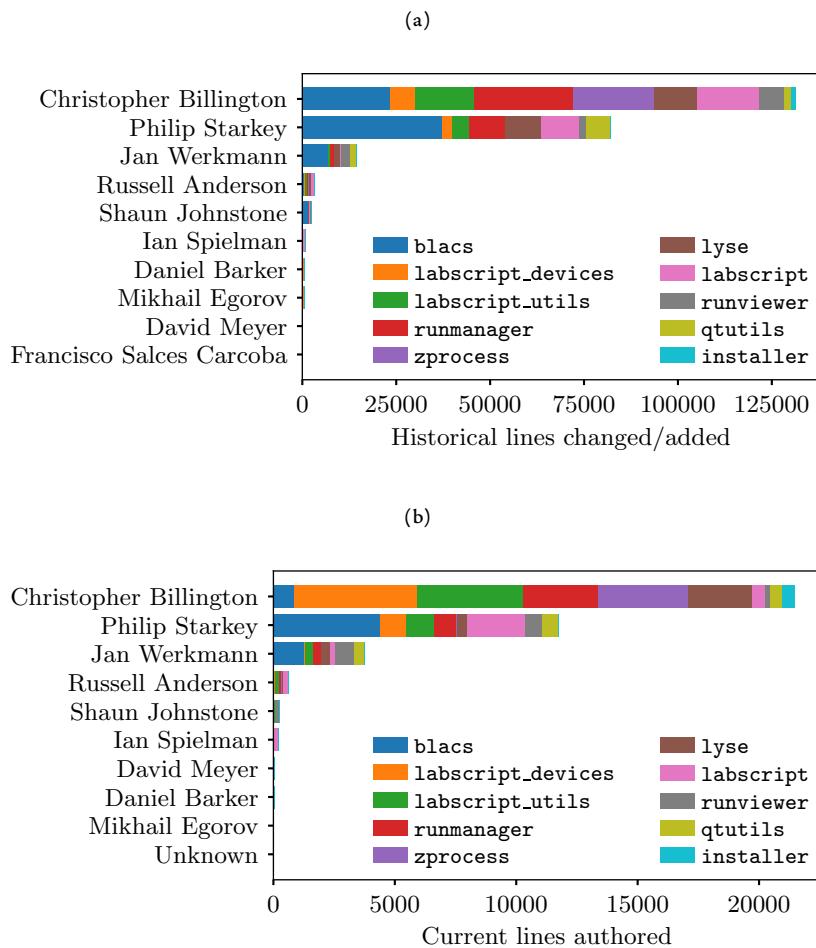


Figure 4.7: Authorship by lines of code of each component of the labsuite suite, for the top ten authors. (a) Authorship of line changes over the entire project history. (b) Authorship of lines currently present in the most recent revision of each component. The line counts for these plots were obtained using the mercurial ‘churn’ extension and ‘blame’ command to analyse all Python, Cython and C source files in our code repositories. This excludes documentation (most of which is in Microsoft Word format) as well as layout files for the graphical interfaces of the programs. Although these results are broadly representative of authors’ contributions to the components of the labsuite suite, they should be taken with a grain of salt. Authorship is difficult to ascertain programmatically as refactoring counts the same as original authorship even though usually less credit (though not zero) should be assigned to someone refactoring code than the author writing it originally. As such my apparent contribution to `labsuite_devices`—the repository containing device drivers—is exaggerated due to me being the one to migrate this code from another repository. Similarly Jan Werkmann’s contributions to `BLACS` are exaggerated due to recent renaming of one particular large source file. We both have made original contributions to both repositories as well, but these are not distinguishable from refactoring in these plots.

```

rev:      183 (f22c5af4a314)
author:   chrisjbillington
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summary: Increase size of tracer particles in velocimetry.
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```

as a multi-process model and improved the state machine architecture it uses.

In February 2012 I wrote `lyse`. In April 2012, Philip Starkey re-wrote a substantial portion of `runmanager`, making its user interface suitable for larger number of globals and improving other functionality.

In January 2013, Philip Starkey ported `BLACS` to use the Qt toolkit, and in May 2014, he expanded the capabilities of the `labscrip` compiler by implementing the ‘gated clocks’ feature, allowing more devices to be controlled by a single pseudoclock device such as a SpinCore PulseBlaster. Between August and November 2014 while visiting Ian Spielman’s group, I ported `runmanager` and `lyse` to the Qt toolkit, wrote the `labscrip` suite installer script, and adopted the practice of tracking dependencies of the different components on each other using semantic versioning [39].

Throughout this time device driver code was contributed, various features implemented, and bugs fixed by many including Russell Anderson, Shaun Johnstone, Martijn Jasperse and Ian Spielman. Documentation was written primarily by Philip Starkey. `BIAS` was written and maintained by Martijn Jasperse from late 2011 onward.

When we started writing applications in Qt, I wrote the initial code for multithreading in Qt that became the `qtutils` [30] package, with most of the later functionality in the package added by Philip Starkey.

The `zprocess` package, encapsulating the network communication and multiproCESSing code common to several components within the `labscrip` suite, was written and is maintained by me (as always with some bugfixes and features contributed by others).

4.7 Conclusion

The `labscrip` suite is an increasingly mature software project for control of hardware-timed experiments. It has an increasing number of users and contributors, and has evolved to keep up with changing software environments. It is a living project accepting changes from non-core developers, and is free for anybody to use under a permissive license. Due to the modular design and open development process, the `labscrip` suite has thus far avoided some of the pitfalls that befall many laboratory control systems and software, such as relegation to legacy software or hardware environments due to a lack of development process capable of keeping them up to date, or fixes to bugs remaining unresolved for most because a fix applied in one place has not been distributed to others, or because the source code is only available to few. The `labscrip` suite is hardware-agnostic, ensuring its use is not restricted to officially sanctioned or in-house hardware. Finally, it is written in a popular programming language with an abundance of on-line resources and a vibrant community behind it, within both scientific and software engineering circles. Equally important as the implementation details of the codebase itself, these decisions have resulted in a thriving project beneficial to experimental physics research.

4.8 Reproduced publication: A scripted control system for autonomous hardware-timed experiments

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rev:    183 (f22c5af4a314)
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```

A scripted control system for autonomous hardware-timed experiments

P. T. Starkey,^{a),b)} C. J. Billington,^{a)} S. P. Johnstone, M. Jasperse, K. Helmerson,
L. D. Turner, and R. P. Anderson

School of Physics, Monash University, Victoria 3800, Australia

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We present the *labscrip* suite, an open-source experiment control system for automating shot-based experiments and their analysis. Experiments are composed as Python code, which is used to produce low-level hardware instructions. They are queued up and executed on the hardware in real time, synchronized by a pseudoclock. Experiment parameters are manipulated graphically, and analysis routines are run as new data are acquired. With this system, we can easily automate exploration of parameter spaces, including closed-loop optimization. © 2013 AIP Publishing LLC.
