

Bachelor Thesis
Decoding the Color Code

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Contents

1	Overview of QEC algebra	3
1.1	Schroedinger picture	4
1.2	Heisenberg picture and stabilizer formalism	4
1.2.1	Stabilizer group	4
1.2.2	Effect of gates on stabilizers	5
1.2.3	Effect of measurements on stabilizers	5
1.2.4	Circuit Analysis in Stabilizer formalism	6
1.3	The Clifford Gates	8
2	Error detection and correction	9
2.1	Error Model	9
2.2	Classical/ Linear codes	9
2.2.1	Repetition code	10
2.2.2	Ringcode	11
2.3	2D codes	12
2.3.1	Surface code	12
2.3.2	Toric code	12
2.3.3	Color code	12
2.4	Decoding schemes	13
2.4.1	Thresholds	13
2.4.2	Decoders for Surface/Toric codes	13
2.4.3	MWPM decoding	13
2.4.4	Union Find decoder	13
2.4.5	Color code decoders	13
2.4.6	Lookup table decoding	13
2.5	Lifting decoder	13
2.6	Next steps	13
3	Decoding Schemes	15
4	Conclusion	15
5	Appendix	16
5.1	Schroedinger picture calculation of CNOT circuit	16

1 Overview of QEC algebra

A quantum computer operates on so-called *qudits*, which can be any multi-level quantum system. Physical implementations of these include particles with spin, as well as controlled EM-waves, i.e. lasers.

In this thesis we will focus on *qubit*-based systems, i.e. two-level quantum systems as base units of computation.

In the following we will analyze quantum circuit diagrams using the different pictures of quantum mechanics. A quantum circuit diagram is a visual representation of the computation done in a quantum computer, whereby:

- States progress in time along horizontal parallel lines
- Time goes from left to right
- Gates denoted X,Y,Z are the single qubit pauli operators $\sigma_x, \sigma_y, \sigma_z$
- Gates can act on one or multiple qubits, whereby an X gate on qubit 1 in a 3-qubit system should be interpreted as:
 $(X \otimes \mathbb{I} \otimes \mathbb{I})(|\psi_1\rangle \otimes |\psi_2\rangle \otimes |\psi_3\rangle)$

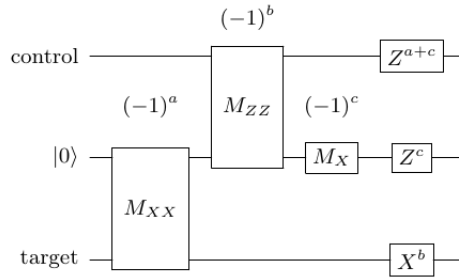


Figure 1: A Quantum Circuit to implement a measurement based Controlled- $X_{|\psi\rangle_{control} \rightarrow |\psi\rangle_{target}}$ Gate, where $|0\rangle$ is the +1 eigenstate in σ_z -basis.

1.1 Schroedinger picture

In the Schroedinger picture, we focus on the time evolution of qubit states:

$$|\psi\rangle = |\psi(t)\rangle \quad (1)$$

Measurements project these states onto eigenstates of the measurement operators via a projection P , so:

$$P_M^\pm |\psi\rangle = \frac{(M \pm \mathbb{I})|\psi\rangle}{2} \quad (2)$$

Where M is a matrix representation of the physical observable to be measured. For example, a measurement of a single qubit's spin along the z-axis would be represented as:

$$M_Z = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & -1 \end{pmatrix} \quad (3)$$

And that measurement would perform a projection P_Z :

$$P_Z^+ = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \text{ or } P_Z^- = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \quad (4)$$

on the state, depending on whether the measurement result yielded $+1$ or -1 .

Therefore, to calculate the output of a quantum circuit in the schroedinger picture, simply apply the measurements and gates on the input states .

As can be seen explicitly calculated in the Schroedinger picture in Appendix 5.1 , the circuit from figure 1 implements a CNOT gate from the control qubit to the target qubit.

We will now analyze this circuit in the Heisenberg picture, finding that it results in an equal output.

