NOTES ON WICK'S THEOREM IN MANY-BODY THEORY

Luca Guido Molinari

Dipartimento di Fisica, Università degli Studi di Milano, and INFN, Sezione di Milano, Via Celoria 16, Milano, Italy

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Abstract: In these pedagogical notes I introduce the operator form of Wick's theorem, i.e. a procedure to bring to normal order a product of 1-particle creation and destruction operators, with respect to some reference many-body state. Both the static and the time-ordered cases are presented.

I. INTRODUCTION

For bosons and fermions, destruction and creation operators of a particle in a state $|i\rangle$ annihilate the vac-uum: $\psi_i|\text{vac}\rangle$ and $\langle \text{vac}|\psi_i^{\dagger}=0$. Since observables have null expectation value in the vacuum state, it is convenient to construct them with creation operators on the left of destruction operators (normal order). However, in a many body theory one usually makes reference to the ground state $|gs\rangle$ of some non-interacting or effective theory, which is filled with particles or quasiparticles. The theory is also supplied with a basis of canonical operators α_a^- and α_a^+ , $a=1,2,\ldots$

$$[\alpha_a^-, \alpha_b^-]_{\mp} = 0, \quad [\alpha_a^+, \alpha_b^+]_{\mp} = 0 \quad [\alpha_a^-, \alpha_b^+]_{\mp} = \delta_{ab}$$

 $([O_1,O_2]_{\mp}=O_1O_2\mp O_2O_1)$ that annihilate the reference state:

$$\alpha_a^-|gs\rangle = 0, \quad \langle gs|\alpha_a^+ = 0.$$
 (1)

Since they are a basis, 1-particle creation or destruction operators ψ_i or ψ_i^{\dagger} , which will be here indifferently denoted as A_i , have a decomposition

$$A_i = A_i^- + A_i^+ \tag{2}$$

where the first term is a combination of operators α_a^- , and the latter is a combination of operators α_a^+ . One term is not the adjoint of the other: the labels — and + refer to their action on the reference state $|gs\rangle$:

$$A_i^-|gs\rangle = 0, \qquad \langle gs|A_i^+ = 0$$
 (3)

Since the operators α_a^- and α_a^+ are canonical, by contruction one has

$$[A_i^-, A_j^-]_{\mp} = 0, \quad [A_i^+, A_j^+]_{\mp} = 0$$
 (4)

while mixed brackets $[A_i^-, A_j^+]_{\mp}$ are in general non-zero. We require them to be c-numbers¹. This is a vital assumption, which makes Wick's theorem hold.

In a many particle theory one encounters the problem of expanding products of several field operators into normal-ordered expressions of the operators α_a^- and α_a^+ . The general problem of bringing products of field operators into a normal form was solved in 1950 by Gian Carlo Wick [1] (1909-1992). He obtained his theorem while in Berkeley, in the effort to give a clear derivation of Feynman's diagrammatic rules of perturbation theory.

II. EXAMPLES

The Hamiltonians in the examples below share a common property: they are quadratic. They are diagonalized by a linear canonical transformation which assures us that $[A_i^-, A_j^+]_{\mp}$ are c-numbers.

A. Independent fermions

This example is relevant for the perturbation theory with N interacting fermions. In the zero order description, the two-particle interaction is turned off and the independent fermions are described by a Hamiltonian of the form $H = \sum_a \hbar \omega_a c_a^{\dagger} c_a$ (a is a label for one-particle states, ordered so that $\omega_1 \leq \omega_2 \leq \ldots$). The ground state $|F\rangle$ is obtained by filling the states $a=1\ldots N$. The operators that annihilate $|F\rangle$ are:

$$\alpha_a^- = \begin{cases} c_a^{\dagger} & \text{if } a \le N, \\ c_a & \text{if } a > N \end{cases}, \quad \alpha_a^- |F\rangle = 0$$
 (5)

$$\alpha_a^+ = \begin{cases} c_a & \text{if } a \le N, \\ c_a^+ & \text{if } a > N \end{cases}, \quad \langle F | \alpha_a^+ = 0$$
 (6)

 α_a^+ creates a particle (above the Fermi level) or creates a hole (by removing a particle in the "Fermi sea" $|F\rangle$); α_a^- destroys a particle above the Fermi sea, or destroys a hole (by adding a particle in the Fermi sea). These particle-hole operators form a CAR.