[\[http://dx.doi.org/10.1063/1.4817213\]](http://dx.doi.org/10.1063/1.4817213)

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern experiments in quantum science demand flexible, autonomous control of heterogeneous hardware. Many such experiments are *shot*-based: a single experiment shot comprises analog, digital, and radiofrequency (rf) outputs operating under precise timing, as well as synchronized camera exposures and voltage measurements. Bose–Einstein condensation (BEC) experiments,¹ for example, require a timing resolution down to a few hundred nanoseconds, and may last for up to a minute. Output must, therefore, be hardware timed, requiring devices be programmed with instructions in advance of an experiment shot. Most measurements of interest require numerous shots, to build up statistics, or to observe the response of the system to varying parameters. Such repetition is common to experiments employing cold quantum gases or trapped ions for precision metrology,² quantum computation,³ and quantum simulation.⁴

Individual shots are typically complex, requiring the coordination of many devices. This coordination is the role of a *control system*. A good control system should automate the programming of devices based on a high-level description of the experiment logic.⁵ It should handle the repetition of shots and automated variation of experiment parameters, the increasingly complex demands of which cannot be rapidly, robustly, and continuously met by human operators. It should automate analysis, leading to the prospect of closed-loop control: the results of analysis influencing subsequent experiment shots. Applications of such closed-loop control include autonomous algorithmic optimization of parameters, and automatic recalibration in response to environmental drifts.

Most existing control systems take one of the two approaches for providing a human interface to programming hardware. One is text-based, in which experiments are written using a general purpose programming language.⁶ In the other, experiments are instead described graphically using a custom user interface.^{7–11} The text-based approach natively offers the

advantages of a programming language, particularly control-flow tools such as conditional statements, loops, and functions. Its disadvantage is that frequently varied settings and parameters may be hidden in hundreds of lines of code. Conversely, the graphical-user-interface (GUI) approach makes experiment parameters more accessible to the user, but features providing for complex experiment logic must be anticipated and implemented specifically.^{10,11}

The two approaches need not be mutually exclusive: by separating experiment parameters from experiment logic, parameters can be manipulated graphically and logic textually.^{12,13} We contend that by using a high-level programming language with appropriate hardware abstraction, text-based control can be more comprehensible to a newcomer than an equivalent graphical representation of hardware instructions.

We present the *labscrip* suite which utilizes a hybrid text-and-GUI approach for control and builds on previous work by addressing the need for autonomous control, analysis, and optimization. Hardware control is abstracted, providing an identical software interface to devices of a common type. Graphical interfaces are dynamically generated based on the current hardware set in use. Analysis is an integral part of the control system, with user-written analysis routines run automatically on new data. Finally, analysis results can modify subsequent experiment shots, closing the feedback loop on analysis and control.

II. AN OVERVIEW OF THE LABSCRIPT SUITE

The *labscrip* suite comprises several programs, each performing one main function; the flow of data between programs is shown in Fig. 1. Each experiment shot is associated with a single file: each program writes to and reads from this file as required before passing it on to the next program. Programs may be run on separate computers, communicating over the network using the ZeroMQ messaging library,¹⁴ exchanging references to the experiment file.

We use the Hierarchical Data Format (HDF version 5)¹⁵ which provides cross-platform storage of large scientific datasets. Exploiting the extensibility of HDF, each file

^{a)}P. T. Starkey and C. J. Billington contributed equally to this work.

^{b)}Author to whom correspondence should be addressed. Electronic mail: philip.starkey@monash.edu

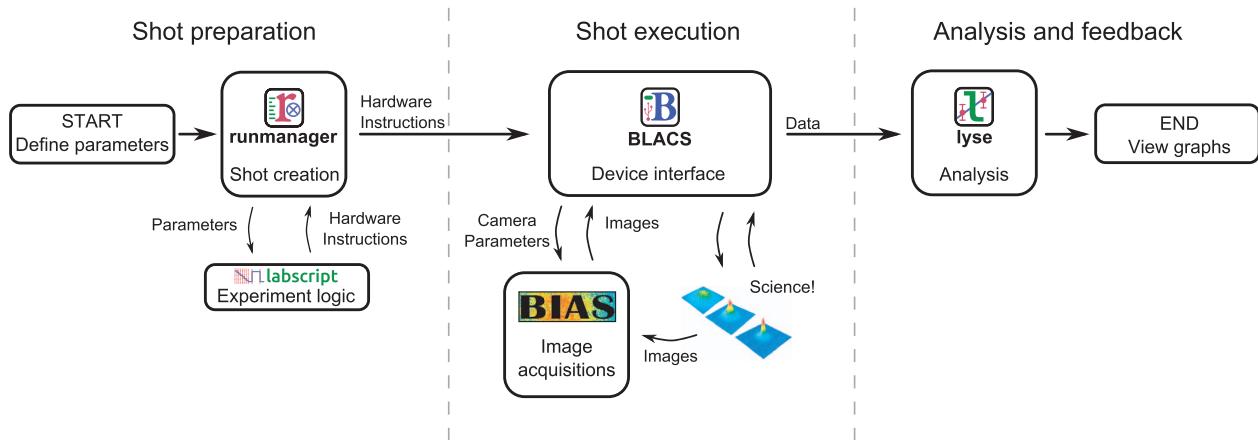


FIG. 1. Each experiment shot comprises three stages: preparation, execution, and analysis. Arrows indicate how the HDF file for an experiment shot passes between software components of the labscript suite. Only the shot execution stage is coupled to hardware timing, allowing new shots to be created and queued while others are running. Similarly, analysis can be performed on executed shots at any time.

is a complete description of the experiment shot. The HDF file begins life containing only experiment parameters. As it is passed between components of the labscript suite, the file grows to contain the hardware instructions, acquired data, and analysis results. Metadata is also stored including user-written scripts and version control information. This maintains a comprehensive record of the experiment shot for post-hoc analysis, reproducibility, and publication preparation.

Attempts to standardize laboratory device programming have largely failed, with only a minority of devices conforming to standards such as SCPI (Standard Commands for Programmable Instruments).¹⁶ This calls for abstraction to shield the user from low-level interaction. We have created a software library for Python,^{17,18} labscrip (Sec. IV), which provides a common interface for commanding output and measurements from devices. The user writes the experiment logic in Python, and labscrip generates the required hardware instructions, including a clocking signal for timing (Sec. III).