1.2 Heisenberg picture and stabilizer formalism

1.2.1 Stabilizer group

We call an operator/gate S , to which the input state is an eigenvector ($S|\psi\rangle = |\psi\rangle$), a *stabilizer* of that input state. For n -qubit systems, we write these stabilizers as n -tensor-products of pauli operators $P \in P_G$, where P_G is

the group generated by the Pauli operators and the Pauli operators are the operators on \mathbb{F}_2 such that:

$$\forall P \in P_G : P^2 = \mathbb{I}. \quad (5)$$

In the Heisenberg picture, stabilizers are tracked instead of states. The stabilizer group S_G is the group generated by the set of stabilizers:

$$S_G = \langle S_0, \dots, S_n \rangle : S|\psi_{in}\rangle = |\psi_{in}\rangle \forall S \in S_G \quad (6)$$

So for the example in Figure it is the group of operators to whom $|\psi_{control}\rangle \otimes |0\rangle \otimes |\psi_{target}\rangle$ is an eigenstate, namely $\mathbb{I} \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{I}$ (and trivially $\mathbb{I} \otimes \mathbb{I} \otimes \mathbb{I}$, which we choose to ignore as a stabilizer since any three-qubit state is stabilized by it, and it can be generated by squaring any stabilizer constructed through tensor products of Pauli matrices).

A stabilizer group is always an abelian group i.e. its elements commute, since if:

$$\forall A, B \in S : AB|\psi\rangle = BA|\psi\rangle = |\psi\rangle \Rightarrow [A, B]|\psi\rangle = 0 \quad (7)$$

1.2.2 Effect of gates on stabilizers

To determine the effect a gate operation A has on a stabilizer, consider the following:

If $S|\psi\rangle = |\psi\rangle$ then:

$$A|\psi\rangle = AS|\psi\rangle = AS\mathbb{I}|\psi\rangle = \underbrace{ASA^\dagger}_{=S'}A|\psi\rangle \quad (8)$$

So we now know that the post-gate state is an eigenstate of S' .

Therefore $S'_G = \langle AS_0A^\dagger, \dots, AS_nA^\dagger \rangle$.

1.2.3 Effect of measurements on stabilizers

A Pauli measurement operator M can either commute with all stabilizer operators, in which case M itself is a stabilizer already. In this case the measurement has no effect on the state, since the measurement of a stabilizer projects onto identity. Otherwise it can anticommute with at least one operator in S_G , since Pauli operators as well as their tensor products can only commute or anti-commute with each other. The product of two operators

that both anticommute with another operator will then commute with that operator.

So in order to obtain the new stabilizers S'_G :

1. Identify $S \in S_G : \{S, M\} = 0$
2. Remove S from S_G
3. Add M to S_G
4. for $N \in S_G \cup \overline{X} \cup \overline{Z} : \text{if } \{N, M\} = 0$: replace N with SN

where \overline{X} and \overline{Z} are the sets of logical X and Z operators respectively. (a logical operator is an operator which acts on a systems metastructure which can be treated as its own qubit)

1.2.4 Circuit Analysis in Stabilizer formalism

After a measurement M , an n qubit input state will always collapse into either the +1 or the -1 eigenstate of the measurement operator.

In the first case the acting measurement operator becomes $\mathbb{I}^{\otimes n} + M$, in the second it becomes $\mathbb{I}^{\otimes n} - M$. Therefore, in the circuit shown in figure 1 , the measurements project onto:

$$P_1^\pm = \frac{1}{2} (\mathbb{I}^{\otimes 3} \pm \mathbb{I} \otimes X \otimes X) \quad (9)$$

$$P_2^\pm = \frac{1}{2} (\mathbb{I}^{\otimes 3} \pm X \otimes X \otimes \mathbb{I}) \quad (10)$$

$$P_3^\pm = \frac{1}{2} (\mathbb{I}^{\otimes 3} \pm \mathbb{I} \otimes X \otimes \mathbb{I}) \quad (11)$$

In the following stabilizers will be written without the tensor product symbols, so in our case the stabilizer is initially: $S_G^0 = \langle IZI \rangle$, the logical \overline{X} operator is XXX and the logical \overline{Z} operator is ZIZ.

After the first measurement, the state is stabilized by IXX, since it collapses into an eigenstate of the measurement operator. Notably, if the measurement operator M anticommutes with some element of the stabilizer S:

$$SP_-S^\dagger = \frac{1}{2}S (\mathbb{I}^{\otimes 3} - M) S^\dagger = \frac{1}{2} (\mathbb{I}^{\otimes 3} + M) SS^\dagger = P_+ \quad (12)$$

So by applying an anticommuting previous stabilizer operator after the measurement one can ensure that the state is in the P_+ projected state $P_+|\psi_{init}\rangle$ (in short, +1 and -1 eigenstates have the same stabilizers if we add conditional gates accordingly).