Any destruction or creation operator admits a decomposition in this basis into positive and negative parts:

$$\psi_{i} = \sum_{a \leq N} \langle i | a \rangle c_{a} + \sum_{a > N} \langle i | a \rangle c_{a}$$

$$= \sum_{a \leq N} \langle i | a \rangle \alpha_{a}^{+} + \sum_{a > N} \langle i | a \rangle \alpha_{a}^{-} = \psi_{i}^{+} + \psi_{i}^{-}$$

$$\psi_{i}^{\dagger} = \sum_{a \leq N} \langle i | a \rangle^{*} c_{a}^{\dagger} + \sum_{a > N} \langle i | a \rangle^{*} c_{a}^{\dagger} = (\psi_{i}^{\dagger})^{-} + (\psi_{i}^{\dagger})^{+}$$

¹since $[\alpha_a, \alpha_b^+]_{\mp} = \delta_{ab}$, this is certainly true if the operators A^{\pm} are *linear* combinations of the α_a^{\pm} .

in this example: $(\psi_i^{\dagger})^- = (\psi_i^+)^{\dagger}$ and $(\psi_i^{\dagger})^+ = (\psi_i^-)^{\dagger}$.

B. Bogoliubov transformation

In this example $|gs\rangle$ is the ground state $|BCS\rangle$ of the superconducting state at T=0 (Bardeen, Cooper and Schrieffer, 1957). It is filled of Cooper pairs of electrons (spin singlets, with zero total momentum),

$$|BCS\rangle = \prod_{\mathbf{k}} (u_{\mathbf{k}} + v_{\mathbf{k}} a_{\mathbf{k}\uparrow}^{\dagger} a_{-\mathbf{k},\downarrow}^{\dagger}) |\text{vac}\rangle$$

 $u_{\mathbf{k}}$ and $v_{\mathbf{k}}$ are complex amplitudes, with $|u_{\mathbf{k}}|^2 + |v_{\mathbf{k}}|^2 = 1$ for the normalization of the state. The state is not an eigenstate of the total number operator. It is annihilated by the following operators (Bogoliubov and Valatin, 1958):

$$\alpha_{\mathbf{k}} = u_{\mathbf{k}} a_{\mathbf{k},\uparrow} - v_{\mathbf{k}} a_{-\mathbf{k},\downarrow}^{\dagger}, \quad \beta_{-\mathbf{k}} = u_{\mathbf{k}} a_{-\mathbf{k},\downarrow}^{\dagger} + v_{\mathbf{k}} a_{\mathbf{k},\uparrow}^{\dagger}$$
 (7)

$$\alpha_{\mathbf{k}}|BCS\rangle = 0, \quad \beta_{-\mathbf{k}}|BCS\rangle = 0$$
 (8)

Together with their adjoint operators,

$$\langle BCS | \alpha_{\mathbf{k}}^{\dagger} = 0 \quad \langle BCS | \beta_{-\mathbf{k}}^{\dagger} = 0$$
 (9)

they satisfy the CAR rules. They are obtained by a canonical transformation that mixes creation and destruction operators for spin-momentum states, in a way adapted to the BCS state.

Inversion gives the operators $a_{\mathbf{k},\sigma}$ and $a_{\mathbf{k},\sigma}^{\dagger}$ as sums of a – term (linear combination of α and β) and a + term (linear combination of α^{\dagger} and β^{\dagger} operators). Note that, although $\langle a_{\mathbf{k},\sigma} \rangle = 0$, BCS-expectation values of pairs aa or $a^{\dagger}a^{\dagger}$ may be different from zero (anomalous correlators).