The labscrip suite separates experiment logic (written in Python) from experiment parameters, which are manipulated in a GUI. The GUI, runmanager (Sec. V), creates the HDF file for the experiment shot and stores the parameters within. If a parameter is a list of values, rather than a single value, runmanager creates an HDF file (a prospective shot) for each value. If lists are entered for more than one parameter, runmanager creates a file for each point in the resulting parameter space.

For each shot, labscrip inserts the parameters from the HDF file into the experiment logic, compiles hardware instructions for each device, and writes them to the same file. runmanager sends the compiled HDF files to BLACS (Sec. VI) which places them in a queue. BLACS interfaces with hardware devices either directly, or via secondary control programs such as BIAS (Sec. VII). BLACS programs the hardware and triggers the experiment shot to begin. The experiment then proceeds under hardware-timed control.

Once the experiment shot has finished, acquired data such as voltage time-series and images are added to the HDF file.

BLACS then passes the file to a dedicated analysis system, lyse (Sec. VIII). lyse coordinates the execution of analysis routines, which are Python scripts written by the user. These scripts may analyze individual shots or a sequence of shots as a whole. This facilitates autonomous analysis of results from parameter space scans, as experiment shots are completed.

The labscrip software library can be applied to automatically generate shots based on the results of analysis. We have used this to implement a closed-loop optimization system, mise (Sec. IX).

III. PSEUDOCLOCK

A typical BEC experiment requires precise timing over a large range of time scales.¹ There are periods during which magnetic fields or laser intensities, for example, may change with sub-microsecond resolution. Conversely, there are periods during which no devices change their output for several seconds, e.g., loading a magneto-optical trap (MOT). To ensure accurate output during the rapid changes, hardware devices must be preloaded with a set of instructions that can be stepped through by a clock once the experiment begins. Stepping through instructions at a constant rate requires repetitive instructions during the more inactive periods. As many devices only support a limited number of instructions, a constant-rate clock limits the maximum sample rate. A common solution^{8,9,11,12} is a variable frequency master clock, or *pseudoclock*, which steps through instructions only when a clocked device needs to update an output (see Fig. 2). This removes the need for redundant instructions.

All devices sharing a pseudoclock must have an instruction when any one of their outputs changes value. This can lead to redundant instructions if only some of the devices are changing at a given time. The instruction limitations of one device may then limit another, e.g., some devices hold only a few thousand instructions in their internal memory, whereas others are limited only by the RAM of the host computer refilling their buffers. To solve this problem, we employ

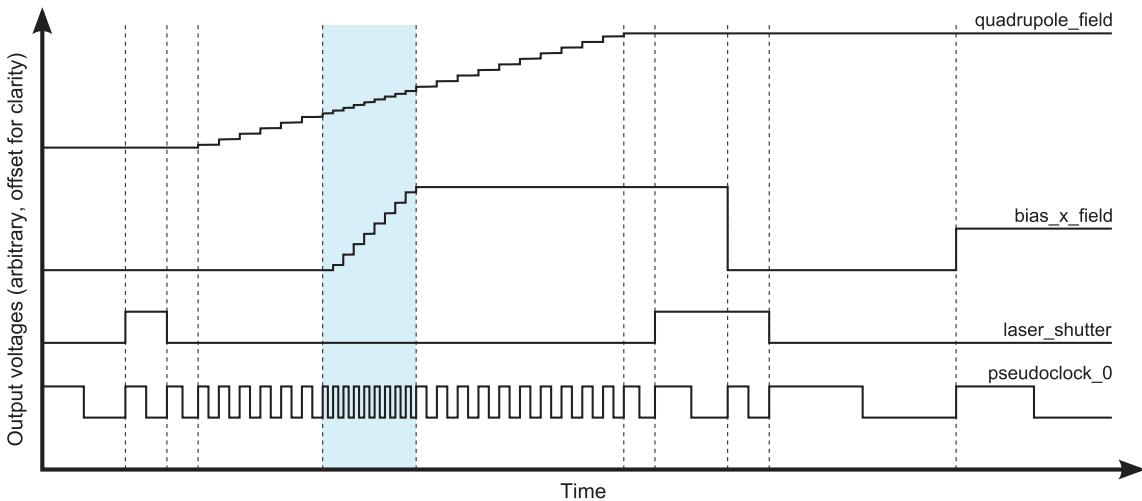


FIG. 2. An example of digital and analog voltage outputs generated by the labscript code in Fig. 3. The pseudoclock (lower trace) ticks when a digital output must change, or at the requested sample rate for time-varying analog outputs (upper two traces). Dashed vertical lines indicate a change in the pseudoclock frequency. When multiple analog outputs are varying at the same time (shaded region), the pseudoclock ticks at the highest of their sampling rates.

multiple pseudoclocks, assigning devices of similar memory limitations to the same clock. At the beginning of a shot, the software starts one pseudoclock (the *master clock*), which then triggers other clocks.

To be a useful pseudoclock, a device must be able to deterministically generate arbitrary digital signals, be hardware triggerable, and hold enough instructions for the required experiment. We currently use two pseudoclocks: the Spin-Core PulseBlaster DDS-II-300-AWG, a commercial device based on a field-programmable gate array (FPGA); and the PineBlaster, a device developed in house based on a microcontroller. Both devices are externally referenced to a stable 10 MHz source.

The PineBlaster is a low-cost device using commodity hardware, based on the Arduino-like Digilent ChipKIT Max32 microcontroller prototyping board.¹⁹ The board is flashed with a program that accepts clock instructions over universal serial bus (USB) and executes them with deterministic timing. It is capable of clocking at up to 10 MHz (100 ns between rising edges) with a resolution of 25 ns. The PineBlaster needs one instruction for each change in clock rate (see Fig. 2) and supports up to 15 000 instructions.

labscript provides support for adding new pseudoclocks. It uses an intermediate format for storing timing instructions; implementing a new pseudoclock entails translating them into the required format for the hardware.

Some experiments require the time between instructions to be determined *during* a shot. This can be achieved by pausing the pseudoclocks until some condition is met. A common example^{11–13} is waiting for a sufficient level of fluorescence from a loading MOT. Both the PulseBlaster and the PineBlaster support *wait instructions*, which pause output until resumed by a trigger. These instructions, when used in tandem with devices such as voltage comparators, can command the experiment to wait for events of interest.