For the logical operators, if \bar{X} or \bar{Z} do not commute with the measurement operator, we know that their product with another anticommuting operator from the previous stabilizer must then commute with the measurement operator: $[S_{prev}\bar{X}M, MS_{prev}\bar{X}] = 0$ (recall the previous statement that all Paulis and their tensor products must either commute or anti-commute).

In our case, IZI and IXX anticommute, so now the state is stabilized by $S_G^1 = \langle IXX \rangle$. Both initial logical operators commute with the first measurement operator, so they are left unchanged.

After the second measurement $M_2=ZZI$, since this measurement anticommutes with the IXX stabilizer, the new stabilizers are: $S_G^2 = \langle ZZI \rangle$. The logical \bar{X} and \bar{Z} operators are unaffected, since they commute with the measurement operator.

After the third measurement $M_3=IXI$, since this measurement anticommutes with the stabilizer, the new stabilizers are: $S_G^3 = \langle IXI \rangle$. The logical \bar{Z} operator anticommutes with the measurement, so is replaced by $\bar{Z}_3=ZZI \cdot ZIZ = IIZ$. The logical \bar{X} is unaffected since it commutes with the measurement operator.

The stabilizer for the control and target qubit is still identity, and logical $\bar{Z} : ZIZ \rightarrow IIZ$.

Since CNOT maps: $Z \otimes Z \mapsto I \otimes Z$, this implements a logical CNOT from the first to the third qubit.

1.3 The Clifford Gates

It has been proven in *reference source* that operators that map a state stabilized by some member of the Pauli-Group to a state stabilized by another member of the Pauli Group can be simulated efficiently on a classical computer. The Group of operators that satisfy this condition is called the Clifford Group.

For the decoder we wish to implement in this thesis, it therefore makes sense to focus on those first and foremost, as applying corrective gates is a computationally/ experimentally expensive task that should be put off until the latest possible moment, and the propagation of an error until then can be simulated efficiently. Also, the pauli-stabilizers utilized to construct our encoding schemes only stabilize clifford and pauli gates, therefore these encoding schemes *can't* protect against non-clifford/pauli operator errors.

The Clifford Group can be generated by:

- The Hadamard-Gate H , which performs single qubit basis changes from eigenstates of X to eigenstates of Z and vice-versa:

$$H|+\rangle = |0\rangle, H|0\rangle = |+\rangle, H|-\rangle = |1\rangle, H|1\rangle = |-\rangle$$

- The Phase-Gate P , which performs single qubit sign flips on the state parts which are $|1\rangle$ in the computational basis:

$$P(\alpha|0\rangle \pm \beta|1\rangle) = \alpha|0\rangle \mp \beta|1\rangle$$

- The CNOT-Gate, which on a two qubit system performs an X gate on the second qubit if the first qubit is $|1\rangle$, so maps:

$$\begin{aligned} &\alpha|00\rangle + \beta|01\rangle + \delta|10\rangle + \gamma|11\rangle \\ &\mapsto \alpha|00\rangle + \beta|01\rangle + \gamma|10\rangle + \delta|11\rangle \end{aligned}$$

In the σ_z -basis their matrix representations are:

- $H = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 \\ 1 & -1 \end{pmatrix}; P = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & i \end{pmatrix}$

- $CNOT = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$

2 Error detection and correction

2.1 Error Model

One of the big challenges of physically realizing a quantum computer is its subjection to noise in the real world. Unlike classical computers, the type of error is not limited to a bitflip, as even single qubit states have an infinite amount of differing states to it on a Bloch sphere, and therefore an infinite amount of types of errors can have occurred in the presence of noise such as thermal or electromagnetic noise.

Fortunately, this noise can be modeled as a sum of Pauli gates. Any single qubit error operator matrix E can be written as:

$$E = \begin{pmatrix} a & b \\ c & d \end{pmatrix} = \alpha \mathbb{I} + \beta X + \delta Y + \gamma Z \quad (13)$$

With an appropriate choice of $\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta$. In effect, this means that with probability α , the effect of the error $E|\psi\rangle$ will be \mathbb{I} ; with probability β its effect will be X , and so on.