The variational parameters $u_{\mathbf{k}}$ and $v_{\mathbf{k}}$ of $|BCS\rangle$ are chosen to minimize the ground state energy $\langle H \rangle$. The evaluation is simplified by Wick's theorem [2], which is proven in section III.

C. Independent bosons

For independent bosons the ground state $|BEC\rangle$ is a Bose-Einstein condensate with N particles in the lowest energy state, a=1, and no particles in higher one-particle states, at T=0. Since $\langle BEC|c_1^{\dagger}c_1|BEC\rangle=N$, Bogoliubov suggested the rescaling $c_1=\sqrt{V}b$ and $c_1^{\dagger}=\sqrt{V}b^*$, the other operators being left unchanged. Then

$$[b, b^*] = \frac{1}{V}, \quad \langle BEC|b^*b|BEC \rangle = \frac{N}{V}.$$

The operators b and b^* may be treated as c-numbers in the thermodynamic limit [4], with $|b|^2 = N/V$. For any creation and destruction operator, one has the decomposition into a condensate term, and an excitation term:

$$\psi_i = \sum_{a} \langle i|a\rangle c_a = \langle i|1\rangle \sqrt{V}b + \phi_i, \tag{10}$$

$$\psi_i^{\dagger} = \sum_{a} \langle i|a\rangle^* c_a^{\dagger} = \langle i|1\rangle^* \sqrt{V} b^* + \phi_i^{\dagger}$$
 (11)

where $\phi_i | BEC \rangle = 0$ and $\langle BEC | \phi_i^{\dagger} = 0$.

III. NORMAL ORDERING AND CONTRACTIONS

A product of operators A_i^{\pm} is normally ordered if all factors A_i^{-} are at the right of the factors A_i^{+} :

$$A_1^+ \cdots A_k^+ A_{k+1}^- \cdots A_n^-$$
 (12)

In particular, a product of operators of the same type, $A_1^+ \cdots A_k^+$ or $A_1^- \cdots A_\ell^-$, is normally ordered. The very usefulness of the definition is the obvious property that the expectation value on $|gs\rangle$ of a normally ordered operator is always zero:

$$\langle gs|A_1^+ \cdots A_n^-|gs\rangle = 0 \tag{13}$$

It is clear that any product of operators $A_1A_2...A_n$ can be written as a sum of normally ordered terms. One first writes every factor as $A_i^+ + A_i^-$ and gets 2^n terms. In each term, the components A_i^- are brought to the right by successive commutations (bosons) or anticommutations (fermions). After much boring work, the desired expression will be obtained. Wick's theorem is an efficient answer to this precise problem: to write a product $A_1...A_n$ as a sum of normally ordered terms. The theorem is an extremely useful operator identity, with important corollaries. To state and prove it, we need some technical tools.

The **normal ordering operator** brings a generic product into a normal form. If the product contains k factors A_i^+ mixed with n-k factors A_i^- , it is:

$$N[A_1^{\pm} \cdots A_n^{\pm}] = (\pm 1)^P A_{i_1}^{+} \cdots A_{i_k}^{+} \cdots A_{i_n}^{-}$$
 (14)

where for bosons $(+1)^P = 1$, while for fermions $(-1)^P$ is the parity of the permutation that brings the sequence $1 \dots n$ to the sequence $i_1 \dots i_n$ (another frequently used notation for normal ordering is $A_1^{\pm} \dots A_n^{\pm}$:).

It may appear that normal ordering is not unique, since within + operators or – operators one can choose different orderings. However the different expressions are actually the same operator, because A^+ operators commute or anticommute exactly among themselves, and the same is for A^- operators. For example $N[A_1^+A_2^+]$ can be written as $A_1^+A_2^+$, or with the factors exchanged: $\pm A_2^+A_1^+$: the two operators coincide.