IV. THE LABSCRIPT LIBRARY

We have created a Python software library, `labscript`, for defining experiment logic. `labscript` provides *hardware abstraction*, a common interface to control heterogeneous hardware. For example, the `DigitalOut` class provides `go_high(t)` and `go_low(t)` functions to set the state of a digital output at time t . The user calls these functions without regard to the underlying device, its method of programming, or the state of other digital outputs connected to the same device. Based on an experiment script containing such function calls, `labscript` automatically generates instructions for output and measurement devices as well as pseudoclocks. The automatic generation of pseudoclock instructions saves the user from dividing overlapping function ramps into segments (Fig. 2), or manually interpolating output values when a new time point is created on another channel.

An experiment script consists of two parts: a *connection table* (Fig. 3(a)), and code defining the logic of the experiment (Fig. 3(b)). The connection table provides a complete description of devices that are required for the experiment and how they are connected. `labscript` creates a set of Python objects based on the connection table, each with associated functions for commanding output or measurement from devices. The logic of the experiment is then defined by calling these functions with parameters such as time and output value.

As the experiment script is executable Python code, the user has full access to standard Python control flow tools, as well as standard and third party Python libraries. Using a high level language such as Python spares the user from low-level tasks such as memory management.⁵ User-created functions can be stored in modules and imported into other experiment scripts. This allows complex experiments to be constructed from simple components, while maintaining comprehensibility, resulting in a gentler learning curve for new students. For example, one might define a `make_BEC()` function which

```
(a) # Device definitions
PulseBlaster(name='pseudoclock_0', board_number=0)
NI_PCIE_6363(name='ni_card_0', parent_device=pseudoclock_0, clock_type='fast clock',
    MAX_name='ni_pcie_6363_0', clock_terminal='/ni_pcie_6363_0/PFI0')

# Channel definitions
Shutter (name='laser_shutter', parent_device=ni_card_0, connection='port0/line13')
AnalogOut(name='quadrupole_field', parent_device=ni_card_0, connection='ao0')
AnalogOut(name='bias_x_field', parent_device=ni_card_0, connection='ao1')

(b) # Experiment logic
start()
t = 0

# first laser pulse at t = 1 second
t += 1; laser_shutter.open(t)
t += 0.5; laser_shutter.close(t)
t += 0.4;

t += quadrupole_field.ramp(t, duration=5, initial=0, final=3, samplerate=4) # samplerate in Hz
# start ramping the bias field 3 seconds before the quadrupole ramp ends
bias_x_field.ramp(t-3, duration=1, initial=0, final=2.731, samplerate=8)
# t is now 6.9s, the end of the quadrupole field ramp

# second laser pulse
t += 0.4; laser_shutter.open(t)
t += 1; bias_x_field.constant(t, value=0.0)
t += 0.5; laser_shutter.close(t)
t += 2

# hold bias field at bias_x_final_field for 2 seconds before finishing shot
bias_x_field.constant(t, value=bias_x_final_field)
t += 2
stop(t)
```

FIG. 3. An example `labscrip` file. The connection table (a) defines a pseudoclock and a multifunction DAC object and configures three output channels. This is followed by the experiment logic (b) which commands output from these channels by name at times specified by the variable `t`. The experiment logic refers to the parameter `bias_x_final_field` which is set in `runmanager` (Sec. V).

contains the logic to form a Bose–Einstein condensate. While students might not fully understand the experiment logic to create a BEC, they can focus on subsequent experiment logic after a BEC is made. We have found that text based experiment scripts benefit not just from code re-use but also version control, bug tracking, and comparison of incremental changes (diffs).

When the experiment script is run and a timing sequence created, the `labscrip` functions take into account hardware limitations and provide error messages if these are exceeded. If no errors are found, the hardware instruction set for all devices in the connection table is written to the HDF file.

While a text-based definition of experiment logic gives a broad overview of the timing sequence, it is not ideal for visualizing the device outputs to ensure the experiment logic is as intended. The hardware instructions generated by running experiment scripts are difficult to interpret (indeed, `labscrip` was created to mitigate this very problem). Our program (`runviewer`) produces plots (similar to Fig. 2) of the hardware instructions generated by `labscrip`, allowing quick diagnosis of the timing sequence before reaching for the oscilloscope.

V. SETTING PARAMETERS—RUNMANAGER

Repeating experiments while varying parameters is a fundamental part of the scientific method. Anyone who has performed a quantum science experiment will be familiar with

tweaking parameters to find a resonance, calibrating a measurement, or acquiring a large amount of scientific data prior to publication. The logic of the experiment does not change every time a parameter is adjusted, and it is cumbersome to edit numbers in a text file for each modification.

To ameliorate this, `labscrip` experiments can take a series of parameters as input. The names and values of these parameters are defined in the graphical interface of `runmanager` (Fig. 4). The values can be any valid Python expression (such as `0.74`, `1E-3`, `sin(pi/2)`, or `True`) and can refer to each other. We call these parameters *globals* because they are available as global variables in experiment scripts, where they are simply referred to by name. For example, these globals might be used to specify the duration of a π -pulse, the delay between releasing atoms from a trap and imaging them, or the field strengths of bias magnetic coils. This provides a clean separation between code, which defines the nature of the experiment (such as creating a BEC with a vortex or performing a matter-wave mixing experiment), and parameters that modify individual shots.

The user may enter a list of values for a global, such as `[1, 2, 3]`, or `linspace(0, 10, 100)`. In this case `runmanager` produces a corresponding list of experiment shots: one for each value. If multiple globals are entered as lists, `runmanager` performs a Cartesian product, creating one shot for each point in the resulting parameter space. Two or more lists can be *zipped*, in which case `runmanager` iterates over these lists in lock-step when producing shots.

