

Euler-Heisenberg Effective Action

immediate

1 Spinor electrodynamics in flat space-time

Maxwell Lagrangian

$$S_{\text{Maxwell}}[A_\mu] := \int d^{d+1}x \left(-\frac{1}{4} F^{\mu\nu} F_{\mu\nu} \right) \quad (1)$$

Dirac Lagrangian [1, sec. 11]

$$S_{\text{Dirac}}[\psi, \bar{\psi}] := \int d^{d+1}x \left\{ -\bar{\psi}(\gamma^\mu \partial_\mu + m)\psi \right\}. \quad (2)$$

Interaction term

$$S_{\text{IDM}}[A_\mu, \psi, \bar{\psi}] := \int d^{d+1}x \left(-\bar{\psi} \gamma^\mu i e A_\mu \psi \right). \quad (3)$$

The total action for spinor electrodynamics reads

$$\begin{aligned} S_{1/2}[A_\mu, \psi, \bar{\psi}] &:= S_{\text{Dirac}} + S_{\text{IDM}} + S_{\text{Maxwell}} \\ &= \int d^{d+1}x \left\{ -\bar{\psi}(\gamma^\mu \nabla_\mu + m)\psi - \frac{1}{4} F^{\mu\nu} F_{\mu\nu} \right\}, \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$

where

$$\nabla_\mu \psi := (\partial_\mu + i e A_\mu) \psi. \quad (5)$$

Generating functional

$$\mathcal{Z}[j^\mu, \bar{\eta}, \eta] := \int \mathcal{D}A \mathcal{D}\psi \mathcal{D}\bar{\psi} \exp \left\{ i \left(S_{1/2} + \int d^{d+1}x (j^\mu A_\mu + \bar{\eta} \psi + \bar{\psi} \eta) \right) \right\} \quad (6)$$

Effective action

$$\mathcal{Z}[j^\mu, 0, 0] =: \int \mathrm{D}A \exp \left\{ i \left(S_{\text{Maxwell}} + \Gamma_{\text{EH}}[A_\mu] + \int \mathrm{d}^{d+1}x j^\mu A_\mu \right) \right\}. \quad (7)$$

In other words,

$$\begin{aligned} \exp\{i\Gamma_{\text{EH}}[A_\mu]\} &\equiv \int \mathrm{D}\psi \mathrm{D}\bar{\psi} \exp\{i(S_{\text{Dirac}} + S_{\text{IDM}})\} \\ &\equiv \int \mathrm{D}\psi \mathrm{D}\bar{\psi} \exp \left\{ i \int \mathrm{d}^{d+1}x \bar{\psi} (-\not{\partial} - ie\mathcal{A} - m) \psi \right\} \\ &= \int \mathrm{D}\psi \mathrm{D}\bar{\psi} \exp \left\{ i \int \mathrm{d}^{d+1}x \mathrm{d}^{d+1}y \bar{\psi}(x) S^{-1}(x, y) \psi(y) \right\} \\ &= \tilde{\mathcal{N}} \det[-iS^{-1}(x, y)], \end{aligned} \quad (8)$$

where

$$S^{-1}(x, y) := (+\not{\partial}_y - ie\mathcal{A}(y) - m) \delta^{d+1}(x - y). \quad (9)$$

$$\begin{aligned} \Gamma_{\text{EH}}[A_\mu] &\equiv -i \left(\ln \tilde{\mathcal{N}} + \ln \det[-iS^{-1}] \right) \\ &= -i \left(\ln \tilde{\mathcal{N}} + \text{Tr} \ln[-iS^{-1}(x, y)] \right). \end{aligned} \quad (10)$$

Note that

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Tr} \ln[-iS^{-1}(x, y)] &\equiv \text{Tr} \ln[-iM^\top(x, y)] \\ &= \text{Tr} \ln[i(+\not{\partial}_y^\top - ie\mathcal{A}^\top(y) - m) \delta^{d+1}(x - y)] \\ &= \text{Tr} \ln[i(-\mathcal{C}\not{\partial}_y \mathcal{C}^{-1} + ie\mathcal{C}\mathcal{A}(y)\mathcal{C}^{-1} - \mathcal{C}m\mathcal{C}^{-1}) \delta^{d+1}(x - y)] \\ &= \text{Tr} \{ \mathcal{C} \ln[i(-\not{\partial}_y + ie\mathcal{A}(y) - m) \delta^{d+1}(x - y)] \mathcal{C}^{-1} \} \\ &= \text{Tr} \ln[i(-\not{\partial}_y + ie\mathcal{A}(y) - m) \delta^{d+1}(x - y)]. \end{aligned} \quad (11)$$