The action of N-ordering is extended by linearity from products of components A_i^{\pm} to products of operators A_i . For example:

$$\begin{split} &\mathsf{N}[A_1A_2] = \mathsf{N}[(A_1^+ + A_1^-)(A_2^+ + A_2^-)] \\ &= \mathsf{N}[A_1^+A_2^+] + \mathsf{N}[A_1^+A_2^-] + \mathsf{N}[A_1^-A_2^-] + \mathsf{N}[A_1^-A_2^+] \\ &= A_1^+A_2^+ + A_1^+A_2^- + A_1^-A_2^- \pm A_2^+A_1^- \end{split}$$

The following property follows from (14):

$$N[A_1 \cdots A_n] = (\pm 1)^P N[A_{i_1} \cdots A_{i_n}]$$
 (15)

A product $A_1 \dots A_n$ can be written as a sum of normally ordered terms. For two operators the process is

straightforward:

$$A_{1}A_{2} = (A_{1}^{+} + A_{1}^{-})(A_{2}^{+} + A_{2}^{-})$$

$$= A_{1}^{+}A_{2}^{+} + A_{1}^{+}A_{2}^{-} + A_{1}^{-}A_{2}^{-} + A_{1}^{-}A_{2}^{+}$$

$$= N[A_{1}A_{2}] + [A_{1}^{-}, A_{2}^{+}]_{\pm}$$
(16)

The last term $[A_1^-, A_2^+]_{\mp}$ is a c-number. The **contraction**, denoted by a bracket, of two operators is defined as

$$A_1 A_2 \equiv A_1 A_2 - \mathsf{N}[A_1 A_2]
 \tag{17}$$

Combining the contraction definition with (16) yields

Also, since the gs-expectation value of a normal ordered operator is zero, it follows that

$$\overrightarrow{A_1 A_2} = \langle gs | \overrightarrow{A_1 A_2} | gs \rangle = \langle gs | A_1 A_2 | gs \rangle$$
(19)

The following definition extends the contraction of two operators to the case where there is a product of n operators in between:

$$\overrightarrow{A(A_1 \cdots A_n)} \overrightarrow{A'} = (\pm 1)^n \overrightarrow{AA'} (A_1 \cdots A_n)$$
 (20)

IV. WICK'S THEOREM

We begin by proving three Lemmas - each one is a generalization of the former. In the first one, a single A^- operator is at the left of A^+ operators, and normal ordering is achieved by bringing it to the right of them by repeated (anti)commutations.

Lemma IV.1.

$$A_0^-(A_1^+ \cdots A_n^+) = \\ \mathbf{N}[A_0^- A_1^+ \cdots A_n^+] + \sum_{i=1}^n \mathbf{N}[A_0^- \cdots A_i \cdots A_n^+] \quad (21)$$

Proof.

$$\begin{split} &A_0^-(A_1^+\cdots A_n^+)\\ &=([A_0^-,A_1^+]_\mp)(A_2^+\cdots A_n^+)\pm A_1^+A_0^-A_2^+\cdots A_n^+\\ &=A_0A_1A_2^+\cdots A_n^+\pm A_1^+([A_0^-,A_2^+]_\mp)A_3^+\cdots A_n^+\\ &+A_1^+A_2^+A_0^-A_3^+\cdots A_n^+\\ &=A_0A_1A_2^+\cdots A_n^++A_0A_1^+A_2A_3^+\cdots A_n^+\\ &+A_1^+A_2^+A_0^-A_3^+\cdots A_n^+=\ldots\\ &=\sum_{i=1}^n\overline{A_0A_1^+\cdots A_i}\cdots A_n^++(\pm 1)^nA_1^+\cdots A_n^+A_0^-\\ &=\mathbb{N}[A_0^-A_1^+\cdots A_n^+]+\sum_{i=1}^n\mathbb{N}[\overline{A_0\cdots A_i}\cdots A_n^+]. \end{split}$$

Lemma IV.2.