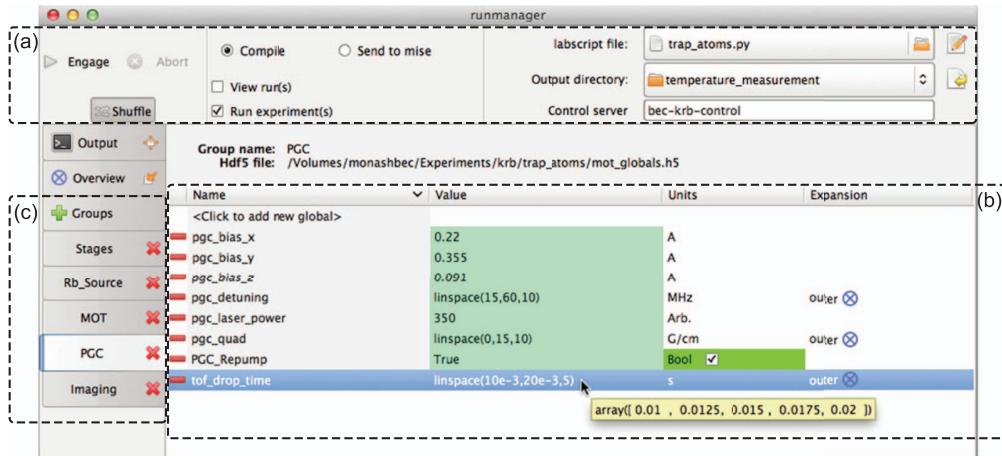


FIG. 4. The `runmanager` interface for configuring experiment parameters. (a) The experiment logic is specified by the `labscript file` (here `trap_atoms.py`). HDF files for experiment shots created by `runmanager` are saved in the `Output directory`. (b) The value of experiment parameters (“globals”) are specified by Python expressions and may have units. These can be single values (i.e., 350 or `True`), lists, or expressions creating lists (as shown for the globals `pgc_detuning`, `pgc_quad`, and `tof_drop_time`). A tooltip shows the evaluation of the global. The “Expansion” column specifies how lists of values are combined to construct a parameter space. (c) Globals can be separated into groups for convenience.

Specifying globals as lists makes it possible to explore complicated parameter spaces containing hundreds or thousands of shots. For example, one might investigate how the temperature of laser cooled atoms varies with laser detuning and magnetic field gradient. Taking the Cartesian product of ten field strengths and ten detunings results in a parameter space of one hundred points. Thermometry at each point in this parameter space commonly requires multiple shots to characterize the expansion rate of the atom cloud. A five-shot temperature measurement brings the number of shots to five hundred. Producing these shots amounts to entering three lists in `runmanager` and clicking on the “Engage” button, as shown in Fig. 4. `runmanager` then creates five hundred HDF files containing the globals for each shot. The experiment script is run for each shot, storing hardware instructions in each file.²⁰ The HDF files are then submitted to BLACS for execution.

VI. EXPERIMENT EXECUTION—BLACS

BLACS coordinates input and output through hardware devices. These devices can be local, and thus under the direct control of BLACS, or connected to a different computer as part of a secondary control program such as BIAS (Sec. VII). BLACS provides both manual control of devices (through a GUI) and buffered execution of experiment shots.

The GUI for manual control is dynamically generated from a *lab connection table* that describes the current configuration of all connected devices. Each device is allocated a tab in the interface, containing controls for commanding output when in manual control mode (Fig. 5).

Upon submission to BLACS, HDF files containing hardware instructions are checked for validity and placed in a queue. The queue can be reordered, paused, or put on repeat. The validity check compares the connection table of each shot to the lab connection table, rejecting those with incompatible

hardware. This prevents unintended device output that would produce nonsensical results and possibly damage equipment.

BLACS takes the first experiment in the queue, coordinates hardware programming, and sends a start trigger to the master pseudoclock. The experiment then proceeds under hardware timing. At the end of a shot, BLACS coordinates saving data acquired by devices to the HDF file, and returns to manual control mode. Each GUI control is updated to the final values of the shot, maintaining output continuity.

Laboratories are a hostile environment for hardware interface libraries. Power cycling of devices and unplugging of cables are common occurrences. A student tripping over a USB cable (health and safety implications notwithstanding) might be expected to cause an experiment to fail, however the control system ought to recover gracefully when it is plugged back in. Similarly, bugs in closed source drivers and libraries are points of failure outside of a users control.

To make our system robust against such hardware and software failures, BLACS implements a multiprocess architecture similar to the sandboxed tabs of the Google Chrome web browser.²¹ For each device in BLACS, a *worker process* is spawned, which communicates with the hardware device. This makes BLACS robust against crashes: if one device has a problem it will not affect others. If a hardware device becomes unresponsive, or the device driver encounters a serious error, its isolation in a separate process prevents the GUI and other devices from suffering the same fate.

Should a worker process crash, the user is presented with the option of restarting the process, which will reload any device libraries it uses. It is worth noting that systems implemented in LabVIEW cannot force libraries to reload, so errors leading to an undefined state would only be remedied by restarting the entire control system.

The initialization of hardware in preparation for a shot is an important part of an experiment, and can significantly contribute to the experiment cycle time. The multiprocess

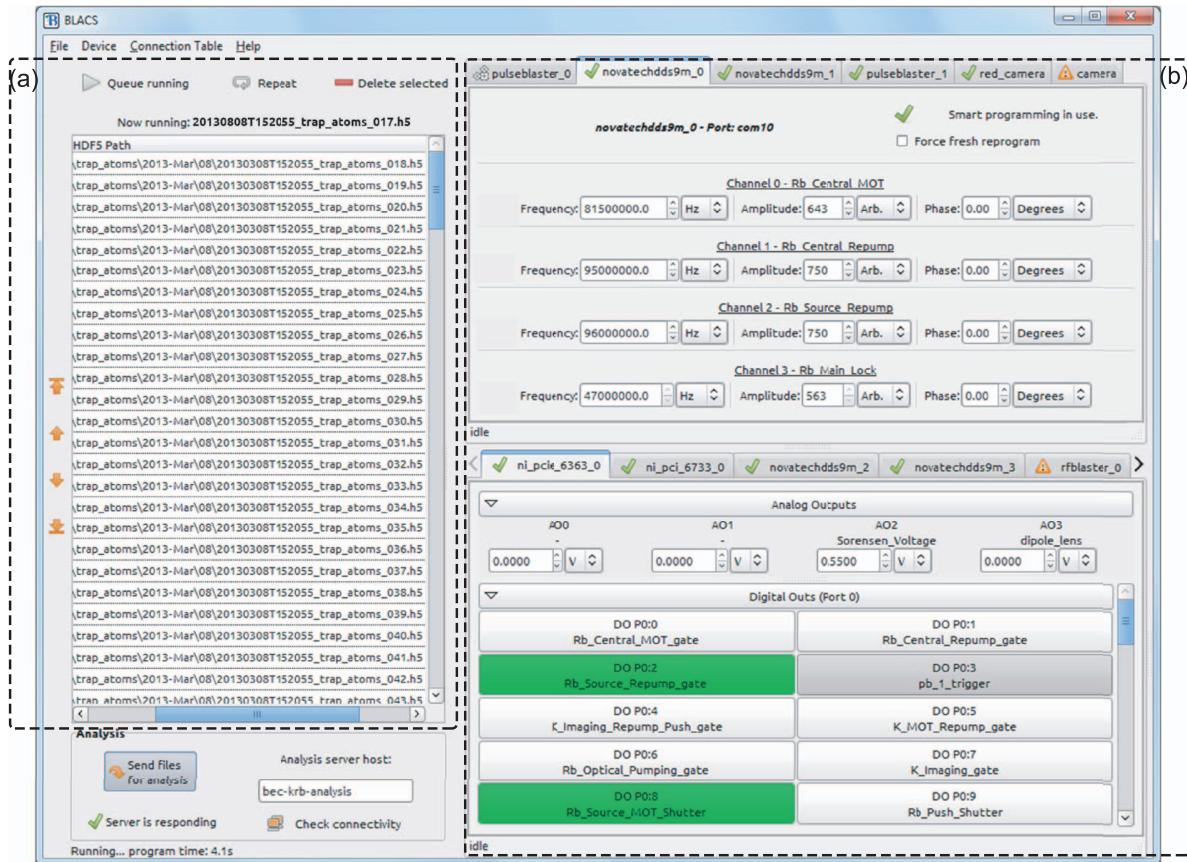


FIG. 5. The BLACS interface for controlling hardware. (a) The queue of shots submitted via `runmanager.r`. (b) The manual control interface. Each tab controls one device. Controls for all outputs are automatically generated and are named based on the BLACS connection table.