where the transpose $^\top$ is taken in the spinor space. Therefore

$$\text{Tr} \ln[-iS^{-1}(x, y)] = \frac{1}{2} \text{Tr} \ln[S_2^{-1}(x, y)], \quad (12)$$

where

$$S_2^{-1}(x, y) := \mathcal{S}_{2y}^{-1} \delta^{d+1}(x - y), \quad \mathcal{S}_{2y}^{-1} := \left((\not{\partial}_y - ie\mathcal{A}(y))^2 - m^2 \right). \quad (13)$$

One may further simplify eq. (13) by noting (y suppressed)

$$\begin{aligned}
(\not{\partial} - ie\not{A})^2 &= \partial^2 - e^2 A_\mu^2 - ie \frac{1}{2} ([\gamma^\mu, \gamma^\nu]_- + [\gamma^\mu, \gamma^\nu]_+) (\partial_\mu A_\nu + A_\mu \partial_\nu + A_\nu \partial_\mu) \\
&= \partial^2 - e^2 A_\mu^2 - ie (\partial_\mu A^\mu + 2A^\mu \partial_\mu - i\sigma^{\mu\nu} \partial_\mu A_\nu) \\
&= (\partial_\mu - ieA_\mu)^2 - e\sigma^{\mu\nu} \partial_{[\mu} A_{\nu]} \\
&= (\partial_\mu - ieA_\mu)^2 - \frac{e}{2} \sigma^{\mu\nu} F_{\mu\nu},
\end{aligned} \tag{14}$$

so that

$$\mathcal{S}_2^{-1} \equiv \left((\partial_\mu - ieA_\mu)^2 - \frac{e}{2} \sigma^{\mu\nu} F_{\mu\nu} - m^2 \right), \tag{15}$$

where y is suppressed as well. Now we may write

$$\begin{aligned}
\Gamma_{\text{EH}}[A_\mu] &= -\frac{i}{2} \text{Tr} \ln \{ \mathcal{N}^{-1} \mathcal{S}_2^{-1}(x, y) \} \\
&= -\frac{i}{2} \text{Tr} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{ds}{s} \left\{ -e^{is(S_2^{-1}(x, y) + i0^+)} + e^{is(\mathcal{N} + i0^+)} \right\} \\
&= +\frac{i}{2} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{ds}{s} \int d^{d+1}x d^{d+1}y \delta^{d+1}(x - y) \\
&\quad \cdot \text{tr} \left\{ +e^{is((\partial_\mu - ieA_\mu)^2 - \frac{e}{2} \sigma^{\mu\nu} F_{\mu\nu} - m^2 + i0^+)} \delta^{d+1}(x - y) - e^{is(\mathcal{N} + i0^+)} \right\},
\end{aligned} \tag{16}$$

where tr takes place in the spinor space.

1.1 Constant background field in (3 + 1)-dimensions

Equation (12) can be solved exactly when $F_{\mu\nu}$ is constant throughout space-time. One has

$$F_{0i} \equiv -F_{i0} = -E_i, \quad F_{ij} \equiv -F_{ji} = \epsilon_{ijk} B^k, \tag{17}$$

and the spinor part of eq. (15) can be calculated

$$-\frac{e}{2} \sigma^{\mu\nu} F_{\mu\nu} = -e \begin{bmatrix} (\vec{B} - i\vec{E}) \cdot \vec{\sigma} & 0 \\ 0 & (\vec{B} + i\vec{E}) \cdot \vec{\sigma} \end{bmatrix}, \tag{18}$$

so that

$$\begin{aligned}
&\text{tr} e^{is((\partial_\mu - ieA_\mu)^2 - \frac{e}{2} \sigma^{\mu\nu} F_{\mu\nu} - m^2 + i0^+)} \delta^{d+1}(x - y) \\
&= e^{is((\partial_\mu - ieA_\mu)^2 - m^2 + i0^+)} \delta^{d+1}(x - y) \text{tr} e^{is(-\frac{e}{2} \sigma^{\mu\nu} F_{\mu\nu})},
\end{aligned} \tag{19}$$

in which

$$\text{tr } e^{is(-\frac{\epsilon}{2}\sigma^{\mu\nu}F_{\mu\nu})} = 2 \left\{ \cos \left(se \sqrt{(\vec{B} + i\vec{E})^2} \right) + \cos \left(se \sqrt{(\vec{B} - i\vec{E})^2} \right) \right\} \quad (20)$$

$$= 4 \cos(seB) \cosh(seE), \quad \text{for } \vec{B} = B\hat{x}^3, \quad \vec{E} = E\hat{x}^3. \quad (21)$$