$$A_0^- \mathsf{N}[A_1 \cdots A_n]$$

$$= \mathsf{N}[A_0^- A_1 \cdots A_n] + \sum_{i=1}^n \mathsf{N}[A_0 \cdots A_i \cdots A_n].$$
(22)

Proof. The proof is by induction. Eq.(22) holds for n = 1. If, by hypothesis, it holds for n operators, it is now proven for n+1 operators (we write 1^{\pm} in place of A_1^{\pm}):

$$\begin{split} &0^{-}\mathsf{N}[1\cdots(n+1)]\\ &=0^{-}1^{+}\mathsf{N}[2\cdots(n+1)]+(\pm 1)^{n}0^{-}\mathsf{N}[2\cdots(n+1)1^{-}]\\ &=0^{-}1\mathsf{N}[\cdots]\pm 1^{+}0^{-}\mathsf{N}[\cdots]+(\pm 1)^{n}0^{-}\mathsf{N}[\cdots]1^{-} \end{split}$$

The hypothesis of induction is now used in the second and third terms:

$$\begin{split} &= \mathsf{N}[01\,2\cdots(n+1)] \pm 1^+ \mathsf{N}[0^-2\cdots(n+1)] \\ &\pm 1^+ \sum_{k\geq 2} \mathsf{N}[0\cdots k\cdots(n+1)] \\ &+ (\pm)^n \mathsf{N}[0^-2\cdots(n+1)]1^- \\ &+ (\pm 1)^n \sum_{k\geq 2} \mathsf{N}[0\cdots k\cdots(n+1)]1^- \\ &= \mathsf{N}[012\cdots(n+1)] \pm \mathsf{N}[1^+0^-2\cdots(n+1)] \\ &+ \sum_{k\geq 2} \mathsf{N}[01^+\cdots k\cdots(n+1)] \\ &+ (\pm 1)^n \mathsf{N}[0^-2\cdots(n+1)1^-] \\ &+ (\pm 1)^n \sum_{k\geq 2} \mathsf{N}[02\cdots k\cdots(n+1)1^-] \\ &+ (\pm 1)^n \sum_{k\geq 2} \mathsf{N}[02\cdots k\cdots(n+1)1^-] \\ &= \mathsf{N}[012\cdots(n+1)] + \mathsf{N}[0^-1^+2\cdots(n+1)] \\ &+ \sum_{k\geq 2} \mathsf{N}[01^+\cdots k\cdots(n+1)] \\ &+ \mathsf{N}[0^-1^-2\cdots(n+1)] \\ &+ \sum_{k\geq 2} \mathsf{N}[01^-2\cdots k\cdots(n+1)] \\ &= \mathsf{N}[0^-1\cdots(n+1)] + \sum_{k\geq 2} \mathsf{N}[01\cdots k\cdots(n+1)]. \end{split}$$

The last line is (22) with n+1 operators. \square

Lemma IV.3.

$$A_0 \mathsf{N}[A_1 \cdots A_n]$$

$$= \mathsf{N}[A_0 \cdots A_n] + \sum_{i=1}^n \mathsf{N}[A_0 \cdots A_i \cdots A_n].$$
(23)

Proof. This is achieved by adding $A_0^+ N[A_1 \cdots A_n] = N[A_0^+ A_1 \cdots A_n]$ to both sides of Lemma 4.2.

Wick's theorem gives the practical rule to express a product of creation and destruction operators as a sum of normally ordered terms. It is an operator identity. Each contraction, being a c-number, reduces by two the operator content.

Theorem IV.4 (Wick's Theorem).

$$A_{1}A_{2}\cdots A_{n} = N[A_{1}\cdots A_{n}]$$

$$+ \sum_{(ij)} N[A_{1}\cdots A_{i}\cdots A_{j}\cdots A_{n}]$$

$$+ \sum_{(ij)(rs)} N[A_{1}\cdots A_{i}\cdots A_{r}\cdots A_{j}\cdots A_{s}\cdots A_{n}]$$

$$+ \dots$$

$$(24)$$

The first sum runs on single contractions of pairs, the second sum runs on double contractions, and so on. If n is even, the last sum contains terms which are products of contractions (c-numbers). If n is odd, the last sum has terms with single unpaired operators (see examples).