architecture naturally provides for simultaneous programming of hardware devices, resulting in an increased experiment duty cycle. We have implemented a *smart programming* feature on many of our devices, further decreasing programming time, reprogramming them only if their instructions have changed since the previous shot (on a per-instruction basis when possible). Devices with large buffers and slow communication (such as the Novatech DDS9m rf synthesizer) benefit greatly from this technique.

VII. IMAGE ACQUISITION—BIAS

Using secondary control programs to communicate with specific devices is desirable when software to do so exists and has been debugged, particularly software written in another programming language. BLACS integrates such programs into the control flow by sending them HDF files containing hardware instructions to program devices for execution upon a hardware trigger. BLACS notifies secondary control programs that the shot has completed, at which point they write any acquired data to the HDF file.

Our camera control and image acquisition system, BIAS, is one such program. BIAS is a LabVIEW application that operates scientific cameras, captures image sequences, and performs image processing tasks such as background subtraction, saturation correction, optical depth calculation, and simple 2D fitting.

Multiple instances of BIAS can be run simultaneously to control multiple cameras in one experiment. BIAS can also run as a stand-alone program for quick visualization of previously captured data or acquire images manually. Hardware communication in BIAS is abstracted through LabVIEW's object hierarchy, allowing a camera class to be written for any vendor library.

LabVIEW provides convenient components for creating graphical interfaces, and BIAS displays raw and computed images as they become available (Fig. 6). Fit results such as atom cloud shape and atom number are prominently displayed to detect and diagnose problems as they occur. The camera acquisition area and regions of interest used to inform fits can be interactively adjusted, without needing to interrupt or recreate a currently running sequence of shots. Multiple regions of interest can be selected and their coordinates saved to the HDF file, enabling further analysis.

VIII. ANALYSIS—LYSE

Analysis is a critical part of an autonomous control system. Automated analysis—performed immediately after every shot—is often restricted to routines that change infrequently and are applied uniformly once per shot. Ideally analysis should be flexible as well as autonomous; these can be conflicting goals without a unifying analysis framework.

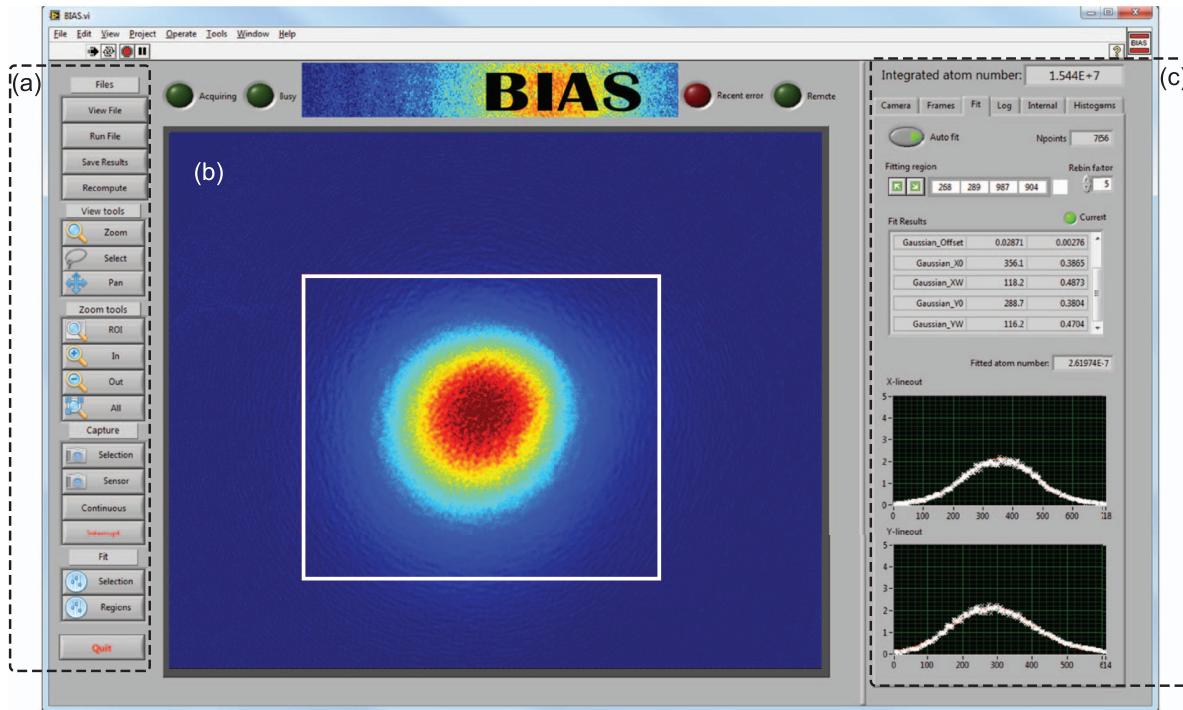


FIG. 6. The BIAS interface displaying a laser cooled atom cloud. (a) Manual controls for loading and capturing images, selecting regions of interest and zooming. (b) Computed optical depth (OD) image of the atoms, with a region of interest (white) selected for fitting. Multiple regions of interest may be selected for multi-component atom clouds. (c) Atom number and cloud size are displayed for immediate feedback.