Therefore it is sufficient to determine which of these errors \mathbb{I} , X , Y or Z has occurred, and we can apply the same operator again to return to the initial state. Since an identity noise occurring is irrelevant to us, and XY as well as ZY (anti-) commute, we need only detect for X and Z errors occurring in order to detect any single qubit errors.

2.2 Classical/ Linear codes

From classical computer science there are well known existing encoding schemes, such as the repetition and ring code. We call these codes linear because their graph representations are linear, or one-dimensional. In Quantum error correction, we speak of $[[n, k, d]]$ stabilizer codes if an encoding scheme allows for n physical qubits to encode k logical qubits to an error distance of d , i.e. d individual errors being corrigible. In the following I will refer to linear or classical codes as having a distance of $\frac{1}{2}$, to indicate that they do not protect against an arbitrary single qubit error, but only against flips in one specific eigenbasis.

2.2.1 Repetition code

For this error code information is encoded by repeating the intended message some amount of times, and then decoding it by performing a majority vote on the transmitted message.

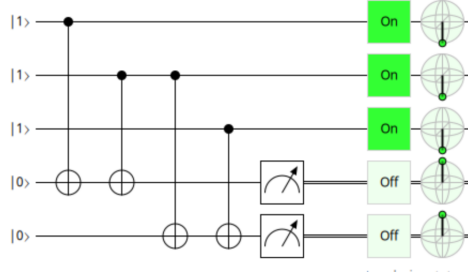


Figure 2: Bitflip Syndrome extractor
+1 measurement result on first Ancilla indicates a bitflip
error on qubits 1 or 2, +1 result on second ancilla
indicates bitflip on second or third qubit

A quantum equivalent of the 3-bit repetition code performed on the message $|1\rangle$ is the $[[3,1,\frac{1}{2}]]$ repetition code depicted in figure 2, including so-called *syndrome extraction*. A syndrome is a stabilizer that can be measured to detect whether and where an error has occurred in a multi-qubit system. It is crucial that the measurement of such syndromes occurs without harming the actual quantum information stored in the *data – qubits*. Therefore two additional *ancilla – qubits* (both initialized to $|0\rangle$) are attached to the circuit via CNOTs. This circuit is stabilized by IZZ and ZZI , measured by ancilla 1/2. The measurement result will therefore be a vector of length two, with each entry either being +1 or -1. To simplify the algebra this will be changed to the binary representation of 0 for +1 and 1 for -1.

To represent the code, Stabilizers can be stacked together to a so-called parity-check-matrix, which satisfies:

$$M_{pc} \cdot \vec{v}_{error} = \vec{v}_{syndrome} \quad (14)$$

So e.g. the parity check matrix for the $[3,1,\frac{1}{2}]$ repetition code would be:

$$M_{pc3} = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \quad (15)$$

And the syndrome for an X error on the first qubit would be $\begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}$.

This way of encoding information however leaves two notable issues:

For one, it only detects bitflip, or Pauli-X errors occurring on the stored quantum information. While using Hadamard gates one could trivially adapt this code to instead detect Pauli-Z errors, it is not possible to use linear codes like the repetition code to *simultaneously* detect Pauli-X and Pauli-Z errors occurring.

Secondly, it also assumes a noise model of a “Noisy Channel”, which is not compatible with the actually encountered errors in real physical quantum computers.

INSERT FIGURE SHOWING REPETITION CODE

2.2.2 Ringcode

The ring code’s graph essentially just loops around at the repetition code’s single-edged nodes, so for example its edge matrix or parity-check matrix for a three-qubit system looks like:

$$M_{pc3} = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \quad (16)$$

INSERT FIGURE SHOWING RINGCODE

2.3 2D codes

Previous research in computer science provides a toolset for generating valid codes from existing encoding schemes. Hypergraph product codes, introduced by Tillich and Zémor, of two existing codes will always remain a valid detection code.

The parity check matrix H of a hypergraph product code is generated by the parity check matrices of two valid codes in the following

2.3.1 Surface code

We can therefore form a hypergraph product code of two repetition codes for X error detection and Z error detection respectively, obtaining the $[[d^2, 1, d]]$ “Surface-Code” which can detect up to d of *both* X and Z errors, and therefore any pauli error happening. We can draw this code as a graph, whereby the code’s stabilizers are understood as an adjacency Matrix, the data qubits are on edges of the graph and the ancilla qubits for Z-checks are on faces while the ancilla qubits for X-checks lie on nodes.

Like the repetition code, the Surface code is a code that is regular until it’s boundary nodes.