Proof. The theorem is proven by induction. For n=2it is true. Next, suppose that the statement is true for a product of creation/destruction operators $A_1 \cdots A_n$: it is shown that it is true for a product $A_0A_1\cdots A_n$. By hypothesis of induction for n operators:

$$A_1 \cdots A_n = \sum_{k=0}^{\lfloor n/2 \rfloor} N_{n,k} \tag{25}$$

where $N_{n,k}$ is the sum of normally ordered products of **Example IV.7.** n operators with k contractions² By Lemma 4.3:

$$A_0 N_{n,k} = N[A_0 N_{n,k}] + N[A_0 N_{n,k}], \qquad (26)$$

where $A_0 N_{n,k}$ means the sum of all contractions of A_0 with unpaired operators A_i contained in $N_{n,k}$. The following relation takes place:

$$N[\overline{A_0}N_{n,k}] + N[A_0N_{n,k+1}] = N_{n+1,k+1}.$$
 (27)

Using the induction hypothesis and the last two identities we find.

$$\begin{split} A_0 A_1 & \cdots A_n = A_0 N_{n,0} + A_0 N_{n,1} + A_0 N_{n,2} + \dots \\ &= \mathsf{N}[A_0 N_{n,0}] + \mathsf{N}[A_0 N_{n,0}] + \mathsf{N}[A_0 N_{n,1}] + \mathsf{N}[A_0 N_{n,1}] \\ &+ \mathsf{N}[A_0 N_{n,2}] + \mathsf{N}[A_0 N_{n,2}] + \dots \\ &= N_{n+1,0} + N_{n+1,1} + \dots \end{split}$$

which expresses Wick's theorem for n+1 operators. \square

Example IV.5.

$$A_1 A_2 A_3$$

= N[123] + N[123] + N[123] + N[123]
= N[123] + $\langle 12 \rangle A_3 \pm \langle 13 \rangle A_2 + \langle 23 \rangle A_1$ (28)

$$^2 \text{For example}, \ N_{n,2} = \sum_{(pq)(rs)} \mathsf{N}[A_1...A_p...A_r...A_q...A_s...A_n].$$

$$\begin{split} A_1 A_2 A_3 A_4 \\ &= \mathsf{N}[1234] + \mathsf{N}[1234] + \mathsf{N}[1234] + \mathsf{N}[1234] \\ &+ \mathsf{N}[1234] + \mathsf{N}[1234] + \mathsf{N}[1234] \\ &+ \mathsf{N}[1234] + \mathsf{N}[1234] + \mathsf{N}[1234] \\ &= \mathsf{N}[1234] + \langle 12 \rangle \mathsf{N}[34] \pm \langle 13 \rangle \mathsf{N}[24] + \langle 14 \rangle \mathsf{N}[23] \\ &+ \langle 23 \rangle \mathsf{N}[14] \pm \langle 24 \rangle \mathsf{N}[13] \pm \langle 34 \rangle \mathsf{N}[12] \end{split}$$

(29)

An important consequence of Wick's operator identity is a rule for the expectation value of the product of an even number of destruction and creation operators:

 $+\langle 12\rangle\langle 34\rangle \pm\langle 13\rangle\langle 24\rangle +\langle 14\rangle\langle 23\rangle$

Corollary IV.6.

$$\langle gs|A_1 \cdots A_{2n}|gs\rangle = \sum (\pm 1)^P \langle A_{i_1}A_{j_1}\rangle \cdots \langle A_{i_n}A_{j_n}\rangle$$
 (30)

The sum is over all partitions of $1, \ldots, 2n$ into pairs $\{(i_1, j_1) \dots (i_n, j_n)\}\$ with $i_\# < j_\#$. P is the permutation that takes $1, \ldots, 2n$ to the sequence $i_1, j_1, \ldots, i_n, j_n$.

$$\langle gs|123|gs\rangle = 0\tag{31}$$

$$\langle gs|1234|gs\rangle = \langle 12\rangle\langle 34\rangle \pm \langle 13\rangle\langle 24\rangle + \langle 14\rangle\langle 23\rangle$$
 (32)

This is a general rule: two-point correlators determine all n-point correlators.