A Landau-like choice of four-potential [3] reads

$$A_\mu := (0 \quad -x^0 E_1 + x^3 B^2 \quad -x^0 E_2 + x^1 B^3 \quad -x^0 E_3 + x^2 B^1), \quad (22)$$

applying which leads to eq. (17).

Consider the case where $\vec{B} = B\hat{x}^3$, $\vec{E} = E\hat{x}^3$. The scalar part of eq. (15) simplifies to

$$\begin{aligned} (\partial_\mu - ieA_\mu)^2 - m^2 &= -\partial_0^2 + \partial_1^2 + (\partial_2 - ie x^1 B)^2 + (\partial_3 + ie x^0 E)^2 - m^2 \\ &= U \left\{ -\partial_0^2 + \partial_1^2 - (eB)^2 (x^1)^2 - (eE)^2 (x^0)^2 \right\} U^\dagger, \end{aligned} \quad (23)$$

where

$$U := e^{+i(\partial_1 \partial_2 / eB - \partial_3 \partial_0 / eE)}. \quad (24)$$

One can first solve the sub-eigensystem

$$\left\{ +\partial_1^2 - (eB)^2 (x^1)^2 - \lambda \right\} \tilde{f}_\lambda(x^1) = 0, \quad (25)$$

and the general solution is

$$\tilde{f}_\lambda(x) = c_1 D_{-\frac{\lambda}{2eB} - \frac{1}{2}} \left(\sqrt{2eB}x \right) + c_2 D_{+\frac{\lambda}{2eB} - \frac{1}{2}} \left(i\sqrt{2eB}x \right), \quad (26)$$

where $D_\nu(z)$ is the parabolic cylinder function. For

$$\lambda = -(2n+1)eB, \quad n = -\frac{1}{2} - \frac{\lambda}{2eB} \quad (27)$$

eq. (26) reduces to a combination of the Hermite polynomials

$$\tilde{f}_n(x) = c_1 2^{-n/2} e^{-eBx^2/2} H_n \left(\sqrt{eB}x \right) + c_2 2^{+(n+1)/2} e^{+eBx^2/2} H_{-n-1} \left(i\sqrt{eB}x \right). \quad (28)$$

The first branch constitutes a complete orthogonal set of basis for $L^2(\mathbb{R})$ when $n \in \mathbb{Z}^+$, and its normalised version will be denoted as $\{f_n\}$.

It has been argued that the same solution applies for

$$\left\{ -\partial_0^2 - (eE)^2 (x^0)^2 - \lambda \right\} \tilde{g}_\lambda(x^0) = 0 \quad (29)$$

if one applies $E \rightarrow iB$, so that the eigenfunctions are

$$g_n(x) = f_n(x), \quad n = -\frac{1}{2} - \frac{i\lambda}{2eE} \quad \text{or} \quad \lambda = i(2n+1)eE. \quad (30)$$

However, we know that complex differential equations are subtle!

The eigenfunctions of eq. (23) can now be written down

$$\begin{aligned} & \{(\partial_\mu - ieA_\mu)^2 - m^2\} \{Uf_n(x^1)g_k(x^0)\} \\ &= U \left\{ -\partial_0^2 + \partial_1^2 - (eB)^2(x^1)^2 - (eE)^2(x^0)^2 \right\} f_n(x^1)g_k(x^0) \\ &= -i(2n+1)(2k+1)e^2BE \{Uf_n(x^1)g_k(x^0)\}, \end{aligned} \quad (31)$$

and they are

$$\phi_{nk}(x) := Uf_n(x^1)g_k(x^0). \quad (32)$$

$$\begin{aligned} \delta^4(x-y) &= \sum_{n,k} \phi_{nk}^*(x) \phi_{nk}(y) \\ &= \sum_{n,k} \{U(x)f_n(x^1)g_k(x^0)\}^\dagger \{U(y)f_n(y^1)g_k(y^0)\}. \end{aligned} \quad (33)$$

[4]