INSERT FIGURE SHOWING TORIC CODE

2.3.2 Toric code

Similarly, a hypergraph product code of two ring codes can be generated. We call this code the “Toric code”.

INSERT FIGURE SHOWING TORIC CODE

2.3.3 Color code

The color code is a code whereby the graph whose adjacency matrix’s rows are both the code’s X stabilizers and Z stabilizers. Any three-colorable graph represents a valid color code. On the color code, an error is bounded by syndromic faces of all colors.

INSERT FIGURE SHOWING COLOR CODE

2.4 Decoding schemes

2.4.1 Thresholds

In order to compare different codes and decoding schemes, we introduce the concept of thresholds.....

2.4.2 Decoders for Surface/Toric codes

2.4.3 MWPM decoding

2.4.4 Union Find decoder

2.4.5 Color code decoders

2.4.6 Lookup table decoding

This takes a long time to generate and cannot be done to scale, but is a nice toy.

2.5 Lifting decoder

- Create dual of graph
- Generate single-edge-colored subgraphs of the dual
- Decode subgraphs using MWPM/Union-Find
- Unify all edges from subgraph corrections
- Find all loops on this

2.6 Next steps

- add some visual form of the stabilizer circuit analysis
- explain graphs and hypergraphs
- add visual graph representation of 1D and 2D codes
- add subsection about toric and color code
- add subsection about decoding

- write out xyz matrix representations
- add equation for probabilities in schroedinger picture
- find general commutation property of pauli matrices
- change stabilizer indeces
- change 1.2.3 formulation

3 Decoding Schemes

4 Conclusion

5 Appendix

5.1 Schroedinger picture calculation of CNOT circuit

In the quantum circuit depicted in figure 1 the input state can be written as $|\psi_{control}\rangle \otimes |0\rangle \otimes |\psi_{target}\rangle$ and the measurement in the first timestep can be expressed as $\mathbb{I} \otimes X \otimes X$.

The initial state $|\phi_{t=0}\rangle = |\psi_{control}\rangle \otimes |\psi_{ancilla}\rangle \otimes |\psi_{target}\rangle$ where

$$|\psi_{control}\rangle = \alpha|0\rangle + \beta|1\rangle$$

$$|\psi_{ancilla}\rangle = |0\rangle$$

$$|\psi_{target}\rangle = \gamma|0\rangle + \delta|1\rangle$$

therefore:

$$|\phi_{t=0}\rangle = \alpha (\gamma|000\rangle + \delta|001\rangle) + \beta (\gamma|100\rangle + \delta|101\rangle) \quad (17)$$

If the first measurement result is +1, the state becomes:

$$\begin{aligned} |\phi_{t=1}^+\rangle &= \frac{1}{2} (\mathbb{I} \otimes \mathbb{I} \otimes \mathbb{I} + \mathbb{I} \otimes X \otimes X) |\phi_{t=0}\rangle \\ &= \alpha (\gamma (|000\rangle + |011\rangle) + \delta (|001\rangle + |010\rangle)) \\ &\quad + \beta (\gamma (|100\rangle + |111\rangle) + \delta (|101\rangle + |110\rangle)) \end{aligned}$$

if the result is -1, it becomes:

$$\begin{aligned} |\phi_{t=1}^-\rangle &= \frac{1}{2} (\mathbb{I} \otimes \mathbb{I} \otimes \mathbb{I} - \mathbb{I} \otimes X \otimes X) |\phi_{t=0}\rangle \\ &= \alpha (\gamma (|000\rangle - |011\rangle) + \delta (|001\rangle - |010\rangle)) \\ &\quad + \beta (\gamma (|100\rangle - |111\rangle) + \delta (|101\rangle - |110\rangle)) \end{aligned}$$

In the case of the +1 Measurement $\rightarrow a=0$:

$$\begin{aligned} |\phi_{t=2}^{++}\rangle &= \frac{1}{2} (\mathbb{I} \otimes \mathbb{I} \otimes \mathbb{I} + Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{I}) |\phi_{t=1}^+\rangle \\ &= (|000\rangle\langle 000| + |001\rangle\langle 001| + |110\rangle\langle 110| + |111\rangle\langle 111|) |\phi_{t=1}^+\rangle \\ &= \alpha (\gamma|000\rangle + \delta|001\rangle) + \beta (\gamma|111\rangle + \delta|110\rangle) \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} |\phi_{t=2}^{+-}\rangle &= \frac{1}{2} (\mathbb{I} \otimes \mathbb{I} \otimes \mathbb{I} - Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{I}) |\phi_{t=1}^+\rangle \\ &= (|010\rangle\langle 010| + |011\rangle\langle 011| + |100\rangle\langle 100| + |101\rangle\langle 101|) |\phi_{t=1}^+\rangle \\ &= \alpha (\gamma|011\rangle + \delta|010\rangle) + \beta (\gamma|100\rangle + \delta|101\rangle) \end{aligned}$$