Our analysis system `lyse` accommodates collective analysis of a group of shots and trivial re-analysis upon changing or adding routines.

`lyse` is a scheduler for user-written analysis routines, which are ordinary Python scripts. It provides functions for extracting the experiment data and metadata from the HDF files and saving analysis results to these files. Multiple analysis routines added to `lyse` execute one after the other when a new HDF file is received over the network, or on command through the GUI. Plots produced by the user's code are updated following every shot as new data comes in from the experiment.

There are two types of routine that `lyse` can run: single-shot, which are run on every shot, and multi-shot, which analyze a group of shots together. Analysis of the thermometry example in Sec. V is shown in Fig. 7. A single-shot routine computes the size of an atom cloud after a fixed expansion time, and a multi-shot routine uses these results to determine the expansion rate and thus the temperature. The multi-shot routine then plots this temperature as a function of laser detuning and magnetic field strength.

Splitting, sorting, plotting, and exploring large multidimensional datasets are cumbersome when directly accessing a set of files. In addition to direct access to the HDF files, `lyse` provides a tabular data structure—a `pandas`²² DataFrame—for multi-shot routines, containing all globals as set by `run-manager`, and all single-shot analysis results. With `pandas`²⁴ and the standard Python scientific stack of `numpy`,²³ `scipy`,²⁴ and `matplotlib`,²⁵ `lyse` provides a powerful environment for analysis.²⁶

Analysis routines can be run independently of `lyse` if desired. This allows the same framework and analysis code to be used for publication preparation.

IX. OPTIMIZATION—MISE

Marrying powerful Python tools to shot-based analysis permits extensibility of the control system, such as closed loop optimization of measured quantities. One often performs parameter space scans for optimization, requiring many shots. This may be tuning a parameter of an apparatus to enhance its performance, finding a resonance of some transition, or some other feature of interest. The quantity being optimized is often the result of some analysis, e.g., the temperature of ultracold atoms (mentioned in Secs. V and VIII). We have created `mise`, a program that performs automatic optimization of analysis results using a genetic algorithm.²⁷ A user specifies one or more parameters to optimize against a predefined figure of merit. Genetic algorithms are resistant to noise, making them particularly useful for optimizing experimental results.

The data flow of the optimization process follows Fig. 8, modifying that shown in Fig. 1. The user specifies in `run-manager` one or more parameters to optimize, with upper and lower limits for each. An analysis routine in `lyse` reports optimality to `mise`, which creates shots with modified parameters and submits them to BLACS.

For each parameter being optimized the user also specifies a *mutation rate*. This determines how much the parameter is varied per generation of the genetic algorithm:

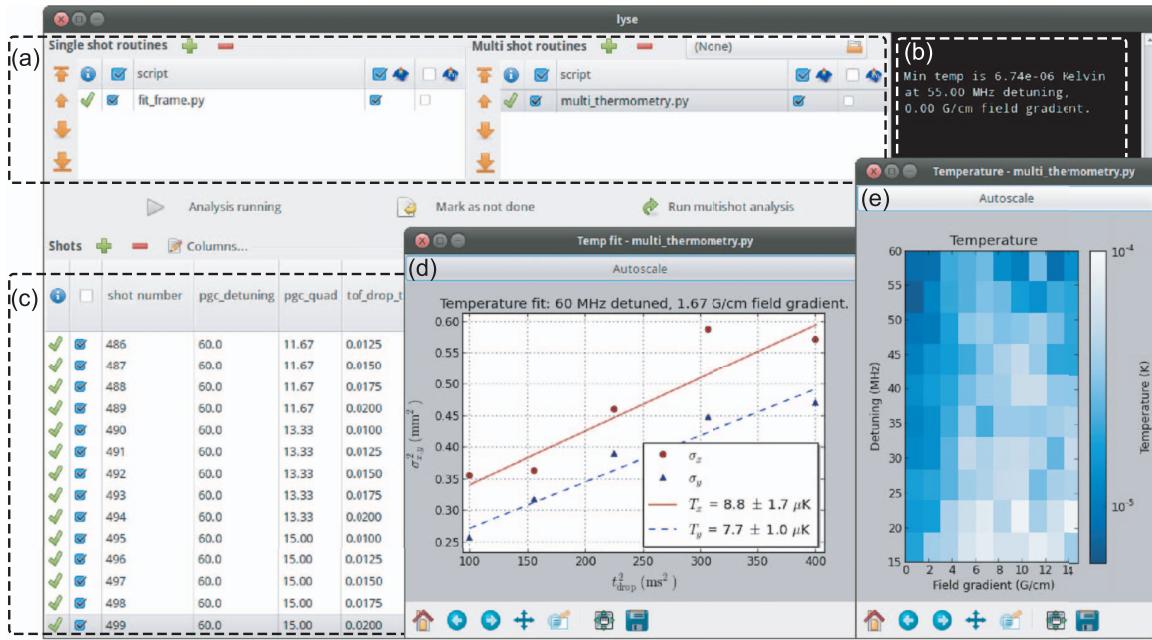


FIG. 7. The lyse interface. (a) Routines can be selected to analyze single or multiple shots. (b) Terminal output from the analysis routines in (a). (c) Table of shots; columns show globals and analysis results. A small subset of columns is displayed here. (d) A fit yielding the temperature of laser cooled atoms prepared at a particular field gradient and detuning. (e) The results of the analysis in (d) repeated at each point in the parameter space.

the larger the mutation rate, the faster mise will move towards the optimum. However, a large mutation rate limits the precision to which the optimal parameters can be determined.

With this specification of parameters, mise creates a population of *individuals*. Each individual comprises values from one point in the optimization parameter space, initially chosen at random. An individual may be a single experiment shot, or—when optimizing the result of a multi-shot analysis—a sequence of shots. Once the shots comprising an individual have executed, the user's analysis routine computes a *fitness*, which may be derived from any measured quantity. mise uses the reported fitness in the genetic algorithm to optimize the specified parameters. The genetic algorithm used by mise²⁸ is a variation on pointed directed mutation,²⁹ in

which mutations are biased in directions previously shown to be successful.

The user can specify when to stop the optimization, either by manual intervention or by a convergence condition written into their analysis script. They may also “guide” the evolution by adding and deleting individuals from the gene pool at any time.

An example of automated optimization using mise is shown in Fig. 9. By preferentially exploring the more interesting regions of parameter space, autonomous optimization allows optima to be found in fewer shots.