2 Scalar electrodynamics in flat space-time

Complex Klein–Gordon Lagrangian

$$S_{\text{CKG}}[\phi, \phi^*] := \int d^{d+1}x \{ -\eta^{\mu\nu} (\partial_\mu \phi)^* (\partial_\nu \phi) - m^2 \phi^* \phi \}. \quad (34)$$

Interaction term

$$S_{\text{ICKGM}}[A_\mu, \phi, \phi^*] := \int d^{d+1}x \eta^{\mu\nu} \{ ieA_\mu (-\phi^* \partial_\nu \phi + \phi \partial_\nu \phi^*) + e^2 A_\mu A_\nu \phi^* \phi \}. \quad (35)$$

The total action for scalar electrodynamics reads

$$\begin{aligned} S_0[A_\mu, \phi, \phi^*] &:= S_{\text{CKG}} + S_{\text{ICKGM}} + S_{\text{Maxwell}} \\ &= \int d^{d+1}x \left\{ -(\nabla_\mu \phi)^* (\nabla^\mu \phi) - m^2 \phi^* \phi - \frac{1}{4} F^{\mu\nu} F_{\mu\nu} \right\}, \end{aligned} \quad (36)$$

where

$$\nabla_\mu \phi := (\partial_\mu + ieA_\mu)\phi. \quad (37)$$

Generating functional

$$\mathcal{Z}[j^\mu, \bar{J}, J] := \int DA D\phi D\phi^* \exp \left\{ i \left(S_0 + \int d^{d+1}x (j^\mu A_\mu + J^* \psi + \psi^* J) \right) \right\}. \quad (38)$$

Effective action

$$\mathcal{Z}[j^\mu, 0, 0] =: \int DA \exp \left\{ i \left(S_{\text{Maxwell}} + \Gamma_W[A_\mu] + \int d^{d+1}x j^\mu A_\mu \right) \right\}. \quad (39)$$

In other words,

$$\begin{aligned} \exp\{i\Gamma_W[A_\mu]\} &:= \int D\phi D\phi^* \exp\{i(S_{\text{CKG}} + S_{\text{ICKGM}})\} \\ &\equiv \int D\phi D\phi^* \exp \left\{ i \int d^{d+1}x \left\{ -(\nabla_\mu \phi)^* (\nabla^\mu \phi) - m^2 \phi^* \phi \right\} \right\}. \end{aligned} \quad (40)$$

The integral in the exponent can be manipulated; only the first term is essential

$$\begin{aligned} &\int d^{d+1}x \left(-(\nabla_\mu \phi)^* (\nabla^\mu \phi) \right) \\ &= \int d^{d+1}x d^{d+1}y \left(-(\nabla_{x^\mu} \phi(x))^* \delta^{d+1}(x-y) \nabla^{y^\mu} \phi(y) \right), \end{aligned} \quad (41)$$

where

$$\begin{aligned} \delta^{d+1}(x-y) \nabla^{y^\mu} \phi(y) &= \delta^{d+1}(x-y) \left\{ \partial^{y^\mu} + ieA^\mu(y) \right\} \phi(y) \\ &= \left\{ -(\nabla^{y^\mu})^* \delta^{d+1}(x-y) \right\} \phi(y) + \partial^{y^\mu} B, \end{aligned} \quad (42)$$

in which

$$B = B(x, y) := \delta^{d+1}(x-y) \phi(y); \quad (43)$$

going back to eq. (41),

$$\begin{aligned} &= \int d^{d+1}x d^{d+1}y \left\{ -\left\{ \partial_{x^\mu} + ieA_\mu(x) \right\} \phi(x) \right\}^* \delta^{d+1}(x-y) \nabla^{y^\mu} \phi(y) \\ &= \int d^{d+1}x d^{d+1}y \left\{ -\partial_{x^\mu} C^\mu + \phi^*(x) \nabla_{x^\mu} \delta^{d+1}(x-y) \nabla^{y^\mu} \phi(y) \right\} \\ &= \int d^{d+1}x d^{d+1}y \left\{ -\partial_{x^\mu} C^\mu + \phi^*(x) \left\{ -(\nabla_{y^\mu}) (\nabla^{y^\mu})^* \delta^{d+1}(x-y) \right\} \phi(y) + \partial^{y^\mu} \nabla_{x^\mu} B \right\}, \end{aligned} \quad (44)$$

in which

$$C^\mu = C^\mu(x, y) := \phi^*(x) \delta^{d+1}(x - y) \nabla^{y^\mu} \phi(y). \quad (45)$$