In thermal theory there is no distinguished state to define a normal ordering, and thus no Wick's theorem in the form of an operator identity. Nevertheless, one can prove a thermal analogue of the corollary. For noninteracting particles the thermal average of a product of one-particle creation and destruction operators is the sum of all possible thermal contractions of pairs. The thermal contraction of two operators is the thermal average of their product [2, 3].

V. WICK'S THEOREM WITH TIME-ORDERING

An important variant of Wick's theorem deals with the normal-ordering of a time-ordered product. A necessary condition is that the time evolution of the operators α_a^- and α_a^+ is a multiplication by some timedependent phase factor (c-number). Then, the discussion on normal ordering and contraction of operators $A_i(t_i)$ remains unaltered.

A. T-contractions

Let us begin with two operators, and apply Wick's theorem:

$$\begin{split} &\mathsf{T} A_{1}(t_{1}) A_{2}(t_{2}) \\ &= \theta(t_{1} - t_{2}) \{ \mathsf{N} [A_{1}(t_{1}) A_{2}(t_{2})] + \overleftarrow{A_{1}(t_{1})} A_{2}(t_{2}) \} \\ &\pm \theta(t_{2} - t_{1}) \{ \mathsf{N} [A_{2}(t_{2}) A_{1}(t_{1})] + \overleftarrow{A_{2}(t_{2})} A_{1}(t_{1}) \} \\ &= \theta(t_{1} - t_{2}) \mathsf{N} [A_{1}(t_{1}) A_{2}(t_{2})] + \theta(t_{2} - t_{1}) \mathsf{N} [A_{1}(t_{1}) A_{2}(t_{2})] \\ &+ \theta(t_{1} - t_{2}) \overleftarrow{A_{1}(t_{1})} A_{2}(t_{2}) \pm \theta(t_{2} - t_{1}) \overleftarrow{A_{1}(t_{1})} A_{2}(t_{2}) \\ &= \mathsf{N} [A_{1}(t_{1}) A_{2}(t_{2})] + \overleftarrow{A_{1}(t_{1})} A_{2}(t_{2}) \end{split} \tag{33}$$

The last term is a c-number. We define the time-ordered contraction (T-contraction):

$$\widetilde{A_1(t_1)A_2(t_2)} = \langle gs|\mathsf{T}A_1(t_1)A_2(t_2)|gs\rangle$$
(34)

The T-contraction of two operators with a product of n operators in between inherits the property of ordinary contractions

$$\widetilde{A_1(t_1)(\cdots)A_2(t_2)} = (\pm 1)^n \widetilde{A_1(t_1)A_2(t_2)}(\cdots)$$
(35)

T-contractions have a new property, not shared by an ordinary contraction:

$$\widetilde{A_1(t_1)A_2(t_2)} = \pm \widetilde{A_2(t_2)A_1(t_1)}$$
(36)

For field operators we have the explicit expressions:

$$\widetilde{\psi(1)}\psi^{\dagger}(2) = \langle gs|\mathsf{T}\psi(1)\psi^{\dagger}(2)|gs\rangle = iG^{0}(1,2)$$
(37)

$$\widetilde{\psi(1)}\widetilde{\psi(2)} = \langle gs|\mathsf{T}\psi(1)\psi(2)|gs\rangle = iF^0(1,2),$$
(38)

$$\widetilde{\psi^{\dagger}(1)}\overline{\psi^{\dagger}(2)} = \langle gs|\mathsf{T}\psi^{\dagger}(1)\psi^{\dagger}(2)|gs\rangle = iF^{\dagger 0}(1,2) \quad (39)$$

If $|gs\rangle$ has a definite number of particles, the anomalous correlators F^0 and $F^{\dagger0}$ are equal to zero. They are non-zero in the BCS theory.