mise uses the labscript software library to create HDF shot files and submit them to BLACS. Additional user-written components could similarly submit shots to BLACS if more complex programmatic generation of shots is required.

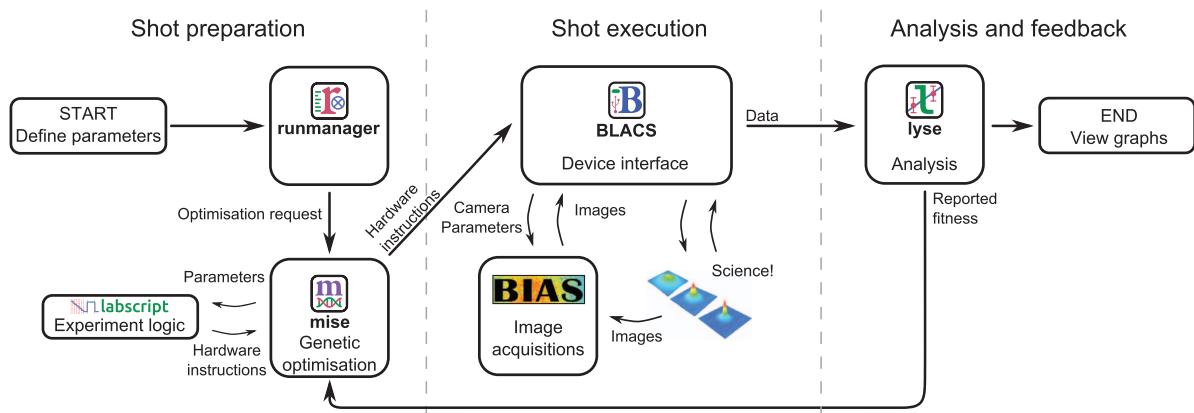


FIG. 8. The data flow for closed loop optimization. In contrast to Fig. 1, analysis results are used to determine future shots automatically. The optimizer mise varies parameters, directly calling labscript to compile new experiment shots. Parameters to be optimized are selected by the user in runmanager. lyse reports fitness to mise which is used to create the next generation of shots.

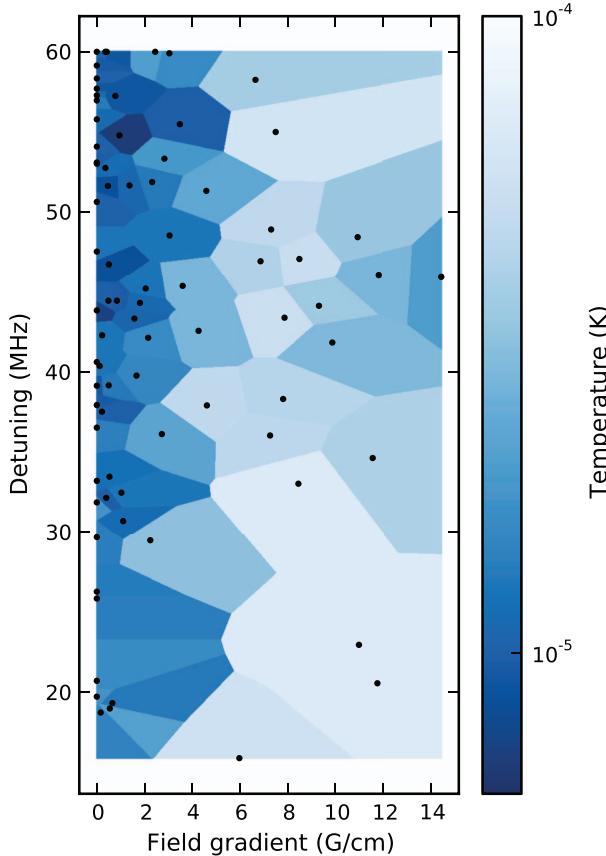


FIG. 9. A proof-of-principle optimization using mise. mise scanned the parameter space described in Sec. V, searching for the coldest point. Each black point represents a temperature measurement at a specific field gradient and detuning, with the surrounding shading indicating the temperature. Eighty points were taken, corresponding to 400 shots. The colder region of parameter space is sampled more densely than the uniformly-sampled scan, shown in Fig. 7(e), with 500 shots.

X. PORTABILITY AND EXTENSIBILITY

Our software runs on Windows, Linux, and OS X, although BLACS and BIAS compatibility is subject to the availability of appropriate hardware drivers. If particular devices must be interfaced with a specific computer, operating system, or programming language, a secondary control program (such as BIAS, Sec. VII) can be used. The components of the labsuite suite communicate with each other via data in HDF files, and over the network with ZeroMQ sockets. The widespread support of these technologies across many platforms³⁰ ensures users are not bound to any one operating system or programming language. The modular nature of our system allows users to replace or supplement any of our programs in their choice of language.

The programs themselves are also written with extensibility in mind. Adding new hardware support to the labsuite suite entails writing a new device class for labsuite, and a GUI tab for BLACS,³¹ or a camera class for BIAS. Adding analysis routines to lyse amounts to writing a Python script to process experiment data. Existing library functions and base classes assist such development. The suite has already proved useful in a setting distinct from quantum science ex-

periments, automating the prototyping of an objective lens, in which the image of a pinhole was acquired and analyzed at 3600 points in a plane to determine the field of view.³²

The labsuite suite is open-source and freely available online.³³ We encourage readers to contact us if they are interested in implementing the suite in their laboratory.

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¹⁸J. M. Hughes, *Real World Instrumentation with Python: Automated Data Acquisition and Control Systems* (O'Reilly Media, Inc., 2010).

¹⁹The source code for turning a ChipKIT Max32 into a PineBlaster is available at <http://hardware.labsuitesuite.org/>.

²⁰In our lab, a typical hardware set for running this experiment would be a SpinCore PulseBlaster DDS-II-300-AWG as a pseudoclock, along with a Novatech DDS9m, National Instruments PCIe6363 and PCI6733 boards and a Photonfocus MV1-D1312(I) camera.

²¹A. Barth, C. Jackson, C. Reis, and The Google Chrome Team, “The security architecture of the chromium browser,” Technical Report, Stanford Security Laboratory, 2008, available at <http://seclab.stanford.edu/websec/chromium>. See <http://youtu.be/29e0CtgXZSI> for more information.

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³¹BLACS communicates with hardware devices through user-written interface code. Devices communicating over standard buses (RS232, USB, Ethernet) are easily interfaced using standard Python libraries for these buses. Devices with proprietary interfaces can be programmed by calls to vendor-supplied libraries through Python’s sophisticated foreign-function interface.

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