In the case of the -1 Measurement $\rightarrow a=1$:

$$\begin{aligned} |\phi_{t=2}^{-+}\rangle &= \frac{1}{2} (\mathbb{I} \otimes \mathbb{I} \otimes \mathbb{I} + Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{I}) |\phi_{t=1}^{-}\rangle \\ &= \alpha (\gamma|000\rangle + \delta|001\rangle) - \beta (\gamma|111\rangle + \delta|110\rangle) \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} |\phi_{t=2}^{--}\rangle &= \frac{1}{2} (\mathbb{I} \otimes \mathbb{I} \otimes \mathbb{I} - Z \otimes Z \otimes \mathbb{I}) |\phi_{t=1}^{-}\rangle \\ &= -\alpha (\gamma|011\rangle + \delta|010\rangle) + \beta (\gamma|100\rangle + \delta|101\rangle) \end{aligned}$$

Now the applied measurement is $\mathbb{I} \otimes X \otimes \mathbb{I}$, which means:

$$\begin{aligned} |\phi_{t=3}^{+++}\rangle &= \frac{1}{2} (\mathbb{I} \otimes \mathbb{I} \otimes \mathbb{I} + \mathbb{I} \otimes X \otimes \mathbb{I}) |\phi_{t=2}^{++}\rangle \\ &= \frac{1}{2} ((|010\rangle + |000\rangle)\langle 000| + (|011\rangle + |001\rangle)\langle 001| \\ &\quad + (|000\rangle + |010\rangle)\langle 010| + (|001\rangle + |011\rangle)\langle 011| \\ &\quad + (|110\rangle + |100\rangle)\langle 100| + (|111\rangle + |101\rangle)\langle 101| \\ &\quad + (|100\rangle + |110\rangle)\langle 110| + (|101\rangle + |111\rangle)\langle 111|) |\phi_{t=2}^{++}\rangle \\ &= \frac{1}{2} (\alpha (\gamma(|000\rangle + |010\rangle) + \delta(|011\rangle + |001\rangle)) \\ &\quad + \beta (\gamma(|101\rangle + |111\rangle) + \delta(|100\rangle + |110\rangle))) \end{aligned}$$

In this case, a,b and c would each be zero, therefore no further gate would be applied.

As intended, this state is equivalent to $CNOT_{|\psi_{Control}\rangle \rightarrow |\psi_{Target}\rangle} |\phi_{t=0}\rangle$.

If the last measurement result is -1:

$$\begin{aligned} |\phi_{t=3}^{++-}\rangle &= \frac{1}{2} (\mathbb{I} \otimes \mathbb{I} \otimes \mathbb{I} - \mathbb{I} \otimes X \otimes \mathbb{I}) |\phi_{t=2}^{++}\rangle \\ &= \frac{1}{2} ((|010\rangle + |000\rangle)\langle 000| + (|001\rangle - |011\rangle)\langle 001| \\ &\quad + (|010\rangle - |000\rangle)\langle 010| + (|011\rangle - |001\rangle)\langle 011| \\ &\quad + (|100\rangle - |110\rangle)\langle 100| + (|101\rangle - |111\rangle)\langle 101| \\ &\quad + (|110\rangle - |100\rangle)\langle 110| + (|111\rangle - |101\rangle)\langle 111|) |\phi_{t=2}^{++}\rangle \\ &= \frac{1}{2} (\alpha (TODOTODOTODOTODOTODO\gamma(|000\rangle + |010\rangle) + \delta(|011\rangle + |001\rangle)) \\ &\quad + \beta (\gamma(|101\rangle + |111\rangle) + \delta(|100\rangle + |110\rangle))) \end{aligned}$$

Notably, each measurement sequence has a differing resulting ancilla state, however we do not care since ancillas are meant to be discarded. For now, the other 7 final computation steps are left as an exercise to the reader, however I probably will still finish that.