B. Wick's theorem for time-ordered products

For the time-ordered product of several operators, Wick's theorem retains the same structure as in (24), with T-contractions replacing ordinary ones. The statement is:

Theorem V.1 (Wick' theorem, with time-ordering).

$$T[A_{1}(t_{1})\cdots A_{n}(t_{n})] = N[A_{1}(t_{1})\cdots A_{n}(t_{n})]$$

$$+ \sum_{(ij)} N[A_{1}(t_{1})\cdots A_{i}(t_{i})\cdots A_{j}(t_{j})\cdots A_{n}(t_{n})]$$

$$+ \sum_{(ij)} N[\cdots \text{double T-contractions}\cdots]$$

$$+ \dots$$

Proof. $\mathsf{T}(1\cdots n)$ corresponds to a time ordered sequence $(\pm 1)^P i_1 \cdots i_n$ (we put $i = A_i(t_i)$), to which the previous formulation of Wick's theorem applies:

$$\begin{split} & \mathbf{T}[12\cdots n] = (\pm 1)^P \mathbf{N}[i_1\cdots i_n] \\ & + (\pm 1)^P \sum_{(ij)} \mathbf{N}[i_1\cdots i \cdots j \cdots i_n] \\ & + (\pm 1)^P \sum_{(ij)(rs)} \mathbf{N}[i_1\cdots i \cdots r \cdots j \cdots s \cdots i_n] \\ & + \dots \end{split}$$

The factor $(\pm 1)^P$ is compensated by restoring the sequence $1 \cdots n$ inside the normal ordering. Then the first term is $N[1 \cdots n]$. In doing so in the next terms, a contraction ij remains unaltered if $t_i > t_j$ otherwise it is twisted to ji meaning that j precedes i in the sequence $1 \cdots n$. Therefore:

$$(\pm 1)^{P} \mathsf{N}[i_{1} \cdots \overrightarrow{i} \cdots \overrightarrow{j} \cdots i_{n}] = \mathsf{N}[1 \cdots \overrightarrow{i} \cdots \overrightarrow{j} \cdots n]$$
where $\overbrace{ij} = \theta(t_{i} - t_{j})\overrightarrow{ij} \pm \theta(t_{j} - t_{i})\overrightarrow{ji}$.

As an interesting application, consider an n-particle Green function

$$i^{n}G(x_{1}...x_{n}, y_{1}...y_{n})$$

$$= \langle gs|\mathsf{T}\psi(x_{1})...\psi(x_{n})\psi^{\dagger}(y_{n})...\psi^{\dagger}(y_{1})|gs\rangle$$

$$(41)$$

where x denotes a complete set of quantum numbers and time, and the Heisenberg evolution is given by the Hamiltonian whose ground state is $|gs\rangle$. For independent particles Wick's teorem applies. The average is evaluated as a sum of total T-contractions of field operators, i.e. propagators (we now exclude anomalous propagators):

$$G^{0}(x_{1} \dots x_{n}, y_{1} \dots y_{n}) = \sum_{P} (\pm 1)^{P} G^{0}(x_{1}, y_{i_{1}}) \dots G^{0}(x_{n}, y_{i_{n}})$$
(42)

where P is the permutation $P(1...n) = (i_1...i_n)$. The sum corresponds to the evaluation of the permanent (bosons) or determinant (fermions) of the matrix $G^0(x_i, x_j), i, j = 1,...n$.

Remark V.2. A free theory is a many-particle theory where, in some basis, n-particle Green functions are determined solely by one-particle Green functions.

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