Now eq. (40) can be written as (dropping the boundary terms)

$$\begin{aligned} &= \int D\phi D\phi^* \exp \left\{ -i \int d^{d+1}x d^{d+1}y \phi^*(x) D^{-1}(x, y) \phi(y) \right\} \\ &= \tilde{\mathcal{N}} \{ \det [D^{-1}(x, y)] \}^{-1/2}, \end{aligned} \quad (46)$$

where

$$D^{-1}(x, y) := \mathcal{D}_y^{-1} \delta^{d+1}(x - y), \quad \mathcal{D}_y^{-1} := +(\nabla_{y^\mu})(\nabla^{y^\mu})^* + m^2. \quad (47)$$

$$\begin{aligned} \Gamma_W[A_\mu] &\equiv -i \left(\ln \tilde{\mathcal{N}} - \frac{1}{2} \ln \det D^{-1} \right) \\ &= \frac{i}{2} \text{tr}_x \ln (\mathcal{N}^{-1} D^{-1}) \\ &= \frac{i}{2} \int_0^{+\infty} \frac{ds}{s} \int d^{d+1}x d^{d+1}y \delta^{d+1}(x - y) \\ &\quad \cdot \left\{ -e^{is \left(+(\nabla_{y^\mu})(\nabla^{y^\mu})^* + m^2 + i0^+ \right) \delta^{d+1}(x-y)} + e^{is(\mathcal{N} + i0^+)} \right\}. \end{aligned} \quad (48)$$

[5]

A Notions and conventions

The metric convention is mostly positive, i.e. $\eta_{\mu\nu} := \text{diag}(-, +, +, \dots)$

Pauli matrices

$$\sigma^1 := \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}, \quad \sigma^2 := \begin{pmatrix} 0 & -i \\ +i & 0 \end{pmatrix}, \quad \sigma^3 := \begin{pmatrix} +1 & 0 \\ 0 & -1 \end{pmatrix}. \quad (49)$$

The γ -matrices satisfy [1, sec. 5]

$$[\gamma^\mu, \gamma^\nu]_+ := 2\eta^{\mu\nu} \mathbf{1}_4. \quad (50)$$

$$\mathcal{J}^{\mu\nu} := -\frac{i}{4} [\gamma^\mu, \gamma^\nu]_- \quad (51)$$

$$\sigma^{\mu\nu} := \frac{i}{2}[\gamma^\mu, \gamma^\nu]_- \equiv -2 \not{\mathcal{J}}^{\mu\nu}. \quad (52)$$

In $(3+1)$ dimensions, choose the chiral representation

$$\gamma^\mu = -i \begin{bmatrix} 0 & \sigma^\mu \\ \bar{\sigma}^\mu & 0 \end{bmatrix}, \quad (53)$$

where

$$\sigma^\mu := (1_2, +\vec{\sigma}), \quad \bar{\sigma}^\mu := (1_2, -\vec{\sigma}). \quad (54)$$

$$\begin{aligned} \sigma^{\mu\nu} &\equiv -\frac{i}{2} \begin{bmatrix} \sigma^\mu \bar{\sigma}^\nu - \sigma^\nu \bar{\sigma}^\mu & 0 \\ 0 & \bar{\sigma}^\mu \sigma^\nu - \bar{\sigma}^\nu \sigma^\mu \end{bmatrix} \\ &= \begin{cases} 0 & \mu = 0, \nu = 0; \\ i \begin{bmatrix} +\sigma^j & 0 \\ 0 & -\sigma^j \end{bmatrix} & \mu = 0, \nu = j; \\ i \begin{bmatrix} -\sigma^i & 0 \\ 0 & +\sigma^i \end{bmatrix} & \mu = i, \nu = 0; \\ \begin{bmatrix} +\epsilon^{ij}_k \sigma^k & 0 \\ 0 & +\epsilon^{ij}_k \sigma^k \end{bmatrix} & \mu = i, \nu = j. \end{cases} \quad (55) \end{aligned}$$

B Fresnel functional integral

[6, ch. 10]

C Algebra

$$[a\partial_1\partial_2, x^1]_- = a\partial_2 \quad (56)$$

central.

Baker–Campbell–Hausdorff formula

$$e^{+a\partial_1\partial_2} x^1 e^{-a\partial_1\partial_2} = x^1 + a\partial_2. \quad (57)$$

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